

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL AMERICAN STUDIES:

A Review of Trends and Prospects

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JUAN FERMIN DE AYCINENA, CENTRAL AMERICAN COLONIAL ENTREPRENEUR, 1729–1796. By Richmond F. Brown. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. Pp. 298. \$34.95 cloth.)

ORIGINS OF LIBERAL DICTATORSHIP IN CENTRAL AMERICA: GUATEMALA, 1865–1873. By Wayne M. Clegern. (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1994. Pp. 166. \$24.95 cloth.)

A PLACE IN THE RAIN FOREST: SETTLING THE COSTA RICAN FRONTIER. By Darryl Cole-Christensen. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. Pp. 243. \$35.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)

TRADE, INDUSTRIALIZATION, AND INTEGRATION IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CENTRAL AMERICA. Edited by Irma T. de Alonso. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994. Pp. 291. \$59.95 cloth.)

REINTERPRETING THE BANANA REPUBLIC: REGION AND STATE IN HONDURAS, 1870–1972. By Dario A. Euraque. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. Pp. 242. \$39.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)

CENTRAL AMERICA, 1821–1871: LIBERALISM BEFORE LIBERAL REFORM. By Lowell Gudmundson and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995. Pp. 156. \$19.95 cloth.)

PANAMANIAN MILITARISM: A HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION. By Carlos Guevara Mann. (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1996. Pp. 221. \$23.00 paper.)

THE BANANA MEN: AMERICAN MERCENARIES AND ENTREPRENEURS IN CENTRAL AMERICA, 1880–1930. By Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schoonover. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995. Pp. 219. \$29.95 cloth.)

The field of Central American studies, despite the death squads, Contras, and revolutionary movements that rocked the region in the 1980s, has developed rapidly in the last twenty years. In fact, the international scandals helped to stimulate or intensify academic studies of the crisis at universities and academic centers around the world. Concerned about the

immediate conflict but not engaged exclusively with it, scholars quietly sought a deeper understanding of the crisis and its long-term implications simply because they realized that Central America, the most underdeveloped region in Latin American studies, needed academic study in virtually every discipline.

Central Americanists can congratulate themselves on the impressive body of scholarship they have produced in recent years. The field is vibrant and promising. Notwithstanding commendable progress in a number of fields, topical, methodological, and geographical gaps in Central American studies persist. Political and economic analyses of modern Central America continue to dominate the field, while social and cultural studies, particularly those with a long historical sweep, remain relatively underdeveloped.

Guatemalan and Costa Rican studies have developed more rapidly than those on the other countries, partly because the archival material is more abundant and accessible. Monographs by Richard Immerman, Jim Handy, Piero Gleijeses, and this reviewer were made possible by the declassification or release of documents in the United States and Guatemala.¹ David McCreery's brilliant analysis of Guatemalan land tenure, *Rural Guatemala, 1760–1940*, reflected the documentary strength of Guatemala's Archivo General de Centro América, one of the best archives in the region despite innumerable problems for researchers. Robert Trudeau has also demonstrated the existence of rich and accessible sources of information for analyzing contemporary political trends.²

Costa Rica's well-organized archives and libraries, plus a strong school of Costa Rican historians, have been the foundation for impressive scholarly contributions in recent years. Costa Rican and U.S. scholars like Mario Samper Kutschbach, Lowell Gudmundson, and Aviva Chomsky have made substantial and valuable contributions to Costa Rican social and economic history.³ Unfortunately, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador,

1. Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944–1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); Paul Dosal, *Doing Business with the Dictators: A Political History of United Fruit in Guatemala, 1899–1944* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1993); and Dosal, *Power in Transition: The Rise of Guatemala's Industrial Oligarchy, 1871–1994* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995).

2. David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760–1940* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Robert Trudeau, *Guatemalan Politics: The Popular Struggle for Democracy* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1993).

3. Mario Samper Kutschbach, *Generations of Settlers: Rural Households and Markets on the Costa Rican Frontier, 1850–1935* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990); Lowell Gudmundson, *Costa Rica before Coffee: Society and Economy on the Eve of the Export Boom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); and Aviva Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870–1910* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

where researchers are burdened by a lack of documentary sources and poorly organized archives and libraries, have attracted relatively fewer scholars. But a few recent publications (including a book under review in this essay) indicate that progress is being made in those countries as well.⁴

The field of Central American studies continues to be characterized by great diversity in methodology. There are no discernible trends. Central Americanists are not rushing en masse to test, apply, or revise any dominant paradigm or theory. A few scholars have been shaped by postmodernism, some have adopted a regional methodology, and others remained wedded to traditional political and economic approaches. In studies of contemporary affairs, substantial progress has been made in women's studies and ethnic relations, but few scholars have probed these issues in historical perspective.⁵ Central Americanists can take pride in the progress they have made in the last two decades, including the works under review here, but much remains to be done.

