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Review Articles



A Force in the Field

Recent Interventions into the Military History of the Caribbean

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This essay is dedicated to the memory of three recently fallen academic soldiers: Louis Regis, Colin Palmer, and the militantly loving Connie Sutton



Don E. Walicek & Jessica Adams (eds.), *Guantánamo and American Empire: The Humanities Respond*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018 xxix + 302 pp. (Cloth US\$109.00)

Karen E. Eccles & Debbie McCollin (eds.), *World War II and the Caribbean*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2017. xi + 409 pp. (Paper US\$ 45.00)

Shalini Puri & Lara Putnam (eds.), *Caribbean Military Encounters*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. xvi + 364 pp. (Cloth US\$ 99.99)

The Caribbean entered modern history “as the pawn of European power politics, the cockpit of Europe, the arena of Europe’s wars hot and cold,” wrote Eric Williams almost a half century ago in *Columbus to Castro* (1970). Yet despite this observation by one of the most influential historians of the region, Caribbeanist historiography has been mostly unimpressed by military history in the strict sense; historical scholarship on the activities of armies and weapons is rare. In recent decades, however, change of a certain kind has become visible. Military history, reconceived expansively as studies of “war and society,” has become a force in the field.

The volumes under review here attest to this transforming situation. Despite obvious differences in approaches, all three affirm the crucial role played by the armed forces and preparations for war in the twentieth-century Caribbean. Indeed, Shalini Puri and Lara Putnam argue that military operations and the political culture of militarism make for the coherence of the region as an object of study. Of course, they do not suggest that militarization and its effects have been uniform across Caribbean time and space. Certain zones—including Guantánamo, the subject of the collection by Don E. Walicek and Jessica Adams—have borne special, enduring burdens in this regard. Likewise, particular historical moments have witnessed heightened and conspicuous interest in the military. World War II, the setting for the volume edited by Karen Eccles and Debbie McCollin, is surely such a moment.

The Caribbean moved into the twentieth century on a major martial note. In 1898 the United States intervened into the armed Cuban anticolonial struggle against Spain, preempting nationalist victory and taking on the imaginary white man’s burden. For North Americans, the many consequences of this speedy and “splendid” war included the appropriation of Cuba’s Guantánamo Bay (1903) for use as the republic’s first overseas naval base. Gained in the aftermath of a war supposedly fought to end Spanish terror, Guantánamo would become infamous a century later as a detention center for terrorists deemed too dreadful to process by law.

It is against this post 9/11 geopolitical backdrop that *Guantánamo and American Empire* must be read. Unapologetically political and artistic (at least by conventional academic standards), the volume declares that Guantánamo’s “infamous military prison” is “arguably the most controversial political issue of the early twentieth century” (p. 3). It is intended, the editors assert, as “worldly, outward looking and politically engaged” (p. 3). Aesthetic interests also matter to Walicek and Adams, who approach art as a vehicle of politics, as an attempt to combine beauty and danger. Their book is divided into three sections. The first deals critically with renditions of Guantánamo by a diverse and often antagonistic set of actors, from U.S. state officials to dissenting celebrity

artists like Mos Def. Varying in approach, some of the authors focus on historical representations of Guantánamo. Diana Coleman, for example, locates the symbolic significance of the base and prison in a deeper past, a history that goes back to the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Both contemporary and late nineteenth-century representations, she argues, have served to legitimize U.S. imperial ambitions. Walicek's essay establishes that the very embeddedness of Guantánamo in an imperial past has been erased by official discourse. He notes that even before the post-9/11 war on terror, Haitians and Cubans seeking asylum found themselves detained in Gitmo. Other contributors to the volume restrict themselves to contemporary representations, showing how artists have protested the uses of Gitmo. And while the essays admit the limits of these artists' political achievements (as in Guillermo Gil's discussion of Mos Def's "revolutionary failure" or A. Naomi Paik's consideration of documentaries such as *The Road to Guantánamo*), the authors nevertheless affirm the value of this truth-telling work to combat misleading official fictions.

The second section of *Guantánamo and American Empire* considers how Cubans have imagined the base and the broader region. Whether looking at photography, fiction, or public history, the authors grapple with the way U.S. concealment, censorship, and surveillance have challenged locals' capacity to capture Guantánamo. Examining visual representations, Esther Whitfield emphasizes the struggle of local artists to show Gitmo, against the cliché as a "no man's land," to be a place inhabited by people. In a similarly humanizing vein, two short stories by Ana Luz Garcia Calzada render the complex reality of this piece of U.S. territory within Cuba. Meanwhile, an interview with historian José Sanchez Guerra looks at the changing significance of Guantánamo, stressing the radically isolating effects of the Cuban Revolution. Jan Lipman's compelling chapter interrogates how the base has been portrayed in the official organ of the revolutionary regime, *Granma*. Noting its absence for the most part, Lipman goes further to show that when Guantánamo is publicly discussed in Cuba at all, the issue largely is refracted through other stories about detention and terror that are little known in North America but familiar in Cuba. An essay by anthropologist Laurie Frederik argues that although it is absent from the official press, the base often serves to obscure the lives of those who actually live in the province. Underlining the quotidian culture of the place, Frederik reminds readers of the often forgotten people in the "real Guantánamo." The volume closes with the voice of poet Jose Sanchez Leyva, whose interview and verses betray the kind of high irony associated with the most militant sectors of Caribbean intellectual life.

