

# Vieques, Puerto Rico: From Devastation to Conservation and Back Again

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This article proposes a reclamation of the Vieques bombing range as a spearhead project in the transformation of this Caribbean Island from a U.S. weapons storage and combat training site to an inevitable tourist destination. The real “nature” of the island is today concealed by a carefully constructed camouflage. Official sources promote the island’s landscape as representing untouched nature, preserved from development by its former military use. But the island had a long history of agricultural use before the military took it over, and today’s supposed natural areas hide high levels of toxic contamination. Nevertheless, a reassembled tableau communicates to visitors that they gaze at something original. This theme is so strong it has even seduced those who came to Vieques to oppose the military presence. Tourists of both strains today read an empty wilderness where residents of the island have no place, and where current problems with pollution and poverty can be ignored. Reversing complacent attitudes may require a new look at the bombing range as a location of an alternative form of tourism.

*At all events, in retrospect I became preoccupied not only with the unaccustomed sense of freedom but also with the paralyzing horror that had come over me at various times when confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past, that were evident in that remote place.*

— W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*<sup>1</sup>

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Vieques is a tiny island located off the east coast of Puerto Rico. It sits amidst vast waters and underneath a huge sky. Long and narrow like a machete, its slimness brings the ocean close to daily life, never too far to be seen, touched, heard, smelled or tasted. Watching too intently the motion of fast-moving clouds caught in the Trade Winds may cause dizziness. Some days, the view of a chopped-up ocean gives testimony to these



FIGURE 1. Vieques, Puerto Rico. Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

gusts, accentuated by the feeling of salt that clings to skin, as if one had dived into the sea before even arriving at the beach (FIG. 1).

Vieques's north shore has a fine, sawtooth grain containing several dozen half-moon bays and a few beaches where palm trees lean toward an ocean that digs the sand from beneath them. As the terrain gradually slopes upward, however, the soil provides a more stable habitat for other coastal plants, like sea grape. Meanwhile, on the island's south side, tangled areas of mangrove — with their thin, sinuous rhizomes layered with dark, waxy leaves — obscure the many shorelines to create an ecosystem that forms an intriguing edge between water and land, providing shelter for a thriving mix of wildlife. Inland, the island's eastern half is partly covered by a rare subtropical dry forest. Much of the rest of the island is open livestock pasture or thorny scrub, with an occasional forested streambed or hilltop.

On April 19, 1999, an F-18 fighter jet dropped two 500-pound bombs several miles off target and killed Vieques-born David Sanes-Rodríguez, a civilian security guard working for the U.S. Navy. The outrage caused by this event marked the beginning of the end for sixty years of U.S. military presence on the island.<sup>2</sup>

The effort to stop the use of Vieques as a theater of war — one with many chapters over several decades — entered its crucial last phase two days after the death of Sanes-Rodríguez.<sup>3</sup> On April 21, a group traveled to the restricted observation post where he had died and installed a Roman cross in his honor. As the story goes, one member of the group, Alberto “Tito Kayak” de Jesús, then decided to stay at the observation post, at least until someone would replace him. Cacimar Zenón, the son of the president of the local fishermen's association, joined de Jesús the next day, and the group's numbers continued to multiply.<sup>4</sup>

Their actions sparked a growing protest against the U.S. military, which adopted religious iconography to commemorate not only Sanes-Rodríguez, but also the other islanders allegedly killed by cancer as a consequence of military pollution (FIG. 2). By the end of May 1999, protestors had completed a small open-air chapel on a beach in the Navy bombing range on the eastern tip of Vieques. The Catholic Church threw its support behind this act of civil disobedience, and two bishops visited the site in open violation of federal law.<sup>5</sup> Soon, more and more protestors were flouting federal laws to camp on the bombing range and other areas adjacent to where Sanes-Rodríguez had died. The news



FIGURE 2. *Playa Yayí*. Photo by Alina Luciano/Claridad.

media followed with their own tents and transmitters to report visits by local or foreign politicians, church leaders, and celebrities.<sup>6</sup> Reporters from all over the world cast the story as one involving underdog opposition to the strongest military the world has ever known.

The bombing range became the apotheosis of this struggle to demilitarize the island. Protest leaders, predominantly local men, were soon leading tours of its most ravaged areas. They confidently explained how the blistered holes in the thick steel sides of tank carcasses could only have been made by uranium-tipped ammunition, the leading suspected cause of Gulf War Syndrome. Such visits caused the Navy to retract previous denials and acknowledge that such ammunition was being used.<sup>7</sup> Cameras on site then turned from the tanks to sweep over the landscape below: a cratered, dry, brown bowl where shells, some the length of a person, stuck out from the bare earth or lay on the ground with their heads squeezed like accordions (FIG. 3).

On May 4, 2000, the FBI, federal marshals, Navy troops, and Puerto Rico state police raided the protest camps and arrested a total of 231 people.<sup>8</sup> Images taken that day at the bombing range were striking: unarmed civilians of all ages, many singing or praying, were rounded up by troops in full body armor, helmets and goggles, backed up by helicopters and battleships.

The arrests only caused the protest to spread beyond Vieques and encourage the largest public demonstrations ever in Puerto Rico. Despite their former disagreements, especially over Puerto Rico's political status vis-à-vis the United States, Vieques became a bumper-sticker issue for all Puerto Ricans. Dissent by elected figures was equivalent to political suicide. At the ballot box in 2000 the power of the issue showed when the party in favor of U.S. statehood lost most of its posts and its grip on the governorship.

On Vieques, after the protestors' encampments were dismantled, military activities resumed under stricter rules set by President Bill Clinton. A pledge was also made for a future referendum on an end to the military presence there.<sup>9</sup> But the protestors rejected this strategy of appeasement and all other compromises that did not entail an immediate, total stop to the bombing. Their response was to persistently enter the bombing range and act as defiant human shields.



FIGURE 3. *U.S. Navy bombing range*. Photo by Alina Luciano.



**FIGURE 4.** *Along the Gates of Camp García. Photo by author.*

Protests also occurred at the main entrance to the Navy's Camp García on the interior of Vieques. As at the bombing range, activists here placed banners, crosses, and Puerto Rican flags (FIG. 4). However, it was the scorched landscape of the bombing range that eventually became symbolic of a struggle larger than Vieques itself.

Eventually, the U.S. Navy completed its departure on May 1, 2003, after a period of civil disobedience that transfixed Puerto Rico and refocused its struggle for a national identity disassociated from the unresolved issue of its *political* identity. Through the bombing range debate, Puerto Ricans approached a claim made by a relatively small community, and deemed it legitimate. In asserting the validity of this claim, Puerto Ricans realized they could speak with a common voice.

#### A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

The island of Vieques lies twenty-two miles southwest of Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, and approximately six miles east of the nearest point on mainland Puerto Rico, the former Roosevelt Roads U.S. Navy base in Ceiba. It is a political municipality of Puerto Rico, with its own mayor.<sup>10</sup> However, between 1941 and 2003, the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Fleet owned and managed more land there than the municipal government.

Vieques is approximately twenty-two miles long and four-and-a-half miles wide. Of its 33,000 acres, the military once owned 23,000, roughly two-thirds.<sup>11</sup> For sixty years, a declining civilian population — now just over 9,000 — lived on a 10,000-acre strip with two towns, Isabel II (the capital) and Esperanza.