Ironically, biographical studies, a traditional approach still popular in the United States, are making a welcome reappearance among Central Americanists. Biographies have been written of Pedro de Alvarado, Francisco Morazán, and Justo Rufino Barrios, but they are outdated in methodology, interpretation, and scholarship. Excluding partial or limited biographies like the political studies of José Figueres, José Napoleon Duarte, and Jorge Ubico, Ralph Lee Woodward's biography of Rafael Carrera is the first full-length biography of any major Central American political figure to appear in the last forty years.⁶

4. Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912–1979* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Weak Foundations: The Economy of El Salvador in the Nineteenth Century, 1821–1898* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

5. Among the recent works on women in modern Central America, see Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994); and *A Dream Compels Us: Voices of Salvadoran Women*, edited by New Americas Press (Boston, Mass.: South End, 1989). On the ethnic dimension, see as examples Philippe Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); and Nancy L. González, *Sojourners of the Caribbean: Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garifuna* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

6. John E. Kelly, *Pedro de Alvarado, Conquistador* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1932); Robert S. Chamberlain, *Francisco Morazán, Champion of Central American Federation* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami, 1950); Paul Burgess, *Justo Rufino Barrios: A Biography* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Dorrance, 1926); Charles Ameringer, *Don Pepe: A Political Biography of José Figueres of Costa Rica* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1978); Kenneth Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo: The Regime of Jorge Ubico, 1931–1944* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979); Stephen Webre, *José Napoleón Duarte and the Christian Democratic Party in Salvadoran Politics, 1960–1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); and Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821–1871* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

Knut Walter made a valuable contribution to the life history of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza in *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza*. But like the works on Figueres, Duarte, and Ubico, it is a general study of politics and government rather than a biography that illuminates the complete personal and professional life of an individual.⁷ Important Central American figures requiring scholarly study include Manuel Estrada Cabrera, Juan José Arévalo, and Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala; Gerardo Barrios, Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, and Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador; Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and Carlos Fonseca Amador of Nicaragua; Marco Aurelio Soto and Tiburcio Carías Andino of Honduras; and Tomás Guardia and Oscar Arias Sánchez of Costa Rica. The list grows even longer when one includes artists, writers, athletes, musicians, and entrepreneurs.

Ralph Lee Woodward and his student Richmond Brown have demonstrated that biography still offers a valuable and potentially rewarding approach to historical studies. Provided that the biographer keeps the subject in proper perspective and steers clear of the “great-man theory” of history, a biography can illustrate the political, social, and economic contours of an era. Like his mentor, Brown uses the life of an individual to illuminate general historical patterns. *Juan Fermín de Aycinena: Central American Colonial Entrepreneur, 1729–1796* is an admirable and much-needed biography of arguably the most influential man in the history of Central America. According to Brown, Central Americanists have focused their studies on the poor and downtrodden, resulting in more knowledge about the powerless than about the powerful. He counters this historiographical paradox in *Juan Fermín de Aycinena*.

The story of Aycinena’s rise to power began with his emigration from the Spanish province of Navarra in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1783 the great wealth and power he had attained was confirmed with the title of Marqués de Aycinena, which made him “the only nobleman in late colonial Central America” (p. 181). The key to his quick rise to power was his marriage to Ana María Carrillo y Gálvez, a coveted bride who came with a large dowry and connections to a powerful family network. The marriage provided Aycinena with the start-up capital for what became an immense family enterprise ranging from indigo plantations to banking and transportation. One of Brown’s significant findings is that Aycinena did not move immediately or enthusiastically into landholding, suggesting that the possession of land was not necessarily the ultimate objective of Central American entrepreneurs (p. 205). The Aycinena enterprise was built on a commercial network that stretched as far as Mexico City, Lima, Havana, and Cádiz. Brown’s biographical study thus dispels several myths about

7. Knut Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza, 1936–1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993).

