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an Afro-Puerto Rican Childhood

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# “Una niña humilde y de color”

## Sources for the History of an Afro-Puerto Rican Childhood

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SOLSIREE DEL MORAL

### Abstract

*This essay explores some of the historical sources available in the case of one young, rural, black girl in mid-century Puerto Rico. When Herminia (pseudonym) was eleven years old, the colonial state – in the form of social workers – invaded her life. That intrusion into the young girl’s home and community generated paperwork, such as correspondence and social work case studies. The first part of this essay explores these social welfare documents (as well as census records) and the story they tell about black childhoods in Puerto Rico. The second half sets aside the social workers’ version of Herminia’s life story and instead explore her childhood in relation to her extended family and their long history in rural Western Puerto Rico. A variety of religious and civil records allows the historian of childhood to apply a broader lens to Herminia’s story in particular, as well as to the stories of other rural black children in Puerto Rico.*

Historian Wilma King, author of the seminal text on enslaved African American childhoods in nineteenth-century United States of America, noted that sources for the study of black childhoods are “vast, but the data must be culled”. Some of the primary sources available to historians include “newspapers, dissertations, theses, scholarly journals, court records, census records, and published primary sources along with unpublished diaries, plantation records, and manuscripts of . . . planters, travelers, and observers of social, economic, and political conditions in America”. Slave narratives and collections of Works Progress Administration (WPA) interviews round out King’s list.<sup>1</sup> The rich and vast scholarship on the comparative history of colonialism and slavery in the Caribbean, as well as the historiography on the modern history of decolonization and state formation in the region, has relied precisely on the types of sources King identified as central for the study of enslaved

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African American childhoods. The question for historians of Afro-Caribbean childhood studies, therefore, is not, "Where are the sources?" but rather, "How can we cull existing sources to document and write the history of 'this enormous population [that] did not write or speak for itself and was often ignored by others'?"<sup>2</sup> This essay explores some of the historical sources available in the case of Herminia, a young, rural, black girl in mid-century Puerto Rico.<sup>3</sup> Using the young girl's story as an entry point, it is proposed that the types of sources examined here could also be used more comprehensively to tell a larger story of Afro-Puerto Rican childhoods, in all their heterogeneity and intersectionality.

When Herminia was eleven years old, the colonial state – in the form of social workers from the Office of Child Welfare and the Department of Veterans' Affairs – invaded her life. That intrusion into the young girl's home and community generated paperwork – in the form of correspondence and social work case studies. The first part of this essay explores these social welfare documents (as well as census records) and the story they tell about black childhoods in Puerto Rico. The second half moves away from the social workers' version of Herminia's life story and instead explores Herminia's childhood in relation to her extended family and their long history in rural Western Puerto Rico. A variety of religious and civil records allows the historian of childhood to apply a broader lens to Herminia's story in particular, as well as to the stories of other rural black children in Puerto Rico.

Significantly, the study of black identities and black racial formation in twentieth-century Puerto Rico shares parallels with the historical study of childhood in the Caribbean. Sources are available, yet there is much work to be done. Luis Figueroa, Eileen Findlay, Ileana Rodríguez-Silva, and several others have contributed to the historical scholarship on race and blackness in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Puerto Rico.<sup>4</sup> Moving forward into the post-World War II era, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and literary scholars have produced exciting new scholarship on racial formation in contemporary Puerto Rican society.<sup>5</sup> Although the number of interdisciplinary studies on black experiences on the island and its diaspora continues to grow, there is much more to learn about the historical experiences of black children.<sup>6</sup>

In *Silencing Race*, Rodríguez-Silva called for a further study of race, racial practices, and racism in Puerto Rico, a Caribbean island where affirmations of black identities have been carefully and intentionally silenced in the service of a national myth of racial harmony. That myth was becoming hegemonic by the late 1950s, around the time that

Herminia came to the attention of social workers. Rodríguez-Silva argues that “the undoing of racialized domination does not require reracialization, but it demands an exploration of its complex workings.”<sup>7</sup> To that end, the ways in which race and class shaped rural black childhoods in mid-century Puerto Rico are explored. The sources allow for the telling of the story of one black child. Herminia’s story also allows the historian, by culling a more expansive group of archival documents, to explore the complex workings of racism and racial discrimination in the formation of black childhoods in Puerto Rico. In turn, this is a small contribution to the larger project of undoing racialized domination in modern Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

## **“Una niña humilde y de color”: Social Welfare Sources**

### *Una niña humilde / A poor girl*

In July 1958, Ms Ríos, the social worker at the local municipal Office of Child Welfare (CW) in Altamar, travelled to rural Asombroso to investigate the living conditions of an eleven-year-old girl. Asombroso was a neighbourhood (*barrio*) in the interior of the municipality of Altamar, located on the West Coast of Puerto Rico. Young Herminia had come to the attention of the social worker earlier that year. Herminia’s father had passed away “while in the military” and the young girl was receiving her father’s monthly military pension.<sup>8</sup> It was her deceased father’s social worker, Mr García at the Veterans’ Administration Office (VA) in San Juan who wanted to follow-up with the child. Mr García was concerned that, in fact, Herminia “may not be benefitting” from the pension.<sup>9</sup> Someone – perhaps her paternal aunt, mother, or the CW social worker – had expressed concern about Herminia’s living conditions. More specifically, Mr García asked Ms Ríos to inquire whether the child’s guardian would accept his recommendation that the monthly pension be used to enroll the child in a private boarding school. With that request in hand, Ms Ríos went to Herminia’s home, located deep in the sugar-cane growing community of Asombroso.

Social workers composed field reports and case studies according to the guidelines provided by Puerto Rico’s Office of Child Welfare and the Office of Public Welfare. When individuals requested support or assistance for themselves, their families, or neighbours, a local social worker (SW) was tasked with investigating the case and producing a

report and recommendation. SW reports followed a standard format. They were divided into six sections: the first provided basic information and identification (names, addresses, birth dates, case file numbers); the second specified the reasons for the study (why concerns had been expressed); the third provided a summary and the SW's evaluation of the child's living situation (the household composition and any concerns); the fourth reported on the child's progress in school; the fifth included a physical description of the child and his/her state of health; and the final section provided the SW's recommendation and justification for that decision. Social workers prepared local case studies and then submitted them to their district office for review and approval. Once the case study was approved, it became part of that individual's file. After her visit to Asombroso, Ms Ríos prepared a case study that detailed those six aspects of Herminia's life.

Case studies recorded a child's life story and, more specifically, provided a snapshot of immediate concerns from the perspective of an individual social worker – a professional, often but not always a woman, who had been trained in social work at the University of Puerto Rico or the private social workers' college.<sup>10</sup> The case studies, evaluations, and recommendations were shaped by the tenets of their discipline at mid-century, as well as their personal identities (informed by race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexuality, and/or personal history), even if they had been taught to minimize those aspects through their professional training. The information they collected about children's lives allows for the exploration of individual childhood experiences and the evaluation of the patterns that emerged within municipalities or across regions of the island. SW case studies, as well as the correspondence they generated between departments, district offices, and local units, provide a lens into SW's professional concerns about child welfare, as well as the limited options they could pursue. At times, in combination with other sources, they may allow a glimpse into a child's perspective or opinion.

