

## BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

# Andean or Caribbean? Nine Books on Colombia

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This essay reviews the following works:

**An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World.** By Ernesto Bassi. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. Pp ix + 360. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822362401.

**Marijuana Boom: The Rise and Fall of Colombia's First Drug Paradise.** By Lina Britto. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020. Pp. 352. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520325470.

**Crafting a Republic for the World: Scientific, Geographic, and Historiographic Inventions of Colombia.** By Lina del Castillo. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. Pp. 402. \$30.00 paper back. ISBN: 9781496205483.

**Guerrilla Marketing: Counterinsurgency and Capitalism in Colombia.** By Alexander L. Fattal. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. Pp. 304. \$27.50 paperback. ISBN 9780226590646.

**1892: Un año insignificante; Orden policial y desorden social en la Bogotá de fin de siglo.** By Max S. Hering Torres. Bogotá: Critica y Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2018. Pp. 245. COP\$50.000 hardcover. ISBN: 9789584266606.

**Makers of Democracy: A Transnational History of the Middle Classes in Colombia.** By A. Ricardo López-Pedrerros. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. Pp. 360. \$28.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478002857.

**Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas.** By Amy C. Offner. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. 400. \$39.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780691190938.

**No Limits to Their Sway: Cartagena's Privateers and the Masterless Caribbean in the Age of Revolutions.** By Edgardo Pérez Morales. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 248. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780826521927.

**The Politics of Taste: Beatriz González and Cold War Aesthetics.** By Ana María Reyes. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. Pp. 328. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478003977.

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Recently, Colombia met a deadly milestone. On November 16, 2020, Hurricane Iota roared over the islands of Providencia and San Andrés, located in the Caribbean Sea, demolishing homes, uprooting trees, and leaving two dead. It marked the first time in recorded meteorological history that a category five hurricane ever hit Colombian soil. Colombian governmental, charitable, and international aid agencies rushed to support the pair of tiny islands. It is almost certain that international newspapers likely unfamiliar with Colombia were unaware of this Caribbean portion of its territory. Yet the islands are a part of a renewed scholarly interest in the history of the country when it was conceivably a Caribbean-Atlantic nation.

The nine books under review in this essay span the length of Colombia's existence, from a late Spanish colonial possession, to a vast postcolonial state called Gran Colombia in the aftermath of the age of revolutions, to a republic amid unresolved political, social, and economic inequalities. While historians increasingly uncover and highlight the ways Colombia was a part of a Caribbean-Atlantic nexus, they also explain how political and intellectual elites intentionally offered an alternative vision of Colombia as an Andean-Atlantic nation. These competing visions of Colombia underline the nine books reviewed in this essay, which show the endurance and legacies of these powerful framings of the nation-state. Despite these divergent renderings of Colombia, however, scholars are interrogating depictions of Colombia as "a nation in spite of itself" and centering narratives of the country's past away from violence as a framework.<sup>1</sup> Replacing it, these nine books under review uncover Colombian statecraft in either its emergent or mature form, often deployed to promote order, and then include as well as exclude Colombian citizens. These books, sometimes intentionally, and other times unintentionally, historicize Colombia's position within Caribbean-Atlantic and Andean-Atlantic networks that shape the formation of the country's politics, society, and economy in ways not fully appreciated. Hemispheric encounters addressed in some of the books under review reveal the centrality of Colombia within wider debates about republicanism in the age of revolution, modern economic development schemes, social classes and popular cultural aesthetics, international drug smuggling and control systems, and state responses to radical political projects.

### From a Caribbean-Atlantic to an Andean-Atlantic Nation

Over the last two decades, historians of Colombia have seriously applied the Atlantic World framework that emphasizes the interconnectedness of peoples, ideas, and commerce between Colombia, the Caribbean, the United States, and Spain. This has been mostly shepherded by scholars studying in doctoral programs in the United States and, to a lesser extent, Colombia. This scholarship reconfigures Colombia as a node in a maritime Atlantic network within the contours of the greater Caribbean. The Viceroyalty of New Granada could not have been more different from the large and small islands in the Caribbean Sea with plantation-based economies drawn exclusively on enslaved African labor. Traditionally, historians understood that ports such as Cartagena only served as entrepôt to move goods from Europe to the Americas and slaves bound to other parts of the South American continent, since New Granada had a modest economy of gold, salt, and agriculture for local markets. Yet a generation of new scholarship on the independence era has challenged such assumptions and increasingly situated colonial New Granada within the wider global markets as well as intellectual and cultural exchanges.<sup>2</sup>

