EXPLAINING U.S. POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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CROSSROADS: CONGRESS, THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION, AND CENTRAL AMERICA. By CYNTHIA J. ARNSON. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989. Pp. 275. $13.95.)
THE GOOD NEIGHBOR: HOW THE UNITED STATES WROTE THE HISTORY OF CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN. By GEORGE BLACK. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988. Pp. 200. $9.95.)
CAN GOVERNMENTS LEARN? AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY AND CENTRAL AMERICAN REVOLUTIONS. By LLOYD S. ETHEREDGE. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985. Pp. 228. $13.95.)
BANANA DIPLOMACY: THE MAKING OF AMERICAN POLICY IN NICARAGUA, 1981–1987. By ROY GUTMAN. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988. Pp. 404. $19.95.)

The recent literature on U.S. relations with Central America and with the Caribbean region exhibits broad agreement on several recurring patterns in U.S. policy.[1] First, U.S. policy toward the region has been erratic, oscillating between benign neglect of the area and overreaction to its crises. Second, the United States has sought first to achieve and then to maintain hegemony over the region by keeping leftist governments out of power. Third, in doing so, the United States has often supported repressive regimes whose practices have polarized local populations and ultimately undermined regional stability and U.S. hegemonic control. A more general theme in the literature is that the United States seems to have learned so little from the history of its relations with the countries of Central America and the Caribbean.

By identifying these patterns in U.S. policy toward the region, this new scholarship has reinvigorated an old debate on the sources and the consequences of U.S. foreign policy. The debate revolves around several theories of foreign policy, each of which offers a different answer to the question of whether and how states can learn from the past. The first theory, shaped by the Western tradition of *realpolitik*, argues that there is

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nothing remarkable about U.S. actions in Central America because power is the currency of international relations and small states will inevitably be subjected to the influence of large ones. A second type of explanation focuses on the cognitive sources of foreign policy, placing greater weight on the psychological structures in policymakers' minds than on the external structures determined by the distribution of power among states. Yet a third approach emphasizes the role of domestic institutions such as the U.S. capitalist economy and the separation of political powers. Finally, political-cultural approaches focus on the ways in which foreign policy articulates the underlying myths or dramas that have come to define a country's national identity. The four books under review in this essay contribute to this debate in distinct ways.

Political Realism

The realist approach to foreign policy rests on the assumption that states compete to preserve or enhance their status in the international system. This competition takes place because in an ultimately anarchic world order, security can be achieved only through accumulating political power.[2] The idea that states define their interests in terms of power is a basic realist tenet that informs most scholarly work in the fields of international relations and foreign policy.[3]

Except when employing recent structuralist approaches, political realists have traditionally been concerned with the problem of learning in foreign policy. At a general level, realism suggests that the degree of learning by states is inversely related to their power and security. Where resources are scarce or a state's external environment is threatening, states will learn because of the high costs of making mistakes. But where no such constraints exist, as in the foreign policy of a large state toward a much smaller one, there may be little incentive to learn. Thus from this perspective, the United States has repeated errors in its policy toward Central America and the Caribbean simply because it has been able to afford to do so.[4]

Given the apparent relevance of a realist approach, the absence of serious attempts to apply it to U.S. policy toward the Central American and Caribbean region is conspicuous. A notable exception is the distinguished work of British historian Gordon Connell-Smith, who has shown that the vaunted U.S. ideal of a democratic community of equal states in the Americas has rarely been allowed to interfere with the perceived imperatives of protecting and extending U.S. power in the Western Hemisphere.[5]

The work of U.S. analysts has noted similar patterns in U.S.-Latin American relations, but the tendency in the United States has been to argue that U.S. policy toward Central America and the Caribbean cannot

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be explained solely in terms of the relative power of the United States and its neighbors. Indeed, the books reviewed in this essay are all informed by the underlying assumption that the motives of U.S. foreign policy either are or should be different from those ascribed to states by realpolitik. The notion that the United States is not just another great power in its dealings with its smaller southern neighbors is reflected in two specific lines of argument. One asserts that the United States is different because it possesses mechanisms for learning from past mistakes built into the institutional structures of decision making in both the executive and congressional branches. The reasons why these mechanisms have proved inadequate is explored by Lloyd Etheredge, who uses a cognitive approach, and by Cynthia Arnson and Roy Gutman, who use explanations emphasizing the interaction of ideology and institutions. George Black's eclectic historical analysis offers a second argument about U.S. exceptionalism. His study focuses not on the institutional capacity to learn but on the sociocultural obstacles to policy reform, which he believes are partly rooted in the unique set of frontier myths that have shaped the U.S. national identity.

