

ALTERNATIVE U. S. INTELLECTUALS IN LATIN AMERICA, 1910-1970: RECONSIDERING THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS

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Until recently, in its history and literature, the United States has almost completely ignored the role of other regional countries in the development of the Americas. Throughout most of the twentieth century, North American histories and literature generally assigned second-class status to Latin American politics, economics, and culture. This is especially obvious in the historiography of the so-called "Spanish-American War". Nowhere in the literature dating from 1900 to 1970 do United States scholars address the Cuban struggle for independence, which began long before the United States entered the war, nor in the naming of the war do they acknowledge the agency of the Cuban people. Such myths as the "Spanish-American War", in which Cubans become virtually invisible in their own history, have become so deeply entrenched that it requires "myth breaking" to ensure that, as William McNeill states, "mythhistories will become truer and more adequate to public life."¹

For most of the twentieth century the tendency in the histories of United States-Latin American relations written by United States historians was to dismiss or stereotype the multifaceted roles of Latin Americans. Given that tendency, then how complete was the process?

Some non-mainstream scholars and intellectuals

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addressed the issues of United States-Latin American relations more fully, with a sympathetic appreciation of Latin America. Their ideas, however, were rarely incorporated by mainstream scholars, and for the most part their works have slipped from our historical memory. Between 1910 and 1970, Carleton Beals (1897-1979), Herschel Brickell (1889-1952), Waldo Frank (1889-1967), Samuel Guy Inman (1877-1965), and Frank Tannenbaum (1893-1969), sought to balance the literature and the scholarship on United States-Latin American relations. The works of these non-mainstream or alternative intellectuals might add a new dimension to the literature of twentieth-century U.S.-Latin American relations as well as make our historiography and general understanding of this subject more complete and less one-sided.²

Beals, Brickell, Frank, Inman, and Tannenbaum stand out in their efforts to portray the realities of Latin America to North American readers. Carleton Beals came to the study of Latin America through journalism, but left his post as a journalist to become one of the most prolific scholars of United States-Latin American relations. Herschel Brickell, a book reviewer and literary critic, and Waldo Frank, a popular writer and intellectual, represent literary figures who wrote books about United States-Latin American relations and about Latin American culture and history. Brickell reviewed Latin American literature so that for the first time in the twentieth century, significant numbers of North Americans could be exposed to Latin American books. Brickell and Frank turned their attention to the literary scene in Spain and Latin America during the 1920s, when most North American writers were looking to France for inspiration. Samuel Guy Inman became interested in Latin America through Protestant missionary work, which he virtually abandoned to spend his life lecturing and writing about

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Latin America through Protestant missionary work, which he virtually abandoned to spend his life lecturing and writing about Pan-Americanism and the importance of better hemispheric relations.³ Frank Tannenbaum, a Polish immigrant, became interested in Mexico while working for the United States Bureau of Statistics in 1922 as a Columbia University student.

Tannenbaum, who had made the front page of the *New York Times* as a twenty-year-old who had led an army of the poor into New York churches demanding food and subsequently went to prison for a year, went on to study Latin American history and became the first full-fledged Latin American history professor at Columbia University in 1935. All five intellectuals wrote about Latin American civilizations when most North Americans scarcely acknowledged that there were civilizations in Latin America. In *The Nation* Beals noted that "we are accustomed to paying more attention to a dog fight in Yugoslavia than to a first class revolution in Latin America."⁴

Ideally, my work is both a study of cultural criticism and an example of cultural criticism. It deals with an important, yet neglected aspect of American intellectual culture in the first six decades of the twentieth century. It attempts to link the goals of the members of a loosely-defined group of alternative intellectuals and the historical problem of the asymmetry of studies of United States-Latin American relations. Another goal is to confront some of the major problems of the historiography of United States-Latin American relations by emphasizing culture and ideology in the Western hemisphere. The general trend has been that United States intellectual historians have underemphasized the influence of Latin American ideas and culture on United States intellectuals. United States diplomatic historians have tended to omit the effects of United States policies on Latin America.⁵

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Carleton Beals, Herschel Brickell, Waldo Frank, Samuel Guy Inman, and Frank Tannenbaum believed in the possibility and desirability of bridging the distance between American ideals and American practices in inter-hemispheric relations. They were Americanists in the broadest sense, and they struggled to narrow the cultural and intellectual gaps between the United States and Latin America. The five alternative intellectuals were all born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and experienced the alienation of being--to paraphrase Waldo Frank--"Unwelcome Men" caught between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They rejected both Victorian values and those of uncontrolled industrial capitalism. They were doubly alienated because of their interest in Latin America. All were cultural critics who tried to understand and interpret Latin American realities for the broad American reading public. Their interest in Latin America radically separated the alternative intellectuals from other liberal and leftist critics in the United States.

