

CENTRAL AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AFTER THE VIOLENCE

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WEST INDIAN WORKERS AND THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY IN COSTA RICA, 1870–1940. By Aviva Chomsky. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996. Pp. 286. \$35.00 cloth.)

THE LOGIC OF THE LATIFUNDIO: THE LARGE ESTATES OF NORTHWESTERN COSTA RICA SINCE THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY. By Marc Edelman. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992. Pp. 478. \$55.00 cloth.)

REVOLUTION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE: RURAL CONFLICT AND AGRARIAN REFORM IN GUATEMALA, 1944–1954. By Jim Handy. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. Pp. 272. \$45.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

TRADE UNIONISTS AGAINST TERROR: GUATEMALA CITY, 1954–1985. By Deborah Levenson-Estrada. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. Pp. 288. \$45.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

RURAL GUATEMALA, 1760–1940. By David McCreery. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994. Pp. 450. \$49.50 cloth.)

THE REGIME OF ANASTASIO SOMOZA, 1936–1956. By Knut Walter. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. Pp. 303. \$49.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)

STATES AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION: COFFEE AND THE RISE OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA. By Robert G. Williams. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. Pp. 357. \$45.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

Now that Central America has ceased to be of serious interest in Washington, the deeper questions that plagued the region's politics during the 1970s and 1980s can finally be addressed with some degree of equanimity. One of the numerous problems bedeviling attempts at social and political analysis over the past two decades has been the weak historiographical tradition throughout the region. Even the most elementary questions that dominated such analyses could not be answered without

advances in the literature. How and when did capitalism develop in the region? What were the size and role of the peasantry and labor in movements for social and political change? What role did ethnicity play in the development of national political cultures, and what roles did Indians and blacks play in national development and programs for revolutionary change? Why did rightist authoritarian regimes predominate in all countries except Costa Rica? The works to be reviewed here provide new perspectives that allow for redefining these questions for those of us who still find these themes compelling.

In *States and Social Evolution: Coffee and the Rise of National Governments in Central America*, Robert Williams challenges the idea of a single system organizing coffee production in any of the five Central American republics. Beginning with Guatemala, he first describes the slow transition from production of cochineal (a red dye) to coffee around Antigua and Amatitlán between 1840 and 1870 via the system of perpetual lease (*censo enfitéutico*) on small and medium properties. Williams then contrasts it artfully with the hurried development of large-scale plantations on the Boca Costa by the Liberals after their Revolution of 1871. He adds to this portrait the *sui generis* system of German coffee planters and Indian village laborers in the Verapaces, portraying Guatemala's coffee economy as more a mosaic than a single model.

Similar contrasts appear in the other Central American republics. Costa Rica's smallholder pattern in the center-west of the Central Valley is counterbalanced by the no-less-distinctive plantations of Turrialba to the east and the large-scale commercial operations of later colonization zones. Nicaragua's experience with large farms around Granada is balanced by its northern highlands pattern of smallholding and fragmented former cattle ranches. El Salvador's infamous "fourteen families" receive Williams's attention (broadening the number and focus to many times that number), but one also finds ample information on the survival of peasant and family farmer production even there. Finally, Williams's unsurpassed knowledge of the history of Honduran coffee is presented in striking detail.

Williams was able to weave together in *States and Social Evolution* materials gathered from extensive research in each country. While the material is most abundant for the period after the 1870s, he has also uncovered original documents for earlier periods. The many excellent maps detailing the location and distribution of coffee and other crops are another major attraction of this fine work.

In attempting to explain the connection between the rise of the coffee-export economy and the emergence of the nation-state, Williams opts for a "path analysis" in which historically "early" choices regarding production and land systems conditioned subsequent development. Although this perspective is undeniably useful, Williams tends to make a more rigid argument about political development than his own complex

land and labor data may support. In arguing that control of municipal-level politics and institutional innovation in the earliest coffee districts in each country determined most of subsequent patterns of political relations, he may underestimate the relative independence of national-level political structures as well as the possibilities of reformist fault lines in those societies where reform may not necessarily have triumphed in the twentieth century. Similarly, such an argument may overemphasize the causal role of land and labor systems in pioneer experiences and districts, especially in light of Williams's substantial discoveries regarding the remarkable heterogeneity of such structures within each national case.

