

Refusal to recognize this historical and sociological fact is likely to lead to the perception that the historian or sociologist can see the Caribbean in much the same light as Africa and Asia.

Rush opens up a rewarding path for future scholarship and research into the making of identities in post-colonial and post-imperial social orders. While it is unfortunate that Rush's admirable work does not entirely transcend some sociological barriers, her book should be welcomed as a recognition of some of the problems involved in understanding how our present has evolved from our past in the Caribbean as well as in Europe.

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MICHELE REID-VAZQUEZ. *The Year of the Lash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World*. (Early American Places.) Athens: University of Georgia Press. 2011. Pp. xiii, 251. Cloth \$59.95, paper \$24.95.

During the fall of 1843, panic spread among government officials and planters in Cuba when rumors reached them that a slave revolt was in the works. The nervousness of the colonial elite was not surprising: in the last thirty years, the slave population on the island had doubled, leading to frightened comparisons with Haiti. The official response was swift and brutal. 1844 came to be known as the Year of the Lash, a reference to the repressive policies that followed the alleged *Conspiración de la Escalera*, or Conspiracy of the Ladder, the plot named for a common interrogation technique used by the government—suspects were tied to a ladder and whipped in order to coerce a confession.

Michele Reid-Vazquez's book examines the aftermath of *La Escalera*. Among the many people accused of fomenting the rebellion—the slaves, British abolitionists, and foreigners in general—free people of color took the brunt of the repression. The Cuban elite determined that the revolt's ringleaders had to be punished to set an example. Ten prominent members of the free black community were executed, including well-known men of letters, colonial militia officers, and established artisans. Hundreds of other free Cubans of African descent were tortured, deprived of their property, sent to jail, or deported, their expulsion connecting these refugees to other Atlantic world exiles.

Historians have debated whether free people of color were in fact behind the rebellion. There is even disagreement on whether a conspiracy existed or was merely an excuse deployed by the colonial government to undermine the influence of free blacks. The Spanish legal practice of *coartación*, which made it possible for certain slaves to buy their own freedom, together with the high numbers of black refugees from the disintegrating Spanish Empire, resulted in an unusually large population of free blacks on the island. Although legal restrictions prevented this population from entering professions, peninsular contempt for manual labor cre-

ated opportunities for free people of color to take on such jobs. They became the island's carpenters, masons, midwives, musicians, and cooks. Spain's desperate need to maintain colonial rule made it necessary for men of color to become members of the army. While soldiers benefited from the privileges that army membership implied, the very prominence they enjoyed made them targets of repression. Cuban elites and colonial authorities increasingly worried about slave revolts in the Caribbean region and explored ways to whiten the island by adding immigrants from Spain and other areas. They distrusted free blacks whose loyalty to the status quo was unclear.

Did influential people of color in fact scheme against the government? Did they team up with slaves? Reid-Vazquez prefers to avoid this controversy all together and focuses instead on the strategies *libres de color* resorted to when coping with repressive policies. Her aim is to show that, despite many circumstances beyond their control, free blacks in Cuba found ways to fight back and, to some degree, regain their previous position. This thoroughly researched study provides examples of the legal and extralegal actions communities took when resisting punitive colonial policies. In other words, the author is interested in demonstrating that free blacks exhibited agency. She convincingly proves that while handicapped by the brutal repression that followed *La Escalera*, the vibrancy of the free black community could not be extinguished. This is an important point, but one wants to know where the author stands regarding the nature of the revolt and on the character of free black and slave alliances. Why not venture an opinion based on all the research material she has encountered?

The study leaves the reader hungry for information on the opinions held by free people of color and their opportunities to influence the slave population. The author could provide proof of agency by showing how free blacks tried to undermine the status quo of slave society, or by arguing that they took refuge in the autonomous spaces they created that set them apart from slaves. Perhaps it is too hard to reach a conclusion given, as this study makes clear, the messy nature of history.

Despite its overtly cautious tone, Reid-Vazquez's study expands our understanding of a crucial segment of the nineteenth-century Cuban population and helps to explain the significant role free blacks would play in Cuba's politics in the decades ahead, as the island embarked on a nationalist project.

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JONATHAN M. HANSEN. *Guantánamo: An American History*. New York: Hill and Wang. 2011. Pp. xvii, 428. \$35.00.

Before its branding as a space of barbed wire fences and shackled prisoners wearing orange jump suits, the U.S. naval facility at Guantánamo Bay had long embodied

the contradictions of American political identity, chiefly the tensions between U.S. constitutional principles and the naked pursuit of self-interested foreign relations.

