

NEW CARIBBEAN STUDIES

Edited by
DON E. WALICEK and JESSICA ADAMS

GUANTÁNAMO AND AMERICAN EMPIRE

The Humanities Respond



New Caribbean Studies

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“This is a very satisfying collection for those of us who default to thinking of Guantánamo as just a carceral space. Full of provocative forays into history, criticism, poetry, and intertextual analysis, the book reveals some of the extraordinary cultural context in which our extralegal prison resides. The pieces remind me of the waves described by my clients in their poetry from the prison—insistent, mesmerizing, strange. Their effect is cumulative, and begin to make Guantánamo an intellectually more visible place.”

—Mark Falkoff, *Professor of Law at Northern Illinois University, USA*

“Even as the post-9/11 war on terror has shifted critiques of U.S. foreign policy away from the Americas, Guantánamo and American Empire reminds us of the ongoing centrality of the Caribbean to understanding the past and present of U.S. imperialism. The book offers important and original perspectives from scholars and artists in the United States, Cuba, and other parts of the Caribbean. The result is a powerful portrait of how asylum seekers and refugees, enemy combatants and those labeled as terrorists, and even everyday Caribbean people, all become the enemies of the state that Guantánamo exists to contain and exclude. Focusing on Guantánamo shows how violence and subjugation remain at the center of U.S. Empire.”

—Raphael Dalleo, *author of American Imperialism’s Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism (2016), USA*

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Editors

Guantánamo and American Empire

The Humanities Respond

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Cover illustration: U.S. Marines raising the American flag over Guantánamo Bay in 1898
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*This book is dedicated to the writers, artists, poets, and performers
of Guantánamo.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume was first imagined in a conversation that unfolded just outside the gates of one of the oldest and largest public universities in the Caribbean, the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras Campus. After collaborating on a project years earlier, we had kept in touch as our paths took us in very different directions. Finally, we found ourselves in the same part of the world again, and had the chance to spend a weekend catching up.

Over coffee, we talked about the possibility of working on a book together. "What would we do, if we could do anything?" we asked ourselves. It quickly became clear that we wanted to bring together our shared interests in Caribbean issues and matters of global significance. The topic of Guantánamo—a profound crossroads in so many ways—beckoned us immediately.

Colleagues, friends, and family near and far have supported this project over the three years that followed that initial conversation, including our families, who have helped us formulate difficult questions and instilled in us the confidence to answer them. We're thankful for their generosity and compassion and hope to give back some of what we've received by nurturing compassion in our own lives and work. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to work with the contributors to this book, whose knowledge, goodwill, and patience have sustained us.

Humberto García Muñiz and César A. Salgado offered crucial support shortly after the project was launched and have continued to support our work since then. Katherine Miranda provided important critiques after reading an early draft of this volume's introduction, and Maritza Stanchich proved a key interlocutor who checked in on our progress from beginning to end, offering inspiration and encouragement. Celeste E. Freytes González shared insights about justice and social change early in the project, and later, in her interim role as President of the University of Puerto Rico, she helped us to raise awareness of the significance of writing about Guantánamo at an event that we organized on our campus. We thank these colleagues for their engagement and support.

A critical turning point in the process of creating this volume was our trip to Guantánamo Province in the summer of 2015, and we thank Esther Whitfield and Ana Vera for sharing their contacts and their knowledge of the area. Our trip from Havana to Guantánamo City took 19 hours by car, giving us a chance to contemplate the many links between geography and society as we took in the landscape on both sides of the mostly empty *carretera*. The hospitality and warmth of José Sánchez Guerra and Yadira Mercedes Muñoz Gonzáles upon our arrival and throughout the whole of our visit enabled us to better understand El Oriente from Cuban perspectives so much more fully than we ever would have been able to do otherwise.

We are also grateful to the staff of *Casa de la Historia* in Guantánamo City for inviting us to present the ideas behind this volume on a panel with José Sánchez Guerra and Mario Montero. The experience allowed us to share impressions and receive feedback that guided later stages of the project. Without José's willingness to share his time and his vast knowledge of Guantánamo Province with us, this volume would not exist in its current form.

At UNEAC in Guantánamo City, we enjoyed a long, leisurely lunch with Jorge Núñez Motes and Ana Luz García Calzada during which we talked about so many things, including what 'Guantánamo' and the humanities mean in eastern Cuba. We owe a special thanks to Ana Luz and Raúl García for accompanying us to the border separating Cuba and the U.S. naval base. The perspectives that we exchanged during that journey were invaluable to our understanding of key themes of this book.

