

especially in Argentina and Chile, that would parallel what they believed was being accomplished in the United States' own trans-Mississippi West. These advocates of development insisted that railroad expansion, especially a transcontinental line from Santiago to Buenos Aires, would open up the drier lands of the interior to agricultural settlers and community organizers.

It didn't happen that way, so a "new West" of boosters, traders, tourists, and immigrants never appeared south of Capricorn. The critical reason that southern South America did not develop in the same manner as western North America is explained primarily in the book's longest chapter, which details the "failure of the railroads in the Southern Cone" (pp. 32–111). Argentina depended on European financing and adopted a British model of railroad development that guaranteed higher returns to investors than the riskier approach taken in the United States. Rather than rapidly laying rails into undeveloped lands to stimulate settlement and economic growth, the British system involved slower and more costly construction expanding into regions that already had become economically viable. For this reason, by 1914 Argentina's network of railroads had not grown much beyond the established settlements of the humid pampa. For the most part, Argentina's railroad companies did not try to attract immigrants or to encourage small-scale land ownership. If the railroads received land grants from the government—and only six did—they sold the land in large blocks to speculators instead of in small allotments to settlers. As for a transcontinental line, an ineffective route opened in 1910; but crossing the Andes did not remove the greatest barrier to an integrated railway system—the political boundary between Chile and Argentina.

Much like the British system for railways, Fifer has constructed her book carefully and safely. She has taken the U.S. advocates of western-style expansion on their own terms, with their own view of western history, which they misapplied to Argentina and Chile. Her book does not incorporate the scholarly assessments of the U.S. West, which increasingly have recognized the social, political, and environmental cost of western expansion. For this reason, hers is not a comparative history. Nonetheless, it is a solid study that will allow many readers to consider differing models of economic development in a historical context.

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Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective. Edited by CHARLES BERGQUIST, RICARDO PEÑARANDA, and GONZALO SÁNCHEZ. Wilmington: SR Books, 1991. Charts. Glossary. Notes. Index. xiv, 352 pp. Cloth, \$45.00. Paper, \$14.95.

This interdisciplinary collection of essays takes as its axis the violence that has permeated Colombian society during the past 150 years. Three opening chapters by North American scholars explore the political and social history of Colombia

from independence to World War II. Major revisionist work by Colombians on the classical period of “la violencia” between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s follows. The balance of the book includes rich offerings from the body of empirical research and interpretation, again mostly by Colombians, on guerrilla conflicts, drug wars, and right-wing paramilitary activity in the last two decades. As a response to the violence, the volume seeks, in the words of editor Ricardo Peñaranda, to “constitute a body of analysis and a platform for democratic action” (p. 293).

The book questions the traditional, largely monochromatic explanations of Colombian violence, such as distorted modernization, cultural legacy, failed agrarian revolution, and “weak state” theories. Instead, as Charles Bergquist explains in his opening essay, the articles draw attention to the confluence of social conflicts, primarily in the countryside, and political culture and institutions. Several essays focus on the perennial struggle over land. Catherine LeGrand portrays the conflicts between landowner-merchant elites and smallholders throughout the Andean massif well into this century, and Alfredo Molano describes the “armed colonization” on the Amazonian plain and other more recent frontier zones. At the same time, the book sets in relief the crucial role of Colombia’s exclusionary political system in giving impetus and shape to the country’s endemic violence throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. David Bushnell sets the stage with his discussion of partisan divisions among the elites in the postindependence period. In the book’s third section, the contributors indicate how the elites’ use of the National Front to contain lower-class claims after 1958 contributed to Colombia’s eventually finding itself where it is now, in what philosopher Luis Alberto Restrepo calls “the eye of the hurricane” (p. 275).

Rarely does an edited volume provide a new historical synthesis, and this is no exception. This book does, however, represent a prospectus for the rewriting of Colombian social and political history since independence. The essays demonstrate that the upper classes have been continuously reconstituted since the beginning of the republic, through a complex intertwining of political and economic entrepreneurship. The emergent coffee elite described in Carlos Miguel Ortíz Sarmiento’s study of the Quindío during the 1950s and 1960s prefigures the drug cartels two decades later. In a somewhat different vein, Medófilo Medina compares the place of violence in shifting capital accumulation strategies and elite economic development programs in the 1940s and 1980s.

This collection also engenders a more complex approach to the study of lower-class politics than has usually prevailed in Colombian historical writing. Several essays focus on individual and collective agency among subaltern groups within discrete regional contexts, and place renewed emphasis on the role of ideology in this conflict-ridden society. Bergquist restates his highly original narrative of the relatively successful claims making by smallholders against the state and landlords, which led to the upheavals of the late 1940s and 1950s. In a pathbreaking essay, Colombia’s preeminent social historian, Gonzalo Sánchez, suggests the manner by

which country folk forged a discourse of resistance at the height of the midcentury violence. The provocative contributions of Eduardo Pizarro and Alfredo Molano also take up these issues as they explore contemporary revolutionary agrarianism in newly colonized zones.

Finally, this book places on the scholarly agenda comparisons of Colombia with other regions in the Americas and elsewhere. French political scientist Daniel Pecaut notes, for example, that the coexistence of an enduring parliamentary regime and permanent civil war presents an intriguing contrast with the turn to authoritarianism in the Southern Cone during the 1960s and 1970s. Such an approach could challenge the inordinate parochialism of so much Colombian historiography, and could also cast new light on such diverse phenomena as the Mexican Revolution, the more recent Central American insurgencies, and the multiple histories of this continent of frontiers.

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