In *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World*, Ernesto Bassi takes a refreshing approach with his focus on maritime activities in his historicizing of the transition from a Caribbean to an Andean-Atlantic Colombian nation. He situates Colombia within a transimperial greater Caribbean drawn from his reconstitution of the lived geographies and mobility of a host of historical actors, such as multiracial and multilingual Caribbean seafarers, maritime Indians, and even independence figures like Simón Bolívar. Using an impressive array of multilingual and multisite archival research, such as shipping records, he reveals the links between Colombian minor ports like Santa Marta and hidden ports like San Andrés Island and wider commercial Caribbean networks centered in Jamaica. For instance, Bassi uncovers how British commercial activities with New Granada reflected a need to recover from the loss of trade with the thirteen colonies in the aftermath of the American Revolution. Mainland New Granada became an alternate site for British expansion as it looked to obtain raw materials. Moreover, a range of British actors, from displaced American loyalists to military adventurers, planned to invade and conquer far-flung territories such as the Mosquito Coast in Central America and the adjacent offshore San Andrés Island and San Blas Islands. Although these planned invasions were unsuccessful, Bassi's focus on them pushes us to move beyond principal ports like Cartagena to envision the multiple ways Colombia became a node within broader Caribbean trading networks.

In *No Limits to Their Sway*, Edgardo Pérez Morales also explores the maritime dimensions of Colombian independence and recovers the role of privateers in the short-lived revolutionary republic of Cartagena. Like Bassi, Pérez Morales situates northwestern Colombia and specifically Cartagena in the age of revolution. Unlike Bassi's maritime and greater Caribbean Colombia, Pérez Morales centers his study on Cartagena as a central place in the early independence struggles. Specifically, he explores the decision of an independent

<sup>1</sup> See the classic work by David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Kris Lane, *Colour of Paradise: The Emerald in the Age of Gunpowder Empires* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

state of Cartagena to authorize foreign, multilingual, and multiethnic but mostly French-speaking Afro-Caribbean men to attack Spanish ships in the Caribbean between 1811 and 1815. Taking seriously the political aspirations and goals of independent Cartagena and later the United Provinces of New Granada, Pérez Morales insists that privateering became a radical tactic of cosmopolitan, modern anti-Spanish leaders seeking to find resources to safeguard their independence. Without a navy, and in need of resources due to ongoing battles with royalist stronghold Santa Marta, Cartagena leaders welcomed foreign privateers to launch attacks against Spanish vessels for defense and to raise desperately needed funds. Privateers such as Louis Aury and his multiracial crew came to highlight the degree to which New Granada promoted and fully embraced its radical polity vis-à-vis royalist Cuba and revolutionary Haiti. While privateers, or amphibian guerrilla fighters, initially caused leaders of early revolutionary Cartagena little concern, the lack of loyalty to a political territorial boundary and overwhelming presence of Afro-Caribbean men as captain and crew on privateering ships tested the limits of what would be independent Colombia.

While Bassi recovers Jamaican entanglements with New Granada, Pérez Morales shows how Cuba as a royalist stronghold and arbiter of plantation slavery became the antithesis of a radical and more egalitarian Cartagena. As a result, privateers flying the Cartagena flag attacked Spanish vessels outside Cuban waters. In one of the more insightful aspects of this work, Pérez Morales integrates Colombia into the shifting political economies of the Caribbean in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution by positioning independent, anti-slavery Cartagena against colonial, pro-slavery Cuba. Cartagena's band of privateers siphoned some of Cuba's wealth to support a radical yet short-lived political project in Cartagena. Unable to expect help from the Spanish Navy as the war against France raged on the peninsula, and with no end to Cartagena-backed privateers' assaults, Cuban elites assembled funds to launch a defensive fleet against privateer attacks, which ended only after leaders like Simón Bolívar stopped pursuing privateering as an attack against Spanish authority.

Pérez Morales and Bassi both build on recent scholarship when highlighting Colombian links with revolutionary Haiti. Their works argue that Les Cayes and Port-au-Prince were cosmopolitan hubs that attracted pro-independence exiles from Spanish America, privateers, merchants, and even spies from Spain and France, who exchanged information, passed on rumors, plotted invasions, and sought adventuring opportunities. Both acknowledge that racial animus against Haiti figured in Colombia's unwillingness to establish official relations with Haiti after Colombian independence. While Pérez Morales only hints at this issue, Bassi examines more closely the racist anxieties Bolívar had about accepting Haitian support while seeking to establish a nation with connections to the Euro-Atlantic modern world. Bassi then argues how early nation builders intentionally erased Haitian contributions to the independence struggle in an effort to construct Colombia as an "Andean Atlantic nation." Nineteenth-century "politician-geographers" employed discursive as well as cartographical tricks to delink Colombia from the Caribbean, such as choosing to call the sea to the north of Colombia the Atlantic rather than the Caribbean. Such efforts, Bassi notes, proved partially successful. Colombia failed to gain acceptance as a Euro-Atlantic republic and this set in motion a process for remaking the nation into an Andean-Atlantic nation.

