Katherine A. Zien, *Sovereign Acts: Performing Race, Space, and Belonging in Panama and the Canal Zone*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017. xii + 265 pp. (Paper US\$34.95)

Sovereign Acts is a fascinating examination of both the history of the Panama Canal Zone and its impact on various aspects of Panamanian society in the twentieth century. In clear, largely jargon-free prose, Katherine Zien articulates how acts of performance mark both perceptions about, and the material conditions of, the Panama Canal Zone from its inception to the present.

The book's central thesis is that the nearly century-long U.S. occupation of the Canal Zone, with its effects on U.S. citizens, Panamanians, and multinational labor immigrants, was predicated on linguistic ambiguities in the Panama Canal Treaty of 1903 "that transformed it from a performative utterance—language that enacts, in philosopher J.L. Austin's conception—to a legal borderland, in which conditions of *performance* took hold" (p. 4). The Treaty's language created a fundamental ambiguity about the Canal Zone's status when it declared "The Republic of Panama grants to the United States all the rights, power, and authority within the zone mentioned ... which the United States would possess and exercise as if it were the sovereign of the territory ... to the entire exclusion of the exercise by the Republic of Panama of any such sovereign rights, power or authority" (p. 4). Zien persuasively argues that the Treaty's use of "as if" transforms it from a performative utterance (one that involves its carrying out), to a *subjunctive* utterance, which semantically "may be defined as the inability to commit to the reality of a situation" (p. 5), and is also a defining mood of performance in which the performer acts "as if" he or she were the character. Under the terms of U.S.-Panamanian diplomacy Panama retained "titular sovereignty" while still allowing the United States to perform sovereign acts. As Zien puts it, "this self-definition allowed the United States to treat Panama as an independent, sovereign nation-state *and* a dependent 'ward' under U.S. trusteeship" (p. 5). This split identity (comparable in physical terms to how the Panama Canal split the isthmus in half) forms the various rituals, instances of theatricality, and performance in and around the Canal Zone that Zien investigates.

Zien contends that the performance of sovereignty in Panama provides a potential critique of the Panamanian status quo through its subjunctive character. Quoting Diana Taylor, she argues that "Political *as ifs* create a desire and demand for change; they leave traces that reanimate future scenarios" (p. 15). By doing so in the Panamanian context such performances make clear the specta-

tors' status as what Zien terms "the *subjunct*," caught between being considered a citizen and a noncitizen simultaneously.

Sovereign Acts is divided into five chapters and a coda. Chapter 1 looks at the aesthetic and political ramifications of the Canal Zone's architecture and landscape, as well as U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt's 1906 diplomatic tour and how it defined perceptions of the Zone. Chapter 2 explores "the politics of recreation in the Panama Canal Zone" from 1904 to 1935. Chapter 3 focuses on West Indian workers and their descendants' attempts to create legal and aesthetic status for themselves using performance. In Chapter 4 Zien examines multiple productions of the Panamanian farce *La Cucarachita Mandinga* (*The Little Mandinga Cockroach*) as differing instances of creating a notion of popular sovereignty. Chapter 5 looks at two performances, the Handover Gala and Patria Entera, that marked the Canal Zone's return to Panamanian control in 1999, with the Coda briefly addressing the repercussions of the nearly century-long lack of sovereignty over the Canal Zone in Panama today.

Throughout each chapter Zien explores the components of race, space, and belonging that appear in her title in illuminating ways. This is a book that could be productively read in conjunction with Renée Alexander Craft's *When the Devil Knocks: The Congo Tradition and the Politics of Blackness in Twentieth-Century Panama* (2015, reviewed in *NWIG* 91–1&2). Both books investigate U.S. colonial legacy in Panama, and point toward new modes of conceiving U.S.-Latin American relations today.

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