

## 1: Project MUSE - Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, (review)

*Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, By Felix V. Matos Rodriguez (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, xi plus pp.). Carefully researched, informative, and pleasant to read, this book deals with women's participation in a specific urban context, that of a.*

University Press of Florida, By the s, San Juan had fallen behind other sugar growing towns as the plantations became more prosperous in other areas of Puerto Rico, such as Guayama, Ponce and Mayaguez. Because of its steep location and fortified walls, the city of San Juan lacked space and remained dependent on the supply of subsistence agricultural supplies and coal from the nearby countryside up to the end of the nineteenth century. Beginning in , new construction consumed its few open spaces and were built over its poorer arrabaldes. Neo-classical, two-storied buildings spread over poorer clusters of wooden, single-storied houses. Much in the same way that the author opposes colonial and neo-classical San Juan, he also confronts two other opposite poles: Not only were they expanding the realm of public action open to women by venturing out into philanthropy as organizers, managers, educators and partners; these sanjuaneras also pressed for their own class agenda. In doing so, they were staunch allies of men of their own class" p. This simplistic interpretation of political hegemony jeopardizes Dr. By men outnumbered women and the early nineteenth-century sex ratios had been reversed: The chapter on the strategies of survival of poorer women as well as their living conditions in the four barrios of San Juan is finely documented. Occupations among the poorer classes involved mainly domestic work but also included street vending, or small retail commerce in foodstuffs, coal or fish. These people lived in miserable wooden huts mainly in the S. Domingos and Santa Barbara barrios, and towards the Puerta de Tierra Firme, which was the main access to town from the surrounding rural areas. The lack of space and water wells made their survival more difficult. Spanish authorities gradually moved their arrabaldes from within the fortified walls, although the housing shortage had already raised rents and the poor that were unable to afford to pay them were already moving out beyond the city limits spontaneously, towards other poor barrios like La Marina or Congrejos pp. Their buying and selling of rural and urban properties as well as of slaves are well grounded by the author through notary documents. The historian also documents how they collected urban rents in spite of adverse conditions and raised money for charitable associations over which they had direct control, either as opposed to or in collaboration with Church charity activities. Matos Rodriguez adheres to a Gramscian conception of hegemony in a more dualistic than dialectic approach. He contents himself in schematically opposing two different classes of women. Concepts should be challenges to the historian and they have to be elaborated in their temporality and in the specificity of their historical context. It is up to the historian to explore their rich possibilities and to document them with his sources. For example, the heterogeneous nature of the social elite in San Juan presents many difficulties. The author clearly points them out for example when he describes the members of the Junta de Damas, p. Mediations in power relations as well as interest conflicts between the several sectors of the dominant group are broad themes that warrant a greater elaboration in this study. Differences between elite women and Church interests as well as their relations to state authorities should have been pursued further. For example, in their marriages with merchants, sometimes of peninsular origins, sometimes of European background, women of the planter class probably faced conflicting interests. Instead of documenting differences and opposing interests, Matos Rodriguez is misled by a simplified interpretation of the concept of social and political hegemony. This is probably what leads him into a dualistic narrative scheme of interpretation, with working women on one side and the politics of social control by the elite on the other. Correspondingly the book tends to develop a schematic interpretation of social conflict. The main focus is on social control and political power. The differences within the diverse sectors of the dominant classes are ignored by the author in favor of hegemonic concepts like patriarchy or modernity. We emerge with a thorough documentation of how the Church and elite women kept the poorer working women under control and how they campaigned against their

distinctive family structure, with laws and social measures against illegitimacy and concubinage. But the challenge of criticizing political and power relations within the families and in the context of the daily activities of women of different social classes would have guided a more profitable path for research that proposes to be a contribution to gender studies in Central America and the Caribbean. Above all we need more attention to the process of marginalizing working women and expelling them from within the city walls, and how this relates both to patriarchy and modernity. A non manufacturing port such as San Juan depended greatly on the outside supply of foodstuffs and coal. Even if the small urban space confined within the city walls favored a more efficient social control policy than in other similar colonial towns throughout Latin America, it seems unlikely that when the female population ceased to be a majority-when the population was changed by European, white immigration or other factors; the demographic explanation is not convincing -that the poor women disappeared from the streets and the local markets. The author informs us that after abolition in , libertas started coming into the city much in the manner that slaves and free women had moved to San Juan in the final decades of the eighteenth century. In this book, domestic work is emphasized over other trades or forms of survival. It is as if it were the main occupation of poorer working women and made them a co-opted part of elite households. It is true that the censors might list their occupations in a simplified way p. At least, that has been the case in many of the studies listed by the author in his bibliography, which are always useful for comparative overviews. A certain percentage of women were in fact occupied in domestic work. But many had to complement their earnings with other activities, and these probably outweighed the domestic work available in elite households. As long as women found work attractive and available, they continued to migrate into the city" p. The author almost surely underestimates the number of women occupied in different marketing activities providing supplies for the urban population. It probably was safer for them to declare themselves as domestic workers in order to protect themselves against fiscal authorities. We need a more thorough analysis of what domestic labor meant in a city with slaves and with scarce opportunities of work outside the local market. Certainly domestic work represented an economic sphere of activities much broader than what we understand today by the same term. The author hints at a process in which subsistence agriculture zones close to San Juan were transformed into coffee plantations. One also wonders if charitable associations could have attended to the needs of the poor working women in and around San Juan, particularly in the period that followed the abolition of slavery. This might be explained by the high demand for male slaves in the sugar producing areas of Puerto Rico, as Matos Rodriguez points out. But perhaps it had some relation to the main topic of this book, that is, to the great number of former slave women who were continually migrating to San Juan. This majority of women working for small earnings and smaller salaries may well have anticipated the abolition of slavery in the city and the turn towards a free labor market even before or in spite of European immigration.

## 2: Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, by Félix V. Matos Rodríguez

*Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, By Felix V. Matos Rodriguez (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, xi plus pp.).*

## 3: PUERTO RICO HERALD: Women And Urban Change In San Juan, Puerto Rico,

*Detailed Description: Dispelling the common perception of Puerto Rico as a male-dominated society, Women and Urban Change in San Juan examines the roles of women in the economic and social changes that affected the Puerto Rican capital during the mid-th century.*

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## 5: Timeline of San Juan, Puerto Rico - Wikipedia

*Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, (review) Lillian Guerra The Americas, Volume 59, Number 3, January , pp. (Review).*

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## 9: University Press of Florida: Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico,

*"Felix Matos Rodriguez's Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, is one of the most important studies of nineteenth century Puerto Rican history in the last twenty years, and the only study to focus entirely on Puerto Rican women of this era.*

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