

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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J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 47 (2015). doi:10.1017/S0022216X15000188

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

social rights, federal judges and Supreme Court justices are depicted as being ideologically opposed to the Constitution's redistributive and protective social principles and thus inclined to obstruct systematically their implementation. Timothy M. James uses largely unexplored jurisprudential sources (the resolutions of federal tribunals and the writings and commentaries of jurists and other legal professionals, found mainly but not exclusively in the Supreme Court's historical archive) to challenge this long-held view. In doing so, he builds on the work of Mexican legal scholars such as Ignacio Burgoa, Lucio Cabrera, and Antonio Carrillo, who have shown that jurisprudence very often favoured revolutionary social reform. And yet, the Supreme Court did end up granting protection to hundreds of employers and landowners against workers and villagers between 1917 and 1934. Therefore, the aim of this book is to explain how, why, and when the Supreme Court became an obstacle to the implementation of labour legislation and land reform. This point might seem a subtle one, but it is central to understanding the Mexican political system, especially the balance of power between different branches of government, during a formative period in the history of the post-revolutionary state.

Chapter 1 provides a revisionist history of the Supreme Court prior to 1910. Because the Court could not interfere in electoral matters and did not represent a direct threat to the executive controlled regime, it did have relative autonomy with regard to *amparo* suits, an individual's right to annul arbitrary or illegitimate acts committed by state authorities. Unlike most studies of the Porfirio Díaz regime (1876–1911), James takes seriously the Supreme Court's actions in this area and reaches a number of original conclusions. First, *amparos* did in fact sometimes prove to be a check on the discretionary use of state power. Second, in line with the work of Robert Knowlton and Justus Fenner, James shows that the *amparo* suit was often used (sometimes successfully) by the non-elite as well as the elite. And third, the Supreme Court was quite efficient, resolving some 57,000 *amparo* suits between 1887 and 1907.

This history of a relatively strong and active Supreme Court is important because in chapter 2 the author argues that 40 years of constitutional jurisprudence conditioned the understanding of revolutionary social reform and the relationship between the new social rights and the rest of the Constitution. If historians and social scientists have portrayed debates about articles 27 and 123 at the 1916–1917 Constitutional Convention as a struggle between conservative and progressive delegates, James shows that delegates across the political spectrum accepted the *amparo* as a key device to preserve the balance of power among the three branches of government. There was consensus for a strong judiciary and, following nineteenth-century precedent, the social reforms embodied in articles 27 and 123 were conceived as social limits to liberal rights. The paradox was that, in constitutional arrangements that preserved an earlier tradition of judicial oversight and guarantees of individual rights, the *amparo* became a powerful tool used by employers and landowners to resist new labour and land reform laws.

Chapter 3 explores the Supreme Court's implementation of article 123 and the newly created conciliation and arbitration boards designed to mediate worker-employer conflicts in a way that avoided court formalities and delays. Court justices recognised the social justification for these boards, but they argued that, given that article 16 of the Constitution upheld the division of powers among the executive, judicial and legislative branches of government, the boards should be administrative (executive branch) agencies, not tribunals pronouncing sentences. Employers

benefited from the constitutional limits established by the Court to protect the individual rights of citizens, and they managed to deploy the *amparo* against the implementation of state labour laws regulating the boards. In response, the emergent organised labour movement brought considerable political pressure to bear on the Court, forcing it to expand the federal government's administrative discretion and thus allow the boards to render binding decisions. Moreover, by the time that a federal labour law was enacted in 1931, a constitutional amendment had reduced the overall scope of the *amparo*.

If in labour matters the early Supreme Court insisted on respecting the division of powers upheld by article 16, chapter 4 shows that this was not the case with regard to the executive-led land reform, where the National Agrarian Commission acted as a tribunal and the president pronounced binding sentences (a violation of article 16 that this book might have explored further). In fact, until at least 1922 the Supreme Court actively supported the executive branch in its efforts to implement land reform. And yet, as James shows, the Court did retain the power of judicial oversight, through which it protected the right of landowners to use *amparos* to denounce illegal proceedings at a time when the national government was systematically violating agrarian legislation during the implementation of land reform. As in the case of labour, James shows that 'the Court was not subjectively committed to a defence of the current property regime', even though 'its constitutional jurisprudence meant that ultimately its judicial decisions favoured those who were' (p. 100).

With the resurgence of research on the legal history of Latin America, particularly a growing interest in the role of the judiciary (in part prompted by current reforms in many countries' court systems), books such as the one reviewed here are engaging in a long-needed dialogue between social scientists and historians, on the one hand, and well-established traditions of legal scholarship, on the other. This dialogue allows scholars like James to explore important social rights without having to disregard matters such as due process, the rule of law, the balance of power among the three branches of government, and, for Mexico, the question of limiting or expanding the scope of the *amparo* suit guaranteeing individual rights.

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J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 47 (2015). doi:10.1017/S0022216X1500019X

Thomas Miller Klubock, *La Frontera: Forests and Ecological Conflict in Chile's Frontier Territory* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. ix + 385, \$99.95, \$27.95 pb; £65.00, £17.99 pb.

La Frontera: Forests and Ecological Conflict in Chile's Southern Frontier uses social and environmental history, from a 'bottom-up' analytical framework, to understand the origins of Chile's forestry boom and the recent conflicts between Mapuche communities and forestry companies. But the first historical actor in this monograph is the forest. Land that is now covered with vast Monterey pine plantations had been, since the mid-nineteenth century, forested by an 'impenetrable' (p. 46) intermingling of trees, including araucaria pine, beech and larch, providing cover for a dense undergrowth of wild bamboo and vines.

Klubock organises his analysis of how regimented pine came to replace native forest chronologically, beginning in the 1850s with the Chilean state's conquest and