Social worker Ríos paid a visit to doña Chabela, Herminia's guardian and maternal grandmother. Doña Chabela lived in the small two-bedroom home she owned and shared with two adult daughters. It was located on a "*camino malo*" (bad path) far from the rural county's main road.<sup>11</sup> One bedroom was occupied by doña Chabela's daughter, Goyita, her husband and her children. Margot, another daughter, resided in the second bedroom with her consensual partner and their children. In the evenings, doña Chabela and Herminia shared a bed in the family room.

During the day, the bed itself was stored against the wall, so family members could also utilize the space. The social worker was concerned that Herminia did not have a bedroom of her own and was living in overcrowded quarters. Together, there were eighteen family members living in the small family home. On average, five members shared a home in rural Asomante.<sup>12</sup> While overcrowding was of concern, it was also significant that doña Chabela owned the home and that she was able to provide housing for her two adult daughters and their children.

Social worker Ríos also found that Herminia split her residence between two households. She slept at her grandmother's house "*en el campo*" (the countryside), but ate her meals at her mother's house "*en el pueblo*" (in the city). Herminia's mother, Graciela, lived with her common-law husband, Ignacio, in a small house located to the rear of Ignacio's parents' land.<sup>13</sup> Such homes were commonly built on "*solares*". A family that owned a plot of land (*solar*) often, over time, built smaller buildings on it to house extended family members.<sup>14</sup> Once Graciela and Ignacio became a couple, Herminia moved in with her grandmother. It appears that Ignacio was unwilling to accept her in the home. The social worker noted that there was no space for Herminia in the small urban house and, more significantly, Ignacio had contracted tuberculosis. Ignacio took his meals with his parents and adult siblings at the main house, while Graciela, their two children, and Herminia ate together in the small house on the *solar*. The social worker was reassured by this arrangement because the individual who suffered with tuberculosis was not preparing food or eating in the home and Herminia did not have to sleep in the same room with the infected person (although Graciela's other two children did). Social worker Ríos did not, however, provide an explanation as to why Ignacio ate at the main house with his parents, while Graciela and two of his own children were left behind to eat in the house out back.

There was a third adult in Herminia's life responsible for her well-being. Her paternal aunt, Casimira, administered Herminia's military pension. When her aunt received the monthly cheque, she deposited an amount into Herminia's savings account, bought Herminia's groceries and had them delivered to her mother's house, and, as necessary, provided the child with clothing and shoes. The social worker noted that Herminia's mother was not satisfied with this arrangement. Graciela complained that at times Herminia ran short of both food and clothing.<sup>15</sup> Herminia's weekly groceries consisted of "six small cans of evaporated milk, never eggs and very rarely meat". Herminia was "almost always

short on clothing" and the social worker noted that the mother "alleges that on occasion she has had to buy her shoes with her own money so that [Herminia] does not have to walk about barefoot".<sup>16</sup> The social worker's use of the word "alleges" suggests she may have doubted some of Graciela's accusations.

Earlier in the year, the VA and CW social workers had inquired with the family *en el campo* and *el pueblo* about changing Herminia's sleeping quarters. They wondered whether the family could use the monthly pension to build Herminia an adjoining bedroom at her mother's house. That option would remove her from the overcrowded rural home and provide her with a private place to sleep and store her belongings. If not there, perhaps the grandmother could build Herminia a bedroom at the country home. A third option, suggested by the VA social worker, was to send Herminia to a private boarding school. The third option offered the family a way to guarantee the child's safety, health and education. They could choose to apply her military pension and savings toward tuition and boarding expenses at a private residential school.

Initially, during the July visit, the family had supported the ideas. None, however, was willing to present these suggestions to Herminia's grandmother. The family described doña Chabela as an old woman who suffered periods of disorientation – "*es una anciana la cual pierde la razón por temporadas*". Social worker Ríos highlighted that "there are strong ties of affection between grandmother and granddaughter. They have always lived together. Doña Chabela raised her."<sup>17</sup> The family was afraid of how doña Chabela might react to the thought of removing Herminia from the home to live with her mother in town or away at school. Herminia was equally attached to her grandmother. Despite the overcrowding in the home, the social worker noted that "Herminia gives the impression that she is happy and contented."<sup>18</sup> Ríos concluded that sending Herminia away to school might improve her material well-being, but would surely also cause her great emotional distress. "*En términos emocionales la perjudicaríamos toda vez que entre ella y su abuela existen lazos fuertes de cariño. Indudablemente que una separación abrupta de ambas podría perjudicarlas mutuamente.*"<sup>19</sup> Ríos reported to the VA social worker that Herminia's mother had agreed to investigate the possibility of building a bedroom for Herminia in town, rather than sending her away to school.

Months later, in October, social worker Ríos returned to Herminia's home to observe the progress on the bedroom construction. This was a very different visit. Ríos expressed frustration that Graciela had "done

nothing" to build a room for Herminia. This time, when she visited Herminia at her grandmother's home, she was disappointed to find them living in "deplorable conditions".<sup>20</sup> The bed shared by Herminia and her grandmother was now of very poor quality, barely large enough for one person, with dirty bedding. While Ríos had described doña Chabela in July as an old woman with some moments of disorientation, she provided a harsher assessment by October. The grandmother's condition may have deteriorated over time because she was now described as an old, sickly woman who rarely demonstrated awareness of her present surroundings. "She spoke incoherently at length and then laughed and cackled."<sup>21</sup> Ríos concluded that while she was not dangerous, she could not take responsibility for a child.

In the meantime, the "bad road" to the country house was now considered a "dangerous road", especially for an adolescent girl to navigate alone.<sup>22</sup> It was surrounded by tall sugar cane on both sides, the house was isolated, and when it rained the road became impassible. Months had passed and Herminia continued to make the trek to her mother's house in town for meals. During this October visit, then, the social worker concluded that because the house was in poor condition, the bed small and dirty, the grandmother insane, the stepfather still suffering from tuberculosis, and the mother not making any progress on building a room, it would be best to remove Herminia from the home.<sup>23</sup> None of the other adults in Herminia's life (maternal and paternal aunts) were willing to assume responsibility for the child. This time, Ríos concluded definitively that "the only way to guarantee her welfare and safety was to remove her from the home."<sup>24</sup> The grandmother and mother agreed with the recommendation. The second option, finding an appropriate residential school, was the next step.

### *Una niña de color / A black girl*

The social worker's report described a child who, despite receiving a military pension, lived in poverty. Herminia was loved by her mother and grandmother. She lived in an overcrowded rural house isolated among sugar cane fields. Every day she walked to town to eat her meals, yet did not always have enough food or clothing. Despite these material challenges, however, the eleven-year-old was doing well in school and attended fifth grade. There may not have been anything exceptional about the fact that Herminia lived in a crowded home with her extended family or that she was being raised by more than one adult. None of



these factors suggests that Herminia was experiencing a childhood outside of the norm for a poor family in a sugar district. If anything, Herminia's progress in school exceeded the norm. She had access to a public school and was in an age-appropriate grade. Just as significant, she was happy and contented.

Ríos' case study, however, also provided some details about Herminia which help us understand that while some of her childhood experiences were typical of poor, rural children, in other ways, they were particular to black children. Case studies provided a physical description of the child and their health. Ríos noted that "in general, we cannot say that the child has a good appearance."<sup>25</sup> She was thin and pale and looked unhealthy. The elementary public-school children had recently been tested for tuberculosis and Ríos confirmed that Herminia was free of that disease. If tuberculosis was not the cause of her sickly appearance, perhaps it was poor nutrition.

