

D'Haeseleer effectively shows that the case of El Salvador provides crucial cautions and sobering lessons, but not the ones drawn by proponents of counterinsurgency.

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MARC BECKER. *The FBI in Latin America: The Ecuador Files*. (Radical Perspectives: A Radical History Review Book Series.) Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2017. Pp. xii, 322. Paper \$26.95, e-book \$26.95.

There still are few in-depth studies of the Third Reich's interest in exploitation and possible conquest of Latin America during World War II. Yet it was precisely this concern that prompted President Franklin Roosevelt, following the collapse of France on June 25, 1940, to charge Foreign Service Officer Robert Murphy with the secret mission to French North Africa to persuade senior Vichy officials Maxime Weygand and François Darlan to cooperate with the United States and Great Britain instead of with Nazi Germany. Roosevelt told Murphy that if the Germans commandeered airfields in Dakar, they could easily fly to the Azores, refuel, and invade Brazil. He wanted Murphy to erase that potential threat.

It was my long-term interest in this particular subject that persuaded me to review *The FBI in Latin America: The Ecuador Files*, Marc Becker's recently published study of Roosevelt's authorization of then FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to send seven hundred agents to Latin America, including assigning forty-five to Ecuador. Becker, who has previously published works on Indian and peasant movements in Peru and Ecuador, by his own admission, found by happenstance extensive documentation of FBI surveillance of urban labor leaders and leftist militants in Ecuador during World War II, which prompted his writing and publication of this work.

I regret to say that Becker's book failed to meet any of my expectations. It does shed some useful and sympathetic light on the efforts of FBI agents (who knew only rudimentary Spanish and had no prior field experience in Latin America) to do their best to identify local dissidents, and the book does not exaggerate the importance of foreign disruptive influences. But Becker fails to place certain elements of this story into the appropriate global context of the early 1940s—namely, Roosevelt's justified concern and the FBI's assignment of personnel to Latin America. Instead, Becker views world events through the lens of imperialism versus anti-imperialism.

It is in this context that he dismisses the efforts of *New York Times* correspondent Russell Porter to document Nazi interest and inroads into Latin America in the summer of 1940 as “a series of alarmist articles in

the *New York Times* about a growing Nazi threat in Latin America, further fueling Washington's paranoia” (28). By the midsummer of 1940, with virtually all of Europe (except for Great Britain) under Nazi domination and with Hitler bent on world conquest, if ever there was a time for mass hysteria—forget paranoia—that was the time. Having read Porter's analytical dispatches—including his piece “Usual Nazi Tactics Tried on Ecuador” (1940)—I find Porter's focus to be spot on. Becker seems unaware as to why Germany would be specifically interested in Ecuador. He quotes correspondent Porter as noting Germany's interest in purchasing Ecuador's cacao and balsa exports (29), but Becker is unaware of the utility of balsa wood in aircraft production. I must note that an airplane much admired by German air marshal Hermann Göring was the British de Havilland Mosquito, whose airframe was made entirely of wood, with the fuselage comprised of balsa wood pressed between layers of cedar plywood. On one occasion during a January 1943 speech in Berlin after a British Mosquito air raid, Göring famously lamented, “It makes me furious when I see the Mosquito. I turn green and yellow with envy. The British, who can afford aluminum better than we Germans can, knock together a beautiful wooden aircraft that every piano factory over there is building, and give it a speed which they have now increased yet again. What do you make of that? There is nothing the British don't have. They have the geniuses, and we have the nincompoops.”

Then, of course, there were the Galápagos Islands, which is what really made Ecuador of strategic interest in World War II. Becker never mentions the Galápagos, and, in his defense, it is doubtful that any of the FBI informants in Quito or Guayaquil referenced them. The United States feared that either Germany or Japan could use the Galápagos as a staging base to bomb the Panama Canal. In 1942, the United States built “The Rock,” an air base on Baltra Island, which it closed in 1946.

Throughout the book, Becker focuses extensively on what he calls imperialism, but he never disparages totalitarianism. He even goes so far as to castigate the sixteenth-century Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, who didn't know about Incas or Ecuador, for being a Spanish “imperialist.” Becker writes: “If our options are las Casas or Christopher Columbus, an argument from a humanist perspective can be made for las Casas. If we are interested in human liberation and the rights of self-determination, they are equally objectionable” (252). What does this have to do with the FBI in Latin America during World War II?

