Chapter Six

Thinking about Democracy: Inevitable Revolutions

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In June 1982, Walter LaFeber wrote a piece for The Atlantic entitled "Inevitable Revolutions," arguing that US policies in Central America had "encouraged what they are supposed to prevent." The article indicted Ronald Reagan's policies toward Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala for fomenting revolution. Blighted by an "ignorance of history," Reagan and his closest advisors were clinging to the same premises that had undermined John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress twenty years before: first, that free markets automatically led to free and democratic governments; and second, that economic progress and political stability depended upon eliminating leftist dissent. Meant to stymie the appeal of a Castro-like revolution, the Alliance for Progress had offered Latin American countries massive economic and military aid and the promise of a brighter future. Instead, LaFeber argued, the Alliance had raised expectations only to crush them, widening the chasm between the rich and the poor in country after country while training national militaries that tortured and killed their own people. Such circumstances inevitably fueled support for leftist revolution, the opposite of the original intention of the Alliance for Progress. Historically, nowhere was US power more pervasive than in Central America. And nowhere were the ravages of political upheaval and economic chaos triggered by US interference more apparent.[1]

With the Atlantic article, LaFeber entered contemporary policy debates by deliberately intervening in the nation's understanding of US-Central American relations. He intervened in three ways. First, he provided a much needed and accessible historical context to the current

crisis. The “Inevitable Revolutions” article appeared when the Reagan administration was seeking to topple triumphant Sandinista revolutionaries in Nicaragua, quash left-wing guerrillas in El Salvador, and keep arms flowing to generals in Guatemala who were confronting unprecedented indigenous protest. Second, as in his analysis of the gap between the purported aims of the Alliance for Progress and its negative effects, LaFeber carefully exposed an inherent contradiction in US policies toward Central America: the United States actually bred the revolutions it hoped to avert. Third, with the memories of the Vietnam War still raw, the article served as a call to action, one that encouraged an end to contemporary interventions in Central America by exposing how Reagan and his advisors were repeating the mistakes of their predecessors. “With luck and an understanding of the past,” LaFeber concluded, the United States could end its long-standing complicity in regional upheaval and exploitation.[2]

The three interventions found in the 1982 Atlantic article permeated LaFeber’s work regarding Central America. The article served as the genesis for a book with the same title published the following year. Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America expanded the scope of the original article both temporally and geographically. Starting with the late 18th century and extending to the moment of publication, the book examined US interactions with Costa Rica and Honduras as well as with Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. All these nations, LaFeber contended, were trapped in a system that he called “neo-dependency,” through which the United States exerted tremendous economic, military, and political influence and control while Central Americans suffered.[3] LaFeber’s involvement with current policy, moreover, began before Inevitable Revolutions. Another work, The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical that would return the Panama Canal to Panamanians. Taking a long view again—the first chapter opened with the Spanish explorer Balboa—LaFeber offered a persuasive case in

favor of the treaty and on behalf of Panamanian nationalism. For good measure, he blasted anti-

fragile enterprise at home and abroad. In his books on Central America, as in his other works, LaFeber warned of the erosion of individual liberties given the tendency of power to concentrate in the hands of the executive, no more so than when conducting foreign affairs. Privately, he also worried about the erosion of democratic norms in general within the United States. In terms of inter-American relations, the implication was clear. With US democracy still a work in progress at home, what business did Americans have trying to export it abroad? Skeptical of the American habit of demanding free elections in other nations, as if elections by themselves had the power to function as a societal panacea or offered certain proof of a just society, LaFeber maintained that in Central America only “fundamental structural change” could address “gross inequities” and stop those inevitable revolutions.

activists, and everyday US citizens who might have been vaguely aware that their country was deeply engaged in several countries south of Mexico but had little understanding as to why.

Orienting US readers was a chief concern. The book started with a “capsule view” circa 1980 of each Central American country: a brief paragraph that highlighted turning points and tragedies in each nation’s history accompanied by a handful of data points that underscored the tremendous societal differences between the Colossus of the North and the nations of Central America. The data points included rates of illiteracy (50 percent to 70 percent everywhere but Costa Rica, where it hovered around 10 percent), per capita income (ranging between $640 and $1,520 a year), and land mass (these were small nations roughly comparable to the size of various US states).[10] Together, these capsule views introduced readers to the heartbreaking violence and poverty that had plagued Central America historically and that continued to the present day. They also suggested the massive role that the United States had played in Central American affairs for the past 100 years.