Through months of correspondence, as well as in person, José Ramón Sánchez Leyva has always underscored humor as well as strategic outrage as crucial aspects of meaningful dialogue. We're indebted to him for his generosity and commitment to this volume.

As this project progressed, it led to dialogues with people who have worked on the base, as well as to smaller related projects in the areas of writing, teaching, and extra-curricular activities. James Yee, former Muslim Chaplain in the U.S. Army, graciously discussed his experience ministering to detainees, the military's solitary confinement, and his opinions about the War on Terror. Alida Millán Ferrer, director of the newspaper *Claridad, El Periódico de La Nación Puertorriqueña*, supported corollary writing projects related to the War on Terror, including a summer 2016 media tour of the detention facilities at the Guantánamo Bay naval base. Nancy Dorsinville was an early supporter of the project, and her brilliance and kind words have informed and inspired our thinking about the many connections between Haiti and Guantánamo.

We are grateful to the UPR–RP's College of Humanities and the Institute of Caribbean Studies for sponsoring the colloquium 'Guantánamo: Promises of Closure and Justice' in August 2016. Heartfelt thanks to retired U.S. Navy Major General Michael Lehnert for traveling to our institution to discuss the work he did to close the base's detention facility, including his role as a commander of security forces operating Cuban and Haitian migrant camps in the 1990s, and his return to the base to construct and oversee detention facilities for alleged Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists in 2002. Presenting via Skype from Birmingham, England, Moazzam Begg spoke about his three years of detention, and pointed out that the horrible accounts of torture and abuse that emerge from Guantánamo are the result of cooperation between the U.S. and the UK, countries that are the great "bastions of democracy, human rights, and freedom." We appreciate his contribution and his description of the actions of a few soldiers (including Virgin Islanders and Puerto Ricans) who treated him with humanity and kindness in moments of great despair. A special thanks to Esther Whitfield, one of the contributors to this volume, for presenting her work in the colloquium.

We are grateful to the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor for a curriculum development grant that led to a course at our institution in which Guantánamo was the main topic of discussion. As a result, undergraduate students enrolled in several semesters of 'The Human Condition in Literature' shared their opinions about texts related to Guantánamo, including poetry, short stories, and memoirs written by detainees and

past base employees. The project's relevance became all the more apparent when, in each class, some students had personal links to the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo—for example, fathers, aunts or uncles, and friends who served there in the National Guard. These amazing students have helped us to see hope as an essential component of our critiques of U.S. empire.

A group of talented graduate students at the UPR–RP—Eduardo Rodríguez Santiago, Ángel Lozada, Sharif El Gammal Ortiz, and Fabiola Mattei—worked as research assistants and assisted with translation, library visits, and administrative tasks.

We thank the women and men of the Media Relations Office of Joint Task Force Guantánamo for their organization of journalists' and writers' visits to the detention camps. Such work stands out as essential to keeping the public informed about the operation of these facilities and helps citizens and other concerned individuals hold elected officials accountable for their actions. We hope that it can eventually lead to the transformation of how people all over the world see Guantánamo Bay, converting it from a symbol of torture and empire to a site that represents healing, safety, and justice.

We are grateful for interest in this project on the part of our colleagues Jane Alberdeston, David Auerbach, Agnes Bosch, María de los Ángeles Castro, Mayra Cortes, Sally Everson, Nicholas Faraclas, Lowell Fiet, Jorge Giovannetti, Yolanda Izquierdo, Aurora Lauzardo, Mildred Lockwood, Denise López Mazzeo, Evelyn Dean Olmstead, James Penner, Nadjah Ríos, María Cristina Rodríguez, Alma Simounet, Luz Miriam Tirado, and Yvette Torres. We thank them for their support and for ensuring that our university remains a place where academic work on controversial topics can be combined with teaching, extracurricular activities, and broader concerns about social justice. Years of friendship and inspiring dialogue with Adriana Garriga López, Linta Varghese, and Eva Villalón Soler have also shaped this project in positive ways.

Finally, special thanks to Sandino Vargas Pérez for his love, understanding, and insistence that research on Guantánamo should be a priority, and to Adam Stone and Tallulah Stone for the constant reminder to seek joy in the world, no matter what.