Hispanic entrepreneurs by showing that the Marqués de Aycinena was as astute and ambitious as his Anglo-Saxon contemporaries in the emerging capitalist world.

Brown's *Juan Fermín de Aycinena* is built on impeccable research. Not content with the colonial documents he could find about the family in Guatemalan and Mexican colonial archives, Brown gained unlimited access to the Aycinena family papers. These consisted of more than two dozen plastic bags filled with correspondence, business records, and inventories from the late eighteenth century. Future researchers should note the value and the limitations of using private family documents. It is difficult to win the confidence of Guatemala's secretive and sensitive families, partly because they might ask researchers to portray the family in a favorable light. Richmond Brown certainly has not sacrificed professional standards, but he had to content himself with an incomplete documentary foundation. For all that the Aycinena family papers revealed about the history of Juan Fermín, they shed little light on the character and personality of the man. Brown relied heavily on three estate inventories to reconstruct Aycinena's entrepreneurial career. Unfortunately, he did not find Aycinena's diaries or a full run of personal correspondence. Without such documents, it is impossible to compose a pure biography that simulates a life as it unfolded. *Juan Fermín de Aycinena* cannot bring the noble entrepreneur back to life, but given the sources, it is likely to stand as the definitive biography of Aycinena.

Brown, like Lowell Gudmundson and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, belongs to a growing "clan of historians" who are revising commonly held beliefs, shattering political myths, and applying new methodologies to historical studies. The field has developed enough that Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes, two of its most successful and influential practitioners, felt the need to synthesize and reevaluate the state of the literature on Central America prior to 1871. *Central America, 1821–1871: Liberalism before Liberal Reform* will not surprise scholars familiar with the historiographical trends of the last two decades, but it provides a succinct historical summary and a framework for further research.

The central premise of Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes's book is that the Liberal reforms of the 1870s were not a dramatic and revolutionary break with a Conservative past but "only formalized a situation long in the making" (p. 1). The half-century prior to the Liberal reforms of the 1870s were more than "a long wait," a dormant period prior to a series of dramatic political, economic, and social changes. In effect, the Conservative regimes were not so conservative, and the Liberal governments that followed them were not so liberal.

Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes recognize that those familiar with the literature on nineteenth-century Central America will not be caught off-guard by their revisionist synthesis. Woodward, McCreery,

Samper Kutschbach, Julio Castellano Cambranes, and others have already downplayed the significance of the Liberal revolutions by identifying the precursors of Liberal reform during the period of Conservative rule.⁸ Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes have also helped construct the revisionist school in their previous works on Costa Rica and El Salvador. Gudmundson is best known for *Costa Rica before Coffee*, a study of Costa Rican social and economic life prior to the Liberal reforms. Lindo-Fuentes established his expertise with *Weak Foundations: The Economy of El Salvador in the Nineteenth Century*, an analysis of Salvadoran economic development.⁹

The revisionist interpretation of Central America before the Liberal reforms has never been asserted so persuasively. The characteristics commonly associated with the long period of Liberal rule—*personalismo*, *continuidad*, monocultural economic dependency, a subservient and compact elite class, and the dispossession of the Indian masses—were already evident during the period before 1871. The continuity between the Conservative and Liberal eras of Central America is so striking that Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes refer to the Liberal reforms of the 1870s as “a revolution that never was” (p. 128).

Validation of their conclusions, however, will require more detailed national and regional studies of Central America before and after the Liberal reforms of the 1870s. The histories of Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador in the mid-nineteenth century have been explored by several scholars. But Honduras and Nicaragua, despite the valiant effort of the late Bradford Burns in *Patriarch and Folk*, still beg for serious historical studies of the early national period.¹⁰ The lack of archival material for these countries will make such a study problematic, if not impossible. For the moment, historians must be satisfied with a revisionist interpretation built on an incomplete foundation. Nevertheless, the available data from Guatemala, Costa Rica, and El Salvador suggest that the revisionist synthesis offered by Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes in *Central America, 1821–1871* will probably become the standard by which all subsequent studies of nineteenth-century Central America are measured.

Without deliberately attempting to test the revisionist view of Guatemalan history, Wayne Clegern sheds light on the subject in *Origins of Liberal Dictatorship in Central America: Guatemala, 1865–1873*, his study of the regime of Vicente Cerna. While Clegern challenges some of the Liberal historical mythology, he also affirms part of the revisionist interpretation offered by Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes. They would not agree with

8. Julio Castellano Cambranes, *Coffee and Peasants: The Origins of the Modern Plantation Economy in Guatemala, 1853–1897* (Stockholm: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1985).

