

FORMING AN INFORMAL EMPIRE  
WITHOUT COLONIES:  
U.S.–Latin American Relations

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- THE GEOPOLITICS OF SECURITY IN THE AMERICAS: HEMISPHERIC DENIAL FROM MONROE TO CLINTON.* By Martin Sicker. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002. Pp. 200. \$81.95 cloth.)
- JAMES G. BLAINE: ARCHITECT OF EMPIRE.* By Edward P. Crapol. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002. Pp. 157. \$65.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- JAMES G. BLAINE AND LATIN AMERICA.* By David Healy. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001. Pp. 296. \$39.95 cloth.)
- INTEGRAL OUTSIDERS: THE AMERICAN COLONY IN MEXICO CITY, 1876–1911.* By William Schell Jr. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001. Pp. 274. \$55.00 cloth.)
- A WORLD SAFE FOR CAPITALISM: DOLLAR DIPLOMACY AND AMERICA'S RISE TO GLOBAL POWER.* By Cyrus Veese. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Pp. 238. \$27.50 paper.)
- MISSIONARY CAPITALIST: NELSON ROCKEFELLER IN VENEZUELA.* By Darlene Rivas. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. Pp. 224. \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- EMPIRE AND REVOLUTION: THE AMERICANS IN MEXICO SINCE THE CIVIL WAR.* By John Mason Hart. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Pp. 668. \$39.95 cloth.)

Scholarly opinion overall supports the view that three interlocking objectives have formed the basis of United States policy toward Latin America in modern times. Beginning with Secretary of State James G. Blaine's espousal of a Pan-American vision in the 1880s, U.S. leaders consistently sought to exclude European presences, to expand trade and investment, and to uphold peace and stability. The rank order of importance among these goals changed from time to time, depending on circumstances and personalities, and the same held true for the tactics. In

contrast, the strategy of forming an informal empire without colonies remained more or less constant throughout the twentieth century.

The imperial project picked up momentum as a consequence of the Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War in 1898. U.S. leaders first relied on unilateral measures while employing military interventions in the creation of five protectorates. Such practices prevailed during the presidencies of McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson but ultimately entailed high costs and unwanted obligations. As a result, a shift took place after the First World War. The German defeat eliminated for a time European threats and also the principal rationale for intervention. These outcomes, in combination with the onset of the Great Depression, called for multilateral initiatives in efforts to embrace Latin Americans as junior partners during the age of the Good Neighbor. A succession of new policies conjured up cooperative undertakings with hopes of increasing commerce, policing the region against internal strife, and providing safeguards against Nazi Germany. During the Second World War, this change in favor of nonintervention paid off in the form of Latin American support for the United States. For Latin Americans, the gringos no longer appeared as a natural enemy.

Most of the books under consideration in this essay exemplify current historiographical tendencies by bestowing agency on Latin Americans. They also employ various methodologies while exploring diverse aspects of complex international relationships, including geopolitics, Pan-Americanism, economic and cultural interactions, and private initiatives by nongovernmental organizations in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela. Several of these works sparkle with originality and innovation. They also set forth significant findings, heighten levels of understanding, and force consideration of new ideas.

The least distinctive among them, Martin Sicker's *The Geopolitics of Security in the Americas*, may appeal to political science traditionalists but strikes me, a historian, as something of a rehash of theories based on dated secondary accounts. Sicker claims that geopolitics, "the relationship between geography and power politics," retains utility as "a valid approach to understanding the realpolitik of international relations." He explores "the geopolitical and geostrategic factors that have helped shape . . . policies toward Latin America . . . albeit," he says, "largely unacknowledged" (2) by U.S. leaders. In his view, public statements of high purpose and principle seldom reveal true intentions, the formulation of which more typically resides in clandestine geopolitical calculations.

As he explains, his thesis holds that "a number of relatively constant environmental factors . . . have helped *condition*—not *determine*—the course of the political history of the Western Hemisphere over the past two centuries" (2). The ensuing quest for U.S. security constitutes the

main theme, developed much in the fashion of Samuel Flagg Bemis's classic, *The Latin American Policy of the United States* (1943). At the end of the Latin American wars for independence, U.S. leaders staked out their strategic claims by means of the Monroe Doctrine, warning the Europeans to stay clear of American turf but nevertheless fearing the possibility of European intrusions. Before the Civil War, U.S. expansionists justified aggressive acts in pursuit of a land-based continental empire, in part because of alleged British and French threats. Later they embraced even more expansive aspirations.