Military lands were formerly divided into eastern and western areas. On May 1, 2003, the day after the Navy left, the U.S. Department of the Interior inherited most of these lands. Although a portion of the western property was returned to the municipality of Vieques in 2001, this means the U.S. government

still holds title to around 19,000 acres on the island.<sup>12</sup> These lands are now controlled by the Fish and Wildlife Service, and are known as the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge, the largest such area in the Caribbean (FIG. 5).<sup>13</sup>

During its years on the island, the Navy used its lands in different ways. The western lands served principally as an ammunition storage depot, while its eastern holdings were treated as part of something called the Inner Range. Not just a piece of Vieques, the Inner Range was an enormous 195,000-square-mile game board that covered more ocean surface than land itself.<sup>14</sup> More accurately, it was a game *space* that stretched into the air above and to the sea floor below. The eastern lands were then further subdivided into the notorious bombing range and a "maneuver area" used to train amphibious units, battalion landing teams, and combat engineering units.<sup>15</sup>

The Navy was fond of Vieques. They could practice beach landings, special-operations parachute drops, and small-arms fire in the maneuver area. They could shoot big artillery shells from the dry forest into the bombing range. They could shoot from ground to air, air to the ground, ground to sea, and sea to ground.<sup>16</sup> And they could simulate realistic combat involving close coordination between units and even foreign allies. They claimed such multiuse space was hard to find anywhere else.<sup>17</sup>

By the Navy's own admission, such military activities changed the landscape — just as previous human uses had changed it before the Navy. But the largest of these impacts has yet to be completely measured.<sup>18</sup> Just as there were two different military activities on Vieques — weapons storage on the west and live-fire war practice on the east — there are today two different pollution profiles: synthetic chemicals on the west, and heavy metals on the east. This is a generalization for the sake of brevity, but it not far from what is known. Estimates of the complete nature of the pollution problem are likewise too complicated to fully document here. The total price tag for the cleanup, however, has been estimated at between \$130 million (without cleaning up the bombing range) to more than \$1 billion.<sup>19</sup>

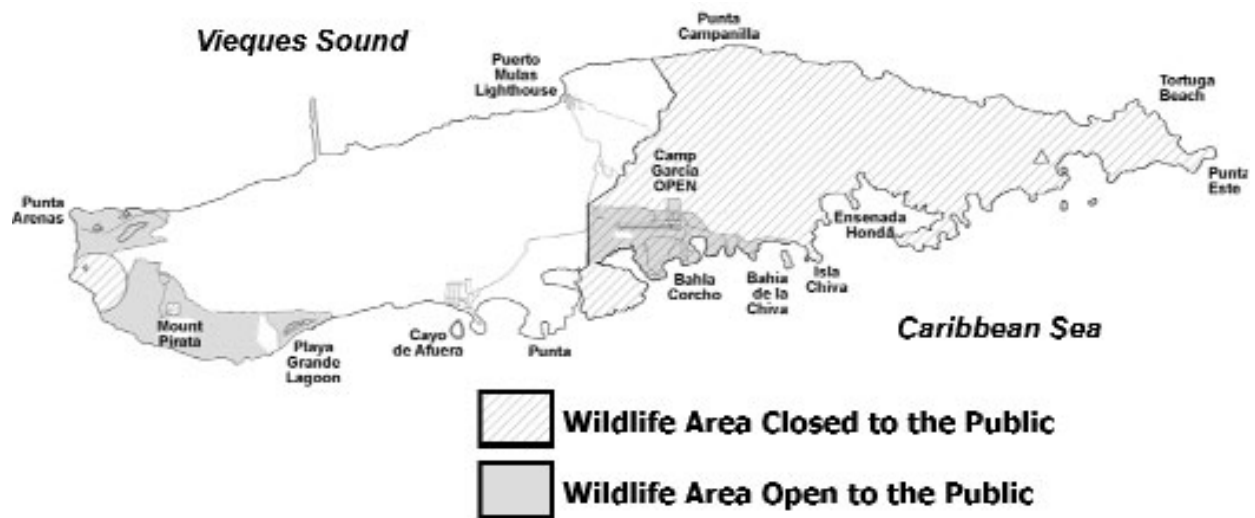


FIGURE 5. Vieques National Wildlife Refuge Map (2004). Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

One thing is certain: the bombing range will surely prove the most polluted part of Vieques.

In its rhetoric, the military has always insisted that it serendipitously discovered the bombing range in a natural state perfectly suited to its training needs. But was this the case? Did the military “find” or “make” this landscape — and how?

The donning of camouflage allows a military force to deceive an enemy by dissolving into the surroundings. On Vieques, camouflage has worked differently. Instead of camouflaging soldiers, the military has tried to camouflage the landscape. More specifically, it has worked to synchronize physical attributes of the land to hide the traces of its former presence, redirecting interpretation of the past to absolve itself of the lingering harm that resides there. This is done by recasting the gaze into the landscape to convince viewers they are seeing pure nature instead of an assemblage of idealizations. A composite of successional vegetation is thus legitimated as primordial, an effect further promoted through the marketing outreach of multinational tourism companies that have come after them. Such an image is so strong it is not just appealing to tourists; it has also captured the imaginations of many who resisted the military presence on the island.

According to Paul Virilio: “open warfare must be a constant allusion to primordial *camouflage*, and its only consistency must be constant change, in which *no one element takes precedence for too long*.”<sup>20</sup> Drawing from primary and secondary sources, personal visits, military environmental reports, internal memos, and tourism reviews, I hope here to show the hallucinatory multiplicities through which the military has presented itself: restorer of nature after Spanish ravaging of the island, yet steward of a virginal wilderness; altruist, and muscular, protector of tiny Puerto Rico; defender of America with timely demonstrations of power, but also defender of America with dutiful, disciplined practice for future combat. The imposition of these multiple perspectives

on the landscape exhaust it of any personal content or associations, leaving it unprepared (yet so well prepared) for transformation by the service- and commerce-based economy of late capitalism. Like that of many of its Caribbean neighbors, the landscape of Vieques, despite its violent history, is now presented as a fulfillment of tourist fantasies.

Politically, the prohibited bombing range — like the devastated cloister in Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* — is the most powerful part of the Vieques landscape. Yet, the government-appointed Special Commissioner for Vieques and Culebra has deemed that this crucial site contains such grave health and safety risks that it will never be opened to the public.<sup>21</sup> The true power of this landscape comes not from the history of protest activities that happened there. Rather, it comes from its sterility and the lessons it has to teach about how people continuously make and remake the landscape. There are no “found” landscapes, as the military would have people believe.

Before discussing how the former Vieques bombing range can be instrumental to a rediscovery of such values, I will first step back and examine how the military exploited an idea of tropical nature to pollute an island with relative impunity. Then I will step back even further to see how the people of Vieques were forcibly removed from their lands according to an idea of nature that excludes humans. Finally, I will discuss how it might be possible to use tourism as a way back into this landscape, and possibly reclaim its devastation.

#### THE VIEQUES PARADOX; OR, JUST HOW LUXURIOUS POLLUTION CAN BE

Bahía de la Chiva on Vieques’s southern coast, one of many crystalline beaches there, can be easily reached on a former military road. It has been open to the public during limited daytime hours ever since it was cleared of live ord-

nance in 2003.<sup>22</sup> Previously, this beach was a mangrove forest, but this was felled to make way for a coconut grove during Spanish colonization of the island around 1840. Then, after the United States took the island over from Spain in 1898, the coconut palms, too, were destroyed to create “fields of fire” to use in World War II drills.<sup>23</sup>

The tourism industry has disseminated images of coconut palms far and wide because of their association with warm, sandy beaches. In fact, the coconut palm first appeared to Western eyes through the travel journals of Spanish colonists in the late sixteenth century. It is believed to have evolved in the Pacific region, and is not native to the Caribbean; nevertheless, it has since adapted well to tropical coasts everywhere, and has been planted extensively in the Caribbean because of its valuable fruit.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, wherever there is a concentration of coconut palms, the human hand surely created it. Recently, however, the international tourism industry has intensified propagation of this plant, attempting to use its image to lure the global leisure class. The coconut palm is also a handy selection for hotel landscaping because its foliage is high off the ground and can be used to frame tempting paths to the beach.

Several species of palms were present on Vieques at the time Columbus arrived in the Caribbean, but none were the coconut type. Thereafter, however, Vieques’ coasts were widely used for coconut farming — although it’s hard to visualize such plantations today. Indeed, many of Vieques’ coasts are quite rocky, and others remain dense with mangroves, unlike the beautiful southern beach of Bahía de la Chiva or the dreamy visions of white sand presented in mainstream travel articles about the island (FIG. 6).

Today there is only one coconut grove remaining on Vieques from the agricultural period.<sup>25</sup> This swath, at Punta Arenas on the island’s northwest tip, has been protected within what is now known as the Laguna Kiani conservation area (FIG. 7).<sup>26</sup> In 1972, researchers compared a new aerial photograph to a 1941 U.S. Geological Survey map and found that approximately 18 percent of the mangrove forest here had been lost since the military administration began. With this concern on their minds, they urged protection of the entire area.

