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El eterno vaivén e incertidumbre... ‘The never-ending swaying/oscillation and uncertainty’ can be used to describe Puerto Rico’s political and historical landscapes and positions within the Américas and the world. This sense of uncertainty and belonging not only impacts Puerto Rican cultural works but is also reflected in the narratives portrayed in those works, including youth literature. Given the current geopolitical and imperialistic relationships and interests of Puerto Rico to the United States, the geographical and economic constrictions of the colonial status of Puerto Rico, and its influence in educational and cultural topographies, are enough fuel to encourage readers, educators, and scholars to critically engage with Puerto Rican youth literature. Marilisa Jiménez García is one of these scholars, and through her book *Side by Side: US Empire, Puerto Rico, and the Roots of American Youth Literature and Culture* joins the body of work of critical conversations of youth cultural works by and about Puerto Ricans.

Prior to the publication of *Side by Side*, in 1979, Luis Nieves Falcón analyzed school texts and trade books about Puerto Rico published in the United States. He highlights how these publications “are used to promote a subordinated ideology among Puerto Ricans,” “stress the present and give the erroneous impression that the history of Puerto Rico started in 1898, with the invasion by the US,” and how they are “ignoring entirely the exploitation of Puerto Rico by the US” (19-20). On the other hand, in 2000, Consuelo Figueras published “Puerto Rican Children’s Literature: On Establishing an Identity,” where she argues that books published in Puerto Rico in the early years of the US invasion were done to “Americanize” Puerto Rican culture, but throughout the years “Puerto Rican children’s literature began to forge its own identity from the very beginning, one closer to Latin American than US children’s literature” (24). Written in different decades and perspectives, both pieces encapsulate the different

approaches and narratives that exist, persist, and resist throughout the history of Puerto Rican youth literature published in the archipelago and the United States.

These conflicting principles and ongoing conversations converge in Jiménez García's *Side by Side*. This monographic work, divided into an introduction and five chapters, centers Puerto Rican youth literature and culture, and presents the frame of seeing Puerto Rican literature as US American empire literature. The phrase "side by side," used in the title and throughout the book, is defined as "the dynamics of the US and Puerto Rico colonial relationship as one that is functionally dysfunctional, inherently close, and awkwardly ambiguous. The proximity and seeming partnership between the colonized and the colonizer" (Jiménez García 3). This "side by side" phrasing and usage can also be extended to the cultural production of Puerto Ricans in the archipelago who were creating "side by side" with the diaspora, and to the works of teachers, children's educators, and youth literature writers working and creating "side by side" with writers of adult literature but who are left out of the literary canon and scholarly recognition. *Side by Side* is also positioning itself and existing in tandem with children's literature scholarship in the United States that oftentimes distorts and excludes scholarship that centers youth literature focused on US Empire colonies and its diasporas.

In her introduction, Jiménez García provides a condensed description of the "functionally dysfunctional" relationship between Puerto Rico, the United States, and their respective cultural productions. From the illustrated primers and texts created after the US invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898 to the Puerto Rican children's authors creating in the twenty-first century, Jiménez García challenges the notion that US colonial practices and imperialistic characteristics are a thing of the past by presenting it as an ongoing and persistent colonial project. Jiménez García also imparts multiple valid and needed critiques to children's literature scholarship, academia,

and literature as a field. For instance, she critiques how K-12 cultural works and educators are regularly left out and not seen as “scholarly” in academic spaces and in literature courses, and how often Latinx youth literature is not included or discussed in Latinx Studies or even Children’s Literature Studies, and the need to see it as literature with literary merit and criticism. Noteworthy, Jiménez García writes why and how she uses the term “youth literature and culture” to include and “to extend to those works written for younger audiences” and “engage this term as more inclusive of texts and media created by and centered on young people, such as hip hop, youth-run newspapers, performance, and comics as alternative texts and counter-stories” (6). Throughout the five chapters of *Side by Side*, readers get a glimpse and examples of the extension and reflection of this term and its characteristics.

