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Dario Euraque. *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic: Region and State in Honduras, 1870-1972.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. xxvi + 242 pp. $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4604-9; $49.95 (library), ISBN 978-0-8078-2298-2.

Reviewed by Michael J. Schroeder (University of Michigan-Flint)
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"Hondurans joke that their country is so poor it can't even afford an oligarchy": two riddles wrapped in a bad joke. Why is Honduras so poor? And why, unlike its neighbors, does it lack a historically powerful and repressive oligarchy? It is the second of these riddles that engages the attention of Dario Euraque, a native of Honduras and currently Associate Professor of History at Trinity College (Hartford, Connecticut) in this fine study of modern Honduran history. Despite some problems in organization, presentation, and editing, this theoretically informed and richly detailed empirical work goes a long way toward unraveling what might be called "Honduran exceptionalism," and is sure to enhance Euraque's prominence among a new generation of Honduran historians.

Reinterpreting the Banana Republic offers a historically grounded explanation for Honduras's post-1972 military populism, which stood Honduran domestic politics in such stark contrast to the swirl of civil war, revolutionary movements, and/or state-sponsored violence then engulfing neighboring Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. How does one explain the historical origins of a Central American military *not* beholden to entrenched oligarchic interests, one responsible for implementing a range of social and economic policies designed to ameliorate the most glaring social inequalities and forestall serious revolutionary challenges from below?- As John Booth observed in 1991, "Violent regime repression [in 1970s and 1980s Honduras] remained moderate by Central American standards ... both the Honduran and Costa Rican cases should reinforce the expectation that revolts [and revolutionary situations] are least likely to occur where governments respond to mobilization with even very modest reform and restraint in using repression." (Booth, "Socioeconomic and Political Roots of National Revolts in Central America," *Latin American Research Review* 26 [1]: 55.) In other words, unlike its neighbors, the Honduran government dealt with organized opposition through genuine bargaining.

Why? In a word, bananas. Euraque locates the origins of that "modest reform[ism] and restraint" in the crucial period from the 1870s to the 1930s, and in the political and economic peculiarities engendered by the history of Honduras's best-known and principal export crop. But why bananas? The argument in broadest outline runs as follows:

The period from around 1870 to 1930 constituted a critical "conjuncture" (p. xviii) that fundamentally shaped the twin engines of modern Central American and Honduran history: state formation and capitalist transformation. During this period, Central America became more fully integrated into the structures of global capitalism as a producer of primary export commodities, particularly coffee. As coffee exports grew, led by dynamic "coffee townships" dominated by an emergent class of local-regional coffee growers, imports and the fiscal base of the state expanded dramatically. After much struggle, by the 1850s in Costa Rica, the 1870s in Guatemala and El Salvador, and the 1890s in Nicaragua, this newly-formed class of coffee growers came to dominate the Isthmus's newly-formed liberal-national states.

But not so Honduras. Building on the above arguments of Robert G. Williams and others, Euraque gives them a distinctly Honduran twist. Here bananas, not coffee, and the Caribbean North Coast, not the interior highlands, were at the center of the process of capitalist transformation. Here a small class of mostly foreign-born merchants and capitalists, *not* a small class of mostly native-born coffee growers, emerged. The "absent Honduran oligarchy" argument, in short, "primarily addresses only what was not there." In contrast, this work seeks to "[look] very closely at the capitalists and workers of the [North Coast banana enclave] as subjects of their own history" and as creators of a "liberal and defiant social and political culture that cut across class lines ..." (pp. xix-xx). In this way the book aims to re-orient

the attention of historians of Honduras toward this historically central but historiographically marginalized city and region.

Since independence in the 1820s, the Honduran state had been dominated by the most powerful families of the interior provinces and cities of Tegucigalpa and Comayagua. The growth of the North Coast banana industry from the late nineteenth century spurred the formation of an ethnically distinct, mostly foreign-born commercial bourgeoisie, centered on the city and *municipio* of San Pedro Sula. The stage was thus set for a prolonged struggle between two groups of regionally-based elites, with two very different sets of class, commercial, and political interests. Disadvantaged by geography and history, and committed to defending and advancing their interests vis-a-vis Tegucigalpa and the interior, the North Coast commercial bourgeoisie coalesced as a class (mainly through the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Cortes, or CCIC) as it sought strategic allies. It found such allies mainly in the region's burgeoning organized working class. The resultant bargains struck between the these two groups from the 1920s and 30s comprise the historical roots of the military populism of the 1970s and after.

The argument proceeds in stages, and follows a rough chronology. Chapters One-Three focus on the period from the beginnings of La Reforma in 1877 to the end of World War II. Major events are situated within a broader context conceived as a number of closely related social processes, most prominently: (1) the formation and growth of state institutions and finances, at both national and regional levels, and in relation to specific political battles and fiscal crises; (2) class formation, as a consequence of the growth of the North Coast's banana industry; and (3) regional differentiation as shaped by the relations and struggles between individuals and groups of the North Coast and the interior. The author rightly focuses on major moments of rupture and transition, including the reconfiguration of political parties in 1919-1920; the 1924 civil war and its aftermath; and the accession to power of the dictator Tiburcio CarIas Andino (1933-1949).