Ríos' evaluation of Herminia's poor appearance was based on another factor – her colour and race. The social worker detailed that Herminia was a very dark-skinned child – "her skin is very dark and she belongs to the race of people of color." She had very thick lips ("*labios bien gruesos*") and large protruding eyes ("*ojos grandes medio brotados*"). Ríos described her hair as "nappy" and "kinky" and assessed that Herminia always gave the impression of being unkempt – "*da la impresión de estar siempre desaliñada*".<sup>26</sup> Ríos' choice of words and description suggested distance between herself and those who could be clearly distinguished as members of the black race.<sup>27</sup> Ríos was right to be concerned for Herminia's future. Her "mala apariencia" – that is, the fact that she was a black child with visible African heritage in the form of very dark skin, thick lips, and untreated natural black hair – would prove to limit Herminia's options (academic and social welfare) in ways that even Ríos found hard to accept.

Herminia's black skin and African heritage narrowed her academic options in 1950's Puerto Rico. In November 1958, Ríos contacted two Catholic boarding schools for girls located on the west coast of Puerto Rico to inquire about admitting Herminia. By mid-December she wrote the VA social worker to report on the obstacles she had faced and to ask for additional suggestions. The Mother Superior at the Catholic Immaculate School of Manatí explained to Ríos why Herminia could not be admitted. First was the issue of cost. The \$700 in Herminia's savings account and the \$70 monthly pension would not be enough to cover the tuition and boarding fees at the school.<sup>28</sup> Second was concern

over the "type" of girl the nuns were willing to admit at the school. Ríos was careful about how she conveyed to García the Mother Superior's concern about another important factor – "*otro factor de mucho peso el cual dificulta la colocación*". Herminia was a poor, black girl – "*una niña humilde y de color lo cual contrasta grandemente con el tipo de niña que allí está internada*".<sup>29</sup> Herminia's race and class were great obstacles, in stark contrast to the type of girls admitted to the school, that is, elite, white girls.<sup>30</sup> The Mother Superior requested that Ríos not pursue Herminia's admission to the school for her own well-being. She feared Herminia "would face problems".<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the director of the Mayagüez school responded to Ríos' inquiry by letter. That director regretted that there was "no hope there would be a vacancy" for Herminia.<sup>32</sup>

Census records confirm the Mother Superior's characterization of the type of girl they were willing to accept. In fact, it was an assessment that extended to most private schools and colleges throughout the island, not just those on the west coast. Private Catholic schools were segregated institutions where almost one hundred per cent of the teaching faculty, students, and other staff were enumerated in census records as white. They were racially exclusive institutions that were also located in racially and class-segregated neighbourhoods. Conversely, the only racially integrated residential institutions for youth were public institutions, such as state homes for boys and girls (homes for delinquent children) or correctional schools (institutions for minors charged with a crime).<sup>33</sup> The two Catholic schools Ríos contacted were typical of other private schools in their racial and class exclusion of non-white and non-elite faculty and students.

Nevertheless, there were some differences between these two institutions. The first one, the Catholic School of Mayagüez was staffed and directed by nuns who had come to the island from the United States of America.<sup>34</sup> In 1930, fourteen white nuns resided at the school. Only one was born in Puerto Rico, two others were born in Europe, and the rest in the United States of America. Ten years later, the 1940 census listed fifteen nuns at the school; one each from Puerto Rico and Spain, and the rest from the United States of America and Ireland. The majority of nuns at the second school, the Catholic Immaculate School of Manatí, however, were born in Spain and had arrived in Puerto Rico between 1902 and 1916.<sup>35</sup> In 1930, its thirty-three residential schoolgirls (who ranged in age from seven to sixteen) as well as six staff members (servants and laundresses) were enumerated as white.<sup>36</sup> By 1940, this school was becoming more creolized. Half of its eight teachers had been

born in the Caribbean; three in Puerto Rico and one in Cuba.<sup>37</sup> These nuns were members of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Mother Superior hailed from the Canary Islands.

What we cannot know from documentation of the conversation is the Mother Superior's motivation when she offered Ríos advice regarding the student who she feared might have a difficult time at the school. The Mother Superior could have been concerned for the child's well-being, invested in maintaining the school's racial segregation, or both. In this example, Catholic nuns from Europe, the United States of America, and the Caribbean united in maintaining Puerto Rico's rigid racial segregation in private schools. In contrast, it was civil and secular staff, like the post-World War II generation of state-employed social workers, who advocated for both black and white poor children on the island.

Catholic schools also reflected the broader racial segregation of their neighbourhoods. Manatí's urban population was fifteen per cent non-white and Mayagüez's was twenty per cent non-white.<sup>38</sup> The Manatí school was located in Pueblo Ponente and the Mayagüez school was located in Barrio Candelario. A survey of the ten households in the immediate environs of each institution in 1940 confirms the racial segregation of the neighbourhoods. For example, out of 122 individuals residing near the school in Pueblo Ponente, only three were women of colour.<sup>39</sup> One was an "*alojada*", or an individual renting a room; the second was a servant in a private home; and the third was the niece of the head of household. Barrio Candelario was a bit more diverse. Out of 112 individuals, four women of colour resided in that neighborhood. One was a servant, the second a cook, and the third a head of household who resided with her grandchildren. The segregation in these neighbourhoods were both gendered and racial. The only non-white individuals recorded as residents were women, almost all of whom worked in domestic service in private households. Significantly, no black men lived anywhere near the schools. The Catholic school directors' exclusion of Herminia – a poor, black girl – reproduced the racial segregation of private institutions, as well as their segregated neighbourhoods.

By December 1958, social worker Ríos was frustrated that she could not find a school for Herminia. The child's opportunity to study in a residential school had been denied because of her race and class. Not even a military pension could buy the child access to those privileged and exclusive spaces. Ríos may have been sincere, or she may have been

sarcastically condemning the racist institutions when she asked the VA social worker: "If you think that Puerto Rico has a Catholic school with different rules and requirements for admission, please let us know so we may be in contact."<sup>40</sup>

The next option for Herminia was a foster family. In the late 1950s, the Bureau of Institutions of the Department of Health identified overcrowding in state institutions for minors (state homes and correctional schools) as a concern and priority. The Department of Health initiated a public media campaign on radio and in newspapers to find new foster homes for those children in need of a place to live and who should not (or could not) be held in institutions.<sup>41</sup> In spite of the public campaign and pressure from district directors for social workers to investigate and approve potential homes, very few foster homes were approved, and the Bureau of Public Welfare remained concerned about how best to procure homes into the 1960s.

Herminia's skin colour and race limited her options for placement in a foster home as much as they did in a boarding school. Luckily, Herminia's case emerged just as the number of approved homes was slowly growing at the end of the decade. This was "lucky" because while the number of available foster homes was low overall, those willing to accept black children were almost non-existent. For example, for the fiscal year of 1949–1950, social workers had approved only thirteen foster homes in Carolina, a black-majority municipality located east of San Juan on the north coast of Puerto Rico.<sup>42</sup> Children from throughout the island, not just Carolina, were eligible to be placed in those homes.

