

political incentives and rules of the game shape the extent to which these interests translate into policymaking outcomes.¹

One final point about case selection and empirical case studies. The book does a very nice job of justifying how and why, in Argentina, a case of low ICI and high barriers, executives tend to use decree authority more frequently than in Brazil, a case of higher ICI, where legislating through statutes is more common. Although they are outside the scope of this book, the more extreme cases deserve closer attention for their use of decree authority. In Ecuador, a case of low ICI, the incidence of decrees remains low to medium during the period of multiparty fragmentation and short-term legislative and judicial horizons, but decree usage is triggered precisely when the government has a working legislative majority, higher legislative re-election rates, and lower hurdle factors. A possible explanation may be the existence of significant executive veto power, which became stronger and more frequently used after 2005 and helped to reinforce unilateral executive policymaking. Perhaps a future adaptation of the model should consider the combined effect of decrees and vetoes to strengthen executive powers and undermine other players' institutional commitment.

Checking Presidential Power is a must-read for the new generation of political scientists, who can greatly benefit from a comprehensive overview, sharp criticism, and improvement on a vast literature looking at executive prerogatives, interbranch conflict, and policymaking. It shall also serve as a necessary point of entry for those interested in studying specific political dynamics and detailed causal analysis between the policy preferences of interest and lobbying groups and the institutional commitment, incentives, and strategies of established political actors in the policymaking process.

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NOTE

1. For a systematic analysis of the role of nonlegislative actors in policymaking see, e.g., Juan Pablo Luna, Frente Amplio and the Crafting of a Social Democratic Alternative in Uruguay, *Latin American Politics and Society* 49, 4 (2007): 1–30; and Jennifer Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Lars Schoultz, *In Their Own Best Interest: A History of the U.S. Effort to Improve Latin Americans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. Bibliography, index, 392 pp.; hardcover \$35, paperback \$24.95.

Why has the US government sought, for more than a century, to improve the economies, politics, and societies of its neighbors in Latin America? And what have the results of this sustained campaign of “uplift” been? Lars Schoultz sets out to

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answer this question through a detailed historical narrative, tracing how the interests in and justifications for US foreign aid to the region have shifted over the last one hundred years or so. From the war of 1898 in Cuba to current efforts at democracy promotion in places like Honduras, Schoultz details the pronouncements and policies that have defined US attempts at uplift, uncovering changes—and continuities—in the ideologies and interests that underlie them.

Schoultz offers two competing theories to explain why the United States undertook campaigns of foreign aid in Latin America in the first place: at one end, there is altruism, which he traces to a theory of sympathetic human nature derived from the very first sentence of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*; at the other, realism, derived from Hans Morgenthau's conception of foreign aid as a weapon like any other. He then uses this Smith-Morgenthau continuum to guide us through the actions of presidents, policymakers, and diplomats over the long twentieth century. Throughout the period, US actors combined altruistic rhetoric—"the obligatory idiom of U.S. policy toward Latin America" (290)—with a hard-edged, realist focus on US interests: economic interests in raw materials and foreign markets, interests related to domestic partisan politics, and security interests, especially in containing the threat of communist subversion.

Examining the ideology of US policymakers, Schoultz argues that belief in the inferiority of Latin Americans and in the importance of protecting and promoting US interests were constant across the period under study, and therefore do not require further explanation. (One result is that the book, written in a wry and sometimes sardonic tone, lets the racism of US leaders and policymakers speak for itself. Quotations from historical actors that range from paternalistic to openly vile are frequently presented without further commentary on their racializing content, a clearly intentional choice that might exasperate some readers.) What Schoultz wants to explain is how an additional belief—that "the United States should seek to improve underdeveloped peoples" (10)—grew into a guiding principle of US policy, becoming ever more central to the conduct of the United States in the hemisphere.

As he argues was true of the history itself, the book does not proceed in a linear fashion along a steady chronology, but instead concentrates on two "bursts" of US activity: the first emerging from the Progressive era, roughly until Dollar Diplomacy gave way to the Good Neighbor Policy; and the second in the Cold War. As the book approaches the present day, it accelerates rapidly, as is perhaps fitting, given the sources. Using a plethora of primary documents, earlier chapters provide deeply detailed historical narratives on the campaigns of US marines and money doctors in places like Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, and middle chapters detail the messy boundaries between the covert action of the CIA in places like Guatemala and Cuba and the development campaigns of institutions like AID. The final chapters, however, move quickly from one presidential administration to the next, having a less comprehensive base of primary sources from which to draw. In fact, the book's footnotes are almost entirely to historical documents, particularly from the State Department, Congress, and the presidency. Despite its synthetic quality—and Schoultz's credentials as a leading scholar of US-Latin American rela-

tions, obviously familiar with vast bodies of research—there are only rare footnotes to existing secondary literature, and readers hoping for bibliographic guidance, or a glimpse into the longstanding historiographic debates around the episodes he chronicles, might be disappointed to find instead the *FRUS*, the *Congressional Record*, and telling memos culled from the National Archives' Record Group 59.

