
Review

Reviewed Work(s): *British Lions and Mexican Eagles: Business, Politics, and Empire in the Career of Weetman Pearson in Mexico, 1899-1919* by Paul Gamer

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observes, “about the business world before limited liability, and when reputation was based on a more complicated reputational nexus than simply financial success” (p. 237). The contrast between the two periods suggests that good and bad versions of embeddedness can exist: a good one prevailing in the late eighteenth century and a bad one in the early twenty-first. But this possibility, of course, raises more questions and problems. Despite such theoretical conundrums, the standard of empirical research presented in this book is very high indeed, and its contents will, therefore, be of great interest to historians of the Atlantic World and to business historians generally.

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British Lions and Mexican Eagles: Business, Politics, and Empire in the Career of Weetman Pearson in Mexico, 1899–1919. *By Paul Garner.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. xi + 319 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, appendix, notes, index. Cloth, \$65.00. ISBN: 978-0-8047-7445-1.

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Reviewed by Marcelo Bucheli

In mid-2013, just a few months after his election as president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto announced a series of economic reforms to end existing monopolies. His targets included the national state-owned oil company PEMEX, established after the 1938 expropriation of foreign oil companies operating in Mexico. Considering changing PEMEX’s privileged position in the Mexican economy goes beyond changes in the oil market. Since PEMEX’s creation, the Mexican government has portrayed this firm as the symbol of the final battle of the Mexican people’s long struggle against foreign domination of their national economic resources. This image is consistent with the official narrative of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), a bloody war that started with a rebellion against the regime of Porfirio Díaz, a man who ruled Mexico between 1877 and 1911. Postrevolutionary governments portrayed Díaz as a dictator who imposed a free-trade liberal economic system in which the main beneficiaries were foreign corporations, particularly the oil multinationals that Díaz welcomed. Not only did this narrative provide historical legitimacy to the overthrow of Díaz but also to subsequent actions, such as the writing of the 1917 Constitution that provided legal grounds for the expropriation of private property in the oil sector, the eventual nationalization of oil in 1938, and the creation of PEMEX. Because of this context, *British Lions and Mexican Eagles*, written by Paul Garner

(Leeds University), touches particular nationalistic sensibilities that are still relevant in Mexico's current political debates.

British Lions and Mexican Eagles focuses on the operations of British entrepreneur Weetman Pearson in Mexico between 1889 and 1919. Pearson was one of Díaz's main contractors, and they developed a close personal relationship. Pearson was responsible for some of the most important infrastructure works of the *porfiriato*, including the Tehuantepec railway (the main connection between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans before the opening of the Panama Canal) and the Gran Canal (which put an end to the centuries' old problem of floods in Mexico City). These two projects provided Pearson handsome profits, fame, and reputation in Mexico and beyond, but it was Pearson's involvement in the Mexican oil industry that turned him into a major player in the international economy and international politics. The fortune Pearson built from these operations, his close relationship with Díaz, and the ease with which he moved among the *porfirian* elite led many to consider him the quintessential representative of those foreign investors who benefited from Díaz's dictatorship and gave justification to the Revolution.

Garner bases his study on a detailed reading of an impressively large amount of primary sources, particularly the rich Pearson collection held at the Science Museum Archive in London, which contains thousands of memos, reports, and confidential telegrams of Pearson's international operations covering several decades. He also extensively used the amazing Archivo General de la Nación, the PEMEX Archive in Mexico City, and other more specific archives in Great Britain and Mexico. Garner is also an authority on the Porfirian regime; he wrote *Porfirio Díaz: A Profile in Power* (2001) and several articles in English and Spanish.

In *British Lions and Mexican Eagles*, Garner aims to reconsider what he believes are misconceptions of both Pearson in Mexico and the Díaz regime. First, he claims that Pearson's operations in Mexico were not part of a wider expansion of Britain's informal economic empire (a perception that would make Mexico look like a victim of both U.S. and British imperialism before the Revolution). On the contrary, Garner argues that Pearson's success in Mexico owed nothing to British imperial policy and that he in fact succeeded *despite* the British Empire. The British government did not want to alienate the United States (a country it increasingly needed as an ally) in its area of influence and refused to provide any help to Pearson when he requested it or needed it (chs. 6 and 7). As well, the United States government distrusted Pearson himself, considering him a corrupt force in Mexican politics who

used his influence to deter the entry of U.S. corporations and to support Mexican antidemocratic forces.

