

**Stefano Tijerina, *Opportunity & Goodwill: Canadian Business Expansion in Columbia, 1867-1979***, Toronto, [University of Toronto Press](#), 2021, vii + 210pp., notes, bibliography, index. Cloth; ISBN: 978-1-4426-4686-5, \$48.75.

Stefano Tijerina's new book provides a fascinating and detailed analysis of the changing economic relationship between Canada and Columbia. The book is an original contribution to our understanding of how Canadian enterprises carry out business abroad, particularly in a turbulent and violent environment like Columbia. There is insufficient information and analysis available of the changing international role of Canadian businesses. Tijerina's study complements the much earlier important work by J.C.M. Ogelsby, *Gringos from the Far North: Essays in the History of Canadian-Latin American Relations, 1866-1968*, which came out in 1976. By focusing on the specific case study of Columbia, the author is able to develop a nuanced and empirically rich analysis of Canada's role in the Americas, with a focus on a country that is little known to most Canadians, apart from its controversial role in the drug trade. However, Columbia has been a key business partner and ally of Canada in the region.

For the most part, discussions of the historical relationship between Canada and Latin America focus on diplomatic relations and tend to conclude that Canada played a minimal role in Latin America until quite recently, partly because Ottawa failed to take up a seat in the Organization of American States until the Mulroney government chose to do so in 1990. Tijerina's book shows the important role played by Canadian businesses, beginning as early as the mid-1700s, when schooners registered in Halifax began to ply their trade in the Caribbean and the northern ports of what was then the Viceroyalty of New Granada. Tijerina's work shows the role played by the business sector in advancing ties between Canada and Columbia, often precisely because the government chose not to emphasize political and security issues in its relations with the region, leaving these other important and controversial issues to the United States and the United Kingdom to deal with.

His main argument is that Canadian commercial expansion in Columbia has gone through ebbs and flows, affected by the state of Columbian political economy, the role of other great powers like the US and UK, and the role of pioneering and enterprising business leaders. The most important factor in his account is the gradual development of what he calls a "promotional state" in Ottawa.

In contrast with the tendency of academics and activists to emphasize the role of imperial powers, especially the United States, Tijerina's study shows that in the early years, the Canadian private sector was able to take advantage of gaps left by Britain, the United States, and other Western actors. Canadian trade and investment thus played an important role in the economic development of Columbia in periods when others were less active. Canadians also benefitted from their country's reputation as a relatively benevolent player, in contrast with the anti-American attitudes commonly held in Columbia, particularly in the period of the creation of Panama (once part of Columbia) and the US-controlled canal zone. Canada's role declined, however, as the United States asserted its hegemony in the region, and began heavy promotion of its own companies' interests in the Cold War period.

Despite growing US presence, the Canadian state and business leaders viewed Latin America as an ideal site to diversify trade relations away from first the UK and then the US. Columbia was a particularly attractive site for this endeavour, partly because of the strength of economic liberal ideologies in that South American country.

Particularly insightful are specific chapters on leading business sectors like the Canadian financial and insurance industries. Companies like Sun Life, The Manufacturers' Life Insurance Company, and the Royal Bank of Canada in a sense opened up this South American market to Canadian capital. These companies helped modernize Columbia's financial system and promoted economic expansion and integration into the global capitalist system. Canadian companies also played an important role in the Columbian oil industry, as well as in gold mining. These chapters provide important context for understanding the contemporary role of Canadian extractive industries in Latin American markets. As this study shows, this is not a new phenomenon. For over 100 years, Canadian companies have sought to take advantage of lax governmental regulations, a weak Columbian private sector, and the incapacity of local civil society actors to resist foreign corporate interests.

It was not until the government of Pierre Trudeau took a stronger interest in the diversification of Canadian trade that the promotional state really took hold. Trudeau's government adopted a much more expansive development assistance program, and established the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Both agencies funded and expanded technical assistance programs in Columbia, and the Trudeau government attempted to balance humanitarian and commercial motivations. However, Tijerina argues, over time the former tendency lost out to more narrow self-interested behaviour. Columbia, it must be said was an eager adopter of free trade and liberal policies, and thus it became somewhat of a favoured recipient of Canadian development assistance which helped promote capitalist interests.

Much recent scholarship and activism has focused on the rapacious behaviour of Canadian-based mining companies operating in Latin America and elsewhere, and their willingness to ride roughshod over local environmental, social, and cultural preferences. Some, like Todd Gordon and Jeffery Webber, *Blood of Extraction: Canadian Imperialism in Latin America*, (2016), describe Canada as acting as an imperialist power in its own right, driven by these corporate interests. Tijerina's study suggests a more modest claim: Canada has generally acted as a secondary player in the broader story of capitalist and imperialist expansion in Columbia and other Latin American countries. The Canadian state has played a key role in promoting the expansion of Canadian interests abroad, but it has done so in an often hesitant and limited manner. Canadian financial and mining corporations' activities abroad have certainly expanded in the years since those covered in this book. *Opportunism & Goodwill* provides much-needed evidence and analysis to help us understand how these activities play out in different places at different times, and how much has or hasn't changed in current corporate behaviour abroad.

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