The greatest physical expansion of Gitmo came during World War II, a period of profound militarization across the Caribbean and the setting for

World War II and the Caribbean. The book begins with a set of essays examining some of the serious consequences of the global conflict, from dislocation and food insecurity to economic boom and uncertain sovereignty. Lovell Francis focuses on the British colony of Trinidad where the radically new conditions generated by war and, especially, by U.S. base construction resulted in near fatal labor problems for the island's sugar industry. Also set in wartime Trinidad, Rita Pemberton's essay plays up the paradox of food scarcity and insecurity in the midst of Yankee-sponsored prosperity. In other islands, World War II witnessed less shocking transformations than continuous development. This was the case with Puerto Rico, according to Geoff Burrows, who shows that what happened in Puerto Rico during the war was consistent with New Deal policies that had tightened and thickened the relationship between the federal government and the island in the aftermath of two devastating hurricanes. For the Dutch colony of Suriname, the consequences were otherwise. Esther Captain and Guno Jones reveal a case of "reversion" in which the metropolitan Netherlands' increased dependence on the Caribbean possession ultimately bolstered autonomist calls for "self rule."

Indeed, the second group of essays emphasizes the problems war posed for the practice and survival even of European imperialism in the region. In the French Caribbean, which had great strategic value for the Vichy Regime, the situation was particularly bleak. The rich work of Eric Jennings underlines that loyalty to the Vichy regime made Martinique and Guadeloupe crucial yet vulnerable within the region. These islands experienced a period of great food deprivation, a scarcity that helped to propel political resistance on the islands even in the face of unprecedented Vichy repression. The situation was less drastic in the British Caribbean, but even here Great Britain was forced to renegotiate its imperial rule as the empire entered into the Bases for Destroyer deal with the United States, allowing the Yankees to establish and operate bases on several islands in the region. This U.S. military presence had great consequences. The multiply-authored essay on St. Lucia stresses "intoxicating" economic times as well as social destabilization that prompted many people to migrate away from the island once the base activity was subdued. Migration within and beyond the Caribbean was, of course, a region-wide phenomenon during World War II. Dannelle Gutarra recalls that as U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans left the island during these years to serve with the Allies. Joining compatriots already in the Diaspora, they would experience, among other things, the kind of racism that these "transmigrants" had been negotiating in putative peacetime.

The final set of essays approaches the wartime Caribbean as a place of exile, detention, and occupation, paying particular attention to the activities of wo-

men. In a very informative piece, Christian Cwik and Verena Muth survey the experiences of thousands of European refugees in the region, noting that the Caribbean was hardly a paradise for them. Indeed, many seeking refuge were turned back, and those lucky enough to land often met anti-Semitism in their new home as well. Some Europeans arrived in the region not as refugees but as internees and evacuees. An essay by Suzanne Francis-Brown explores Jamaica's role in hosting these Europeans, underlining how their presence produced anxieties around gender, class, and white supremacy. Also focusing on wartime Jamaica, Dalea Bean considers how the increased arrival of military servicemen on the island led to a spike of now-familiar issues around entitlement and the "sexploitation" of women. Public health and sexuality preoccupy the essay by Debbie McCollin, which turns attention to U.S.-occupied Trinidad. U.S. concern with the welfare of its sex-hunting military personnel, she shows, prompted the modernization of health facilities and training of locals. Finally, Eccles is fair in reminding that the arrival of foreign military forces in Trinidad drew local women into respectable activity. Challenging historians who have emphasized the "derogatory" treatment of working-class women during World War II, Eccles focuses attention on their largely ignored middle-class and elite counterparts who pursued honorable civic roles.

Caribbean Military Encounters prioritizes a scholarly comprehension of the subject matter. Despite a commitment to "demilitarization," the editors mean less to advocate than to interrogate. From various disciplinary perspectives as well as through its interdisciplinary lens, the volume investigates the meaning of militarization to the lived experiences of Caribbean people, especially subalterns, in their everyday life. Resistance, not surprisingly, plays an important role in many of the essays; yet it is only part of the story of the ubiquity of "strategic manipulations" of militarization across the region.

