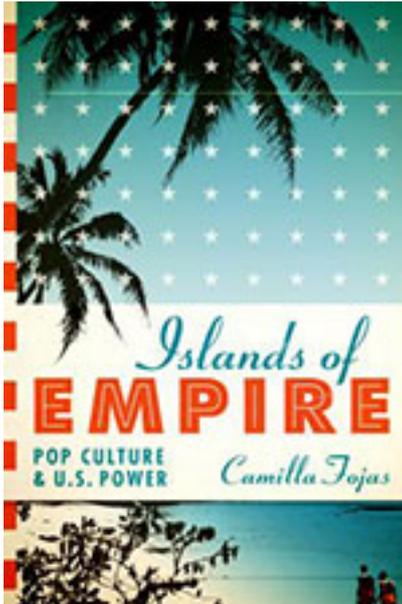


***Islands of Empire: Pop Culture & U.S. Power* by Camilla Fojas**

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Camilla Fojas. 2014. *Islands of Empire: Pop Culture & U.S. Power*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 238 pages; \$55 hardcover.



In *Islands of Empire: Pop Culture and U.S. Power*, Camilla Fojas masterfully brings together a massive media archive to illuminate how popular culture has always been at the service of empire. Using flyers, posters, tourism brochures, films, and television, she spans more than a century of history, roughly from the late 1800s to today. She also takes on a large physical geography, from Guam to Puerto Rico, incorporating spaces that are tied together by what she calls a “circuit of empire.” This historically rich book is valuable to those interested in the transnational connections of disparate groups of people who are nevertheless represented as homogenous. As Fojas argues, these peoples are brought together by empire, though they struggle in distinctly different ways for sovereignty. *Islands of Empire* thus contributes to critical tourism scholarship, particularly in analyzing films designed to draw tourists to these locales.

Fojas’ most important intervention is in identifying tropes used across these islands to justify imperialism and exploitation, while also making a thoroughgoing archival analysis of the specificities of each place to draw conclusions as to how and why particular narratives were constructed as they were. While universalizing stories and images exist across the islands, painting native populations in familiar stereotypes, Fojas identifies major differences in the depictions of each island. This is a welcome intervention. As Fojas writes, “empire demands a story,” (191) and she unravels those stories for the reader. For example, popular culture presents Cuba, particularly Havana, through nostalgia and mourning, as it eluded the U.S.

EMISFÉRICA

imperial grasp as a potential U.S. tourist destination after 1959. Fojas says Puerto Rico replaced Cuba in this capacity in the U.S. consciousness of the Caribbean. It became what Fojas called an embodiment of the American way while also lingering in limbo as neither a U.S. state nor a sovereign nation. She notes that Hawaii also replaced Cuba as a U.S. tourist destination and became the “gold standard” with state status. Heroic American protagonists in films in and about Hawaii incorporate “desires for redemption from mainland unrest” (191). Guam, on the other hand, falls short of Hawaii’s touristic glory as popular imagery depicts it primarily as a military support site, despite a rise in its tourism and sovereignty movements. The Philippines and Filipinos are represented as “foreign domestics.” Fojas argues that, as such, Filipinos’ foreignness comes from never being completely incorporated into the U.S. imaginary and “sphere of influence,” though they were used in U.S. popular culture to show a kind of familiarity, particularly in war movies.

Fojas’ supports her analysis by offering thorough histories of each place and by signaling key moments in U.S. popular culture related to the islands. For example, she argues that Elvis did to Hawaiian culture the same thing he did to African American culture by appropriating and whitewashing it for a wider audience. For her analysis of Puerto Rico, she reads key popular 20th-century films, including *West Side Story* and *Fame*. Fojas convincingly demonstrates that these texts do not simply exist as American culture, as Hollywood often tells us; they function as extensions of the empire, if not as an apparatus working actively for empire. She extends critiques of orientalist discourses that allow us to see how these texts serve to define and legitimize U.S. dominance. *Islands of Empire* helps the reader further locate the history of the U.S. as an empire, and the role that film, television, and print advertising played in its construction as such.

In addition to analyzing a wide range of texts that connect a handful of islands to provide a picture of how empire and popular culture are intertwined, the book is incredibly well-written. At times the writing is poetic. The author delivers complex ideas in language that a wide range of readers can grasp, while presenting beautiful prose. While there is some repetition throughout, this is a reflection of how representational themes repeat across different island cultures. Though the chapters can stand alone, it is together that they make a strong intervention. The chapter on Puerto Rico has perhaps the most recent examples and could stand to be its own project, particularly because it draws from so many objects of analysis, from Rosie Perez’s career and activism to Jennifer Lopez’s stardom to *Fame* and *West Side Story*. The author offers glimpses into films that many have not seen or considered—including *They Were Expendables*, *Cuba*, and *No Man Is an Island*—providing accompanying photographs to help orient the reader throughout.

This reviewer approaches the book with a media studies background and suggests that media studies scholars will benefit from this book. Fojas conducts qualitative visual and textual analysis and identifies visibility and accessibility as criteria for selecting texts. For some readers it would be helpful to have more details about how texts were selected for the project. Still, most

readers will be satisfied with the methodology. This excellent book has interdisciplinary appeal and will be useful in Media and Cultural Studies, Latino/a, Latin American, Asian, Asian American, and American studies. Its analysis is well-timed, but the chapter on Cuba is especially timely in the wake of the U.S. government lifting travel restrictions to Cuba in December 2014. Throughout the text, Fojas articulates that representation is linked to power and demonstrates how images can be important tools for creating a particular narrative—not just one of empire, but also a narrative of the places and people U.S. empire dominate and consume.

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