In *Crafting a Republic for the World: Scientific, Geographic, and Historiographic Inventions of Colombia*, Lina del Castillo offers a glimpse into the process of transforming Colombia into an Andean-Atlantic nation. In this book, she privileges politician-geographers as essential in shaping cartographic representations and geographic narratives about Colombia. Across six chapters, del Castillo makes a two-pronged argument. First, early nation builders tackled the enormous project integrating diverse parts of the former colony into a republic by investing in the idea of overcoming colonial legacies. Second, these projects rested on a consensus among Colombian elites who shared scientific training from institutions that urged them to construct a unified geographical narrative of the nation. This included depicting the Spanish as a backward, brutal, and unprogressive empire bereft of science, and arguing that the circulation of a shared transportation infrastructure would unify rather than fragment provinces formed along colonial boundaries. These legacies, del Castillo insists, led this vanguard of early nation builders to pursue modernization projects fit for a republic. Given the tendency to characterize this period and, specifically, Colombia as plagued by volatile partisan clashes and regional, racial, and class divisions, del Castillo calls into question rather than fully countering interpretations stressing divided rather than unified visions of the nation.

Del Castillo's interpretation is strongest when highlighting how space and state converged to shape early nation builders' united and inclusive visions of a republic across partisan lines. Closely linked to Bolívar's Liberator Party, this generation of early nation makers came from a similar cohort: young men from provinces all over the country who received an education at new institutions such as the Colegio Militar in Bogotá. Young cadets at the Colegio Militar received military-based engineering instruction and took

part in surveying, calculating, and mapping indigenous *resguardos*, or indigenous communal landholdings, into private property or printing cartographic maps for public school pupils. Other political elites formed a shared vision of a modernizing Colombia through their membership in the Instituto de Caldas in Bogotá. Unlike Bassi, del Castillo argues that Bogotá became the capital to standardize activities related to the integration of the provinces and the project of circulation of education and infrastructure, rather than as a withdrawal from the Caribbean.

Although nestled in the Andean highlands, Bogotá was a cosmopolitan capital designed to centralize authority and to include the provinces within the wider nation, which proved more an ideal than a reality. Racialized fears about a radical Afro-Caribbean state, however, do not figure in del Castillo's analysis or explanation for the move away from the Caribbean lowlands to the Andean highlands. In short, she argues that the goal was neither to withdraw Colombia from the Caribbean-Atlantic nor to privilege Bogotá above Cartagena. Rather, it was to serve as the node enabling the circulation of goods and people through an infrastructure of an imagined modern nation built on partisan consensus and not conflict. In this way, del Castillo's work parallels Nancy Appelbaum's 2016 study on the Chorographic Commission, and her insistence that cartographers like Agustín Codazzi tried to reconcile the tension between regional heterogeneity and national homogenization, particularly in terms of race, and sought to use maps to unify in spite of differences.<sup>3</sup> While race and nonmestizo, creole, and European elites do not figure as prominently in del Castillo's work, she does insist that the shared educational training and circulation of ideas led to consensus and a shared project of homogenization. In sum, del Castillo clearly took inspiration from James Sanders and his insistence that Colombia was one of several Latin American nations that truly developed modern republican states in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, readers will likely wrestle with her provocative argument that consensus rather than conflict defined early nation builders' efforts to create a unified republic.

In *1892: Un año insignificante; Orden policial y desorden social en Bogotá de fin de siglo*, the Colombian historian Max Hering Torres investigates one aspect of the state edifice that del Castillo attributes to the creation of early Colombian nation builders: the national police. Like the politician-geographers drawing on scientific methods to build the nation, late nineteenth-century Colombian state builders drew on European models of modern political systems and state institutions. Using the Police Collection at the Archivo General de la Nación as well as newspapers, memorials, and other sources, Hering Torres applies a microhistorical methodological approach as he shows how state builders sought to develop Colombia into an Andean-Atlantic nation. With the recruitment of a retired French police officer, the Colombian modernizing state stood up its newest institution, the police force, which regulated the leisure and social activities of nonelite urban dwellers in Bogotá. Hering Torres explores the ways the newly established police force tried to codify behavior and dominate the discourse over the politics of culture. He concludes that the institutionalization of the police and their attempts to control explain the subsequent sociopolitical system that reproduced inequality and repression toward the vulnerable.