Notably, foster parents could specify the type of child they were willing to accept by placing limits on their age, sex, and race. Out of thirteen potential foster homes in Carolina, nine specified that they were only willing to accept white children. Three were open to mixed-race children, or brown or *mulato* children in island parlance. The one household willing to accept a black child (a "*negra*") specified that the child should be "*tipo india*" (red-brown skin colour) with "*pelo que se peina*" (wavy or curly hair that could be combed through).<sup>43</sup> Herminia, who the social worker described as a child with very dark skin and nappy or kinky hair, might not have been acceptable to that family. None of the households in Carolina were open to fostering a black boy. Herminia's prominently African phenotypical features, therefore, narrowed her opportunities to be placed in a foster home. If Herminia had been a young, black boy, it can be concluded that his chances for placement would have been limited even further. The documents did not record

the race of the foster parents. It may be safe to assume, however, that black parents were likely the ones willing to accept a black foster child. Herminia's example supports this proposition.

The VA social worker stopped corresponding with Ríos after the Catholic boarding schools denied Herminia admission. Ríos, nevertheless, tirelessly advocated for Herminia. Almost a year after the VA social worker's July 1958 inquiry, Ríos secured the child a foster home in Barrio Obrero in Santurce. Ríos coordinated with the Santurce district office and arranged for Herminia to visit the foster home twice before final placement. In May 1959, Ríos travelled with Herminia the long distance between the sugar town of Asombroso in Altamar on the west coast of the island and arrived at the Bureau of Public Welfare office in urban Santurce near the capital city of San Juan. Herminia's new social worker from the Santurce office, Ms Lipton, then accompanied Herminia to her new foster family in Barrio Obrero.<sup>44</sup>

Herminia's experience of this transition would have been significant for several reasons. Barrio Obrero, or the Worker's Neighbourhood, was a majority black, but multiracial, residential neighbourhood. Black families in a variety of occupations – civil servants, artisans, skilled workers, and other wage workers – made up the community.<sup>45</sup> Today, Barrio Obrero is a historic black working-class neighbourhood with a reputation for cultivating and nurturing black Puerto Rican pride and musical artists.<sup>46</sup> In the 1950s, it was a neighbourhood bordered by Caño Martín Peña, a narrow channel filled with black waters that pulled sanitation waste away from the Bahía San José, and the emerging shantytown at its margins, into the Bay of San Juan. Herminia may have experienced a difficult transition coming from a small wooden house in the sugar cane fields of Asombroso into the crowded streets and urban housing district of Barrio Obrero. Nonetheless, the black community of workers and middle-class families was precisely the one that had the capital, property, family honour, and black racial pride necessary to grant poor, black children like Herminia temporary refuge, when they opened their homes to those in need. While Herminia no doubt faced many difficult transitions in Barrio Obrero, they would have been very different from those she would have experienced in a private Catholic school.

What we know with certainty from the documents, however, is that Herminia made it known to all who would listen that she had no intention of staying at the foster home for long. The correspondence between the social workers in Altamar and Santurce recorded that,

before leaving Altamar, Herminia told her mother that she would be back after a couple of weeks. Ríos acknowledged that Herminia had been placed out of necessity and without her consent – “*con poca aceptación de ella hacia el plan.*”<sup>47</sup> After one of the two initial overnight visits to the foster home, Herminia complained to her mother that the foster father woke her in the middle of the night so that she could bring him water and medicine for his pain. She also complained that the foster parents did not provide her meals in the afternoon. In the first two weeks of her stay, Herminia wrote several letters to her mother in Altamar complaining that she could not adjust to the home, that she cried a great deal, and had stopped eating.<sup>48</sup>

Social worker Ríos was concerned about these complaints and, especially worried that if Herminia did not receive proper orientation, it might derail the foster placement. Lipton, the Santurce social worker, followed-up with Herminia and reported to Ríos that, after discussing the issues further with the child, she was confident Herminia had exaggerated the problems. In her opinion, Herminia simply wanted to provide her family in Altamar with a negative impression of the foster family so that they would allow her to come home. Lipton also confirmed that it had been made plain to Herminia that this foster home placement would last for an “indefinite amount of time”.<sup>49</sup> Ríos concluded her letter to the Santurce office asking for further updates about Herminia’s adjustment to the home. However, that was the final document in Herminia’s social welfare file.

No more documents were found regarding this case. It is worth noting that there were many documented cases of abuse and neglect of children in state homes (the State Home for Boys, State Home for Girls, and the School for the Blind) and correctional schools in the first half of the twentieth century. Some cases were investigated and those reports are available in the archives of the Bureau of Institutions and the *Fondo del Gobernador*.<sup>50</sup> The cases investigated were preceded by repeated complaints, personal letters of appeals, and public shaming (taking the case to the newspapers).<sup>51</sup> The archival sources accessed do not relate a history of abuse or neglect in foster homes in mid-century Santurce. They do record, however, Herminia’s complaints. The records show that Herminia was happy and contented living with her grandmother, that she did not want to leave her mother for Santurce, that she had no intention of staying in Santurce for long before returning home, that she complained about how the foster parents treated her (like a servant at night and not being fed in the afternoons), that she cried for long periods

of time, and had difficulty eating. We also know that these complaints, after a conversation with a social worker, were dismissed and considered exaggerations by a young girl who was finding it difficult to adjust to her foster home placement. Herminia was then placed in a foster home despite her protests and desire to remain at home. Her complaints being dismissed as exaggeration.

## **Family, Place, and Sugar: Additional Sources in the Study of Puerto Rican Childhoods**

Archival sources – individual case studies and correspondence – produced by the social welfare staff tell the story of a young girl, her family, and the social worker who dedicated a year to the case. By definition, the social welfare documents approach the child's history and experiences with an assumption of deficiency. The grandmother's house did not have enough space for all who occupied it, while the mother's house failed to provide the child with enough food and a disease-free environment. Both guardians lacked the trustworthiness required to manage the child's monthly pension, requiring a paternal aunt to supervise and a VA social worker to investigate and verify its expenditure. The child did not receive attention with respect to personal hygiene and cleanliness and, significantly, did not have the "good appearance" that was the marker of a healthy child. As a poor, black child she lacked the white skin and class breeding necessary for admission to a private college and for full consideration by available foster homes. According to social workers, Herminia did not have an understanding of the promise of a foster home and the emotional maturity to be truthful with her family about conditions in her new placement. Despite some glimpses into positive aspects of Herminia's life in Altamar – the love of her mother and grandmother; attention from a father who listed her as a beneficiary; success in school; and evident happiness and contentment with her extended family – social work records documented the moments of crisis and intervention into a child's life.