Maps amplified the message about US power while also exposing readers to an unfamiliar geography. “Throughout the twentieth century," LaFeber noted, "the overwhelming number of North Americans could not have identified each of the five Central American nations on a map, let alone ticked off the region's sins that called for an application of US force.”[11] Conveying the proximity of Central America to the United States, a map of the Caribbean Basin, spread across two entire pages, greeted readers almost as soon as they opened the book. Each chapteolc (t)-1 (eo)6 (l)-1 [sgni.dk-9.88-9.88-9.88-9.o1o.(r)-1 ape.]TJ-18.(p)6.1 (l Tc 0 Tw [((g)1 (s)-2 (l)t 0 z(as

confirmed a disturbing and presumably interlocking pattern of US intervention and regional upheaval stretching across a century.

LaFeber, nevertheless, chose to begin his history further back in time, in 1776. Beyond a familiar reference point for US readers, this periodization allowed LaFeber to distinguish between two types of revolutions: the American Revolution versus the radical leftist revolutions then occurring in Central America. In 1776, he explained, Americans broke away from Britain in the name of individual liberty. Without an aristocracy, they had launched an unprecedented experiment in democracy. Americans, "especially if they were white and male," he wrote, enjoyed a "rough equality." For those who enjoyed the freedom to move, moreover, a landed frontier rich with possibility beckoned. In contrast, Central America had been an economic backwater throughout the colonial period. A tiny population of wealthy landowners profiting from the work of others made for highly stratified societies. Tellingly, Central Americans finally broke from Spain in 1821 not in the name of individual freedom but as a backlash to liberal reforms emanating from the mother country.

From these different starting points, the histories of the United States and Central America continued to diverge over the course of the 19th century. While the isthmus remained poor and vulnerable, the United States emerged as a continental empire, a leading industrial power, and after 1898, an overseas empire by acquiring Spain's last colonies, the Philippines and Puerto Rico and by exerting, as sanctioned by the Platt Amendment, routine interference in Cuba. In Central America, the United States had the luxury of exerting tremendous power without formal acquisition and sans any Platt Amendment. Working closely with each nation's

followed secured economic concessions, backed politicians who did what Washington wanted, wrangled a canal, and, when all else failed to protect US interests, sent in the Marines.

Military intervention completed a massive switch in US history, according to LaFeber. A revolution fought in the name of individual liberty had made the United States "the world's leading revolutionary nation" at its birth, he wrote. By the 20th century, however, the United States had "turned away from revolution toward the defense of oligarchs" in Central America and elsewhere.[13] The partners of US investors, these oligarchs needed defending because the

for export crops, such as the bananas and coffee that Central American nations produced.[14] Yet as LaFeber noted, Central Americans experienced plenty of US military intervention and political pressure too. He employed the term “neodependency” to describe a multifaceted system of US informal control. For LaFeber, an emphasis on economic relations alone did not suffice to capture the many manifestations of US power in Central America.

As an additional boon to readers, the notion of neodependency operating as a system of informal control arranged the book’s many moving parts into a neatly structured narrative arc. The system needed to be set up (Chapter 1), maintained (Chapter 2), and updated (Chapter 3) before finally collapsing in the wake of the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution (Chapter 4) and leaving the Reagan administration to confront, in the first edition’s fifth and f ton‘ving

sure where the Panama Canal is located." Eager to contribute to the ongoing debate about the fate of the canal, LaFeber rapidly produced what he modestly termed "only a survey," one organized around a few key themes, among them that Panama did not owe its existence to Theodore Roosevelt and that, "contrary to Reagan's statements," the United States did not buy the canal in 1903 or ever own it.[15]

Describing the US-Panamanian relationship in the affirmative, however, proved tougher. As LaFeber noted elsewhere, Panama's history set it apart from the other five Central American nations that he later focused on in Inevitable Revolutions. In 1903, Panama broke away from Columbia, not Spain. Afterward, the new nation was even more tightly integrated into the American empire than its Central American neighbors. A 1903 treaty permitted the United States to act "as if it were the sovereign" in the 10-mile-wide Canal Zone "in perpetuity" and charged the United States with protecting Panamanian independence (in effect sanctioning a US right of intervention).[16] In sh

international relations and political science, Emerson defined colonialism as “the establishment and maintenance, for an extended time, of rule over an alien people that is separate from and subordinate to the ruling power.” In further noting that colonialism was “white rule” over non-whites, moreover, Emerson paid attention to racism. So did LaFeber.[18] Still, in the absence of any formal recognition by the United States of Panama as a colony, LaFeber favored the term “informal colonialism.” Yet he did not stop there.

