

With few notable exceptions, neither Peru nor France was particularly well served by the Gallic accounts of Peru.

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*Peru*. By VICTOR ALBA. Boulder, 1977. Westview Press. Notes. Pp. vii, 245. Cloth. \$15.00.

The number of general books published on Peru during the past decade—more than a half dozen by my count—calls to mind the early days of capitalist development in Latin America around the turn of the century. Rummaging around libraries in Rio, Buenos Aires, or Lima (the place is really unimportant) one invariably finds a spot reserved for the numerous country surveys written by those intrepid foreign businessmen who were crisscrossing Latin America then, much like their early sixteenth or nineteenth-century counterparts. They were anxious to alert their associates and the general public back in Toledo or Pittsburgh of the virtually unknown yet seemingly limitless capitalist potentialities of these “remote and exotic lands.” So they trumpeted their discoveries with considerable hyperbole in the accounts that they sent home—accounts which, however rudimentary, also served to introduce the reader to the peoples, politics, history, and economies of the region.

Times may have changed but the genre persists, with scholars and diplomats having replaced the businessman who now rarely ventures forth into the world of letters. Victor Alba, the labor historian with a long list of books to his credit, is the latest entry into this field as far as Peru is concerned. While not a Peruvianist, and this shows in the rather meager state of his bibliography, Alba understands the basic dynamics of Andean history and polity, at least at the level of generality to which this slim volume is reduced. Intelligent, at times simplistic and yet readable, the book, like its predecessors which it so closely resembles in format and structure, seeks to introduce and enlighten the general public and more specifically university students to the “peoples and places” of modern Peru. For the scholar, however, it is not a particularly useful book and certainly does not rival the more serious surveys of Astiz, Bourricaud, Dobyns and Doughty, Pike, or David Werlich, to name the most recent.

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