The military delayed any formal steps toward protection for another ten years.<sup>27</sup> But the Laguna Kiani conservation area was finally established, along with seven others, as part of a 1983 agreement, a “Memorandum of Understanding” between the Governor of Puerto Rico, Carlos Romero-Barceló and the U.S. Navy.<sup>28</sup> The Memo settled a 1978 lawsuit that Puerto Rico had brought against the Navy for environmental damage on Vieques.

What many heralded as a wilderness conservation area was actually a reduced version of what was once a larger and better-functioning mangrove system. Nevertheless, the military pointed to the establishment of the conservation areas in congressional hearings as a way to justify its presence in Vieques for the next twenty years. And today such areas further fulfill an iconic, ecological theme essential to the tourism industry in the post-Navy era.

What may be more interesting from a local perspective, however, is that the surviving mangroves at Laguna Kiani share space with another remnant, a once-productive grove of coconut palms, in a frozen representation of its past agricultural dynamism. This only underscores how tourists arrive on an island like Vieques, convinced they will find tropical nature. In reality, they gaze into an arranged vitrine that is devoid of a human presence like that which shaped it as a landscape in its agricultural past.<sup>29</sup>

As big tourism corporations establish a more substantial presence in postmilitary Vieques, they will increasingly seek to re-create such faux-agricultural panoramas. The military, with some dose of naïveté, eased the assimilation of such landscapes by protecting places like Laguna Kiani. Certainly, when Navy officials agreed to set aside conservation areas on the island, they could never have imagined they would be aiding the development of a resort industry there. However, the landscape they left coincides perfectly with what the resort business now needs to market Vieques globally.

The tourism business, likewise, has no reason to debunk the message of a heroic military past. But its presence also tacitly facilitates the continued existence of a silent peril the military has left behind. With the 1983 Memo, the military not only struck a compromise with the government



FIGURE 6. *Playa Caracas.*  
Photo by author.



**FIGURE 7.** *The grainy texture of the vegetation on the jutting peninsula is caused by the coconut palms of the Laguna Kiani conservation area. The vegetation around the lagoons are mangroves. The top lagoon is Kiani. Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

of Puerto Rico to protect places like Laguna Kiani; it also created a cloak for the toxic contamination that would be its greatest legacy. The correspondence between polluted areas and conservation areas on Vieques is especially apparent in the transfer of land on western Vieques.

At the Navy's weapons depot on the western end of the island, ammunition was stored in concrete bunkers partially burrowed in the earth (**FIG. 8**).<sup>30</sup> After the 1999 bombing sparked local activism, the Navy did relinquish ownership of most of this land to comply with a directive from President Bill Clinton.<sup>31</sup> But it did not return everything the Clinton administration apparently expected it to.<sup>32</sup> The February 2000 directive, in the last year of the Clinton administration, called for, among other measures, the return of the depot area to Puerto Rican municipal administration.<sup>33</sup> After coordination with several agencies and Congress, a different plan was negotiated with the Puerto Rico Planning Board and implemented on April 30, 2001. That plan gave 4,000 acres to the Vieques municipal government for low-density residential and tourism development; it transferred 3,100 acres to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for conservation zones; it transferred 800

acres to the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust, an entity that protects wilderness and historic places; and it retained 100 acres for use by the U.S. military for a so-called drug-interdiction radar. In total, then, only half the former depot was returned to state and local administration.

The idea of such a distribution of former military lands has a long lineage; indeed, the 2001 land use plan seems to



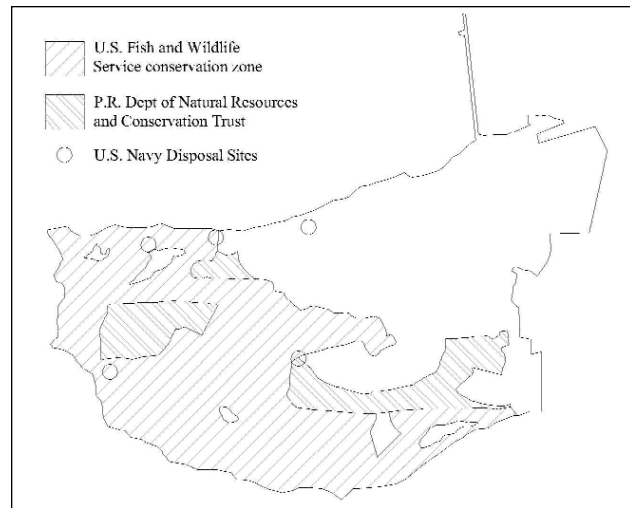
**FIGURE 8.** *Ammunition storage magazine, western Vieques. Photo by author.*

have been thirty years in the making. In effect, it reaches back to the 1972 research in which scientists first proposed the creation of the eight conservation areas.<sup>34</sup> Sometime between the late 1970s and early 1980s, Navy officials also started to conduct interviews with officers who had been stationed on Vieques.<sup>35</sup> The root of this investigation was the 1978 lawsuit demanding the disclosure of polluted sites. But before releasing this information, the Navy may have consulted the 1972 report and harmonized the selection of acknowledged polluted sites with those proposed by the scientists as conservation areas. As I will explain below, such reasoning makes great sense if one considers the economics of toxic cleanup.

More immediately, however, the existence of conservation areas also become useful in ways the Navy may not have anticipated. For example, in 1993, when a bomb missed its target by ten miles, activists appealed to Congress and the White House to stop military maneuvers on Vieques.<sup>36</sup> In defense of the Navy's presence, Rear Admiral Ernest E. Christensen, Jr., the highest-ranking representative of the Department of Defense in the Caribbean at the time, pointed to the Navy's role in environmental conservation. In front of the Congressional Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs, and in opposition to a House bill presented by Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Carlos Romero-Barceló, Christensen not only remarked on the urgent national-security need for the depot, but he also highlighted the benefits of the Laguna Kiani, Monte Pirata, and Playa Grande conservation areas for Puerto Rico and all of humanity.<sup>37</sup> He specifically stressed the access that the military provided at the time to Green Beach and the Laguna Kiani mangroves, "in order to allow everyone the enjoyment of the beauty of our conservation areas on the Naval Ammunition Support Detachment [the depot]."<sup>38</sup>

By contrast, it is today known that the U.S. Navy operated five dumps on the weapons depot lands in western Vieques.<sup>39</sup> No modern environmental safeguards, such as clay linings, were ever used at these. Nevertheless, in addition to dumping solid waste and providing an open incineration site for explosives, the Navy used some of these areas to dispose of industrial-strength lubricants, lead-based paints, and solvents for cleaning airplanes and vehicles.<sup>40</sup> The Navy explains on its community relations website for western Vieques that these disposal areas ceased to operate in the late 1970s and early 80s.<sup>41</sup> However, the disposal practices at these sites were never well documented, and other records are lost, the Navy claims. Today, four out five of these dumps are within the boundaries of the conservation zones of the western coast in the 2001 land use plan (FIG. 9).<sup>42</sup>

By 1983 the Navy had identified a total of seventeen toxic sites on the depot, including the five dumps (FIG. 10).<sup>43</sup> Of these sites, it claimed nine were no longer harmful, and it requested that they be certified as needing no further remediation.<sup>44</sup> This request finally received a public hearing on January 23, 2004, and it must now be approved by the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board and the U.S. EPA.<sup>45</sup>



**FIGURE 9.** Conservation areas occupy nearly half of the former weapons depot on western Vieques. Map by author, compiled from information of the Junta de Planificación, Puerto Rico, and El Nuevo Día.

Out of the four dumps that are in the conservation zones, one is a "No Further Action" (NFA) request. That leaves eight toxic sites that the Navy ostensibly continues to investigate, five of which are on the land relinquished to the Municipality of Vieques. In other words, more than twenty years after the toxic sites on the western end of Vieques were first identified, eight are still under review, and no significant action has been taken with regard to any of the nine others. Assuming that the sites in conservation zones will only need to be cleaned to a low standard, and if all the NFAs are approved, this may ultimately mean the Navy will be obligated to clean only five of the original seventeen sites to the highest standard.

This unfolding scenario reveals how conservation areas have provided first a pollution veil, and second (especially after 1993) a green shroud in which the Navy has wrapped itself. But how is it that toxic sites on conservation areas need to be cleaned to a lower standard than sites on other lands? In the world of "risk-based" legal standards, the cleanup of a wilderness conservation area does not have to be as stringent as, for instance, that for an area planned for housing. In the remediation business, future use must be determined before answering the question "how clean is clean?"<sup>46</sup> Obviously, it would be in the Navy's fiscal interest if the worst-polluted areas were to remain as federally managed wilderness refuges.<sup>47</sup>

Today, however, such calculations of self-interest are obscured by a rhetoric of preservation.

