

sought to disseminate the notion that their operations were modernizing Venezuela and held the key to its future progress. The propaganda effort worked. Cooperation with the companies became a hallmark of centrist and conservative conceptualizations of development among the increasingly powerful middle class. In practice, oil failed to improve the lives of marginalized Venezuelans, but the visible impact of the petroleum sector was sufficiently dramatic to keep the dream of oil-fueled progress alive for decades, blunting the appeal of more radical models of nationalism.

Tinker Salas's interpretation of relations between the oil companies and the Venezuelan state forms a logical extension of his social and cultural analysis, and differentiates his view of oil politics from that of previous historians. Other scholars have perceived conflicts between the companies and the progressive government dominated by Acción Democrática in 1945-1948, which they contrast to the allegedly more cordial relationships between the foreigners and military regimes, especially the 1948-1958 government led by Marcos Pérez Jiménez. In contrast, Tinker Salas offers persuasive evidence that both the companies and the leaders of Acción Democrática sought compromise and mutual accommodation.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, then, political leaders, the middle class, and Venezuelan economic elites found that a continuation of the oil-centered economy served their interests best, despite their lip service to the goal of economic diversification. Following the nationalization of oil in 1976, the new state petroleum company, Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), perpetuated elements of the corporate culture inherited from Creole and Shell. Employees of PDVSA often portrayed themselves as the representatives of Venezuelan modernity, a technocratic elite with the skills and insight to manage oil on behalf of the nation. After Venezuela's economy began to unravel in the late 1980s, PDVSA increasingly came to be seen as an isolated, self-serving enclave, setting the stage for conflicts with Hugo Chávez.

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*Dictatorship and Politics: Intrigue, Betrayal, and Survival in Venezuela, 1908-1935.* By Brian McBeth. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008. Pp. xiii, 578. Tables. Appendices. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00 cloth.

In addition to defining the Venezuelan twentieth and twenty-first centuries (so far), oil bequeathed to scholars the opportunity to write using rich metaphors. Intellectuals have called oil the permanent dilemma that produced an irrevocable stain on Venezuela's history, a substance that had to be sowed to create national prosperity and social harmony or else the nation would become a petroleum parasite. Oil has also inspired a sort of backwards teleology in which U. S. oil dependency in the decades subsequent to World War II shaped how we interpreted United States-Venezuelan relations as mutually dependent throughout the twentieth century, including during the presidency of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935). Brian McBeth's book is neither limited by metaphor nor any sort of teleology to explain the Gómez regime. In the process of analyzing the fortunes of

those who opposed the regime internally and from exile, and who actively conspired with international forces to upend Gómez, McBeth presents us with one of the most nuanced and thorough assessments of the Gómez era to date. McBeth argues that it was not Gómez's use of multiple means of repression that resulted in his longevity, but instead his political skill to consolidate and maintain control despite persistent and pervasive opposition from within and without Venezuela that produced a regime that endured until Gómez's peaceful death.

Well publicized realities of Gómez's life (wealth, teetotaling behavior juxtaposed with a plethora of illegitimate children, etc.) led to the construction of Gómez as myth. That mythmaking has also limited historical interpretation. McBeth's analysis of Gómez, extremely well grounded in a vast collection of primary sources, shows Gómez as a much more complicated figure, a savvy politician who was as aware of his political strengths and weaknesses as he was of complex internal and international political dynamics. McBeth does not question Gómez's corruption. He argues instead that Gómez used his political acumen to strategically spread the wealth of the state to break regional loyalties and to definitively construct a centralized, modern Venezuelan state. The first chapters of the book in their close evaluation of regional and national machinations are as much a study in modern state formation as they are a study of the slow consolidation of Gómez's power.

Upon that foundation (the drawn out process of consolidation of power yielded the first of several crops of exiles) McBeth builds his assessment of the conspiracies against Gómez that began in the late 1910s and culminated in the late 1920s. Conspirators found supporters throughout the Caribbean basin, including the United States. In sum, groups of conspirators organized 25 movements against Gómez, including 12 invasions. They forced Gómez to reorganize the national military and his relationships with state presidents to insure as much loyalty as possible. McBeth's analysis of the multiple movements that wracked Venezuela in 1928 is particularly insightful. McBeth argues that more menacing to Gómez than threats from without were threats from within the cadre of his supporters. One of McBeth's arguments, innovative in Gómez historiography—that Gómez's son, Vicentico, was rumored to have spurred the March 1928 student uprising and more than likely participated in the April army revolt—adds credence to McBeth's overall argument that Gómez's rule was frequently much more precarious than historians previously presumed. Using repression and exile as the tools associated with political acumen enabled Gómez's survival.

No work is perfect. I wonder in particular to what degree conspiratorial exiles were aware of growing labor unrest in the 1920s and if said unrest in any way shaped how conspirators planned for action after coups began. Other flaws are equally minor. Despite McBeth's inclusion of lists of cabinet ministers, state presidents, and short biographies of important figures to guide the reader through the Gómez presidency, the detail in the work at times is dizzying. Such flaws, however, do little to tarnish the quality of a history that will become the standard on the Gómez regime for years to come.

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