The French intervention in Mexico during the 1860s set back their plans but mattered hardly at all over the long-term. In 1865 the Union victory provided enough leverage to encourage a French exit and allowed expansionists to resume their search for security through hegemony. In Sicker's view, geopolitical imperatives, sustained by perceptions of European dangers, provided the primary impetus for forming an informal American empire without colonies, except of course in the Philippines, a steppingstone on the way to the China market. In the Western Hemisphere, in contrast, Cuba, with its potential base (Guantánamo) at the crossroads of Caribbean trade routes, became the first protectorate, followed by Panama, the site for building a trans-isthmian canal. Strategic requirements also called forth efforts to block presumed British and German ambitions, contributing twice to military invasions of Mexico in 1914 and 1916 and to the imposition of protectorate status on Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. For Sicker, the key for understanding the larger strategy resides in geopolitics. For me, the requirements of cost accounting and public relations dictated the choice of means. Serving as a kind of public fiction, the construction of protectorates in cooperation with willing local elites conformed more readily with the desired appearance of spreading democracy and civilization for the benefit of our diminutive brown brethren.

The elimination of Wilhelmine Germany as an international menace allowed for tactical experimentation. Under Presidents Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, an evolving conception of the United States as "Good Neighbor" resulted in the deconstruction of the protectorates and the repudiation of intervention. Indeed, the United States jettisoned the self-proclaimed right of hemispheric police power while moving toward new initiatives supporting multilateral engagements on behalf of trade expansion and hemispheric defense.

Similarly during the Cold War, geopolitics conditioned U.S. behavior in reaction against the Soviet threat. U.S. leaders employed both multilateral and unilateral methods, including the creation of collective systems of security and consultation (the Rio Pact, the Organization of American States) and military interventions, sometimes clandestinely (Guatemala, Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua), sometimes overtly

(Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama). For Sicker, such actions demonstrate that geopolitics has consistently played the primary role in shaping U.S. policy toward Latin America.

Possibly so, but historians have drawn other inferences. For example, while researching German archives for her book, *The Danger of Dreams: German and American Imperialism in Latin America* (1999), Nancy Mitchell found no evidence of designs on the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, she suggests that American leaders, such as Theodore Roosevelt, deliberately exaggerated such concerns as a smoke screen for their own expansionist schemes. Over the course of U.S. history, American presidents habitually have issued proclamations about alleged European perils posed either by the British or the French or the Japanese or the Germans or the Russians. In this way, they constructed rationalizations for their own aggressive acts and made them palatable.

As shown by the other works considered in this essay, geopolitics, though part of the larger story, hardly tells the whole of it, not even the most crucial part. In recent years, a resurgence of interest in the late nineteenth century has raised many questions about the causes and consequences of U.S. conduct over a century ago, resulting in publications such as John L. Offner's *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain over Cuba, 1895–1898* (1992); David M. Pletcher's *The Diplomacy of Trade and Investment in the Hemisphere, 1865–1900* (1998); Kristin Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine Wars* (1998); and Louis A. Pérez, Jr.'s many works on U.S.-Cuban relations, such as *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (1998), which takes on importance because of its criticism of U.S. historians who simply left Cubans out of the narrative.

Also, as part of the larger trend, the two books under review, Edward P. Crapol's *James G. Blaine: Architect of Empire* and David Healy's *James G. Blaine and Latin America* both consider the nature of American imperialism and Blaine's role in the unfolding process. As charter members in "the Wisconsin school" of diplomatic history, Crapol and Healy do not differ appreciably in their understanding of Blaine's statecraft. Crapol's account is more broadly gauged and presented in general terms for undergraduates and lay readers; Healy's work, the more detailed of the two, is focused on the specifics of relations with Latin America and aimed more clearly at an audience of specialists.

As a career politician, Blaine ranked among the leading Republicans of his era. His election to the Maine legislature in 1857 marked the beginning of his political career and his resignation as secretary of state in 1892, shortly before his death, the end. In between he served several terms in the House of Representatives where he took over as Speaker in 1869 at age thirty-nine. Seven years later he became Maine's junior

senator. Following James A. Garfield's victory in the presidential election of 1880, he assumed the duties of secretary of state for almost a year until the consequences of the president's assassination forced him to leave Chester A. Arthur's administration for political reasons. In 1884 he lost a presidential bid to the Democrat, Grover Cleveland. Four years later, he returned as secretary of state and performed conspicuously in cooperation with his prize pupil, the new Republican president, Benjamin Harrison.