Cognitive Approaches: A Drama of Hardball Politics

Etheredge's *Can Governments Learn? American Foreign Policy and Central American Revolutions* grapples explicitly with the apparent U.S. failure to learn from past mistakes in its policy toward Central America and the Caribbean. After examining the botched U.S.-backed invasion of the Bay of Pigs, Etheredge addresses two questions. First, why, despite efforts to "learn" from the Bay of Pigs, did the United States launch a second covert campaign (Operation Mongoose, designed for the purpose of assassinating Fidel Castro) that may have helped precipitate the Soviet decision to emplace nuclear weapons in Cuba? Second, why did the United States embark on a similarly misguided effort to undermine the Nicaraguan Revolution in the 1980s?

To explain this pattern of failure, Etheredge identifies two "tracks" of foreign policy: first, rational, technical analysis of the situations that the United States sought to influence; and second, imagination-based thinking about power relationships. Many theories of foreign policy focus on the analytical track, explaining deviations from rationality in terms of organizational factors like a lack of multiple advocacy, frequent personnel changes that undermine institutional memory, poor organization of the Central Intelligence Agency, "groupthink" dynamics, and domestic political pressures. Etheredge argues instead that the real problem in U.S. policy toward Latin America lies in the second track of what he describes as imagination-derived patterns of thinking. Drawing from literature in the fields of cognitive and political psychology, he seeks to demonstrate

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how policymakers tend to substitute their preferred understanding of the situation for the reality that a dispassionate analysis of the facts at their disposal would reveal. For example, despite unambiguous CIA intelligence showing strong Cuban support for Castro, President John Kennedy and his advisers never relinquished their cherished assumption that communism was so unpopular and U.S.-style democracy so appealing that the Cubans would eagerly rise up in an insurrectionary wave against Castro in the wake of a U.S.-backed invasion. According to Etheredge, this proclivity to substitute fantasies of U.S. influence over other countries for less appealing realities is especially strong in U.S. relations with weak states like those of Central America and the Caribbean.

Etheredge argues that the second track of imagination-based behavior is driven by a larger-than-life drama of power, which he calls "hardball politics." The essence of this drama is competition for access to (if not possession of) the U.S. presidency and an almost religious reverence for the power of the office: "Ambitious, shrewdly calculating men . . . vie for power and status behind a public veneer of civilized and idealistic concern" (p. 147). The personality of those attracted to this drama is typically defined by a divided, unintegrated sense of self: a "grandiose self" identifies with the power of the presidency and believes it can make the world a better place while a "lower self" feels profoundly inadequate and vulnerable. This paradoxical combination of idealized power and deep insecurity infuses U.S. policy toward Central America and the Caribbean, producing on the one hand an overconfidence in U.S. ability to influence (as revealed in the ambitious aspirations embodied in the Alliance for Progress or the Kissinger Commission report) and on the other, a deep sense of vulnerability to revolutionary regimes (as expressed in former President Ronald Reagan's injunction that "Managua is only two days from Harlingen, Texas").

Unfortunately, Etheredge introduces and develops this argument in a way that makes for tedious and somewhat repetitious reading. He does not clearly summarize the direction he is taking at either the outset or the conclusion of his chapters, nor does he present the core of his argument until after the Cuban cases have been described in detail. Despite these flaws, the argument put forth in *Can Governments Learn?* contains significant insights. Etheredge's account of the most striking manifestations of the hardball politics drama in U.S. foreign policy is worth summarizing.