In the book, Hering Torres explores the reasons for the creation of a police force in the capital. In 1892 the Colombian state formed the police force to promote social order and Catholic morality while using modern, scientific approaches to address growing concerns about public health, sanitation, and security. This was a process mirrored in other parts of Latin America.<sup>5</sup> Hering Torres then uses four cases to lay out his argument. The first case focuses on the newly established Bogotá police seeking to respond to public fears of ghosts inhabiting a cemetery and the removal of dead bodies. A widely shared belief in ghosts even among the police agents forced Jean-Marie Gilbert, the French detective and head of police, and other police authorities to discredit and combat such beliefs, which were deemed oppositional to state authority and modernity. In another case, Hering Torres shows how *chicherías*, or chicha drinking establishments, caused concern as the police force both surveilled and patronized these establishments. This is also a case where Hering Torres focuses on illicit police behavior and police corruption. In doing so, he highlights the culture of denunciation where social privilege accentuates yet undermines power relations between elites and non-elites. In another case, he analyzes the way Bogotá residents pushed back on policing of their popular activities, such as cockfighting, with a riot in Chapinero. With close analysis, Hering Torres shows

<sup>3</sup> Nancy P. Appelbaum, *Mapping the Country of Regions: The Chorographic Commission of Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> James E. Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> To see a similar process with the creation of firefighters, see Anna Rose Alexander, *City on Fire: Technology, Social Change, and the Hazards of Progress in Mexico City, 1860–1919* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

how the fragmentation of power among multiple actors made it difficult to police popular activities. Finally, Hering Torres describes how the Bogotá police took street children and carried them to coffee plantations to work. Public outrage over the use and abuse of street children as forced laborers led the police to attack newspapers and to defend their actions as essential in transforming street children into productive, modern citizens.

These four cases alone, Hering Torres argues, are not significant to our understanding of Colombian history, at least, not in reference to a single event or historic moment. Rather, Hering Torres's microhistorical approach brings into sharper view the ways ordinary people challenged, circumvented, disrupted, and adhered to state dominion and authority as institutions such as the police hardened their position as tools of state and elite authority. However, his microscopic focus on a single institution and a set of police cases in a given year does much to show at the ground level the ways Colombian state builders turned to European models and systems, with considerable difficulty, to craft an Andean-Atlantic nation with Bogotá at the center.

### **From an Andean-Atlantic to a Caribbean-Atlantic Nation**

The next four works revisit mid- to late-twentieth-century Colombia. Amy C. Offner, A. Ricardo López-Pedrerros, Ana María Reyes, and Lina Britto focus their attention on the years before, during, and immediately after the Colombian National Front (1958–1974). During this nearly twenty-year period, this coalition government sought to cease the partisan violence that had nearly destroyed the country through constitutionally mandated power sharing between the Liberal and Conservative Parties. Some of the works under review also note the tremendous economic and social experimentation pursued by the National Front coalition designed to modernize Colombia and strengthen its interconnections with northern Atlantic ideas of capitalist development, which proved difficult and had contradictory results. Other works reviewed in this essay, however, reveal continuities with commercial entanglements and the adoption of radical ideas circulating from and within the Caribbean that also shaped Colombia in the late twentieth century.

In *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas*, Amy Offner situates Colombia within this larger hemispheric and northern Atlantic discourse about the state and political economy. She argues that the Colombian efforts to build a developmental state, an interventionist government in the economy, drew inspiration and support from US New Deal policymakers but ultimately came under the authority of entities managed by capitalists who gained and used public authority to pursue policies of privatization and deregulation. These programs, in turn, did not eradicate poverty or raise the economic standing of the nation through government-supported social reforms. In contrast, the mid- to late-twentieth-century Colombian state enacted economic policies that increasingly relied on transnationally trained economists and technocrats who undermined the state's capacity to run social welfare programs. The result is a provocative claim that the roots of neoliberalism as it emerged in the later decades of the twentieth century were rooted in political economies that developed through exchanges between Latin America, the United States, and the wider northern Atlantic some three decades earlier.

Offner takes the reader on a journey from how Colombia became a decentralized state to its transfer of public powers to economists, managers, and other capitalist policymakers, then to the ways lessons learned in Colombia came to the United States in the 1970s. Central to this study is an array of Colombian and foreign jet-setting business executives, economists, and technocrats such as David Lilienthal, Lauchlin Currie, and Eduardo Wiesner. They all helped to promote the idea of a decentralized state that drew on private actors in Bogotá and Cali who carry the story forward. Part 1 focuses on the Cauca Valley Corporation (CVC) founded in 1954 with the support of transnational actors like Lilienthal. The group, composed of Cali executives and large landowners, preached corporate planning as the key to economic development. After securing capital from multinational agencies such as the World Bank, the CVC eventually wrangled public powers from the state to set policies on transportation and taxation in the Cauca Valley. The CVC even shaped the 1961 Agrarian Reform Law, which transferred land into the hands of smallholders and strengthened the agribusiness sector. From there, Offner explores the tensions between state sponsorship and privatization in the Alliance for Progress's signature program: the housing project at Ciudad Kennedy in Bogotá. Without the capital to finance such a project, even with international financing, the Colombian government offered service plots, pointed aspiring homeowners of middle income to lending agencies, and encouraged them to construct their own homes with their unpaid labor as key to attaining middle-class stability. Promoted by a band of managers and economists who shared the CVC's and Lilienthal's privatization approach to

development, the program managed to benefit some state employees, occasionally through graft, but also heightened class conflict between the residents and the poor.