Crapol wrote his book for the purpose of providing readers "with a better understanding of James G. Blaine's pivotal role in shaping nineteenth-century American foreign relations" and explaining "some of the underlying reasons why the United States acquired an overseas empire at the turn of the century." Crapol depicts Blaine as "one of the chief proponents of America's national destiny and greatness" and "the most important late nineteenth-century architect of American empire." Crapol credits him with designing the "blueprints" for the "empire builders" who followed, notably his protégés, William McKinley, John Hay, and Elihu Root. (xiv).

Blaine grew up as a child of privilege in West Brownsville, Pennsylvania, where he acquired a taste for history, literature, and politics at an early age. As a young adult, he moved to Kennebec, Maine, where he became a journalist before entering local politics. Blaine early on affirmed an internationalist outlook, focused especially on Latin America and Europe. As his heroes, he embraced John Quincy Adams, William H. Seward, and Henry Clay whose idea of an "American system" inspired his advocacy of an activist government, a protective tariff, and various internal improvements including the construction of railroads.

As "an enterprising capitalist and partisan politician," Blaine "saw nothing inconsistent or shameful in combining public service with an ongoing quest for financial gain." As a consequence, charges of corruption sometimes dogged him, but he always denied them. As an imaginative visionary and "a true believer" in the prevailing "culture of progress" at the time, Blaine championed "economic growth, technological advancement, and market expansion at home and abroad." When the Civil War broke out, he supported Lincoln and the Union cause but, as wealthy men then could do, he hired a substitute to take his place in the fighting, while he pursued a seat in the House of Representatives (19).

In foreign affairs, Crapol describes Blaine as "an informal empire man." After the civil war, he assumed that his reunited nation "would soon establish global economic hegemony" to provide "the backbone" for the larger project (21). To achieve it, the United States would have to experience "boundless economic growth and material progress based upon unrivaled agricultural and manufacturing production." Advocacy

of commercial expansion into Latin America and Anglophobic opposition to the main competitor became principal issues for him (22, 25).

David Healy's "nuts and bolts" approach, while incorporating many of these same themes, begins with a defense of tradition in diplomatic history. In the introduction, Healy states that in recent times "diplomatic historians seem less and less interested in the history of diplomacy" while emphasizing other topics concerned with "non-state factors such as corporations, missionaries, cultural and intellectual influences, and the emergence of a global economy." Though willing to engage this "multiform development" as a source of "fresh and useful insights," he reminds his readers, "However broad the conceptual spectrum, at some point it is necessary to study the formal relations between sovereign states" (1).

In this work, Healy poses two fundamental questions: "Was Blaine one of those policy makers who made a difference? If so, just what difference did he make?" To find out, Healy looks "at Blaine's diplomacy in some detail; to examine what he actually *did*." He also inquires into "who and what he *was*" and "how [his identity] affected his approach to foreign relations" (3). Much as Crapol, Healy characterizes Blaine as "Brilliant and imaginative" but also "inexperienced in diplomacy, impulsive, hasty and overambitious when he first took over the State Department" He wanted his country to function as "the arbiter of Western Hemisphere affairs" and as "the equal" of the great European powers, especially Great Britain, hitherto "the dominant economic and diplomatic force in Latin America" (3).

During his first stint at State, various "errors and fiascos" diminished his efforts, especially clumsy involvements in a boundary dispute between Mexico and Guatemala and his support for Peru against Chile during the War of the Pacific. His plans for a Pan-American conference also failed when Garfield's death made Arthur the president, leading to Blaine's resignation, and his successor, Frederick T. Freylinghuysen, cancelled the invitations (3). Blaine returned to State in 1889 with increased experience and maturity, ironically just in time to host the First International American Conference beginning on 2 October 1889. This festivity, summoned by members of the U.S. Congress over President Cleveland's opposition, attracted delegates from sixteen Latin American countries. Blaine welcomed them effusively during the opening proceedings in which he stated his main purposes, the creation of a customs union to expand trade and an arbitration system to settle disputes. His guests then embarked on a six-week railroad tour through the industrial heartland to observe U.S. wealth and power. The return to Washington initiated the diplomatic deliberations, resulting in frustration for Blaine, since he obtained none of his major objectives, mainly because of mistrust and opposition from Chile and Argentina.

