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Reseña de “¡Llegó La Gringada!: El contexto social-militar estadounidense en Puerto Rico y otros lugares del Caribe hasta 1919” de Héctor R. Marín Román
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Finally, *Colonial Crucible* displays a profound commitment to the analysis of imperialism as a political and economic process tied to social relations and cultural representations of Americans and their others. Yet the authors in *Colonial Crucible* often overemphasize the cultural and political over the economic rationale. To be sure, most authors acknowledge that American expansion involved very diverse set of motivations, some of which were economic. There was a strategic opportunity to remove the Spanish empire from the hemisphere and thus do away with economic competition. The war also represented an opportunity to prevent other empires from moving into Spanish colonies and compete with the United States. Further, the economic depression and class conflict of the 1890s encouraged a distinctively American capitalist imperialism. It was believed that expanding overseas markets could stop the falling domestic demand, and some even argued that expansion abroad could sidetrack and even prevent domestic class, racial, and ethnic conflicts by reinforcing nationalist sentiments. However, even though most contributors to *Colonial Crucible* are aware of the connections between capital, state, and overseas expansion, and often address them, the book falls short in revealing the intricate connections linking capital, imperialism, and state transformation in the United States and the colonies. This is an area requiring further research; it is a significant topic in fully understanding state transformations in the United States. The shift of American state capacities toward realizing internationally interventionist goals versus domestically interventionist ones has been crucial in pushing American capital’s global expansion, with tremendous effect in both the colonies and the metropolis. The American state has been deeply implicated in the facilitation of capital expansion, meaning that its policies shaped colonial economies through various strategies. Nevertheless, economic policies and practices were instrumental in the transformation of economic courses of action and practices in the United States. In spite of these critical comments, *Colonial Crucible* goes a long way as an impressive, remarkable and exciting achievement in American historical scholarship.

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**¡Llegó La Gringada!: El contexto social-militar Estadounidense en Puerto Rico y otros lugares del Caribe hasta 1919**

By Héctor R. Marín Román
San Juan: Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 2009
698 pages; $39.00 [paper]

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For more than six decades now, as Roger Spiller comments in an article on moral responsibility and the writing of military history, “Historians have posed for themselves an ever-expanding range of interpretative and methodological questions, produced a dizzying variety of approaches, divided and subdivided into schools, camps, and tribes—all in an unprecedented intellectual and global ferment, a worldwide quickening of pulse” (Spiller 2006). Most recently, the global approach in historiography has opened the way to uncharted research territories, and to yet another revision of the simplistic postulates and all-encompassing theories concerning our recent past. Within this current trend, Héctor Marín Román’s
¡Llegó La Gringada!: El contexto social-militar Estadounidense en Puerto Rico y otros lugares del Caribe hasta 1919, offers a fresh, comprehensive, and well-informed account of U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean throughout the first two decades of the 20th century. Its scope lies beyond the traditional, limited confines such studies sometimes evince. The work not only expands the geographical boundaries for this history beyond the Greater Antilles by integrating the other territories of the Caribbean Basin, but also extends its chronological framework to 1919, highlighting certain effects of the First World War on the pre-war, imperialist blueprint. The account manages to merge the diverse, parallel imperialist experiences in the region, identifying similarities and differences as well as the interconnection between these situations, emphasizing a “connect the dots” process to U.S. imperialism according to a sometimes chaotic, try-and-error method of decision-making.

Aside from integrating data from a number of well-documented works, ¡Llegó La Gringada! affords a distanced perspective through which certain formerly irrefutable facts concerning U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean are brought into question, and confronted with unpublished documentation from jealously guarded U.S. military archives. The author's personal experience as a former Major in the U.S. Army Reserve also contributes to his unique methodological approach and insight, since his research is informed by a solid understanding of military science. For example, Marín Román is keen on segregating the Army's military and strategic interests from the Navy's specific goals in the area, particularly in the case of Puerto Rico, a view that contradicts the traditional historiographical perspective on the subject. According to him, only after the interests of the three spheres of power—government, Army, and Navy—were joined together on the eve of the First World War, did the island and region as a whole acquire a significant role in the United States imperialist scheme (pp. 406–16). The historiographical essay at the end of the book serves as a well-argued, bibliographical summary for a number of major works on American imperialism and specific, regional cases, as well as a useful, engaging, critical review of these sources, for both scholars and students.

Marín Román’s argument also stands as an intelligent, unprecedented proposition in the study of imperialism, colonialism, and wars in general, since it suggests that imperialism and its choice of targets, at least in the case of the United States, may have depended on the interests and goals of different military enclaves, and may have been sometimes dominated by other forces in the political periphery, against the government’s own agenda, or its economic cronies’ dearest wishes. In this respect, the book’s general contention breaks free from theoretical restrictions such as the primacy of economic interests as a fundamental motivation behind U.S. imperialism in the region (pp. 19–22). Although capitalist exploitation stands out as a factor in certain expansionist actions, particularly during the first decade of the 20th century, the preeminence of capitalist entrepreneurial lust is not underlined as the most powerful impulse leading to expansion in Marín Román’s account. In fact, it is German economic interests rather than those of the United States that actually stand out at least at the beginning of his work, adding another interesting twist to the traditional imperialist paradigm (pp. 50–1).

