

Peperstraete makes use of the situation of two colonial authors drawing from one source to examine how their differing backgrounds and agendas influenced their re-presentation of the *Crónica X* materials. In spite of limited data, she provides surprisingly good perspective on the lives and motivations of Durán and Tezozomoc. While Tezozomoc remained closer to the *Crónica X* in many ways, he wrote for Spaniards to glorify his ancestors and their empire. He minimizes elements that would have offended non-Christians, while affirming his own Christianity. With these objectives, he interferes with and changes the structure of the original to a lesser degree than Durán, who incorporates the indigenous history into a more formal Western historiographic tradition, connecting it to Western origin myths in the Bible, tracing the rise of a great indigenous empire with all its glories and problems, until its fall as an act of divine retribution.

These two books represent a promising trend in Mesoamerican studies and historiography. Major basic sources are getting long overdue critical examination, without an excessively heavy or ideologically driven hand and without premature advocacy for alternative “correct” histories. They make it clear that we have not come so far as we have thought, but that we will be able to go forward with more reliable results. I only hope and recommend that authors such as these, building on the monumental work of Charles Dibble and Marc Thouvenot, will turn their attention to the great but still poorly understood Nahua history—the *Códice Xolotl* and its dependent sources.

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## NATION BUILDING & NATIONALISM

*The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo.* By Lauren Derby. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. Pp. xv, 412. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$94.95 cloth; \$25.95 paper.

Until recently, novelists, not historians, have written the most insightful, not to mention riveting, portraits of dictatorship. Many of the giants of Latin American literature—Miguel Angel Asturias, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Agustín Roa Bastos, just to name a few—have been seduced by the allure of the strongman. Why has it been so problematic for historians to discern what makes authoritarian regimes tick? By definition dictatorships foster closed, often asphyxiating societies; the climate of fear and surveillance obscures more than it reveals. This may help explain why when historians do write about strongmen, they are drawn to the tyranny; no doubt it is easier to count the bodies than plumb how fear and consent worked hand in glove to keep dictators in power.

That is changing. Lauren Derby has written a fascinating cultural history of the brutal, three-decade-long Trujillo regime, illustrating the complex and complicit relationship between the dictator and the Dominican pueblo. Drawing on the literature from symbolic anthropology and cultural studies, Derby transports her readers to Trujillo's theater

state, a “murky quotidian terrain where people lived in a space of ambivalence and complicity of passive action in the subjunctive mood” (p. ix). For the most part, the focus is on city dwellers, especially those who lived in the capital then named Ciudad Trujillo. As such, this monograph is a valuable complement to Richard Turits’ excellent *Foundations of Despotism* (2003), which explained how the populist generalissimo forged a base of support in the countryside.

Although Derby never shies away from the regime’s more sanguinary methods, the emphasis is on subtler methods employed to cultivate a culture of compliance. She is, for instance, drawn to the spiritual realm, arguing that everyday Dominicans believed that the dictator tapped occult powers that made it possible for him to defeat his rivals and to exercise seemingly omniscient control over his subjects. The dictator and his inner circle cunningly utilized secrecy, rumors, leaks, denunciations and praise-speech, and when these methods were coupled with selective, seemingly arbitrary repression, they only heightened the pervasive specter of fear.

Derby also maps how Trujillo took bread and circuses to theater of the absurd lengths, accruing symbolic capital by adding a profusion of civic holidays (over 100 new holidays were added to the already hefty dose of religious holy days), and staging extravagant, carnivalesque beauty pageants, parades and processions. The *pièce de résistance* was a multi-million-dollar boondoggle of a world’s fair in 1955. Such an exquisitely managed house of mirrors served to burnish his populist credentials and stoke nationalism, Derby contends, while playing on the racial and class fantasies of the popular classes.