The first manifestation is the lack of autonomy accorded to other human beings and countries when foreign policy is shaped by this Hobbesian drama. Ultimately, Etheredge argues, such a lack of autonomy is due to the psychology of the players of hardball politics, who have "little genuine love and affection for others" (p. 150). Their main emotional bond to other human beings is an intense loyalty to those who support their

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political striving. As a result, the public at home and the rest of the world are perceived not as groups of "fellow human beings" but as a "supporting cast of subordinate parts" in a drama that, in the players' view, represents the idealistic principles and benevolent behavior of the United States (p. 149). The U.S. practitioners of hardball politics therefore experience leftist revolutions—particularly those in proximate regions—as threats that are as much personal as political in nature.

President Dwight Eisenhower was less vulnerable to this drama's pressure to "prove" himself in foreign policy because of the enormous prestige he had gained in World War II (although his personal security also made him more willing to undertake the covert operation against Guatemala, which was estimated to have only a 20 percent chance of success).[6] But President Kennedy, who suffered foreign policy setbacks in Laos and Berlin and at the Vienna summit with Nikita Khrushchev almost immediately after assuming office, was deeply concerned that Castro's defiance of the United States would diminish his own personal stature and thus undermine his domestic and international standing as president.

Second, the hardball politics drama inhibits and sometimes even prevents the U.S. government from learning. Because the Guatemalan coup of 1954 had conformed almost perfectly to the expectations of this kind of drama (only a small covert operation was needed to topple a government perceived as anti-American), policymakers failed to anticipate that the Cubans under Castro would take measures to prevent a repeat performance in their country. When the next U.S. effort to topple a Latin American regime met with humiliating defeat on the beaches of the Bahía de Cochinos, the Kennedy administration's postmortem never questioned the underlying political rationale of the invasion: that Castro was a security threat to the United States who must be eliminated rather than dealt with via negotiations. Instead, the Taylor Commission report focused on technical issues—the nonfunctional outboard motors, the mistaken assessment that the coral reef off the beach was seaweed—and embraced the operation's political assumptions with renewed vigor. The report concluded, "We feel we are losing today on many fronts. . . . [T]here can be no long-term living with Castro as a neighbor" (p. 73). This emphasis on technical rather than political learning spawned Operation Mongoose, which involved more U.S. resources and caused more destruction to the Cubans than did the Bay of Pigs. It also prevented policymakers from anticipating any Soviet response to Mongoose, much less a decision to emplace missiles in Cuba.

Third, by preventing learning on issues of a political nature, the hardball politics drama ultimately undermines even the autonomy of the United States. The missile crisis, which was aggravated by Kennedy's decision to confront the Soviet Union publicly rather than pursue quiet diplomacy, could have ended the foreign-policy game altogether. In addi-

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tion, the refusal of Castro and later the Sandinistas to play the compliant role prescribed for them by the hardball politics drama not only angered but eventually obsessed policymakers, diverting their attention from other issues of equal importance. For example, Etheredge relates that Robert Kennedy often prolonged the emotionally charged weekly meetings on Operation Mongoose for as long as seven hours. In a similarly emotional vein, the Reagan administration found itself increasingly preoccupied with the Sandinistas to the detriment of other pressing issues in U.S. relations with Latin America.

For foreign-policy analysts trained in the realist tradition, *Can Governments Learn?* will raise at least two questions. First, has foreign policy not always been driven by the drama that Etheredge calls "hardball politics?" Second, is the United States not more constrained in its practice of such politics than other great powers because of its democratic political institutions? To anticipate these questions, Etheredge might have grounded his argument in a more comprehensive analysis of the literature dealing with the sources of foreign policy. Nevertheless, Etheredge's effort to understand the reasons why the United States has often tried to impose a single script upon the diverse realities of other nations, especially those of its southern neighbors, constitutes an important contribution that may inspire further research.