*[The] Department of the Interior . . . created, arguably as a kind of absolution for earlier governmental policies, the largest fish and wildlife refuge in the Caribbean, all of it on a single island. One important, and positive, legacy this leaves for Vieques is that development will be kept severely limited and perpetually in check.<sup>48</sup>*

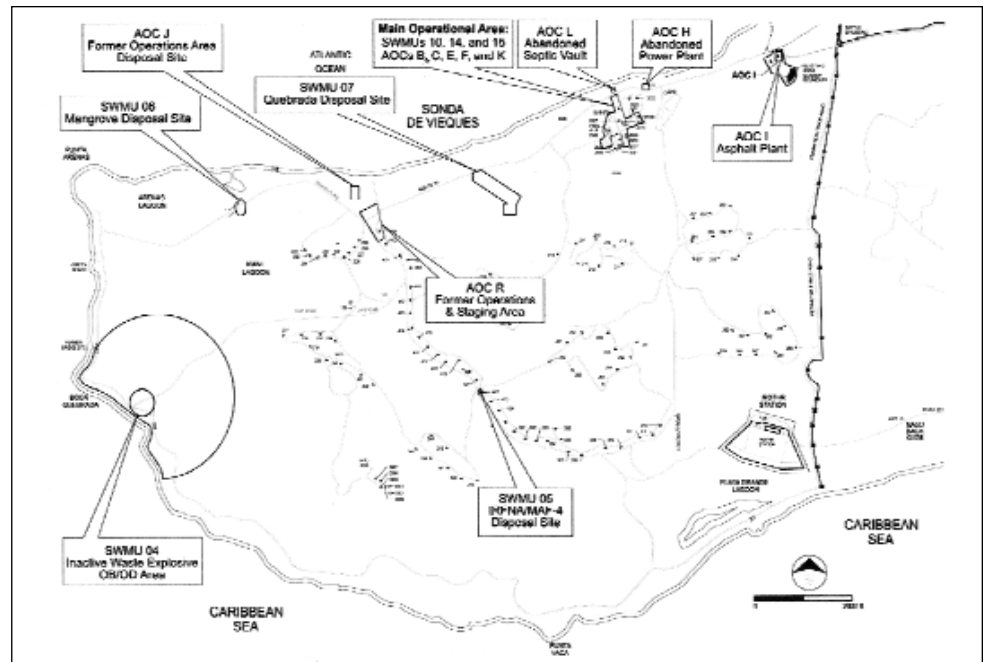


FIGURE 10. Map documenting the seventeen sites on the western side of the island identified by the Navy as potentially toxic. Source: U.S. Navy.

This statement is taken from a review in *Architectural Digest* of the Vieques Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort and Spa, the first self-contained tourist franchise on the island, which opened in 2003 (FIG. 11). It also exemplifies the importance of conservation and the wildlife refuge in terms of satisfying tourism desires. From the point of view of tourist use, “severely limited development,” and polluted wildlife refuges are a positive legacy of the military’s former presence. However, some might argue that instead of providing “absolution,” they may be considered a form of pay-back.

The leitmotif here is of an “untouched,” “unchanged” wilderness handed over by the military for tourism to safeguard. The polluted, and for that reason “preserved,” wilderness assures two things for the *Architectural Digest* author (and for the rest of the future resort industry on Vieques): the thrill of discovering a “virginal” landscape — ironically, a “discovery” that is widely advertised beforehand; and the pre-



FIGURE 11. The Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort and Spa exterior. Photo by author.

served charm of poverty and underdevelopment that the tourist can experience (from a safe distance).

The inauguration of the Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort and Spa has also marked a monumental change for the residents of Vieques. As one resident commented in *Smithsonian* magazine, “. . . as far as future developments, [the resort] will set the stage.”<sup>49</sup> But does this development represent the arrival of a menace the Navy previously kept at bay? Is it “the beginning of the end of the Vieques that we know,” as another local said?<sup>50</sup> Or does it represent the inevitable future of the island in the context of Caribbean commercialism, and (simultaneously) the beginning of a long-awaited economic miracle?

One can be more certain it will mean that Vieques will see many more coconut palms. The palm has already reappeared in the design of the Martineau Bay’s guest rooms. According to the *Smithsonian* writer, Shane DuBow, “[interior designer Dan Nelson] commissioned toiles that feature palm-tree motifs, had them bordered with raffia and produced an unpredictable headboard.”<sup>51</sup>

The tree’s appearance in the article is surprising because the article includes no other mention of vegetation. It is almost as if DuBow believed the entirety of the hotel’s foliage and grounds were found, not made. Thus, the article credits an architect and an interior designer, but not a landscape designer, whose hand is evident everywhere. The palm, of course, plays a major role in this composition (FIG. 12). If the global tourism corporations profit from this vitrine of conservation, at a place like this Wyndham, they also return the favor to the military by perpetuating a belief that the military defended this sentimental illusion of paradise, especially from the despoiling hands of resident islanders.



**FIGURE 12.** *The Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort and Spa interior grounds. Photo by author.*

Judging by other travel articles, it works. Take, for example, the following impressions. According to Reed Johnson of the *Los Angeles Times*: “paradoxically, the Navy preserved the beauty of Vieques for posterity.”<sup>52</sup> Leigh Gallagher, for *Forbes*: “Vieques has some of the most beautiful beaches in the Caribbean. Paradoxically, it’s the Navy’s presence that has kept them that way.”<sup>53</sup> And Amy Graves, in the *Boston Globe*: “the forests and beaches at each end of the island were never developed because the Navy occupies them — an ironic twist to the controversy.”<sup>54</sup>

Such blanket talk of paradox and irony, of course, forecloses understanding of many real nuances of the island’s history. For instance, the ugliest beaches on Vieques were made that way by the Navy, and the two forest-covered tips of the island are its most polluted areas. Tourists also mistakenly assume present vegetation predates the military presence, and that the military could therefore have “protected” it.<sup>55</sup> Tourists recognize paradise when they see it (but especially when a tourist industry shows it to them). And the consensus is that while the military originally harmed the island, in the end it rescued Edenic nature.

Pollution even plays an explicit part in this calculation of tourist value, as if to acknowledge its blessings. In the following paean from the *Smithsonian* article, DuBow accidentally reveals how the idleness of the tanning tourist may be the most appropriate activity on Vieques. It also shows just how luxurious pollution can be.

*Vieques is a paradox. The Navy’s 60-year occupation has left the island largely undeveloped and free of the commercialism common to other parts of the Caribbean. But the pollution the military left behind may imperil paradise.*

*Even so, apart from the likelihood of a nasty sunburn, a short-term tourist faces little health risk, say experts. And the lack of development means that the visitor has naught to do but bike, hike, kayak, ride horses, and honor the island’s painful past by enjoying its hard-won peace and charm.*<sup>56</sup>

When DuBow cites the island’s “lack of development,” he reveals how even poverty may be presented as one of paradise’s paradoxical charms — as if it were somehow “natural,” a condition that allows companies to be praised for sustaining it.

These writers, as do many other people, eventually manage to “see” paradox almost everywhere. But gazing in order to locate paradox involves both passing judgment on the military and forgiving it. And this gaze is also fixated on a mirage — one that confuses vegetation with a commodified idea of nature, and that misses the real evidence of human-driven change. It is literally also a gaze in desperate search of a silver lining to the dark cloud of Vieques’ past. Thus, the gazing has dual benefit: it facilitates an economically irresponsible exit by a now-excused military; and it spares the tourist from feeling complicit in either the local problems of Vieques or the hypocritical consensus fundamental to global tourism.

#### ENCANTO: WELCOME TO PARADISE

In 2004, community groups including the Vieques Women’s Alliance and the Vieques Pro-Rescue and Development Committee supported a proposal to build modestly priced tourist cabins at Sun Bay beach on Vieques’ south



FIGURE 13. Anonymous anti-Sun Bay cabins development propaganda.

coast. It was a project they said could provide an affordable vacation idyll for working-class visitors. The individuals opposed to this project soon posted a flyer with a hand-drawn image of a beach with palm trees where four lone people enjoyed the sandy plain. In the distance is a peninsula that looks completely foliated: the next frontier to be conquered. The words below the image say: “sabes que [sic] . . . ¡¡la vas a perder!!” or “know what . . . you’re gonna lose it!!” (FIG. 13).

