

# POLITICAL CULTURE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

## *In Search of a Model for Latin America*

*THE POLITICAL CULTURE AND BEHAVIOR OF LATIN AMERICA.* By LOUIS K. HARRIS and VICTOR ALBA. (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1974. Pp. 221. \$9.00 cloth, \$4.50 paper.)

*LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS: A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH.* By W. RAYMOND DUNCAN. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1976. Pp. 277. \$4.95.)

*ISSUES OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT* (2nd ed.). By CHARLES W. ANDERSON, FRED R. VON DER MEHDEN, and CRAWFORD YOUNG. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974. Pp. 278.)

During the early-to-mid-1960s, the field of comparative politics, including the study of Latin American politics, came to be dominated by the developmental approach and framework. As set forth most forcefully in the writings of Gabriel Almond, Lucian Pye, Seymour Lipset, W. W. Rostow, Karl Deutsch, and, somewhat later, Samuel Huntington, this approach posited a universal and unilinear model of national social and political development, based largely on the Parsonian "pattern variables," and implying an inevitable "development" from "traditional" to "modern." Armed with this neat, optimistic, soul-satisfying but hopelessly simplistic, naive, and ethnocentric model, an entire generation of graduate students, as well as many more senior scholars who should have known better, descended upon Latin America to study its "development." Although some continued (and continue still) to try to stuff Latin America into the a priori frameworks with which they began, the more astute among them perceived that Latin America did not fit very well into the developmentalist framework, or at least in the way the great theories presumed, and they began to search for alternative explanations.

Disillusionment with the development literature, plus the wrenching crises of United States society from 1965 on—the Dominican invasion, Viet Nam, cities in flame and institutions under attack, Nixon, the student movement, etc.—not only destroyed the earlier optimistic view but led to a new emphasis on "conflict theories" and "structuralist" interpretations of Latin America—"dependency," "delayed development," "internal colonialism," "class" explanations, and "imperialism." An overemphasis on the structuralist interpretations, in turn, understandable in the context of the time, led by the early 1970s to a renewed emphasis on "culturalist" explanations of Latin American political behavior and, in the more sophisticated of the new writings, to the attempt to sort out and analyze what is useful from what is not so useful in both the "structuralist" and the "culturalist" explanations, while at the same time assessing both for what is universal and what is distinctive about "development" in Latin America.

The book by Harris and Alba, as the title implies, focuses on Latin American political culture and behavior, the current political ideas, institutions, and practices. It is a basic text, an introduction to the area for the general reader, which nevertheless carries a significant message and point of view. Once the reader gets past an atrocious preface, where we learn that the submerged masses of Latin America live a "folklorist life" and that "political events and social happenings are transforming the scene" (is that the idiom in which publishers with their new emphasis on textbooks only now force us to write?), there are a number of interesting perspectives and nuances in the book that make it a valuable contribution to the literature.

The Harris and Alba volume contains a good discussion of personalism, political ideas, and traditional social institutions. It has a useful treatment of not only the familiar theme of the discord between Latin American ideas, as articulated in law and constitution, and practice, but also of the "ill fit" of the major development ideas and literature in Latin America. It analyzes the Latin American concepts of law and shows why, in that cultural context, codes of human rights are so frequently ignored. The book discusses the special nature of democracy in Latin America and the tradition of "democratic caesarism." Particularly interesting is the authors' analysis of the proverbial instability of Latin America and the three logical positions that it is possible to take, in terms of a culturalist explanation, as regards the causes of instability and its presumed solutions. On the one hand is the (reformist, liberal, optimistic) argument that while the theory and basic laws of Latin America are viable, it is the practices (and social structure) that are weak and in need of reform. On the other is the conservative, often caudillistic argument that while the practices are adequate or "functional," it is the theory and law that must be modified to make them more reflective of reality. Finally, there is the realistic, "culturalist" explanation that simply accepts the disparity between theory and practice and argues that it is normal for Latin America to live on two planes that do not converge.

The analysis that Harris and Alba present of the relations between society, economics, and culture is especially interesting for our purposes. They employ a culturalist and sociological perspective, seeing Latin America dominated by a noncapitalist culture and social structure, and hence they highlight the distinctive values and perspectives of banking interests, middle sectors, and trade unions. Their framework leads them to an emphasis on the strong state as the result of the Iberian cultural tradition; they in fact imply it is the culture (including the patrimonialist state system) that shapes and determines class structure rather than class relations that determine political culture and the role of the state. This view leads them also (and perhaps necessarily) to downplay the importance of dependency relations, international economic forces, and North American colonial penetration, or to see these forces in politically accommodative rather than conflict terms.