Domestic Institutions: Replaying the Drama after Reagan

An alternative approach to foreign-policy analysis stresses the determining role of domestic institutions and policy processes. Applied to U.S. foreign policy, this approach is often used to buttress the argument that the United States is not an ordinary power because of the exceptional nature of its domestic institutions, both political and economic. In a book already reviewed in this journal, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, historian Walter LaFeber stressed the role of U.S. capitalism as a major underlying force in shaping what he terms the "system of neo-dependency" characterizing Central American relations with the United States.[7]

By contrast, Cynthia Arnson and Roy Gutman address the ways in which U.S. political institutions have determined U.S. relations with the region under the Reagan administration. Arnson's *Crossroads: Congress, the Reagan Administration, and Central America* analyzes the relationship between the U.S. Congress and the Reagan administration in the making of U.S. policy toward Nicaragua and El Salvador. This especially insightful and well-documented account draws on declassified U.S. government documents as well as the author's interviews with policymakers in both branches of government. Gutman's *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua, 1981–1987* is based on interviews conducted with

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U.S. and Central American officials and focuses more narrowly on the executive branch and the making and implementation of policy toward Nicaragua.

Arnson situates her study of Central America in the context of the more general problem of U.S. policy toward revolutionary regimes and movements in the wake of the Vietnam War. The ideological legacy of the U.S. defeat in Indochina made many members of Congress more committed to preventing U.S. military involvement in Third World countries. Meanwhile the institutional legacy of the post-Vietnam reforms gave Congress a greater role in the foreign-policy process. These changes of the 1970s set the stage for a protracted conflict in the 1980s between a congress jealous of its newly acquired foreign-policy prerogatives and an administration that was as determined to avoid collaboration with the Congress as it was to roll back communism in Central America.

During this conflict, the Reagan administration enjoyed several advantages. First, the shared principles guiding the anti-interventionist coalition in Congress were largely negative in nature; only the administration had a positive vision of what the U.S. role in Central America and the developing world more generally should be. Second, the administration had privileged access to information about U.S. actions and other events in Central America, which it often manipulated in order to reinforce its point of view, and it had exclusive control over the implementation of policy. Third, until the onset of the Iran-Contra scandal in late 1986, President Reagan's immense personal popularity enabled him to persuade many reluctant members of Congress to cast their votes in favor of aid for the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionary armies.

Nevertheless, Congress was able to shape Central American policy in important ways. At the outset of Reagan's first term, it passed legislation requiring that aid to El Salvador be conditioned on presidential certification of that country's progress in making reforms in human rights guarantees and other areas. The certification process actually provided the administration with leverage to insist that the military return El Salvador to civilian rule and even to influence the electoral process so that a centrist candidate, José Napoleón Duarte, eventually won the presidency in 1984 over a rival representing the extreme right. But given the Reagan administration's general unwillingness to press for political and socioeconomic reforms in El Salvador, the other changes resulting from the biannual certification process were largely cosmetic in nature.

Arnson's analysis of the congressional role in making U.S. policy toward El Salvador between 1981 and 1984 sheds new light on Congress's shifting attitudes toward Nicaragua after 1984. Probably the principal reason that the opponents of Contra aid were undermined in 1985 and 1986 was that they had no clearly defined alternative vision of U.S. relations with Nicaragua on which to base their opposition to the admin-

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istration. But a secondary reason followed from Congress's perception of its successful role in recasting administration priorities in El Salvador: it would then try to duplicate the formula of bipartisan congressional cooperation with the executive in order to shape U.S. policy toward Nicaragua. This effort helps to explain why, after restricting and then prohibiting U.S. aid to the Contra forces between 1982 and 1984, a majority of the members of Congress began in 1985 to cast their votes the other way. Specifically, the moderate Democrats and liberal Republicans who joined the pro-Contra coalition hoped that by accepting the Contra armies as a legitimate instrument of U.S. policy, they could then obtain administration acceptance of their right to help determine the objectives of that policy.

Just as Congress was beginning to search for grounds for cooperation with the administration on Nicaragua, however, the administration was stepping up its efforts to bypass Congress politically and intimidate it ideologically. The National Security Council (NSC) had already established a private-aid network for the Contras to compensate for congressional miserliness. Moreover, President Reagan went on the offensive ideologically, accusing opponents of his Nicaragua policy of supporting Soviet ambitions in Central America.

