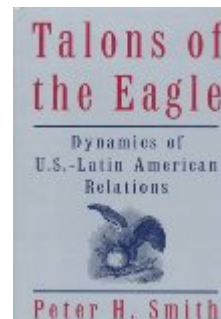


Peter H. Smith. *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S.: Latin American Relations.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. xii + 377 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-508303-3.



Reviewed by William Schell

Published on H-LatAm (September, 1996)

Contents Introduction: International Systems and U.S.-Latin American Relations I: The Imperial Era 1. The European Game 2. The Gospel of Democracy 3. Mr Roosevelt's Neighborhood 4. Latin America: Responses to Imperialism II: The Cold War 5. Closing Ranks 6. Making Friends 7. Crushing Enemies 8. Latin America: Fighting the Cold War III. Age of Uncertainty 9. Hegemony by Default 10. The New Economic Agenda 11. Illicit Flows and Military Force 12. Latin America: In Quest of Alternatives Conclusion: Structure and Change in U.S.-Latin American Relations

"Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre"

I have used Peter Smith's text *Modern Latin America* (1984; 4th ed., 1996)(with Thomas Skidmore) because of its information-packed readability and its well-argued quintessential *dependista* interpretation, which gives the students a view to contrast to my own. I have also used Smith's edited collection *Drug Policy in the Americas* (1992) and like it very much. But I cannot say that of *Talons of the Eagle*. Because I am critical of this work, I have taken several paragraphs to summarize it without comment. My comments follow.

"All mimsy were the borogroves" International Systems (Regimes)

Smith's study "concentrate[s] on the structural relationship between the United States and Latin America" focusing on three related questions: "What has been the stance of the US toward Latin America? What has been the response of Latin American countries? And what have been the variations in response? What have been the consequent forms of interaction?" (pp. 4-5).

His theoretical perspective is taken from Stephen Krasner who, in his "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," posits the existence of international systems (termed "regimes") defined by "tacit codes of behavior ... [in which] the logical content of norms and principles ... depends upon a variety of factors: the number of major powers, the nature of resources available to them, and the scope of competition" (p. 5). And, though nations and their leaders may "behave in reasonable ways" (that is, in consonance with the regime norms), ultimately reality is a "social construction" and so

"rationality tends to be bounded by ideology" (p. 8).

Three systems/regimes "have guided the management of inter-American relations," according to Smith. The first, from the 1790s to the 1930s, was imperialism, defined by the "logic of balance-of-power competition and multi-national competition" for land and resources that "determined the rules of international engagement." The second, from the late 1940s to the 1980s, was the bipolar Cold War regime wherein the Third World (or Less Developed Nations), including Latin America, were the arena of super power competition. The third is the current post-Cold War regime characterized by unipolar U.S. military dominance and a multipolar world economy of declining U.S. power, except in Latin America, where the United States has acquired "hegemony by default" (pp. 6-7).

"The jaws that bite, the claws that catch" The Imperial Regime

Beginning in Thomas Jefferson's administration, the United States played Europe's imperial "game" to exclude European influence from the Americas by "pocketbook diplomacy" (the purchase of Louisiana), by supporting Spanish American independence, and by promulgating the Monroe Doctrine, characterized by Smith as "a full-fledged" claim to hemispheric hegemony (p. 20). Simultaneously the United States pursued its continental Manifest Destiny through annexation (Florida in 1813) and war (Texas and northern Mexico in 1848).

In the late nineteenth century, "intense soul-searching," motivated in large part by a racist reluctance to incorporate within its borders peoples other than Anglo-Saxons, shifted U.S. policy from the acquisition of territory to the creation of an informal commercial empire. In 1896, the British acquiesced to U.S. claims of a *de facto* sphere of influence in the Venezuelan crisis, setting the stage for the Spanish-American War, the seizure of Panama, and Marine-backed Dollar Diplomacy.

But Smith cautions that "the mere proclamation of US hegemony" did not make it so and that "ultimately it was a chain of events and processes in the global arena ... that led to the eventual fulfillment of America's hegemonic pretensions" (p. 39).

