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Author

Kleinman, Mark L.

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Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America. By WALTER LAFEVER. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1983. Pp. xiv + 357. Maps, bibliography, index. \$18.95

With this book, Walter LaFeber makes a timely attempt to synthesize the history of an important aspect of American foreign policy. He gives us a comprehensive, thematic picture of United States-Central American relations from the early nineteenth century to the present, a picture that fills in the details of the patterns that seem so evident on an impressionistic level whenever one thinks about U.S. policy in Central America. LaFeber argues that Washington's policy has been consistent; that the United States has been the force which has dominated the development of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, especially since World War One, and thus has also been the force against which those nations have rebelled.

The first part of the book describes an informal system of control that the United States set up and maintained during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. What was unique to this system, which LaFeber terms "neodependency," was the United States' tendency to use political and especially military power to enforce dependence. Other world powers, such as Britain, had usually relied on simple "dependency," which amounted to applying economic leverage through the control Central American raw materials exports.

The development of this system was not haphazard. Rather it was a long series of "well-considered policies." (p. 18) These policies were based on four principles that had proven effective over the years: "Confidence in capitalism, a willingness to use military force, a fear of foreign influence, and a dread of revolutionary instability." (p.18) By examining United States-Central American relations in the context of these four themes, LaFeber is able to discern continuity and consistency between events widely separated in time. He discusses the mid-nineteenth century Anglo-American conflicts over Central America and concludes that therein lie the origins of Washington's recurrent fear of "ominous foreign influences" in the region. (p. 29) In the same way he demonstrates, in a closing chapter on the "Remains of the System," how Ronald Reagan has followed previous policies. The Reagan administration has also attempted to apply the time-tested techniques of political and military force to Central America in order to maintain stability. But the widespread revolutions of the 1970s have rendered the Central American objects of North American policy less controllable than ever before.

LaFeber's multifarious analysis is also the source of some salient flaws. The second part of the book, which covers the post-World War Two years, falls into a detailed yet wandering narrative. Some of the material

contradicts LaFeber's basic arguments. This is evident in his failure to really explain the United States' participation in the 1948 revolution in Costa Rica, and Costa Rican exceptionalism in general. It is also noticeable when he criticizes the second-term Eisenhower administration's policy, while at the same time noting that it realistically rejected the same sort of policy that he later criticizes the Kennedy administration for adopting in the Alliance for Progress.

Part of this problem stems from LaFeber's tendency to view the United States and Central America as monoliths. The Central American nations appear as homogeneous entities with very little notice given to the moderate, reformist elements that existed within them. The United States is subject to even greater reduction because LaFeber sees U.S. foreign policy as having been shaped exclusively by powerful politicians and business interests. Public opinion has had little or no effect, since "throughout the twentieth century, the overwhelming number of North Americans could not have identified each of the five Central American nations on a map, let alone ticked off the region's sins that called for an application of U.S. force." (p. 13) By discounting the effect of public attitudes, LaFeber confines his analysis entirely to North American leaders. While this is possibly accurate for the early years of the republic, it distorts the history of the twentieth century. LaFeber may be correct in asserting the public's lack of knowledge, but he does not demonstrate that ignorance ever prevented opinionation. He recognizes the importance of public opinion in spite of himself, when, for example, he argues that Woodrow Wilson's moralistic rhetoric regarding U.S. non-recognition of Costa Rica in 1917 was simply a front to hide support of a North American oil concessionaire. If it was not real, then why was it necessary, unless to convince the public? Why did United Fruit Company officials, during the now-infamous Guatemalan episode of the mid-1950s, feel constrained to fly U.S. journalists to Guatemala to report UFCO's side of the story?

Inevitable Revolutions is finally only partly successful. LaFeber has indeed clearly explained what happened in United States-Central American relations over time. But he has not adequately explained why. He has demonstrated consistency and continuity, but not cause. To succeed in this would require recognizing that both the Central American nations and the United States are diverse societies, and that in the latter, public attitudes, whether well-informed or not, might have a causal effect on policy.

Mark L. Kleinman
University of California
Los Angeles