As described in *Crossroads*, the battles over Central America within the Congress and between it and the administration raise two questions. The first is the substantive question of what new set of principles should replace the post–World War II policy of containment governing U.S. responses to efforts at radical social transformation in the developing world. Second is the procedural question of how Congress, the executive, and the U.S. public can disagree and collaborate in ways that will ultimately allow them to define and agree upon such foreign-policy principles. While Arnson does not speculate on the first issue, she does offer some important insights into the second. The main enemy of the administration's Central America policy was not an obstreperous Congress, as President Reagan often claimed, but rather the administration's own failure to accept the post-Vietnam rules of increased collaboration with Congress in foreign policy-making. If a summary lesson can be drawn from this highly informative and perceptive account, it is that U.S. foreign policy-making in the post-Vietnam context must begin with cooperation between the branches of government at home.

Roy Gutman's *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua, 1981–1987* also seeks to explain why ideological warfare rather than pragmatic cooperation defined much of the U.S. policy process. This study, however, focuses more narrowly on the coalitions within the executive branch and between it and the right wing of the Republican party. From the outset, when an aide to Senator Jesse Helms secretly inserted a U.S. commitment to overthrow the Sandinistas into the 1980 Republican

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party platform, moderates who favored a diplomatic solution to the problem of U.S. relations with the Sandinista government were put on the defensive. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Enders found himself forced to yield to pressures to cut off U.S. aid to the Sandinistas in early 1981 in order to preserve control over U.S. policy toward El Salvador. Before taking a trip to Managua later that year, Enders found it prudent to clear his visit with Senator Helms. The watershed in this struggle between the moderates and the hard-liners came in May 1983, when Secretary of State George Shultz tried to centralize Central American policy under his control but was rebuffed by Reagan.

Like Etheredge's drama of hardball politics, the policy process that Gutman describes is one in which Nicaragua had no autonomous existence in the minds of U.S. policymakers. To CIA Director William Casey, the country was "Nicawawa." To all of the hard-liners, Nicaragua was a country to be understood by syllogism: "Communists never allow fair elections; the Sandinistas are Communists; for the opposition to participate in [the 1984] elections will legitimize Communist rule" (p. 235). Unable to accept the existence of a strong, indigenously supported Sandinista regime, the Reagan "war party" developed its own version of Operation Mongoose in the form of covert support for the Contra armies.

Like Operation Mongoose, the Contras served no coherent political-military objective, and the Congress's chronic unwillingness to fund them made it even more difficult to devise a strategy. As the hard-liners consolidated their control within the administration, especially after mid-1985 with the arrival of Elliott Abrams as Assistant Secretary of State, and Congress dug in its heels against renewing funding, the battlefield shifted from Nicaragua to Washington. U.S. efforts to fashion a workable Contra military strategy faltered in 1985 and 1986 as the administration focused its attention on waging an all-out confrontation with the Congress over Contra aid (even though by 1986 the private-aid pipeline was in operation).

Efforts to revive diplomacy proved Sisyphean. Gutman describes how Shultz's June 1984 trip to Managua was undertaken as a covert, guerrilla-like operation known only to National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane. The trip led to a series of U.S.-Nicaraguan talks held in Manzanillo, Mexico, but because there was no internal mandate to undertake serious negotiations, the U.S. State Department's hands were tied, and it could promise no concrete quid pro quo for the concessions it was asking of the Sandinistas. Even after some of the key hard-liners—especially Abrams and NSC aide Oliver North—had been discredited by congressional hearings on the Iran-Contra affair, Abrams succeeded in blocking Special Envoy Philip Habib's proposal that he negotiate an accord with the five Central American leaders following their agreement to the Arias Plan in August 1987.

Gutman's account makes stimulating reading, providing important

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new insights into the Reagan administration policy toward Nicaragua. In the end, however, his book falls somewhat short of its objective of explaining how U.S. foreign policy became captive to a coalition of determined ideologues within the administration. Gutman emphasizes Reagan's casual policy style, which made it easier for private interests to penetrate the policy process on Central America, but he might have given greater attention to the role that Reagan's own strong ideological commitments played in defining the parameters of the foreign-policy process.