Part 2 shows how Colombian capitalists increasingly and effectively used economic arguments to promote or protect their interests. The adoption of economic arguments to defend and make policies was not limited to the CVC and Valle del Cauca landowners. Economists and managers gained the upper hand in setting national policy as academic and professional managerial programs grew and trained a coterie of policymakers at newly established private institutions such as the Universidad de los Andes and Universidad del Valle. There these professional economists and policy wonks promoted privatization rather than government-supported welfare programs. Part 3 shows how the decentralization of the Colombian state came to the United States as men like David Lilienthal, with his CVC experience, and even Eduardo Wiesner, a Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico (CEDE) graduate and former state planner, shared their experiences. Offner persuasively shows how self-help housing schemes like Ciudad Kennedy served as models for Native American reservation programs, and the ways US policy makers increasingly began to transform public programs into for-profit entities.

Like Offner, A. Ricardo López-Pedrerros shows how social scientists and policymakers from the North Atlantic poured into the Andean capital of Bogotá seeking to promote and develop professional workers as the middle-class vanguards of democracy. *Makers of Democracy: A Transnational History of the Middle Classes in Colombia* also takes a transnational approach to the formation of midcentury middle classes in Bogotá. Postwar international lending institutions and US development agencies insisted on linking democracy with the existence of a middle class. Drawing on interviews, business records, union records, newspaper articles, training material, and marketing brochures, López-Pedrerros explores the rise of the middle class and the gendered as well as classed experiences in Bogotá during the 1960s and 1970s. As Offner also shows, this was a period when the National Front attracted many international social scientists and technocrats as well as tremendous financing to support economic and social experimentation in Colombia. It was a period when the middle class, which comprised independent employees, white-collar workers, and professionals, grew from 45 to 64 percent of the population between 1951 and 1964. Some of the white-collar employees had attended private institutions like the Universidad de los Andes or worked for managers who had done so. As office workers in private sector service or owners of small or medium-sized companies, their jobs rested on the financial support received from Alliance for Progress–supported Colombian development agencies. Through interviews often included as opening vignettes to the book's chapters, readers learn how these middle-class service workers took pride in their status while minimizing the role state subsidies played in employment or businesses. López-Pedrerros painstakingly and repeatedly rejects notions that the middle classes were either passive or consumerist. On the contrary, he argues that they took control of their own destinies and pursued agendas that radically departed from state visions of them as apolitical.

Throughout *Makers of Democracy* López-Pedrerros consistently shows the gendered formation of the middle class in discursive and concrete ways. It is a strength of the book. According to López-Pedrerros, the National Front envisioned roles for both men and women as professionals. Masculinized white-collar subjectivities meant that married and virile men took the lead in a hierarchically gendered division of labor. Female office workers gained a level of occupational status as professional women but were often forced into positions where they took on gendered work as instructors, supporters, and even “godmothers” to their male counterparts. Their femininity was considered a strength as it could control the more aggressive and conflict-ridden aspects of a masculine workspace. During the late 1960s and 1970s, white-collar men frustrated with the National Front's limiting of opportunities for upward mobility regularly directed anger toward professional women, who feminized the workplace because of their sheer presence. These men insisted women's place was as homemakers to middle-class husbands rather than occupying professional jobs that men should naturally hold. Ironically, López-Pedrerros also noted that this resentment did not change the fact that some middle-class households depended on the financial contribution of such wives who worked in these new professional settings. His commitment to understand class through a gendered lens extends some of the gender work found in Ann Farnsworth-Alvear's *Dulcinea in the Factory*, which examined working-class women's experiences in factory mills in Medellín.<sup>6</sup> López-Pedrerros convincingly shows how professional women, like working-class women in the industrial mills, were shaping class identities and labor relations.

The significance of López-Pedrerros's argument emerges in his book's final two chapters, where he shows the divergent ways that frustrated white-collar employees pushed back against the National Front's program.

