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Christopher Darnton. "Asymmetry and Agenda-Setting in U.S.-Latin American Relations: Rethinking the Origins of the Alliance for Progress." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14:4 (Fall 2012): 55-92. DOI: 10.1162/JCWS_a_00276. http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00276

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Reviewed by **Andrew J. Kirkendall**, Texas A&M University

The political scientist Christopher Darnton has performed a valuable service by taking a fresh look at where the John F. Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress came from. He contends that there has been a "serious and as yet unacknowledged historiographical disagreement" on this subject (60). He offers an answer that is illuminating, if only partially convincing. I hope that his article will inspire further research, by him as well as by others.

Darnton argues that an Alliance paternity test would confirm that Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek was the biological father. Scholars have long been aware of the ambitious and long-term hemispheric development plan called Operation Pan-America that he put forward following Vice-President Richard Nixon's disastrous trip to the region in May 1958. The tie between Operation Pan-America and the Alliance has sometimes been ignored altogether (by authors like Greg Grandin).¹ Jeffrey Taffet argues that while initially grateful to Kubitschek for providing a positive public relations opportunity, the administration of Dwight David Eisenhower was hesitant to make a break with policies which had emphasized investment and trade over aid. And by the time, Eisenhower's opinions on the matter changed following a trip to Latin America in February 1960, the Republican president was a lame duck with a limited ability to break new ground.² Darnton's major contribution stems from his decision to conduct research in Brazilian and

¹. See Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 47.

². Jeffrey F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 18-29.

Argentine diplomatic records, which allows him to analyze the ‘missing link’ between Operation Pan-America and the Alliance for Progress: the concerted efforts by the Kubitschek administration to garner support in Latin America for his plan³

Moreover, Darnton has also conducted research in the archives of the Organization of American States. This is particularly important because relatively few scholars have taken the OAS seriously enough to do so. (He also recognizes that more research needs to be done in other Latin American archives.) But what he has done already indicates that a new ABC coalition (consisting of Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia rather than Chile) played a major role in working out the Act of Bogotá at a meeting of the OAS in September 1960. He helpfully reminds us that the Charter of the Punta del Este itself, which was drawn up in August of 1961, was defined as being constructed “within the framework of Operation Pan-America” (67). But by this time, Kennedy had adopted the “child,” so to speak, and given it its new name.

Darnton contends that this was a time when democratic and semi-democratic Latin American nations were able to work together and, by doing so, were able to set the agenda for hemispheric action. Given what the author himself acknowledges is the longstanding “asymmetry of interest” (64) between the United States and Latin America over the importance of inter-American relations, however, he needs to address more directly the question of why the United States even cared that a Latin American consensus had developed (64). Kubitschek was initially trying to take advantage of U.S. concern following the disastrous Nixon trip. Even more critically, the Cuban leader Fidel Castro’s wooing of the Soviet Union from 1959 to 1961 raised fear, desperation, and even hysteria, among many U.S. officials with an interest in Latin America. Darnton certainly recognizes these factors.

From a historian’s perspective, however, the major problem with the article is that Darnton tries to argue that these Latin American nations’ actions had a direct impact on U.S. policy. To make this argument, he will have to do research in the National Archives and the presidential libraries of Dwight David Eisenhower and Kennedy.

Historians of Cold War U.S.-Latin American relations as well as those interested in the history of development and modernization undoubtedly will benefit greatly from reading this article. And I also think that it has implications for those who research topics such as the Non-Aligned Movement or the New World Information and Communication Order.

³ He might have usefully engaged the following biographies of Kubitschek, Claudio Bojunga, *O Artista do Impossível* (Rio de Janeiro: Objetivo, 2001), particularly 345-350, 368-370, 374-378, 403-411, and 501-515 and Robert J. Alexander, *Juscelino Kubitschek and the Development of Brazil* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991). Darnton correctly notes that the best work we have on U.S. relations with Brazil during the Kubitschek years is W. Michael Weis, *Cold Warriors and Coups d’Etat* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

In the end, however, I fear that when one considers the origins of the Alliance in the light Darnton's article provides, the failure of the Alliance for Progress seems even more tragic. Latin Americans themselves quickly came to view it largely as a unilateral project-----of 'foreign aid.' I have long believed that one should take the Alliance rhetoric seriously, if not completely at face value. But in the end, as Jeffrey Taffet argues, the United States could not "allow the Latin Americans to control spending."⁴ Realistically, there would have been no way to get the program through Congress otherwise. Therefore, no Latin American administrative structure was ever created.⁵

The Alliance failed in large part due to the fact that the United States did not work to actively maintain it as an alliance. That some non-democratic nations might find it less appealing is hardly surprising. But, over time, even previously sympathetic Latin American governments and leaders felt that it had failed as a partnership as many bilateral agreements rather than regional ones were signed. Moreover, if fear initially may have made the United States more receptive to the idea of a hemispheric development plan, the sense of urgency was not sustainable, and certainly by the mid-1960s, at the latest, the urgency was gone. And, in most Latin American countries, so was the enthusiasm for an alliance that, for most countries, never existed.

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⁴ Taffet, 29.

⁵ Taffet, 37.