The five alternative intellectuals absorbed themselves in searching for a new meaning of America in the United States that would encompass Latin America. Carleton Beals best expressed this hope for a "New America": "Let both worlds, both expressions of human destiny, our own and that of Latin America's shine out, undefiled, to make a joint future... The new world may then become an ampler experiment in human achievement than history has yet witnessed."⁶ The group also believed that when the United States intervened unjustly in Latin America that it marked a defeat for "Our America" as well. Beals professed, "... when I defended Mexico against invasion, economic and cultural, I and my little band were defending our America, the America of Whitman and Thorough(sic). We, I said, were as hated or ignored in our own land--more inwardly

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exposed to the menace of business than the peasants of Tampico to the Yankee Kingdoms of oil."⁷

These alternative intellectuals were all educated generalists, who, like other intellectuals of their generation regularly crossed disciplinary boundaries between literature, history, the social sciences, and philosophy.⁸ What separated the alternative intellectuals from their better-remembered New York intellectual contemporaries such as Randolph Bourne, Lewis Mumford, and Edmund Wilson, was the alternative intellectuals' interests in Latin America. The alternative intellectuals, nonetheless, were successful generalists who published often in the major mainstream and non-mainstream periodicals and journals from the 1920s until the 1940s, without much competition from specialists and scholars. In fact, specialists and scholars often deferred to them. Samuel Guy Inman was a respected instructor at Columbia University before Frank Tannenbaum joined the faculty, and was regarded by the president of the university, Nicholas Murray Butler, as one of the nation's best experts on Latin America.

The group came of age in the 1930s when they published most widely in periodicals such as *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, the *New York Post*, and *Current History*. Their books were published by such houses as Robert McBride and Company, J. B. Lippincott, Farrar and Rinehart, Alfred A. Knopf, and B.W. Huebsch. All of them spoke at universities throughout the United States and Latin America. Because they voiced their concerns for the downtrodden and the socially and politically alienated, they often identified and collaborated with other leftist intellectuals and leftist organizations in the United States, Latin America, and elsewhere. But because they rejected any rigorous ideologies, they remained isolated and unorganized, on the periphery of most groups. Beals slowly detached himself

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from the bohemian exiles in Mexico and later the Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky; Brickell could not accept many of the policies of the State Department; Frank resigned from the editorial board of the *New Masses* when he detected that the periodical had traded criticism for uncritical Marxism; and Inman could not accept the goals of the Protestant Missionary Board. Although Frank Tannenbaum loved Columbia University above all things, he created the Columbia University Seminars because he was "unhappy with the division of knowledge into disciplines" and the myopic views of many of his colleagues. Waldo Frank wrote in his autobiographical notes that "in the thirties, I wanted to be ravished by a community."⁹ Indeed, the alternative intellectuals did share a desire for a democratic inter-American community. Simultaneously, they had a difficult time gaining either grassroots or official support for their ideas in the United States. While they spent much time in Latin America (and in the case of Waldo Frank, Europe), all eventually made their homes in or near New York City, where they were surrounded by other intellectuals. Because of their literary ties, Beals, Brickell, and Frank tried to find solidarity with their contemporaries, but found little common ground with bohemians who were "more interested in protesting against conventional morality than those interested in social revolt."¹⁰ The alternative intellectuals were not exiles; they preferred "America" to Europe and strove to combine North American and Latin American ideas and writings in order to strengthen the Western Hemisphere culturally and intellectually. For similar reasons they thought little of literary modernists, in particular, H. L. Mencken, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and T. S. Eliot, and others of the "Lost Generation" who seemed to offer America no hope of regeneration.

As the alternative intellectuals reached the height of

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their publishing careers, the Division of Cultural Relations was created in the State Department. The division provided speaking and traveling opportunities for the alternative intellectuals in Latin America. United States interest in Latin America increased with the crisis of 1939 to 1941 as the fear of German penetration and Italian fifth columns south of the border preoccupied the State Department. Although only Herschel Brickell was directly employed by the State Department as a cultural attache in Colombia, the rest were called on by government agencies for advice and to speak in Latin America on behalf of the United States. Their relationships with the United States government were ambivalent; all but Brickell had been investigated by the United States Department of State, by Military Intelligence, and by the Federal Bureau of Investigation on numerous occasions. Only Frank temporarily endorsed communism and marxism, but none of them tolerated close relationships with Marxists for long because of their distrust of the "fellow travelers" turgid Marxist ideology.