Notable here is the inventive effort to paint a clearer picture of regional class formation and capitalist transformation on the North Coast during this period, particularly for the region's economic and political dynamo, the department of CortEs and its capital of San Pedro Sula. The city and region's leading merchant families, whose ranks included a significant proportion of Palestinian Arabs, receive special attention. The author also endeavors to incorporate the region's working people into his narrative, though the paucity of printed sources limits the discussion to broad overviews of major labor organizations and episodes of collective action. Oral interviews might have enriched the story considerably here; only a handful are used, and these sparingly.

One of the book's principal strengths, in short, is that it continually underscores the importance of local actors to the making of Honduran history. Many individuals, families, and family networks figure prominently in Euraque's telling. Indeed, sometimes the book reads like a virtual *Who's Who* of modern Honduran political history, a narrative strategy that confers both benefits and costs. On the one hand, families and family networks clearly mattered, as did powerful individuals; part of the power of Euraque's analysis derives from the close empirical attention he pays to these key players and their often dense interconnections. On the other hand, what feeds the analysis can choke the narrative; masses of such information can bog the reader down in a morass of names and detail.

Relatedly, and perhaps in an over-reaction to a historiography that over-emphasizes their role, foreign "banana men," banana companies, and the U.S. State Department make only brief appearances on Euraque's stage. External actors and agencies might have been integrated more effectively into the narrative's overall sweep. Still and rightly, Euraque's account should go a long way toward focusing the attention of historians of Honduras on the ways that Hondurans have shaped their own history.

Chapters Four-Nine carry the story from 1945 to the military coup of 1972 and the inauguration of General Lopez Arellano's second regime and the military populism that accompanied it. The complex political events of these years are traced with considerable attention to empirical detail. Several key episodes that helped to define the contours and lay the groundwork for subsequent bargaining between state and organized citizens deserve mention here. One came in 1954, with the U.S.-supported overthrow of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala. In that year the U.S. government, along with CIA- and AFL-CIO-linked "labor consultants," worked toward the peaceful resolution of a major strike by North Coast banana workers, pressuring the United Fruit Company and the Honduran government into granting major concessions to labor, and setting "an important precedent for the future of labor-management relations" (p. 96). Ironically, rabid U.S. anti-Communism toward one Central American country helped to foster reformism and class and political

accommodation in a neighboring one. More important for the story Euraque wants to tell "was the extensive backing given to the strikers by the North Coast bourgeoisie, including the CCIC" (p. 97), though the features of that alliance might have been examined more thoroughly.

Other key moments in the post-WWII Honduran political landscape are also analyzed in some detail, particularly the military coups of 1956 and 1963, the 1968 state of siege, and the 1969 war with El Salvador. Euraque works to explain the significance of these events while situating them within a series of larger contexts, including the Cold War; the formation and expansion of the Central American Common Market; and the Cuban Revolution and U.S. responses to it. Eventually all of these contexts are established, though in a number of places the timing seems problematic (e.g, the context of the Cuban Revolution is invoked more than thirty pages after the narrative has breached the 1960s).

Yet if *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic* succeeds in gathering between two covers many of the most important pieces of the puzzle of modern Honduran history, those pieces might have been fit together more coherently. At times the book's disjointed structure, abundance of evidence, and paucity of clear interpretive signposts combine to make for some rather tough going. Chapter Five, for instance, begins promisingly enough: "The streets of San Pedro Sula in late September 1968 remained under the watchful stare of Honduran soldiers charged with enforcing a violently imposed state of siege" (p. 77). The narrative then shifts focus, and readers must wait more than fifty pages for the author to circle back to make fuller sense of these events. One could cite many such examples. If these organizational problems do not undermine substantively the book's central arguments, they do not help. One hopes that Euraque's next work will evince greater organizational rigor and an enriched capacity to engage the reader's historical imagination. Perhaps precisely because the author knows his subject so well, the book's ability to capture and guide the reader could be stronger.

Among the book's strengths, in addition to the focus on local actors, two stand out. One is the insistence that arguments be based upon empirical evidence. The range and extent of the research represented here is expansive and impressive. Second, this is both a *dynamic* and a *relational* story that seeks a more robust understanding of the *connections* between major social processes, events, groups, and individuals over time: capitalist transformation, class formation, state formation, party politics, patron-client relations, collective action, imperialist intervention: these are among the book's analytic touchstones, and they are substantial and enabling. Some important and related themes might have been incorporated more effectively, including ethnicity and the formation of ethnic identities, agrarian structures, national ideology, gender, and sexuality. Still, the fine-grained attention to local actors, social process, and empirical evidence would seem to mark a signal advance in the field.

Defined by the kinds of questions it asks, *Rethinking the Banana Republic* can be described as institutional, political, and state-centered history. The book succeeds in advancing knowledge of Honduran history in some important and original ways, even as it does not depart substantially from the dominant historiography it critiques and seeks to transcend. Subsequent research on these issues will doubtless be indebted to this solid piece of scholarship. While the book does not explain fully all the major riddles posed by modern Honduran history, it goes a long way toward asking many of the right questions and suggesting some compelling answers.

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