While Williams's research ranges widely across national boundaries, David McCreery focuses on Guatemala over an extraordinarily long time period in *Rural Guatemala, 1760–1940*. His earlier articles whetted scholars' appetites for this volume, but here McCreery goes much further in conceptualization and documentary resources. The study's most interesting contributions and perspectives deal with the impacts of coffee after the 1870s and the complex system of coerced and indebted labor that endured until the 1940s. But the sections on the colonial period and early independence are meticulously researched as well.

Thanks to this pathbreaking work, historians can now perceive that the Reforma Liberal carried out in Guatemala was radically unlike the image of it generated by subsequent historians and polemicists. This reform did not deprive most Indian communities of land. To the contrary, it more often confirmed their possession of village lands with its titling program (frequently even increasing them), while depriving a small minority of coffee piedmont villages of their ancestral lands and all communities of their more imprecise claims in far distant areas. Indeed, the Reforma dealt more with mobilizing and controlling labor than with landownership per se.

The selective implementation of this reform is reflected with remarkable clarity in the documentation that forms the basis of McCreery's study. The Guatemalan state, whether Conservative, Liberal, or Liberal-Dictatorial, appeared to care little and know less about the internal workings of farms themselves, Indian as well as ladino, while obsessively organizing the state's database and coercive power over labor, especially the seasonal labor of the Indian communities. Thus McCreery can offer a convincing explanation for the apparent lack of resistance to the Reforma Liberal and its land policies. Most subsequent conflict developed among villages in opposition to forced labor recruitment and terms of payment. The picture that emerges is not only regionally nuanced (something recognized at least implicitly long ago in the literature and now detailed by Williams) but can distinguish precisely the new antagonisms and conflicts that emerged under the Liberal state rather than invoking land titling or speculation as some sort of generic causal agent.

McCreery's treatment of the system of "coerced wage labor" that emerged with coffee is multifaceted and subtle. He believes that in this Dantesque social world, coffee planters and Indian villagers built and inherited a system that neither found acceptable but neither could escape. Employers who were paying advances and risking lost debts to runaway laborers, continuing to offer corn rations as food prices increased, and paying off a veritable army of recruiters and political parasites could only dream of a self-regulating wage system or an enforceable debt-peonage system in which they could actually calculate and predict their labor costs. Labor may have been "cheap"—a goal shared by employers and the state—but it was also unpredictable in terms of price and availability. Similarly, villagers may have pressed their limited advantages up to and beyond the "limits of the law," but the system worked ultimately to their disadvantage because the Reforma had slowly but effectively closed off for most Indians any option of nonparticipation in seasonal labor migration. Moreover, as the Indians' "need" for cash income grew by or before the 1920s, less and less overt coercion was required by the state or private employers.

Ultimately, McCreery presents a vivid case study supporting the idea that export agriculture, far from quickly overturning precapitalist social institutions, relied on peasant self-provisioning and noncapitalist coercion of labor for its dynamism and profitability for many decades prior to the revolution in 1944. He views direct coercion, particularly the *mandamiento* system after the 1870s, as merely establishing the key background or context and making clear to all that the issue of participation was, from the Liberal state's point of view, nonnegotiable. But in closing off this option in the name of export promotion and progress, the state effectively undermined the possible emergence of a free wage-labor market and assured the debt-advance and political patronage systems of labor control that have plagued Guatemala ever since. "Cheap labor" thus proved to be horribly expensive for both employers and future generations once the indirect costs of its control and deployment by the political system were felt with full force.