There are, thus, both valuable contributions and severe limitations in the Harris and Alba view. Those who have read Victor Alba's earlier writings will find the materials in several of the chapters familiar, although it is interesting to see how he has changed in his interpretation of both military and middle-class

behavior. The unabashedly culturalist explanation serves as a useful corrective to some of the excessively structuralist explanations that came before, but the culturalist explanation also implies certain biases in terms of what is examined and what is left out. Moreover it leads to an excessively static approach, with emphasis on the constants of political behavior and little on the changes. In this sense it is also a pessimistic work, a product of liberal and social-democratic disillusionment, a somewhat cynical view by two long-time observers of Latin America who began with reformist hopes for the area but ended with a certain sense of frustration for seeing their hopes implemented and who have turned to culturalist explanations to help explain why reform was so consistently thwarted.

But if this is an "older man's book" in this sense, the study by W. Raymond Duncan is a "young man's book." Moreover, it is a book that cites the reviewer in many and favorable passages, and it is difficult to be harsh on a book that treats one's own work so generously. Duncan's focus is on political development in Latin America. His is a hopeful and optimistic book, and he provides an interesting, worthwhile link between some of the general development literature of the 1960s and the newer culture-area interpretations of the 1970s.

Duncan defines political development in terms of the Latin American peoples becoming more integrated with their political systems, of their putting more demands on their systems and the systems responding through programs leading to more equitable distribution. While such laudable liberal policies are clearly Duncan's goal (and presumably the goal of "political development" as well), he also emphasizes Latin America's distinctive cultural patterns as derived from Southern Europe, the special nature of the colonial experience, the implications of the area's corporatist, as distinct from a liberal, tradition, and hence that Latin America is a unique world area meriting separate study by scholars and policymakers. The author thus faces in two directions at once: he places heavy emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Latin American experience and yet he cannot entirely abandon the political development concepts with which many younger scholars grew up in the 1960s. One suspects that this book was written, like others in recent years, when the author's ideas were in transition from the latter to the former and when no firm reconciliation between the universals of the development literature and the particulars of the Latin American experience had yet been achieved.

The result is a number of dilemmas that Duncan has not resolved. He has frequently treated "development" both as an ethical, liberal, America-style "good" and as an inevitable, historical process. In terms of his model, as Latin America develops the traditional forces (Church, army, oligarchy) are supposed to be weakened; yet Duncan also recognizes realistically that that does not appear necessarily to be happening. At the same time the newer, emerging, "modernizing" forces are supposed to be gaining in strength, and yet the author sees that that is not necessarily occurring either. He emphasizes that Latin American development is *sui generis*, uniquely conditioned by the area's special values and culture, and yet, like the AID administrator, he continues to view Latin American development in terms of the "problems" to be "overcome." Latin America's political culture thus becomes, in his terms, the "least developed

sphere"—presumably another "obstacle" that can be transcended, although by the other face of Duncan's analysis he recognizes that will not happen.

There are, despite these difficulties, numerous valuable insights that the book contributes and that make it a useful addition to the scholar's shelf. In the chapter on "Attitudes and Values" there is an interesting discussion of Latin America's "traditional" values. In terms of his developmental framework these are also "obstacles to be overcome," but Duncan analyzes how the particular character of these institutions will condition the special path that development takes in Latin America. He shows how the traditional political culture may, as in Cuba, be reconciled with modernizing leadership, how Latin America may move toward development and "civic mindedness" but in a distinct way that reflects its own cultural values. He has an interesting chapter on "pressure groups," while the chapters on ethnicity and interethnic differences represent some of the most original and stimulating contributions of the book. His discussion toward the end on how the corporative nature of Latin America is interrelated with the dependency thesis (i.e., the Latin American nations with weak state systems are more susceptible to foreign penetration and dependency) is fascinating.

This introduction to Latin American politics in the post-World War II era focuses on the unevenness between economic and political development, the major groups and forces that condition these developments (or the lack thereof), and the possibilities for future change. It recognizes realistically that while development is coming to Latin America, these changes will be in accord with the area's own values and political culture. It is a good primer, although it never adequately resolves the dilemma between the cultural relativism and the universalist prescriptions, both of which it sets forth. One admires Duncan's hopefulness and optimism while at the same time wishing there were less emphasis on the cultural "problems to be overcome." Political culture is not something that is "overcome" but, as Harris and Alba recognize, and Duncan, too, in some passages, must be treated and dealt with realistically, perhaps manipulated, given new emphases, and reconciled with newer pressures. That, after all, is how most change and "development" in Latin America, as elsewhere, has gone forward, and one wishes that Duncan had done more with this set of themes.

