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Book Review: Whose America? The War of 1898 and the Battles to Define the Nation, by Virginia M. Bouvier

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Whose America? The War of 1898 and the Battles to Define the Nation. VIRGINIA M. BOUVIER (ed.). Westport CT: Praeger, 2001. xi + 241 pp. (Cloth £54.50)

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Whose America? The War of 1898 and the Battles to Define the Nation examines the important last years of the nineteenth century when dramatic political, social, cultural, economic, and military changes resulted in ending more than four hundred years of Spanish colonialism in the Caribbean. The idea for the book and some of the chapters grew out of a conference held in 1998 entitled "Challenges to Peace, 1898-1998: Visions from the Past, Lessons for the Future." Collectively, the chapters analyze how Spaniards, Cubans, Cuban-Americans, Americans, and Puerto Ricans, as well as imperialists,

anti-imperialists, and nationalists all engaged in a process of reexamining and reformulating their own political and national identity during the war and after. The editor and the contributors do not shy away from addressing the imperialistic designs of the United States that other scholars have tended to minimize, especially in U.S. historiography (see the discussion in Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States & Cuba in History and Historiography* [1998]). The idea of the “splendid little war” still influences academic discussion and debate a century later. A co-sponsor of the conference “made it clear that there were explicit political limits to what might be discussed under its auspices” (p. 3).

Bouvier has judiciously divided the book into three sections: “Historical Underpinnings of Foreign Intervention”; “The War of 1898”; and “Legacies of 1898.” Lester Langley analyzes the idea of the term “Americas” to show that there have always been “two Americas” defined in contrast to each other. In the United States, the concept “Americas” served to justify and explain intervention in the Hemisphere, whereas in Latin America, for Simón Bolívar and José Martí the notion of a common “Americas” culture emphasized the absence of Anglo and U.S. influence to resist imperialism.

In Part II, the chapters by Sylvia L. Hilton, Lillian Guerra, Virginia M. Bouvier, and Kristin L. Hoganson employ nuanced perspectives to examine the reaction by Cubans, Spaniards, and Americans to the War of 1898. Hilton analyzes how the opposition to “Monroeism” in Spain directed criticism not only at U.S. intervention, but also served to destabilize the Spanish government at home by the inability to maintain possession of their colonies. Guerra provides a carefully argued and detailed discussion of the different political priorities of Cuban rebels in the United States and those fighting on the island. She demonstrates how an “imperialist nationalism” defined the activities of the U.S.-Cuban émigré community’s political strategies that resulted in their pursuing a policy that the “nation not only extended forth from an imperialist nationalist identity; its future depended on it” (p. 65). Bouvier turns her attention to ways in which images in the form of political cartoons provide a different perspective to assess the discourses that debated U.S. participation in the war. Cartoons served to create the image of a unified country behind the war for U.S. audiences. When the drawings depicted Spanish colonial subjects, they were portrayed as devious, ungrateful children, with exaggerated stereotypical racial features to buttress an argument of their inability to control their own affairs. Hoganson extends the need to see U.S. imperialism from cultural perspectives by demonstrating how a gendered discourse of masculine honor served to justify intervention. Not only would defeating Spain restore an abused U.S. male honor both at home and in the world caused by the Panic of 1893, but any opposition to the war became regarded as a dishonorable action with feminine connotations.

In Part III, the chapters by Louis A. Pérez, Jr., Francisco A. Scarano, and Jim Zwick analyze the long lasting legacies of the War of 1898 as it relates to Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and the United States. Pérez argues that the demographic, political, and economic dislocation produced by the thirty-year struggle for Cuban liberation provided an atmosphere for U.S. cultural imperialism to thrive. He demonstrates that for the Cuban middle class, “much of what was incorporated into national identity after 1898 was assembled from an environment by North American forms” (p. 155). Francisco Scarano’s chapter on Puerto Rico analyzes U.S. policy as an action not of “intervention,” but of “possession.” He argues that unlike other military occupations during the twentieth century, “at the moment of initiating the imperial project, key U.S. policymakers made the controversial decision to invade Puerto Rico for keeps” (p. 163). Jim Zwick focuses on the Anti-Imperialist League from 1898 to 1921 that formed in opposition to the annexation of territories newly conquered by the United States. Zwick effectively charts their role in national and international politics, revealing the tensions that the War of 1898 created in the ways in which North Americans began to define their national identity in relation to foreign interventions and imperialist designs.

Virginia Bouvier provides the edited volume with an insightful introduction and conclusion, and a bibliographic essay that situates the important findings of the chapters in their larger historiographical context. *Whose America? The War of 1898 and the Battles to Define the Nation* should find a wide audience among scholars in Caribbean, Latin American, colonial, anti-colonial, and diplomatic history because the lessons and legacies of 1898 continue to influence U.S. policies of imperial domination that have their roots in events over a century earlier.