Moreover, part of the cost of the new system must be blamed on the crassly racist organizing principles of a system ultimately resting on the recognition by all involved that Indians were the ones who had to find work or protection with wealthy non-Indians to avoid becoming the prey of politicians, merchant-lenders, or employers randomly seeking their fortunes. McCreery is clearly not passing this tradition of labor coercion off as just another "retention" from earlier times. Rather, he acknowledges it as a novel and virulent pathology of capitalism and export agriculture in the Guatemalan context. Thus the effects of the Reforma Liberal—more concerned with labor than with land, more with coffee exports and the western piedmont than with highland agriculture and living standards—would live on in the form of its racist "coercion

into the market" long after fully capitalist institutions had been decreed for agriculture (in 1944) and at least partially repudiated (in 1954).

Williams provides a comparative framework for thinking about coffee cross-nationally, and McCreery offers a compelling explanation for highland Guatemala's unique land and labor system. But Marc Edelman's *The Logic of the Latifundio: The Large Estates of Northwestern Costa Rica since the Late Nineteenth Century* could serve well as a prototype for analyses of Central America along the Pacific Coast and its transformation by cotton and cattle export industries. By all accounts the most "Central American" of Costa Rica's provincial economies and societies, the province of Guanacaste witnessed the rapid development of cattle ranching for export after the late 1950s. Its "departure" from presumed patterns of Costa Rican smallholding has become a staple of local and foreign analyses, made all the more paradoxical by the fact that these same estates were owned by leading members of the highland society perceived as somehow defining national values.

Edelman manages to explain this apparent paradox by showing how, on various levels, the two opposing patterns fit together all too well. His discoveries include at least three major points. Central Valley owners of Guanacaste's latifundia capture (and are subsidized by) a form of "institutional rent," especially cheap production credit from the state banking system, which makes their properties far more profitable as large units than their output and sales receipts would warrant or would be in the hands of numerous fragmented and politically less powerful owners. Second, a commercial reconcentration of landholdings occurred following even the most widespread land invasions of the 1920s and statist reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, allowing the *latifundista* group to avoid being identified with recurring bloody polarization over land claims. Third, Edelman shows how the cattle breeding and grazing industries developed in such a way that small ranchers (breeders) remained dependent on the latifundistas (grazers) and actually reinforced its profitability by disproportionately shouldering high-risk aspects of the business.

If the logic of the latifundio thrives even in social-democratic Costa Rica, it is because of the ways in which its profit opportunities and levels are socially embedded in national politics: local peasants become dependent on the system as calf-producers or complicit in it as sellers of land-reform properties to merchant speculators. Researchers working on other Pacific Coast economies in Central America will profit enormously from studying Edelman's research, for a similar logic may well be at work in sustaining the latifundio in those areas as well.

Jim Handy's long-awaited study, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944–1954*, culminates more than a decade of research on the most controversial area of contemporary Guatemalan history. Handy presents a formidable challenge to the domi-

nant scholarly interpretations of the democratic revolution, sustained by his thorough documentation of government policies and social struggles in the countryside. The earlier interpretations had profound consequences in the 1970s and 1980s and are still vital to understanding Guatemala's political culture today.

Several scholars have attempted to explain the reasons for the failure of the 1944–1954 democratic revolution by citing the impact of the agrarian reform (either too moderate or too radical) on the rural population and the U.S. intervention (either justified or not). Although intense criticism has been made from the Left and the Right, the democratic revolution's most serious critics during the 1960s and 1970s were on the Left. They often extrapolated from President Jacobo Arbenz's stated goal of capitalist development in the countryside to argue that the reformist "bourgeois nature" of the agrarian policies and organization curtailed the effectiveness of rural resistance to the intervention.

Through a careful, grassroots study of numerous municipalities, Handy challenges the position that the impact of agrarian reform was insufficient to mobilize the Guatemalan rural peasantry and working class in defense of the revolution. He effectively rebuts the almost commonplace charge made by the Left that the rural poor refused to defend the revolution in 1954. Handy concedes that a sense of impotence and demobilization weighed heavily in the cities among a national political leadership that was exceedingly young, inexperienced, and often ignorant of Guatemala's complex agrarian structures. But in the countryside, he places the blame squarely on the Arbenz government's misplaced faith in the military, a faith that effectively blocked rural resistance.

