

GUNBOATS IN THE CARIBBEAN DANGER ZONE

STRUGGLE FOR THE AMERICAN MEDITERRANEAN: UNITED STATES-EUROPEAN RIVALRY IN THE GULF-CARIBBEAN, 1776-1904. By LESTER D. LANGLEY. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976. Pp. 225. \$10.00.)

THE UNITED STATES IN PANAMANIAN POLITICS: THE INTRIGUING FORMATIVE YEARS. By G. A. MELLANDER. (Danville, Ill: The Interstate Printers & Publishers, Inc., 1971. Pp. 215. \$7.95.)

GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY IN THE WILSON ERA: THE U.S. NAVY IN HAITI, 1915-1916. By DAVID HEALY. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976. Pp. 268. \$15.00.)

The events of 1898 cast a long shadow. Historians ineluctably turn to the overseas expansion of that year for clues to the later behavior of the United States in world affairs. The books reviewed here represent recent attempts to move beyond established analyses. Langley considers Caribbean events from a regional perspective across a long span of time, treating what he calls the Gulf-Caribbean region in terms of rivalry between the United States and European nations. The book begins with the American Revolution and ends with the Dominican customs receivership of 1904. Two other scholars examine certain specific episodes of the period 1904-16. Mellander traces the evolution of U.S.-Panamanian politics during the period 1904-08, concentrating on the presidency of Manuel Amador Guerrero. Healy illuminates the U.S. intervention in Haiti during 1915, emphasizing the proconsular role of Rear Admiral William B. Caperton.

Langley's title, *Struggle for the American Mediterranean*, seems to promise a broad international history of the Gulf and Caribbean locales during the nineteenth century—an escape from conventional bilateral analysis—but no such attempt is made. For the most part he explores just those questions with which historians are familiar, and for the most part he purveys conventional views. We do not get a truly international perspective but rather accounts of largely bilateral controversies treated as such. Conceptually Langley does not move beyond what can be found in extant surveys of U.S.-Latin American relations. We learn that "the United States followed policies that were ingenious amalgams of idealism and expediency." Only in the 1890s did the United States develop sufficient power to impose its desires in the Gulf-Caribbean region. The people then became "unconsciously imperialistic." We acted on essentially strategic and cultural motives, seeking stability in the region to insure control of the area, and aspiring also to transplant "Anglo-Saxon concepts" in other parts of the world. Elimination of outside interference would facilitate both objectives.

All this may be defensible, but it is hardly pathbreaking, and this reviewer cannot help but propose that other historians approach the history of the Gulf-

Caribbean region differently. Another book might begin with a truly careful geographic analysis of the area, drawing attention especially to the strategic and economic setting. It might then examine the Age of Discovery in order to explain the rivalries of the old imperialist nations, particularly Spain, France, and Britain. Next it might consider the culmination of Franco-British competition on a global scale during the period 1756–1815, inquiring into the role of the Gulf-Caribbean in that great age of discontinuities. Only at this point would the author reach Langley's principal concern—the nineteenth century—but he would reach beyond 1904 to 1920. How did various nationalist movements prosper in the area? What happened to the remaining dependencies? How did the Gulf-Caribbean fit into the pattern of free-trade imperialism as practiced by the British? Finally, what circumstances allowed the United States during the period 1890–1920 to achieve practical hegemony in the region? The First World War figured importantly in this culminating event. Only after that catastrophe did the United States find itself capable of dominating the Gulf-Caribbean region.

If historians adopt a periodization based on the larger patterns of international and indeed world history from the Age of Discovery to the earlier twentieth century, they might escape the restrictive bonds of bilateral history and discover new things. Langley's survey limns in the possibilities inherent in such an approach, but it does not pursue them.

Mellander's work is curiously refreshing. Because his investigation of Panama's first years of independence sometimes seems amateurish, reviewers might be tempted to attack this study. To do so would be to overlook a solid and helpful analysis of what went on in Panama during this critical period. Extant accounts of the origins of the Panama Canal fail to probe the isthmian scene in sufficient depth. Mellander spent many years in the Canal Zone, and he is more interested in the politics of Panama than anything else. The result is an interpretation that definitely modifies earlier views. Mellander is a rank political historian; he eschews the social and economic history of Panama, but he is thorough in his examination of power struggles from 1903 to 1908. This aspect of the story leads him to interesting views on the relationship with the United States. Although the *norteamericanos* were deeply involved in Panamanian politics at this time, "strangely enough, the United States appears to have been more of a blundering, though not stupid, giant than a calculating strategist." Fortuitous events rather than careful calculations brought the Yankees into Panama, but once there they took full advantage of opportunities that offered themselves. Although the United States was neither an imperialist bent upon aggrandizement nor a ruthless exploiter of financially backward areas, "its interest in construction of an isthmian canal "would lead her to adopt a rather forceful policy of paternalistic aggression."

