

REVIEWS

John Lindsay-Poland, *Emperors in the Jungle: The Hidden History of the U.S. in Panama* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

This is a skilled and inventive combination of history and investigative journalism. Inspired by the violent 1989 US invasion of Panama, and Washington's lies surrounding it, John Lindsay-Poland set out to uncover what he calls a hidden history of American imperialism in Panama. What he finds is fascinating. But what he calls hidden is accurate only in part. To be sure, Lindsay-Poland uncovers vital new details of the US exploitation of Panama during the Cold War. This book is particularly strong on the terrifying use of the Canal Zone to test depleted uranium and toxic arms; chemical weapons testing on the isthmus began in 1923 and lasted almost five decades. But part of what hidden history means to Lindsay-Poland rings of the tortured path many American liberals take to come to terms with imperial violence. US president George Bush justified the Panama invasion on the basis of threats against an American woman by Panamanian soldiers. "But the very next day," Lindsay-Poland writes, an American human rights worker was stabbed in Guatemala City on military orders. During the 1980s, the author continues, the US had given military support to the Guatemalan government. Putting two and two together, Lindsay-Poland found that President Bush's rationale for the invasion of Panama now "rang false" (1). Forty years past the start of the war in Vietnam, liberal Americans are still shocked to discover that their political leaders are lying to them about imperial violence committed in their names. As much as anything else, Lindsay-Poland's hidden history concerns what the author seems not to have known about US foreign policy before 1990, and should have. Just as there is an ongoing complicity of some American liberals in Washington's imperial project, there is an ongoing scholarship of "discovery" that is now more than forty-years old.

A chapter on American interventions between 1856 and 1925 highlights American racism and how it shaped medical research and treatments, particularly with regard to yellow fever. The analysis of race is excellent; it is unfortunate that the author drops this theme after this chapter. There is a chapter on the relationship between the US government and the Panamanian military during the 1970s and 1980s, with a special emphasis on the drug war. But the most important contributions are chapters on the history of chemical weapons testing and on American conceptions of wildlife and environment as a function of empire. The case of Agent Orange testing typifies the American approach to Panama as a dumping ground. In 1968, at the height of the war in Vietnam, the US Army began experimenting with the toxic defoliant in Panama. One wit-

ness saw US Special Forces drop Agent Orange in 1969 or 1970 and “watched the jungle disappear over the next few days” (72). The result was high levels of Agent Orange in coral reefs in the Pacific Ocean, in Gatun Lake, and likely in other parts of Panama used for recreation and vacationing. Lindsay-Poland’s is the first public report on the use of Agent Orange outside of Southeast Asia. While in this and other cases of chemical weapons testing *Emperors in the Jungle* cites cases of Americans whose health was severely compromised as a result, there is very little discussion or evidence of how the damage affected Panamanians. There is a stirring chapter on Project Plowshare, a US government plan in the 1950s and 1960s to use nuclear explosions to build a new sea-level waterway through Panama without locks. The plan never came to fruition but the arrogance of Cold War era US imperialism is shown by the author to have never been greater.

Lindsay-Poland offers a concluding chapter that discusses changes in US military strategy in Panama during the twentieth century. He argues effectively that American military interests shifted over time to de-emphasize the strategic defence of the canal and to focus more and more on Panama as a testing range. He also revisits an important theme from the first chapter, the place of race in US imperialism. The return to race so late in the book highlights opportunities lost by the author. At the end of the day, driven by his stated and understandable outrage over US government lies, this book is more exceptional exposé than connected historical analysis of US imperialism in Panama. While all chapters are strong, and some are excellent, there is little to join them methodologically beyond the violence of imperialism. While research in US sources is well done and thorough, the book is based on very little primary research in Panama. Further, not only does Lindsay-Poland not tie Panamanian problems in the face of American brutality, like racism and sexual violence, to key book themes, but there is no discussion of popular Panamanian responses or resistance to imperialism. What did Panamanians think of their exposure to dangerous chemicals over the years? How did they respond? Based almost exclusively on first rate research in the United States and focusing on an analysis of American policy and action, this book sets aside the notion that imperialism functions as a dynamic interaction between dominant and subject peoples.

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