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John A. Britton, *Cables, Crises, and the Press: The Geopolitics of the New International Information System in the Americas, 1866–1903* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), pp. xiii + 473, $60.00, hb.

Despite the explosion of scholarship analysing transnational networks and connections in Latin American history, comparatively little is understood regarding the actual physical infrastructure and businesses that sustained these transnational links. John A. Britton's *Cables, Crises, and the Press* draws our attention to the importance of considering the influence of telegraph line construction, communication technology, and, most importantly, how these advances altered hemispheric diplomacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As his title suggests, Britton examines how the simultaneous developments of telegraphic cable and printing technology forged a new geo-political reality for diplomacy in the Western Hemisphere starting in the 1860s. Britton is keen to note that, although states expected to reap the benefits of rapid communication, the financial needs of the privately-owned telegraph cable companies quickly began to shift information to the equally profit-driven newspaper industry that had exploded in the United States. The 'new information system', as termed by Britton, greatly increased the pace and volume of communication flowing to and from Latin America. More importantly, this system shifted the control of communication from traditional diplomatic channels into the newspaper-reading public, and thus permitted them to have 'an influence in the flow of information and the formulation of policy that surprised and troubled government leaders' (p. 315). Britton traces how diplomats and government officials responded, with increasing alarm, to the growing influence of populist voices in driving hemispheric affairs. Britton argues that, between 1895 and 1898, the populist press, fed information by cable, began to take a central role in influencing diplomacy during the Venezuelan Boundary Controversy and the Spanish American War. In addition to increasing populist influences on foreign policy, Britton claims that the new information system also encouraged a more jingoistic nationalism. Echoing Benedict Anderson's emphasis on print capitalism, Britton argues that the books, political cartoons, and news editorials produced by the new information system ominously shifted US nationalism towards an emphasis on masculine military heroism and imperial expansion.

In a hefty tome, Britton employs archival research drawn from the records of telegraph companies, diplomatic correspondence, and historical periodicals to emphasise the role of the telegraph and the press in a series of notable diplomatic incidents in US-Latin American relations. The author's attention to technology and geography deserves praise. Britton details how, in a new era of telegraphic communication, factors ranging from sea coral, mountain ranges, and the highly-specific skills needed to operate mirror galvanometer receivers sometimes proved equally influential as traditional politics in determining hemispheric events. Britton also highlights moments when Latin American actors used the new information system to thwart or alter events in their favour. For example, Britton recounts how Chilean diplomats employed the telegraph network to outmanoeuvre the Peruvian-friendly US diplomatic corps during peace negotiations following the War of the Pacific. He also describes how Venezuela effectively lobbied US public opinion in the press during its border dispute with Britain. Britton's account of Philippe Burnau-Varilla's successful exploits in Panama, which he claims as a 'revolution by electronic communication' (p. 263), is a particularly-intriguing case supporting his argument of the new influence

of the power of telegraph cables and the press over traditional diplomatic and political channels.

However, Britton sometimes overstates the existence of a dialectic between the new information system that sought to publicise diplomatic imbroglios and supposedly-responsible government officials who aimed to contain them. Britton does document how some political figures like Theodore Roosevelt used the press to their advantage. However, he downplays moments when diplomats may have employed the cooperation or co-optation of the press. The influence of other critical actors, for example, business interests, are generally overlooked despite their growing influence in hemispheric relations. As a result, Britton arrives at conclusions that are bound to raise the eyebrows of some readers. William McKinley, often viewed as one of the first imperial and media-adept presidents, is described as 'overwhelmed' by the new information system and forced into war in Cuba (p. 226). Meanwhile, Britton argues that Benjamin Harrison 'mastered the use of international telegraphy' by using pro-war US press headlines to pressure Chile during the Baltimore Crisis (p. 153). Such a conclusion was not shared in the furious telegrams between Chilean diplomats, North American politicians, and businessmen who used telegraphs and their connections in the press to thwart what they viewed as Harrison's irresponsible jingoism.

Finally, Britton's definition of the 'new information system' also proves to be somewhat vague. Including travel accounts, novels, and even Mahan's theories on naval power, Britton's analysis appears at times to encapsulate all publications from the era related to Latin America. By doing so, the differences between the 'new information system' and earlier eras of slower, but equally influential populist publications, filibuster narratives, for example, are diminished. On the other hand, nearly all the publications of the 'new information system' are based in the United States. Although Britton accurately points out that the absence of mass-circulation newspapers in Latin America created a fundamentally-different scenario, one can speculate that Latin American urbanites and the small, but growing, middle classes sought to sway their countries' diplomacy through a growing exchange of information. This final criticism may not be entirely fair as Britton states in his acknowledgements that he plans to continue researching on the roles of non-US and Latin American actors in the formation of global information systems in a later work. Such research will be welcome in a field where historical studies are still often limited to national or regional questions. Britton's demonstration of extensive research and his vast knowledge of secondary literature make him a perfect candidate to continue the much-needed work of analysing the formation and fallout from the creation of global systems of information.

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Timothy M. James, *Mexico's Supreme Court: Between Liberal Individual and Revolutionary Social Rights, 1867–1943* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), pp. xvi + 149, $45.00, hb.

The Mexican Constitution of 1917 was the first in the world to include social rights, with article 27 providing land for landless population centres and article 123 creating protections for workers and their families. In the received history of these famous