



Lars Schoultz. *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998. xvii + 476 pp. \$28.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-674-92276-1; \$41.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-92275-4.

Reviewed by Steve Hobden (Department of International Politics, University of Wales, Aberystwyth)
Published on H-LatAm (November, 1999)

What links the following?

- In 1989, US President George Bush, at a summit meeting of Central American presidents in Costa Rica, described Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega as 'that unwanted animal at a garden party'. Furthermore, on several occasions he described Ortega as a 'little man'. When pushed on why he used such a term, Bush replied 'because he is - that's why.'

- Eighty years previously US Secretary of State described one of Ortega's predecessors, President Jose Santos Zelaya as 'an unspeakable carrion.'

- Nearly two centuries ago, John Adams (father of John Quincy Adams) noted that the people of Latin America 'are the most ignorant, the most bigoted, the most superstitious of all the Roman Catholics in Christendom.' Any attempt to promote democratic governments in Latin America would be 'as absurd as similar plans would be to establish democracies among the birds, beast, and fishes.'

These comments do not just represent examples of the invectives used against the US's southern neighbours. For Lars Schoultz, the sentiments that they represent demonstrate a mindset that has driven US policy towards the region. This mindset sees the region as inherently inferior to the United States in just about every sense. The countries of Latin America are indeed *Beneath the United States*. In this major new survey of US policy towards Latin America over two centuries, Schoultz sets out to give an explanation of the logic that underlies such statements. As such, this is not a book about Latin America: 'It is about the policies the United States has used to protect its interests in Latin America. It is about the way a powerful nation protects its interests' (p. xii).

Schoultz works within a realist framework, but argues that this is only a starting point. Hegemony

describes the asymmetries between the US and Latin America, but does not explain the specific policies pursued by the hegemon. Self-interest provides an initial focus. Schoultz argues that there are three elements of self-interest in US policy: security, domestic politics, and economic development. These have been constant over the last two centuries: 'as the challenges to these interests ebb and flow, US policy adjusts to meet them. What remains unchanged are the interests' (p. xv). However, underlying these interests is the view that 'Latin Americans constitute an inferior branch of the human species' (p. xv). More positive views of the southern neighbours would not have altered US interests; rather, Schoultz argues 'they would have led to different policies for protecting these interests' (p. xvi). These views about the character of Latin Americans and Latin American countries originated at the start of the nineteenth century and remain the dominant way of considering the region. 'The result is a distinctive mental orientation that officials use to interpret the bewildering array of incidents and problems that constitute the raw data of international relations' (p. xvii).

Schoultz is, of course, entering a crowded field and is competing with a number of other texts. Some, which like this one, take a broad overview of US policy towards the region,[1] while others focus on a specific time period or country.[2] Some have had a realist orientation[3] while others have had Marxist or neo-Marxist views,[4] whilst others have been influenced by post-structuralist thinking.[5]

This book is particularly successful in providing an overview of the history of US-Latin American relations. It is particularly strong on the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Schoultz deals with the complexities of these relations very effectively. Each chapter has a specific theme with one or two country

examples. Schoultz handles well shifts in time between chapters as different countries and policies are covered. He is particularly good at detailing the origins of foreign policy shifts. The Good Neighbor Policy, primarily associated with Franklin D. Roosevelt, is shown to have had its origins with Elihu Root, Secretary of State to FDR's Uncle Theodore. Theodore Roosevelt is, of course, better known for his corollary to the Monroe doctrine, and for carrying a big stick and speaking softly. However, in an address to Congress, he noted that there were republics in Latin America that had developed so far that 'we now meet not only on a basis of entire equality, but in a spirit of frank and respectful friendship.' In these words, Schoultz sees the influence of Root (p. 190), who elsewhere in private correspondence to a friend noted that 'I really like them [the South Americans] and intend to show it. I think their friendship is really important to the United States, and the best way to secure it is by treating them like gentlemen' (p. 191). Despite these first signs of a more progressive approach towards Latin America, it wasn't until after prolonged periods of occupation by US Marines of Cuba and Nicaragua that this started to become more of a policy, first under Hoover, and subsequently during FDR's presidency. Hoover started the policy of the withdrawal of the Marines, and under FDR, non-intervention became central to US policy (for a time at least). In a similar way, Schoultz demonstrates that the Alliance for Progress, mostly associated with Kennedy, had its origins in the preceding Republican Eisenhower presidency (p. 354).

Whether the book is successful in fulfilling its aims depends on how one views the analysis of culture that it provides. Its original contribution is the combination of an essentially realist interpretation of US foreign policy, with an analysis of political culture. Here Schoultz reflects a current move in International Relations to take culture seriously.^[6] He is extremely successful at providing details of the views of a continuous parade of diplomats and policy makers. This makes for a very depressing spectacle of racism at the centre of US foreign policy making. The elements of this change over time. Through the nineteenth century, US prejudice was primarily directed against the Spanish and Catholic colonial heritage. Through the twentieth century, this developed into more of a black-white racism. The official view was that political stability in the region was more or less in direct relation to the proportion of pure white inhabitants (p. 278).