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TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1400s

Indigenous communities with a long history on the island live in eastern Cuba. They create jewelry, petroglyphs, and stone objects that house spirits known as *zemis* or *cemis*. In the area are the ancestors of the rebel chief Guamá and his wife Casiguaya, who would be remembered for resisting Spanish conquest.

April 29, 1494

Columbus's fleet first enters Guantánamo Bay, and he and his soldiers make landfall, one of several voyages that would trigger a period of European exploration, conquest, and colonization lasting several centuries.

1511

The Spanish burn the defiant cacique Hatuey at the stake and proceed to decimate the area's indigenous population. Hatuey had fled to what today is known as Guantánamo Province from Ayiti (contemporary Hispaniola).

1791

The Haitian Revolution begins and wealthy planters begin to flee to eastern Cuba, what today is Guantánamo Province, taking with them enslaved Africans.

1804

Haiti becomes an independent nation and the world's first black republic.

May 4, 1822

The Monroe Doctrine is established in a speech to the U.S. Congress.

October 24, 1823

Thomas Jefferson writes to James Madison, "I candidly confess that I have ever looked on Cuba as the most interesting addition which could ever be made to our system of states. The control which, with Florida Point, this island would give us over the Gulf of Mexico, and the countries, and the isthmus, bordering on it, as well as all those whose waters that flow into it, would fill up the measure of our political well-being."

1848

Jefferson Davis argues that "Cuba must be ours," in the interests of expanding the slaveholding territories of the U.S.

1858

The first official commercial port in Guantánamo Bay is established at Caimanera and opened to free trade.

1860

U.S. ships are landing large cargoes of enslaved Africans in Guantánamo Bay in violation of national and international laws.

October 7, 1886

Slavery in Cuba is abolished by Spanish Royal Decree.

June 1898

During the Spanish–American War, American and Cuban forces defeat the Spanish at the Battle of Guantánamo Bay, and the Americans occupy the long-coveted harbor. They establish a naval base for use as a coaling station by U.S. military forces.

July 1898

The U.S. Army sets up Camp Lawton in the area of Guantánamo Bay as a staging area from which it invades and takes control of Puerto Rico.

March 1, 1901

The U.S. Senate votes to affirm the Platt Amendment; the Cuban government reacts with protests.

1902

Cuba becomes a U.S. protectorate and remains so until 1934.

October 1903

The Cuban Senate ratifies the provision of the Platt Amendment, formally leasing to the U.S. the area of Guantánamo Bay that will become the U.S. naval base.

May 12, 1912

Afro-Cubans rise up to resist racism in Cuba; as a result, U.S. marines on the naval base at Guantánamo mobilize to protect U.S. interests in Cuba and quell the uprising.

July 28, 1915

Responding to orders from U.S. president Woodrow Wilson, 330 U.S. marines begin the occupation of Haiti, joining a group that had landed about six months earlier. Wilson hoped to rewrite the Haitian constitution and to replace its ban on foreign ownership of land with a clause that would guarantee U.S. businesses financial control of the country. This occupation ended in 1934.

May 1916

Marines are deployed from the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo to occupy the Dominican Republic. This occupation ended in 1924.

March 2, 1917

The Jones–Shafroth Act is signed, conferring U.S. citizenship on inhabitants of Puerto Rico, a territory it had annexed at the conclusion of the Spanish–American War.

March 31, 1917

The Danish West Indies formally becomes the U.S. Virgin Islands following the U.S. government’s purchase of the islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John from Denmark for \$25 million.

1920s

Parts of Caimanera and Guantánamo City begin to function as sex and alcohol destinations for thousands of U.S. military personnel.

1940

A \$37 million upgrade of the U.S. base at Guantánamo begins, leading Cuban as well as Jamaican and other Caribbean people to join its workforce.

Circa 1956

Protests take place in Guantánamo City in favor of workers’ rights, and against Batista and American influence.

1959

The Cuban Revolution results in Fidel Castro becoming the head of the Cuban government and the beginning of its powerful anti-imperialist critiques of the U.S. presence in Guantánamo and military actions launched from the base.

March 1959

Cuba stops cashing the annual checks from the U.S. government for the lease of the part of Guantánamo Bay that it occupies.

October 11, 1959

The U.S. Navy helps to put out a fire that threatened to destroy the Guantánamo Bay town of Caimanera.

January 1960

Cubans who are disgruntled with Castro's revolution and manage to reach the premises of the U.S. naval base are generally provided with support and transported to the U.S.

