David Ciarlo has written a wonderfully complex, rich, and thought-
ful history of advertising, race, and colonialism that sets a standard for
future work.

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Diamonds and War: State, Capital and Labor in British Ruled Palestine.
trations, maps, tables, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, $95.00.

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Reviewed by Ray E. Dumett

This meticulously researched and well-written book establishes the au-
thor as the ultimate authority on the diamond-cutting and -marketing
business of Israel and as one of the leading writers, along with C. W.
Newbury and others, on the history of the world diamond industry. Even for those with a solid background in mining and business history, there is much to learn from this lengthy, complex, and intriguing study. The writing style is unusually dense, fact-filled, and analytical. The au-
thor, who is a professor of labor studies at Tel Aviv University, spares
the reader no detail in explaining the intricacies of the Atlantic diamond-
marketing system and the vital role played by the British Mandate of
Palestine in furnishing the western allies with needed supplies of both
industrial diamonds and, especially, gemstones during World War II.

It is impossible to either summarize or distill the essence of this
fine book in the space allotted here. Just a few of the major issues scru-
atinized in depth include: the powers of the famous De Beers–led dia-
mond cartel and its network of subsidiary companies; the operations of
the diamond exchanges at Antwerp and Amsterdam before the German
takeover in 1940; the central labor role of Jewish expert diamond cut-
ters in moving from these older centers to the new one in Palestine; and
the dynamic role of this industry in the spread of capitalism in Palestine
and the importance of capital derived from diamonds in building the
state of Israel. The book is clearly multidisciplinary, involving history,
economics, sociology, political science, and international relations. In-
deed, it is fair to say that this is many books in one. And of special inter-
est is the tangled skein of complex interrelations that the author un-
arvels to show not only the cooperative efforts, but also the tensions
and frictions that developed between leading forces, personalities, and
institutions. Among these were the London-based Diamond Syndicate; Ovid Ben Ami, head of the Palestine Diamond Manufacturers Association; F. A. Mathias, economic adviser at the British Ministry of Economic Warfare; the Palestine Agency (which headed the Zionist Movement in Palestine); and last, but not least, Histadrut, the General Federation of Laborers in the Land of Israel, which was itself splintered into a number of contending subgroups. These interrelations served a variety of vital, and not commonly appreciated, international goals, not the least of which were to enable Great Britain to meet its extraordinary wartime indebtedness for war matériel through indispensable diamond sales to the United States, and to beat off attempts by Nazi Germany to establish new diamond centers within its own borders.

Among the numerous ancillary themes that I found of special interest were De Vries’s efforts to show how the supply of diamonds to Britain and the United States were bound up with the maintenance of imperialist connections with Palestine and, even more, with the continent of Africa during and after the war. From what sources were the rough uncut diamonds derived? We need to remind ourselves that a cardinal canon of classic mercantilist dogma had always been that colonies were made to service their metropolitan overlords at times of war. And it is often overlooked how great was the dependence of Great Britain and the United States on the colonies and settlements of Africa for a number of their strategic minerals, including gold, chrome, copper, cobalt, manganese, vanadium, and uranium—all crucial in the ultimate victory over the Axis.

Nowhere was this dependence more fundamental than in the case of diamonds. The Belgian Congo (in a special wartime relation with the United States), the British Gold Coast, British Sierra Leone, Angola, and the Union of South Africa were the leading producers of both “industrials” and gemstones. The Belgian Congo itself provided the western Allies with 65 percent of their industrial diamonds, which were indispensable for machine-drilling and cutting tools during the war. For as one acute report of the time observed, “There is no important war weapon used by our forces that does not employ the diamond in its manufacture.” And lest we forget, De Vries reminds us that two of the major advantages in all of these colonial and quasi-colonial connections—whether in Sierra Leone or in mandated Palestine (with its heavy emphasis on refined gemstone cutting)—were price-fixing and the ability to cut costs and expand profits by relying on cheap labor.

Ray E. Dumett is professor of history at Purdue University. He is author of many works on Africa and on British imperialism, including El Dorado in West Africa: The Gold Mining Frontier, African Labor and Colonial Capitalism in the Gold Coast, 1875–1900 (1999).