

The ABC Presidents: Conversations and Correspondence with the Presidents of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. By ROBERT J. ALEXANDER. Westport: Praeger, 1992. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 321 pp. Cloth. \$45.00.

Trained as an economist but having practiced as a historian, Robert Alexander is a biographer of Juan Domingo Perón, Jorge Alessandri, and, most recently, Juscelino Kubitschek. Alexander kept his interview notes and correspondence with 20 presidents from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile from 1946 to 1989. This book is an unedited collection of these letters and research notes on the ABC countries and their history during the fascinating era that witnessed the birth, apogee, and decline of populism.

The book covers an impressive array of topics, ranging from the origin of the Alliance for Progress (with Kubitschek of Brazil) to the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King (with Arturo Frondizi of Argentina) to Salvador Allende and the Chilean military (with Eduardo Frei). Throughout the book, Alexander allows his interview subjects to speak their minds, even at the risk of inviting them to tell “untruths.”

Perón comes across as a bumbling ex-pol, solely interested in telling Alexander a post facto history of such items as the financing of the Eva de Perón Foundation and the sequence of his rise to power. Arturo Illia sheds light on the Unión Cívica Radical’s difficult period in the 1960s and its subsequent self-destructive fragmentation. Frondizi confesses that he had no qualms about the social and economic dimensions of Peronism but did oppose the caudillo’s political tactics. Frondizi’s views on the conspiracy theory in the RFK assassination make fascinating reading, revealing the Latin cultural nuance in the belief that no event of historical significance can happen by chance.

Some of the presidents turn out to be bad historians or inept analysts of the events they helped create. João Café Filho of Brazil insists that the Getulio Vargas suicide letter was not genuine (João Goulart claimed that it was; he held the second “original copy”) and that there was no conspiracy to keep Kubitschek from taking office. Kubitschek, for his part, argues that the United States indeed wanted to keep Brazil from developing, but contradicts himself by asserting that he and John Foster Dulles created the Inter-American Development Bank as an alternative to charity and a Marshall Plan for Latin America, and that his ideas guided John F. Kennedy to establish the Alliance for Progress, all measures for Latin American and Brazilian development.

Some of the presidents’ views on history are banal or based on slight foundations. González Vidal of Chile is certain that Salvador Allende committed suicide and was not murdered by the military, as his followers believe; and that if Allende had not been overthrown in late 1973, the Chilean Communists had a plan to take over the country at that very moment, so the Chilean military acted in time. Ignoring the tremendous human cost, González Vidal prefers the Chilean

military dictatorship to the Brazilian version. Eduardo Frei comments that both Communists and socialists were dishonest and corrupt as officials of the Allende government, but the former turned over bribe money to the party while the latter kept it for their own personal use.

The book could have been richer had Alexander added personal editorial notes. In too many places, he lets the presidents speak “untruths” and even fabricate history. Those familiar with Latin American history will not be duped by this, and may even enjoy the vignettes. But for a book of this magnitude, Alexander could have shared his personal insights and experience from five decades as a distinguished student of Latin American politics and economy. In spite of this weakness, however, the book makes fascinating reading and will be an invaluable source for historical research.

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Flucht vor Nürnberg? Deutsche und österreichische Einwanderung in Argentinien, 1945–1955. By HOLGER M. MEDING. Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1992. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. ix, 311 pp. Cloth.

After 1945, the vast majority of European war criminals—Germans and their allies and collaborators—escaped accountability, much less punishment. The how and why of this phenomenon have remained a puzzle for many years. For a long time it was customary in the United States to identify Argentina as the principal bolt-hole of the twentieth century’s most detestable fugitives. In the past decade or so, however, a more nuanced understanding has emerged. Argentina has hardly been exculpated, but it is now evident that complicity and culpability were widely shared by the United States, Great Britain and its dominions (Australia and Canada; South Africa has yet to be heard from), France (the foreign legion had its uses), other European and Latin American nations, and organs of the Roman Catholic church. No accounting from the former Soviet bloc is yet in sight.

Holger Meding’s remarkable book, the expansion of a 1991 doctoral dissertation at the University of Cologne, is a major contribution to recent historiography. Using secondary sources, Meding describes Allied planning and execution of a comprehensive policy toward a conquered Germany; then, shifting his focus to Argentina, he describes the German collectivity on the Plata and its involvement in the machinations of the 1930s and 1940s. The final chapter of the opening section concerns Peronismo, Perón’s plans for postwar immigration (linked, of course, to his industrialization program), and his personal stance toward Germans and Germany.

The remainder of the book draws heavily on personal interviews Meding conducted in Argentina with postwar German immigrants and the Argentines and German-Argentines who helped to bring them there. The author obtained access