In 2003 prominent ecologist John Todd, *Time Magazine*’s “Hero of the Planet,” wrote a *New York Times* editorial to similar effect.<sup>57</sup> Todd called the wildlife refuges on Vieques a “priceless gift,” and his article strongly advocated ecotourism, particularly that which could take advantage of them. But who exactly will participate in such ecotourism, and at what price? Todd also referred to the Vieques refuge as “16,000 acres of untouched land,” as if Bahía de la Chiva (among other examples) had not been completely altered by human hands. Most of the refuge is actually covered by dry, thorny scrub that is merely sixty years old — vegetation that has emerged since the abandonment of agriculture.<sup>58</sup>

Todd went on to state: “Vieques may one day be nostalgic for the era of Navy occupation,” saying that the Sun Bay project would destroy mangrove areas. Yet why should anyone be

nostalgic for a Navy occupation that caused the deforestation of much of the Laguna Kiani area between 1941 and 1972?

I am in no position to judge if the Sun Bay cabins would result in the ecological damage Todd envisioned, or if it would ever cater to “working-class families” as some community activists promised.<sup>59</sup> What is more important is that even a knowledgeable academic like Todd can be blinded by the brightness of a sugar-sand beach. This not only allows him to excuse the military by calling the wildlife refuge an “accident of history,” but praise an essentially elitist vision of paradise. “The magnificent white-sand beaches are almost deserted,” he wrote, seemingly gripped by the same charm as other travel writers. However, it is only “deserted” because the Navy expropriated the holdings of people who had previously lived there.

The United States government actually took control of two-thirds of Vieques through two rounds of land acquisitions, in 1942–43 and 1947–1950. Recently, Cesar Ayala has argued that the land transfer was only legal on paper. He also wrote that the first round took place in response to paranoia of another Pearl Harbor-like attack, and the second under the cloud of the Cold War.<sup>60</sup>

Before 1942 land ownership was extremely concentrated among a few sugar-producing families who were largely absent from the island. The property-less rural class lived both as workers and tenants, under arrangements where they exchanged their labor for permission to plant subsistence crops. Such conditions made the Navy takeover relatively easy; rather than dealing with more than 10,000 worker-tenants (*agregados*), it only had to deal with a handful of absentee owners.

According to Ayala and Carro, since the sugar economy was battered at the time, the Navy mainly had to strong-arm two weak owners: the eastern Sugar Associates and the Tió family. Later patterns of Navy ownership corresponded almost exactly to the property boundaries of these sugar producers, with the addition of a few additional small cattle farms. However, as Ayala and Carro stated, “it would seem necessary to distinguish between the process of expropriation as such, and a much wider process of evictions (*desalojos*) which affected not only landowners, but *agregados* and rural workers as well.”<sup>61</sup>

After these evictions, many of the former rural class, especially the men, turned to fishing. For about two years after the first evictions, the construction of the Navy’s Mosquito Pier on the north coast of the island also provided some jobs. But after 1943 the situation grew increasingly dire, especially in terms of jobs, and some islanders migrated to mainland Puerto Rico and the neighboring islands of St. Croix and St. Thomas.

Anthropologist Katherine McCaffrey has researched and written about the identity of the fishermen of Vieques. She claimed that the practice of fishing involved more than survival in the face of a difficult and sudden transition; it became a practice of resistance and proud defiance.<sup>62</sup> It was a way of “making-do.” But what started as informal resistance to a

common enemy (an enemy that just wanted them to leave the island completely<sup>63</sup>) eventually mutated into an organized movement. One reason was that the fishermen's daily life increasingly came into conflict with the U.S. military as maneuvers destroyed fishing nets and progressively killed off the nearby coral reefs that were vital to the sea harvest. As a result, the fishermen began to take direct action in fierce clashes on the high seas that quickly gained the aura of a David-and-Goliath struggle — especially when viewed by press photographers.

However, while the fishermen were ultimately victorious in their battle to remove the military, the identity they forged in this decades-long confrontation already appears to have been co-opted for tourism.<sup>64</sup> Esperanza, on the south coast of Vieques, is the only other town on the island besides the capital of Isabel II. It does retain a small boat landing and an unkempt, almost forgotten parking lot at one end of a long ocean boulevard. Presumably, this is where fishermen once launched their boats and perhaps cleaned their catch — although I have never seen many of them around. But the rest of Esperanza Fishing Village consists of two-story buildings, most containing restaurants with names like “Bananas” or “Coconuts,” owned and operated by Americans (FIG. 14). The establishments all offer typical American diversions: burgers and fries, beers, and baseball on television.

The views from the *malecón*, or boardwalk, are spectacular, and the rents or mortgages in this area must be correspondingly high. Thus, while the presence of fishermen can still be imagined in a view of masts silhouetted against the horizon, the reality is this place is dominated by island-hopping ex-pats. To complete the panorama, a few guesthouses are intermixed with the restaurants, or are located on the second floors of the buildings. Taxi-vans come and go. Even the one-time pro-Navy Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust has its headquarters on the boulevard.<sup>65</sup>



FIGURE 14. The Esperanza Fishing Village. Photo by author.

In short, the practice of fishing, like the successional forest that has taken over much of the island since agriculture was terminated, is now a by-product that has been commodified as “native.” For tourists, it is part of the supposed authentic “charm” that glosses over an actual emptiness left in the wake of military occupation. Graves used the word “charming” in the title of her *Boston Globe* article: “Vieques: A Charming Caribbean Island.”<sup>66</sup> She wrote: “Locals fishing on a pier at sunset. Wild horses roaming nearly empty beaches. Family-run restaurants serving tapas and paella. If there’s one island in the Caribbean that I hope never loses its authentic charms, it’s Vieques.” In fact, paella and tapas are not part of “native” Puerto Rican cuisine, casting some doubt on what, if anything, is authentic about this Vieques charm.

Exactly eleven years to the day before the death of David Sanes-Rodríguez, the chief admiral of the Atlantic Fleet’s southern Command was quoted in the *El Mundo* newspaper explaining how 40,000 service personnel throughout the Inner Range were participating in an operation called “Ocean Venture 88.” The mock event included an attack on an imaginary island. Ironically, that island was Vieques, and the Navy also code-named it “Encanto,” or “Charm.”<sup>67</sup> Military occupation has further been at least partly responsible for the “charming” underdevelopment of Vieques. This is apparent if one compares Vieques to other Puerto Rican municipalities, especially those with similar agricultural pasts.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, the military also seems to have lulled itself into believing that Vieques had something indigenously charming, not found anywhere else in the world:

*This unique facility is the only location in the Atlantic where realistic multi-dimensional combat training can be conducted in a combined and coordinated manner. It is the only range which offers a live fire land target complex with day and night capability, an immediately adjacent large area of low traffic airspace, and deep water sea-space. Co-located are underwater and electronic warfare ranges, amphibious landing beaches and maneuver areas, a full service naval base and air station and interconnected range support facilities.*<sup>69</sup>

As the description later continues:

*Vieques also offers the opportunity for U.S. forces to train with Allied forces in combined naval exercises, enhancing our ability to operate with potential coalition partners. . . . Vieques stands alone in its ability to support senior commanders in evaluating and strengthening the readiness of weapons, systems, and most importantly, people.*<sup>70</sup>

“Unique”; “the only”; “stands alone.” These were the same points made to the U.S. Congress after the bomb drop that killed Sanes-Rodríguez in 1999. A few years before those statements, Rear Admiral Christensen testified on Capitol Hill

that “this facility is perhaps the best training facility in the world.”<sup>71</sup> What the Navy seems to imply is that it discovered Vieques, and therefore deserved to keep the island.<sup>72</sup>

If the military once managed to convince itself of this, it is easy to see how the tourist can assume a similar sense of ownership. In his *Smithsonian* article, DuBow expressed a similar sense of being seduced by the sense of discovering Vieques:

*By now we've glimpsed enough sugar-sand beaches and aquamarine views to know that if we're not careful, we may soon feel gripped by a certain sense of possibility that so many travelers have felt, a sense that this might be the sort of place that we could at last settle in, buy some property and feel like our lives have turned lucky.*<sup>73</sup>

One attraction of Vieques before the Navy's departure and Wyndham's arrival was its slow pace. There were seemingly few cares here — not even a stoplight. Such “sleepiness,” however, heralded only a backwardness symptomatic of its lack of socioeconomic development during the more than sixty years of the Navy's presence. Leigh Gallagher of *Forbes*, as if out of a Stanley Kubrick script, even encouraged tourists to get there before the shelling stopped. His article was accompanied by the teaser “Forget the bombing. Vieques is one of the Caribbean's best-kept vacation secrets. For now.”<sup>74</sup> He was clearly aware the big hotel chains would face serious challenges trying to maintain the same slow pace and charm the Navy occupation was able to instill.

