In the fall of 1898, Major General Joseph Wheeler wrote to Gilbert K. Harroun, who was the treasurer of Union College in Schenectady, and asked him to contact the presidents of American universities to see if they would offer free tuition to young men from Cuba. Wheeler had just returned from the island, where he had commanded U.S. troops in the final phase of the Cuban War of Independence from Spain. Wheeler chose well with Harroun. Over the course of the following years, until his death in September of 1901, Harroun devoted himself to the creation and development of the Cuban Educational Association (CEA), an organization that would place hundreds of Cubans and Puerto Ricans in schools in more than twenty states.

The CEA, though short-lived, played an important role in the postwar settlement of 1898, during which the United States emerged as an imperial power with overseas possessions. The organization sought to educate young men who might return to Cuba and Puerto Rico and become political, social, or business leaders. Many of the students placed by the CEA had close ties to the power structure of the American occupation, given that they were most often accepted on the recommendation of an American military officer. Others were placed at the request of leaders of the Cuban exile community. Among these were the sons of two key generals who had commanded the Cuban insurgency, Antonio Maceo and Calixto García.
The creation of this organization and the experiences of the Cuban and Puerto Rican students who came to study in the United States suggest both the ambiguity of the time when hemispheric power relations hung in the balance as well as the future outlines of some of the ways in which the United States would project power in the world. While American-led reform of public schooling in the islands ceded to the United States by Spain proved key to direct governance in the years immediately following the war, programs such as the CEA, which sought to Americanize elite students through education and direct experience living in the United States, became a persistent and crucial feature of the type of informal diplomacy characterized as soft power.\textsuperscript{1}

The organization draws our attention as a private initiative with explicitly public aims. The CEA sought recognition and funding from the federal government. Although it never received either, individual members of the colonial administration of Cuba and Puerto Rico encouraged the organization’s efforts, and it later served as a model for some state-sponsored programs with similar aims. The CEA suggests a transition away from the predominance of charities and religious missions that had most often characterized nineteenth-century non-state activity in the field of international development—although missionaries would continue to have significant influence through foreign missions and on secular organizations.\textsuperscript{2} The men who organized the CEA had backgrounds in charity and missionary work, as well as philanthropy, but recognized that their goal of supporting the U.S. presence in Cuba and Puerto Rico required rejecting religious affiliation and the explicit paternalism of charitable giving. The CEA might best be characterized as a private, voluntary organization that predated the later proliferation of what became designated as nongovernmental organizations and nonprofit organizations in the post-World War II period.

Even so, the CEA’s practices were shot through with the paternalism inherent to U.S. American imperialism in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{3} The CEA was the first program developed in the aftermath of 1898 that sought to encourage international student migration with the express purpose of developing a leadership class in tune with American aims. It brought together numerous private organizations and individuals to facilitate the education of Cubans and Puerto Ricans at preparatory schools and universities in the United States. This suggests the ways in which United States expansionism took place, not only through military conquest, state-led political efforts, or commercial