Trujillo also turned Dominicans into voyeurs by flaunting his *machista* conquests of young daughters and wives of the *gente de primera*. In this way, he bullied his way into the ranks of the upper class, all the while accumulating status and currying favor with his base. Womanizing, as Derby relates, even became a popular, if scandalous, regime export during the Trujillato, when a handpicked debonair surrogate, Porfirio Rubirosa, was a fixture in international gossip columns for bedding such Hollywood and jet set starlets as Zsa Zsa Gabor and Betty Hutton. Trujillo and Rubirosa shared plebeian, mulatto roots. They played up their *tiguere*, or trickster, traits to socially and politically claw their way to the top. Manliness was accentuated, Derby argues, because the dictator, lacking even the most rudimentary oratorical skills, was far from charismatic. Instead, Trujillo cultivated the image of a powerful, tireless man of action, most notably in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake in 1932 that leveled the capital, when he cast himself as a whirling dervish who personally attended to the poor and the dispossessed in their hour of need.

As Derby brilliantly illustrates in her conclusions, the linchpin of Trujillismo was gift giving. The dictator showered the poor with televisions, pianos, “Hollywood beds,” cash, food, and even invited some to partake in banquets in the National Palace. And when he was not bestowing gifts, he and his associates were parceling out white-collar sinecures in his political party. The gifts may have been a form of “symbolic citizenship,” but as Derby assures us, it was all a ploy, making it possible for the dictator and his associates to amass enormous wealth through kickbacks and the tithing of public salaries. Such magnanimity was humiliating to those on the receiving end, because Dominicans had no hope of

repaying such largesse. Ultimately, such asymmetrical patronage meant that the debt had to be repaid by obsequious compliance.

This overview does not do justice to such a rich, nuanced and rewarding study. If I had a grumble (or two), it is that the book's thematic organization provides a rather static portrait of the regime. Some readers also may wish for less theorizing and more empirical evidence, especially in the tantalizing chapter on denunciations and praise-speech. Finally, Derby chides historians for fetishizing the strongman at the expense of analyzing the inner workings of the dictatorship, but she is, quite understandably, drawn to her fascinating protagonist and devotes much less attention to his advisors, his political party, and the media (entities that gave new meaning to the word slavish). As Derby shows so compellingly, it always came back to Trujillo and his subjects.

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ALLEN WELLS

*The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela.* By Miguel Tinker Salas. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi, 324. Map. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$84.95 cloth; \$23.95 paper.

Miguel Tinker Salas's book on the social and cultural impact of the oil industry in Venezuela from the late 1910s into the 1970s, with a brief but insightful discussion of more recent events, is a welcome addition to Venezuelan historiography. It will find a receptive audience not only among Venezuelanists, but also among scholars of foreign investment in Latin America. The first half of the book surveys the early development of oil in Venezuela, including the interplay between the industry and the environment, migration from various regions of Venezuela and the Caribbean to the oil fields, the oil companies' decision to encourage American and European workers to bring their families to the oil zones, and the eventual shift towards hiring more Venezuelans into skilled and professional positions. During their first few decades in the country, the companies followed a policy of "enlightened industrialism" (p. 88) in which they provided utilities and services to communities where they operated, in part to compensate for the disruption caused by their operations.

Tinker Salas argues that the oil camps became "social laboratories" (p. 242), implanting new models of work, social life, consumerism, and citizenship. For example, company commissaries introduced products, brands, and patterns of supermarket-style shopping that became hallmarks of a middle class lifestyle, while foreign managers sought to inculcate company values of corporate loyalty, internalized work discipline, and "appropriate" use of leisure time. Although only a fragment of the Venezuelan labor force found employment in the oil sector, the centrality of oil resulted in the projection of these innovations more broadly throughout the nation, if only as ideals to which all Venezuelans might aspire.

Perhaps most important was the new concept of citizenship that the companies sought to propagate. According to Tinker Salas, Creole Petroleum (owned by Standard Oil of New Jersey) and Shell, motivated in part by the Mexican oil nationalization of 1938,