A popular standard journalists point to when they try to describe Vieques's charm is that the island has no fast-food franchises, no stoplights, no shopping malls. “Not yet, anyway,” wrote Reed Johnson in *The Los Angeles Times*.<sup>75</sup>

But such narrators also omit other things. For example, there are no hospitals on Vieques — not even, until 2003, a neonatal unit. This is cruelly ironic for a population that has a roughly 25 percent higher cancer rate than San Juan.<sup>76</sup> However, to acknowledge that these problems exist is to acknowledge that people live there. And this would contradict the sense of discovery, and thus ownership, inherent to the Vieques charm.

## PROTEST AS TOURISM

The 1885 map *Inspección de montes de la Isla de Puerto Rico: Plano del Monte del Estado, Cabeza del Este de la Isla de Vieques*, which predates American colonization, shows the bombing range long before it was even planned. Cabeza del Este means “Eastern Headlands.” What is surprising about the survey is how it demarcates the same western boundary the military used for the “live-impact area” of the bombing range. The map's title and the fact that it was drawn by a public-lands division of the Spanish Department of the Interior imply that this property was once more or less the

equivalent of a public land trust for the Spanish crown.<sup>77</sup> While other parts of Vieques were leased to European plantation owners operating in the Caribbean, this was set aside.

Even more striking is how the survey presents several water bodies on the eastern tip that are no longer there. On the map, they are demarcated as *salitiales*, or salt flats periodically recharged by ocean tides. In fact, the U.S. military emptied these to provide a place to locate the ruins of tanks and airplanes for target practice.<sup>78</sup> The 1972 Survey of Natural Resources also alluded to “land filling, drainage, silt-in, and cutting off access to tidal water” as a general problem of Vieques under military administration.<sup>79</sup> Photographs taken after 1999 indeed show landscapes that resemble American deserts more than the Caribbean: flat, cratered expanses with spent shells where nothing grows.

The report implies that the Navy took a functioning environment and removed all the natural elements that might have caused it to change over time.<sup>80</sup> From 1999 to 2003, the protest movement also used this landscape as a blank slate onto which to graft temporary monuments to a fantasy nation in the form of religious iconography and structures, national flags, and other symbols. The protestors demanded that the military stop its activities; but they also accepted without question — and perhaps willingly — the literal and symbolic stillness the Navy had installed there. This emptiness had been created through the removal of people, animals and vegetation, and it had been sustained by the severance of natural interchanges between them.

Today this movement, like the Navy, is gone. It succeeded in establishing its own heroism, but it has left Vieques with little more than the same problems it had before: pollution, poverty and disease. If there is a *military-tourism complex* on Vieques, one should also include protest in the category of *tourism* — even if it was only a careless collusion of forces.

On the other hand, tourist visits to the bombing range could serve as a means to reclaim this landscape. Tourism could provide the vehicle by which residents and members of the visiting public come to see the bombing range as a fertile ground for reinvention. The danger of ignoring this place may be too great. Yet, without diverse involvement from various sectors, its eventual reclamation could produce an artificial construct like Crissy Field in San Francisco's former military installation, the Presidio. There, the military destroyed a wetland to build an airfield — where aviation records were broken and important missions were launched. But in recent years the National Park Service has restored the airfield to its 1920–30s condition and simultaneously re-created the marshes where they never existed. The outcome is an atemporal montage that recaptures an implausible combination of cultural and natural origins. In the words of Krinke and Winterbottom: “The airfield has been made into a sculpture about the airfield. The marsh may also be considered a sculpture about a marsh. . . .”<sup>81</sup>

By the time a few generations pass and anyone is allowed back into the bombing range on Vieques, its “live-impact area” could look like an improbable original wilderness, be it polluted or not — as if it had been rescued by the U.S. military and subsequent federal agencies. Perhaps worse, it could be made to appear like a set of sculptures about salt flats, mangroves *and* craters, with re-creations of protest signs and crosses.

The truth is that a comprehensive remediation process will drastically overturn everything there and obscure the experience of *landscape as process*. The most immediate remediation need is to de-mine the place. But ultimately more severe measures will need to include removing radioactive soil to special landfills. Other soils on site will need to be treated to remove chemicals through a mechanical process called “low-temperature thermal desorption” — a reverse of “absorption.” Still other contaminants, such as heavy metals, might be removed through phytoremediation, a process by which local species of dry forest plants take pollutants up into their bark. Depending on circumstances and future uses, however, these plants might have to be removed to a special landfill or incinerated.<sup>82</sup>

But these are all design choices. To dig and not regrade, or to remake the contours of the land? To plant or remove vegetation? What is important is that residents should demand participation in these decisions. There must also be external support for the local people. This is the pressure that alternate tourism could generate.

Since the bombing range today poses many threats to humans, such an engaged tourist option would need to involve careful assessment of dangers to determine what areas were safe enough for passage. But design and engineering could partially ameliorate these risks, or at least provide sufficiently safe conditions for a level of temporary occupation.

Politically, however, such a program would be a complex hurdle to pass, for such use would certainly be objectionable to all segments of the military-tourism complex. Military and corporate concerns would clearly not be in favor of such a disruptive project. But the leftist protest movement would also probably object to any such iconoclasm in their cathedral. For them, the permanence of the site “conserves” the idea of Vieques as a wounded paradise without real people, enshrined by an obstinate alliance between bureaucratic caution and political opportunism (FIG. 15).

Nevertheless, to comprehend what the tourist experience of the bombing range might be like, one can turn to W.G. Sebald’s travelogue *The Rings of Saturn*. In it he visits the British test area of Orfordness. This place is neither entertaining nor pleasant — at least not in the way Crissy Field is. However, at this formerly top-secret site, Sebald turns Henry David Thoreau’s 1846 journey to Katahdin mountain, Maine, on its head.

As William Cronon has explained, Thoreau tapped into the sublime on Katahdin in an unnerving meeting between the vastness of a supposedly untouched nature and human



FIGURE 15. *The native and the nation blur at the bombing range.*  
Photo by Alina Luciano/Claridad.

loneliness.<sup>83</sup> Sebald, on the other hand, could not have had a more “unnatural” experience when he arrived at Orfordness. But it was just as much an encounter with a “stern loneliness,” and it was “sublime” in the sense that he almost lost himself:

*My sense of being on ground intended for purposes transcending the profane was heightened by a number of buildings that resembled temples or pagodas, which seemed quite out of place in these military installations. But the closer I came to these ruins, the more any notion of a mysterious isle of the dead receded, and the more I imagined myself amidst the remains of our own civilization after its extinction in some future catastrophe. To me too, as for some latter-day stranger ignorant of the nature of our society wandering about heaps of scrap metal and defunct machinery, the beings who had once lived and worked here were an enigma, as was the purpose of the primitive contraptions and fittings inside the bunkers, the iron rails under the ceilings, the hooks on the still partially tiled walls, the shower-heads the size of plates, the ramps and the soakaways. Where and in what time I truly was that day at Orfordness I cannot say, even now as I write these words.<sup>84</sup>*

Whereas Thoreau thought he encountered God himself personified in Katahdin mountain, Sebald felt the haunting presence of demons. But Sebald surpassed these feeling and discovered that what was chasing him was not something supernatural, but something utterly human: the destruction caused by his own species.

By contrast, one can read this quote from the marketing brochure for Wyndham's Martineau Bay Resort and Spa.

*There's a world of wonders to explore inside and out. Sun, sea, sky — this is where it all comes together in perfect harmony. Our relaxed style and attentive service will make you feel as if the whole island were created for your enjoyment.<sup>85</sup>*

This is precisely the illusion that would be shattered by a Sebald-like experience of the bombing range, for it would underscore how the whole landscape *is* created and transformed by people over time. By opening the bombing range to a gradually emergent process, one could pull the curtain, as it were, and allow the audience to take charge of the action on stage.