Rather than glorify the agrarian reform, *Revolution in the Countryside* demonstrates in convincing detail the complexity of peasants' and workers' responses to Arbenz's policies. Handy concludes: "The relatively simple articles of Decree 900 [the agrarian law] lost their clarity as they were enveloped by the dense fog of the immensely complicated social relations of rural Guatemala. Class, ethnic, and community conflict rarely followed the simple bipolar lines espoused by those intent on implementing the reform" (p. 205). Thus he does not minimize the problems inherent in a state-initiated program conceived in ideological terms that often had little relevance to Guatemalan society. Handy fully acknowledges the distance between the government planning offices and the villages as well as the conflicts provoked by Decree 900 within and between rural communities. Yet he also emphasizes the exceptionally successful land-distribution program—more than 15 percent of the country's total population benefited in less than two years. Handy stresses its revolutionary, empowering effect on the rural population, which he describes as "the dramatic alteration . . . [that it] helped inspire in the relations of power in the countryside" (p. 206).

Handy engages another critical issue posed by anthropologists over the past few decades: the negative impact of the revolution on indigenous communities. Most anthropological critics have argued that government policies, in failing to understand and therefore address the specificity of indigenous cultures, tended to undermine native forms of organization and identities. Handy examines closely the disruptiveness and divisiveness of the revolution in many Indian villages and finds that political competition and agrarian mobilization tended to exacerbate pre-existing class, ethnic, and community cleavages. Moreover, Handy concurs with the ethnographic assessment of government policies that they aimed to “integrate” Indians into the national society by incorporating them as citizens with land rights, political rights, and labor rights. The overarching goal of the revolution’s indigenous policy was in effect to “ladino-ize” the Indians and thereby create ethnically homogenous proletarian and peasant classes that would eventually lead a socialist revolution. Yet ladino as well as indigenous beneficiaries were offered not the freehold deeds that one might have expected of a petty or peasant capitalist policy but a new form of the same “censo enfitéutico” or perpetual lease described by Williams and McCreery before its demise in the late 1870s.

Revolution in the Countryside is particularly valuable because Handy analyzes the historical development of indigenous communities, recognizing their preexisting internal class and generational tensions. Moreover, he engages the manner in which indigenous groups interpreted and appropriated national discourse, politics, and policies. Thus Handy’s study offers scholars a nuanced elaboration of Richard Adams’s insight that despite the revolution’s failure to address Indians as subjects, in allowing them to organize as campesinos it also allowed them to recognize the possibility of social and political change.

Unfortunately, *Revolution in the Countryside* does not examine those aspects of local discourse that would have permitted Handy to evaluate Adams’s equally important suggestion that the stirrings of a pan-Indian identity emerged out of the revolutionary mobilization. Two somewhat minor flaws in the book impede a deeper analysis of the problem of indigenous identity during this period. First, Handy’s use of the word *Maya* to describe indigenous groups confuses any effort to understand identities that extend beyond the *municipio*. Similarly, failure to discuss the relationship between the real development of indigenous communities and governmental creation of institutions known as *comunidades indígenas* neglects a potentially intriguing interface between state policy and local appropriation. This omission also leaves closed a potential window onto changing indigenous consciousness during those years. Nevertheless, Handy has performed an invaluable service to modern Guatemalan scholars and activists in documenting the actions of indigenous

groups and factions during that momentous decade, leaving it to future scholars to analyze the transformation of consciousness of the indigenous actors during those years of decisive social change.

Deborah Levenson-Estrada's *Trade Unionists against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954–1985* continues the history of Guatemalan subaltern groups after the coup that overthrew the Arbenz government in 1954. In shifting the terrain of analysis to Guatemala City, Levenson-Estrada makes a powerful contribution to the underdeveloped field of Central American labor history. Scholars outside Costa Rica have not focused much attention on urban labor for understandable reasons. At the height of industrial development in 1973, workers in factories employing more than fifty employees represented less than 15 percent of the laboring population of Guatemala City. As she and others have pointed out, capital-intensive industrialization during the 1960s and 1970s under the sponsorship of the Central American Common Market did not expand the industrial proletariat to any significant degree: between 1965 and 1975, only thirty thousand Guatemalans were employed in industry, while many working in artisanal and small manufacturing shops lost their jobs. Moreover, the organized urban working class in Central America has been extremely weak in comparison with those in the Southern Cone countries or Mexico (with the exception of Sandinista Nicaragua). At its height in the 1970s, the Guatemalan labor movement involved less than 5 percent of the urban working class.

