

## Book Review

*Dawson, A. (2014). Latin America since Independence: A History with Primary Sources. Taylor and Francis.*

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Narrating the history of third world societies is often mired in contradictions as the diverse and complex processes through which these societies have gone prevent a simple and coherent narration. This is further substantiated by the inherent Eurocentric bias in historiography. The operation of modernity in Europe is treated as the universal history, to which every individual history has to be synchronised and linked. Historians are preloaded with this gaze of seeking parallels between European historical experiences and indigenous histories which ends up in a desperate attempt to cut the complexities of events in order to fit them in given boxes. What makes '*Latin America since independence; A history with primary sources*' by Alexander Dawson different is precisely this vigilance in making Latin American history as rooted and contextualised as possible. Like other third world societies the challenge with Latin American historiography is the absence of primary sources, as most of the information comes from the accounts of colonial officers and bureaucrats. The author has shown an extra ordinary effort in trespassing the information barrier by accommodating carefully selected stories and primary source documents into his work. Another caveat in writing the history of a continent is the tendency to generalise historical events without taking care of theregional particularities. It is worth appreciating that the author has given enough consideration to make Latin American history inclusive and well represented.

The book presents a modern history of Latin America right from the period of independence spanning over its early periods of modernisation, political developments and revolutions. Rather than being a textbook history that exclusively focus on big political events, the book investigates into areas as wide as gender, environment and democratization. In authors own words the attempt is to write the history of everyone. That's why the recurring concern of the author is the diversity of historical experiences in the continent and not to overrun these diversities by a dominant narrative. The book identifies the Latin American lived experiences as essentially fragmented with each region and communities being differently related to the overall historical development. This wider catchment area of this book comes from the fact that it is written in the form of storytelling. A history is being weaved out by carefully collecting stories and chronologically ordering them. Stories in contrast to factual narration have a better explanatory capacity with respect to third world societies where history is primarily transmitted through myths and stories. This novelty in style enables a smooth sailing across Latin American history without ever feeling the typical drudgery of an academic text. This method is undoubtedly a worthy innovation in historical writing.

Chapter one deals with Latin American independence from the early nineteenth century and the decolonization wave that followed. The impact of independence

movement and the way it was interpreted and perceived varies across nations and communities. In the case of indigenous people, the much-cherished independence was nothing more than a power transfer. Their living conditions remained the same and the new ruling elites acted no different than their colonial masters. Therefore, we can see the same leader being hailed as the greatest liberator as well as a wicked despot in the same region. Chapter two explains the rise of 'Caudillos' and the complexities surrounding their rule. Caudillos are the Bonapartists or the political strong men who filled the vacuum left by the colonial masters. Their period is characterised by sheer rule of force and immense instability throughout the region. Like all other aspects of Latin American history, the case of Caudillos is also characterised by immense diversity. Some celebrate them as National heroes while others regard their rule as the dark age of the continent. Chapter three deals with the gradual movement towards political maturity with the rise of constitutionalism, rule of law and the concept of citizenship being enrooted in Latin America. Political modernisation in a society characterised by centuries of persecution and enslavement is indeed a worthy material to read. Chapter four and five explains the period of Export boom in which the foundation of modern Latin America was laid. This period witnessed rapid modernisation and immense social changes in the continent, coupled with social tensions and crises. In Chapter 6 the role of United States in the continent is explored. No regional history is complete without an account of foreign influence and in the case of Latin America its greatest external influence is none other than the United States of America. Chapter seven to thirteen deals with twentieth century Latin America and its modern challenges. This includes political events such as Cuban revolution, rise of dictatorship and the democratic resistance, gender question and environmental crisis.

In short, '*Latin America since independence; a history with primary sources*', is an asset to all enthusiasts of Latin American history. It is very rare to find works that keeps a pleasant reading experience as well as the necessary academic vigor expected from a historic text. Dawson's approach in treating third world history is remarkable and can be rightly emulated. Due to the lucid style of writing, the book is even approachable to non-academic audience.