The first chapter, “Indescribable Beings: Reframing a History of Empire and Priming the Public in Illustrated Youth Texts,” examines the primers and textbooks created by US American white authors after 1898 and those created by Puerto Rican educators throughout the twenty-first century. The illustrated primers created by white authors portrayed Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican children as “fertile lands” and “subjects,” both in need of intervention and that end up exoticizing and dehumanizing Puerto Rican children. Jiménez García argues that these texts and children’s literature play a role in sustaining colonialism as they are sites for “documenting the first moments of US rule in Puerto Rico” (32). As Edward W. Said asserts in *Culture and Imperialism*, to examine the process of colonialism and imperialism that occurs beyond economic and political levels, you also need to examine its manifestation in education, literature, and arts (12).

In Part II of this first chapter, Jiménez García introduces readers to the illustrated texts created by Manuel Fernández Juncos, José González Ginorio, and the work of teachers such as

Ángeles Pastor Pérez, Carmen Gómez Tejera, Ester Feliciano Mendoza, and Isabel Freire de Matos. The works of these Puerto Rican authors and educators were used primarily in public schools and focused on centering Puerto Rican children as their audience and their respective realities of life in the archipelago and its diaspora. Although some of their works don't shy away from commentaries on anti-Black racism, sexism, and a support of the "US colonial educational project of Puerto Ricans" (54), they moved forward and strengthened the field of Puerto Rican youth literature and the tradition of shaping and affirming a Puerto Rican national identity through culture productions for youth. The early primers and textbooks published by US American authors, and the ones later created by Puerto Rican authors, evidence the role of schools and curricula in exposing youth to literature and shaping their views.

Chapter 2, "From the Ground Up: Pura Belpré, Arturo Schomburg, and Afro-Boricua Pedagogies of Literacy and Resistance," speaks back and showcases Black Puerto Ricans' educational and cultural works created prior to and concurrently with the illustrated texts discussed in the first chapter. Jiménez García centers "Afro-Boricua literacies and epistemologies" by connecting Rafael and Celestina Cordero's work as Black educators for young Puerto Ricans in the 19th century, and Arturo A. Schomburg and Pura T. Belpré's commitment to histories, text, and knowledge production in the 20th century (71-72). While the former were in Puerto Rico and the latter were in New York City, *Side by Side* sheds light on how these respective duos of Black Puerto Ricans showcased the role of schoolrooms and public libraries as spaces for the development and support of youth literature, culture, and counterstories. Throughout the chapter, Jiménez García argues and supports how Rafael and Celestina Cordero, Schomburg, and Belpré laid foundations for and inspired future generations of educators, thinkers, cultural workers, and writers to know stories and to share their stories.

One of these writers is Nicholasa Mohr, a Nuyoricana author who centers the diasporic Puerto Rican child in her cultural works. She is the focus of chapter 3, “Nicholasa Mohr Writes Back: Imagining a Diaspora Child in a Garden of Multiculturalism.”

In this third chapter and *Side by Side*'s forte, Jiménez García situates Nicholasa Mohr in a much-deserved space within the US American literature and Puerto Rican literature canon. It states how Mohr brings to youth literature a Puerto Rican diaspora child that exists and struggles in the city, a protagonist not often seen in the youth literature produced in the 1970s. By drawing examples from Mohr's work and the life of Puerto Rican diaspora cultural workers, Jiménez García argues that diasporic writers are in a sort of limbo, where they are often marginalized and excluded from Puerto Rican literature and US literature. These diasporic writers also embrace and confront definitions of what it means to be “Puerto Rican,” and how displacement and migration patterns, due to the relationship with the US Empire, influences their work and identities. The chapter ends with how “Mohr holds US ideology accountable for its imperialism,” evidencing the political nature and power of youth literature as an intrinsic forum to portray the existences, struggles, and resistances of Puerto Rican, both in the diaspora and the archipelago (Jiménez García 144).

