

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Greg Grandin. *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism.* New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006. 237 pp. \$25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8050-7738-4.



Reviewed by Michelle DiPuma (School of Law, Hofstra University)

Published on H-LatAm (October, 2007)

The average U.S. citizen is doubtless unaware of its country's involvement in Latin America throughout the twentieth century. In *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*, Professor Greg Grandin attempts to give his readers the inside scoop into U.S.-Latin American relations, with extra attention to the period of the Reagan administration. Grandin here argues that the foreign policy pursued in Latin America since Reagan correlates to the current guiding principles leading U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Actually, Grandin explicitly states that the U.S. foreign policy implemented in Latin America during the 1980s became the model for the policy pursued today in the Middle East, especially in Iraq.

Although written following the traditional arrangement of an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion, the book can be broken down into four distinct sections. They are as follows: The first quarter of the book gives a brief overview of U.S.-Latin American relations from the end of the nineteenth century up to the present. The second quarter of the book details U.S.-controlled activity in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador during the 1980s and the events leading up to this activity in the 1960s and 1970s. The third quarter of the book explains how these events in Central America were kept from or legitimized to the U.S. public. The final quarter of the book focuses on

economic incentives for U.S. involvement in Latin America. Grandin begins in the 1940s but he once again focuses a great deal on the Reagan administration. Grandin then concludes by re-stating his thesis that much of the foreign policy pursued by the Reagan administration in Latin America is today emulated by the Bush administration in the Middle East.

This book may prove a good read for both scholars of Latin American history and those who have little background in Latin American history. For readers who are unfamiliar with Latin American history, the book opens their eyes to a side of U.S. history little known to general audiences, especially its involvement in Latin America in the last twenty-five years. For these readers, the book definitely has a shock value, as it describes U.S.-led brutality in Central America and other regions. For readers with a background in Latin American history, the book provides further insight into why the United States selected the foreign policy that it did in Latin America.

But, for reasons that are not clear, this book is really targeted more toward readers who already have knowledge of Latin American history. Throughout the book, for example, Grandin constantly cites events that occurred in Latin America without explaining them. Although the book admittedly follows a loose chronological order, Grandin does jump around, both in place and

time, more than what I would have preferred. This may prove even more problematic for readers who do not know much about Latin American history. Furthermore, the meaning of the titles of Grandin's chapters and the titles of the subsections within these chapters are not so obvious. If a reader does not fully understand Grandin's argument, then she will not appreciate the significance of the titles.

While it may prove informative and beneficial to readers familiar with Latin American history, from the perspective of the uninitiated Grandin's book contains one major flaw: Grandin never proves his thesis. Do not get me wrong. Grandin does fully explain how U.S. imperialism in Latin America, particularly in the 1980s, parallels U.S. imperialism today in the Middle East. But what Grandin fails to show is how the Bush administration directly models its current foreign policy in the Middle East, especially Iraq, after the foreign policy of the Reagan administration in Latin America. In fact, Iraq itself is barely mentioned at all in the book.

Throughout the book, Grandin in a way disproves his own thesis. He discusses how during the Reagan administration, the United States managed to control Central America without sending a large number of U.S. troops. Indeed, much of Grandin's book is based on how the United States gained so much control in Central America with little actual occupation. But Iraq currently has a relatively large number of U.S. troops physically there, which does not compare well to the numbers present in Central America in the 1980s. In his introduction, Grandin states that most Americans do not pay much attention to Latin America because they take it for granted. But perhaps most Americans currently ignore Latin America because what is currently occurring in Iraq is very different from what occurred in Latin America during the Reagan administration. And yet, despite this shortcoming, the book is an invaluable addition to the literature on U.S. and Latin American relations, though, perhaps, the non-conversant should read it accompanied by other traditional references.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-latam>

Citation: Michelle DiPuma. Review of Grandin, Greg, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. October, 2007.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13755>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.