

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Barbara Tenenbaum, ed.** *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996. Five Vols. \$449 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-684-19253-6.

**Reviewed by** Barry Carr (Latrobe University)

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This mammoth undertaking is an extraordinary achievement in the annals of historical scholarship on Latin America. In five massive volumes and over 1.8 million words, 832 scholars have collaborated to produce the first encyclopedia to offer a genuinely global coverage of Latin American history. Dozens of excellent, boldly drawn maps (many of them suitable for classroom use readers should note!) and hundreds of photographs (not always well reproduced unfortunately; many are rather dark) complement this five volume set which will immediately become *the* obligatory reference work for students and scholars interested in Latin America.

Reviewing such an enterprise (there are 5,287 entries) is a difficult task. Perhaps the best place to start would be with some comments on the scope of ELAHC. Sensibly, the editors have decided to go for the broadest possible interpretation of their brief. In addition to Central and South America and the Caribbean (including anglophone and francophone territories), there are entries on the Spanish Borderlands and even, to take a rather bizarre case, on Portuguese Asia. The time-scale covered by entries is generous—ranging from pre-Columbian cultures to very recent events, personalities and concerns. The Mexican EZLN and Mercosur are there, as are drugs, foreign debt, and forests.

The bulk of the entries in ELHAC are not unsurprisingly biographical (3,000 items), institutional and event-related. Country entries, ranging from 6 pages (Honduras) to 57 (Brazil), begin with major essays on the colonial and national periods, followed by shorter sections on topics such as Constitutions, Geography, Movements, Organizations and Political Parties. Each of these sections in turn is made up of short entries on particular topics. Thus, readers trying to locate “Tupamaros” will

find a short entry in the section “Revolutionary Movements” located in the country essay on Uruguay. Likewise, the entry on APRA and Aprismo is to be found in the Peru country essay although, in this case, there is a cross-reference to assist the reader. The Tupamaros don’t warrant a cross-reference in the text although the excellent index (in volume 5) will guide the reader to the entry.

Non-country-specific topics, such as, Science, Cartography, Mining, Banditry, Pan-American Conferences, Cartography, Women, Gender and Sexuality are frequently divided up into smaller essays written by different authors. The essay on textiles, for example (by Steve Haber) has sections on different sectors (wools, cottons) in the colonial period as well as succinct micro-entries on different dimensions of the modern textile industry (early factories, expansion, large firms, capital, competitiveness). This entry is followed by a substantial essay on indigenous textiles.

A welcome feature of this Encyclopedia is its commitment to venturing outside the safe territory of familiar political, economic and administrative topics. The editors have included a large number of entries on popular culture, especially theatre and cinema (David Maciel), music (some excellent essays by Simon Collier), sport, literary figures and food and drink (a very good essay by John Super). Key concepts in agrarian and social history (class, hacienda, urbanization, closed corporate peasant community) and a large number of entries on indigenous peoples are also given prominence.

The contributors to ELHAC are overwhelmingly scholars based in the United States or Canada with a scattering of European writers (mainly from the UK, Spain and Portugal). There are distressingly few contribu-

tors from Latin America itself—with writers like Carlos Marichal, Clara Bargellini, Eduardo Zimmerman and the Cuban historian Fe Iglesias (the only Latin-American-based scholar to author a country essay) being the exceptions. Authors are generally well-known specialists on their topic: Richard Slatta (on bandits), Warren Dean (on Brazil); Brian Hamnett, Jaime Rodriguez, Gilbert Joseph, Stuart Voss, Alan Knight, Rod Camp (on Mexico), Vince Peloso and Peter Klaren (on Peru); J. Leon Helguera and David Bushnell (on Colombia); William Slater (on Chile) and Ralph Lee Woodward (on Central America). But there are many less well known names (at least for this reviewer) and the variety in style and approach this openness to talent brings is extremely refreshing. Particular authors, by the way, can be tracked by scanning the very useful list of contributors.

Most of the entries in the Encyclopedia are followed

by a list of relevant books and journal articles; these generally provide details of classic studies as well as more recent treatments. However, the editors and contributors to ELHAC have opted for comprehensive and broad, synoptic treatments of their topics rather than for a critical examination of the shifting currents and debates in the historiography which underpins the issues. Some readers may find this a problem. But the space freed up by the decision to go for breadth has clearly paid off in the sheer range and diversity of the topics treated in the five volumes. Bravo Barbara Tenenbaum, her fellow editors and contributors!

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