

support, they could not effect change due to internal divisions, combined with the fact that most of their supporters were disenfranchised by literacy requirements.

Becker shows that US officials' responses to the Ecuadorian left varied. Although the FBI concentrated on a perceived communist threat throughout the period, members of the State Department viewed the left as a potentially moderating influence in Ecuadorian politics in the early 1940s. They became more worried about Ecuadorian communism only as the Cold War took shape. Throughout most of the period, both State Department and FBI officials called for progressive reforms rather than the elimination of communism. Becker sees this tactic as a template for similar policies in the post Cold War era.

Becker's book relates an astonishing amount of information about both Ecuadorian history and US diplomatic priorities in the 1940s. His expertise in Ecuadorian political history allows him to underscore how FBI agents often misinterpreted events and problems in Ecuador because they did not understand how global issues played out in the country. He also, rightly, notes that race, class, and gender were particular blind spots for US officials in Ecuador. Becker fills in these gaps to some extent, describing women's roles and influence in the momentous events of the 1940s and referencing the actions of workers in the countryside. Readers will not, however, find in-depth analysis of race or gender in this book, although Becker closely analyzes indigenous activism in many of his other works. Instead, the author concentrates on political analysis that highlights the importance of the left in events of the 1940s.

Becker's own politics are apparent, particularly in his closing critique of US policy in Latin America, which lacks the depth and precision of the rest of the book. These minor points, however, do not detract from what is overall a compelling and innovative work. This book is essential reading for scholars interested in twentieth-century Ecuadorian history, the history of the Latin American left, or the history of US surveillance in Latin America.

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ARGENTINA

The Right to the City: Popular Contention in Contemporary Buenos Aires. By Gabriela Ippolito-O'Donnell. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2011. Pp. 320. \$38.00 paper.
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The rich array of studies on social movements and democratization in Latin America notwithstanding, the relationship between the collective action of marginalized people

and the expansion of democracy is still poorly understood. Ippolito-O'Donnell contributes to this long-standing debate by focusing on urban popular contention in contemporary Buenos Aires. She does so through studying, in depth, the emergence and collapse of a grassroots organization in a poor neighborhood in the southern part of Buenos Aires, the Villa Lugano Neighborhood Committee (CVL). She also places this particular experience in the history of popular contention in Buenos Aires, as well as in the study of popular political culture in Argentina. In her theoretical approach, Ippolito-O'Donnell emphasizes the role of geography, space, and territory ("the landscape of contention"), which she connects with an empirical focus on frames and discourses ("the politics of signification").

Following a brief introduction, the book reviews the state of social movement research (Chapter 1). Ippolito-O'Donnell here observes that the "spatial turn" in the social sciences has yet to be taken up by scholars of contentious politics, and she argues that taking "the relevance of geography in its dual reality (material and symbolic)" into account will help in understanding the dynamic relationship between political opportunities, processes of organization, and discourses (33). After a historical account of popular contention in Buenos Aires (Chapter 2), she demonstrates how social divisions in Buenos Aires are spatially structured and situates in this context the district of Villa Lugano, a conglomerate of poor popular neighborhoods that combines an old town, a series of state-built high-rise condominiums, and five shantytowns (Chapter 3).

The heart of the book is in Chapters 4 to 7, which focus on the recent history of popular contention in Villa Lugano. In an analytical narrative, Ippolito-O'Donnell recounts the emergence (in the 1980s) and the decline (in the 1990s) of the CVL, "a network-type organization that effectively mobilized residents and grassroots associations for improving environmental and living conditions in the neighborhood" (84). To understand the eventual failure of the neighborhood committee, she then looks in detail at the politics of signification, that is, at the cognitive frames of meaning that shaped popular contention in this particular context.

Ippolito-O'Donnell's core argument is that the CVL had to deal with a series of social and political divisions that crossed the popular political culture of Villa Lugano. These divisions were essentially rooted in different local territorial traditions and, therefore, place-based. As a consequence, frames of meaning that proved successful in Villa Lugano's old town could not simply be expanded to mobilize, for instance, the shantytown dwellers in Villa 20. But the problem was not merely discursive dilemmas. In the end, the CVL failed because of a deep-rooted social hostility that divided the urban poor according to the socio-geographical division of Villa Lugano. For instance, most old town residents "believed that their tax payments were being used clientelistically to benefit shantytown and state-built condominium dwellers" (223).

Two caveats for would-be readers: First, the "contemporary" in the book's subtitle is to be understood in relative terms. Fieldwork and media analysis mainly treat the 1980s and

early 1990s. This is fine for the case study, but it means that the wave of popular contention in Argentina since the mid 1990s, as well as the country's complex transformation during the Kirchner governments (2003–15), is largely missing from the picture. Second, the book overall is less about the role of urban popular contention in processes of “democratization ‘from below’” (2) than about understanding the internal logics of popular urban social movements and their contradictory relations with local politics. In this latter regard, it is however an important contribution, both in empirical and in theoretical terms. Its particular strength lies with the author's capacity to combine the stance of a sympathetic participant-observer with a critical distance that allows her to identify patterns of stigmatization and outright hostility among those studied.

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MEXICO

Mexico's Supreme Court: Between Liberal Individual and Revolutionary Social Rights, 1867–1934. By Timothy M. James. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014. Pp. 168. \$45.00 cloth.
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Anyone who has experienced Mexico's legal world is most likely familiar with the type of court case called the *amparo* suit. The *amparo* is a constitutional procedure that both common Mexicans as well as their elite counterparts have utilized to defend their liberal individual rights against what they consider local or state violations. Timothy M. James provides a much-needed study of this suit and the careers, writings, and interpretations of jurists and Supreme Court justices, who had the final say in the *amparo* cases, from approximately 1867 to 1934.

One of James's most original contributions to the legal history of modern Mexico is precisely his focus on the judiciary branch, which has often gone unexplored by historians of modern Mexico. His command of the legal intricacies of the judiciary, his analysis of justices' interpretation of laws, and his extensive use of judicial sources is quite impressive. His creative efforts to uncover some of these sources deserve applause—some judicial archives are uncatalogued and almost inaccessible.

One of the author's main arguments is that the members of the Supreme Court were autonomous individuals who were not pawns of Mexico's presidents. James challenges the notion that jurists were conservative and opposed the *amparo* during the Porfiriato, and shows that it was during this period that justices resolved thousands of *amparo* cases. The interpretations that emanated from the court in the last decades of the