9. Gudmundson, *Costa Rica before Coffee*; and Lindo-Fuentes, *Weak Foundations*.

10. E. Bradford Burns, *Patriarch and Folk: The Emergence of Nicaragua, 1798–1858* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Clegern's assertion that the Liberal revolution of 1871 "signified a real change in political direction for Guatemala and, it may be argued, for the entire isthmian region" (p. xi). At the same time, Clegern argues that the government of Vicente Cerna (1865–1871), traditionally viewed as a pale replica of the Carrera regime it replaced, was actually a transitional regime. Although Cerna tried to maintain the foundations of the Conservative state, he also initiated or at least tolerated reforms in the name of progress, including a railroad to the Atlantic coast (p. 149).

Clegern's seemingly paradoxical conclusions do not directly refute the revisionist school, nor are they meant to do so. Clegern limited his analysis to the decade before the Liberals came to power in Guatemala. Because he focuses primarily on the political history of this period, he loses sight of larger historical trends. Although he views Cerna as a transitional figure, Clegern perceives real and substantial differences between Conservative caudillo Rafael Carrera and the Liberals led by Miguel García Granados. Clegern argues that Liberals as well as Conservatives spoke of the need for progress but disagreed over the means by which they could promote it. He even points out overlapping interests and links between the Conservative and Liberal elites. Nonetheless, the inauguration of García Granados in 1871 represented a fundamental shift in political orientation.

That shift became permanent and more extensive during the regime of Justo Rufino Barrios (1873–1885). According to Clegern, the Barrios regime represented "a truly radical departure for Guatemala" (p. 153). Clegern's traditional interpretations of Barrios and the Liberal "revolution" are not likely to survive the revisionist onslaught. The means by which the revisionists have reconstructed Central American historiography are not employed or considered by Clegern. The *Origins of Liberal Dictatorship* is a traditional political history focusing on events in Guatemala City. The revisionists have built their interpretive edifice on the social and economic life of the Indian masses far beyond the capital city. Their interpretation will stand or fall on the evidence of change and continuity in rural society, not frequent changes in the national palace.

This comment is not meant to discount the need for political histories of Central America. Methods like those employed by Knut Walter in his biographical work on the Somoza regime could be applied profitably to Manuel Estrada Cabrera in Guatemala and Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in El Salvador. It is fortunate that there is no single school of Central American studies. Clegern's political-economic analysis and Brown's biography of Aycinena demonstrate that more traditional interpretations and approaches to history have not been displaced by postmodernist social and cultural approaches, certainly the rage among graduate students today. It is difficult to discern historiographical trends in the literature, a situation that probably demonstrates the health and vitality of the field. Central Americanists are not moving around like laboratory rats, blindly pur-

suings any historical bait, whether postmodernist, revisionist, or traditional. Strands of traditional and revisionist history are evident in the style and substance of recent works on Central America.

One might consider *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880–1930* to be an example of traditional history. Lester Langley and Thomas Schoonover focus on some of “the great men” who ran through and over Central America at the turn of the century. While they write in an engaging narrative style reminiscent of politically insensitive studies like *Conquest of the Tropic* and *Empires in Green and Gold*, the content of Langley and Schoonover’s narrative differs substantially.¹¹

Rather than glorifying “the banana men” for bringing “civilization” to backward countries and “progress” to virgin forests, Langley and Schoonover recount incredible stories within the framework of social imperialism and dependency theory. Adventurers like Lee Christmas, New Orleans police chief and mercenary, and Sam Zemurray, a Jewish immigrant who gained fame as “the Banana Man,” are portrayed as agents of manifest destiny, soldiers of fortune and fame who indirectly helped the United States acquire an informal empire in Central America (p. 167). Thus Langley, the dean of Latin American diplomatic historians, and Schoonover, an accomplished theorist and analyst of social imperialism, present a carefully balanced and politically moderate account that is engaging yet provocative.