<sup>6</sup> Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

Despite an acceptance of the belief that the middle classes were the agents of democracy, the attempt to create social peace between the elite and working classes frustrated white-collar employees, who came to see their bosses and managers as antidemocratic and impediments to true democracy. López-Pedrerros explains the true objective of programs like the Alliance for Progress: “These development programs seeking to create social peace emerged for the sole purpose of obscuring the oligarchical power behind the FN, with its exclusionary and anticommunist political order” (177). Some office workers in state-run and private-sector agencies took the step to form unions, while many middle-class workers who viewed their service work as above class conflict abhorred unions. But middle-class unions like Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Rama Activa Aseguradora (SINTRASE) and Asociación de Trabajadores de Sudamericana de Seguros (ATSS), both at Colseguros or the Asociación Nacional de Empleados del Banco de la República (ANEBRE), likely called on “the democratization of a ‘waged economy’ in which they could ‘get what [they] deserve[d]’” (154).

Owners of small to medium-sized industries fiercely combatted the rise of middle-class unions as feminization of white-collar employment and destruction of businesses. They saw themselves as the bearers of democracy for calling more people’s attention to the exploitative capitalist system, which focused on increased productivity and profits. Although they were antagonistic toward middle-class unionists, they both claimed status as democracy bearers and advocated for their own interests. Owners of small and medium-sized businesses wanted a reduction in taxes and more business credits. López-Pedrerros concludes with an analysis of the 1977 civic strike, which drew some radicalized middle-class workers in solidarity with working-class unions and activists. While some middle-class men and women had come to envision themselves as impediments to social peace and true democracy, the bulk of the middle class sat out the strike, as it did not conform to their gendered and classed hierarchical notions of democracy, which rejected oligarchical rule or “proletariat dictatorship.”

Class anxieties and anticommunist state fears circulating between the Andean capital of Colombia and the wider north Atlantic world also manifested in debates about the way Colombians should present and consume art. In *The Politics of Taste: Beatriz González and Cold War Aesthetics*, art historian Ana María Reyes offers us a window into how Colombians—elite and popular groups—mediated ideas around taste and class in a contested period when revolutionary politics threatened the traditional stratified Catholic nation in the 1960s and 1970s. Reyes draws readers into the Bogotá art scene by introducing and analyzing Colombian pop cultural artist Beatriz González, whose paintings, Reyes argues, aroused social anxieties over the state-led modernization programs spearheaded by President Alberto Lleras Camargo (1958–1962). Internationally celebrated at the Tate Modern in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Beatriz González initially emerged as an abstract artist in the modernist tradition before turning her attention to everyday life in a style akin to Andy Warhol’s Pop art movement. Focusing on González’s artistic practices and the art world’s responses to her work, Reyes analyzes how debates over González’s embrace of urban, working-class culture became a critique of taste as conceived by modernizing elites. By the 1970s, art critics considered González’s work as “*lo cursi*,” the tacky or “excessive behavior over tasteless objects” (105), since it challenged modernizing elites’ views on acceptable subjects for art.

*The Politics of Taste* traces Beatriz González’s art career and relationship with her mentor, Marta Traba, as well as public responses to González’s work. Reyes deftly shows the tension between González’s work as a provocateur and elite anxieties over her choice of subject matter, which became part of a cultural debate over taste. Two chapters really highlight these tensions while introducing González and her work in the early 1960s. Chapter 2 centers on González’s 1965 award-winning *Los suicidas del Sisga* (The Sisga suicides) portrait, which drew inspiration from an *El Tiempo* newspaper article about the double suicide, or more accurately the murder-suicide, of a working-class couple. By examining González’s work and the public reception of it, Reyes shows how the National Front’s modernizing program’s focus on women’s reproduction and population control fed into elite condescension toward popular classes and the labeling of González’s work as tacky because of her decision to make the murder-suicide of a working-class couple the subject of her art. In chapter 4 Reyes delves into the polemical public debates surrounding González’s 1967 *Apuntes para la historia extensa I y II* (Notes for the extensive history I and II), in which she reimagines the Colombian founding fathers by placing the portraits of Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander side by side. The act provoked public condemnation and accusations of plagiarism as the portraits threatened to disturb the bipartisan coalition government of the National Front, which was designed to deter partisan violence. More alarmingly, *Apuntes para la historia* served to further dislodge Bolívar from his position as the founding father of the Conservative Party and transform him into a hero of the radicalized popular classes, signified by the stunning theft of Bolívar’s sword in 1969 by the Nineteenth of April Movement (M-19). Through the lens of art history, Reyes’s examination of González shows how art can be a historical actor

that reveals, shapes, and informs our thinking about mid-twentieth-century Colombia and anxieties over modernization and the looming threat of communism.