Contrary to his own advice to avoid long citations, at this point in the text a footnote

accompanied his initial grappling with dependency theory. As a non-Latin Americanist, LaFeber admitted, he was still a learner. He concluded the footnote by thanking his "most helpful" Cornell colleague, Thomas Holloway, for his "continued and often unavailing efforts . . . to initiate me into the mysteries of dependency theory."[22]

That LaFeber felt the need to explain his rejection of dependency theory speaks to the popularity of this set of ideas at the time he wrote. Dependency theory originated in Latin America as an alternative to 1960s modernization theory. As articulated by Walt Rostow, an economist who worked in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, modernization theory proposed that capitalist development occurred along a series of stages. While Western countries had reached the highest stage of development, or what Rostow called the era of "high mass consumption," other, poorer, countries, like those in Latin America, had yet to reach "take-off."[23] The built-in biases were hard to ignore. By viewing capitalism as a phenomenon that occurred strictly within nations, modernization theory

nonetheless tended to shy away from the word "theory" (and any accompanying mysteries).[30] The smallest details matter here. Only once in his work on Central America did he even mention "a theory called 'dependency'," a turn of phrase that still contained a bit of distancing.[31] Otherwise, he referred to "dependency" alone versus "dependency theory." Equally telling in this context was his choice to define neodependency more vaguely as a "system" versus a "theory." Terminology aside, neither idea provided a "testable hypothesis" with any predictive value. Instead, LaFeber took what James Mahoney and Diana Rodríguez-Franco characterized as a "theory frame" approach to the Latin American scholarship that informed his work. He gained a "series of orienting concepts" and "general questions for analysis" not a rigid set of assumptions.[32] In sum, LaFeber borrowed from Latin American theorists, but he never aspired to join their ranks. As a historian of US foreign relations, he sought to deliver a blistering critique and analysis of US interventions in Central America based upon the demonstrated evidence of their impact. Neodependency was his means to that end.

All hesitation gone, LaFeber's forthright use of neodependency in Inevitable Revolutions allowed him to expand the Atlantic thesis backward in time. In the book, the Alliance for Progress still acted as a key pivot point, a last-ditch attempt to save a system about to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. But LaFeber now introduced another contradiction, or tension, that dated back to the nation's Founders. Thomas Jefferson liked to talk about an "an empire of liberty," but championing self-determination soon fell to the wayside as the United States expanded across a continent and then projected its power overseas.[33] The long view illuminated enduring themes in US foreign relations as they pertained to Central America. John Quincy Adam's doubts about the likelihood that newly-independent Latin American nations would ever follow the democratic example of the United States— "arbitrary power, both military

of people from the countryside to the city. Some moved expecting the Alliance to produce new industrial jobs (it failed to do so), while others were pushed off the land as export crop production expanded. An impoverished, disappointed population concentrated in urban areas, LaFeber points out, was one ripe for radicalization. Third, the Alliance for Progress as a program of economic aid lasted only for the Kennedy administration. Lyndon Johnson, distracted by Vietnam, soon tipped the scales toward military aid almost exclusively. Conveniently, the Pentagon's School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone had been churning out hundreds of US-trained Latin American army officers, groomed to protect Central American elites and advance US interests, since 1946.[46] The upshot? A decade after the launch of the Alliance for Progress, Central American societies were still grotesquely stratified, and the populations of each country, again with the sole exception of Costa Rica, more at the mercy of their own brutal militaries than ever before. In Guatemala, violent uprisings of indigenous peoples by the 1970s could also be traced to decades of repression conducted by post-coup military governments.