Mellander convincingly demonstrates that it was the Panamanians and the agents of the old French canal company who initiated the revolutionary project of 1903. He shows that the United States fell in with the plotters because of interest in the projected canal. The Liberal Party in Panama, probably a majority, "displayed injudicious haste and impropriety" in manifesting a legitimate

desire to take power from Amador's Conservatives, the first rulers. The Liberals pleaded for intervention and eventually the Yankees responded. Mellander condemns the behavior of both Panamanian parties: Conservatives practiced corrupt electoral politics; Liberals fostered intervention. The United States allowed itself to become unduly involved in the internal affairs of Panama. Here is an analysis that ought to be read by all those interested in the negotiations to settle a new canal treaty. Mellander's thorough research and fairmindedness triumph over certain benign deficiencies.

Healy's treatment of the Haitian intervention in 1915 is a thoroughly professional work by a thoroughly professional scholar. Here is a senior historian who is not afraid to pursue monographic research in depth. He begins with the apt presumption that all too much generalization and all too little close analysis characterize the present state of knowledge about this episode. When the First World War began, the United States, desirous of protecting the Panama Canal, became more concerned than before about strategic security in the Caribbean Sea, but the struggle across the Atlantic in fact greatly reduced the likelihood of European meddling. Healy draws attention to the pervasive Wilsonian desire to foster representative democracy in other places. Therefore strategic and ideological motives influenced the policy of the United States. In the Caribbean the direction of affairs fell regularly to the United States Navy. In this connection Healy notes: "Neither conventional diplomatic history nor economic analysis can fully expose this dimension of the Caribbean story, and it therefore merits more scholarly attention than it has received, for generalizations about the motives and methods of United States actions in the region can be made with confidence only after the military dimension has been integrated with the others." Healy's account of Caperton's activity stresses the decline of a truly independent Haiti despite the admiral's intentions. If Caperton showed considerable interest in what today would be called foreign assistance for Haiti, his views received little attention in Washington, "which never did do much to stimulate loans and investment in Haiti, while the costs of what was done there came almost wholly out of Haitian government revenues. The United States wanted stability and security in the Caribbean, and having attained this it showed little further interest in those for whose fate it had assumed responsibility." The situation meant abandoning the "more constructive occupation goals," decline of a real Haitian role in power, and "emergence of a military autocracy as a central mechanism of power." This flowed from a course of action based on force rather than consent of the governed. Haitian inadequacies also enter into the pattern, as do lack of vision and understanding in Washington. Caperton, treated sympathetically in this work, nevertheless is faulted for his resort to misrepresentation and intimidation.

Healy concludes that no one motivation explains the behavior of the United States in this critical situation. Like Mellander's work his research eschews dialectical simplisms. If this study falls into a category that some disparagingly call "creeping eclecticism," let users make the most of it. Neither Healy nor Mellander can be dismissed as simply blending "realist" and "revisionist" views. Both build on prior scholarship, move into unexamined areas, and create a new and different product. History is a cumulative discipline, and these two

scholars understand that truism. Both historians note the strategic concerns of the United States along with her tendency to make ad hoc responses as unexpected developments took place. Both stress the important role of local actors—both civil and military—in the shaping of American policy. Political realities in both Panama and Haiti surely indicated that the United States model of representative democracy could not develop easily, whether or not imposed by force. Today it is obvious that there was never a serious strategic threat to the Caribbean from Europe during the period 1898–1914 and equally evident that the onset of World War I reduced the threat to nil. Had this latter point been understood, the United States might at least have avoided interventions of the sort that occurred in Haiti.

Perhaps the most serious policy omission was the failure to develop a forward-looking economic program. The United States did little in Haiti to help develop the local economy, and the record in Panama does not appear to have been much better. Interventionists merely added to the burgeoning Yankeeophobia of the era. Historians of later Haitian and Panamanian development will find much of interest in these accounts of extraordinarily important episodes in the experience of these two small Caribbean nations. These monographic accounts also contribute importantly to generalizations about the overall policies of the United States during the imperial interlude between 1898 and 1917.

DAVID F. TRASK

U.S. Department of State