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Russell W. Ramsey

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# Review Essay

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## War and Its Aftermath: New Writing on Latin America

RUSSELL W. RAMSEY

This cluster of books on Latin America deals with war, civil-military relations, and the social aftermath of conflict. The works are literarily important, strategically significant, uneven in scope, and likely to enjoy an enduring place in library collections.

We jump quickly into the ideological frying pan with John Charles Chasteen's new work, *Born in Blood and Fire: A History of Latin America*. In short and superbly written chapters, Professor Chasteen profiles a survey sketch of Latin American history which emphasizes both military and social conflict in each major period. The focus gives the reader an unbalanced overall view, since cultural history and civil society get little space. Author Chasteen's outlook is also distinctly at odds with well-documented facts revealing Latin America to be the world region historically possessing the fewest casualties due to war, the fewest soldiers as a percent of the population, and the smallest percent of the gross domestic product devoted to military spending (see Ruth L. Sivard's *World Military and Social Expenditures*, 1991, pp. 22-23; 50-51).

Professor Patricio Silva has edited *The Soldier and the State in South America: Essays in Civil-Military Relations*, the title deriving from Professor Samuel P. Huntington's 1957 classic on civil-military relations. Professor Silva's book fills the gap between the definitive writing on this topic by Professor Lyle N. McAlister in the 1960s and the present day. The essays deal with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru and are descriptively valuable, but not structurally definitive. Professor Paul Cammack's contribution characterizes these Latin American countries as "state-managed democracies," with the armed forces being increasingly less praetorian, yet retaining social roles not fully consistent with the posse comitatus model. Complementing this book is the Fall 2000 issue of the *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. The essays in that issue cover civil-military relations in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela. They show an expansion of civil society, a growth in constitutionalism, and occasional forays into military populism.

Manual G. and Cynthia M. Gonzales have written *En Aquel Entonces*, which translates loosely as "Way Back Then." They depict the post-conflict conditions under which Mexican citizens lived during the transition into immigration to the United States, or to living in proximity to the United States. They capture unforgettably the racially negative stereotypes which North Americans have usually held about Mexicans, a racism best understood as the "Black Legend." Shifting from the world's most populous Spanish-speaking country to the overwhelmingly dominant Portuguese-speaking nation, we examine Professor R. S. Rose's *One of the Forgotten Things: Getulio Vargas and Brazilian Social Control, 1930-1954*. For a period of time in the late 1930s, Vargas was evidently more akin to Adolph Hitler than to the benign autocrat the distinguished liberal Brazilian historian Gilberto Freyre has portrayed him to be. This book offers intimate detail on the centralization of power from the state capitals to the national capital then located in Rio de Janeiro, supported with sickening accounts of torture administered to alleged communists in select prisons. The author shows how vicious struggles between the political right and the left of that era somewhat resembled events in the streets of Rome and Berlin a decade earlier. The author does not implicate the Brazilian armed forces, but rather identifies terroristic police entities resembling the German Gestapo.

Bradley L. Coleman has written "The Colombian-American Alliance: Colombia's Contribution to U.S.-Led Multilateral Military Efforts, 1938-1953," in which he portrays the United States and Colombian armed forces as senior and junior partners in a cooperative military partnership which effectively boosts the national security goals of both countries, including the strengthening of democracy. Dennis Rempe has authored "Counterinsurgency in Colombia: A U.S. National Security Perspective, 1958-1966," showing convincingly that the transmission of the oft-

controversial US version of counterinsurgency doctrine in the John F. Kennedy era was a humane and effective tool of democracy and stability when applied by the Colombian armed forces. This is critically important, for the so-called Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have invested in a multimillion-dollar program to promote the myth that they are innocent social reformers when their chief products are, in fact, murder, social mayhem, and illegal narcotics (see the *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, 14 October 2001, p. A-12). Professors Gonzalo Sanchez and Donny Meertens have just published *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics: The Case of La Violencia in Colombia*. These authors build upon my own earlier works, studies by Professor Eric Hobsbawm, and Colombian Professor German Guzman's field interviews to create a social portrait of Colombia's socially rebellious rural sector. The detail is exacting and valuable, but there is little commentary on the somewhat skewed connections these people have with Colombia's national institutions. Finally, Professor Charles Berquist et al. have edited *Violence in Colombia, 1990-2000*. This book, in its original Spanish form, is influential in the current Colombian policy of negotiating with the FARC, although that arrangement may soon end. It covers Colombia's tempestuous rural violence in the most recent decade with great detail and precision; its biggest limitation is its minimal commentary on the armed forces and police, which are obviously vital in any serious discussion of rural violence in Colombia.

Emerging civil-military relations in Latin America are a key element in the region's democratization, and in the success of neo-liberal economics in a region that resisted free-market economics for many years due to its Hispano-Catholic colonial heritage. No discussion of civil society, as pioneered so vitally by the late Professor Seymour Martin Lipset, is complete without it. These books relating to conflict and the social consequences of its aftermath open important windows into civil-military relations in Latin America. They are recommended reading.

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**The Reviewer:** Russell W. Ramsey, Ph.D., D. Min., is Distinguished Visiting Professor from Troy State University to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, founded in January 2001.