Much of Jonathan M. Hansen's absorbing account of the history of the forty-five-square-mile facility on the southeastern corner of Cuba will be familiar to observers of American imperialism and U.S. overseas bases. Cuba's occupation in 1898 admitted the United States into the global club of formal empires and, as with its annexation of the Philippines, Panama, and Hawai'i, forced U.S. officials to reconcile their public commitments to freedom and independence with violating a people's sovereignty and political aspirations. The book also contributes to a growing literature on the social history of U.S. military bases abroad as Hansen explores changing relations among the base's command, its local labor force, and private contractors; the mythical idealization of its social life; gender relations and the management of a tacitly sanctioned sex industry; and the racial tensions contained within and across the base's fences.

But Hansen goes further to argue that "for over a century Guantánamo provided the laboratory and staging area where U.S. imperial ambition could be implemented beyond the scrutiny of the American public and the constraint of U.S. law" (p. 350). The first of these moves was the notorious Platt Amendment of 1903. The article, inserted by U.S. officials into the nascent Cuban constitution, conditioned Cuban independence on granting the United States naval bases and the right to intervene in the island's domestic internal affairs, a provision that the United States regularly exercised for three decades. Later, the base was used covertly to aid the forces of Cuba's embattled Fulgencio Batista during the civil war, and after Fidel Castro's accession to power—and in violation of both international law and repeated U.S. public assurances at the United Nations (UN)—it became a springboard for numerous plots to overthrow the Cuban President.

Hansen's most important contribution is his detailed account of Guantánamo's physical and legal role in halting the passage of Haitian asylum-seekers. From the late 1970s to the high-profile exodus of 1992, over 50,000 boaters were detained at Guantánamo, the ones with HIV placed in a sequestered pen, before their forced repatriation. U.S. officials vigorously argued that U.S. law and international treaty commitments did not extend to the naval site, while U.S. ships preemptively captured Haitian boats, most of which were in international waters. Despite a series of lower court findings that U.S. government officials discriminated against the boaters and violated their due process rights, in 1993 the Supreme Court found that U.S. obligations under the 1967 UN Protocol on the Status of Refugees did not apply extraterritorially. The miserable fate that awaited the refugees upon their return to Haiti and its vindictive regime can be contrasted with the steady stream of political asylums unwaveringly granted to Cubans during the same time.

Hansen then shows how the Bush Administration drew upon this legal trail after 9/11 when it selected Guantánamo as an extraterritorial site for the tribunals and indefinite detention of selected "enemy combatants." This final chapter authoritatively traces how the chilling legal opinions delivered by leading senior officials and their counsels promoted widespread torture and degradation of the detainees, while concerned dissenters and whistleblowers, many of them in the military, were silenced and sidelined.

The book also provides some new and unexpected insights. Platt's suspension was driven as much by American fears that opportunistic Cuban politicians would entangle the United States within its dysfunctional politics and jeopardize U.S. economic interests as it was by Cuban public anger. Hansen interviews Charles Ryan, a young base resident who joined pro-Castro fighters, and reveals how the base became embroiled in arms smuggling in the run-up to the revolution. And the author echoes recent studies in claiming that during the Cuban missile crisis Soviet tactical nuclear missiles were positioned to target the base itself.

Perhaps there is one additional exceptional feature of Guantánamo's story, not noted in Hansen's account: throughout the 1950s and 1960s in other overseas base hosts, the forces of nationalism, the general climate of decolonization, and populist politics strengthened the hand of local elites who forced U.S. officials to renegotiate highly unequal basing agreements and extracted increased rental payments and military assistance to secure their regimes. Not so in Guantánamo, where the presence of a U.S. facility within a hostile state froze this imperial relationship in time, validated only by a nominal U.S. rent check that the Cuban government refuses to cash.

Hansen makes a plea for Guantánamo's reversion back to Cuba, especially in light of its declining strategic utility for the U.S. Navy. But given his compelling narrative about the base's distinct and even publicly celebrated extralegal role, reversion seems unlikely, even if U.S.-Cuban relations are normalized in the near future.

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EMILY WAKILD. *Revolutionary Parks: Conservation, Social Justice, and Mexico's National Parks, 1910–1940*. (Latin American Landscapes.) Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 2011. Pp. xiii, 235. \$26.95.

Emily Wakild's book is an interesting contribution to the slowly emerging body of literature on the environmental history of the Mexican Revolution. Despite the dates in the subtitle, its temporal focus is squarely on the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), during which period Mexico rapidly became a world leader in the creation of national parks. Since that fact challenges a narrative that credits "wealthy, white, urban actors" (p. 7) from highly developed countries with fostering environmental consciousness, Wakild asks