But Levenson-Estrada's *Trade Unionists against Terror* is about unions under a terrorist regime. Despite the relative weakness of the movement, they played a dramatic role in resisting the military machine. Levenson-Estrada portrays brilliantly how a small group of labor activists in Guatemala City inspired tens of thousands of workers and Guatemalans on the urban margins and served as a moral beacon that beamed beyond the country's borders to denounce inhuman levels of repression.

One of Levenson-Estrada's stunning achievements is her chapter entitled "City Life," a collective biography of a group of union activists in which she demonstrates that life lived on the margins prepared them for struggle against terrorism. This powerful analytic description of the milieu in which the unionists emerged could well be used as a model for contemporary urban social history in Central America. The working-class neighborhoods that she describes were decidedly unlike the classic working-class strongholds in the rest of Latin America, such as La Boca in Argentina or the ABC region in Brazil. Levenson-Estrada underscores the fundamental differences between such classic centers of working-class organization and Guatemala City: the lack of state socialization projects beyond the most minimal education, the lack of stability in employment and residence, and the consequently low level of urban communal organization. What members of the new working class shared was a particu-

lar kind of existential ethos forged through living in what she describes as “an urban disaster.” Levenson-Estrada skillfully describes the kind of experience that prepared activists for struggles in which dismissals were the least one had to fear:

Everyday life demanded that people be inventive and accept risk. . . . Making one’s home on the sharp slope of a ravine that could become a landslide with an earthquake tremor or in heavy rain, living with the constant sentence of death squads, riding on overcrowded, fast-moving, old, ill-kept buses on roads made more of holes than pavement, amid cars with malfunctioning brakes and no rearview mirrors, working hard on an empty stomach, giving birth in a public hospital or at home—in short all the demands of ordinary life—required the same trusting of oneself to the moment and to what was at hand that heroism and that trade unionism did. (Pp. 65–66)

Trade Unionists against Terror can be read as the heroic narrative of a few men and women who, conditioned by their life amid misery and terror, were capable of defying death squads so that the labor movement might survive. Yet Levenson-Estrada also urges readers to question that narrative. Even as she recreates the glorious high point of the movement in 1977–1978, she questions the roots of labor militant “triumphalism.” During that period, relatively autonomous class organizations managed to mobilize hundreds of thousands in the cities and virtually shut down the agro-export industry along the Pacific Coast. Yet Levenson-Estrada demonstrates just how much the collective will seeking a popular victory, which fed the mobilization drive itself, simultaneously created the dangerous illusion of imminent success. A sense of dramatic wonder pervaded the conversion of the movement from a tiny group of courageous activists into a movement encompassing the urban and rural masses. Yet it was precisely this transformation that convinced the military to strike back so decisively and brutally. Such a terroristic response has raised questions (however illegitimately) about their courage and commitment by making it seem complicitous with the gruesome outcome. Levenson-Estrada and her informants recognize this gnawing ironic contradiction. She comments in the conclusion, “Voluntarism helped workers organize against near impossible odds, but it rested on a certain blindness to the state’s powers and to the union’s vulnerabilities. It nourished trade unionism and then led to a disastrous triumphalism . . .” (p. 233).

