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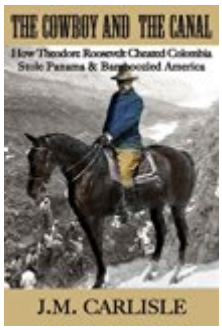
J. M. Carlisle. *The Cowboy and the Canal: How Theodore Roosevelt Cheated Colombia, Stole Panama, and Bamboozled America.* Tucson: Integral Publishers, 2014. 338 pp. $19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-9904419-1-5.



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In a controversial move in foreign policy in 1903, US President Theodore Roosevelt used executive power to order the US Navy to effectively aid in the Panamanian declaration of independence of Panama from Colombia. International dispute remains as to the motives of Panamanian citizens, the Colombian government, and US investors in this unprecedented event; that the US government was (illegally) shifting its foreign policy by doing something new to gain sovereignty over part of the isthmus in order to build a canal is not in dispute. The centenary of Panama's independence inspired a number of publications from all three countries, in which scholars took on the role of each country's interests in the events that made Panama an independent country under the protection of the United States. From all three, scholars agree that US interests as perceived by the Roosevelt administration guided US actions.

In *The Cowboy and the Canal: How Theodore Roosevelt Cheated Colombia, Stole Panama, and Bamboozled America,* J. M. Carlisle examines documents, primarily newspapers, to show the extent of corruption—especially revolving around Roosevelt, French engineer Philippe Bunau-Varilla, and US lawyer Nelson Cromwell—surrounding the US acquisition of the Panama Canal. The work is intended for a popular audience, extolling the virtues of using primary sources rather than secondary, and generally reads well as an overview of Roosevelt's corruption for a popular audience. Carlisle does not, however, engage at all in any consideration of the historiography since the early part of the twentieth century, of theory, or even of much historical context before 1896—including the active involvement of Panamanian people—resulting in a book that is not only a general overview of one isolated aspect of this history but also a monograph often as sensational and as incomplete as the contemporary newspapers and accounts from which the analysis comes. More than analysis, in fact, it is an easily readable narrative of corruption pulled together from reactions and investigations from the early twentieth century. The reader is stunned by the absolute lack of any attention to any author who has written about

these events since, as though the events had literally never been studied by anyone after the death of Roosevelt.[1]

Read as a publication that brings together concerns revealed in the early twentieth century about the US acquisition of the Panama Canal Zone, Carlisle's work is very interesting despite somewhat frequent editing issues (there is a typo, misspelling, or editing error for about every four pages of the book, and some are major). It begins with a brief introductory chapter about Panama and pre-twentieth-century interests in building a canal, in which the only Panamanian actor is Panama itself in the form of an uninhabitable jungle of disease, misery, and evils. Carlisle, in fact, writes that "in thinking the Isthmus was cursed, [Richard Harding] Davis might have been on to something" (p. 26). The ambitious chapter intends to introduce Panama and its geography, the discussions of an isthmian crossing from 1500 through to the 1900s, and the development of US interests in Panama. In trying to do so much, the chapter manages to do very little, and the nonexpert may find the chronology confusing.

Carlisle moves quickly into the meat of the book, which surrounds the corrupt and underhanded dealings of US (and foreign) statesmen and lawyers in angling for profit gains by making the Canal happen in Panama rather than the more geographically reasonable Nicaragua. Here and throughout, Carlisle discounts all arguments for the Panama route as dishonest scheming, probably a result of her sources as much as of the reality of politics at the time. The rest of the book is divided into chapters arranged in roughly chronological order, from the growing involvement of corrupt US business and legal interests in the late 1800s through Roosevelt's ascension to the presidency; the way that President Roosevelt got tied in with those business interests; the eruption of political debate surrounding US involvement in Panama; global reaction and the effects of this action on US diplomacy from 1903 to 1908; 1908-12 attacks on Roosevelt's involvement with the Canal; and, finally, the opening of the Canal in 1914. This final chapter emphasizes the role of Roosevelt and the ways that he used the Canal's opening in his own politics, ending with consideration of Roosevelt's concerns about his own manliness, which brings the book stylistically to a nice full circle from its introduction.

Most useful in this work, although the portrayal is not balanced, is the demonstration of how concerns from the time and Roosevelt's own character guided his actions in relation to foreign policy toward Panama. The reader clearly sees, especially in the frequent direct quotes from dozens of US newspapers, how the public was receiving news about Panama and how politicians, lawyers, and investors manipulated the press (and, at times, fought against certain agents of the press, such as Joseph Pulitzer). In chapter 2, the author provides some interesting insights into the ways that powerful figures affected lobbies and politics in the United States at the time. It is important to note that this is a completely US-focused work. Panamanian people figure directly into 17 of 276 pages of text, and no Spanish-language sources are referenced.

In showing the use of US propaganda surrounding the Canal, Carlisle has done a commendable job in bringing together sources from over one hundred newspapers and publications. The book, unfortunately, suffers from an utter lack of attention to any historiography—which includes information learned and revealed after the publication of her sources—or any of the now-extensive literature about the topic, the gender questions involved, the theory of manifest destiny, and dollar diplomacy. The author frequently provides paragraphs or pages of information with no relevant citations, where both author and reader would have been well served with references to all of this extensive literature. Overall, therefore, while the book seems intended for a popular audience, it will be most useful for experts on this

topic, who already know the theory and much of the contextual information within which this story should be situated.

Note

[1]. Many scholars have published work on this topic, especially marking the hundredth anniversary of Panama's independence. See, for example, Ovidio Díaz Espino, ***How Wall Street Created a Nation: J. P. Morgan, Teddy Roosevelt, and the Panama Canal*** (New York: Basic Books, 2003); and Lawrence O. Ealy, ***Yanqui Politics and the Isthmian Canal*** (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971). See also Michael J. Hogan, ***The Panama Canal in American Politics: Domestic Advocacy and the Evolution of Policy*** (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Matthew Parker, ***Panama Fever: The Epic Story of the Building of the Panama Canal*** (New York: Anchor Books, 2009); David McCullough, ***The Path between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914*** (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1977); J. Saxon Mills, ***The Panama Canal: A History and Description of the Enterprise*** (n.p.: The Project Gutenberg EBook of the Panama Canal, 2010); and Noel Maurer and Carlos Yu, ***The Big Ditch: How America Took, Built, Ran, and Ultimately Gave Away the Panama Canal*** (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). Numerous Spanish-language sources have also been published in the past few decades.