

The Sparrow and the Hawk: Costa Rica and the United States during the Rise of José Figueres. By KYLE LONGLEY. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. viii, 239 pp. Paper, \$29.95.

Kyle Longley has written a fine, compact study of United States–Costa Rican relations during the period 1942–57. These fifteen years are significant because they mark the activism of José Figueres, one of Costa Rica’s most dynamic political leaders, in conflict with U.S. policy in the early Cold War period. Figueres promoted vast economic change in his small nation at a time when the United States wanted no distractions in Latin America so that it might devote its energies to the challenge of the Soviet Union in Europe and Asia. How Figueres got away with it is the subject of this well-researched volume.

Longley deals with the nuances of power, demonstrating how the sparrow pursued its interests without provoking the hawk. Figueres was a skillful politician. He clearly was a social democrat, believing that the government ought to own banks, insurance companies, railroads, utility companies, telephone service, granaries, oil pipelines, etc., serving the public and providing social security, health care, education, and housing. He achieved these ends during his presidencies (as junta head in 1948 and 1949, and as elected chief executive from 1953 to 1958), much to the displeasure of the United States. But he did not expropriate the lands of the foreign-owned banana companies, as Guatemala was then doing, and he kept labor unions in check, outlawed the Communist party, and firmly supported U.S. policy in the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

Longley points out that Figueres was very familiar with U.S. culture, having lived in Boston and New York for four years as a young man. Moreover, he banked heavily on Costa Rica’s reputation as a model democracy in Latin America. Even when Caribbean dictators denounced him as a communist and sponsored an “exile” invasion of Costa Rica in 1955, the United States came to his rescue, seizing upon the opportunity to atone for its action in Guatemala the preceding year. Figueres portrayed himself as a New Deal Democrat, and he acquired many admirers among U.S. academics, activists, journalists, and politicians who viewed him as an ideal option to both military dictatorship and communism.

Longley explains Figueres’s success in thoughtful detail. Critics described Figueres as a lackey of the United States, particularly following revelations in the mid-1960s of his collaboration with the Central Intelligence Agency. But the question still arises, Who was influencing whom? The title of Longley’s final chapter, “Oftentimes the Tail Wags the Dog,” suggests a possible answer to the question.

CHARLES D. AMERINGER, Penn State University