In chapter 4, “The Letter of the Day is Ñ: *Sesame Street*, a Girl Named Maria, and Performing Multilingualism in Children's Television,” Jiménez García focuses on the children's TV show *Sesame Street* and Maria, one of the main characters played by writer and actress Sonia Manzano. Through the character of Maria, *Sesame Street* “gave a face and voice to a diaspora community that is significantly underrepresented in the children's literary world” (146) and supported the late 1960s and early 1970s New York City movement for bilingual education, housing rights, and Nuyoricana literary productions. The inclusion of Spanish language and

bilingualism in this public television children's program exemplified the visual, oral, and literary traditions of Puerto Ricans and the "negotiation of power" (157) of cultural elements via Latinx children's media. Jiménez García builds the case by underlining how literacy and reading works outside literature and literary canon, and how *Sesame Street* as audiovisual media has literacy, reading, and empowering capabilities for children. By centering Latinx children, bilingualism, and non-traditional ways of reading, Jiménez García showcases how *Sesame Street* challenges what is seen and documented as the selective tradition, a tradition that celebrates and centers white dominant ideologies and narratives.

To conclude *Side by Side*, Jiménez García presents chapter 5, "How to Survive the End of the World: Founding Fathers, Super-heroines, and Writing and Performing Stories When the Lights Go Out," and incorporates her concluding remarks within this section. In an amalgam of subsections, Jiménez García brings a variety of Puerto Rican youth culture in conversation with various political, environmental, and human disasters. She highlights the popular musical *Hamilton: An American Musical* by Lin-Manuel Miranda and how its on-stage and off-stage performances reflect "the history of colonialism" in Puerto Rico (199). On-stage, Miranda rewrites Alexander Hamilton's life "as a means of reframing the value of immigrants to the US" (197) and a celebration of the US American Revolution; while off-stage, Miranda supported the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) bill, signed by former president Barack Obama and which established a US Congress-supported oversight board to make and impose financial and political decisions upon Puerto Rico, its youth, and communities. Jiménez García then contrasts *Hamilton* with *La Borinqueña*, a comic book series created by Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez, whose main character Marisol and her superheroine alter ego La Borinqueña are "deeply rooted in Afro and Indigenous Puerto Rican narratives"

(202). Both cultural works created by Puerto Rican men invite audiences to regard and embrace different types of revolutionary thinking that mirror the conflicting and uncertain political views and landscapes of US American colonies.

The concluding chapter also centers on what Jiménez García refers to as “frontline kid lit,” which are works by Puerto Rican writers, mainly women, that assist in “preparing young people for the inevitability of both man-made and environmental disasters” (178). This showcase of Puerto Rican creators includes Georgina Lázaro-León, who serves as a bridge between the autoras-cátedras, and contemporary writers like Tere Marichal, Wanda de Jesús, Ada Haiman, and Laura Rexach Olivencia. Investigating a sample of their works, Jiménez García argues how these Puerto Rican writers “continued a legacy of feminist and Afro and Indigenous pedagogies through engaging audiences in stories about self-determination and community solidarity as opposed to individual heroism” (196). There is a need to include into this list the cultural productions of the Cátedra de Mujeres Negras Ancestrales, led by writer and poet Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, whose focus is to include and amplify Black narratives and stories through youth literature that mirrors the work of Afro-Boricua pedagogies discussed in chapter 2. Generally, Jiménez García sheds light on how youth literature created and published in Puerto Rico is often neglected and invisibilized in youth literature, culture conversations, and scholarship outside the archipelago. This argument of how Puerto Rican culture works are neglected in youth literature is mentioned in this final chapter, as well as the ongoing impact of US American colonialism and empire to publishing, distribution, and usage of youth literature in Puerto Rico.

Side by Side fills the gap of Puerto Rican youth literature scholarship that connects several decades of youth cultural productions within and outside the archipelago. The comprehensive study done by Jiménez García, although in need of Spanish language spelling and

tilde revisions, demonstrates the baton passed to her by Sonia Nieto as Puerto Rican scholars and educators that advocate for their place in academia and youth literature scholarship. In *How to Hide an Empire*, Daniel Immerwahr questions, “when have you ever seen a map of the United States that had Puerto Rico on it? Or American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Northern Marianas, or any of the other smaller islands the United States has annexed over the years?” (9). These questions also apply to the exclusion and inclusion of youth literature and culture from these countries and colonies in the US American youth literature landscape. It mirrors the “hiding” of cultural works and colonial projects of the United States, and the variety of literature that replicate, challenge, or critique the influence and impact of imperialism in youth literature and culture. Through *Side by Side*, Jiménez García unmask Puerto Rico and its youth literature as “colonial subjects” of the US Empire.

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