Although the alternative intellectuals were steadfast in their criticism of United States foreign policy, all supported the United States entry into World War II. They thought it paramount to thwart the spread of totalitarianism and fascism to America, and because they had travelled frequently to Latin America, they were aware of the German and Italian presence, especially in Argentina and Brazil. They may also have been aware, as scholars have recently argued, that corporatism and fascism deeply appealed to oligarchies and military leaders steeped in Hispanic Catholic culture.¹¹

By 1945, however, the alternative intellectuals began to doubt the effectiveness and underlying motivation of the United States government's efforts in building hemispheric solidarity. The government began decreasing the budget of the Division of

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Cultural Relations and shifting its focus to the post-war reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan and to containing Communism throughout the world. By the 1950s newspapers, journals, and publishers began to solicit their work less frequently. Their decline into relative obscurity after World War II was a result in part of the rise of specialists in Latin American studies. Moreover, what the alternative intellectuals had to say about Latin America was no longer of such compelling interest to the mainstream and non-mainstream press. The group bitterly opposed the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the United States response to Third World nationalism. The shift in United States policy, the Cold War, and McCarthyism served to exacerbate the decline in their individual fortunes, as presses and publishers no longer found a broad audience for books and articles about Latin America, especially those critical of United States foreign policy.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, during the first few years of the Cuban Revolution, the alternative intellectuals, with the exception of Herschel Brickell, recovered their readership. They had predicted such a revolution as early as the 1930s, and saw in Cuba hope for sovereignty for Latin America. Beals, Frank, Inman, and Tannenbaum all wrote about the Cuban Revolution and visited Cuba between 1959 and 1960. Each supported the revolution, although Beals, Frank, and Tannenbaum had reservations about Fidel Castro and his tendency toward dictatorship. Reservations notwithstanding, they supported Castro in his efforts to gain "the complete independence of Cuba from the dominance of the United States."¹²

From the 1910s until the 1960s the alternative intellectuals challenged scholars and other intellectuals to recognize and understand the complexities of Latin America, and

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to become more sophisticated in their analyses of United States-Latin American relations. Beals, Inman, and Tannenbaum became interested in Mexico through witnessing the Mexican Revolution; Brickell's interest was stimulated by the murder of his friend, Spanish poet Garcia Lorca; Frank sought to understand Latin America as part of his response to a perceived cultural crisis in America, North and South. Historically, their initial reaction to Latin America was consistent with the State Department's policies in that the United States government's interest was provoked by crisis, and its policies reflected short-term crisis goals. But the alternative intellectuals strove to understand Latin America more fully, and their goals for hemispheric cooperation were long-range. Their goals, by nature, were bound to conflict with those of the State Department and those of the American population at large.

United States-Latin American relations between 1910 and 1960 were defined by major revolutions at the beginning and at the end, enveloping the Good Neighbor Policy (which incidently Carleton Beals referred to as the "Good-Will Raquett"), and the early stages of the Cold War in between. The alternative intellectuals began writing about Latin America during the Mexican Revolution, and it is fitting that four of the five ended their careers writing about the Cuban Revolution and its significance for Latin America. Although imperfectly, the revolution highlighted basic problems in United States-Latin American relations because it evolved out of the long, troubled history of Cuban-United States relations. The intellectuals did not embrace Castro and the revolution uncritically, but they did experience some vindication for their decades of study.

Although their opinions differed on many issues, the alternative intellectuals had some similar personality traits and backgrounds which significantly affected their views and

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distanced them from many of their contemporaries. Brickell and Inman were both from the South, a region that had experienced conquest and defeat more than once, a region that had known more widespread poverty than any other in the United States. They were in some ways more prepared to understand the poverty and oppression of Latin America. Beals, Frank, and Tannenbaum were Jews, and necessarily experienced America from a problematic perspective, partly within and partly without the mainstream culture. Beals, Frank, and Tannenbaum were discriminating intellectuals from a very early age, which separated them early from their young, intelligent middle-class peers. As they grew older, Beals and Frank chose to divorce themselves from their middle-class roots and middle-class intellectual circles. Although these intellectuals were isolated and marginalized because of their backgrounds and their interest in Latin America, they wrote articles and books about "Our America," in which they spoke for diverse peoples in diverse regions of the Western Hemisphere.