What the reader will find are painstakingly detailed accounts of US deliberations and actions during some of the most consequential periods of hemispheric history. While Schoultz is not blind to the thought and action of the Latin Americans with whom US actors engage, they are not the focus of the book; this is unapologetically a history written from the perspective of the United States, using US documents, attempting to explain US actions. Although historians have lately sought to read the center from the periphery, to trouble existing chronologies, and to understand multidirectional flows of information and influence—part of a longer “transnational turn” exemplified by recent work like Amy Offner's *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy* (2019), Tore Olsson's *Agrarian Crossings* (2017), or Karin Roseblatt's *Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910–1950* (2018)—this is not Schoultz's project. (Perhaps if he had had more Latin American sources, or had looked with a different angle of vision into the conference records he cites, some of the chronologies he reproduces might come into question. My own research shows that, for example, Latin Americans were demanding the capital for development, and the institutions to secure it, at least as early as the 1933 Montevideo meeting, which Schoultz discusses at length, rather than only after 1945, as he implies).

Instead, the book looks to the men (and they are nearly all men) who argued about and carried out the policy of the United States in the hemisphere, to ask what forms those actions took and to explain how they justified them to their contemporaries. Buffeted always by the “Latin Americans' stubborn refusal to be passive” (11), US presidents consult with officials like Frank Kellogg, Sumner Welles, Nelson Rockefeller, and Henry Kissinger as they construct policies and institutions for the improvement of their neighbors. These men are live characters on the page, their personality flaws and interpersonal feuds bolstering explanations for their actions, and the reader gets a strong sense of how engaging Schoultz's lectures must be, with telling details and damning quotations woven into stories told with wit and dry humor.

The book mostly covers territory largely already familiar to students of US-Latin American relations, especially those who will have read Schoultz's earlier and highly influential book *Beneath the United States* (1998), but it draws that analysis forward into more recent history, putting it into conversation with efforts at democracy promotion in the 1980s and 1990s under the rubric of the National Endowment for Democracy. The book opens and closes with an examination of contemporary democracy-promotion and good-governance objectives in Honduras, and repeatedly reveals the resonances of this contemporary form of uplift with its earlier incarnations, uncovering the rhymes of history, even as it chronicles change over time.

The decision to conclude the book with a focus on democracy promotion is, however, a revealing one. Throughout the book, Schoultz stresses that among US interests, security has long been paramount, trumping other concerns. Even in the

early chapters' focus on economic aspects of Latin American improvement, when the United States took over other countries' customs houses at the barrel of a gun, Schoultz argues against the notion that the United States went abroad in search of profits. If racism holds little explanatory power for Schoultz, neither does the promotion of capitalism; instead, as the Taft administration asserted about its gunboat diplomacy in Honduras, "political tranquility" was a "bigger game than bananas" (49). Similarly, that there was a relatively low return to be gained in negotiating the various US claims on which Nicaragua had defaulted in the early twentieth century demonstrates, for Schoultz, that "the protection of U.S. economic interests appears to have been a minor concern" (51). Later, in the Cold War period, as the Kennedy administration outlined its new development programs under the Alliance for Progress, he similarly argues that economic interests were "of far lesser importance" than security interests (240).

In making this argument, Schoultz has offered a strong interpretative claim, staking out a position in a long historiographical debate between revisionist and postrevisionist scholars of US foreign relations, though it is mainly woven subtly throughout the book. The emphasis becomes crystal clear, however, when we reach the 1980s, when Schoultz asserts that US policy toward Latin America underwent an "evolution from economic to political improvement" (242), and his attention shifts to the National Endowment for Democracy as the era's most important institution of uplift. In these two final chapters, the only discussion of Latin America's "lost decade" of debt crisis comes in the context of promoting the return to electoral democracy in Chile; the phrase *structural adjustment* does not appear in the text. The World Bank and IMF do not appear, either, and NAFTA receives a single quick mention, in stark contrast with the thorough discussion of earlier free-trade initiatives like the 1934 Reciprocal Trade Act.

That the United States and the multilateral institutions it had come to dominate spent the two decades after 1982 attempting to thoroughly transform economies throughout the region under the rubric of the Washington Consensus is, therefore, curiously inconsequential to this history of "improvement." Such an absence allows Schoultz to argue, in conclusion, that Latin Americans have long been willing recipients of US efforts, and to declare that "we do not know if Latin Americans will ever begin to distance themselves from Washington's uplifters" (303). This is an assertion that would certainly surprise the likes of Evo Morales, Néstor Kirchner, or Hugo Chávez, not to mention the social movements that brought them to power. As the region convulses with a new round of social upheaval over its economic and political future, in a moment when the Trump administration has backed away from the mission of uplift—and, indeed, from a concern with democracy at all—we should ask what such an interpretative frame allows us to see, and what it does not.

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