

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Review

<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/>

Published on **13 April 2011**

H-Diplo Review Editor: Diane Labrosse

H-Diplo Web and Production Editors: George Fujii
and John Vurpillat

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane Labrosse

H-Diplo has commissioned reviews of the Makers of the Modern World Series (Haus Publishing), which concerns the Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and their aftermath. The 32 volumes are structured as biographies in standard format or as specific national/organizational histories.
<http://www.hauspublishing.com/product/229>

H-Diplo Book Review of

Michael Streeter. *Central America and the Treaty of Versailles*. London: Haus Publishing Limited, 2010, viii + 232 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, further reading, index. ISBN 978-1-906598-25-9 (hardcover, \$19.95).

Michael Streeter. *South America and the Treaty of Versailles*. London: Haus Publishing Limited, 2010, viii + 222 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, further reading, index. ISBN 978-1-906598-24-2 (hardcover, \$19.95).

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/Haus-Americas.pdf>

Reviewed for H-Diplo by **David McCreery**, Georgia State University

Together with his *Epitacio Pessoa: Brazil* (Haus, 2010)¹ Michael Streeter's *Central America and the Treaty of Versailles* and *Central America and the Treaty of Versailles* provide a survey of Latin American participation in the conference and treaty that ended World War I. The effort is in part crippled by the admission that Central America's "contribution [was] hardly significant" (175) and that the South American countries, apart from Brazil, "were almost entirely irrelevant to the Conference proceedings" (99). Having said this, the author makes a good effort with what he has.

The first chapters provide background for the countries involved, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Cuba and Haiti for a loosely defined "Central America," and Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Uruguay from South America. Most of the countries in Central America followed the U.S. lead and eventually declared war on Central Powers, while those in

¹ See the H-Diplo review at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/Haus-Brazil.pdf>

South America largely contented themselves with breaking relations, raising the question in 1918-1919 of who would be invited to the conference. Further complicating the problem for the United States was the possibility that Panama and Haiti might use the opportunity to protest interference in their internal affairs, and Ecuador faced resistance from British bond holders over a failed railroad investment. Nevertheless, and largely through the intervention of the U.S. which, the author suggests, wanted the conference to be seen as something more than just a “big power” gathering, all received invitations; Costa Rica, though it too declared war, was shut out because the U.S. refused to recognize a government brought to power by a coup.

Several of the countries showed up in Paris hoping to meet directly with “big power” leaders to air their interests, but their best chance for active participation in the conference was on the various subcommittees and commissions set up attendant on the main negotiations, and they worked assiduously if not always in concert to be seated in these groups. Even here, however, they found themselves and their concerns largely shut out. And they did have concerns: Haiti, for example, wished for an end to martial law and to regain control of its customs receipts, and Peru and Bolivia wanted to air their grievances about Chile’s continued occupation of Tacna and Arica; all of the Latin American participants hoped that the proposed League of Nations would blunt the threat of U.S. intervention. To this end they pointed to Wilson’s expressed concern for “the absolute right of all states [to] have their sovereignty respected” (*Central America*, 94). They were disappointed. The United States not only negotiated a wording of the treaty that left untrammelled the Monroe Doctrine but then refused to join the League. In all, Streeter suggests, the Latin Americans felt that they had been “left out of much of the important business of the Conference” (*Central America*, 116), which indeed they had.

All, nevertheless, joined the League, and the last chapters of each book trace out this participation, as well as providing brief histories of the countries to World War II and the 1950s and information on the subsequent careers of several of the delegates. Chile and Peru, for example, eventually negotiated a settlement to the Tacna-Arica dispute, shutting out Bolivia, figuratively and literally, while Bolivia itself became involved in the ruinous Chaco War with Paraguay, and Uruguay pioneered the welfare state in Latin America. Dr. Antonio Sánchez de Bustamante y Sirén, Cuba’s delegate to the Conference, went on to serve on the World Court and authored the Bustamante Code of international law; Uruguay’s Juan Antonio Buero helped found the soccer World Cup. The U.S. evacuated Nicaragua in 1933 and Haiti in 1934 leaving both to the care of domestic dictatorships, and in 1954 the U.S. intervened to topple a left-leaning but democratic government in Guatemala.

In a “Postscript” to *South America*, Streeter sums up, and this applies equally to the countries of Central America and the Caribbean involved at Versailles: “The importance of the Peace Conference and the Treaty for the four countries was, unsurprisingly, then, limited” (176). The books end with timelines and “Further Reading.”

David McCreery was graduated from Tulane University with a Ph.D. in Latin American history and subsequently studied social anthropology at University College, London. He has published articles and books on Brazil, Guatemala, and on the history of work, and since 1977 has been on the faculty of Georgia State University. His current research is on the maritime history of Brazil.

Copyright © 2011 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.