The United States could not find an alternative way forward even as the system veered toward collapse. To the surprise of some reviewers, LaFeber's neodependency thesis prompted him to condemn the policies of Jimmy Carter just as vigorously as those of Ronald Reagan.[47] The problem with Carter's human rights emphasis, LaFeber argued, was that it was mostly talk. In a damning assessment considering his prior analysis, he wrote that it was "the moral equivalent of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress."[48] As another quality that LaFeber brought to the task of telling the multifaceted story of US-Central American relations was the clarity of his writing, his comparison of how both Kennedy and Carter futilely sought a non-existent middle ground in Central America warrants quoting at length:

Both men talked about revolution when they meant painfully slow evolution. Both men desired more democratic societies in Central America as rapidly as possible but without the radical changes that those desires entailed. Both wanted the military-oligarch

US-Central American relations without accessing Latin American archives would be a tough sell to a publisher. More broadly, however, the criticism mimicked one that was soon directed at dependency theory itself. By emphasizing how economic relations trapped Latin Americans in a system of exploitation, the argument went, the concept failed to leave them much agency.[50] Similarly, other reviewers contended that in demonstrating the overwhelming nature of US power, LaFeber had diminished the role that Latin Americans played in their own history and presented them mainly as victims.[51]

On the other hand, LaFeber may not have portrayed Central Americans as passive, but he most assuredly presented many who lived in the regions as victims targeted by the hemisphere's one and only superpower working in cooperation (most of the time), with each country's elites. Here LaFeber's attentiveness to how US-style racism shaped and misshaped the relationship between the United States and Central American nations merits mention. Demonstrating that his concept of neodependency was an expansive one, he traced how, despite different ideas about race and race-mixing, the power elite in the United States often found common ground with similarly-hued economic and political elites in Central America to the detriment of darker-skinned folks. In Panama, for example, where the local population resented the importation of West Indian workers to the Canal Zone, anti-blackness became an occasion for bonding between two presidents.[55] At other times, LaFeber noted, the United States abandoned nuance in favor of assuming widespread Latin American racial inferiority, elites included. Theodore Roosevelt's

the Reagan administration's failed attempts to topple the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the destabilizing consequences that reverberated elsewhere in Central America as a result. "As North Americans debated and escalated," he wrote, "Central Americans grew poorer and died."[58]

In short, LaFeber paid attention to the historic cheapness of brown lives.

A Scholar-Activist

In a 1984 review of Tom Buckley's Violent Neighbors: El Salvador, Central America, and the United States in the Washington Post, LaFeber praised the journalist for providing "some of the most powerful writing yet published on the charnel houses of El Salvador and Guatemala that pass as Central American governments." LaFeber counterpoised the Reagan administration's sanitized reference to the "unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of life" to Buckley's graphic description of a "disposal site" in a country where 40,000 people had already lost their lives to right-wing repression. There, Buckley wrote, the countless victims, male and female, young and old, carried on their bodies evidence of rape, torture, and mutilation. "For death squads" in El Salvador, LaFeber wrote, "death is not enough."[59]

This level of seemingly endless violence, and US complicity in it, inspired LaFeber to write and revise Inevitable Revolutions. tl Jet3 (t)-2 [C /P <<al(n)2 (d)2 a<acnc reaA(5(v)-1 (ol)- 1 Tf[(I))-2 (i

military intervention risked turning into an unjustifiable slog. After William Howard Taft sent US troops to Nicaragua in 1911, they stayed until 1925, only to return the following year and remain until 1933. In 1975, just a few years before LaFeber began writing Inevitable Revolutions

Harrington, Becker, and other "Progressive historians" insisted that change was possible, particularly if a more educated public could counter the power of economic elites. Yet despite foregrounding class conflict in their work, they did not advocate it. Instead, they confined their scholarly activism to improving existing democracy. What logically flowed from these priorities and assumptions was a strong belief that historians ought to write books in service of democracy, books that addressed critical issues, offered insightful analysis, yet were still accessible to a broad audience. In other words, they ought to write the type of books that LaFeber did, as

Although he never bothered to respond to Arthur Schlesinger's damning assessment of *Inevitable Revolutions*, LaFeber did reveal much about his priorities as a scholar-activist in an exchange about the review with a former student:

> "I think Schlesinger probably killed the book in Washington. He really wrote a savage and from my view unfair review. Arthur has always worked over people from Wisconsin whom he suspects of "revisionism"—whatever that is. No doubt he also did not like my fundamental criticism of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, on which the entire book turns—especially since Arthur was working on the Alliance in the White House. But he never mentions that in the review. Interesting thing is that the Associate Editor of the POST wrote a letter of apology to me for the review—but published it anyway. The book is selling well in New York City, Boston, and other places, but clearly not having much effect on the crazy people in the Reagan Administration.[71]

Clearly blunter in his private correspondence than in his public pronouncements, LaFeber in public held to a standard of polite discourse that encouraged reasonable debate, a position consistent with his high opinion of democracy's capacity for improvement. Therefore, he deeply regretted that Schlesinger's review may have kept his work from reaching its main target: Reagan administration policymakers.