Like many Latin American pensadores, the five intellectuals also shared a love of Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Miguel De Cervantes. In these three writers they saw inspiration for the rebirth of a more enlightened America. All in some ways were "Don Quixotes," and most of them identified with the Quixote-like quest for a more ideal society based on humanitarianism, equality, and justice. The alternative intellectuals sought hope for America, which many of their contemporaries such as bohemian exiles, communists, and weary Progressives had long abandoned. The alternative intellectuals all shared similar criticisms of the United States-Latin American relations. They all searched for an ideology of political, social, and economic justice for the United States and Latin America, and were driven by a concern for the peasants and the working

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classes. They all ascribed to a hemispheric idea of America, although they differed about what exactly that meant. Above all, they wanted hemispheric cooperation based on a more balanced relationship between the United States and Latin America.

Scholars of United States and Latin American history as well as intellectual history can learn much from the works of the alternative intellectuals. They were writing perceptive historical works about United States-Latin American relations in the early and mid-twentieth century when most historians merely echoed the myths and stereotypes of Latin American inferiority. They used the prism of culture to understand Latin American history at a time when most historians focused mainly on politics and economics. Even though at times the alternative intellectuals engaged in perpetuating popular myths about Latin America, they generally transcended their middle-class Victorian backgrounds, a necessary precondition for taking Latin American societies seriously.

It is a tragedy of American historiography that the alternative intellectuals have been relegated to obscurity. The most important reasons for their obscurity are the increasing domination of the American historical profession by a liberal, positivistic ideology; the over-specialization of academic disciplines and the failure to encourage cross-disciplinary scholarship; the widespread inability to overcome negative myths and stereotypes of Latin American civilizations; and the United States government's policies of short-term crisis goals in its relations with Latin America. The growth of "imperial democracy"¹³ and the military-industrial-academic complex since World War II created a climate inhospitable to critiques of U. S. interventionism and imperialism in Latin America.

The works and ideas of the alternative intellectuals comprise an important component in the history of United

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States-Latin American relations.¹⁴ Theirs were active voices which transcended several generations of scholarship in the twentieth century. To understand the history of United States-Latin American relations and of twentieth-century intellectual currents, historians would do well to reconsider the works of this unorthodox group of intellectuals.

NOTES

1. William H. McNeill, *Mythhistory and Other Essays* (Chicago and London, 1986), 20.

2. I have created this term "alternative intellectuals" for the group that I have identified. Although I am ambivalent about the use of the term, I think that it is necessary to distinguish between this group and the "New York intellectuals" from which they have been excluded.

3. The Pan-American Movement of the first half of the twentieth century pervades this study. The movement was multifaceted because sponsors of Pan-Americanism had divergent goals. Some North Americans desired the United States to dominate the hemisphere politically, economically, and culturally. Others sought to protect Latin America from itself and from European penetration. A third group had the pluralistic aim of bringing about greater cultural, political, and social hemispheric unity through mutual understanding of cultures and a shared knowledge of science and technology. The latter group articulated the most multicultural approach to Pan-Americanism; it was the method Samuel Guy Inman spent his

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entire career promoting.

4. *The Nation* (May 1, 1925), 6.

5. Since 1980 the scholarship has become somewhat more balanced. Examples of United States historians who present more complete analyses of United States-Latin American relations are Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic During the United States Occupation of 1916-1924* (Austin, 1984) 249; Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York, 1984); Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and United States Foreign Policy*, (New Haven, 1987); Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990); Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean 1898-1934*, (Chicago, 1983); and Fredrick B. Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature*, (Austin, 1992).

6. Carleton Beals, *Mexican Maize* (Philadelphia and London: 1931), 361.

7. Carleton Beals, *Banana Gold* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott, 1934), 296.

8. Much has been written about the group of intellectuals known as the "New York Intellectuals". See Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley, 1991), 1-48.

9. Waldo Frank, Autobiographical Notes, Waldo Frank Collection, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

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10. Carleton Beals, *Glass Houses: Ten Years of Free-Lancing* (Philadelphia and New York, 1938), 36.

11. See Alfred Stepan, *Democratizing Brazil* (New York, 1989).

12. Samuel Guy Inman, Open letter to Fidel Castro, June 1960, Inman Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

13. Melvyn Dubofsky and Athan Theoharris, *Imperial Democracy: The United States Since 1945* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1983).

14. The five alternative intellectuals wrote more than two-hundred books and articles. For a complete listing see Virginia S. Williams, "Alternative Intellectuals and United States-Latin American Relations, 1910-1970", Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1993.