



Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940

By Mary A. Renda

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The U.S. invasion of Haiti in July 1915 marked the start of a military occupation that lasted for nineteen years--and fed an American fascination with Haiti that flourished even longer. Exploring the cultural dimensions of U.S. contact with Haiti during the occupation and its aftermath, Mary Renda shows that what Americans thought and wrote about Haiti during those years contributed in crucial and unexpected ways to an emerging culture of U.S. imperialism.

At the heart of this emerging culture, Renda argues, was American paternalism, which saw Haitians as wards of the United States. She explores the ways in which diverse Americans--including activists, intellectuals, artists, missionaries, marines, and politicians--responded to paternalist constructs, shaping new versions of American culture along the way. Her analysis draws on a rich record of U.S. discourses on Haiti, including the writings of policymakers; the diaries, letters, songs, and memoirs of marines stationed in Haiti; and literary works by such writers as Eugene O'Neill, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston.

Pathbreaking and provocative, *Taking Haiti* illuminates the complex interplay between culture and acts of violence in the making of the American empire.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

In July 1915, U.S. armed forces occupied Haiti, where they remained until 1934. Renda (history and women's studies, Mt. Holyoke Coll.) explores the intellectual underpinnings of the U.S. military and political actions and how the occupation affected American intellectuals and artists. Supporting the economic and military reasons for the occupation was a sense of paternalism and racism. Haitians were seen as a backward, inferior people needing the white man's benevolent protection. This protection turned at times to violence, as U.S. marines suppressed Haitian uprisings during the occupation. In turn, the exotic nature of Haiti as a whole, and the lure of its voodoo tradition in particular, shaped individual Marines along with black and white American thinkers, writers, and artists: Orson Welles, Eugene O'Neill, James Weldon, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston produced wonderful works of art inspired by Haiti. Renda uses a wide collection of materials from diaries, memoirs, letters, books, plays, and the arts to produce an excellent cultural study of the development of American imperialism. Recommended for all libraries. Stephen L. Hupp, West Virginia Univ., Parkersburg

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Review

Renda draws from a wide variety of texts--marines' memoirs, missionary reports, pulp fiction, official documents, African American and Haitian literature--to suggest the multiple meanings of the United States occupation of Haiti. (Emily S. Rosenberg, Macalester College)

"Taking Haiti" provides a superb analysis of the complex cultural meanings of the Haitian occupation as well as its aftermath on the North American mainland. (Gail Bederman, University of Notre Dame)

Renda uses a wide collection of materials from diaries, memoirs, letters, books, plays, and the arts to produce an excellent cultural study of the development of American imperialism. Recommended for all libraries. ("Library Journal")

Renda's interpretation of Haiti as 'America's Africa' combines an empathetic analysis of the American military presence with a provocative discussion of interventionist paternalism's impact on America's identity. (Dennis E. Showalter, Colorado College)

Review

A study of the cultural characteristics and consequences of the intervention rather than as a complete narrative of events. This innovative work is less about Haiti than about the United States. That focus allows Renda to provide new insights on the occupation. . . . One of the most important accomplishments of *Taking Haiti* is Renda's persuasive argument that the Haitian intervention occupies a pivotal place in the formation of twentieth-century American culture. A historical episode often treated as an oddity is inscribed here as central to an emerging national conversation about race, gender, and power.--*Journal of American History*

This is a unique synergy of the historical and the mythic aspects of the quarter-century U.S. occupation of Haiti. Renda's interpretation of Haiti as 'America's Africa' combines an empathetic analysis of the American military presence with a provocative discussion of interventionist paternalism's impact on America's identity.

The occupation simultaneously made U.S. imperialism more resilient and led to the destabilizing of central cultural forms, especially in the contexts of race and gender.--Dennis E. Showalter, Colorado College

[A] significant and exciting contribution to this growing interdisciplinary field. . . . Prodigiously researched and persuasively argued. . . . Without doubt, the research, analysis, and conclusions presented in this work will shape, enrich, and inspire scholarship in these and related fields for time to come.--*Caribbean Studies*

Renda makes a sterling contribution to this growing literature [on the U.S. occupation of Haiti] with a bold and provocative look at the interplay of race, gender, culture, and national identity in U.S.-Haitian relations.-*Florida Historical Quarterly*

Renda draws from a wide variety of texts--marines' memoirs, missionary reports, pulp fiction, official documents, African American and Haitian literature--to suggest the multiple meanings of the United States occupation of Haiti. She integrates cultural analysis related to gender, race, class, and nation into international history, producing a sophisticated and highly readable book suitable both for classrooms and for specialists.--Emily S. Rosenberg, Macalester College

Taking Haiti provides a superb analysis of the complex cultural meanings of the Haitian occupation as well as its aftermath on the North American mainland. Renda paints a nuanced panorama of gendered imperialism, from policymakers and enforcers in Haiti, to confused Marines, to writers, playwrights, and other intellectuals invoking Haiti as they threaded their ways through the maze of American gender, racial, and national identities. Renda delineates the complexities and ironies of these stories with great sensitivity and lucidity.--Gail Bederman, University of Notre Dame

[A] provocative and insightful interpretation of twentieth-century United States imperialism.--*History*

[*Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism*] does an excellent job of establishing a cultural and historical context for Haiti and the United States before the intervention.--*Eurospan*

Renda's examination of Haiti is a fine example of a second wave of scholarship that has emphasized cultural interaction, especially issues related to gender and race.--*Choice*

Renda uses a wide collection of materials from diaries, memoirs, letters, books, plays, and the arts to produce an excellent cultural study of the development of American imperialism. Recommended for all libraries.--*Library Journal*

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