

ness,” just 17 days after murdering 15 opposition leaders, shot “attempting to escape.” One does not have to travel to Rwanda, Somalia, or Bosnia to discover atrocities and “ethnic cleansing”; Bouterse’s campaigns against the “Jungle Commando” (bush negro) uprising in 1986–87 were savage and underreported. Given this flawed record, democracy was “restored” in 1987, but the military (sans Bouterse?) returned for a second try in 1990.

Permeating Suriname’s political turmoil has been its economic condition. Suriname was once relatively well off; today it is dirt poor. Dew tries to explain why, guided by the concern that for Suriname’s own good “the more unfortunate and unpleasant experiences” in its history must “not be distorted or forgotten.” This is an honest book, and the author brings into account “ethnic politics,” a “rogue military,” “outside brokers,” and “corrupt elites.” As it demonstrates, the “trouble” in Suriname continues.

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*Los comerciantes de Caracas. Cien años de acción y testimonio de la Cámara de Comercio de Caracas.* By MARÍA ELENA GONZÁLEZ DELUCA. Caracas: Cámara de Comercio, 1994. Notes. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. 848 pp. Cloth.

The author of this volume is one of a small but active group currently revising the traditional Venezuelan historiographical vision of the role of business. She has been particularly interested in the relationship between business and politics, as shown in her excellent analysis, *Negocios y política en tiempos de Guzmán Blanco* (1991). Although her new book is an anniversary publication of the oldest business association in Venezuela, the author was given a free hand; this is as much a study of the commercial history of the last one hundred years as of the Caracas Chamber of Commerce (CCC). More to the point, it is a study of how the country’s most influential group of businessmen has reacted to changes in the Venezuelan economy, its insertion into international commerce, and the political arena in which these changes have taken place.

The study is divided into five sections, which denote major transitions in circumstances. In its early years, the CCC was more of a club than a business association. Located in the capital, its members included the leading import-export houses, the banks, and the few industrial enterprises of those years. Their economic power meant that much of their activity on behalf of business in all parts of Venezuela was accomplished through personal contacts rather than formal group actions; and that arrangement continued, despite increased organizational activity, until World War II.

The most interesting sections of the book are the two chapters detailing the CCC’s reaction to the slippage of traditional exports, such as coffee, cacao, beef, and hides, in the 1920s and the rise of petroleum exports—which were not in its hands—in the 1930s. The state’s growing power as a result of the petroleum revenues, ac-

centuated by the worldwide economic crisis and the eventual restrictions of the war, temporarily revitalized the CCC. Members not only had to adjust to a new economic world; they had to confront, for the first time since the 1840s, criticism from a relatively free society, criticism that reached its peak during the 1945–48 democratic “revolution.” During the ten-year dictatorship that followed, their collective sigh of relief in these pages is almost audible, even though their role as exporters almost disappeared and that as importers was slowly undermined by increasing protection for nascent industries.

The last two chapters present a history of the changes brought about by the country’s return to democratic politics and the challenge of the entrepreneurial state. By this time, very few of the CCC’s leading members were simple merchants; most had diversified their interests. This created an identity problem for the CCC as these interests came into conflict. But as the petroleum boom of the 1970s turned into the lost decade of the 1980s and a generational change in leadership took place, the CCC began to find its role as the leading voice for what has come to be known as economic neoliberalism: privatization of state-owned businesses, the lifting of price and exchange controls, free (or freer) trade, and less state intervention in employer-employee relationships.

Based primarily on the remarkably comprehensive economic and commercial information in the CCC’s *Boletín* (published irregularly from 1894 to 1901 and monthly between 1919 and 1979), this study also had open access to archival material, such as minutes of meetings and the yearly assembly, reports, and correspondence. The book would have benefited from conscientious editing (it is increasingly repetitious toward the end and suffers at times from erratic punctuation). The index is not particularly useful. Not done by the author, it seems to have been computer generated. It fails to capture concepts, and it incessantly lists by author and title every citation in the text, the footnotes, and the bibliography.

Despite these minor faults, the book is a veritable marvel of information, analysis, and subtle criticism. It should be part of any collection with an interest in Latin America or business history.

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*Legitimación del poder y lucha política en Venezuela, 1936–1941.* By OSCAR BATTAGLINI. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1993. Bibliography. 176 pp. Paper.

This book is the first account of the year 1936, when Venezuela allegedly entered the twentieth century. Its point of departure is what the author calls the Movimiento Popular (MP), the street protests and other mobilizations of nonprivileged sectors. Oscar Battaglini attempts to refute the view prevalent in much recent literature that President Eleazar López Contreras adroitly safeguarded the nation’s fledgling