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Dollar Diplomacy by Force: Nation-Building and Resistance in the Dominican Republic

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Ellen D. Tillman

Dollar Diplomacy by Force: Nation-Building and Resistance in the Dominican Republic. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. x + 274 pp. (Paper US\$ 29.95)

Ellen Tillman has produced a major monograph on the U.S. military occupation of the Dominican Republic between 1916 and 1924. In it she offers a novel account of the powerful national army that the occupying forces created there. Prior to the U.S. invasion, a centralized Dominican military existed only nominally. In the eyes of many U.S. policy makers, this created vulnerabilities for U.S. capital and strategic interests. Drawing heavily on Dominican as well as U.S. archival sources, Tillman demonstrates that remedying this with an effective national army shaped by, and loyal to, the U.S. government was the occupation's most fundamental objective and enduring consequence.

In the early 1900s, growing U.S. sugar companies in the Dominican East were being threatened by local armed groups. These groups found increasing recruits as peasants' traditional land access and way of life was hindered by the expanding estates. In this period too, some U.S. leaders feared future German or other European efforts to dominate the weak independent states of the Caribbean.

Tillman narrates how, in light of these conditions, the U.S. government demanded greater control over Dominican finances and ultimately its armed forces. Yet Dominican leaders knew that if they acquiesced to U.S. demands, they would be overthrown by political rivals, who opposed state centralization and compromised national sovereignty. Since independence, regional leaders had mobilized the rural population to topple governments that threatened peasants' traditional independence. Opposition to U.S. control, however, was found even among those favoring greater central and urban control over the nation.

Tillman shows how this stalemate among Dominican and U.S. leaders triggered the invasion in 1916. Yet the U.S. occupation's efforts to create a new national army that could shore up a centralized Dominican state were far from successful at first. The U.S. military dictatorship failed to recruit anything close to the numbers set for the new force, known as the Guardia Nacional Dominicana. And a large portion of those who did sign up deserted. Not only were those who joined seen as traitors and disdained as "Americans" or "pimps" (p. 166), but they were discriminated against by U.S. forces as well. Many were enticed by the promise of upward mobility but then barred from ranks above lieutenant. And U.S. leaders demanded that even lieutenants be white, though most recruits, like the population at large, were black or mulatto. The U.S. commitment to building the Guardia also remained half-hearted, as long as

the Marines expected to remain in control. In 1919 the U.S. military governor announced that he expected the occupation to continue indefinitely.

Yet Dominican resistance to U.S. rule only intensified. As other scholars have shown, hundreds of armed rebels fought U.S. forces to a stalemate in the country's East. There, nationalist animosity drew on a pre-existing war between a central state that backed expansion of sugar companies and peasants who were accustomed to exploiting land and wildlife freely. Hundreds of Dominican insurgents and civilians lost their lives in Marine attacks on areas perceived to be rebel strongholds (see Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention* [1984] and Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism* [2003]). Tillman argues that few Dominicans were co-opted by the Occupation government. Indeed, a growing number of civilian nationalists who publicly disavowed violent resistance began supporting the armed rebels financially. At home, the Dominican press was subject to strict censorship of any anti-Occupation discourse. But Tillman shows how Dominican exiles and others skillfully took their demands for independence and denunciations of U.S. war crimes abroad. This produced widespread protests against the Occupation across Latin America.

By 1920, U.S. leaders were obliged to reverse course and begin envisaging an end to occupation. At this point, they finally got serious, Tillman argues, about developing the Guardia. With international loans that Dominican governments would subsequently have to repay, the U.S. Military Government invested in the Guardia as well as in roads and telecommunication systems to facilitate central state control over the country. The force's officer corps was opened up to Dominicans. U.S. leaders agreed to turn nominal rule over to a provisional Dominican government in 1922 and to withdraw U.S. troops by 1924. The number of Guardia recruits now grew, and many armed opposition leaders and their adherents laid down their arms under an amnesty plan. Doing so no longer seemed like treason or surrender. The U.S.-created Guardia would continue to expand and be linked to the U.S. military after the Occupation, hence its willingness and ability to sustain U.S. interests. The Guardia would soon also sustain Trujillo's brutal 31-year dictatorship.

Tillman's engagingly written and solidly researched history illuminates much about both the motives and the impact of the peculiar form of twentieth-century U.S. empire known euphemistically as "intervention" or "nation-building."

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