There are additional sources, however, that allow historians to more fully develop the story of Herminia and other rural black children. Civil and parish records (birth, baptism, marriage, and death certificates), census manuscripts, and military registration documents provide information about the child's family history, specifically the history of family and place, sugar and poverty, and literacy and social mobility. While

these documents do not record the child's story in her own words (as in a personal letter or transcript of an interview or conversation), they nonetheless allow for a deeper and more substantive understanding of the world she inhabited and the impact of the changes she faced with the intervention of social welfare staff.<sup>52</sup>

### *Family and Place*

When social workers removed Herminia due to deficiencies in the home, they temporarily cut her ties to family and place, from the large community of extended family members deeply rooted in the history, traditions, and values of rural Asombroso. Civil and church records show that Herminia's family had lived in a rural community on the west coast of the island for at least six generations.<sup>53</sup>

Herminia's maternal side of the family had lived in the same municipality since the early nineteenth century, since the arrival of some members from the continent of Africa. She descended from African-born great-great-grandparents, as well as other black, brown, and white residents of the island who may have arrived in Puerto Rico much earlier. The census records did not provide much more information about her ancestors' region of birth in Africa or their Atlantic or Caribbean port of departure or entry into Puerto Rico.<sup>54</sup> Slavery and sugar in Puerto Rico expanded rapidly in the first half of the nineteenth century due to Spanish colonial legislative reforms, collectively known as the 1815 *Cédula de Gracias*, which provided liberal economic incentives for the expansion of the sugar industry, including the importation of the enslaved to the island.<sup>55</sup> Herminia's great-great-grandfather Cándido Alvarez was born in Puerto Rico in 1843. The child of two African-born parents, Cándido was born before the end of the Atlantic slave trade (1850) and the abolition of slavery on the island (1873).<sup>56</sup>

Civil and church records also document that Herminia's ancestors were married in the Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup> This is significant for it meant that the children born of those unions were considered "legitimate". In the Spanish Catholic colonial territory of Puerto Rico, legitimacy was a marker of honour. It signified a child born of a marriage approved by the church versus one born out of wedlock. Legitimacy was also a lifeline for some, for it ostensibly meant that a father's financial and parental support of legitimate children was prioritized over any illegitimate ones.<sup>58</sup> Nineteenth and twentieth-century civil and religious



documents recorded an individual's state of legitimacy – from birth, marriage, to death. Herminia's paternal ancestors were also married in the church and their children (including Herminia's father) were recorded as legitimate.

The same documents recorded the race of the child, parents, and grandparents, albeit inconsistently. The majority of Herminia's ancestors were recorded as members of "*la raza negra*" or "*la raza mulata*". They were described as *negro*, *mulato*, or *de color*, all terms that represent a range of black and brown skin colours. Occasionally, individual family members were recorded as white. Even then, the race of those individuals changed in civil records throughout their lifetime. A child might be recorded as "white" on his or her birth or baptismal record, but over two to three censuses (1910, 1920, and 1930) he or she could have been enumerated as black, negro, coloured, or mulatto. Historian Rodríguez-Silva reminds us that "the multitude of terms should not be interpreted as a lack of racialized social boundaries or as proof of their fluidity. Rather, this plurality of terms reflects both the attempt to catalogue racialized transgressions and efforts to resist such classifications."<sup>59</sup>

What we know from the documents is that Herminia's ancestors were African-descended and some were racially mixed. Any "whites" were so described rarely and inconsistently. We also know that eleven-year-old Herminia, born in 1940's rural Altamar, descended from African-born ancestors and inherited their black skin, facial features, and hair texture. The social worker witnessed how these physical features limited the young girl's academic and social welfare options at mid-century. What Ms Ríos' report cannot document, however, was whether Herminia, her mother and grandmother valued and cherished their black skin, for it represented heritage, legacy, and family connection to a place spanning six generations.

While civil and church records note that Herminia's grandparents and great-grandparents had been married in the church, her mother was not. This would have had consequences for Herminia. José, Herminia's biological father, was in the second month of his marriage to his new and legitimate wife when Herminia was born to Graciela. José died two years later of tuberculosis. At the time he was a member of the US military, as well as a third-year university student. There is no record that José and his legitimate wife had children of their own. Graciela, meanwhile, entered into a consensual union with her new partner, Ignacio. Herminia's mother and father were black, but Ignacio was

white. He was a white man who lived in the town centre, not the *campo*. Ignacio's father was a business owner and all the adult siblings in his extended family worked for that company. The exclusively white street on which Ignacio lived was populated by other business owners and elite members of Altamar society.<sup>60</sup>

The social worker reported that Graciela, Ignacio, and their two young children lived in a small house at the back of Ignacio's family land. The house was too small to accommodate Herminia, and while Ignacio slept there at night, he took his meals during the day with his parents in the main house. While the sources do not elaborate on the emotional relationship and commitment between Graciela and Ignacio, we know that Ignacio's black consensual wife, two mulatto children, and illegitimate black stepchild were not welcomed in his parent's house. The exclusion could have been due to race and class prejudice, a reflection of white honour and respectability, testimony to the segregation of intimate white and black spaces, and/or simply Ignacio's parents' dismissal or lack of recognition of their son's consensual wife and family. Racial prejudice surely shaped their relationship. At the very least it affected the quality of housing that Graciela and her three children were allotted, as well as the quantity of food and nourishment they could access. Racial prejudice and illegitimacy, likewise, affected her daughter Herminia. We know this because, according to the mother's complaint, the social worker noted that at times Herminia went hungry and barefoot for lack of food, clothes, and shoes. This might have been different had Ignacio been willing to assume responsibility for the needs of his wife's child.

### *Sugar, Labour, and Poverty*

Herminia's family lived in the same rural barrio, not just the same municipality, for six generations.<sup>61</sup> The west coast of Puerto Rico in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century was a sugar-producing region, home to several plantations and mills. Central Coloso, for example, was a sugar plantation founded in the 1820s, which eventually became a sugar mill (*central*). Over its lifetime (from the late 1820s to the early 2000s), the mill was owned by different foreign and Puerto Rican families and corporations. Once it became a central mill, it refined the sugar produced in *colonias* (sugar-growing land) in the neighbouring municipalities of Aguada, Aguadilla, and Moca.<sup>62</sup> It was also one of the main employers of men in this sugar region. All the men in Herminia's

family, dating back to Cándido Alvarez worked in the sugar industry, in the sugar cane fields as cane cutters (*trabajadores*, *braceros*, or *labradores de caña*), fire stokers (*fogoneros*), or ox cart drivers (*carreteros*). Those who worked at the sugar mill, rather than in the fields, held skilled jobs, such as centrifugal machine operators (*centrifugadores*), other machine operators (*maquinistas*), or loaders (*cargadores*).<sup>63</sup> Some of her ancestors worked at the mill all their lives. For example, her maternal grandfather worked until a week before his death in September 1944. Her paternal grandfather, meanwhile, died one evening at work at the mill in 1936, tragically crushed in one of the machines.

Herminia's father, however, was different. While as a teenager he worked in sugar, as he grew older, he chose road construction. He joined the military in his twenties and had been studying at university for three years before dying in his late twenties. Access to public schools and higher education, the military, and the changing economy at mid-century Puerto Rico meant he was poised to follow a different path than his father, brothers, uncles, and grandfathers. His literacy, education, and military service indicated that he and his wife might have achieved social mobility and pursued different employment options than his ancestors. However, his death reconnected him with the typical experience of the working poor in this region of Puerto Rico. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis for a full year before succumbing to the fatal disease.

