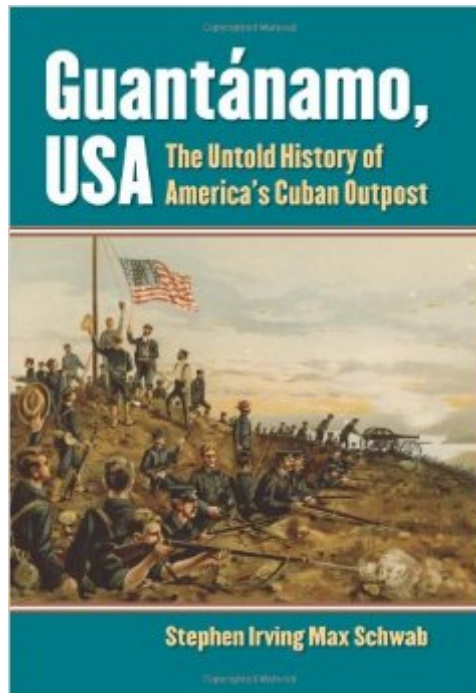


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Guantánamo, USA: The Untold History Of America's Cuban Outpost



Synopsis

Established as America's first foreign naval base following the Spanish-American War, Guantanamo is now more often thought of as our Devil's Island, the gulag of our times. This book takes readers beyond the orange-jumpsuited detainees of today's headlines to provide the first comprehensive history of Guantanamo from its origins to the present. Occupying 45 square miles of land and sea, Guantanamo has for more than a century symbolized the imperial impulse within U.S. foreign policy, and its occupation is decried by Cuba as a violation of international law "even though a treaty legally grants the U.S. a lease in perpetuity. Stephen Schwab now describes the base's role in American, Caribbean, and global history, explaining how it came to be, why it's still there, and how it continues to serve a variety of purposes. Schwab views the base's creation as part of a broad U.S. strategy of annexations, protectorates, and limited interventions devised to create a strong sphere of influence in the western Atlantic. He charts its history from this early belief that it would prevent European powers from staking imperial claims in the Caribbean and examines the crucial defensive role that Guantanamo played as a convoy hub for strategic goods during World War II. He then looks at clashes over Guantanamo during the Cold War, culminating in LBJ's decision to make the base independent by firing Cuban workers and building a desalinization plant. Schwab also fleshes out Guantanamo's ongoing roles as the U.S. Navy's lone forward base in the Caribbean, providing refueling for U.S. and allied ships, as a Coast Guard station engaged in search-and-rescue missions and counternarcotics operations, and as a U.S. facility for processing undocumented aliens. Even though the Castro government persistently protests America's presence "and refuses even to bank the rent that the U.S. dutifully pays "Guantanamo remains the only place where diplomatic exchanges between the two countries occur, and Schwab documents how the facility has served mutual interests as both a point of nationalistic frictions and a center for diplomatic compromise. By presenting Guantanamo's story within its broader historical framework, his book gives readers a greater appreciation of America's true stake in this controversial Caribbean outpost.

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Customer Reviews

Guantanamo, USA. What a remarkable book! Stephen Schwab has presented a detailed, highly researched, and beautifully written text on the history of Guantanamo Naval Base. From the U.S. involvement in the Spanish-American War to liberate Cuba from Spain through Guantanamo's role in World Wars I and II and the Cold War years, the reader is caught up in the rationale for developing a naval base that would not only show the imperialistic strategy of the U.S.A. but the necessity of securing the best location to house a strong naval fleet protecting the Caribbean, the Panama Canal, and the Americas at large. Many of my generation will only remember the Cuban Missile Crisis of the 60's and the more recent use of the base to house and/or detain refugees and prisoners of war as reasons to justify our Cuban presence. Schwab, however, gives us a far broader and more objective picture of this presence, providing insights and assessments of a relationship that has served both the Cuban and American nations. Mutual benefits have been at times economic, political, and military. It reads well and captures the vital influence of the Roosevelts and other significant statesmen in the evolution of this sole surviving naval base in the Caribbean Sea. All in all, Schwab provides a balanced perspective of an American proprietary view of the base at Guantanamo in contrast to Cuba's mixed response to our presence on their shores for over a century.

I admit that the Introduction made me a little apprehensive. I was afraid I might be getting into a dissertation that could be appreciated only by academics with expertise in the field. Fortunately, a few pages into the first chapter, I realized that my fears were unfounded. Schwab has perfected a very readable narrative style, gracefully weaving in quotes from his sources and from others who have analyzed the data at various periods of history. He has made a timely contribution to the discussion of what the U.S. should do about Guantánamo. James Rowe Adams, author of *From Literal to Literary: The Essential Reference Book for Biblical Metaphors*

Schwab does an excellent job laying out the basic narrative, including the long chronology of the

base and its interaction with the bulk of Cuban history. There are moments when he takes the factual narrative too much at face value, as opposed to questioning received knowledge. This is especially true in his treatment of material from the Cuban side; I would have appreciated the same kind of incisive curiosity on some of his Cuban sources that he so masterfully shows with American sources. I also would have liked to see more on the impact of the US base on the surrounding region and its economy. Still, I come away from reading the text with a much greater appreciation for the role Guantanamo has played, especially in US decision-making. Schwab is to be commended for taking on a difficult, hard-to-research topic and doing a commendable job with it.

Primarily, this book is a study of the legal and treaty aspects of Guantanamo Bay and how these evolved up to the Castro regime. As such, it is NOT a casual read. Guantanamo's acquisition as a naval base evolved from what was perceived in the early 1900s as a need to defend new seaways which would result from the opening of the Panama Canal. Actually, when I said it was detailed-oriented I should amend that. It is very detailed when it comes to the proposed acquisition and then becomes less so as the book comes along until the last chapter is pretty much devoted to the last 30 or so years of the base's existence. Hardly anything is said of the evolution of the base itself, how it has evolved as well over the decades. Nothing is said about Cuban psychological warfare against the base, the "mirror" towers, the Cuban claims of snipers shooting at their people, the use of spotlights to blind U.S. guards. The author never points out that as part of U.S. treaty obligations that Soviet and Communist Bloc ships were not only permitted to enter and leave the Guantanamo base's waters but the U.S. also dredged a channel to let them come in and out. And the author dated his own work by stating, in this 2009 book, that Guantanamo Bay detainees would be moved soon because wherever they were going to be held "it wouldn't be Gitmo." Because President Obama said so. Base your writing on the facts not how you voted in the last election. Much good info here but it's only part of the puzzle.

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