September 1960

In a speech at the UN General Assembly, Cuban president Fidel Castro denounces the presence of the U.S. base at Guantánamo as a threat to security and peace and rejects propaganda suggesting that his government plans to attack the base.

Summer 1962

The Cuban Missile Crisis begins. See Fig. 1 for a U.S. government map of Cuba from this period and Fig. 2 for a visual of the base within the context of the bay and surrounding area.

February 1964

Most Cuban workers at the U.S. base at Guantánamo are fired as a result of a dispute between base officials and Cuban president Fidel Castro.

April 28, 1965

Responding to orders from U.S. president Lyndon Johnson, 42,000 American troops invade the Dominican Republic, where Dominican forces were demanding the reinstatement of Juan Bosch. Bosch, a leading writer and intellectual, had been elected in 1963 in the first free presidential election in 30 years. The U.S. government justifies its actions by arguing that "another Cuba" was in the making.

1966

The Cuban song 'Guantanamera,' which includes lyrics from the Cuban independence hero José Martí's poetry collection *Versos sencillos*, is recorded by The Sandpipers and becomes an international hit.

July 3, 1976

The Cuban government issued Law 1304 breaking up Oriente Province into six administrative areas, one of which is today's Guantánamo Province.

1977

101 Haitians fleeing Duvalier in an engineless sailboat, the *St. Joseph*, seek refuge in Guantánamo Bay; all but four are forcibly repatriated to their homeland.

March 17, 1980

Tens of thousands of Cubans march in protest against “imperialist aggression, the illegal base at Guantánamo, and the U.S. blockade.”

1991

A refugee camp is established at Guantánamo Bay to detain and process Haitians fleeing political persecution following the military coup by Raoul Cédras that overthrew the democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

February 29, 1992

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) declares that HIV-positive Haitians will remain at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo until authorities can decide what to do with them; they are barred from entering the U.S.

May 24, 1992

President George H.W. Bush issues the Kennebunkport Order, stating that all Haitians rescued at sea by U.S. ships will be repatriated to Haiti without any consideration of claims to political asylum.

February 1993

The Reverend Jesse Jackson visits Haitian refugees who protested their detention with hunger strikes, including seven who had fallen unconscious. Comparing their actions to that of Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he begins to fast. Rolling solidarity hunger strikes follow at numerous U.S. universities.

March 29, 1993

At the 65th Academy Awards, Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins bring attention to the plight of Haitian refugees at the U.S. base at

Guantánamo. Viewed by an estimated 45.7 million viewers in the U.S. alone, their actions bring significant political pressure on the Clinton administration to finally end detention at Gitmo.

June 17, 1993

Camp Bulkeley is closed and the remaining Haitian refugees, including those who are HIV positive, are relocated to either Miami or New York City.

August 1993

The Clinton administration appeals the ruling of *Gene McNary, et al. v. Haitian Center Council, Inc., et al.*, the case that led to the closing of Camp Bulkeley and the resettlement of the Haitian refugees there, so that the decision will not set a legal precedent for future cases.

Summer 1994

Faced with the mass exodus of 30,000 Cuban *balseiros* and increasing anti-immigration sentiment domestically, U.S. President Bill Clinton announces that migrants interdicted at sea will be detained at Gitmo.

January 11, 2002

The first detainees from the War on Terror are taken to the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo, where they are held in cages inside Camp X-Ray.

February 7, 2002

Via a memo entitled ‘Humane Treatment of Taliban and al Qaeda Detainees,’ President George W. Bush declares that the Geneva Conventions do not apply to the prisoners at Camp X-Ray.

March 2007

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed confesses to masterminding the 9/11 attacks and numerous other acts of terrorism after six months of detention and alleged torture at Guantánamo Bay.

2007

Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak, a collection of 22 poems by 17 detainees edited by Marc Falkoff, is published by the University of Iowa Press.

February 2006

Legal counselor Philip D. Zelikow issues an ethics memo opposing Justice Department authorization of the torture and enhanced interrogation techniques that the Bush administration authorized for use in Guantánamo and other locations. The White House attempts to destroy all copies of the memo.

January 22, 2009

U.S. president Barack Obama orders the closure of the detention facility at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo.

2009

The Guantánamo Public Memory Project is launched online to build public awareness of the history of the U.S. naval station at Guantánamo Bay and to foster dialogue about its future and the policies it shapes.