Consistently, the United States attempted to legitimate its imperialism by preaching the Gospel of Democracy in order "to redefine the substance of the conflict, to seize control of the agenda, to capture the terms of debate, and to shape the outcome of the struggle." Democratic rhetoric "was aimed at three main audiences": 1) the domestic homefront, to assure Americans that Dollar Diplomacy had a higher and more noble purpose than mere profit; 2) the European powers, as a warning and an ideological challenge; and 3) the "subjugated societies" of Latin America, to encourage "voluntary acquiescence" in the "march toward a higher truth" (pp. 40-41). The failure of Latin American nations to achieve democracy (by U.S. standards) provided an excuse for repeated military interventions "from the 1830 to the 1930s ... not [one of which] led to the installation of democracy in Latin America." In fact, "it could be argued ... that US military interventions tended to retard the prospects for political democracy" (pp. 62-63). Seen in this context, writes Smith, Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy was not "a departure from past practices but the culmination [and consolidation] of trends in US policy [that] ... reflected a hardheaded ... *realpolitik* that promoted and protected the long-standing US quest for hegemony throughout the hemisphere" (pp. 65-66). FDR tolerated dictators, those legacies of previous Washington interventions (He may be a son-of-a-bitch, but he's our son-of-a-bitch), promoted bilateral trade reciprocity as the most effective way to maintain hegemony (Dollar Diplomacy minus the Marines), and, as World War II got under way, provided direct developmental assistance through the Export-Import Bank to offset Axis influence (for example, Brazil's Volta Redonda steel mill). FDR recognized the importance of cultural exchange and created the Office of Coor-

dinator of Inter-American Affairs headed by Nelson Rockefeller, initiating a brief period associated in popular memory by Hollywood classics such as Walt Disney's animated Pan-American goodwill ambassador, the "dapper" Brazilian parrot Jose Carioca, paired with a "bewildered" (but bewitched) Donald Duck in *Saludos Amigos* (pp. 83-84). North America's wartime infatuation with its southern neighbors did not survive the return of peace.

Smith describes four categories of Latin American response to the imperialist regime: 1) Latin American union to create a "continental counterweight to the US" (the Bolivarian Dream; 2) closer ties with Europe (pax Britannica, Hispanidad, and Francophilia); 3) the establishment of subregional hegemony (by Brazil or Argentina); and 4) to "fashion doctrines of international" behavior to restrain the United States (the Calvo/Drago Doctrine). All were tried, all failed, but in failure, Latin America evolved "cultures of resistance" predicated on a "series of interlocking assumptions. ... To be nationalist was to be anti-imperialist. To be anti-imperialist ... was to become ... anti-yanqui. Paradoxically, however, nationalism also implied [Latin American] solidarity [as] ... victims of a common enemy" (p. 105). Ultimately, Smith writes, the rise of U.S. power left Latin Americans with three practical choices: to embrace, tolerate, or resist U.S. hegemony--most frequently the latter.

"He took his vorpal sword in hand" The Cold War Regime

Super power diplomacy, the bipolar world, George Kennan, Containment, multilateral alliance systems, conflict conducted through clients on the periphery as wars of liberation and counter-insurgency--you fill in the blanks. With the Cold War, the Good Neighbor died a quick death. Smith takes as its epitaph Philip Jessup's observation: "... the post-war situation will be a great challenge to [America's] intelligent self-restraint" (p. 87). Too great a challenge--the capstone

of the Good Neighbor era, the Organization of American States, founded in 1948 on a doctrine of nonintervention, was, by 1950, transformed into a variation of Cold War multilateral alliance that permitted its members collectively "to intervene within the affairs of a member state" (p. 126). The general fear of European intervention, the *raison d'etre* of the Monroe Doctrine, was superseded by the specific fear of Communist aggression and influence.

Personalistic Latin American politics quickly became ideological, as dictators and caudillos wrapped themselves in the cloak of anti-communism to be accepted by a Washington now more concerned with containing the Reds than promoting democracy. This conflicted pragmatism is crystallized in John F. Kennedy's assessment of the situation of the Dominican Republic in 1961: "There are three possibilities in descending order of preference: a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the Trujillo regime, or a Castro regime. We ought to aim at the first but we cannot renounce the second until we are sure we can avoid the third (p. 142). Military aid to repressive authoritarian regimes proceeded apace with Dwight Eisenhower's creation of the Inter-American Development Bank and the Social Progress Trust Fund and with JFK's initiation of the Alliance for Progress to eliminate the economic misery that had always been the basis of Latin America's social revolutions. All was Containment. The theoretical underpinning of the Alliance for Progress, Walt Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth*, was subtitled *An Anti-Communist Manifesto*. The gospel of modernization replaced the gospel of democracy, but the practice of Washington's Latin American policies was remarkably consistent with that of the previous "imperial regime" (1790s-1930s)--diplomatic and economic pressure (carrot and stick), covert action, and direct military intervention.

Under the Cold War regime, Latin America had three options: 1) to defy the United States by

taking the Socialist path either by elections or armed insurgency; 2) to seek U.S. support "on the basis of anti-communist solidarity; or 3) to pursue nonalignment "to secure economic, political, and cultural independence" of both East and West. Of Latin American nations taking the first option--Cuba, Nicaragua, and Chile--only Cuba was successful. Even those following the second course could not be certain of unconditional support. But all could and did tap into the economic model of the third option. Raul Prebisch's work as head of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (Sp. CEPAL) gave rise to the most influential economic paradigm of the Cold War period--dependency theory. The nations of the periphery agreed on little or nothing in the political realm, but all recognized their economic reality in Prebisch's description. This is the real meaning of what Smith calls "Third World solidarity," which, he says, "expanded, preserved, and maximized political room for maneuver" (p. 214).