For the sake of summary, a few themes warrant notice, the first of which might be considered "war and citizenship." The Great War provides the occasion for two essays that look at the way British West Indian loyalty to Empire was constituted as well as contested. Reena Goldtree, taking a literary approach, discusses how poetry by colonials both expressed imperial patriotism during the war and betrayed efforts to lobby and critique Great Britain after the conflict. On the other hand, Richard Smith recalls objectors to the Great War by critics and pacifists in the colony of Jamaica. Later, nearly half a million Cuban soldiers were asked to show their patriotism by joining the anti-imperial cause in Angola between 1975 and 1991. Marisabel Almer argues that this episode of internationalism "provided an opportunity for the populace to validate themselves as exemplary revolutionary citizens," and her essay explores the complicated remembering of this experience among Cuban soldiers decades later.

Meanwhile twenty-first-century Caribbeans have had to deal with a nominally novel form of warfare, the U.S.-led “War on Drugs.” This campaign, Deborah Thomas recounts, pushed Jamaican security forces to invade the Kingston community of Tivoli in order to seize its leading “don.” How residents have remembered this “Tivoli Incursion” and how their memories expose doubtful feelings about sovereignty in Jamaica is Thomas’s central concern.

A second set of essays in *Caribbean Military Encounters* can be read as studies of “the invaded.” Attending to the way Caribbean people have engaged with foreign armed forces, mostly American, in their midst, the authors show a particular appreciation of the gendered aspects of these encounters. Grace Johnson focuses on the early twentieth-century U.S. occupation of Haiti, stressing the way North American occupiers endangered Haitian women in a range of ways, from rape to reckless driving, as well as the way these women played a central role in the protests that eventually led to the end of the occupation. Similarly concerned with women is Shalini Puri, who examines fictional portraits of women, especially sex workers, in U.S.-occupied wartime Trinidad. Her essay demonstrates that in the past quarter century representations of sex work have tended to dismantle the patriarchal nationalist frame that silenced the subjectivities of the women involved. The emergence of a sex-work industry in Vieques provides the context for Katherine McCaffrey and Bonnie Donahue to recount the story of the 1953 murder of businessman Julian Felipe Francis. Unpunished, this killing has to be understood, they argue, in the context of Cold War militarization as well as the racial and gendered privileges that were enjoyed by U.S. personnel on the island. Vieques also serves as the setting for Daniel Arbino’s piece on the violent history of the U.S. military presence and the protests that led to the demilitarization of the little island in 2004. Don Walicek brings awareness to the landing of British paratroopers and marines in Anguilla in 1969 after leaders on the island declared “independence” from St. Kitts and Nevis. Little known outside of Anguilla, this British Invasion (“Operation Sheepskin”) reminds us that in the age of decolonization tiny Caribbean societies too were caught up in militant struggles for self-government. Unlike the case of Anguilla, the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1984 has been the subject of numerous studies; John Nelson’s essay on this event stands out for its uncommon perspective. In addition to being a student of Caribbean literature, Nelson was also part of the invading military force in 1984; as a result, he proposes a conceptualization of Grenada as a mix of “contact zone” and “kill zone.”

A final group of essays explores how militarism has figured in the broader cultural politics of the Caribbean, and how institutions and ideas around the armed forces have played out in practices of power, identity, and creativity. Aims McGuinness approaches the issue through Maud Carter, an Afro-Pana-

manian of West Indian descent who rose to political prominence in the 1980s through her connections to the military dictatorship that began in the late 1960s. Subversive in her personal style (famous for wearing shorts), but hardly a serious radical in other ways, Carter was the kind of contradictory figure, McGuinness recalls, that proved useful for a military populism rooted in traditional notions of order. In Cold-War Haiti, too, the military played a critical role in society, penetrating into institutions as intimate as the family. Chelsey Kivland, an anthropologist, takes on the difficult relationship between a former soldier in Duvalier's army and his son, a militant anti-Duvalierist activist and musician. In a revealing analysis (uncomfortably so at moments), Kivland uses the embattled men to weave a powerful analysis of issues involving the state, popular politics, sexuality, and music. Music, in fact, plays a major role in this group of essays. Andrea Queeley, for example, addresses the complex identifications of Guantánamo's West Indian-descended base workers. While these locals were seen as privileged people who "worked for the enemy" and had their national loyalty doubted, they at the same time called on U.S. connections on the base to identify with the black musical culture expressed in television material such as Soul Train and singers such as Luther Vandross. Two other essays concerned with Trinidad also center on music. Jocelyne Guilbault insightfully links the anxiety about armed violence to the increasing use of militarized policing at the large soca "fetes" that define the island's Carnival season. And Louis Regis (recently passed) turns away from the insecurity of soca fetes and toward the texts of songs to examine the treatment of military issues in calypso and soca across the twentieth century. Dealing with a massive discography, Regis stresses a range of themes, showing how lyrics have moved from warning women about predatory policemen, to condemning the U.S. invasion of Grenada and pleading for peace.

These three books all deserve wide readership, both for their intellectual quality and, unfortunately, for the enduring relevance of their subject. The military, after all, remains part of a killing enterprise that seems unlikely to become a dying business in our lifetimes.