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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Disciplinary Conquest. U.S. Scholars in South America, 1900-1945* by Ricardo D. Salvatore

Review by: Michiel Baud

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## Book Review

- *Disciplinary Conquest. U.S. Scholars in South America, 1900-1945*, by Ricardo D. Salvatore. Duke University Press, 2016.

In this book the Argentine historian Ricardo Salvatore sets himself the task to understand the logic and consequences of what he calls the ‘rediscovery’ of South America by U.S. scholars in the early twentieth century. His focus is on the geographic region located south of Panama. To support his analysis he uses the works of five scholars covering as many different disciplines: Hiram Bingham, Isaiah Bowman, Clarence Haring, Edward Ross and Leo Rowe. They are considered pioneers in the fields of, respectively, archaeology, geography, history, sociology, and political science.

These scholars are characterized by their first-hand research and extensive traveling in Latin America, as well as by their broad public and political influence. They not only heightened academic knowledge on the region; they also became political and cultural brokers for U.S. politicians and business men. In this sense, their role was ambiguous. While they were ‘translating’ Latin American voices and views for an uninformed U.S. public, they were also actively working with U.S. imperial interests. Salvatore has a keen eye for this ambiguity. He avoids simple accusations of U.S. scholars as instruments of empire and highlights their genuine interest in the region. His book focuses on two often related topics: the significance of their work for disciplinary academic knowledge, and the influence it had on the formulation of U.S. foreign policies towards Latin America.

Bingham’s explorations in the Andean highlands – which started with his famous ‘discovery’ of Macchu Picchu in 1911 – are a good example. Bingham’s expeditions were large-scale and costly affairs. They were organized by Yale University and sponsored by National Geographic Magazine and Kodak. National Geographic had the monopoly of presenting Bingham’s findings to a general public and Kodak advertised widely with his Peruvian pictures. Bingham and his colleagues presented the shipping of archaeological findings from the Holy Valley around Cuzco to Yale as an exclusively academic affair. They were appalled when they were accused of cultural imperialism and even robbery by an emerging group of nationalist indigenistas. In his contribution, Leo

Rowe identifies experiences like these as fundamental in bringing about an innate distrust of, and obstacle to, Pan-American solidarity.

In his book Salvatore highlights the academic influence of these five scholars, but he is also interested in their social and political influence. He demonstrates that apart from Bingham, these scholars were explicitly trying to influence foreign policies. Bowman advised two U.S. presidents and participated in various international policy conferences. Rowe and Haring were very active and influential in the Pan-American movement, which tried to foster new political and economic relations between the North and the South. They created networks, gave conferences and wrote reports to establish an intellectual, cultural and political integration of the continent under U.S. leadership. In reality, they functioned as representatives of U.S. interests in Latin America.

Latin Americanists interested in the early development of U.S. research into the region will find much new and relevant information in *Disciplinary Conquest*. Nevertheless, I found the book slightly disjointed. The different chapters hang loosely together and contain repetitions and contradictions. The book's title uses the word 'conquest'. In the book itself imperialism and interventionism are regularly used terms, and Salvatore identifies the 'imperiality' of knowledge as the key to understanding the work of these authors. The period covered in this book saw some of the most blatant U.S. interventions in Latin American politics. However, this substantial political imperialism is hardly touched upon in the book, and the relationship between the academic community and U.S. foreign policies remains obscure. Sometimes the tone is accusatory, suggesting that academic research was part of an 'imperialist project'. In the Introduction, Salvatore calls the new academic interest for Latin America an 'intellectual conquest', 'in the sense of appropriating and incorporating the region within the field of vision and range of influence of U.S. academic knowledge' (p. 5). The ethnocentric and (neo)-colonial simplifications presented as academic insights by these scholars are criticized. In other parts, however, the tone is less critical. These are the passages where Salvatore lauds the attempts of the scholars who ventured into unknown territories and formulated new insights for their respective disciplines. He admires them for their attempts to comprehend the development of Latin American society and to assuage U.S. hard-line imperialist ideas.

Salvatore's attempt to steer clear of simplistic contrasts is laudable and in this sense his book opens avenues for further research. However, without clear criteria, the conflictive and contradictory relationship between the intellectual community and U.S. foreign policies remains frustrating and unsatisfactory. Personally, I believe that the key for understanding these kinds of ambiguities are to be found in the basic ambiguity of scholarly practice. The academic community is immersed in a perennial search for funding and recognition (two factors that normally reinforce each other), but these come at a price. All Latin Americanists try to live and practice the illusion that they are independent, and

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even more so when they are based in the strongest imperial power in the region, but they are unavoidably connected, embedded and sometimes subservient to the geopolitical interests of their own society.

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