In *Inevitable Revolutions*, he noted with concern the damage this same group was also doing at home. When lecturing, LaFeber often spoke with admiration of "small 'd' democrats," that is, Americans who valued democratic government and recognized its fragility. Not many

were to be found in the Reagan White House, he feared. Although unlikely to join a protest himself, LaFeber reserved some of his most scathing comments for the damage done by that administration to individual liberties during the late 1980s. He detailed the illegal spying and harassment endured by those who opposed official US policy, such as the members of CISPES, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador.[72] His summation of the damage wrought by the Iran-Contra affair in which US agents sold arms to Iran to fund the contras was scorching:

> The Iran-Contra scandal posed a dangerous threat to the United States. U(i)-2 7CID 2 >t0 Tw 3Hlrr , aoalemmli>t0 T(a)1 (ty)2 (oF)7 ffichasn (th)2 (e)6 (Nt)4 .US34 .U

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considered the transition of the United States from a nation that inspired revolution to one that opposed it as “one of the central questions in US diplomatic history,” he viewed the rapid transformation of the United States from a collection of former colonies to a global superpower in less than two centuries as a crucial topic of inquiry, arguably the most crucial, in US history overall.[75] Endlessly pursuing this

diplomatic history, to use an old-fashioned term, was too focused on white men and too US-centric. Consequently, critics labeled US diplomatic history hopelessly out-of-date, irrelevant, and worst of all, boring.[77] Although he did not buy the criticism, LaFeber saw room for some improvement. As he once pointed out in seminar, US presidents and secretaries of state were, at least until recently, all white men, a circumstance that skewed the field away from easy incorporation of the dominant themes of race, class and gender that had captivated US historians in the wake of 1960s social movements.[78] Nevertheless, LaFeber showcased racism as a function of US power in his work on Central America, as part of his endeavor to "move beyond the usual diplomatic history—that is, what we said to them, they to us, and we to ourselves."[79]

Recognizing gender as a category of analysis took LaFeber more time. Initially resistant to including women and family history within a US history textbook that he co-wrote, LaFeber and his co-author "finally caved in" on that point, deciding to add a third author to do what they literally considered women's work.[80] In 1998, however, LaFeber contributed a blurb to Kristin L. Hoganson's Fighting for American Manhood, a gendered look at 1890s expansionism, in which he praised her "pioneering, imaginative and provocative analysis." The book could not be ignored, he explained, "in part because of the spirited debate about its innovative approach."[81]

Nonetheless, to LaFeber, the tragedy of 9/11 settled the debate about what were relevant research priorities and approaches within the field of the history of US foreign relations. Indeed, in the aftermath of that tragedy, LaFeber detected with satisfaction a renewed interest in what some considered old-fashioned diplomatic history. "All those jazzy cross-cultural, ethnic, gender descriptions seem to have given way to more traditional categories since 9/11," LaFeber noted in 2002. He had a theory as to why: "Those traditional ways of studying the field have rebounded, not least in my view, because the less traditionally trained scholars have done a lousy job of

trying to explain what happened on 9/11."[82] Not surprisingly, both before 9/11 and afterward, LaFeber demonstrated little patience with any approach that decentered the United States as a hegemonic power. "A major problem with transnational history or, as many job descriptions now call a variation, international history, is that, in the effort to be inclusive, the realities of power are too often avoided," he insisted in a 2007 Diplomatic Historyarticle. Not all players on the international stage were created equal, he insisted. As for cultural studies of "soft power," they might be fun to read but lacked analytical heft. If a traditional field, at least the history of US foreign relations was one directed at understanding important matters. By default, the fields that LaFeber labeled "minor" were not. "Some day scholars will look back at this era and wonder why so many researchers and teachers were pushing minor (if different) perspectives when the guts of the issue, American foreign policies in key countries, were failing—and too few in the United States either cared or analyzed the problem," he wrote to a friend in 2010, seven years into the Iraq War.[83]

