

tenance of a civilian façade in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala a condition for the ongoing provision of military aid—aid that served to underwrite the dominance of antidemocratic forces. Ultimately, though, the Reagan roughriders learned what more seasoned conservatives had long recognized: that a civilian leader unwilling or unable to act on a popular mandate is a better hedge against social change than is an unbuffered military dictatorship. Perhaps it is time the United States quit trying to export democracy and started thinking about importing some.

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Magical Reels: A History of the Cinema in Latin America. By JOHN KING. New York: Verso, 1990. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. x, 266 pp. Paper. \$15.95.

This comprehensive account intends to reveal and do justice to an artistic odyssey that has been unjustly relegated to a minor chapter in the history of cinema. In spite of their peripheral status and because they have had to fight the wealthier, better-equipped and market-preponderant American and European industry, Latin American filmmakers have had to resort to new images and keen imagination. Creativity was therefore instigated rather than undermined, in the best cases, despite local indigence of means and lack of support.

This is nonetheless a very complex story, fraught with successes and failures, risks, heroics, and betrayals. Cinema in Latin America is much more a wish and an obsession, dealing with crucial questions of identity and self-emancipation, than a truly established part of the cultural environment. Hence the apt title of the book.

By its scope this book offers the most complete analysis of the subject published in English, filling an enduring gap. John King divides his study according to chronological and geographical criteria. The three introductory chapters consider the historical development of the film industry and aesthetic trends from the beginning up to the 1950s and 1960s, mainly in its oldest markets, Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil. The rest of the book is dedicated to specific analysis of individual countries or related groups of nations, up to the beginning of the 1990s.

The author seeks to trace the filmmakers' unrelenting effort to create an original filmic language, fit to convey typical Latin American predicaments and existential dilemmas to huge populations seduced by cinema (in Hollywood versions, though). The state might sometimes help through subsidies and protectionism, but more commonly it is a constant threat through censorship and repression. This is the survival story of a rare, endangered species.

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