Cultural Approaches: Implications of the Drama for the Region

While Gutman laments the deterioration of U.S. foreign policy to a level more in keeping with a "banana republic" than a superpower, George Black suggests in a perceptive and lucidly written essay that U.S. policy toward Central America and the Caribbean has almost never followed its professed ideals. Black shows how the very term *banana republic*—and the images that it typically evokes of a profitable but exotic and violence-prone locale—reveal more about U.S. fantasies than about the region itself. Black's eclectic *The Good Neighbor* draws on press reports, travel guides, novels, and movie scripts written about the region from a U.S. perspective. Accompanying the text are newspaper cartoons and photographs spanning more than a century, which illustrate a persisting U.S. fascination with the vast disparity in power between itself and its neighbors in the Caribbean region.

This diverse array of sources enables Black to capture the important role played by Central America and the Caribbean in the formation of the U.S. national identity. With the closing of the U.S. Western frontier in the 1890s, the region to the south became a major stage on which the U.S. identity was to be forged and affirmed. From the start, however, this stage was a private one, a "backyard" over which the United States exercised intimate and exclusive control. As Black analyzes this commonplace metaphor, the backyard represents a place that is "crucial to the family's security; if it is not safe, then nothing is safe. . . . [It] is an area where one can act without inhibitions—sunbathe nude, relax with a barbecue, let the pets run wild. . . . It is also where the garbage is dumped, and in the old days it doubled as an outhouse. It is an area for play, experimentation, and control, a place where the owner makes his own laws, a laboratory for ideas that will be tried out later on the broader world beyond its walls" (p. xv).

On this backyard stage, the United States has scripted for itself the role of savior and civilizer of the region and its inhabitants. A turn-of-the-century cartoon showing dark-skinned babies labeled Cuba and the Philippines clinging to Uncle Sam's coattails expresses powerfully the desperate gratitude that U.S. actions have been expected to evoke amongst its

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weaker neighbors. The most valuable contribution of *The Good Neighbor*, however, is Black's perceptive portrayal of what it means for Central Americans and Caribbean islanders to be held hostage to the destructive fantasy that has enclosed them within the U.S. backyard. Although Black himself does not explicitly identify any pattern in this treatment, several motifs emerge from his account.[8]

First, and perhaps most frequently, the region and its inhabitants have been rendered invisible. A particularly dramatic example was the U.S. tourist industry's response to the Cuban Revolution. Typically, this island paradise for U.S. travelers had been featured on U.S. maps of the state of Florida. After Castro took power, however, U.S. cruise lines literally obliterated Cuba from their maps of the Caribbean.

More generally, when no crisis is erupting, Central America simply disappears from the U.S. media as completely as if a news blackout had occurred. The region vanished in this fashion just after World War II, when the area was considered secure from external threat and internal subversion. Journalists who had been covering these countries in the 1930s suddenly found it almost impossible to get anything published. At this time, the region's only identity "seemed to be as a safely exotic, if rather comical, tourist playground for Americans after the rigors of wartime" (p. 91). Even during periods of crisis such as the 1980s, the people in the region counted less than their external alignments. In the words of one U.S. official cited by Black, "El Salvador itself doesn't really matter. . . [what does matter is that] we have to establish credibility" (p. 137). Nicaragua too did not exist except "as a colony of the [U.S.] imagination, a tabula rasa on which the United States examined its own moral record" (p. 167).

A second motif is the depiction of Central Americans and Caribbean islanders as lesser breeds. Pre–World War II cartoons often portrayed Uncle Sam as a towering but benevolent giant who patiently sought to help or discipline little dark-skinned children who symbolized the other countries of the region. This attitude of smug superiority persisted into the postwar era, as suggested by a *New York Times* analysis characterizing the Cuban Revolution on its fifth anniversary as "bearing all the aspects of a willful, moody, undisciplined, but relatively robust child" (p. 115). President Lyndon Johnson's Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Thomas Mann, characterized his neighbors bluntly: "I know my Latins. They understand only two things—a buck in the pocket and a kick in the ass" (p. 115). Such overtly racist rhetoric subsided in 1970s, but it began to creep back into the political discourse of the 1980s, as exemplified by President Reagan's oft-quoted description of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega as "the little dictator in green fatigues" (p. 164).