Second, Garner argues that contrary to the revolutionary discourse, Díaz was not a sellout to foreign interests nor was he a liberal who wanted to impose *laissez faire* economics in Mexico. Rather, Garner argues, Díaz had a clear nationalist economic program that included protectionism, industrialization, and a balanced budget. According to the author, Díaz worked only with those foreign investors who could provide him with what he needed to succeed in this project. This policy is, Garner posits, one of the elements that explains Pearson's success: The British entrepreneur learned how to align his own interests with those of the Mexican government. Pearson provided what the Mexican government needed to develop its economic agenda, while at the same time this agenda allowed Pearson to build a fortune (chs. 3, 4, and 5).

Garner attributes Pearson's success in aligning his agenda with Díaz's to Pearson's personal characteristics. First, throughout the book Garner emphasizes Pearson's managerial and negotiation skills. Second, the author highlights Pearson's ability to play Mexico's domestic political game, which included constantly rewarding those political figures who did him favors, appointing members of the elite to the boards of his companies, maintaining a good relationship with journalists, and carefully building bonds with the Mexican elite (ch. 3). Although Garner calls this the "Mexican business etiquette," Pearson's political maneuvers in Mexico do not seem to differ much from Pearson's strategies in Britain (ch. 2).

There are some minor issues that, if changed, could have made this book more appealing to a wider audience. First, Garner is not shy about showing his admiration for Pearson as an individual. While undeniable that Pearson had incredible political and entrepreneurial skills, the glowing language used in some parts of the book might put off some readers. The author's praise also might make readers suspicious that the healthy distance a historian should keep from the subject he or she studies has been lost. Second, and related to the previous point, this book's title, abstract, and introduction announce its objective to explain Weetman Pearson's success. I believe this bias diminishes the importance of some of the author's findings. This is not a book just about Pearson. Garner sheds light on the political economy of the important porfiriato period in Latin American history. He encourages scholars to reconsider late-nineteenth-century Latin American liberalism and the role of foreign capital in domestic politics. Researchers interested in the political strategy of multinational corporations in historical perspective will find this book a useful model. Moreover, Garner's dynamic writing

style, illustrated with a number of incredible anecdotes and interesting quotations from the protagonists, make this book entertaining for audiences beyond academics and graduate students, including undergraduate students and the wider general public interested in adventurer businessmen in the nineteenth century.

Marcelo Bucheli is associate professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of "Negotiating under the Monroe Doctrine: Weetman Pearson and the Origins of U.S. Control of Colombian Oil," Business History Review 82, no. 3 (2008) and other articles on the history of the oil industry in Latin America.

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Salt and the Colombian State: Local Society and Regional Monopoly in Boyacá, 1821–1900. *By Joshua M. Rosenthal.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. xii + 222 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, bibliography, notes, index. Paper, \$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-8229-6180-2.

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Reviewed by Carlos Dávila

Following a common pattern among Latin Americanists—social scientists specializing in Latin America—historian Joshua M. Rosenthal's book on the salt monopoly in a remote region of the eastern Colombian highlands is based on his doctoral dissertation (2001) at Columbia University. His distinctive focus is to examine through a local prism how the state's nineteenth-century salt monopoly played a significant role—"neither a success nor a failure"—in the society, economy, and politics of a rural community (p. 7). To advance his thesis, the author depicts La Salina as one of the "islands of the bureaucratic state" that "often developed into focal points of defiance to the state and its authority" (p. 9). Rosenthal chose to study Boyacá, a small town (transient population of one thousand in the 1840s to a peak of 1,500 inhabitants in the 1880s) in a remote region of Colombia whose historiography is scant. While this volume contains much that may be relevant to an international readership regarding local history, political culture, state presence at the micro level, and the salt industry, the events in the book take place in a nation thus described in an 1871 British report on emigration: "Everything in Colombia, except nature, is on a small scale" (Accounts and Papers, Parliamentary Papers, 1871, LXVII, p. 214).

Set in this "impoverished world, already full of promise and disappointment," the book chronicles the evolution during the republican period (1821–1900) of the La Salina saltworks state monopoly, the area's primary economic engine (p. 16). Salt, whose economic origins