Ironically, for a student of power as it operated among nations, LaFeber cultivated a narrow view of it elsewhere. As much attention as he paid to the prevalence of racism in the history of US foreign relations, LaFeber never was captivated by the notion of structural racism despite its growing popularity among his academic peers. Nor did patriarchy ever truly interest him. To be sure, LaFeber deplored injustice at a personal level. That five of his last six PhD students were women was more than a coincidence. When he himself was a graduate student, he was surprised by the pervasiveness of segregation in Washington DC.[84] Yet, in a well-visited episode, he strongly condemned the forcible occupation of Willard Straight Hall, Cornell's Student Union, in April 1969 by African American students outraged by a cross-burning and other incidents on campus. After white fraternity members attempted to evict them, the students

smuggled in guns.[85] LaFeber was appalled at the time by the takeover and angered by the Cornell administration's promise of no reprisals for those involved. Long afterward, he continued to insist that the armed display of Black power in 1969 was "essentially raping the major principle of the university," namely the free and peaceful interchange of ideas.[86]

LaFeber likewise opposed the Latinx gun-free four-day sit-in at Cornell's Day Hall in November 1993. Angry over a vandalized art exhibition on campus, students, who were already frustrated about the lack of progress in hiring "Hispanic" faculty and staff, entered the building and refused to leave.[87] While Professor Tom Holloway, the history department's Latin Americanist, considered the demonstration "a semi-spontaneous act . . . of civil disobedience," in the style of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez, LaFeber's reaction was less sanguine. According to Holloway, LaFeber looked as close to angry as Holloway ever recalled seeing him in 25 years of being colleagues: "I think Walt saw the Latino students' actions in 1993 through the lens of 1969 and he didn't like what he saw one bit."[88] Notably, despite his disapproval, LaFeber also modeled the behavior that he preferred by writing directly to the student leader of the Day Hall protest, a history major whom he had taught. The note outlined his disagreement with the protest, according to that leader, "but not in a way that ruptured our relationship."[89]

Ultimately, LaFeber's idealized view of the university as a place that shed light, not heat, as a hallowed ground for reasoned debate, directly paralleled his appreciation of democracy as, in its best incarnation, a forum to advance reform. Unfortunately, however, neither optimistic perspective had much to do with the founding of Ethnic Studies programs across the United

takeovers, hunger strikes, and other forceful demands.

immigration from Central America remain paltry until the 1980s when people started fleeing massive political violence and economic chaos. Many of these new arrivals moved to urban areas, where, as the new Latinos on the block, some young people joined gangs to survive. Meanwhile the United States made it easier to deport immigrants who were arrested or convicted of crimes even if they were in the country legally. That tougher policy ensured the exportation of an American-grown criminal element to poor and politically unstable nations. One result was that a gang like MS-13 became an international criminal organization. Another was more suffering for the people of El Salvador who in 2022 were caught between gang-related criminal violence and, under the rubric of a national anti-gang campaign, brutal government-backed human rights violations.[95] In 2021, more Central Americans than Mexicans congregated along the US-Mexico border hoping to cross.[96] What might LaFeber have said about this chain of events? We miss his wisdom.

We also miss his courage and his general demeanor of polite unflappability. As often as LaFeber's career and publications earned extraordinary praise, he was also targeted for sharp, often unfair, criticism for daring to take a hard, analytical look at the course of US foreign policy. One attempt at a "gotcha" moment was particularly telling. A scholar reviewing eight foreign policy courses for bias (the proposition itself indicative of the writer's own conservative leanings) slammed LaFeber for describing the war in Vietnam as "the most pointless, costly, and bloody war in our nation's history." Casualty rates in the Civil War and both World Wars exceeded the number of dead in Vietnam, the review pointed out. That is true, but only if one looks just at American combat deaths and ignores the estimated three million Vietnamese who died in the war.[97] Not inclined to describe the other wars as "pointless," LaFeber also did not ignore the Vietnamese when writing that sentence. He studied the impact of US foreign relations

at home and abroad, upon Americans and non-Americans. He did so, moreover, by maintaining the highest historical standards. Even this seeker of bias had to admit that he detected, in *Inevitable Revolutions* no less, "a genuine professional scruple . . . on LaFeber's part to respect the facts."

Endnotes

[1] Walter LaFeber, “Inevitable Revolutions: US policies in Central America have encouraged what they were supposed to prevent,” *The Atlantic* 6 (June 1982): 74-83. The authors would like to thank David Langbart, Stephen Streeter, Rachel Jean-Baptiste, Lisa G. Materson, Andrew S. Higgins, and participants in a workshop that took place on the Cornell campus in October 2022 for their contributions to this article.