Yet on several occasions, the United States has seemed to offer

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Central Americans the opportunity to move out of the backyard. An example of this third approach to Central and Latin Americans was the Good Neighbor policy of the 1930s. Its centerpiece was U.S. acceptance of the set of inter-American agreements renouncing the right to intervene, directly and indirectly, in the affairs of other American states. Little if any underlying change occurred, however, in U.S. attitudes toward the neighbors who were still being described as "emotional" and "quick-tempered" (p. 91), and U.S. commitment to nonintervention was quickly undermined by the onset of the Cold War. Similarly, the Alliance for Progress was regarded in the United States as an idealistic attempt to help Latin American countries become full-fledged democratic members of the American community of nations. Soon after the program was launched, however, cartoons and news accounts began to portray Latin Americans as poor students of democracy. The 1963 Panama riots over the flying of the U.S. flag were reported in the United States as a sign of Latin ingratitude for U.S. generosity, for example. The consequence, Black argues, was that the shortcomings of the Alliance for Progress were blamed largely on Latin Americans.

Again in the 1980s, the United States advertised its policy as an idealistic attempt to help the Latin Americans become prosperous democracies. But the Reagan administration sought to reserve for itself the right to define who was democratic and who was not. Thus although the 1982 elections in El Salvador, a U.S. ally, were celebrated as a triumph for democracy, the 1984 elections in Nicaragua were portrayed by the U.S. administration and much of the U.S. media as a sham. It was on the chronically divided and dubiously democratic Contra leadership, however, that the Reagan administration bestowed its highest accolades. NSC aide Oliver North called the March 1985 political declaration by Adolfo Calero, Arturo Cruz, and Alfonso Robelo the equivalent of "our own Declaration of Independence and our own Constitution" (p. 170).

Black comments that although Central America and the Caribbean have changed, U.S. policies and the images and fantasies that shape them have not. Rather than re-examine its cherished self-image in light of the historical record, the United States has tended to insist that the historical slate can be wiped clean. For example, one U.S. official proclaimed that the 1982 Salvadoran elections marked "day one" of El Salvador's new democratic existence (p. 153). The result, Black argues, is a kind of historical amnesia that leaves the United States unable to understand either the cumulative effects of its policies in the region or the antagonistic reactions of Latin Americans to those policies.

In conclusion, the books reviewed in this essay provide differing but not incompatible perspectives on the general theoretical question of how cognitive, institutional, and cultural forces interact with a country's relative power position to shape foreign-policy processes and outcomes.

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The questions raised by the books also suggest a research agenda for exploring further the problem of learning in U.S. foreign policy. First, how can the United States discover new ways of relating to outsiders that are more consistent with the values of democracy, self-determination, and social equality that form the core of its domestic political tradition? How, specifically, do changes in institutions and political culture interact to shape inherited understandings of what it means to be both a U.S. citizen and a member of the larger community of American nations? Finally, do the institutional and legislative changes described by Arnson provide sufficient grounds for forging U.S. foreign-policy principles appropriate to a post-containment era? These issues need to be addressed if the crisis-ridden "backyard" of Central America and the Caribbean region is ever to be turned into a shared neighborhood.

NOTES

1. See especially *Confronting Revolution: Security through Diplomacy in Central America*, edited by Morris J. Blachman, William M. LeoGrande, and Kenneth E. Sharpe (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984); Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Lars Schoultz, *National Security and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).
2. The classic statement of this perspective is Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1973).
3. See in particular the studies of U.S. and British foreign policies during the interwar years by E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); and of the foreign policies of Third World states by Stephen D. Krasner, *Structural Conflict: The Third World against Global Liberalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).
4. Declining hegemonic powers, however, generally cannot afford not to learn from their interaction with other countries. For key studies of this theme, see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987).
5. Gordon Connell-Smith, *The United States and Latin America* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974).
6. The 20 percent estimate of success was made by Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA under Eisenhower. See Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit* (New York: Anchor, 1983), 177.
7. James Lee Ray, "U.S.-Central American Relations: Dilemmas, Prophets, and Solutions," *LARR* 21, no. 1 (1986):227–43.
8. These motifs are similar to the ways in which most communities have typically related to outsiders. For one theoretical explanation of these patterns, see Manfred Halpern, "Choosing between Ways of Life and Death and between Forms of Democracy: An Archetypal Analysis," *Alternatives* 12 (1987):35.

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