Schoonover is largely responsible for the theoretical foundation presented in Chapter 1, “The World of the Banana Men.” Social imperialism, a methodological framework that he employed successfully in *The United States in Central America, 1860–1911*, helps to explain the domestic factors behind U.S. foreign policy.¹² According to this perspective, U.S. officials pursued an aggressive foreign policy to transfer U.S. domestic problems, particularly unemployment and social disorder, to peripheral societies. Dependency theory helps to illuminate the nature of the relationship between the core and the periphery. In applying social imperialism to the periphery, the United States also subordinated the Central American economies to its economic interests. Langley and Schoonover argue, “metropole policies to ameliorate domestic social and economic policies demanded the extraction of wealth from the land, labor, and capital of the periphery and the domination of import and export trade” (p. 10).

After setting up their theoretical scaffolding, Langley and Schoon-

11. Frederick Upham Adams, *Conquest of the Tropics: The Story of the Creative Enterprises Conducted by the United Fruit Company* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1914); and Charles Morrow Wilson, *Empire in Green and Gold: The Story of the American Banana Trade* (1947; reprint, New York: Greenwood, 1968).

12. Thomas Schoonover, *The United States in Central America, 1860–1911: Episodes of Social Imperialism and Imperial Rivalry in the World-System* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).

over narrate the story of the colorful entrepreneurs and mercenaries who “ravished” Central America between 1880 and 1930. Focusing on Nicaragua and Honduras, they tell the fascinating tale of the reprehensible characters who made and unmade governments during the age of the “Banana Republics.” Their account, although often mired in details as confusing as the events they try to elucidate, is commendable for the absence of the moral platitudes and denunciations to which other authors have been inclined. Langley and Schoonover argue that these mercenaries and entrepreneurs did not create the climate of corruption and repression that pervaded Central America in the early twentieth century. Rather, these mercenaries “altered but did not eradicate the familial pattern of Central American political culture” (p. 172).

In trying to capture the spirit of an age and the personalities of those who lived in it, Langley and Schoonover have rendered the historical profession a valuable service. These fifty years in Central America represented a dramatic and exciting period filled with almost fictional characters like “Machine Gun” Molony and Lee Christmas. To their credit, Langley and Schoonover let the characters speak for themselves. No historian could create more evocative prose than that used by the “banana men.” To explain Molony’s reasons for quitting his job in New Orleans to join a revolution in Nicaragua in 1909, Langley and Schoonover simply quote the invitation sent to Molony by his friend and associate “Jew Sam” Dreben: “I’m on the hike to Nicaragua. . . . How about it, kid? Want to come along and sit in?” (p. 121). It was an offer that Machine Gun Molony could not refuse.

Molony, like William Walker before him, was a filibuster, a “soldier of fortune” who fought on behalf of U.S. entrepreneurs. Langley and Schoonover waste no print in their rich narrative with obvious but unnecessary criticisms of Molony’s moral vacuity. They intended to write an accessible descriptive narrative about a band of mercenaries and businessmen who trampled over Central America’s rights at the turn of the century, and they succeeded. Because the authors keep this incredible tale within the broader framework of the U.S. acquisition of an informal empire in the region, their book represents a refreshing blend of traditional narrative history with modern political sensitivity.

In fact, a trend can be discerned in the style of historical writing. Informative analytical studies, once a refreshing improvement on the romantic but unenlightening studies of an earlier period, are giving way to a blend of narrative and analysis. Carefully researched and thought-provoking studies like Piero Gleijeses’s work on the Guatemalan revolution or Jeffrey Gould’s on rural Nicaragua have been written with enough anecdotal material and narrative commentary to add color and character to what are primarily analytical studies.¹³ Students and colleagues certainly appreciate the

13. Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*; and Gould, *To Lead as Equals*.

effort to inject some life back into a profession that was once illuminated by the brilliance of romantic storytellers like Walter Prescott. Langley and Schoonover have demonstrated that it is possible to tell a story and explain its significance in one short monograph. Some scholars might lament the absence of a direct examination of U.S. foreign policy to establish the context for *The Banana Men*, but the product is more palatable and accessible for non-historians, a democratic trend that is at once promising and challenging.

Central Americanists are by no means trendsetters in the field of Latin American studies, but they are certainly not ignorant of general methodological trends. Regional methodological approaches applied so successfully to Brazil and Mexico for over twenty years are finally being used by Central Americanists.¹⁴ With graduate students and assistant professors currently working on regional studies, it is probably too early to assess the utility of the approach. But the new conceptual framework anticipating diversity within and attempting to transcend artificial national boundaries is appealing. Most of the scholarly work on Central America has focused on life in and around the centers of political and economic power, from Antigua in colonial times to Guatemala City, Managua, San Salvador, Tegucigalpa, and San José in the twentieth century. In addition, the countries with relatively well-organized archives and libraries (Guatemala and Costa Rica) have attracted more researchers and developed the most capable historians. The unfortunate result is that the peripheral regions of the Central American periphery, from the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica to the Petén in Guatemala and large areas in between, have been neglected or ignored.