Nevertheless, his various Pan-American initiatives held significance for the future and inaugurated the modern age in U.S.–Latin American relations. Among other things, Blaine called for trade expansion through reciprocity agreements, a trans-isthmian canal, and the establishment of naval bases around the Caribbean. Healy gives him high marks during his second term. Wiser and more cautious, he tried “to awaken the nation to its potential great-power status and to show it a vision of America’s future role in the world” (250). In Healy’s view, James G. Blaine stood as “a transitional figure marking the end of one era in foreign policy and foreshadowing the onset of the next” (253).

In a very different kind of book, William Schell Jr.’s *Integral Outsiders* presents a wonderfully evocative sense of time and place. It begins with a revisionist claim. “The American colony in Mexico was immensely important to the regime of Porfirio Díaz . . . yet little is known of it.” When on occasion history books do refer to it, they typically invoke “the Porfirian black legend that, at its most extreme, presents the Age of Díaz as a criminal conspiracy by weak, greedy Mexican elites and powerful, greedy foreign capitalists who amassed wealth by looting the country, impoverishing the masses, and creating economic underdevelopment.” As Schell explains, this negative, one-sided depiction first appeared in the anti-Díaz conservative Catholic press and then branched out among critics of all persuasions. According to this view, Mexico lamentably had become “Mother to Foreigners, Stepmother to Mexicans” (ix).

Schell presents a subtle, nuanced understanding. Following the lead of his mentor, Gilbert M. Joseph, Schell notes that contemporary scholars “have taken a fresh look at the historical landscape.” “Without dismissing the realities of collaboration and exploitation, they offer a more balanced approach that presents Mexico City’s American colony as a ‘contact zone.’” This, as Joseph describes it, is a place where “forms of power [are] multiple and complex; simultaneously arranged through nation-states and more informal relationships; via business and communications networks and culture industries; through scientific foundations and philanthropic agencies; via imported technologies; and constructions of nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality” (ix–x). Schell ably explores the ramifications by employing the techniques of the “new” cultural history, while moving beyond the traditional focus on formal state relations and considering “close encounters of empire” involving complex people-to-people relationships within many contexts.<sup>1</sup>

1. Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. Legrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.–Latin American Relations* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

To aid his readers, Schell provides an “explicit model” as a guide in what he calls “so spongy an enterprise as the reconstruction of a contact zone.” The following quotation sets forth the main issues and concerns in the author’s own words:

The American colony was a latter-day “trade diaspora” of expatriate cross-cultural brokers (integral outsiders) whose give-and-take relationship with their Mexican hosts was at once intimate and distant and whose relationship with Díaz was integral to a system of “tributary capitalism” that provided the necessary resources for Díaz to stabilize *camarilla* politics through semiconstitutional *rotativismo* (rotation of elites in office) with himself at the center. The Porfiriato was a stable form of chaos, self-replicating at all social and geographic levels. It was random (individuals make choices) and regular (individuals make choices in a cultural context), and, as with all chaotic systems, its stability might yield to turbulence under the right conditions (choices make a difference) (x).

Schell explains further: “Historically, the two salient aspects of Mexico’s economy were the degree of dependence on foreigners and its degree of politicization. From antiquity, trade diasporas were the basis of long-distance commerce between their homeland and their adopted land through partnership and extended kinship.” In addition, “Like all trade diasporas, the American colony was dependent on the local ruler (Díaz) to protect it from excessive elite tribute taking. In this environment of corporatism, political personalism, and reciprocity, political rationality superseded economic rationality to comprise a distinct tradition.” As it worked in practice, the system “produces clientalist networks of amity, family and interest (that is, *camarillas*) around notables (caudillos, caciques, jefes) who are able to arbitrate disputes or grant favors.” As a result, “a natural geometry of interlocking personal relationships, articulated as random, regular, endlessly self-similar forms [move] from the national level to regions, from regions to state, from state to municipality, from municipality to locality (x–xi).