On this issue, Schoultz has provided enough material to be convincing. In particular, he has demonstrated how these views are reproduced. For example, new recruits to the State Department in the 1920s were inculcated into the mindset with a series of lectures that outlined the official views. In such lectures, Ecuador was described as 'Population 2,000,000, About five percent pure white, rest mixed blood or pure Indians. Very backward country.' And that is all! Corruption was to be expected: 'with certain exceptions [the] general characteristic of most Governments of Latin America, especially those in the tropics and having very small pure white population, is that great dishonesty exists among public officials.' 'However, in terms of relations, the new recruits were informed that 'Latin Americans [are] very easy people to deal with if properly managed. Force not necessary. They respond very well to patience.' (all quotes from p. 278)

A further way in which the mindset was reproduced was through the production of national character guidelines. This approach developed following the publication of Ruth Benedict's 1934 work *Patterns of Culture*. Embassies throughout Latin America produced national character analyses based on the guidelines in Benedict's work. Schoultz quotes examples from a 1948 analysis of the Cuban national character produced by James Cortada: 'Cubans are prone to be extremely nervous, which coupled with a tendency to stomach and liver disorders, frequently make them short-tempered and excitable.'; 'They are extremely open-handed with money and usually live beyond their means. This spirit of prodigality overflows to public finance and administrative expenses invariably exceed income' (pp. 329-30).

I would not argue then with Schoultz's main contention that a particular view of Latin Americans is central to US thinking about the region. What I am less clear about is how this converts interests into a particular set of policy outcomes. If interests have remained constant, and a pernicious racism has typified the view of the region, then why have there been twists and turns to US foreign policy. Does the incorporation of an analysis of the State Department's racism get us any closer than a realist consideration of national interest to why a certain policy is followed? Why have one set of policies been chosen and not another? Where policy options have existed, how have the racist views of the State Department resulted in the choice of a particular set of policies?

For me, part of the problem here is the lack of an analysis of Latin American development. I can understand that Schoultz wishes to restrict the scope of his analysis, and not to make this a book about Latin America. However this does have the result of considering US policy in a vacuum. Even if we accept that US policy makers view developments in Latin America through a particular set of lens, this does not deny that (using just about any quantitative data that we may wish as our point of reference) Latin America remains severely underdeveloped compared to the U.S. We might argue about the reasons for this, but, I would argue, US foreign policy towards the regions needs to be seen in the light of this, and potentially as part of the explanation.

Schoultz sees the persistence of this mindset into the structural adjustment, democracy promotion, and drug policies of the current day. I would agree, but wonder whether his conclusion needs to be quite as depressing as it is. Early in 1999, President Clinton went to Guatemala and apologised to the Guatemalan people for the US's involvement in maintaining the post-1956 military democracy. Certainly there is a lot of other apologising to be done for US policies during the Cold War; however, this seems to me be a positive, even if limited, step which suggests that potentially a relationship built on equality is a possibility.

Despite these criticisms, I do think that this is an excellent book, both as a scholarly contribution to the field and as a text for use by both undergraduate and graduate students. It is superbly written and is an enjoyable read. The large cast and wealth of events never become completely overwhelming. Some knowledge of US history and political processes is assumed, but given the scope of the work, this is fair enough. Schoultz is very fond of metaphors, and occasionally these are overplayed—for example, an extended allusion to Panama and Nicaragua as competing wedding partners to the US with regard to a trans-isthmus canal is slightly overdone. The last two chapters do tail off slightly, and the period 1950-1990 is covered in 33 pages, compared to over 360 for the previous 150 years. The Reagan era gets little more than a page. I'm not entirely clear why this is. Perhaps there is less material currently available related

to this period, or maybe Schoultz has not been able to find good material to back up his argument. The most likely explanation is that, as a sensible historian, he is waiting for the accounts of this period to become more settled.

To summarise, Schoultz has produced a superb book which contains much material to enjoy and ponder over. It sheds a great deal of light on the thinking that has led to a dismal history of policy making between the US and Latin America. We can only hope that it will also find an audience within the US Government. If it does, then perhaps there can be some more hope that Schoultz's gloomy conclusions are not entirely justified.

Notes:

[1]. For example, Harold Molineu, 1990, *U.S. Policy Toward Latin America: From Regionalism to Globalism*, Boulder, Col.: Westview Press; Peter Smith, 1996, *Talons of the Eagle : Dynamics of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, Oxford University Press.

[2]. For example, Thomas Carothers, 1991, *In The Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in The Reagan Years*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Piero Gleijeses, 1991, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954*, Princeton University Press.

[3]. Howard Wiarda, 1995, *Democracy and its Discontents: Development, Interdependence, and U.S. policy in Latin America*, London: Rowman & Littlefield.

[4]. Jeremy Brown, *Explaining the Reagan Years in Central America : A World System Perspective*, Lanham, Md: University Press of America.

[5]. Eldon Kenworthy, 1995, *—America/Americas: Myth in the Making of U.S. Policy toward Latin America*, Pennsylvania State University Press.

[6]. Yosef Lapid & Friedrich Kratochwil, eds, 1996, *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Copyright (c) 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Steve Hobden. Review of Schoultz, Lars, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. November, 1999.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3590>

Copyright © 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.