that but, after our reading of the detail in each country, we might well have benefited from some meaningful conclusions being drawn from so many disparate 'cases'. Instead, rather than a book with a clear 'message', we have a richly detailed and always fascinating set of diffuse pictures. One suspects that what works well in a workshop, with discussion and active comparison, works a little less coherently in an edited collection, without such a concluding glue. It is a pity, as the quality of the treatment of each case is often excellent, and the collective contribution offers much to add to our understanding of Che and the post-1959 Latin American Left.

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Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 539, $35.00, hb.

The need to assert 'American exceptionalism' is the keynote of US political culture. It resonates in the boast that the United States is 'the greatest democracy in the world', a claim that was made even when the United States trailed behind most Western democracies by its own definition of what a democracy should be. By the end of the Second World War it was understood in the West that universal suffrage was a prerequisite of political democracy, but in the United States this right was effectively denied to African Americans throughout the South. When John Kennedy strode to the microphone on 20 January 1961 to speak on behalf of liberty, he was the leader of a country in which many citizens were still unable to vote. It was only in 1965, with Lyndon Johnson's Voting Rights Act, that the United States became a fully fledged member of the community of Western democracies.

The same blinkered need to affirm 'American exceptionalism' permeates discussions of US foreign policy. Why should the United States be trusted – in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan? The answer is so obvious that it does not need to be articulated: because 'America' is just and selfless, and it has proven this for more than two centuries.

There are sceptics, however, among them Woodrow Wilson. 'When issues of our own interest arose, we have been selfish', he wrote in *Atlantic Monthly* in March 1901, 12 years before he became president. He continued:

We have shown ourselves kin to all the world, when it came to pushing an advantage. Our action against Spain in the Floridas, and against Mexico on the coasts of the Pacific; our attitude toward first the Spaniards, and then the French, with regard to the control of the Mississippi; the unpitying force with which we thrust the Indians to the wall wherever they stood in our way, have suited our professions of peacefulness and justice and liberality no better than the aggressions of other nations that were strong and not to be gainsaid.

This sobering statement, voiced by one of the nation's great 'idealists', is very realistic. Indeed, the United States had been 'kin to all the world' even when it had fought a war for the ostensible purpose of freeing another country – in 1898, against Spain. Before entering the war, Washington had solemnly pledged that Cuba would be independent, but after Spain's defeat it transformed the island into a US protectorate, granting itself the right to send troops whenever it deemed it necessary and to establish

naval bases on Cuban territory. The Europeans were unfazed: they had expected no better. Americans too were unfazed. Judging by their press and their elected representatives, they were not even aware that the pledge had been violated.

But can we say the same of Wilson? Did not his Fourteen Points, his support for the League of Nations, his defence of the rights of small European countries such as Belgium or Czechoslovakia, fulfil the promise of 'American exceptionalism'?

There is another face to Wilson, however: his unsavoury record in his immediate neighbourhood, in the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico. Let me give one example: Haiti, which the United States invaded in 1915. There is an old chestnut, dusted off by US politicians, journalists and scholars: Wilson tried to bring democracy to Haiti and failed. In fact Wilson did not fail. He never tried. He invaded Haiti not to bring the Haitians democracy or to protect them from a non-existent German threat. He invaded for a most European reason: because the Haitians were resisting his efforts to foist a protectorate on them. Wilson brought Haiti not democracy, but Jim Crow laws, rigged elections and, in the words of Marine General George Barnett, quoted in the *New York Times* (14 October 1920), the 'indiscriminate killing' of civilians.

All this might seem unimportant. Are Haiti and the backyard not a minor footnote to Wilson's glorious defence of liberty in Europe? It is easy to talk like an idealist about distant lands where immediate interests are not at stake, but it reveals more about who you are to see what you actually do, in your backyard, to the weak. When US intellectuals like Zbgniew Brzezinski prattle about 'the idealistic American dislike of spheres of influence' (*Foreign Affairs*, 1984–5), they ignore two facts: that the United States transformed its backyard into a tightly controlled sphere of influence, and that it did so by the true 'European' method – violence. Woodrow Wilson was in the forefront of the crusade. It is a measure of the poverty of US historians that they pontificate on Wilson and his idealism at the Versailles Peace Conference and do not mention that at the time he was brutally occupying Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Brian Loveman sallies forth to correct the record. He has a sober, critical view of US foreign policy, both before and after Wilson. He resists the myth of the 'City on the Hill'. *No Higher Law* focuses on US policy towards Latin America, from US independence all the way to President Obama, but it consistently places it within the broader context of US relations with the world. Loveman is a man on a mission: he wants to search the past in order to understand the present.