Historical research and writing on El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras (countries small enough to be considered the equivalent of a region in Brazil) have progressed substantially in recent years. While work on these countries has been hampered by the loss of archival materials due to neglect, abuse, or natural disaster, recent monographs by Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Bradford Burns, and Jeffrey Gould have demonstrated that these obstacles can be overcome. Research on modern Central America, including regions on the periphery, is feasible if one casts a wide research net and is prepared to put in the extra work to locate and occasionally organize new documentary collections.

Darío Euraque, a young Hondureño, has clearly demonstrated the utility of the regional approach in *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic: Region and State in Honduras, 1870–1972*. He focused on the history of the Caribbean

14. Among the many valuable regional histories are John D. Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation, 1889–1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977); Robert M. Levine, *Pernambuco in the Brazilian Federation, 1889–1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1978); Joseph L. Love, *São Paulo in the Brazilian Federation, 1889–1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1980); and Mark Wasserman, *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, 1854–1911* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

coast of Honduras for valid reasons. The banana enclaves, administered by white U.S. overseers and worked by West Indian laborers, certainly constitute a region distinct from the traditional centers of power in Comayagua and Tegucigalpa. This region deserved a study of its own, and Euraque found the resources required to reconstruct it, showing that the regional methodological approach has validity for Central American studies.

At the same time, *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic* is a major contribution to the national historiography of Honduras. The history of the region cannot be understood apart from its links to the rest of Honduras or the United States. Indeed, one of Euraque's greatest gifts is showing that the Caribbean coast, typically considered an enclave, had direct and influential ties to the rest of the country. Although the Caribbean coast developed as a "noncentral region" that was previously dismissed as an appendage of the fruit companies, the leaders and ideology that emerged there in the 1950s swept across Honduras and kept the country relatively peaceful during the 1980s. Thus Honduran exceptionalism resulted from the unique political culture that emerged on the Caribbean coast. The key to understanding Honduras today, Euraque argues, is to be found in the history of the region he studied: "the North Coast developed a liberal and defiant social and political culture that cut across class lines and that served as the basis for distinguishing Honduras in twentieth-century Central American history, and whose legacies affected the character of the crisis of the 1980s" (p. xx).

Several chapters set the national context in which the Caribbean coast developed. Euraque then examines developments in and around San Pedro Sula, which emerged as the industrial capital of Honduras in the 1960s. From San Pedro Sula came a group of industrialists with a reformist vision and modernizing ideology that subsequently spread throughout the country. Although these business leaders did not take control of the government, the military officers who took power in 1972 adopted the "enlightened ideology" of the Caribbean coast. The enactment of an agrarian reform by the military government reflected a reformist approach to national problems and thereby limited the appeal of revolutionary movements in the 1980s.

Reinterpreting the Banana Republic also advances historians' understanding of Central American elites. Euraque provides a glimpse into the political and economic activities of the Honduran oligarchy. He does not identify and analyze the investment and kinship patterns of the elite family networks, however, making it impossible to compare this study with Enrique Baloyra's on El Salvador or Marta Casaus Arzoe's on Guatemala.¹⁵

15. Enrique Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and Marta Casaus Arzoe, *Guatemala: Linaje y racismo* (San José, C.R.: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1992).

Euraque nevertheless makes some comparative judgments. Having demonstrated that the development of a Honduran bourgeoisie on the Caribbean coast led to the emergence of Honduran exceptionalism in the 1980s, he argues that the Honduran elites were neither "traditional" nor "backward" like the oligarchs in El Salvador and Guatemala (p. 156).

Euraque's study, like Brown's biography of Aycinena, shows that studies of Central American elites are feasible and necessary. Whether the regional approach can be applied to other parts of Central America with the same degree of success remains to be seen. It is reasonable to expect that regional historians will find the variations from national patterns that they expect to find. Even then, the jury will still be out on the value of regional approaches to Central American studies. To most Latin Americanists, Central America is already a periphery on the periphery, meaning that it constitutes a valid regional entity. To subdivide the region beyond the artificial divisions of the nation-states is a methodological approach of inconclusive validity. One wonders where the trend will end. Will historians continue to divide and subdivide until the unit of analysis becomes no larger than a barrio of a small village in central Nicaragua?