The strictly gendered division of labour in the black majority sugar-growing region meant that women worked at home. All documents and records note Herminia's mother, aunts, and grandmothers were employed in domestic work, whether housekeeping and child rearing in their own private homes or working as domestics or cooks in the homes of others (or a combination of both). By the 1940s the needlework industry expanded along the West Coast, and during their teenage years Herminia's aunts also worked at home doing piecework.<sup>64</sup> Women's primary duty was to care for their children. Those who could, in the twentieth century, sent some of their children to public school. However, with the dismal health conditions of rural workers in the first half of the twentieth century, child mortality was high and tuberculosis common and deadly.<sup>65</sup>

Doña Chabela, the grandmother that social worker Ríos would eventually characterize as an insane old woman who had lost her mind in the 1958 report, had witnessed the death of most of her children due to preventable diseases.<sup>66</sup> One of the two children doña Chabela had with

her first husband in the early 1900s died at three years of age from enteritis. Doña Chabela's second marriage to don Domingo was long-lasting and fruitful. They were married in their late twenties, were together at least twenty-five years before don Domingo died, and had eleven children. Unfortunately, they also shared the experience of mourning the deaths of their children. Two daughters did not survive their first year and both died of gastroenteritis. Three of their children lived into their twenties but then died of tuberculosis and bronchitis. The family had an especially difficult six-year period when, from 1928 to 1934, they lost five of their children, all to preventable diseases (gastroenteritis, tuberculosis, and chronic bronchitis). The extreme poverty and harsh conditions for urban and rural workers in post-Great Depression Puerto Rico undoubtedly contributed to their deaths. This rural family lost many of their young and adult children to diseases of poverty, an experience likely to be familiar to neighbouring families in the rural sugar community of Asombroso.<sup>67</sup>

The three sisters who appear in Herminia's social worker's report (mother Graciela and aunts Goyita and Margot) lived into adulthood and cultivated their own families and children. Graciela, unfortunately, fared much worse than her mother with regard to her own children's mortality. Herminia was Graciela's eldest child. Graciela went on to have three more children, two during her marriage to Ignacio, and one after that relationship ended. Tragically, all three children born after Herminia died of preventable diseases. One child lived only three hours, a second at least two and a half years, and the last lived almost to the age of eight. The two children born to Graciela and Ignacio in the small house at the back of Ignacio's family land died from stomach problems – diarrhea, malnutrition, gastroenteritis. This might have been especially difficult for Graciela to accept, for Ignacio's large extended family owned and ran a bakery in town.

Herminia's maternal family's great loss of young children, unfortunately, was typical in sugar-producing areas along the coast of Puerto Rico. One of the sugar industry's legacies over two centuries, therefore, is that it paid working fathers and heads of households (many who spent a lifetime in the fields or mills, and like Herminia's grandfathers, worked until the day they died) a wage that promised to undermine their children's nutrition, health, and mortality. Mothers in the sugar regions struggled to nourish their children and see them survive into adulthood. Given the experience of Herminia's half-brothers and sister, we can suggest with some confidence that when the social worker

removed Herminia from her homes in Altamar, she might have saved her life as Herminia was the only one of Graciela's four children to live to adulthood. While Herminia's archival documents disappear after she moved to Santurce, later records show that she lived at least into her early twenties. She reappears in the archives ten years later when her mother died in 1971. It was Herminia who registered her mother's death at the local civil registrar in Altamar. We know that she survived, unlike her three siblings, and we know that she came back home to her mother.

## Conclusion

The social welfare sources (case studies and correspondence), in addition to civil and church records, census records, and military registration cards, allow scholars to write the history of childhood in mid-century Puerto Rico. More specifically, the archival materials tell the broader history of childhood experiences in coastal, sugar growing, rural regions. These sources confirm the importance of heritage and place. Unlike other histories of rural workers in mid-century Puerto Rico, this study suggests that some coastal families remained in the same location, generation after generation.<sup>68</sup> Their connection to land and labour was tied to the expansion of the local sugar industry and the success of regional sugar mills.

The generations of sugar workers in this example valued family honour and marriage, and registered their marriages with civil and religious authorities. Significantly, they also meticulously and proudly registered their children's legitimate births in church records as well. The studies suggest that there was little opportunity for wage work outside of the sugar industry in this region, and that despite their commitment to work and industry, male heads of household were not able to provide the financial support and stability to guarantee their child's health. This may not have been a question of only money. Rural families had little to no access to health-care services, especially critical preventive services for children. Nonetheless, Herminia's records suggest that by the late 1950s, young schoolchildren were at least tested for tuberculosis in public schools. Families and communities shared the painful experience of the death of young infants and children, and likely celebrated and marvelled at the children who grew into adulthood.

The sense of rootedness and place that emerges from Herminia's family history weighed heavily on the social worker's decision to

remove the child from the home. Ms Ríos sent her far away to a foster family, all the way across the island and into a neighbourhood that was different in every way from what Herminia had known at home – a densely populated urban neighbourhood where city workers, artisans, civil servants, and entrepreneurs generated a different type of dynamic black community. While Herminia had been accustomed to sleeping in a house full of young cousins and aunts along with her grandmother, she was now in a stranger's home governed by new rules, order, routines, and smells. She might have missed the morning walk through the tall cane fields to her mother's house, where she ate her mother's cooking and spent time with her half-siblings. We know that she was happy and contented when she lived in a home and community created and nourished by generations of family members, until that came to an abrupt end.

What most distinguished Herminia's life from those of other rural children was her father. Herminia was born an illegitimate child, something that affected the stability, welfare, and health of children in mid-century Puerto Rico. As soon as the island became a territory of the United States of America, Puerto Rican men joined the US military. Acceptance into the military, however, whether during peacetime or war was not automatic. It was always selective. Literacy was required. This is one reason why Herminia's grandfathers might have chosen not to enlist. We cannot know their personal or ideological positions about colonial military service, but the military registration records show, at the very least, her paternal grandfather's ineligibility. He was not only illiterate, but as his World War I registration card noted, had "*una mano inútil*" (a lame arm).<sup>69</sup> It was his son, José, who chose to enlist in the military. This provided him, his wife, and his daughter with a different type of income and financial stability. Upon his death, his child began to receive a monthly pension.<sup>70</sup> That pension brought the state directly into her home, in the form of the VA and CW social workers. It led to the evaluation of her material conditions and the final and firm recommendation to remove her from family and a crowded home. This set Herminia on a path distinct from that of other poor rural children whose fathers may not have attended school, been literate, joined the military, or "acknowledged" their children.

The social welfare state's intervention into Herminia's life also exposed the particular ways in which black childhoods were circumscribed differently than white ones, regardless of class. Like other rural and urban children, Herminia had access to a secular, co-

educational, public school where she was succeeding. While the social worker advocated for her admission into private boarding schools, the island's history of racism, racial segregation, and class discrimination in private educational institutions and those who policed and reproduced them denied Herminia the opportunity for admission. Elite private schooling, therefore, was not an option for a poor black child. We must consider, as well, that it might not have been Herminia's preference either. We cannot assume that she would have wanted to attend a boarding school that prided itself on the exclusion of poor black children. Herminia lived in a black community and was already attending her local school. Why would she have wanted to be removed from what was familiar and comfortable and placed into such a discriminatory space?

