



BOOK REVIEWS

LATINAMERICANISM AFTER 9/11. By John Beverley. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, 166 pp., \$22.95.

Sherman Alexie has observed that on September 11, 2001, his identity as a Spokane Indian came to an end because the attacks on the twin towers in New York City made him realize the dangers of embracing tribal identities. For many Latin Americanists, September 11, 1973 represents a more significant watershed in our intellectual and political development than do the events 28 years later in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. Cultural theorist John Beverley notes the linkages of these two dates in that, under the control of a brutal military dictatorship in Chile, the first represented the introduction of unbridled neoliberal economic policies in Latin America; the second date introduced a period of decline and hopefully the eventual collapse of what came to be known as the Washington Consensus.

Beverley argues that despite how scholars might present what he terms "Latinamericanism," no clear line separates the embrace of identities (such as those Alexie cautions against) and politics as represented by the "pink tide" governments that have arisen in Latin America in the aftermath of the decline of the Washington Consensus. Despite attacks that Charles Hale and others have launched against multicultural neoliberalism, Beverley is not ready to discard the liberating power of identities, whether they take a personal, ethnic, racial, class, gender, civic, or national form. He challenges both those from the right, who criticize identity politics as a misguided political correctness, and those from the left, who complain about the essentialization of identities into what marxists perhaps once would have called false consciousness. Beverley attempts to build an argument that identity politics should be seen as a precondition rather than obstacle to the reemergence of the left.

Beverley notes the paradox of a neoconservative turn in Latin American literary and cultural criticism that comes not only in the context of the reemergence of a new Latin American left, but also largely from the left itself. He positions this historically in terms of a series of people including Regis Debray, Teodoro Petkoff, and Jorge Castañeda who turned on their previous political positions to become part of the center right. Beverley is concerned that a neoconservative turn could potentially divide a newly emergent left and hinder its growing hegemonic presence in Latin America.

Just when it appears that the issues that Beverley raises are a political not cultural question, he turns his attention directly to issues of rethinking armed struggles and the relationship between subalterns and the state. While armed struggle has largely moved from the realm of current political debate to a historical curiosity in Latin America, the issue of state power



is as pressing as it ever has been. Beverley discusses the tension played out between the Zapatistas and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in the 2006 Mexican presidential elections, and exhibited more recently between social movements and the Bolivian government (as well as other pink tide leaders). He criticizes a shared anti-statist position of neoconservative and ultraleftist forces. In contrast, Beverley argues for the persistent relevance of state structures to realize the noble objectives of contemporary pink tide governments in Latin America.

This short book is a compilation of previously published essays that have been rewritten for inclusion in this volume. Beverley writes from a position which I suppose one could term post-subaltern or perhaps post-post colonial studies. Beverley comments as some length about the tension of writing *desde* (from) versus *sobre* (about) Latin America, and his primary audience remains other cultural theorists most concerned about these tensions in the field. Beverley acknowledges that a golden age of academic theory has faded, but still contends that a meaningful connection can be made between scholarly discourses and the lived realities of politics on the ground in Latin America. Through his decades of work and numerous publications in the field, Beverley remains as a shining example of a politically engaged scholar as seriously engaged with current politics as lived and practiced in Latin America.

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BARTOLOME DE LAS CASAS AND THE CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS. By Lawrence A. Clayton. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 188 pp., \$23.95.

Bartolomé de Las Casas and the Conquest of the Americas, is a short, effective, student-oriented history of the period and major issues of the Spanish presence in the New World that Las Casas confronted. The basic premise of this book, to use the life of Las Casas as a “gateway into the history of the Conquest” (12), works quite well. The fact that his subject was a contemporary and near eyewitness to most of the major events of the first half-century of Spanish exploration and conquest in the Americas allows Clayton to effectively contextualize the career of Las Casas. Much as the Spanish presence unfolded slowly, from the small, economically marginal islands of the Caribbean to the dramatic conquests of central Mexico and the Andes, so Clayton traces the life of Las Casas from his relatively obscure beginnings as a merchant to his frenetic and spectacular religious career.

This is an especially successful approach for discussing the development of the Dominican’s advocacy for the Indian peoples caught by the creation of the vast new Spanish Empire. Clayton effectively narrates the slow awakening of Las Casas to the plight of the Indians, from his brief ownership of a Taino slave, to his experience with the brutality of the