

Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation. By Harvey R. Neptune. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. xiii, 274 pp.

In *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation*, Harvey R. Neptune argues that Trinidadians used the American occupation of Trinidad during World War II to break free from British colonialism and create a specifically Trinidadian cultural identity. Neptune locates this struggle in small, sometimes barely visible acts of resistance, cultural reclamations, and encounters with American culture that began decades before the occupation. He claims that not only did Trinidadians resist colonial ideologies of racial superiority, but also that United States military personnel challenged British beliefs about respectability and racial hierarchy. The British attempted to resist the Americanization and modernization of the colony.

Neptune begins with the 1931 legalization of divorce in Trinidad. Responses to this act highlighted oppositional ideologies in Trinidadian society over patriarchy, sexuality, and the rights of women. By the time of the United States occupation, the rift between the British, patriots (what Neptune calls “the Creole intelligentsia”), and working-class Trinidadians was obvious. Also obvious was the British and patriot fear that American-influenced lifestyles of the working class would determine the national culture of Trinidad. Trinidadians, however, approached Americans with caution. They were wary of the more aggressive White supremacist ideology of Americans and feared that lynchings could accompany liberty.

According to Neptune, the battle to end colonial control and to create a Trinidadian cultural identity was waged in the arenas of labor, culture, and sexuality. By analyzing newspapers, Calypso lyrics, letters, and historical and legislative records, Neptune contextualizes the cultural changes within the global transformations that had taken place since World War I (e.g., changes in the labor market, immigration, and anti-colonialism). He illustrates the ways in which Trinidadians responded to these changes in contradictory ways. For example, Calypsonians created lyrics that sometimes revealed the exploitive nature of the American occupation, while at the same time they sought opportunities to perform for American military audiences. Colonial responses to the Americans also revealed the British conflict between protecting hegemonic Whiteness and protecting British culture. The latter conflicted with the more modern disregard for rules for which American culture was infamous. Neptune positions Trinidadians as strategists who used this conflict to their advantage.

By detailing specific cultural tensions, Neptune also illustrates how nation building created strange bedfellows and unexpected results. For example, Calypso writers risked criticism and self-parody to write Calypsos for Americans, resulting in better pay and international recognition. Neptune also reveals how policy changes maintained the colonial system and global racial hierarchy. For example, the new marriage policy, crafted by the British and Americans, required White commanding officers to approve unions between White soldiers and non-White women. Such approval was rarely granted. Although the voices of those women and the laboring class are limited in the text, one senses that Neptune would have included more had sources been available. This is evident from the fact that he includes the reactions of East Indians to these events, never once allowing us to forget that Trinidad was and continues to be a multiracial society. Neptune therefore raises the question of whether or not a multiracial, non-White society can create a national culture and maintain the cultural identities of each group.

Caliban's strength lies in Neptune's ability to reveal the complexities involved in creating national identities in a changing world. Trinidadians waged their own battle, on their own ground, with two colonial powers that were determined to keep the world “free” and White.

Neptune's analysis suggests that the success of any nationalist movement is based on timing and agency. The American presence disrupted colonial Trinidadian society and propelled it into a new and modern world. Neptune writes, "What a people do with a thing is important." While the British (and the Americans) fought this transformation, Trinidadians embraced it and established themselves as agents of their own change.

Maria Eliza Hamilton Abegunde
Indiana University, Bloomington