

academia. Some of the chapters do not deliver decisive conclusions and can feel hasty, but this is because the book demonstrates a desire to make a social and political intervention in the Puerto Rican public sphere—in both the archipelago and its global diaspora. Since Hurricane María and the most recent earthquakes can be also considered epistemic cataclysms, this book offers tools for scholars and activists to think through disaster and potential ways of creating new futures.

Dartmouth University
Hanover, New Hampshire
Jorell.A.Melendez-Badillo@Dartmouth.edu

JORELL MELÉNDEZ-BADILLO

PANAMA CANAL

Erased: The Untold Story of the Panama Canal. By Marixa Lasso. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019. Pp. 352. \$35.00 cloth.
 doi:10.1017/tam.2020.85

In this book, Lasso seeks to add a more personal and critical aspect to the often-told history of the Panama Canal. As the book's title suggests, she has chosen to focus her analysis on what she contends are gaps and even fallacies in our understanding of how the Panama Canal came into existence. The main thrust of her argument is that, contrary to popular belief, pre-1903 Panama already possessed a vibrant political and economic life—before the arrival of Americans to finish the canal partially constructed by the French. She points out that the depopulation of towns in the future Canal Zone was not a requirement for completion of the canal, and argues that the story of depopulation “is the history of political—rather than technical—decisions” (3). It is her contention that European, and by extension, North American sensibilities assumed that the tropics were an area to be “tamed” and that those living there were “savages” who had no business with or understanding of “modernity.” Europeans and North Americans viewed the tropics as the antithesis of civilization.

According to Lasso, traditional renderings of the history of the Panama Canal tend to overlook and even negate the importance of the first three formative years of the canal's construction. Furthermore, based on her own personal experience as a child living in Panama at the time, she describes in detail the US-created inequalities, misunderstandings, and cultural biases toward Panamanians. Lasso further states that the future Panama Canal Zone directly benefited from the elimination of the pre-existing successful Panamanian settlements.

The book's seven chapters take the reader from the time before a canal through the canal's completion. Lasso begins by noting that Panama's port was a bustling center of international trade before a canal was begun, and the port was already utilizing much of the high-end technology of the day. But the arrival of the United States in 1903,

according to Lasso, heralded the beginning of the end of Panamanian entrepreneurship and innovation. Despite the paternalism and blatant racism of the United States, Lasso argues, Panama was ahead of its time in business, race relations, multiculturalism, and what is now understood as environmentalism.

Despite these advances, North Americans were dismissive of Panamanians' understanding of their own land and their ability to administer their own affairs. Nonetheless, as Lasso explains, Panamanians in the Canal Zone already had in place a robust system of self-governance that was ultimately undermined and eventually eliminated by the Isthmian Canal Commission (ICC) when it abolished municipalities to promote improved sanitation.

While the book seems initially to veer toward chastising the United States for its blindness toward pre-existing Panamanian society, Lasso does appropriately note the positive contributions of the United States, such as the crucial role that William Gorgas played in the implementation of far-reaching sanitation programs to eradicate disease-carrying mosquitoes and the construction of public water systems. Even as she recognizes these positive attributes, Lasso points out that Panamanians' livelihoods were irrevocably altered to benefit the new canal project.

The strength of Lasso's contribution is her focus on the direct effects of the canal's division of Panama rather than a rehash of the extremely well-documented history of the time period. The light she sheds on the complexity of the formative and tumultuous early years of the Canal Zone transformation is shared in many parallels across the globe in which communities have been uprooted, sometimes callously, for technological and economic benefits. Lasso makes the reader consider the age-old question of whether the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

Valdosta State University
Valdosta, Georgia
rcharling@valdosta.edu

ROBERT C. HARDING

HISTORY OF SACKING IN ARGENTINA

La larga historia de los saqueos en la Argentina: de la independencia a nuestros días. Edited by Gabriel Di Meglio and Sergio Serulnikov. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores Argentina, 2017. Pp. 318. \$15.00 paper.
 doi:10.1017/tam.2020.86

Gabriel Di Meglio y Sergio Serulnikov reúnen a un grupo interdisciplinario de historiadores, sociólogos, antropólogos y politólogos para analizar las formas que adoptó el saqueo desde las guerras por la independencia hasta la crisis del neoliberalismo tardío en la Argentina. Tarea elogiada y poco común, los compiladores