Unlike Reyes, López-Pedrerros, and Offner, Lina Britto's work re-centers Colombia within the Caribbean-Atlantic world as she explores an under-told history about the *bonanza marimbera* (marijuana boom) along the Caribbean Colombian periphery, which she calls Greater Magdalena. This area includes the Guajira Peninsula and the Sierra Nevada mountain range in the northern portion of Colombia and serves as "a bridge between the Caribbean and Andean basins" (7). Her work traces the roots of the marijuana trade from a smuggling route along the maritime Caribbean, described in the works of Pérez Morales and Bassi. In doing so, it shows that earlier nineteenth century efforts to silence and redirect connections between mainland Colombia and the wider Caribbean proved elusive. Britto's interdisciplinary, hemispheric approach linking the political economy of marijuana and its surrounding culture to the United States directly, but often by way of the Caribbean, is a powerful testament to Colombia as a Caribbean-Atlantic nation.

Britto draws on oral interviews, folk songs, government correspondence, and anthropological studies. Unlike many scholars of Colombia, Britto argues that the rise of marijuana production was the result of state-building efforts to integrate peripheries into national and international economies, which began during the failed peace of the National Front. Unlike Offner and López-Pedrerros, who suggest a state retreat or inability to control the results of policy initiatives, Britto brings the state back into the narrative. Attempts to integrate various tropical commodities—divi-divi, bananas, and cotton—into the international market led to resistance and accommodation, so local producers turned to an illicit new commodity. Rejecting cocaine as the primary cause of the decline of the marijuana industry, Britto offers an alternative explanation: hemispheric cooperation between Colombia and the United States. Both governments framed marijuana as a security threat and began to establish the bilateral agreements and infrastructure that disrupted the original production and flows of marijuana, causing traffickers to use violence and the cost of marijuana as an export to rise.

Britto's book is divided into three parts that lay out the rise, peak, and decline of the marijuana boom in Colombia. Part 1 focuses on the ascendance and argues that the National Front's limited efforts to address agrarian reform led to contestation and accommodation whereby Greater Magdalena became integrated into national and international markets. The boom-bust cycles of the region's three most important commodities, divi-divi, bananas, and cotton, led a host of actors to compete for land but largely excluded a multitude of landless workers. Joined by newly arrived Andean migrants from around Bogotá, local families began to consume and supply a local and growing export economy of marijuana. Drawing connections with Offner's work, Britto shows the ramifications of having pro-capitalists in charge of national economic policies. Beginning with President Carlos Lleras Restrepo's retreat from agrarian reform in 1966, new commodities reshaped social relations and the economy of the region. Frustrated youth consumed the marijuana that was brought into Colombia by maritime Caribbean routes, rejecting the politics of taste noted in Reyes's work. The proliferation of small marijuana farms across the country offered work for the impoverished, itinerant youth. Using oral histories and folkloric songs, Britto shares the personal stories of marijuana smugglers Barranquilla and Chijo, who enjoyed the opportunity for personal autonomy, freedom of movement, and income.

Part 2 uncovers these murky networks of marijuana smugglers and producers around Greater Magdalena. Most were young men from cities and towns with few employment opportunities, who gained wealth and social status within the upstart industry. Although the main benefactors were the *cachacos*, or Bogotá residents, and local marijuana exporters, others also profited from the new industry. Britto adroitly uses oral histories and Vallenato songs to recover the exploits and sentiments of these brash, young, male, working-class marijuana smugglers. Part 3 argues that the decline and subsequent violence associated with marijuana, and likely the cocaine business, too, were a result of the Two Peninsulas strategy, a US-Colombian partnership to eradicate narcotic crops in Colombia. Britto insists that illicit businesses such as marijuana are not inherently violent but that police efforts to regulate and eradicate the industry ignited intense competition among producers and smugglers that resulted in violence.

It is not entirely certain that Britto has persuasively supported her argument that "the marijuana boom was as dramatic a turning point in the history of Colombia as the one that took place with coffee." Given the bonanza's limited regional scope and short-lived boom-bust cycle, it does not appear to have shaped Colombia's economy, society, and culture in the ways that coffee has done. That being said, Britto's interdisciplinary approach widens the aperture to include shadowy historical figures who help to explain some but not all of the on-the-ground dynamics of the marijuana trade. This is especially true for historians seeking to uncover concealed actions purposefully hidden from full view. What is most refreshing in Britto's

work is the ways that she revisits the role of the Colombian state and deems it responsible for the decline of the marijuana trade through its partnership with the United States. Britto acknowledges that the hemispheric security coalition only served to extend US hegemony in Colombia and, more broadly, Latin America.