Although Levenson-Estrada’s analysis of the movement’s ultimate failure strikes one as convincing, it provokes the question of how this interpretation might be generalized into a comparative framework. Her central interpretive thrust is to counter the Leninist view that trade unionists alone without the intervention of a Marxist party cannot evolve beyond “economism” (a concern with exclusively bread-and-butter issues). Levenson-Estrada argues that activists, many of whom had passed through a Catholic-sponsored labor organization, formed a “small moral commu-

nity" that developed a radical critique of capitalism and the state. Although she makes a strong argument for an endogenous development of political class consciousness, once the small moral community emerges, it is not clear how such a group could avoid the Leninist fate of becoming an activist cadre organization whose task was to inspire and enlighten the masses. Given conditions of vastly unequal power (regardless of terror), how could this group of courageous abnegated militants avoid falling into the trap of Leninist epistemology? How does a group that becomes a conscious elite avoid conceiving of itself as the representative of a class as yet incapable of self-representation? This is not to deny that the Guatemalan trade unionists achieved a remarkably distinct quality of organization in comparison with the traditional Leninist or social-democratic organization (as exemplified by its European or Southern Cone versions). Yet if the unionists were blinded by triumphalism along with the guerrilla Left in 1978, to what extent was their separation from the rank and file responsible? Finally, how could a similar moral community avoid such a pitfall, even when the stakes were not so high?

Levenson-Estrada also criticizes tellingly the divisive role of extra-union forces in the labor movement allied with the guerrilla Left. But several questions remain. First, did the labor activists have difficulty distancing themselves from the guerrilla organizations for ideological reasons? In the extreme political conditions of the time, how did the endogenous ideology of the labor movement—its revolutionary humanism—differ formally and practically from a guerrilla Left committed to overthrowing a barbarous state regime? This fascinating study provokes such a barrage of questions precisely because its analysis is incisive and the story grippingly important.

Trade Unionists against Terror focuses relentlessly on the development of the union movement from its origins through the successful Coca Cola occupation and boycott of the early 1980s. Levenson-Estrada makes numerous suggestive asides along the way. For example, in her early discussion about the elasticity of ethnic identity in Guatemala City, she comments: "the line between Indian and ladino among the urban laboring population was marked. Yet even though Indians lived within a cultural milieu that was specifically theirs, the distance separating lower-class Indians and lower-class ladinos was not always so great in the city in the 1960s and 1970s. Ladinos often had close Indian relatives. . . . However much Indians were held in contempt . . . , there existed no sharp or total segregation of spheres among urban wage earners" (pp. 57–58). Because no specific Indian forms of association existed in the city that might have affected the labor movement, this aspect of the story is not developed. It nevertheless suggests a vitally important field of research.

Aviva Chomsky's *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870–1940* is another important labor history that focuses

intensely on issues of ethnicity and class. Her study represents a substantial advance in Central American historiography in that its thorough research allows for a rich and nuanced account of Afro-Caribbean culture, politics, and labor organizing on the Atlantic Coast. *West Indian Workers* follows in the distinguished line of recent social histories of Atlantic Coast peoples by Philippe Bourgois, Charles Hale, and Darío Euraque among others, all of which have helped return that region to the center of regional research in the past decade.¹

Chomsky's analysis of African and Afro-Caribbean religious traditions and their impact on the Limón labor movement is pathbreaking. The first several chapters concentrate on the creation of the labor force, the organization of production on the banana plantations, and UFCO medical policies. Yet it is her analysis of the 1910 strike that forms the core of *West Indian Workers*, providing an outstanding model for a culturally thick reading of a third world social movement. The movement was sparked by UFCO's firing six hundred Jamaican union members in response to the workers' celebration of Jamaican Emancipation Day. When the company brought in strikebreakers from St. Kitts, they too joined the union, went on strike, and became its main participants. After several months, the arrest and deportation of strike leaders and a lack of support from the Jamaican community and the government led to the strike's failure. United Fruit continued with varying success to pit the two island communities against each other, employing St. Kitts strikebreakers against a Jamaican port workers' strike. But as Chomsky underscores, the union at its height in 1910 represented five thousand from both islands, one-quarter of the West Indian population in Costa Rica.

Significantly, Chomsky has uncovered an important connection between the West Indians in Costa Rica and the African and Afro-Caribbean religious currents of *obeah* and myalism. She achieves a remarkably dynamic analysis of how that tradition operated within the local society, merging imperceptibly with Christian currents among the workers while being firmly rejected by the middle class. Finally, Chomsky shows convincingly the key parts played by local cultural cohesion and conflict in the strike movements of 1910 and 1911.