Herminia's case also highlights the existence and values of middle-class black communities in Puerto Rico and their distinctive and intentional contributions to the welfare and future of poor black children. Records show that if Herminia were to be placed in a foster home any at all, it would have been one run by black parents who were willing to care for black children. Other than foster homes, the only public institutional options for "dependent" black children were in those institutions designated for children with "delinquent" behaviours. While there was nothing delinquent about Herminia's case, if a foster home had not become available in Barrio Obrero, social worker Ríos might have sought institutional placement for Herminia. This would have been similar to what social workers before her had done for black children in the United States of America in order to secure for them a space in the only social welfare institutions that would take them.<sup>71</sup>

Puerto Rico had its own child-savers. Unfortunately, the ones identified here did not focus on black children or found "training schools for negro girls".<sup>72</sup> Instead, the child-savers were elite white women who either highlighted the whiteness of those children most in need (*angelitos blancos*, white angels) or who deployed a discourse of colour-blindness that focused instead on children's material poverty and financial needs.<sup>73</sup> Black foster parents, in this case, also emerge as black child-savers in this story. Black foster homes appear to have been the only social welfare housing option for black children that was not meant to address delinquency. Finally, while this was an option for Herminia and other poor black girls, it was an option that may not have existed for poor black boys.<sup>74</sup> Herminia's case highlights how racism, racial discrimination, racially-segregated spaces (homes and private

institutions), as well as class prejudice and gender, shaped children's options in mid-century Puerto Rico.

Historians are careful to stay close to their sources. Nevertheless, we should not dismiss nor deny the available glimpses into Herminia's thoughts and feelings. What emerges about her perspectives and opinions is filtered and mediated through the writing of adult social workers and recorded in government correspondence and case study reports. If we are to accept her opinions as they are presented in the documents, then, at the very least we can affirm that Herminia was happy and contented living with her grandmother and spending days with her mother in the small house out back; that she had not consented to her placement into a foster home of any kind; and that she was emotionally distraught in Santurce - crying and not eating - and uncomfortable with her foster father's expectations that she should accept being awakened in the middle of the night to bring him water and medicine. What is also known is that in person and in writing, Herminia told her mother that she would be back soon and, therefore, it can be affirmed that she had no intention of staying away from her family permanently. This confirms that a child's emotional health and opinions could not override a social worker's professional evaluation and recommendation. However, access to additional archival materials and family history, allows us as scholars the opportunity to choose not to dismiss or minimize Herminia's perspectives in the same way that the social workers had.

Civil records, nevertheless, suggest that Herminia's health and perhaps even her chances for survival into adulthood were not great. Ms Ríos noted that she was pale and looked unhealthy, and civil records confirm that all of her siblings had passed away before the age of eight. In spite of her protests and objections, Herminia was sent away. This move might, it seems, have provided her with some of the material security - in the form of food, clothing, housing, and access to health care - that was denied to Graciela's other children. In the end, we know that Herminia followed through with her intention to come back home to her mother. The records do not say how long she lived in Santurce or in other foster homes or whether she returned to Altamar soon after leaving. They do note, nevertheless, that the last three days before Graciela's death, Herminia was by her side at the Centro Médico Hospital in Mayagüez. What is evident is that Herminia survived into her twenties and that she fulfilled her goal to come back home.



## NOTES

1. King, xix.
2. Ibid.
3. Pseudonyms are used for all personal names (family and staff) and for all geographic locations on the western coast of Puerto Rico that make reference to Herminia's family's area of residence. Original names are used for all institutions, institutional offices, and private companies in Manatí, Mayagüez, and San Juan.
4. Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery*; Kinsbruner, *Not of Pure Blood*; Dorsey, *Slave Traffic*; Figueroa, *Sugar, Slavery, and Freedom*; Findlay, *Imposing Decency*; Rodríguez-Silva, *Silencing Race*; and Jiménez-Muñoz, "Antonia Sáez Torres".
5. New scholarship on the history of twentieth-century black Puerto Ricans and black identities continues to grow, alongside the more recent history of contemporary Afro-Latin American social movements and scholarship in the region. Dinzey-Flores, *Locked In*; Godreau et al., *Arrancando mitos*; Lloréns, *Imaging*; Merino Falú, *Raza*; Rivera-Rideau, *Remixing Reggaetón*; Godreau, *Scripts*; Lloréns, "Beyond Blanqueamiento".
6. While there are few historical studies that centre on the experiences of black children, a dissertation that examines young girls' and adolescents' racial identity is available. Franco Ortiz, "Manejo".
7. Rodríguez-Silva, 226.
8. "Murio estando en el ejército", Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, box #4, folder "Circulares Sup. y Directora del Distrito, del 56 al 59", Fondo Departamento de Salud, 61-78, Archivo General de Puerto Rico (hereafter AGPR), p. 1.
9. "No estaba beneficiando al máximo", Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, p. 1.
10. On the history of the professionalization of social work in Puerto Rico, see Amador, "Welfare is Work"; and Burgos Ortíz, *Pioneras*.
11. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, p. 2.
12. In rural Asombroso, the most popular size of dwelling units was three bedrooms. There were half as many two-bedroom units, the second most popular size of homes. Sixty-two per cent of rural homes in Asomante had no running water, while on average, forty-five per cent of homes in rural Puerto Rico did not have running water. The median number of persons per occupied dwelling in rural Asomante was 5.0. "Table 21. Occupancy Characteristics, Number of Dwelling Units in Structure, Number of Rooms, Condition and Plumbing Facilities, and Number of Persons in Rural Dwelling Units, for Municipalities: 1950", p. 53–56, *Census of Housing: 1950*; "Table 5. Condition and Plumbing Facilities by Occupancy, for Puerto Rico, Urban and Rural: 1950", p. 53–19, *Census of Housing: 1950*.
13. "Viven en una casita pequeña ubicada en el patio de la casa de los padres del señor M.", Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, p. 1.

14. Scarano and White, "A Window".
15. "La niña carece a veces de alimentación y de ropa", Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, p. 2.
16. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, p. 2.
17. Ibid.
18. "Aun cuando las condiciones en que vive la niña son de hacinamiento, la menor da la impresión de sentirse contenta y feliz", Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, p. 2.
19. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, p. 3.
20. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 30 October 1958, box #4, folder "Circulares Sup. y Directora del Distrito, del 56 al 59", Fondo Departamento de Salud, 61-78, AGPR.
21. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 30 October 1958.
22. Ibid.
23. The difference in the social worker's description of living conditions suggest that the first report was based on interviews with the family members in town (mother and daughter) and may not have been based on the social worker's eyewitness account of the conditions in the rural countryside. There is no reason for the road, house, and bed to have changed dramatically in three or four months' time, although the grandmother's mental and physical condition could have deteriorated.
24. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 30 October 1958.
25. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 14 July 1958, p. 3.
26. Ibid.
27. Ms Ríos' race is not identifiable.
28. "A base de la información remitida pensamos que es sumamente costoso y que la cantidad que recibe la niña mensualmente de la VA no es suficiente para sufragar los gastos de este colegio", Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 15 December 1958, box #4, folder "Circulares Sup. y Directora del Distrito, del 56 al 59", Fondo Departamento de Salud, 61-78, AGPR.
29. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 15 December 1958.
30. "H. es una niña humilde y de color lo cual la contrasta grandemente con el tipo de niña que allí está internada", Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 15 December 1958, p. 1.
31. "Iba a tener problemas", Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 15 December 1958, p. 1.
32. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 2 February, 1959, box #4, folder "Circulares Sup. y Directora del Distrito, del 56 al 59", Fondo Departamento de Salud, 61-78, AGPR.
33. This conclusion is drawn from an analysis of census data from 1910 to 1940. Del Moral, "Street Children". Private institutions such as asylums or orphanages are not mentioned in the text. However, data suggest that some private institutions were multi-racial, such as the George C. Robinson Orphanage in San Juan.
34. All data about the Catholic Schools were collected from census manuscripts specific to these two institutions in the 1910, 1920, 1930, 1935 & 1936, and

