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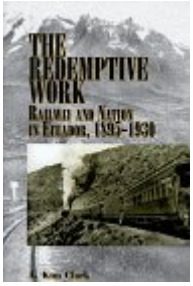

A. Kim Clark. *The Redemptive Work: Railway and Nation in Ecuador, 1895-1930.* Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1998. 244 pp. $48.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8420-2674-1.

Reviewed by George M. Lauderbaugh (Division of Arts and Sciences, Troy State University in Montgomery)

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In 1895, General Eloy Alfaro launched the Liberal Revolution in Ecuador which heralded significant changes for Ecuador's domestic system. Alfaro and his Liberal Party cohorts sought to separate church and state; to enforce religious toleration; to provide for civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths; to secularize cemeteries; to provide universal public education; to professionalize the armed forces; and to construct railroads to unify the country. Canadian anthropologist A. Kim Clark examines the issue of the construction and operation of the Guayaquil and Quito Railway in the context of the goals and aspirations of the Liberals to transform Ecuador. As Clark so ably points out, the railway linking Ecuador's two principal cities–the Pacific port of Guayaquil and the highland capital Quito–was in the liberal's view, "an obra redentora, or redemptive work, the cornerstone of a broad program of economic, political, social and even moral reform." The central purpose of Clark's study is to evaluate the impact of the railway on the political economy and culture of the Ecuadorian nation and to ascertain to what extent the aspirations of the Liberal Revolution were fulfilled, thwarted, or mutated by the vast public works project. In a number of carefully crafted chapters, she provides new insight into Ecuador's often neglected liberal period, 1895-1925.

After presenting her thesis, Clark attempts an overview of the Ecuadorian economy, geography, and history. While it was not her purpose to write a geography of Ecuador or a narrative of the railway's construction, her coverage of these topics is far too brief. Because of her brevity, she fails to capture the enormity of the construction project or to adequately convey that it was an engineering marvel that it was completed at all. Nor is the reader introduced to Archer Harman, the American railroad man and financier, who built the Guayaquil and Quito line for Alfaro. Despite these narrative shortcomings, Clark does provide a sufficient sketch of the Ecuadorian economy and transportation system before the Liberal Revolution. The transportation system was little more than a collection of mule paths linked to coastal rivers. In the dry season, it took a week to travel from Guayaquil to Quito–a distance of only 250 miles. In the rainy season, the trail were impassable. Not surprisingly, Ecuador's nearly nonexistent transportation system contributed to its regionalism in both economic and political terms. In a sense, Ecuador was indeed a tale of two cites, with Guayaquil dominating the coast and Quito the northern highlands. In addition, other localities such as Riobamba and Ambato in the central highlands and Cuenca in the South developed strong regional autonomy. The railroad was viewed as means to remedy Ecuador's transportation woes and to create an integrated national economy. However, it was an expensive solution, projected to cost over seventeen million dollars, an exorbitant sum for Ecuador.

In Chapter Three, Clark investigates the internal political debate over the railroad project and the liberal agenda for Ecuador. She adroitly brings the railroad to center stage of the liberal drama and brings to life the excitement, enthusiasm, and hope of Alfaro and other members of the Ecuadorian elite for the project. The railway, as envisioned by Alfaro, was the means to establish movement and to connect Ecuador's disparate parts into a connective whole. Although there was some strident opposition to the railroad project, it centered on issues of costs rather than objection to the overall concept. Alfaro was able to build a consensus, rare in Ecuador's fractious political history, that included even conservative Archbishop Gonzalez Suarez who commemorated the line's completion by ringing Quito's church bells. However, Clark contends that the railway did not create as solid a consensus as Alfaro envisioned. Rather, discourse over the project provided an opportunity for the elite of both the coast and the sierra to evaluate the project in terms of their own regional interests. Hence, while some of the liberal projects such as the railway were completed with the support of the elite and Ecuador was modernized, the overall goals of nation building and the elimination of Ecuador's regionalism were not achieved completely.

In ensuing chapters, Clark expands on her contention that groups of the elite did not share Alfaro's grand vision and used the railroad project merely to further their own regional or local interests. For example, the coastal agro-export elite was interested in promoting the migration of labor from the sierra to the coast. Driving this interest was the deficient labor supply needed for the littoral's cocoa production, Ecuador's leading export commodity of the period. In addition, labor was needed for sugar plantations, urban centers, and for the construction of the railroad itself. The Liberals were able to mitigate the hold of highland hacienda owners on labor by eliminating territorial taxes that held people to the land and the eventual elimination of debt peonage. However, the railway also greatly facilitated the availability of labor to the coast by offering higher wages, through the encouragement of new agricultural processes that freed highland labor, and by offering a quick and reliable means of reaching the coast.

The highland hacendados also saw opportunities in the railroad project. Unlike their coastal counterparts, sierra agriculturists were not interested in exports, but rather in improving the internal market. Clark finds three ways in which the railway supported improvements in the internal market. First, it allowed rapid transportation of perishable items, most notably vegetables and dairy products from the highlands to the coast. Second, it made possible shipment of commodities in bulk. Third, transportation costs were significantly reduced and profit margins increased. Despite these advantages, Clark concludes that the railroad was only part of the economic revival that occurred in the highlands. She contends that highland elites took advantage of political opportunities to push through programs favorable to their interests.

Clark devotes a chapter to the impact of the railway on the central highland town of Alausi, known as the gateway to the Ecuadorian Andes. This is the most fascinating and detailed account of the work. Indeed the railroad brought many changes to Alausi and, like all changes, some were positive and some negative. Clearly the railroad ended the town's isolation and stimulated the economy. It also brought an influx of visitors who escaped the tropical heat of Guayaquil for a respite of several months in Alausi's temperate zone. Ultimately the railroad enabled Alausenos to journey to the coast and eventually to the United States. But the railroad also brought the bubonic plaque in 1913 and ended the cooperation of Alausi with nearby villages as competition for trade increased. In sum, the railroad was often a mixed blessing to many localities.

This is an important addition to scholarly work on the Liberal Period in Ecuador. Clark has opened new doors into the impact of the Guayaquil and Quito Railway on the political economy of Ecuador. Her work on Alausi is particularly innovative and exhaustive. Her research of economic records, court reports, political tracts, municipal documents, and a plethora of other primary material, as well as secondary sources, is meticulous. Only a more complete and colorful narrative of the railway's construction is lacking. This book is essential for the Ecuadorinist and should prove of general interest to scholars of the liberal era and railroad development in Latin America.

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