Finally, I must note that *The FBI in Latin America* is not written in a reader-friendly manner. The chapter headings, which should guide the reader toward the conclusion, are as opaque and unyielding as the text itself. They are, in succession: “Introduction: FBI,” “SIS,” “Communism,” “Labor,” “La Gloriosa,” “Constitution,” “Coup,” “Departures,” and “Conclusion:

Cold War.” Yet it remains unclear what these topics have to do with the National Archives collection of documents concerning FBI surveillance of urban labor leaders and leftist militants during World War II.

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MAURICIO TENORIO-TRILLO. *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. 239. Cloth \$40.00.

Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo’s *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* examines the persistence of the idea of Latin America—an idea that should have withered away long ago, together with the obsolescence of racial theory. Through many metamorphoses, this nineteenth-century idea has survived into the present and still shapes the institutional study of the Americas. Two intellectual and political currents rooted in preoccupations about empire and race, *iberismo* and *latinité*, gave initial impulse to the idea of uniting Ibero-American and “Latin” peoples. Over time, the idea mutated into something else, turning into a multidisciplinary field of research and teaching called “Latin American studies.” In the United States, the idea acquired the form of a grotesque simplification that the author calls the “text-book version” of Latin America. Few have resisted the temptation of this idea—among them, nineteenth-century Brazilian scholars and art historians. Furthermore, the idea never penetrated beneath the superficial waters of academic discourse. Popular music and poetry in Latin America remained immune to this term, until the *canción de protesta* (protest song) in the 1960s and 1970s disseminated the utopia of a continental revolution among the masses. Yet by the late 1980s, this movement ceased and popular music regained its global, hybrid, and polysemic condition.

In the present the term survives under the rubric of Latino/a studies, related to questions of language, identity, and politics of Hispanic immigrants to the United States. This field is quite different to that instituted around World War II under the aegis of U.S. Pan-Americanism. While different social sciences have tried to take distance from the idea (economics and political science, in particular), the term Latin America still resonates strongly in anthropology, history, and literary studies. The transnational turn in history, the author suggests, had left historical studies of Latin America mostly unaffected. New currents of thought such as postcolonial studies and new Hispanic studies have deepened the search for alternative ontologies and forms of consciousness. Tenorio-Trillo is right when he claims that Latin America as a teaching machine will not disappear and that the experts of multilateral institutions will continue to name the region, for they need to compare this with other global regions. Yet the old allure of the idea of Latin America is gone. At the

end of the book, the author tries to rescue the term as a heuristic and teaching device, advising professors to take the idea of Latin America as a sort of catalogue or map of propositions that need to be criticized and better contextualized under the lenses of local and historical specificity.

With great mastery and erudition, the author describes the changing meanings of the term. During the nineteenth century, the term referred to a defensive strategy against expansive empires (the French confronting Pan-Slavism, and Latin American intellectuals confronting the United States). Yet in the late twentieth century, it came to be the receptacle of various utopian expectations and pessimistic assessments of development, democratic government, social order, and equality in the region. By the 1970s and 1980s, the term was associated with five central ideas: a defensive reaction to the expansion of modern empires; an alternative to the West (the United States and Europe); a sign of the failure of modernization; the site of indigenous authenticity (conceived as anti-modern and anti-capitalist); and the land of many utopias, including the belief in a pristine race, the assertion of spiritual superiority, and the expectation of a continental revolution. The circumstances of the twenty-first century had turned the idea of Latin America obsolete, making evident the lack of consistency between signifier and signified. Yet, despite mounting criticism, the textbook version of U.S.-centered Latin Americanism refuses to die; it still dominates U.S. scholars’ quest for alternative modes of life and understanding (among them anthropologists, neo-*indigenistas*, and postcolonial critics). Tenorio-Trillo finds this search for a radical alterity rather futile in a region fully and diversely connected with global flows of goods, technologies, and information.

The author does not believe that the term is useful, for it fails to designate a race, a culture, a people, or a civilization. The term Latin America actually labels a large area of unclear and changing borders, which incorporates quite different peoples with distinct histories. The appropriation of the term by multiple interpretive communities in order to preserve the pristine dichotomy between Anglo and Latin America has rendered this polysemic fictional place into a permanent institution of knowledge. Only under this constitutive meta-difference were scholars able to build such an impressive set of great generalizations about Latin America. The author does not think that all Latin America can be characterized as the land of underdevelopment, revolutions, high inequality, failure of democracy, and great violence. Today there are countries that have escaped this multiple curse, and there are regions that deserve comparison with other world regions. Because each local region or city in Latin America has its own history and peculiarity, the term Latin America can no longer serve as a meaningful framework for good histories. Historians could write solid regional and local his-