Whew! In language less daunting and more accessible in the remainder of the book, Schell explicates the implications with dexterity, insight, and wit while presenting an engaging and convincing analysis. His discussion of how the various political, economic, social, and cultural parts came together in forming a larger, functioning whole verges on the brilliant. Some of the vignettes are hilarious, for example, the failed efforts of one enterprising American to profit from traditional blood sports while pitting savage lions against Mexican fighting bulls. In an appalling, bloody fiasco, the lions lost. In a chapter entitled “Life Sketches of the American Colony,” Schell provides revealing details about the members as their numbers grew from a few hundred in 1886 to ten thousand in 1910. He also shows how the expatriates interacted



with Mexicans at various levels, how they viewed one another, and how they established prerogatives of place and privilege.

Schell rejects the depiction of Mexicans as exploited dupes, an idea sometimes associated with dependency theory, and bestows upon them some measure of "agency." For example, he spurns John Coatsworth's claim that "the Porfirian regime could not . . . control the process [of modernization] over which it presided; it simply lacked the political and economic resources to do so. Mexico's was ultimately a modernization from without, not from above." To the contrary Schell insists, "modernization came from without, within, above, and among." Mexico "was not a hapless victim of American expansion. Rather, Porfirian planners encouraged *yanqui* investment as a calculated program of 'defensive modernization' (the strategic adoption/adaptation of foreign technology and/or capital designed to make the best of Mexico's geopolitical situation," so concisely captured by Díaz in his famous but possibly apocryphal statement about Mexico, "So far from God, so close to the United States" (xii). This challenging work takes on value by extracting many levels of meaning from the diverse relationships making up this particular "contact zone."

The remaining three books by Cyrus Veese, Darlene Rivas, and John Mason Hart consider the activities of non-governmental organizations in Latin America, viewed as integral parts within the larger context of state-on-state connections. Cyrus Veese's *A World Safe for Capitalism* began as a doctoral dissertation at Columbia University under the direction of Eric Foner and incorporates an array of primary sources from archives in the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Dominican Republic. It also presents an intriguing investigation into the process by which the United States emerged as a Great Power and why the leaders opted for the creation of protectorates instead of colonies.

In January 1905, U.S. officials took over the administration of the customs houses in the Dominican Republic, the source of nearly all revenue-generating activity in this island nation. Henceforth 45 percent of the income would defray the cost of current governmental expenses, while the remainder covered payments on foreign debts owed mainly to Americans and Europeans. As President Theodore Roosevelt explained in his famous Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, such practices followed logically from the United States obligation to intervene elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere when "wrongdoing or impotence" threatened "civilized society" (4). The author approvingly quotes Emily Rosenberg's claim in *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* that the Dominican intervention "represented an attempt by policy-makers to find an alternative to colonialism that would still institute the supervision they deemed necessary for fiscal and social reform" (2).

Veeseer describes his book as a kind of “prehistory of Dollar Diplomacy.” As such, “it goes beyond the scope of traditional diplomatic history.” By examining developments in New York, Washington, Santo Domingo, Brussels, and London, Veeseer integrates “into the same field of vision . . . processes that are usually examined separately.” His account also “introduces a multinational cast of public and private actors—State Department officials, Caribbean rulers, Democratic party leaders, bankers, economists, international lawyers, sugar planters, naval officers, and European bondholders” resulting in this “single narrative” in which he “traces the interplay of government action and private initiative” and presents “a more complete picture of the genesis of Dollar Diplomacy than we have had in the past” (6).

Veeseer’s account focuses on the activities of the San Domingo Improvement Company (SDIC). This corporation based in New York City took over the foreign debt of the Dominican Republic in 1893. Even though it subsequently played “a key role” in the American administration of Dominican finances,” as Veeseer notes, “Neither contemporaries nor historians have since paid much attention” to the story of how “SDIC aligned itself with Washington’s strategic goals in the Caribbean” and worked in harmony with top U.S. officials. The company’s president, Smith M. Weed, “a prominent New York Democrat and close friend of Grover Cleveland,” founded the company in 1892 and later operated with support from Harrison and Blaine (3).