[2] LaFeber, “Inevitable Revolutions,” 83.

[3] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), 16-18.

[4] Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford Press, 1978).

[5] Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective*, Updated Edition (New York: Oxford Press, 1989).

[6] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 2nd ed., Revised and Expanded (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993).

[7] LaFeber, “Inevitable Revolutions,” *The Atlantic*, 83.

[8] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 341. Unless indicated otherwise, quotes are from the 1983 edition.

[9] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 341.

[10] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 8-12.

[11] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 13.

[12] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 31.

[13] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 13.

[14] Omar Sánchez, “The Rise and Fall of Dependency Theory: Does it Inform Underdevelopment Today?” *EIAL (Estudios Interdisciplinarios América Latina)* 14 (2003): 13. Probably the most-cited book on dependency theory in Latin America is Fernando H. Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). For excellent overviews of dependency theory, see Louis A. Pérez, “Dependency” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed., eds. Michael H. Hunt and Steven I. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 159-178.

[21] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 18.

[22] LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 53.

[23] W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

[24] LaFeber, *The Panama Canal*, 53.

[25] Sánchez, "The Rise and Fall of Dependency Theory," 32.

[26] Robert Freeman Smith, "The United States and the Caribbean-Central American Region: Empire, System, or Legitimate Sphere of Influence?" *Reviews in American History* 12 (September 1994): 445.

[27] Schlesinger's exact job title was found in the guide to his personal papers deposited at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/AMSPP, Papers.

[28] Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "The US and Central America: A No-Win Game," *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1983.

[29] Walter LaFeber, "Fred Harvey Harrington," *Diplomatic History* 9 (Fall 1985): 312.

[30] Lloyd C. Gardner and Thomas J. McCormick, "The Making of a Wisconsin Revisionist," *Diplomatic History* 28 (November 2004): 612-624, reprinted as chapter 2 in this volume. Lorena Oropeza remembered that he made the comment about revisionists in a graduate seminar.

[31] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 16.

[32] James Mahoney and Diana Rodríguez-Franco, "Dependency Theory," *The Oxford Handbook of the Politics of Development*, ed. Carol Lancaster and L-4.1 (ler)-3.3 ()berra Wio0]TJ (L)-0.8 .9 (na)3.9 ( )0.5 (R)5.3 (od)6 (r)0.7 (í)5.6 (g)6 (ue)3.9 (z)

[60] LaFeber made this point about relative threats in an article for a Cornell campus publication, "Carl Becker's Histories and the American Present," *Ezra Magazine* 4 (Fall 2011): 8-9, https://ezramagazine.cornell.edu/FALL11/Viewpoint1.html.

[61] For Guatemala, see Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982) and Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982). Rigoberta Menchu's, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, published in English in 1984 (New York: Verso) had appeared in Spanish the year before. See Menchú with Elizabeth Burgos, *Yo me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Havana, Cuba: Casa de las Américas, 1983).

[62] Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) and *The United States and the Caribbean Republics, 1921-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

[63] Jeff Sharlet, "Why Diplomatic Historians May Be the Victims of American Triumphalism," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 24, 1999, A19.

[64] LaFeber, "Fred Harvey Harrington," 318. For an interesting comparison of LaFeber's political position in comparison to that of Gabriel Kolko, whose politics and scholarship were more overtly leftist, see "Functions of Revisionist Historiography during the Reagan Era," *Left History* 15 (Fall/Winter 2010-2011): 65-86.

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[77] Walter LaFeber, "Response to Charles S. Maier, 'Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations,'" *Diplomatic History* 5 (Fall 1981): 362-364.

[78] Among his students, Brenda Gayle Plummer has brilliantly captured the explanatory power of race and racism in her books, including *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) and *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[79] LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 341.

[80] LaFeber to Langbart, April 14, 1986. The textbook, initially co-authored with Richard Polenberg, was called *The American Century* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1975). Later editions featured Nancy Woloch as a co-author. Jim Siekmeier remembered in the late 1980s looking through LaFeber's books in McGraw Hall Room 425, his office for many years, and finding a book by Mary Beth Norton, a Cornell colleague, who taught women's history at Cornell. The inscription read: "Walt -

Training, January 16, 1985, CIA-RDP90-00998R000100010019, CIA FOIA Online Reading Room <www.cia.gov/reading room>. There is no indication that an invitation was ever issued or accepted.

[93] LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions (1993), 413.

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