While researchers ponder the value of studying ever smaller units, they might also consider the possibility of enlarging the unit of analysis. Scholars must identify distinct regional identities within and between countries, but scholars should also consider the benefits to be gained by engaging in comparative analysis across the entire region. And when the region of Central America is defined, it might be advantageous to enlarge it to include Panama and Belize. Although both countries are geographically a part of Central America, Panama's ties to Colombia and Belize's ties to Great Britain have discouraged traditional Central Americanists from studying them. The result is that both countries are understudied and probably misunderstood. The Anglo-Caribbean culture of Belize is a world apart from the highland Maya in Guatemala, but it is undoubtedly part of the same diaspora that landed West Indian laborers on the Caribbean coast from Panama to Guatemala. Panama's historic ties to Colombia and the canal zone distinguish its history from the rest of the region, but it was not the only country to receive direct U.S. investment or a visit from the Yankee marines. If the regional approach to Central American studies continues to demonstrate the existence of distinct cultures within the isthmus, it will make less and less sense to exclude Belize and Panama from the field on the grounds that their historical experiences are exclusive.

Carlos Guevara Mann makes a strong case for including Panama in Central American studies in *Panamanian Militarism: A Historical Interpretation*. A Panamanian native and a graduate student at Notre Dame when he wrote this monograph, Guevara Mann examines the origins and evolution of militarism from colonial times to the present. He argues that Panamanian militarism was shaped as much by isthmian political culture as by U.S.

hegemony. Identifying the roots of “predatory militarism” in the colonial and early national periods, he concludes, “Panamanian militarism is not an isolated phenomenon of the late twentieth century” (p. xviii).

Guevara Mann explains the emergence of militarism as a consequence of the country’s political illegitimacy. The failure to establish a legitimate government allowed the military to subordinate the state to its institutional interests. The demilitarization of Panamanian society therefore requires the creation of legitimacy, which he defines as “the quality assigned to a political system by popular consensus” (p. xv). Even though the United States destroyed the Panamanian Defense Forces in 1989, Guevara Mann cautions that the roots of militarism have not yet been eradicated. If the Panamanian political system fails to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of the Panamanian people, militarism could reappear.

Panamanian Militarism is primarily an application of political theory to Panamanian history, but Guevara Mann’s synthesis will be of value to scholars in many other fields. Rather than a systematic exploration of documents in U.S. and Panamanian archives, it blends research with an interpretation of the current literature. Even without extensive citations to the records of the U.S. State Department or the Panamanian Defense Forces, this brief monograph provides a reasonable interpretive framework for analyzing militarism. Guevara Mann divides the history of the Panamanian military into two broad eras, “Predatory Militarism” and “Institutional Militarism.” The professionalizing of the Panamanian armed forces in the 1950s paved the way for institutionalized military rule in subsequent decades.

Although Guevara Mann makes no explicit comparisons, Central Americanists will note the similarities between the Panamanian, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran experiences. Panama was not the only country to suffer through military rule in the last half of the twentieth century. The Salvadoran armed forces, it could be argued, became a professional military institution at roughly the same time and because of the same external source of support, the United States. Guatemala came under institutionalized military rule in 1970 in the same circumstances as the Panamanian military: the Guatemalan political system lacked legitimacy. On these and many other issues, the Panamanian experience resembles those of its Central American neighbors and merits inclusion in the field of Central American studies.

To scholars outside the discipline of history, Panama’s nineteenth-century ties to Colombia, which were never that strong, are less important than its current political and economic condition. It is true that Panama’s leaders kept the country a respectful distance from the Central American Common Market (CACM) in the 1960s, but it does not necessarily follow that Panamanian economic history and prospects are not related to Central America. President Guillermo Endara has already expressed interest in

joining the CACM and has participated in several meetings of Central American presidents. Thus Panama may not remain on the periphery of the Central American periphery.

The compelling economic rationale for Panama's incorporation into the field of Central American studies is provided in *Trade, Industrialization, and Integration in Twentieth-Century Central America*, edited by Irma de Alonso. She includes Panama in all the statistical tables, and for good reason. Its gross domestic product, rate of growth, and structure of imports and exports all fall within regional parameters. Panama exhibits a more developed service sector, but there seems to be no compelling reason to keep Panama out of the field of inquiry, although some politicians and business leaders might choose to keep Panama out of the CACM.