From 1893 to 1899, Weed’s corporation controlled Dominican finances in close cooperation with the Dominican president, Ulises Heureaux, who performed his role much in the fashion of Porfirio Díaz, that is, with some measure of agency. He too wanted to use gringo resources to advance his own modernization plans for his country. But they went disastrously awry. As Veeseer explains:

The company tried, and failed, to move the country’s peasant farmers toward cash-crop-export agriculture. The SDIC had great success in financial markets, borrowing some \$30 million by selling Dominican bonds in Europe. But those loans and the printing of paper money pushed the republic toward financial ruin, turning Dominicans against Heureaux and his ally, the Improvement Company. When a group of assassins at last ended Heureaux’s life in July 1899, the SDIC became a full-fledged pariah, universally reviled by the Dominican people. (3)

In contrast, the company retained the good faith of officials in Washington, where the government under Roosevelt became “a forceful champion of the company’s rights” in support of its financial claims against the Dominican government. When the new Dominican president refused to pay the debts, Roosevelt sent warships for their “moral effect” and withheld diplomatic recognition. In 1904, “The fusion of SDIC’s private interests and Washington Caribbean policy became

complete . . . when President Roosevelt appointed American officials to collect Dominican customs exclusively on behalf of the Improvement Company" (4).

Veeseer contends that "the disastrous results of the Improvement Company's private control over Dominican finances had pushed Roosevelt toward a new and higher order of interventionist logic," an outcome made manifest in the Roosevelt Corollary (4). Veeseer also insists that the Dominican customs receivership marked "a turning point" in the evolution of U.S. foreign policy when Roosevelt abandoned the "uncertainty" and "improvisation" so characteristic of the early 1890s and moved toward "the self-conscious, executive-driven, interventionist strategies of the early twentieth century." Henceforth, when Latin American nations got in trouble, the U.S. government pressured them "to accept U.S. supervision of their finances in exchange for fresh loans from U.S. banks—the essence of new Dollar Diplomacy" (5).

Veeseer also depicts the SDIC's relationship with Washington policymakers as "a unique window" through which to view the connections between business interests and the government. Unlike scholars such as Richard Collin who deny "the influence of business on policy makers," Veeseer argues that "In fact, throughout its history, the SDIC depended on cooperation between 'aristocrats' of the executive branch and the 'sleazy' entrepreneurs who controlled Dominican finances" (5). In this well-researched and tightly reasoned monograph, the author reopens one of the oldest debates in the historiography of U.S. foreign relations.

Darlene Rivas' contribution takes form in *Missionary Capitalist: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela*, a work initiated as a dissertation directed by Thomas A. Schwartz. This fine first monograph sets forth findings derived from the holdings of the Roosevelt and Truman libraries, the National Archives, the Rockefeller Archive Center, and various repositories in Venezuela, making this work an exemplar of the multiarchival approach. Rivas knows exactly what she is doing when she frames her book conceptually and historiographically "at the heart of recent scholarship on U.S.–Latin American relations" (5). In other words, she too moves beyond the traditional emphasis on state-on-state relationships emphasizing economic and security concerns. Her approach centers on cultural interactions, confers agency on Venezuelans, and directs attention on the activities of nongovernmental organizations in the areas of business and philanthropy.

Rivas presents this book as "a companion volume to Elizabeth A. Cobb's *Rich Neighbor Policy: Rockefeller and Kaiser in Brazil* and endorses Henry Kissinger's depiction of her subject as "quintessentially American in his boundless energy, his pragmatic genius, and his unquenchable optimism" (2). Rockefeller's efforts to influence U.S. relations with

Latin America developed “in both a public and private capacity.” As she explains, “He experimented with business and philanthropic endeavors in Venezuela, in Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America. He also served in appointed positions in the Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower administrations” (3). His maneuvers “between the public and private spheres” often overlapped and focused “his energies” on questions of economic development.

While promoting modernization through the application “progressive” capitalism, Rockefeller hoped to employ both state-sponsored and private initiatives in pursuing his goals. He regarded self-interest, including profit, as compatible with public interest and emphasized the advancement of “capitalism with social objectives.” As Rivas explains, this book challenges the view that Latin Americans became “pawns in the hands of powerful U.S. interests,” “that Americans inevitably sought power and profit at the expense of other nations,” and that Nelson Rockefeller functioned as “an avaricious capitalist” and a “reactive cold warrior blinded by anticommunism.” Instead, she acknowledges the complex and contradictory nature of Rockefeller’s character—he was “idealistic, ambitious, rash, far-sighted, concerned, callous, empathetic, and detached”—but insists that his efforts to perform as a “missionary capitalist” reflected “a broader U.S. interest in reforming capitalist behavior and nurturing worker welfare at home and abroad,” an undertaking “born of the depression and nurtured by the early cold war.” It also anticipated other undertakings such as the Point Four Program, the Peace Corps, and the Alliance for Progress. In addition to presenting an engaging and sympathetic depiction of Nelson Rockefeller’s activities, this book also provides an effective overview of U.S. policy toward Latin America from the late 1930s to the early 1950s (3–5).