January 2010

Former Gitmo guard Brandon Neely travels from Huntsville, Texas to London to reconcile with two ex-prisoners, Ruhah Ahmed and Shafiq Rasul.

October 2010

Random House publishes the 456-page autobiography of Australian national David Hicks, *Guantánamo: My Journey*, which provides shocking details of abuse during his five and a half years of imprisonment in Cuba.

2010

The Obama administration permits the U.S. Justice Department to challenge each and every habeas corpus petition submitted by prisoners following their 2008 U.S. Supreme Court victory, *Boumediene v. Bush*, even when Obama's own task force has approved the detainee's release.

May 18, 2011

Afghan Hajji Nassim, known as simply Inayatullah and classified by the U.S. Department of Defense as an indefinite detainee, commits suicide, bringing the total number of confirmed detainee suicides since 2002 to six.

August 2012

American artist Ian Alan Paul launches The Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History, an online fictional museum focusing on the base's detention operations between 2002 and their imagined closure in 2012.

August 2014

An unidentified male lieutenant nurse with 18 years of service in the military disobeys orders by refusing to force-feed protesting prisoners who are scheduled to receive nasal-gastric feedings twice daily.

December 17, 2014

U.S. president Barack Obama and Cuban president Raúl Castro simultaneously announce a process of normalizing the relations between their two countries. Dubbed 'the U.S.–Cuba thaw,' this ended 54 years of open hostility between the nations.

January 2015

Cuban president Raúl Castro insists that the U.S. must return its base at Guantánamo Bay, lift its trade embargo, and compensate Cuba for damages suffered.

January 2015

The Mauritanian Gitmo detainee Mohamedou Ould Slahi's 2005 memoir *Guantánamo Diary* is published prior to his release. It quickly becomes an international bestseller and is translated into numerous languages.

February 2016

U.S. president Barack Obama proposes to "once and for all close Gitmo" and transfer remaining detainees to a mainland federal facility; in response, U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump vows to keep it open and "load it up with some bad dudes."

November 8, 2016

Donald Trump is elected 45th president of the U.S. following a campaign in which Islamophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and his pledge

to fill Guantánamo with “bad dudes” inform his promise to “Make America Great Again.”

January 11, 2017

Hundreds of protesters call for an end to indefinite detention in a rally in Washington, D.C., marking the 15th anniversary of the prison at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo and their solidarity with the Muslim men held there.

January 12, 2017

U.S. president Barack Obama announces the immediate end of the “wet feet, dry feet” policy and the Cuban government agrees to accept repatriated nationals.

January 19, 2017

U.S. president Barack Obama leaves office without fulfilling his campaign promise to “close Guantánamo,” with 41 detainees remaining in the base’s detention facilities.

January 20, 2017

Five men whom the Obama administration certified for release (Sufyan Barhoumi, Abdul Latif Nasir, Rida bin Saleh al Yazidi, Tawfiq Nisar al-Bihani, and Muieen al-Din Jamal al-Din al-Sattar) remain indefinitely detained in the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo.

June 2017

Delegates from 32 countries attend the Fifth International Seminar on the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases in Guantánamo City, Cuba. Calling for peace and demilitarization, the president of the World Peace Council, Maria Do Socorro Gomes, and retired U.S. colonel Ann Wright assert that Washington aims to control the natural resources and populations of other nations through intimidation and the establishment of puppet governments.

October 16, 2017

“Ode to the Sea,” an art exhibit featuring paintings, drawings, and sculptures created by prisoners at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, opens at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. Apparently concerned about public interest in the exhibit, the Pentagon asserts that the works are government property and ends the practice of releasing prisoner art that its military censors had screened and approved for broad circulation.



Fig. 1 CIA government map of Cuba (1962) with its geographic context. Courtesy of the General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