- 1940 census. The 1950 census manuscripts are not available to the public and researchers until 2022.
35. *Fifteenth Census of the United States.*
  36. The 1930 census included the boarded students in the enumeration of the schools. This information is not available in the 1940 census.
  37. *Sixteenth Census of the United States.*
  38. "Table 34. General Characteristics of the Population, for Urban Places of 2,500 to 10,000: 1950", p. 53-49; and "Table 38. General Characteristics of the Population, for Municipalities: 1950", p. 53-72, US, *Census of Population: 1950.*
  39. Census tables reported the distribution of residents by race in the rural and urban areas of municipalities. However, it did not provide the same information at the neighbourhood (barrio) or "census tract" level. To assess racial segregation in the school's neighbourhood, the racial enumeration of each individual per household in the ten households located immediately before and after the institution in the census manuscript form was recorded. In Pueblo Ponente, the 20 households included 122 people. In Barrio Candelario, the 20 households included 112 people.
  40. Letter M.A.A. to W.G., 15 December 1958.
  41. Foster home placement was rare in mid-century Puerto Rico. Only 800 children were placed in foster care in 1957 and 803 in 1958. In 1960, the number of children placed in foster care doubled to 1,690. "Table 1. Children Receiving Child Welfare Casework Services, 1957", p. 5; "Table 1. Child Welfare Statistics, 1958", p. 9; "Table 2. Child Welfare Statistics, 1960", p. 8; and see foster home recruitment campaign, June 1951, Public Welfare Program, Oficina del Gobernador, 96-20, AGPR. Statistical data about child welfare expenditures, services, clients, and staff for Puerto Rico and other US states and territories are available from annual research publications from the US Children's Bureau, titled *Child Welfare Statistics.*
  42. Letter, 31 January 1950, "Correspondencia sobre hogares de crianza", Negociado de Instituciones, Fondo del Departamento de Salud 59-A-22, AGPR. Roberto Clemente is one of the notable Afro-Puerto Ricans from this community.
  43. Letter, 31 January 1950, "Correspondencia sobre hogares de crianza".
  44. Letter M.A.A. to C.E., 23 April 1959, box #4, folder "Circulares Sup. y Directora del Distrito, del 56 al 59", Fondo Departamento de Salud, 61-78, AGPR.
  45. The foster family that likely had Herminia was traceable because the foster father had a very rare last name, however, this cannot be confirmed.
  46. Picó, *Santurce*; and Esterrich, *Concrete.*
  47. Letter M.A.A. to C.E., 14 May 1959, box #4, folder "Circulares Sup. y Directora del Distrito, del 56 al 59", Fondo Departamento de Salud, 61-78, AGPR.
  48. Letter M.A.A. to C.E., 14 May 1959.
  49. *Ibid.*

50. *Fondo del Departamento de Salud* and the *Fondo del Gobernador* in the AGPR.
51. Del Moral, "Street Children".
52. Additional sources that historians may access to document the history of children in mid-century Puerto Rico in the AGPR Fondo del Departamento de Salud include: social workers' inspection reports of state homes, correctional schools, and private orphanages; and administrators and social workers' investigations into riots initiated by inmates at correctional schools or residents of state homes. In addition, the AGPR Fondo del Gobernador contains correspondence between parents, children, and Luis Muñoz Marín or other administration members. The Colección Puertorriqueña in the Biblioteca Lázaro at the Universidad de Puerto Rico has a collection of microfilmed newspapers and social science primary research in the form of theses and dissertations on the topic of minors and youth, social welfare, state homes, and crime. The AGPR Archivo Fotográfico has a large collection of photographs that documents the modernization process at mid-century, many of which contain images of children and youth in public and private spaces. More documents can be found at the Fondo del Departamento de Educación and the Fondo del Departamento de Trabajo at the AGPR.
53. Her family history in the US federal census for the years 1910, 1920, 1930, 1935/1936, and 1940 were documented.
54. Earlier family history may be available from the *Registro Central de Esclavos, 1872*, Records of the Spanish Governors of Puerto Rico (USNA) and the *Libro de Contratos de Libertos de San Juan* (AGPR).
55. Figueroa, *Sugar*; Dorsey, *Slave Traffic*; and Díaz Soler, *Historia*.
56. *Thirteenth Census*.
57. *Registro Civil, 1836–2001*, Departamento de Salud de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico. About sixty birth, marriage, and death certificates related to Herminia's family and ancestors were located. All are available from the *Registro Civil* and accessible through Ancestry.com. All references to year of birth, year or cause of death, date of marriage, and occupations over an individual's lifetime in this part of the article were collected from the *Registro Civil* or the Social Security Administration Records. Also collected were WWI and WWII registration records for male family members.
58. For a discussion of working-class definitions of race, marriage, and honour in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Puerto Rico, see Findlay, *Imposing Decency*.
59. Rodríguez-Silva, 5.
60. *Fifteenth Census of the United States; Sixteenth Census of the United States*.
61. All family births were registered in the barrio of Asomante, but for a short period (a couple years) when they lived in a neighbouring barrio. *Puerto Rico Monthly Statistical Report*.
62. "Aguada", *Enciclopedia*.
63. The centrifugal machine separates sugar crystals from the liquid sugar.

64. Women's occupations are recorded in census records and are also recorded in birth, marriage, and death records. In addition, the birth records also record the parents' names and occupations and, sometimes, the grandparents' full names.
65. The three leading causes of death in Puerto Rico (by number of deaths and annual rate) in the late 1940s and 1950s were diarrhoea and enteritis, tuberculosis, and diseases of the heart. The fourth and fifth causes were bronchopneumonia and pneumonia. "Table 33. Deaths and Death Rates per 100,000 Population in Puerto Rico, by Leading Causes, January, February, and March 1950 Compared with March 1949", *Puerto Rico Monthly*, 31.
66. All birth and death certificates were collected for doña Chabela's children.
67. Mintz, *Taso*. In this text, Mintz collected the oral testimony of Taso and his wife, Eli. They recount the diseases some of their young children experienced, the struggle to find health care or medication, and individual family and communal experiences of infant and child mortality in sugar regions.
68. Herminia's family offers a different history of sugar cane workers than that provided by Taso in Mintz, *Taso*. In the latter example, Taso's family migrated between the coast and the interior in search of seasonal work in the sugar and coffee industries. Herminia's family, however, documents a long history of not migrating out of the sugar coast region.
69. Del Moral, *Negotiating Empire*; Franqui-Rivera, *Soldiers*.
70. It is not known whether Herminia's father listed her as a beneficiary because he "recognized" his illegitimate daughter or because it was a requirement of enlistment in the US military that adults list all of their legal dependents.
71. Agyepong, *The Criminalization*.
72. Mary McLeod Bethune was the founder of the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls. <https://www.nps.gov/mamc/learn/historyculture/mary-mcleod-bethune.htm>
73. Ángela Negrón Muñoz, "El caso de una mujer haraposa. Intervención del fiscal Aponte. ¿Qué hace Bienestar Público?" *El mundo*, 16 September 1945, p. 4; Del Moral, "Street Children".
74. While secondary sources that focus on the history of black boys in Puerto Rico have not been found, one of the few studies about black men in contemporary Puerto Rico is Marrero Rodríguez, "Visibilizando".

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