Finally, what would we see at the bombing range if we were someday able to gaze at it as an empty wilderness? In another Wyndham brochure, a nude woman becomes an element for the gaze that a person travels all the way to Vieques to possess (FIG. 16). The depth of the reclining woman in between the eye and the infinite emptiness of the ocean beyond is the same as the width of the paper on which she appears: flat.

Perhaps one can compare the fishermen to that woman. The *viequenses* remain as paper figures that complete a desired picture; they are cutouts. But maybe they have one additional purpose besides fulfilling tourist desire: to numb



FIGURE 16. Reclining nude in a promotional brochure for the Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort and Spa.

us, as tourists, from the alienation of the emptiness. The tourist seeks escape. But what if horror seeps in instead?

After the horror induced by a real appreciation of these traces of destruction comes a freedom brought by the realization that new creation is also possible.

## NOTES

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1. W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, Michael Hulse, trans. (London: The Harvill Press, 1998).
2. J.E. Rivera-Santana and L. Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques* (San Juan: GATP, 2001), p.21.
3. For a full account, the reader may want to consult A.A. Barreto, *Vieques, the Navy, and Puerto Rican Politics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); and K.T. McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest: The U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

4. De Jesús is well known as an activist for his spectacular demonstrations. See the documentary film by M. Pérez-Riera, *Cuando lo pequeño se hace grande* (San Juan: Maramara Films, 2001). See also Rivera-Santana and Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques*, p.23.
5. *Ibid.*, p.22.
6. Readers interested in media representations of the events may want to look at F. Jiménez, *Vieques y la prensa: el idilio fragmentado* (San Juan: Editorial Plaza Mayor, 2001).
7. Rivera-Santana and Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques*, p.22.
8. *Ibid.*, p.25.
9. W.J. Clinton, "Directive to the Secretary of Defense, Director, Office of Management

- and Budget," January 31, 2000. The directive included a switch to inert weapons and a shorter practice period.
10. Puerto Rico has 78 municipalities.
11. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District with Technical Assistance from Tetra Tech, Inc., "Environmental Assessment for the Relocation of Special Operations Command, South and Selected U.S. Army South Elements from the Republic of Panama to U.S. Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico and Other Locations," December 1998, p.4-48.
12. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Vieques National Wildlife Refuge Welcomes Public to Eastern End of the Island," press release, April 30, 2003.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Vieques and the Inner Range were man-

aged as parts of the Roosevelt Roads, Ceiba, military base. When the neighboring island of Culebra also was a rehearsal site (until 1975), the entire complex was a sort of Pearl Harbor of the Atlantic. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Environmental Assessment," p.4-48.

15. The bombing range was officially known as the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility, and the maneuver area as the Eastern Maneuver Area. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Environmental Assessment," pp.4-48 and 4-49.

16. *Ibid.*, p.4-49.

17. Commander U.S. Second Fleet and Commander U.S. Marine Corps Forces Atlantic, "The National Security Need for Vieques: A Study Prepared for The Secretary of the Navy," July 15, 1999, p.ii.

18. At the time this article was being finished, a complete accounting of pollution on Vieques was caught in a complicated tangle of red tape, since it was not clear who would pay for the cleanup and in what amounts, the Pentagon or taxpayers. See, for instance, J.J. Pérez, "Escepticismo con la descontaminación de Vieques," *El Nuevo Día*, January 22, 2005, p.12.

19. J.A. Delgado, "Incluido Vieques en la lista oficial del Superfondo," *El Nuevo Día*, January 21, 2005, p.24.

20. P. Virilio, *Popular Defense & Ecological Struggles*, M. Polizzotti, Trans. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990, orig. 1978), p.22. Emphasis mine.

21. The Special Commissioner for the islands of Vieques and its neighbor Culebra, also a training facility until 1975, is a special czar who acts as an intermediary between the federal and local governments. See J. Fernández-Colón, "Casi imposible el lograr una limpieza completa," *El Nuevo Día*, January 6, 2004, p.25.

22. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Vieques National Wildlife Refuge Welcomes Public to Eastern End of the Island."

23. This was done in 1941. *Vieques Times*, Vol.150 (September 2003), p.4.

24. E.L. Little, José Marrero, and F.H. Wadsworth, *Árboles comunes de Puerto Rico y las Islas Vírgenes* (San Juan: Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2001), pp.11-31.

25. See also Map of Vieques National Wildlife Refuge in Figure 5.

26. There is a significant forest of fan-leaved palms, said to be an endemic plant, elsewhere on Vieques, but this is an inland high-elevation variety. See R.O. Woodbury in Environmental Quality Board (EQB), Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, *Vieques 1972: Survey of the Natural Resources*, p.VII-11; and Rivera-Santana and Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques*, p.38.

27. EQB, *Vieques 1972*, p.IX-5.

28. C. Romero-Barceló and J.F. Goodrich, "Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Island of Vieques," 1983.

29. For a more detailed discussion of the history of this idea, refer to R. Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Problems of Materialism and Culture* (New York: Verso, 1980), pp.67-85.

30. The Navy called their western Vieques land holdings the Naval Ammunition Support Detachment, or NASD for short.

31. See W.J. Clinton, "Directive to the Secretary of Defense, Director, Office of Management and Budget," January 31, 2000. See also Jiménez, *Vieques y la prensa*, pp.135-53, for an entire explanation on the substitution of the term "agreement" in the press and in politics in place of "directive." The latter is the appropriate term to describe the unilateral decision by Clinton, rather than an action agreed-upon with the government of Puerto Rico.

32. He stated this in a radio interview with journalist Amy Goodman before the 2000 elections, although the language in the actual order is less explicit than what he would have us believe. W.J. Clinton to A. Goodman, "Exclusive interview with Bill Clinton," *Democracy Now!* (Pacifica Radio, November 8, 2000). Clinton says in his directive: "the Navy will submit legislation to the Congress to transfer land on the western side of Vieques (except 100 acres of land on which the ROTH and Mount Pirata telecommunications sites are located)." On the one hand, it implies that *everything* is to be returned *except* for the 100 acres of the federal telecommunications facility. But on the other hand, it says *land* without specifying a quantity. It leaves the door open for the Navy to satisfy their own needs through legislative process.

33. As I have already mentioned, a previous

strategy of appeasement had not worked.

The protesters were insistent in their demands for a bombing moratorium and a cleaning and return of all military lands.

34. *Vieques 1972: Survey of the Natural Resources*.

35. "Site identification began in the late 1980s. Based on interviews with current and retired station personnel, historic records, aerial photographs, and field inspections, 17 potentially contaminated sites were identified at the NASD." From the Navy's community information website, navy-vieques-env.org.

36. In the first year of his presidency, Clinton was not willing to concede what he gave up in his last. In 1993, he was in a bind with the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy on gays in the military, and was not about to raise the military's ire on the Vieques issue. For a complete account of the second-tier status that Vieques received in light of tensions over the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, see Barreto, *Vieques, the Navy, and Puerto Rican Politics*, pp.34-36.

37. Rear Admiral Ernest E. Christensen, Jr., "Statement before the Insular and International Affairs Subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources," H.R. 3831, October 4, 1994. The Resident Commissioner is Puerto Rico's voice without vote in the U.S. Congress. Carlos Romero-Barceló, founding member of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party, was governor of Puerto Rico from 1976 to 1984, and resident commissioner from 1992-2000. As governor, Romero-Barceló had signed the 1983 Memorandum of Understanding, or "Fortín Accord," which attempted to diffuse calls for the Navy's departure by stimulating investment in the Vieques economy by the military-industrial complex. See also Z. Nazario, *The Battle of Vieques*.

38. Rear Admiral Ernest E. Christensen, Jr., "Statement before the Insular and International Affairs Subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources," H.R. 3831, October 4, 1994.

39. F. Herrera, quoted in Rivera-Santana and Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques*, pp.61-63.

40. U.S. Navy in <http://www.vieques-navy-env.org/>.

41. *Ibid.* I cannot confirm if the Navy is

being honest when it said these disposal areas ceased functioning in the late 1970s-early 1980s. If they did cease operating, the question, then, is why? One hypothesis might be the opening of environmental litigation against them around the same time (Brown vs. Romero-Barceló, 1978). See Rivera-Santana and Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques*, p.16.