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?" The Age of Uncertainty

The post-Cold War period was a return to multipolarity, but with the United States the remaining military super power and with "no clear code for international behavior" (p. 232). Smith suggests that this is a double-edged sword for Latin America. While "the retreat of the Soviet Union reduced the incentives for the US to meddle in Latin American affairs, ... it also lowered the anticipated costs of intervention" (p. 227). The high politics of the anti-Communist crusade gave way to the low politics of trade, environmental protection, immigration, and other "uninspiring issues" (p. 233). This opened the door to participation by private interests and nongovernment organizations and ended the government-bureaucratic domination of hemispheric relations. Smith also points out that the relative percentage of U.S. trade and investment in Latin America declined in relative terms even as hemispheric economic integration increased (for example, NAFTA and

FTAA), at a time when Latin America's stake in the U.S. political economy was growing (pp. 227, 257-62). This "growing asymmetry gave Washington great potential leverage" at the same time as "dramatic increases in immigration gave Latin America more relative importance to the US in social and cultural realms" (p. 229).

Smith sees Latin American options narrowing in the post-Cold War period. Without "extra hemispheric patrons" (for example, the Soviet bloc), the "fact of US power [cannot be] avoided or evaded"; international law and multilateral organizations are impotent with the demise of the tacit rules of the Cold War game; "revolution is out of the question" (p. 324). In brief, the only game in town is neo-liberal "free trade"--with whom: the United States? Europe? Japan?--the only policy option. Or perhaps, Smith offers hopefully, "resuscitating dreams of subregional unification, as Brazil attempted to do through MERCOSUR and SAFTA," which might lead to a "revitaliation of the Bolivarian dream" and Latin America's escape from U.S. "tutelage" so that its nations can stand together on their own (pp. 324, 336).

"Shun the frumious Bandersnatch" My Comments

If Smith's interpretation is right in general, it seems to me it is often wrong in particular. While some events are repeatedly invoked to make the same point, others vital to understanding the dynamics of U.S.-Latin American relations are omitted entirely. I will deal briefly with one set of omissions and conceptual blind spots. We are informed several times of the consequences for Mexico of war with the United States (1846-48): dismemberment, the imposition of European monarchs, and deep psychic scars (pp. 22-24, 62, 106-7). But we are not informed of the recovery of Mexican confidence after the expulsion of the invaders, or of Benito Juarez (other than as the subject of a Hollywood bio-pic, p. 84), or of the Porfirian regime, the cornerstone of U.S.-Latin American relations.

The range of dynamic interaction between the United States and what Smith might call collaborationist regimes is as broad as between the United States and regimes of resistance. Porfirian Mexico was not a hapless victim of the American eagle but the initiator of a program of defensive modernization using U.S. capital, which evolved, after the French intervention, from *puro* liberal schemes to seek outright annexation. (For his second edition, Smith might consult Thomas Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion* [1979] and *The Mexican Lobby: Matias Romero in Washington* [1986] and Donathan C. Olliff, *Reforma Mexico and the United States: A Search for Alternatives to Annexation, 1854-1861* [1981]). By 1910, 50 percent of all U.S. foreign investment was in Mexico, but American capitalists were, at best, unreliable tools of U.S. hegemony. Dollar Diplomacy, by its very nature, granted considerable autonomy to Washington's formal and informal representatives. Diplomatic officials were the functionaries of an expatriate American business establishment intimately tied to public and private Mexican interests. Washington's informal imperialist/hegemonic program could proceed only as far as those local collaborators allowed, and the Diaz regime proved adept at using "its" yanquis to promote Porfirian interests in Washington.

Not only is the Porfiriato overlooked, but Smith barely mentions the other major nineteenth-century collaborator regime, republican Brazil, saying only that, as Rio Branco added 115,000 square miles to the national domain, "[i]t seemed only fitting that, as expansionist powers, Brazil and the US should give support to one another" (pp. 100-101). If expansionism alone was the basis for cooperation, then the United States and Chile should have fallen into each others' arms after the War of the Pacific; they did not. Brazil and Porfirian Mexico were the subject of a diplomatic initiative by Teddy Roosevelt and Secretary of State Elihu Root (who amazingly receives not even a passing reference from Smith) through D. E. Thompson (ambassador to Brazil

until 1906, when he was posted to Mexico) to offer those nations the role of US surrogate enforcers for the Monroe Doctrine -- Brazil in the Southern Cone, and Mexico in Central America. Brazil welcomed the opportunity because it had a large, unassimilated German population in its rebellion-prone southern provinces, feared the Kaiser's ambitions, and worried that the United States would not enforce effectively so far south. Mexico, with very different geopolitical relations (so far from God, so close to the United States), refused the role, instead proposing the Diaz Doctrine to create an OAS-like structure to restrain Washington's ability to act unilaterally in the hemisphere--far more worrisome than the Drago doctrine, which the United States and Europe regarded as foolish and half-baked from its inception. By 1909, the Diaz regime's oblique but persistent opposition to Washington's Central American policies had earned the Taft administration's enmity, the effects of which historians of the revolution have yet to address adequately.

