The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela
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The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela. *By Miguel Tinker Salas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. xvi + 325 pp. Bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, $84.95; paper, $23.95. ISBN: cloth, 978-0-822-34400-1; paper, 978-0-822-34419-3.

Reviewed by Marcelo Bucheli

Few other historical books have been published with the perfect timing of Miguel Tinker Salas's excellent study of the oil multinationals' cultural and social legacy in Venezuela. In a period of continuing tension between Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and foreign oil corporations and the U.S. government, this clearly written, rigorous study is particularly welcome. Covering a period of around a hundred years, *The Enduring Legacy* provides a concise, well-supported background to contemporary oil politics and social conflict in Venezuela.

Drawing from a wide range of archival and oral sources, Tinker Salas analyzes in detail how the oil multinationals' operations (mainly Jersey Standard and Shell) shaped local race and gender relations beyond the oil camps, changed Venezuela's consumption patterns and values, contributed to the creation of a national mythology about the part that oil played in the country's development, and helped to define Venezuela's national identity. His findings challenge the traditional view of the oil camps as enclaves that had limited relations with their host countries. Rather, Tinker Salas finds that the relations were mutual: while the companies exerted a strong impact on local society, for their part, the multinationals discovered that they had to adapt to the local culture.

In examining race relations, Tinker Salas finds that, before the 1950s, the company camps reproduced the conditions of segregation that existed in the United States. Because most American employees were reluctant to learn Spanish, they brought with them West Indians, who worked both as company employees and as maids. This arrangement exacerbated the racist attitudes toward Afro-descendent people that were already present in Venezuelan society. During the first four decades of the century, there was a clear racial hierarchy in the oil economy: white foreigners occupied the top rungs, followed by white locals, then West Indians, and, relegated to the bottom, dark-skinned Venezuelans. Over time, however, the company opened up positions for Venezuelans, enabling them to climb the corporate ladder and creating the perception among the Venezuelan middle class that the oil companies rewarded hard work and acknowledged merit. The companies reinforced this view by launching aggressive public-relations campaigns, publicizing both their commitment to the country's social and economic transformation and their unprecedented social spending in local communities.

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Gender roles were also affected by the oil industry. Before the 1940s, most of the foreign employees working in the camps were single men, which led to a rise in prostitution, gambling, and heavy alcohol consumption in the surrounding towns. Concerned about the effect of this environment on employees' morale, companies encouraged the arrival of married men with their families in the 1950s. The presence of women, the author argues, encouraged better relations between local and expatriate families. Families also transformed the environment of the camps from one revolving around bars and bordellos to one centered on family activities. The integration of the expatriate community intensified when some oil enclaves were built in urban areas and Venezuelan employees were allowed to live with their families in the camps.

The presence of American families also influenced Venezuelans' consumption patterns, and the Americans' lifestyles became a model for the growing Venezuelan middle class. As huge oil incomes flooded the country after World War II, the Americanization of consumption patterns accelerated and became part of the country's national identity.

Despite the benefits that the oil industry offered to a segment of the middle class, the companies' spending on social improvements, and the growing consensus that the oil corporations made development possible, growing numbers of Venezuelans felt that the country was not receiving its fair share from the oil business. The ruling class, however, was not willing to openly threaten the multinationals. As a result, most of the nationalist policies aimed at increasing the domestic share of oil wealth that were imposed after World War II, such as the fifty-fifty formula of 1948, the sixty-forty formula of 1958, or the nationalization of the industry in 1976 and subsequent creation of the national company Petróleos de Venezuela, did not pose a strong threat to the foreign corporations. Instead, Tinker Salas argues, these policies increased revenues, which the government used to reinforce a corrupt system of patronage. The economic and political crises that Venezuela experienced in the 1980s and 1990s fanned skepticism about how the oil economy was managed and provided the political platform that led to the first election of Chávez in 1998. This event, Tinker Salas argues, marked the end of a long period during which Venezuelans assumed that no development was possible without the participation of foreign multinationals. His analysis also enables us to understand the reasons for the strong middle-class opposition to Chávez's policies in the oil sector.

The Enduring Legacy will undoubtedly become required reading for students of the Venezuelan oil industry. It will appeal not only to scholars and graduate students but also to undergraduates and general readers. It opens up new areas for further research, such as the oil industry's legacy of pollution in Venezuela, along the lines followed by

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Myrna Santiago in her study of pollution in Mexico (*The Ecology of Oil* [Cambridge, 2006]). Julio Moreno's *Yankee Don't Go Home* (North Carolina, 2003), describing how multinationals operated in Mexico, offers another model for studies of nationalistic media discourse by the oil companies.

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