42. One of these four sites within the conservation zones has already been proposed as an additional site needing “No Further Action” (NFA). T. Henry to author, email correspondence, February 14, 2004.

43. T. Henry, “Draft Final No Further Action Report,” July 11, 2003, p.3. Furnished by the author.

44. J. Fernández-Colón, “Solicita la Marina la reducción de las áreas a limpiar,” *El Nuevo Día*, December 15, 2003, p.24.

45. *Ibid.*, p.24. At the time of this writing, no decision had been made.

46. *Ibid.*, p.24.

47. This was reasserted by a toxicologist that I consulted regarding the number of contaminated sites on western Vieques. “When there is a site that is too expensive or not technologically feasible to be cleaned up to a useful condition, the military’s first goal is to hand it over to DOI (Department of the Interior). It does not leave the federal government, thus reducing liability; but it does get off the military’s books.” T. Henry to author, email correspondence, February 14, 2004.

48. M. Frank, “Wyndham Martineau Bay,” *Architectural Digest*, 2004, pp.98,100.

49. C. Connelly, quoted in S. DuBow, “Vieques on the Verge,” *Smithsonian*, January 2004, p.78.

50. Taxi driver quoted in DuBow, “Vieques on the Verge,” p.81.

51. DuBow, “Vieques on the Verge,” p.81.

52. R. Johnson, “Forays on Vieques,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 2004. Accessed online.

53. L. Gallagher, “Damn the Torpedoes,” *Forbes*, March 4, 2002. Accessed online.

54. A. Graves, “Vieques, a Charming Caribbean Island,” *Boston Globe*, December 9, 2001. Accessed online.

55. “A large part of the island is in thorn scrub or woodland. This is for the most

part a secondary succession after the original forest was cleared or put in pasture.

The thorn trees are not grazed by cattle and soon take over unless cleared periodically.”

R.O. Woodbury in *Vieques 1972: Survey of the Natural Resources*, p.VII–12.

56. DuBow, “Vieques on the Verge,” p.83.

57. J. Todd, “A Golden Opportunity for Vieques to be Green,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2003. Todd had received *Time’s* accolade in C. Hallowell, “‘Living Machines’ that Make Water out of Sewage,” *Time*, March 22, 1999.

58. See *Vieques 1972: Survey of the Natural Resources*, p.VII–12. See also the military’s own statement on the dominant vegetation after agriculture: “A natural progression of vegetative types from coastal areas to higher elevations has been lost, and present-day vegetation on the island is characteristic of the dry coastal zone vegetation of mainland Puerto Rico. Thorn scrub communities now constitute the dominant vegetation type on the island.” In U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, “Environmental Assessment,” p.4–58.

59. R. Rabin to author in a personal interview, January 21, 2004.

60. C. Ayala, “Del latifundio azucarero al latifundio militar: las expropiaciones de la marina en la década del cuarenta,” *Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, University of Puerto Rico, January 10, 2001, pp.1–33. See also C. Ayala, “From Sugar Plantations to Military Bases: the U.S. Navy’s Expropriations in Vieques, Puerto Rico, 1940–45” *Centro —Journal of the CUNY Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, Vol.13 No.1 (Spring 2001), pp.22–44; and C. Ayala and V. Carro, “Expropriations and Displacement of Civilians in Vieques, 1940–1950,” in *Puerto Rico: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights* (New York: SUNY Press, 2004).

61. “Expropriations and Displacement of Civilians in Vieques, 1940–1950,” p.19.

62. See McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest*, pp.62–64.

63. Between 1958 and 1964 Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara conducted secret negotiations with the Governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz-Marín, to remove every last civilian from Vieques and Culebra. See E. Vélez-Rodríguez, *Plan Drácula: Negociaciones secretas entre Luis*

*Muñoz Marín y la Marina* (Río Piedras: Editorial Edil, 2002), p.15.

64. The name “Esperanza Fishing Village” is a common sight in English tourism media. On Vieques, it is common to hear it called *la villa pesquera* (fishing village).

65. The Trust was one North American-supported entity that for decades worked to protect areas like the bioluminescent bay, but not to take a stand against the military bombings and their effects on ecosystems. McCaffrey demonstrated through interviews that many North Americans (“winter birds”) who purchased land in the civilian suburban areas between the two military zones and built vacation and retirement homes, hotels, and restaurants, such as those at Esperanza, perceived the Navy’s land as undeveloped pristine wilderness, proving that the imagery served its purpose. This privileged class acted upon their attachment to this landscape by joining the Navy League, a social group formed by the U.S. Navy for propaganda and support. For instance, the Navy League sponsored a Sea Cadet program for island youth to earn the sympathies of their families. See McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest*.

66. Graves, “Vieques, a Charming Caribbean Island.”

67. M.S. Calero, “Aquello fue un ataque de película,” *El Mundo*, April, 19, 1988, p.20.

68. Vieques had a 26.7 percent higher cancer rate than San Juan between 1985 and 1989. Socioeconomic stagnation can be grasped by the high teenage pregnancy rate (went up by 14.5 percent between 1990 and 1999, compared to 8.5 percent in San Juan). Also, the lack of health infrastructure, as well as other primary necessities, can be almost as devastating to the citizens as the chemicals themselves. Nonetheless, the cancer rate in Vieques went up by 150 percent between 1990 and 1999, the highest of any Puerto Rico municipality. About 40 new cases are reported each year, out of a population of 9,400. Breast cancer leads among women, and prostate cancer leads among men. See J. Fernández-Colón, “Health chief says cancer on rise in Vieques,” *The San Juan Star*, October 5, 2003, p.8. See also chapter five in J.E. Rivera-Santana and L. Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo*

*Sustentable de Vieques.*

69. "The National Security Need for Vieques: A Study Prepared for The Secretary of the Navy," p.ii.

70. Ibid.

71. See "Statement before the Insular and International Affairs Subcommittee of the House Committee on Natural Resources." Ironically, in 2004 the Navy said that the training they are receiving after leaving Vieques is "much, much better" (B. Kackzor, *The San Juan Star*, March 16, 2004).

72. See Jiménez, *Vieques y la prensa*, pp.61–75. The author has an interesting subchapter, "La niña de los ojos," on the matter of totalizing and cartographic readings of Vieques in the public discourse, specifically the association of landscape with femininity or geomorphology, to metaphorically recover it from the possessive male figure of the military.

73. DuBow, "Vieques on the Verge," p.78.

74. Johnson, "Forays on Vieques."

75. Ibid.

76. DuBow, "Vieques on the Verge," p.82, quoting epidemiologist C. Ortiz-Roque.

Also see Rivera-Santana and Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques*, p.97.

77. The text on the map clearly supports that it was some kind of public property of Spain's Department of the Interior. When the United States began to use it as a bombing range, they did not change the western boundary line of this property at all. Rather than careful military planning, lazy opportunism translated the area from public sphere to prohibited zone. Found at: Mapoteca, Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Instituto de Cultura.

78. There are some accounts of how the military cut the flats off from their ocean channel to make them dry and useful for the target practice all year. One such narrative appears in the documentary film *Vieques: metáfora de Puerto Rico* by I.M. Soto.

79. *Vieques 1972: Survey of the Natural Resources*, p.IX–1.

80. For instance, the images in the "Vieques on the Verge," pp.76–83, from 2004 show new flooding in these areas after the Navy's departure.

81. R. Krinke and D. Winterbottom, "Response: Natural Processes, Cultural Processes and Manufactured Sites," in N. Kirkwood, ed., *Manufactured Sites: Re-Thinking the Post-Industrial Landscape* (New York: Spon Press, 2001), p.207.

82. These statements are a very brief summary of conclusions regarding decontamination on eastern Vieques. A long discussion can be found in Chapter 3 of Rivera-Santana and Cotto-Morales, eds., *Guías para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques*, pp.31–78. It is clear that the specifics of remediation (1), need to be looked at more carefully; and (2), are currently not even on the negotiating table between Vieques and the Pentagon.

83. W. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in W. Cronon ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: Norton, 1996), pp.74–75.

84. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*.

85. Wyndham Martineau Bay Resort and Spa, Vieques, promotional brochure, 2003.