Thus Smith's post-Cold War "cultures of accommodation" are not without historical precedent as he suggests (pp. 316-19). These nineteenth-century collaborationist regimes speak directly to questions that Smith raises about the current Age of Uncertainty which, he notes, resembles the imperial era in many ways (p. 334). Salinas' NAFTA-linked reforms created a neo-Porfiriato, plunging Mexico into a crisis of legitimacy and giving rise to the most widespread revolutionary discontent since 1910. Smith gives the EZLN short shrift, perhaps because his model disallows revolution as a political option in Latin America (see Table 5, p. 331). Smith could not be more wrong about this. With the end of the Cold War, revolution, deeply embedded within Latin American political tradition, is more viable than ever, because charges of communism are less efficacious in discrediting such movements. In other words, the Age of Uncertainty has re-legitimated revolution.

"Whiffing through the tulgey wood" Odds and Ends

The periodization is not convincing. There is a gap between 1932 and 1949 that is not included in a "regime." Is this one of those critical transitions to which Smith refers? If so, should this be treated separately as an intermediate period comparable to the Age of Uncertainty (which cannot be considered a regime by Smith's definition, because the rules of its game are as yet undetermined)?

Smith makes no effort to link his discussions of Rostow's modernization theory (pp. 144-46) and Prebisch's dependency theory (pp. 205-6), although they are really two sides of the same coin. But because the latter is "Latin American," it is neatly compartmentalized as a response/resistance to the "hegemony" of the former.

Smith is less than forthcoming when he notes that JFK approved the Bay of Pigs operation in 1961 even before Castro declared his revolution to be Socialist and admitted his own Marxism (p. 194). He fails to inform his readers (presumably students) of Castro's expropriation of U.S.-owned petroleum refineries for refusing to process Soviet crude obtained as part of a sugar purchase deal struck with Anatas Mikoyan in 1960. Cuba's oil for sugar deal was well within its rights as a sovereign nation. To give the full context would dovetail neatly with what Smith writes about other U.S. interventions. Why then does Smith disingenuously suggest by omission that there was no provocation for the U.S. action?

Smith's analysis can be nuanced and subtle but it can also degenerate into contradiction and confusion. Smith writes that NAFTA's environmental side agreements had "no teeth" (p. 259), but, on the very next page, states that the environmental issue "had one clear consequence: it provided the US with a new kind of opportunity to impose its will upon Latin America" (Smith here transforms Mexico into the whole).

In another instance, in discussing power and policy in the Age of Uncertainty, Smith writes that "while the nation-state remained preeminent as a unit of organization, it no longer exercised a near-monopoly over international transactions" (p. 232). But, except for the high politics of the Cold War, the great majority of "international transactions" were those of multinational corporations, which historically had been the shapers of deep politics, particularly with respect to Latin America. Would William Howard Taft have been so ambiguous toward Madero's organization of a revolution on U.S. soil if Standard Oil had not soured on the Diaz regime? Would Eisenhower have interrupted his golf game to worry about Arbenz's moderate reforms in Guatemala if United Fruit Company minions John Foster and Allen Dulles had not headed the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, respectively? Ike drew attention to what he felt was the most dangerous aspect of this manipulation of the state by business in his farewell address warning of the military-industrial complex.

Finally, the book is not well footnoted; dozens of block quotations lack citation, while rather innocuous information is footnoted without rhyme or reason. Smith's enthusiasm for the Bolivarian Dream unfortunately affects his index, which is awful and impairs its usefulness as a classroom text. There are no national entries—"Brazil," "Mexico," "USA" are not listed, but "Washington" is; "Mexican-American War" and "French Intervention" are missing, but there is an entry for "War of the Pacific."

I believe Smith's introduction and conclusion would make a very nice opening essay to an edited collection, but I cannot recommend the book, which combines redundancy with significant omissions and, too often, substitutes demonization for dispassionate analysis.

Copyright (c) 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the au-

thor and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-latam>

Citation: William Schell. Review of Smith, Peter H. *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S.: Latin American Relations*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. September, 1996.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=577>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.