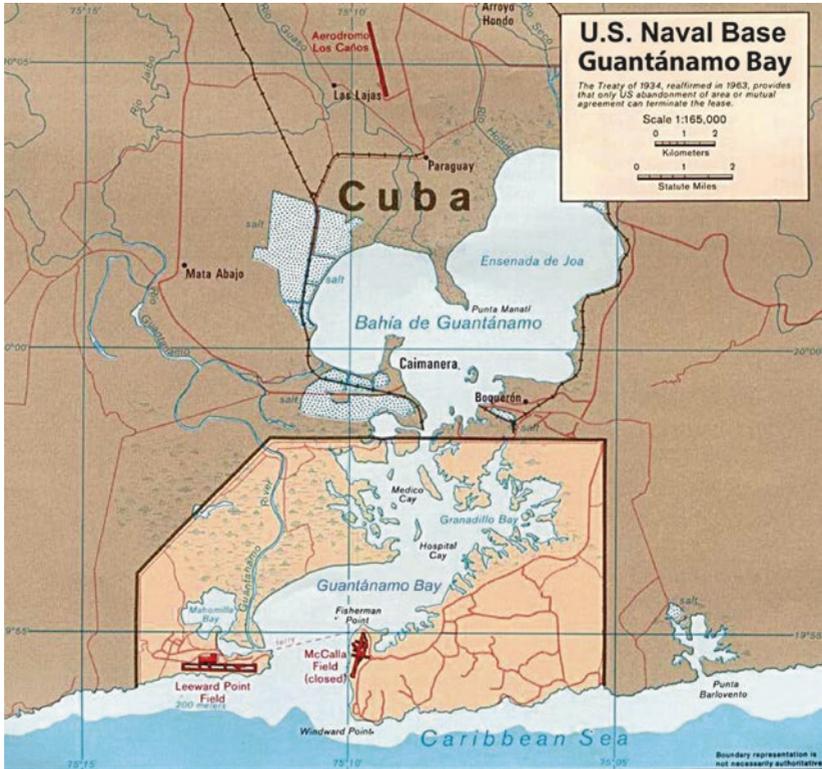


Fig. 2 CIA government map of Guantánamo Bay. Courtesy of the General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

Finding Guantánamo: Freedom, Paradox, and Poetry

Don E. Walicek and Jessica Adams

THE VIEW FROM *LA GOBERNADORA*

We stood, cameras at our sides, looking south across the delta of Guantánamo Bay. A severe drought had extended into summer and the hills were gray-green. The expanse of water, too, was grayish, from the deepest part of the bay out to the ocean. It all looked surprisingly small. But the geographical features that had motivated various empires—Spain, Britain, the United States—to covet the bay were immediately evident: its large, deep, protected harbor; its vantage on the edge of the Caribbean archipelago; and the proximity of the settlement now known as Guantánamo City, important in Spanish efforts to develop commerce

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and to Christianize the indigenous population as early as the seventeenth century.¹ The U.S. military base—albeit distant, nearly a mirage, a set of structures dispersed at the edge of an expanse of sea—appeared weighty, even unwieldy. The bay, incontrovertibly part of the Cuban landscape, is at the same time a nodal point in the history of crossings and recrossings, unexpected intersections, and sometimes inconceivable violence that has shaped countless Caribbean lives.

Flanked by fence lines and walls of cactus, the international borders separating the base from Cuban territory were virtually invisible in the light haze of the afternoon. The arid terrain became a space in which to parse the logic of an expansive empire that has increasingly turned to discourses about freedom to justify incarceration, torture, unlawful detention, and other infractions of basic rights that for many have become virtually synonymous with ‘Gitmo,’ the oldest and most controversial of all overseas U.S. military bases.

Here at the lookout point called La Gobernadora, the closest we could get to the base without official permission from Cuban authorities, we chatted with two of our Cuban hosts, Ana Luz and Raúl, both affiliates of the local branch of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (or UNEAC, in Spanish). A few young French tourists came up the steps behind us, but otherwise the area was strikingly empty. The reflections off an airplane hangar, a desalination plant, and the large fuel tanks of the base were visible in the distance. Contemplating the surroundings, one of us mused, “*No puedo creer que estoy aquí, es un sueño.*”

The words ran the risk of sounding terribly wrong. Why would anyone dream of looking out upon a place that has often championed, to borrow Susan Sontag’s words, “a culture of shamelessness” and “unapologetic brutality”?² Yet the statement formed part of a larger dialogue involving months of email exchange, a common interest in the history and literature of the Caribbean region, and new friendships cultivated through conversation, shared meals, and a visit to Guantánamo City’s *Casa de la Historia*, where we presented a paper that included the rationale for this volume. Moreover, for us, as Americans, this was a mythified place, one we were by and large forbidden to visit—central to the history of our nation, yet essentially off limits to the vast majority of its citizens.

Guantánamo—meaning the bifurcated U.S. and Cuban space—embodies a complex of issues that are crucial to understanding the past, present, and future of imperial power. Guantánamo Bay has figured in plans for military defense and economic development for hundreds of