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Richard H Collin, Theodore Roosevelt's Caribbean: the Panama Canal, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Latin American Context, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990

Pages read 1-268 out of 520.

The author Richard H. Collin obtained a Ph.D., from New York University, 1966 and now teaches at the University of New Orleans. He has written several books on Theodore Roosevelt mostly released through the Louisiana State University Press.

Collin explains how Latin America and the US evolved with relation to each other and covers the evolution of US Latin American relations. The first part of the book is Context. Starting with the Latin American and then the North American context we read about the political and cultural climates. When the author introduces Europe, Debt, Caudillos, and Conflict we begin to see how the long term trouble for Latin America is going to form. The European banking system helped encourage poor fiscal responsibility in the form of spending borrowed money and then being unable to pay back the loans. Inevitably, some nations like Germany and Britain decided to use force to regain lost national honor and profits. This poor management by the Latin American governments, and easy access to loans also encouraged corrupt leaders to play the various governments and banks off of each other to keep the money coming. He also covers the writers, literature and poetry of Latin America and United States that helped form their political consciousness. Theodore Roosevelt's development as a politician is also covered, including his unsuccessful mayoral bid, and his interest in naval power.

The lack of diverse exports also causes trouble in Latin America. Since Simon Bolivar and other intellectuals rejected a US like federalism for South America the export economies tended to hurt one another, as well as become agrarian monocultures. Sugar was highly profitable but destructive too. As one quote stated, "Tobacco is democratic," referring to the crop that gave the United States its early economic success. Tobacco could be cultivated in 6 months and with little capital. Sugar, a major export in south america was expensive and required a large capital investment. Though the profits were high, and the pay good, it created permanent migrant workers instead of landowners. In countries like Columbia that were relatively successful with its coffee products, their economy suffered greatly when Brazil joined the market and depressed prices.

The european nations, during these formative years, played political games with the New World often to the detriment of everyone involved. Spain consistently had trouble shoring up Cuba, and other colonies in the area, and forced the United States to establish the No Transfer policy, and the Monroe Doctrine. Germany and its constant plans to grab land around the world for coaling stations or glory certainly annoyed the United States. I particularly like the idea that Germany considered trying to grab Puerto Rico or part of Baja California. As things progress the authors emphasizes the blockade of Venezuela by Germany, Britain, and Italy. The erratic behavior of Kaiser Wilhelm II, forces Roosevelt to prepare ground and naval forces to counter any potential attempt by Germany to take territory. This incident is resolved when they finally submit the case to arbitration by the United States, most likely a direct result of Germany realizing that it wasn't going to take Venezuela, and that Bowen the negotiator for Venezuela agreed to their unrealistic demand of \$300,000.

The Panama Canal section exposes the near constant trouble a 49 mile strip of land can provide. The governments of Nicaragua and especially Columbia seemed to have absolutely no understanding of how serious the United States was about building a canal. To some Columbians the United States was only ever interested in the Panamanian route, and the Nicaraguan question was only a tactic to get the land cheaply. The author mentions the Nicaraguan stamp with a volcano on it, and concerns over earthquakes. The impossible negotiations with Columbia further irritate the United States. Every time some point seemed settled, like the purchase of the assets of the Compagnie Nouvelle, Columbia tried to alter or re-negotiate it. The civil war in Columbia was the primary interest of Columbia, not the construction of a canal. When the unaltered canal treaty finally gets ratified by the United States, despite Senator Morgan who had attached 69 amendments to the treaty in committee, the Columbian senate manages to reject the deal. As we know this rejection lead to the loss of Panama. However, the author suggests that Columbia gains something quite substantial from the debacle despite the loss of Panama, a new sense of unity, and a chance to embrace a modern world.

I think the book is really well written. The footnotes are extensive, on some key pages, approaching half of a page. The style is very typical of a history text, breaking the material into topics or aspects, and then covering the same dates or events from different viewpoints or with different emphasis. What makes this a particularly good choice is that it follows our classroom lecture and provides an engaging style with lots of interesting details.

I affirm that I have read a total of 268 pages in the book reviewed above.