Taking us to the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, Alexander Fattal's ethnographic study explores the processes that led to the 2016 peace agreement between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government. Like Britto, though with less intention, Fattal shows how the Caribbean continued to serve as a source of radical political ideas, in this case the Cuban Revolution, the original model for the FARC. In *Guerrilla Marketing: Counterinsurgency and Capitalism in Colombia*, Fattal examines the effectiveness of brand marketing as a counterinsurgency tool that the Colombian government used to combat armed guerrillas and establish an image of a peaceful post-conflict state. He offers an ethnography of the Programa de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado (PAHD), a special unit under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense, which collaborated with the international marketing firm Lowe SSP3. Fattal uncovers how the marketing campaign had two objectives: to win over guerrilla soldiers and, even more so, the national and international public. The wisdom promoted during the Álvaro Uribe administration was that securing public trust and stability and international investment would soon lead to the development of a vibrant economy. Propped up by additional financial support from the US State Department, PAHD sold demobilization through a "humanitarian counterinsurgency" campaign that used stunning and emotionally evocative imagery to depict the Colombian state and its armed forces as technologically modern and compassionate. Behind these powerful televised campaigns were the ironic consequences of the strategy: the state's disinvestment in national social and economic reforms in order to expand funding to the armed forces, which they used to purchase equipment necessary to carry out attacks and drive the FARC into negotiations to end the conflict. In turn, the Colombian government also set aside resources to extend welfare to the displaced and demobilized soldiers. In effect, the Colombian state sought to replace the military's human rights abuses with a new construction: the humanitarian post-conflict state.

Poignant yet disturbing excerpted life histories and sketches from demobilized FARC soldiers are interspersed throughout the book, serving as overlapping mini ethnographies. The opening chapter traces the evolution of different actors, from the M-19 to Pablo Escobar, using the media in propaganda wars. Colombians have long been convinced of the power of the media spectacle. Fattal then examines the Operation Christmas campaign, which resulted from a partnership between PAHD and the marketing firm Lowe SSP3. It garnered tremendous attention within and outside of Colombia and did much to depict the post-conflict state as humanitarian. From there, he looks at a yearlong military intelligence mission titled Operation Genuine, which focused on extracting information from demobilized FARC rebels to design highly persuasive media messages targeted to guerrilla soldiers. His final chapter is a mini ethnography of a community of demobilized former FARC rebels struggling to achieve the social and economic reintegration into the formal economy promised by the Colombian state. Some former rebels found the promises desirable yet unattainable as new paramilitary groups sought to recruit them with good pay. Similar to state constructions of the good life for middle-class consumers, as addressed in the works of Offner and López-Pedrerros, Fattal acknowledges the difficult struggle facing demobilized FARC rebels as they run up against ideological brand warfare. While Fattal acknowledged that brand warfare did capture international attention and brought some compensation to victims and resettlement support to perpetrators, the Colombian government failed to address the root causes of the conflict such as socioeconomic inequality and limited access to land. It preferred to consolidate its image as a peaceful and humanitarian post-conflict state. Written two years before the global COVID-19 pandemic, Fattal's predictions that Colombia would remain in a murky period of peace, demobilization, and reintegration appear startlingly true.

## A Final Thought

These nine books do much to complicate existing narratives. One such story is an ongoing back-and-forth depiction of Colombia as either a Caribbean-Atlantic or an Andean-Atlantic republic. While scholars have used geography and race to determine the sociocultural positioning of Colombia, these categories do not fully encapsulate the various ways Colombians have inserted themselves into broader processes. In fact, none of the authors truly grapple with questions of race in meaningful ways. Some highlight the presence of diverse racial populations, whether Wayuu smugglers or Afro-Caribbean sailors, rather than interrogate the way race and racialist thinking shaped the topics. Yet they do point to other scholars doing such work and offer additional framings of how Colombian nationhood outwardly stretched to the Caribbean or the broader northern Atlantic world. In sum, the books under review explain how Colombians, whether centered in the Caribbean lowlands or Andean highlands, over the past two hundred years have looked

outward to generate political or economic innovation and resolve or to approach entrenched social and political problems.

The likely answer to whether Colombia is a Caribbean-Atlantic or an Andean-Atlantic republic is that it is clearly both. Several of the works under review underscore this point very well. Let us take the monographs of Britto and Fattal as examples. The origins of marijuana cultivation and smuggling as well as the state's response to armed revolutionary conflict stem from the Caribbean. The region of Greater Magdalena has a long history of smuggling of goods trafficked across the Caribbean since the colonial era. While the socioeconomic inequality in midcentury Colombia came from local conditions, FARC founders Manuel Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas looked to the Caribbean for answers, drawing inspiration from the Cuban Revolution. Yet neither work fully encapsulates an interpretative lens or situates its study within this Caribbean-Andean nexus. What would be gained by doing so? With such an explicit framing, they might begin to detect state efforts to silence connections with the Caribbean and thread these stories into a fuller and broader representation of Colombia's Caribbean-Atlantic as well as Andean-Atlantic past. .

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