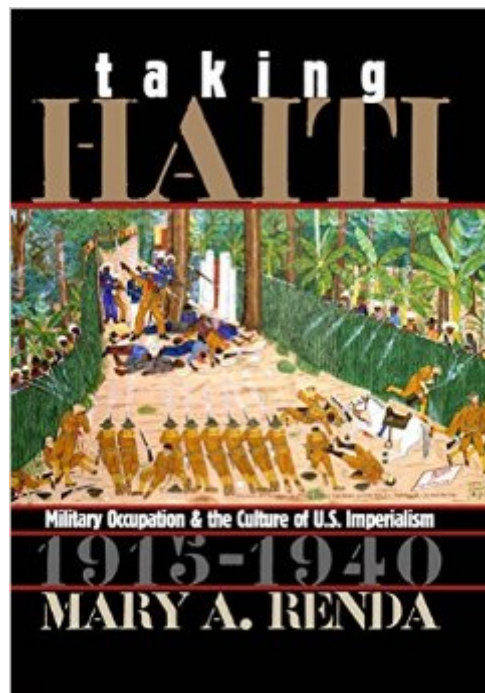


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Taking Haiti: Military Occupation And The Culture Of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Paternalism is the central theme of Mary Renda's analysis of the US involvement in Haiti during the early part of the 20th century, an imperialistic foray in to what most Americans (including the thousands of US Marines sent there) considered to be a "backward," undeveloped land of childlike inhabitants. Renda asks two questions in this well-written book: "who did US American men think

they were in Haiti and how did the people of the United States imagine themselves when they read about their nation's occupation there?" (9) She structures her study in two parts, in order to answer each of these concerns. Statesmen, diplomats and soldiers of the U.S. involved in the invasion and occupation of Haiti in the second decade of the 20th century brought with them a piece of cultural baggage known as paternalism. By observing and reacting to Haiti with this frame of reference, U.S. Americans almost universally saw their duty as occupiers as being in the role of parent to the native Haitians, to bring to the island and its people the benefits of what U.S. Americans regarded as order, stability, secure commerce and modern, rational customs. "Paternalism," she notes, "was the cultural flagship of the United States in Haiti." (15) As agents of U.S. cultural conscription, Marines tried to remake Haiti in to something of their own image of American society primarily through coercive means, though this largely failed due to Haitian resistance. Nevertheless, attitudes toward race, gender and sexuality the soldiers brought with them was the lens through which they viewed this island to be tamed. The racism of the Marines made them see the native Haitians as either ignorant "children," or savages not worthy to rule themselves.

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