I must confess a bias in favour of Loveman. I am sympathetic to his perception of US foreign policy. I have many qualms, however, about his command of the facts. I will give three examples. The first is a glaring omission, the second a gross factual mistake, the third a pervasive problem of distortion.

First, the glaring omission. Loveman devotes a chapter to the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. It begins with a perceptive overview of the foreign policies of both presidents. Then it moves to Latin America. But Loveman never mentions the 1952 Bolivian Revolution, except for a two-line footnote. Yet this revolution was, until Castro's victory, one of the two major challenges Eisenhower faced in Latin America, the other being the Guatemala of Jacobo Arbenz. Important omissions such as this are, thankfully, rare in *No Higher Law*, but they point to Loveman's faulty command of the subject.

Second, the gross factual mistake. It is normal that a book that covers such a long period relies mainly on secondary sources, but Loveman's knowledge of the relevant

literature seems shaky. His footnotes reveal a haphazard collection of secondary sources of varying quality. Loveman's discussion of the 1902–3 Venezuelan crisis is a case in point. In 1902, after seeking, and receiving, Washington's permission, Germany and Britain instituted a naval blockade of Venezuela to force that country's dictator to pay the debts he owed their citizens. The blockade triggered a furious outcry among the US public, forcing Roosevelt to ask London and Berlin to lift it. And they complied. The episode is important because it shows the Europeans' meekness vis-à-vis Washington in the western hemisphere. It is an indication of their acceptance of the Monroe Doctrine. But Loveman misses the point. He swallows hook, line and sinker the tale spun by Teddy Roosevelt that he had sent a veiled ultimatum to the Germans: unless they lifted the blockade, the US fleet would lift it for them. Loveman writes: 'The new navy had enforced the Monroe doctrine as understood by Theodore Roosevelt, against two of the most powerful naval powers in the world' (p. 177). Had Loveman read the definitive account of the incident written by Nancy Mitchell, who has mined all the available US, German and British documents, he would have learned that there is no evidence in any archive to support Roosevelt's claim. Loveman lists Mitchell's *Danger of Dreams* in his bibliography, but his endnotes reveal that he relies on an earlier and much less authoritative source, Richard Collin's *Theodore Roosevelt's Caribbean*. This is but one example of Loveman's haphazard use of the secondary literature.

Third, and most pervasive, Loveman's interpretations of key episodes are often marred by what appears to be an incomplete knowledge of them. In discussing the Louisiana Purchase, for example, Loveman writes that 'President Jefferson was keenly aware of the international and partisan implications of the Spanish retrocession [of Louisiana to France], with the possibility of French troops landing at New Orleans' (p. 21), and that he showed 'an astute and realistic analysis of America's immediate opportunities to buttress its security' (p. 22). This depicts a Jefferson who was on top of events. But in coming to this image of Jefferson, Loveman ignores several important facts: it took Jefferson many months to understand that Napoleon's intended conquest of Haiti, which the president heartily welcomed, would be followed by the occupation of Louisiana; moreover, once Jefferson finally understood Napoleon's intentions, he did not have a clue how to prise New Orleans from the French. Finally, Loveman overlooks a key aspect of the story of the Louisiana Purchase: Jefferson convinced himself, against the express advice of the French and the Spaniards, that Louisiana included West Florida. This sleight of hand allowed Jefferson to brand the victim as the aggressor: by refusing to hand over West Florida, Spain, the legitimate owner, was committing an act of aggression against the United States. Loveman's omission is particularly striking because he devotes six pages to the US efforts to annex West Florida. Although Loveman makes no gross mistake in discussing the Louisiana Purchase, the cumulative effect of his omissions is that his analysis is off-kilter.

This is frustrating, because Loveman also offers astute insights, and I am sympathetic to his interpretation of US foreign policy. Nevertheless, *No Higher Law* is marred by its author's shaky command of the facts, as evidenced in his mistakes, his frequent reliance on the wrong sources, and his inaccurate rendering of key events.

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