Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace: National Identity, Decolonization, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. ix + 275 pp. (Cloth US\$ 74.00)

Seeking Imperialism's Embrace is a major contribution to the literature of the modern Caribbean. Kristin Childers focuses on Antilleans' decision in 1946 to become a French department instead of seeking independence the way other colonies did during the postwar era. She asks why Martinicans and Guadeloupeans opted for heightened integration instead of independence. (Childers opts to deal only with the insular Antilles, leaving aside Guyane, which became a *département* at the same time.) Criticizing those who have seen the departmentalization decision as a "psychosis" borne of misguided eagerness to be metropolitan, she emphasizes Antilleans' agency, and seeks to contextualize their decision within the circumstances of the 1940s. She sees their choice as "a pragmatic step in the Antilleans' ... long struggle for equality" (p. 6), driven by "rational calculations" (p. 97). She notes that departmentalization held the promise of overturning the colonial relationship with metropolitan France. Antilleans greeted 1946 as analogous to 1848, an auspicious moment for completing their equality and repairing emancipation's failures.

Chapter 1 focuses on the Antilles during World War II, particularly with regard to fears that the United States would occupy the French Caribbean. Given legalized racism in the United States at the time, the prospect that Antilleans might be taken over worried them greatly. Chapter 2, "Liberation Choices," explores the hopes surrounding departmentalization. Antilleans expected that a more regularized relationship with the metropole would end the tyranny of the *békés* (wealthy descendants of slaveowners), and "rectify ... the injustices Antilleans had suffered for centuries" (p. 47). Childers notes that intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire viewed Haiti as a "cautionary tale" of what Antilleans should avoid (p. 52); independence was seen as a dangerous course. Childers cites Césaire liberally to explain what departmentalization meant to Antilleans in 1946. She argues that if inequalities endured afterward, "disappointment with outcomes would be a problematic yardstick by which to judge any version of decolonization, whether violent, revolutionary, or consensual" (p. 64).

Chapter 3 looks at the disappointments that followed departmentalization. Childers outlines Europeans' enduring belief that they "ought to be running things" in the Antilles (p. 91), and the fact that metropolitan civil servants were installed above (and paid more than) locally born citizens. The chapter also explores the "geographic dilemma of the Antilles" (p. 100); though legally part

of France, they seemed strange and far away for metropolitans. Chapter 4, one of the book's most fascinating, focuses on contests over memory in 1948, the centennial of abolition. It also explores moments of protest in the Antilles (for instance in 1967 and 2009) as Martinicans and Guadeloupeans contested enduring racial inequalities.

Chapter 5 is similarly compelling, examining how metropolitans justified treating the Antilles differently, even as the invocation of race was legally prohibited. Childers traces the substitution of discourses of "underdevelopment" for those of racial inferiority. Antilleans' low consumption of "modern" consumer goods, which marked them as backward, was used to justify their lower wages and social benefits (which in turn placed purchasing these goods further out of reach). "By the 1960s," she notes, "many Antilleans felt resentment over the broken promises of equality" (pp. 128–29). Chapter 6 covers fresh ground, illustrating how gendered discourse further substituted for race in "rendering inequality ... politically acceptable" (p. 151). Building on her earlier work on French natalism, Childers discusses the chasm between policies rewarding population growth in the metropole and discouraging it for Antillean families. The final chapter reexamines migration from the Antilles to the metropole. Childers concludes by maintaining that "it was not ... departmentalization itself that was wrongheaded, but the incomplete and unjust way" in which it was implemented (p. 201).

Overall, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace*, based on careful research in multiple archives, is very helpful in contextualizing 1946 and reminding readers of the shadow of the United States in this era. Childers offers new insight into Antilleans' choices, and she shows the powerful implications of gendered discourse in postwar Antillean history. Some formulations in the book could have benefited from more nuance, such as a generalization about "the *mulâtres*" of the Antilles who "feared any association" with Blacks (p. 133). And Childers ventures into more controversial ground when she goes beyond contextualizing 1946 to defending the long-term impact of this decision. While she acknowledges continuing inequalities, she ultimately places more weight on the "tangible benefits" (p. 203) of departmentalization over independence for Antilleans, especially women. Still, her book is a sophisticated and important analysis—an essential read for anyone interested not only in the French Caribbean but also in the postwar world.

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