
RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

CARLOS A. FORMENT: *Democracy in Latin America 1760-1900 Volume I, Civic Selfhood and Public Life in Mexico and Peru*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

In this densely written monograph the author claims to have established a revisionist interpretation of Latin America's 19th century. He rejects strongly the "conventional" view that by 1900 Latin America was suffering from a "colonial legacy" that prevented a smooth transition to democracy in the new century. Although Latin America is used in the title, in fact the focus is only on Spanish America. Brazil does not merit a mention. His canvas in this volume is 19th century Mexico and Peru. In a forthcoming volume Argentina and Cuba will be added to the analysis.

The author approaches his task by looking for signs of "associational" activity. Here the author has adopted a "Tocquevillian" analysis, based on the questionable assumption that Tocqueville is as relevant to Latin America as to North America. Few readers will support such a thesis.

In fact, the author chooses to apply the most elaborate of social theories to his historical cases. There are citations from virtually every conceivably relevant social scientist from John Dewey to Hanna Arendt. The author, facing the challenge of interpreting widely disparate century-long data in two countries, confesses that he found himself unable to interpret his own research. He therefore turned to an exploration of social science theory to enable him to link his data to his thesis. The integration mechanism is "civic Catholicism" which the author neglects to define.

A further word about terminology is in order. Amazing as it may seem, nowhere does author explicitly define the terms "democracy" or "democratic." This seems all the more unfortunate in view of the author's harsh words for his scholarly colleagues, whom he accused of "abstracted empiricism, hyperpresentism, jargonistic cant, and scientism that passes for common sense in Latin American Studies." (p.11)

The heart of the book consists of eleven chapters, each of which examines 19th century Mexico and Peru for the traces of democratic life whose taxonomy the author has previously laid out. Not surprisingly, Mexico proves more striking

in its evolution toward democracy. The format of these chapters proves to be rather unwieldy, with chapters alternating between countries and among topics. The overall picture for each country remains fragmented and leaves the reader unsure of exactly what has been proven. This impression is reinforced by the absence of an effectively integrative concluding chapter. Instead we are offered a meandering discourse on Tocqueville and Latin America.

Professor Forment has provided some valuable research findings on 19th century Mexico and Peru. But the reader will need to grapple with organizational oddities, as well as some self-indulgent digressions into social science theory.

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MANUEL ANTONIO GARRETÓN: *Incomplete Democracy: Political Democratization in Chile and Latin America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Reading much of Manuel Antonio Garretón's recent work, one cannot help but be reminded of a quote from Antonio Gramsci: "The old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in the interregnum there arises a great variety of morbid symptoms." This is a particularly apt synopsis of *Incomplete Democracy*, the updated and translated compilation of Garretón's *Hacia una nueva era política* (1995) and *Política y sociedad entre dos épocas* (2000). A prolific author on Latin American politics and sociology, and especially on Chilean society, Manuel Antonio Garretón has been a leading figure among the region's academics for four decades. In this laudable book, he analyzes political history, contemporary trends and future directions in both the region as a whole and in Chile in particular.

According to Garretón, the old Latin American politics was rooted in a social context that the author calls "national-state industrial society," while the new politics—increasingly detached from the social—corresponds to a nascent "globalized postindustrial" society, based on "consumption, information and communication" (p. 25-26). The various dimensions of social life—economy, politics, culture, society—are no longer in sync. Economic models currently in vogue threaten societal integration and prevent meaningful state reform. Identity-based cultural and social movements present a challenge to existing systems of political representation. Politics is becoming more administrative and less political, less concerned with aspiring to formulate a better overall society.

The first half of the book considers Latin America in light of democratic transitions, neo-liberal reform and globalization. But Garretón is quick to point out that grand theoretical approaches to the region are not currently feasible;