Last but assuredly not least, John Mason Hart’s *Empire and Revolution* exemplifies the best tendencies in recent scholarship.<sup>2</sup> This magisterial volume represents a lifetime of labor in academe and contributes significantly to the literature. Hart’s main theme concerns the impact of economic influences shaping modern Mexico, especially the activities of enterprising American investors and entrepreneurs. For Americans, the quest for informal empire produced diverse reactions among Mexicans while forming in the larger context an ongoing process of give and take. For Hart, the unfolding of American purposes south of the border has displayed a remarkable consistency, emphasizing always the acquisition of wealth and power. For Mexicans, in contrast, adaptations have featured various responses, sometimes accommodating and sometimes not.

2. For a more thorough analysis, see my review essay “‘Pobre Mexico’ and the Americans,” *Diplomatic History* 27 (Nov. 2003): 703–06.

In this sweeping, sprawling, insightful book, Hart shows with an abundance of specificity, depth, and detail how U.S. corporate interests acquired so much influence over their southern neighbor. He begins by recalling William Appleman Williams's description of Latin America as a laboratory for U.S. foreign relations, that is, a place where U.S. elites could experiment with various techniques of informal empire for expanding their power and influence. In Hart's view, Mexico became a prototype where Americans tried out such devices as "partnerships with local elites, cooperative arrangements among multinationals . . . interventions . . . [and] outright invasions" (5). As he shows, subsequent applications elsewhere form important parts in the early history of globalization.

While conceived within a distinctive neo-Marxist framework, this account is fair, balanced, and convincing. Hart accepts some claims associated with dependency theory but not others. His work makes clear the exploitative costs born disproportionately by workers and peasants but rejects claims that streams of influence ran only one way from the hegemon to the periphery. For Hart, Mexicans never functioned as mere lackeys of the imperialists. Indeed, they spurned passivity in favor of activist roles and thereby retained some measure of agency, in spite of disparities of wealth and power. He bases this claim on evidence in primary sources derived from more than fifty archives in Mexico and the United States. This material enabled him to construct an untraditional narrative focused not so much on politics and diplomacy as on economics and culture while highlighting "the hidden but history-making interactions between Americans and Mexicans" (3–4).

In this account, the story consists of four parts. In the first, "The Rise of American Influence, 1865–1876," Hart examines the origins and early development of the United States in Mexico during the era of the Civil War. In the second and third, "The Díaz Regime, 1876–1910," and "The Years of Revolution, 1910–1940," the real heart of the book, the author shows how Mexico opened up to the expansion of U.S. influence during the Porfiriato and how nationalists, reformers, and revolutionaries waged internecine war for nearly a decade before attempting to reconstruct their country on a more equitable basis once they consolidated power. In the fourth, "The Reencounter, 1940–2000," Hart examines long-term tendencies involving nationalism, Mexico's ongoing dependency on the United States for investment capitalism, and the process of globalization after the Second World War.

For Hart, the causes and consequences of the Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, constitute a central part of the story. Indeed, he explains it as the product of an immense failure. Without much regard for equity or fairness, Díaz's policies enriched a small oligarchy of Mexicans allied with foreigners but never enabled the majority of people to

gain much wealth or power. As he contends, “The revolutionary challenge . . . began as a call for a more participatory government and agrarian reform, but it quickly developed into a broad-based cultural, political, and nationalist rejection of the elites in the nation’s capital, the great estate owners, and the foreign capitalists—for the most part, Americans” (271). For Americans, in contrast, the Mexican Revolution marked “the first major political challenge to American hegemony in Latin America” and introduced a host of unacceptable possibilities, such as the nationalization of mineral resources and the expropriation of private property (303). Henceforth, containing the Mexican Revolution became a top priority for U.S. foreign policy.

The vibrancy displayed by the books under discussion in this essay suggests many reasons for scholars in the field to take heart. Diplomatic history, no longer merely “the story of what one clerk said to another clerk,” has adapted to new approaches and methodologies and has moved well beyond the traditional forms. Cultural interactions, Latin American agency, and the activities of nongovernmental organizations all figure as prominent parts making up the many dimensions of inter-American relations. At the very least, no historian claiming credibility can any longer discuss the subject while leaving out the Latin Americans. The stream of influence and interaction flows both ways.

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