The work instead tends to emphasize the complexity and intricacies of the process, by incorporating a tug-of-war between contending interests within the political structure, and between the government, the economic sector, and the military high command, highlighting the sometimes contradictory and even fortuitous set of issues leading to imperialist actions. The American expansionist...
project in the Caribbean is stripped of the mythical patina of a calculated conspiracy, by pointing out a sort of “copy-paste” approach to military planning, in which old or competing plans were sometimes refurbished and mixed together according to more or less successful, past experiences or in response to new situations (pp. 409–17). As the author reminds us, the United States Army was in 16th place among the world armies in 1916, along with other unassuming forces such as the Dutch, Danish, and Chilean, serving rather as a “geriatric ward” where a large number of officers and enlisted men “waited for their pensions” (p. 414). The account also stresses the controversies between the President, the Secretary of State, Congress, and the military establishment in view of different interests, which would influence the development of the expansionist agenda, military plans, and American policy for the region (pp. 87, 103, 166–71, 331–2, 340–5, 353–7).

The book’s global perspective underlines the significance of the international situation in the development of the United States imperialist design, by integrating an ongoing, cunning imperialist competition between Great Britain, France, Germany, and even Japan in the hemisphere at least five years before the First World War (pp. 304–15, 362, 366, 473–9) as a major consideration in drafting the American military’s strategic expansion in the Caribbean. The author’s evidence also contradicts the argument that the German threat was rather a mirage-like “dream” manipulated and magnified by the United States authorities to justify an imperialist policy (Mitchell 1999). According to Marín Román, American military planners saw the need of pushing the Germans out of the Caribbean region altogether long before 1917, in view of Prussia’s military influence in the Caribbean periphery (p. 383). Even before the beginning of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Germans already included the capture of Culebra and/or Puerto Rico in their war plans (pp. 78, 255), probably predicting a power vacuum in the region in view of Spain’s weakness. Germany also serves as common denominator in the region’s military and political circumstances between 1914 and 1917, when part of its war strategy apparently included the political and social destabilization of the zone as a means of keeping the United States out of the European theater of war (pp. 353, 362–6).

Local, regional, and global circumstances intertwine in the account, adding to the complexity of the process, while also contributing a rarely considered prism through which to analyze the turn of events. The discussion thus plays a part in outlining a social landscape that may open the way to further research. For example, the military experience afforded an opportunity for different Caribbean population groups to mingle or quarrel with their regional “brothers” — and “sisters” for that matter. The circumstances under which this interaction evolved can hardly escape Marín Román’s biting irony. Educated Puerto Ricans were sent to the Dominican Republic in 1916 for instance, to serve in the American occupation government’s construction, police, and intelligence services, along with thousands of workers (pp. 369–73). As a result, the Dominican Republic became a haven for a migrant population ravaged by years of economic crisis and government neglect, a demographic copy in the negative of present circumstances, since Puerto Rico has become the main destination for Dominican immigrants. The United States occupation of the Dominican Republic also facilitated the arrival of another sort of Puerto Rican immigrants, such as soldiers of fortune who terrorized inhabitants in the rural provinces, and prostitutes who entertained the sugarcane workers of La Romana in their very own brothel district, nostalgically baptized “Puerto Rico” (pp. 373–5). The upsurge of a bar and prostitution economy in Panama thanks to the population of Puerto Rican soldiers in
the area during the First World War, along with the development of a drug addiction problem resulting from the concoction of liquor and cocaine some establishments served, also affords a hardly explored effect of the expansionist campaigns (pp. 462–3).

The author’s sharp humor colors the patchwork-like social fabric in this story, particularly when commenting on the autobiographical accounts of several of the Puerto Ricans who participated in the events. A specially telling report involves the story of the Puerto Rican soldiers in Panama City’s red district bars, who pretended to be “rich islanders,” but were later unmasked as mere boasters, and baptized the “we-haveitalls” (toj’tenemos) because of their grandiose stories of fortune (p. 463). Considering that the book is the first volume of a projected series, extending from 1898 to the end of the Second World War, we can expect that the social and cultural idiosyncrasies informing the present work will also contribute lively, historical nooks and crannies to the multilayered military narratives that may ensue.

NOTES
1 According to Marín Román, most of the books that discuss U.S. imperialism in relation to Puerto Rico mistakenly point out the significance of the island as a strategic, military post since the early period of the occupation. See for example, Estades Font (1988), Negroni (1992), Picó (1987), Piñero Cádiz (2008).

References

Packaged Vacations: Tourism Development in the Spanish Caribbean

By Evan R. Ward
272 pages; $69.95 [cloth]

REVIEWER: Ricardo Pérez, Eastern Connecticut State University

Since the mid-20th century, the international tourism industry has contributed significantly to economic development in Latin America and the Caribbean by providing opportunities for capital investment and infrastructure building. And, as indicated by Evan R. Ward in Packaged Vacations: Tourism Development in the Spanish Caribbean, it continues to be an engine for economic growth in the region. Ward’s book offers a historical narrative of the development and transformation of the tourism industry in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean since the post-World War II period