Trade, Industrialization, and Integration in Twentieth-Century Central America is not the first analysis of the Central American economies to include Panama, but it offers a valuable update.¹⁶ Although works on the economic development of the CACM countries have been too few in recent years, the statistical basis for understanding the "lost decade" of the 1980s has improved dramatically. Each of the thirteen essays in this volume is a self-contained unit related to the general theme of the prospects for revitalizing the CACM as a means of diversifying and expanding exports to generate foreign exchange and create jobs. The essays do not constitute an economic history of Central America in the twentieth century, but they provide valuable analyses of Central America's move toward free trade within a reorganized CACM.

One can only hope that economists will turn their attention to the period prior to 1960. Victor Bulmer-Thomas's monumental work, *The Political Economy of Central America since 1920*, should provide the necessary framework for further economic studies of Central America at national and regional levels.¹⁷ Scholarly understanding of economic developments over the past thirty years far exceeds understanding of the early twentieth century because economic historians of Central America also labor under the burden of unreliable or incomplete statistics and data.

The same can be said of many other topics in the field of Central American studies. Scholars know a good deal more about women in the revolutionary movements of the 1970s and 1980s than about those in earlier times. Even with a number of valuable testimonials or autobiographies of Central American women, most notably that of Rigoberta Menchú, the

16. Several previous studies have been made of the Central American Common Market, including *Economic Integration in Central America*, edited by William R. Cline and Enrique Delgado (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1978); and George Irvin and Stuart Holland, *Central America: The Future of Economic Integration* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989).

17. Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Political Economy of Central America since 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

study of women in contemporary Central America continues to be a promising field of inquiry.¹⁸

Researchers are beginning to learn something about the ecology of Central America, as evident in *A Place in the Rain Forest: Settling the Costa Rican Frontier*. Darryl Cole-Christensen, the owner of Finca Loma Linda, tells the story of his family's efforts to bring "civilization" to the Coto Brus, once a nearly impenetrable rain forest region in southeastern Costa Rica. Without trying to apologize or to justify his reasons for cutting down the rain forest, Cole-Christensen simply narrates a family adventure story, describing the risks and motivations involved in frontier settlement. Yet his account reveals the development of an ecological consciousness, on an individual as well as a national level. When he came with his family to Costa Rica in 1954, Cole-Christensen considered himself a builder who first laid claim to the land by felling the forest. The prevailing attitude among the settlers was that the land was there for humans to work and exploit. In the end, Cole-Christensen has learned that "tropical agriculture, like agriculture anywhere, is not merely the cultivation of the land for a particular profit, but rather an overall management of the environment for a better way of life for people on the earth and their counterparts, other living things" (p. 236).

A Place in the Rain Forest is a rare and valuable contribution to the environmental history of modern Central America. It is nonetheless more of a personal history and testimony than a scholarly examination of Costa Rican ecology. Readers may learn much about the experience on the Finca Loma Linda, but they are not provided with analytical data and information about deforestation and government policy. Nevertheless, this brief and readable account of frontier settlement might find appropriate uses in courses on modern Central America and the environmental history of Latin America.

Readers seeking a book comparable to Warren Dean's analysis of the destruction of the Brazilian rain forest will be disappointed.¹⁹ Environmental issues have been drawing increasing attention in the field of Latin American studies, but beyond *A Place in the Rain Forest*, few Central Americanists deal with the topic directly. The field of Central American studies has developed rapidly in recent years, particularly in the social sciences for Guatemala and Costa Rica. But Central Americanists cannot afford to rest on their laurels. Many challenging and intriguing fields are open to re-

18. Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman in Guatemala*, edited and translated by Elisabeth Burgos Debray (London: Verso, 1984); Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (Vancouver, B.C.: New Star, 1981); and Elvira Alvarado, *Don't Be Afraid, Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart, The Story of Elvira Alvarado* (San Francisco, Calif.: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1987).

19. Warren Dean, *With Broadax and Firebrand: The Destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

searchers, ranging from traditional political biography to environmental studies. The eight works reviewed in this essay reflect impressive scholarship in history, economics, political science, and international relations. It is to be hoped that they will attract more researchers to a promising and stimulating field.