Chomsky's chapter on the role of West Indians in Costa Rican radical nationalist discourse is similarly fascinating. Her work adds to general understanding of the racial dimension of labor politics and also demonstrates how racism has been woven into the fabric of Costa Rican nationalism. Chomsky adeptly dissects competing elite and leftist vari-

1. See Philippe Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Charles R. Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitú Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894–1987* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); Darío Euraque, *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic: Region and State in Honduras, 1870–1972* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

ants of anti-imperialism. And in an analytical tour de force, she delineates the reasons why the leftist variant not only failed but fueled the development of anti-communism among the West Indian population of Costa Rica.

Although it may be unfair to ask for more from such a significant contribution to the region's historiography, a few areas in this narrative demand a treatment similar to that accorded to the 1910 strike experience. For example, Chomsky offers little to add to knowledge of Garveyism on the coast or the important Limón strike movement of 1921 that ended with the outbreak of an armed conflict between Costa Rica and Panama. Similarly, the assimilationist dynamics "within" the Afro-Costa Rican community after the 1930s and the importance of outmigration to Panama are not as well explained as the symbolic role of Blacks in white Costa Rican nationalist thinking.² Notwithstanding this criticism, *West Indian Workers*, more than any other work, has effectively bridged the cultural and historiographical gap between Central America and the Caribbean.

The other Central American countries have a less-developed historiography than Guatemala and Costa Rica, although pioneers like Mario Posas, Darío Euraque, and Marvin Barahona in Honduras and Hector Lindo-Fuentes, Aldo Lauria Santiago, and Patricia Alvarenga in El Salvador have made major strides toward meeting this challenge. In Nicaragua, Knut Walter's *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza García, 1936–1956* has done much to create the conditions for further advances in that country's historiography. His account of the Somoza García regime dramatically revises the portrait of the prerevolutionary state that dominated Nicaraguan politics and scholarship during the 1980s. The book's most provocative basic insight is that Somoza García built a modern state in Nicaragua that was not anomalous and in many ways resembled others throughout the hemisphere.

One of the more compelling arguments of Walter's study is that a close link existed between state and economic expansion and Somoza's ability to neutralize the opposition, particularly at the peak of the anti-Somoza movement between 1944 and 1947. Walter explains, "In fact, the survival of the regime was possible precisely because the Nicaraguan state, as structured and directed by fifteen years of Somocista domination, had acquired the resilience and the cohesion to withstand successive attacks and crises" (p. 180). Somoza's efforts to augment not just the state's repressive capacity but its capacity to deliver services to its citizens helped create legitimacy for the Nicaraguan state.

2. Ronald Harpelle's recent work is particularly strong on these two issues. See Harpelle, "West Indians in Costa Rica: Racism, Class, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Community," Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1992. For the earliest history of West Indians in Limón using photographic records, see Carmen Murillo Chaverri, *Identidades de hierro y humo: La construcción del ferrocarril al Atlántico, 1870–1890* (San José: Porvenir, 1995).

The Regime of Anastasio Somoza will force political scientists to reexamine previously accepted explanations of the 1979 Sandinista victory based on the supposedly exceptional nature of the Somoza regime. Walter's step-by-step retracing of Somoza's economic and state-building policies leads to this conclusion: "the Nicaraguan state during the Somoza regime represented an overall consensus among the politically dominant groups [in Nicaragua] on the desirability of export-oriented, capitalist economic growth and the need to guarantee the institutional and coercive powers of the state to foster and assure such growth" (p. 246).

The seven studies reviewed here all make lasting contributions to a new social, economic, and political history of modern Central America. Ironically, just as the passing interest of foreign observers and meddlers in the region's armed conflicts of the 1980s was receding, a new generation of scholars began to publish a series of monographs revealing many of the deeper historical and structural origins of Central America's problems and possibilities. These works have redrawn the boundaries of Central American scholarship, resolving many old questions and opening up entirely new avenues for future research. When that research is forthcoming, its debts to the authors reviewed here will be abundantly clear.