If the book by Harris and Alba is a pessimistic older man's book and Duncan's a more optimistic younger man's book, then the volume by Anderson, von der Mehden, and Young is for the middle aged. It contains neither cynicism nor misplaced optimism. It is the best written of the three here under review, a pleasure to read for that reason alone. Further, it is tightly organized and argued. It is careful, reasoned, dispassionate, an exceedingly valuable contribution for a course on development that cuts across geographic and culture areas. Unhappily, despite Charles Anderson's presence, the book contains little that would be of interest to Latin Americanists.

The authors have sought to avoid unilinear, deterministic models and those that ethnocentrically posit the development process as ending with a society and polity that look "just like us." They point out the limits as well as the utility of the developmental approach, urging care and discretion. They see there is no one single developmental "pattern" or "process," let alone "stages";

they recognize that development is not unilinear nor the result of some inevitable, relentless process but may take a variety of forms. They urge that the development literature be used judiciously and that caution is required since the term "development" itself implies certain Western premises and moral preconceptions that may not be universal. The authors of this book have nevertheless tried to capture the diversity and heterogeneity of "development," to show how the range of experience of different areas is shaped by distinct beliefs, cultures, presuppositions. At the same time they see value and advantages in a comparative approach that transcends countries and continents. Now all this seems perfectly obvious, but it is particularly well stated by Anderson, von der Mehden, and Young and it may be useful for Latin Americanists, including the other authors here under review, to weigh carefully these measured comments on the universal vs the particular aspects of the development literature and theory. However, there is little in their introductory comments that pertains directly to Latin America.

The book focuses on what the authors see as three key "problems" of the developing world, problems they view as continuous since the drafting of the first edition of this book in 1965. These are: the establishment of political order (nationalism and the problem of cultural pluralism), the maintenance of political order (stability and the problem of political violence), and the purpose of political order (development and the problem of political ideology). As concerns the first "problem," the Latin American nations, with over a century-and-a-half of independence behind them, are hardly "new states" and the questions of boundaries, sovereignty, etc. to which new nationhood gives rise have, for the most part, been long ago resolved. Anderson's treatment of "cultural pluralism" in this section is largely limited to a discussion of the Indian communities in Latin America, a theme which clearly could have been developed more and which was not nearly so interesting as Duncan's analysis of "ethnicity." In the section on political violence, Anderson has contributed a valuable, balanced treatment of "La violencia" in Colombia; but this section does not, as it might have, adequately treat of the pervasive presence of violence as a "power factor" in Latin American politics à la William Stokes, Merle Kling, or James Payne. In the section on the purposes of development and the "problem" of political ideology, there are some comments on nationalism and socialism, in its varied forms, as the coming ideology of Latin America, a significant theme that, however, is hardly new and that could and should have been developed further.

This book is a valuable contribution to the development literature, but it is of only limited interest to Latin Americanists. First, the difficulty is that some of the "problems" on which the authors focus are problems more for the newer nations of Africa and Asia and only marginally relevant for Latin America. Second, even within the confining context of the specific "problems" the authors have chosen for study, more could have been done on Latin American themes than was done. Third, and perhaps most disappointing, nowhere in this book do we learn what Latin America's real "problems" are or how the Latin American systems actually do function. In large part this is due to the framework, or set of "problems," the authors have imposed on their materials. But it is still a

disappointment to find in this book, which lists Charles W. Anderson as co-author, no elaboration of the dynamics of the Latin American change and development process, a theme on which he had earlier contributed what to this reviewer still stands as some of the best understandings and analyses in the literature.

All three of these volumes go beyond, happily, the naive, ethnocentric, unilinear, and deterministic models of the early development literature. At the same time, each provides a valuable political-cultural corrective to the heavily "structuralist" focus of the late 1960s. Although with somewhat different emphases, all three wrestle with the question of what is distinctive about Latin America and its developmental processes, as well as where these conform to more universal criteria. At the same time none of them has adequately resolved this issue, nor have they adequately sorted out what is useful and contributes to our understanding of Latin America in both the political-cultural interpretation and the literature on dependency, delayed development, and class or "structural" analysis. The study that both treats the Latin American change process on its own terms and in relation to broader developmental issues, *and* that recognizes the complex multi-causality of the forces involved, has yet to be written.

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