

Robalino Dávila and Pedro Fermín Cevallos, are now dated and ignore important aspects of the story.

Van Aken's is therefore a welcome addition to the historical literature. Well written, highly readable, and very informative, it shows that there still is ample room for political biography and is destined to have a positive impact on historiography, especially after the Banco Central del Ecuador publishes the Spanish-language edition, now in preparation.

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#### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

*El Conde de Aranda y los Estados Unidos*. By JOAQUÍN OLTRA AND MARÍA ÁNGELES PÉREZ SAMPER. Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1987. Notes. Bibliography. Pp. 254. Paper.

Pedro Abarca de Bolea, the Conde de Aranda y Floridablanca y Castilflorado (1719–98), provided much of the early enlightenment of Carlos III's reign. A Mason, a follower of Voltaire, and, in Condorcet's words, a "destroyer of the Jesuits" in Spain, his secularism and reason in an era of councilor-style government by a small group of unusually talented advisors remained paramount throughout his life.

Aranda's influence on Spanish colonial policy, according to this new study of his work, was particularly important. His diplomatic initiatives, largely developed while he served as Spanish ambassador to France in the 1770s, were grounded in the Anglo-Hispanic colonial struggle that had raged during the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century. While at first simply seeking advantage over Spain's old Atlantic rival, Aranda was soon caught up in the philosophic importance of the emergence of the United States. Aware that his own society differed markedly, he nevertheless found it difficult to break this philosophic spell, although he was aware of the consequences for Spanish possessions in the New World.

The real value of this book lies in its presentation of Aranda's evaluation of North Americans like Benjamin Franklin and John Jay who were responsible for the U.S. diplomatic campaign that neutralized British power in Europe. In general, *El conde de Aranda y los Estados Unidos* is a literate and philosophical study of the most important Spanish ally of North American independence. It furthers our understanding of the eighteenth-century elite that governed Spain, and provides an international context for some of their values. It does not go far enough,

unfortunately, in discussing Aranda's domestic opponents, who feared the impact of his policies on Spain's American colonies.

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*France and Panama: The Unknown Years, 1894–1908.* By JAMES M. SKINNER. New York: Peter Lang, 1989. Illustrations. Notes. Appendixes. Maps. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 310. Cloth. \$40.90.

Skinner's purpose here is to illuminate a little-known period in the history of the French attempt to construct a canal through Panama. Historians have heretofore focused most of their attention on the 1870s and '80s, when Ferdinand de Lesseps and the Universal Interoceanic Canal Company struggled valiantly, but without success, to complete a sea-level waterway. Skinner concentrates instead on the efforts of the New Panama Canal Company, formed in 1894 to pick up the pieces.

This book makes two major points. First, the very existence of a second Panama Canal Company influenced the U.S. decision to choose Panama rather than Nicaragua as a canal route. Second, the much-maligned officials of the New Panama Canal Company actually comported themselves quite well. With extremely limited resources and bargaining leverage, they managed to turn a major national disaster into a limited victory. Stockholders received a 3 percent yearly return on their investment.

Because of the large number of participants in the events of these decades, it is somewhat difficult to determine the precise weight that should be given to the activities of the New Panama Canal Company per se. Certainly, Philippe Bunau-Varilla played a major role in the machinations which eventually led to Panama's independence and construction of a canal. Be this as it may, Skinner marshals an impressive amount of evidence from French, U.S., and Panamanian archival sources to suggest that a nuanced account of these events must examine company actions themselves.

A profitable reading of Skinner's book will require some familiarity with French politics during the period of the Third Republic. It is a useful companion to the existing works of scholars such as Gustavo Anguizola, Charles Ameringer, and David McCullough. Most importantly, Skinner redresses the tendency of previous scholarship to wedge the efforts of the New Company "insignificantly between the colossal tragedy of the Compagnie Universelle and the solid inevitability of the American enterprise" (p. 2).

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