

---

A. KIM CLARK: *The Redemptive Work: Railway and Nation in Ecuador, 1895-1930*. Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1998.

---

The Guayaquil and Quito Railroad is one of the most unusual industrial creations in the history of Latin America. Built relatively late, it connected Ecuador's chief port with its capital city in 1908, some 70 years after the region's first railroad was inaugurated in Cuba. Built by an American company, the G & Q was an incredibly difficult railroad to construct, crossing a multitude of rivers, tropical zones and the constantly shifting Andes. It was an expensive project, both in terms of capital and lives lost in the construction and maintenance of the enterprise. Unlike many of the railroads of the region, the Guayaquil and Quito Railroad was not built primarily for the extraction of exports. It was, as Kim Clark demonstrates, part of a larger 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal project of modernization and national integration that also featured centralized state control of education, expanded markets for goods and labor, and "moral reform" through new forms of work.

During the 1970s, railroads were a popular topic among historians of Latin America. Many studies from this period, including those by Robert Mattoon Jr. on Brazil, John Coatsworth and Arthur Schmidt on Mexico, Rory Miller on Peru and Winthrop Wright and Paul Goodwin Jr. on Argentina, were primarily investigations of the social and economic effects of railroad construction. In general, they emphasized the ways in which railroads became key elements of export economies, the operation of dependent relationships with Europe and the U.S., and the intersection of the political interests of national elites with the economic interests of foreign railroad companies. Although it does not acknowledge these works, Kim Clark's study of railroad construction in Ecuador fits solidly within this historiographic tradition.

Her argument that the railroad should be understood as a catalyst for national integration is not surprising, and the book does not offer an entirely new perspective on the railroad as an agent of change in Latin America. It is, however, a very useful contribution to the historiography of Ecuador. Clark's self-described "anthropological political economy" is a healthy shift away from the narrow political histories so common to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ecuador. She uses the railroad as a backdrop to offer an interesting analysis of the conflicts between coastal and highland landowning elites. Employing a Gramscian model, Clark is intrigued by the fields of discourse which emerge around the building of the railroad.

Drawing on Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as an "imagined community," she envisions the railroad as a cultural and economic connector of regions and an organizer of "social space." In the book's introduction, Clark distances herself from community-level studies, favoring a historical

approach that focuses on the changes in the broad regions surrounding Guayaquil and Quito after the construction of the railroad. However, the book's strongest contribution is a chapter on the community of Alausí, a small town that became the railroad nexus between Ecuador's three most important cities. The writing here is more dynamic than in the earlier chapters on abstract topics such as markets, state policy, and progress.

Clark effectively uses Alausí to demonstrate the costs of the "uneven development" wrought by the G & Q: bubonic plague carried from the coast by rats in freight cars; the burning of houses and livestock by sanitation inspectors and class resistance to a consequent vaccination campaign; and disputes over access to water and violations of customary rights-of-way unleashed by the new economic laws brought to the highlands by the railroad. In the end, it is this in-depth examination of one town through its archives that gives meaning to the broader contours of the nation's evolving political economy.

Clark's investigation of the hegemonic process in Ecuador during this period is limited in scope. It leaves out a key group of historical agents — those who worked on the railroad itself and their allies in the industrial working class. The Guayaquil and Quito was one of the nation's major employers during this period and its workers were at the vanguard of an anarchist-inspired labor movement following World War One. Ecuadorian nationals struck the G & Q three times from 1916-1922 and were involved in the nation's first general strike, launched in Guayaquil in November 1922. The result of this mass strike was the massacre of hundreds and perhaps thousands of workers, and it demonstrates the limits of the consensus on the nature of national development which Clark outlines. Its aftermath is not only the Liberal Revolution of 1925 but the advent of populist politics in the 1930s and a short-lived workers' revolution in 1944. These aspects of Ecuadorian modernization and national identity are omitted from Clark's narrative. Leaving workers out of the analysis of hegemony and discourse ultimately undercuts the power of this analysis to explain social relations in Ecuador. Clark claims that there was no critique of the railroad as a "harbinger of industrial ills" (p. 55), yet this is precisely the way in which it was depicted by G & Q workers and their allies in Guayaquil, who saw it as evil incarnate. Ironically, Clark's claim that the railroad acted as an agent of moral reform through the ways in which it helped reorganize work would have been strengthened by a description of the railroad's program of scientific management and the company union it created in the 1920s.

The book suffers from some problems of presentation as well. Repetitive sentences and phrases, which appear in more than one chapter, were not removed by the editor and prove confusing or disorienting to the reader.

There is a lack of photos, except on the dust jacket, and the two maps are inadequate, leaving out key rail towns which are described in the text. These are disturbing in a study that relies so strongly on space.

*The Redemptive Work* opens up a discussion of railroads in Latin America as machines that had the power to reorganize social space. Clark offers some interesting speculative comments on the railroad as a circulator of ideas, a creator of tourist locales, and a controller of public space. For the most part, these connections are circumstantial. Perhaps they could serve as the launching points for a new historiography of the railroad, one which begins with the workers' perspective of the enterprise as part of the national patrimony.

Anton Rosenthal

University of Kansas

JONATHAN C. BROWN (ed.): *Workers' Control in Latin America, 1930-1979*. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

This is a useful collection of articles for undergraduate and graduate courses on Latin American history in general and Latin American labor history in particular. Most of the articles are written clearly and present their arguments didactically. Each article is arranged in the same way: a brief introduction reviewing the role played by workers in their nation's history is followed by an analysis of a specific episode of importance in the history of their struggle. Each piece ends with a brief post-script of a few paragraphs describing the subsequent evolution of the workers' role in that particular country.

Jonathan C. Brown has written an excellent, if slightly pretentious, introduction to this volume ("What Is Workers' Control?," pp. 1-15). "Until recently," he begins, "Latin American history had been written principally from the top down." Then he goes on to say: "The authors of this volume protest." He promises that this book will be different, that it will let us into the world of those who are "voiceless in history, the laborers and peasants who, even if literate, had been so busy making a precarious living that they had little time to edit newspapers or leave written records of their lives." A worthy ambition indeed.

Revealing "the struggle of workers on the shop floor to gain sufficient command of the work process to bring dignity to their proletarian lives" is no easy task, however. Reading through the book, one cannot help feeling that not all the essays deliver what the introduction promises. Although most of