

THE DIARIES OF FENTON R. MCCREERY;
NOTES ON AN AMERICAN DIPLOMAT IN LATIN AMERICA - 1890-1911

by

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In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a striking contrast was evident to any observer of the New World. The United States, though far from a perfect society, was making tremendous strides in conquering the land and its resources. It was devising and implementing many new technological discoveries, and providing education and what Crèvecoeur had called "a decent competence" in living standards for a majority of its people. Moreover, this was being accomplished under democratic political institutions which provided a great deal of freedom for the individual. Most of the former colonies of Spain, on the other hand, were stagnating. Bugged down with seemingly unsolvable problems of poverty and political instability, they viewed the advances of North America and waited. There were, of course, many geographical and historical reasons for both the relative North American "success" and the relative Latin American "failure." In any case, by the 1890s, the disparity between the progress of the United States and that of its neighbors to the south had created serious problems. These same problems, with only minor changes, have endured to the present day.

Aside from the vast differences in their economic and political development, the fact remained that the citizens of all the Americas were neighbors. The importance of each for the other was obvious. Throughout the nineteenth century they had shared the fear of European re-colonization, with

the smaller and weaker Spanish-speaking nations looking at times to their neighbor with its Monroe Doctrine for protection. At the same time, however, the United States' annexation of the Mexican territories in the 1840s had given rise to a fear of North American expansionism, as well. Thus, in the minds of the Latin Americans, negative and positive attitudes towards the United States alternated. On the one hand, there was the ever-increasing desire to emulate our political and economic institutions, coupled with the fraternal sharing of antagonism towards European domination; on the other, there was the very real fear that the United States would merely replace Spain as their master.

For their part, the North Americans viewed Latin America primarily with rather narrow purposes in mind. First, they feared new European imperialism in Latin America; second, they desired new markets for their growing manufactures and raw materials to supply those manufactures; and third, a significant number of them looked towards the opportunity for further territorial expansion in this hemisphere. A major question is whether or not in the late nineteenth century the United States Government or any influential groups here seriously considered the economic and political progress of Latin America as a good to be sought, not only for the Latins themselves, but for our own best long-range interests, as well.

The present study, therefore, involves a search for an understanding of the basic problems of the Latin American nations, especially with regard to the way these problems

have hindered their economic development. Also desired is insight as to how our relations with these countries could be improved.

With those underlying purposes in mind, this paper will focus on an examination of the career of Fenton R. McCreery, an American diplomat who lived and worked in Latin America during the period 1890 to 1911. This was the time when that area was first gaining real importance in North American capitalist thinking, when expansion overseas was being perceived as necessary because the western frontier in the United States had already been explored, and when Latin America, due to its proximity, was being viewed as the ideal source of new raw materials and markets for United States corporations. Some of the diaries and notes which Fenton McCreery recorded while he was serving in several Latin American countries will be studied in order to determine, first, how a North American of the time described the problems of those countries and, second, what he perceived to be the role which the United States should play in its relations with them. The opinions and attitudes noted in McCreery's writings will be considered in the light of what several present-day analysts have concluded regarding both the enduring problems of Latin America and the often very difficult relationship between that region and the United States

After a brief background description of McCreery's life, this study of his reactions to Latin America will concentrate on the geographical, political and economic problems which

have plagued that area. Needless to say, such divisions are arbitrary, and the problems are closely interrelated.

Fenton R. McCreery - Diplomat

Fenton Reuben McCreery was born in Flint, Michigan in 1866, to a politically prominent upper middle class family. He attended the Michigan Military Academy and the University of Michigan. During his early twenties, he spent several winters in New Mexico, where he began to learn the Spanish language. He went to New Mexico partly to escape Michigan winters for reasons of health and partly, also, to help in arranging several mining ventures for his father. Previously, apparently for the same reasons, he had traveled by ship from New York to Panama (at that time part of Colombia), crossed the Isthmus by train and proceeded up the Central American and Mexican coasts by ship to San Francisco, gaining many first-hand impressions of Spanish American culture along the way. Then, in 1890 his father, William Barker McCreery, a lawyer, Civil War hero, former state treasurer, banker and businessman, was appointed United States consul to Valparaiso, Chile, which post he held for one year. Fenton left a fledgling mortgage broker business in California to accompany his father to Valparaiso as clerk in the consulate.

After a trip back to the United States to receive the appointment, Fenton served as secretary of the United States legation at Santiago, Chile, during 1892 and 1893. For part of that time he was chargé d'affaires. From 1897 to 1907 he was secretary of the United States embassy at Mexico City, and during three of those years served as acting ambassador.

In 1907 he was made minister resident and consul general (the highest post) to the Dominican Republic, this being the time when the United States took over the supervision of the customs collection of that government. Then McCreery was envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary (again, the highest post) to Honduras from 1909 to 1911, a period in which several revolutions occurred in Central America. In 1911 he resigned from the diplomatic service and returned to Michigan to farm. In 1912 he was employed in an advisory capacity by the committee on foreign relations of the United States Senate, being recognized as an expert on foreign affairs. He was a Republican and a member of the Episcopal Church.¹

Two aspects of McCreery's background stand out as especially significant. First, he spent nearly twenty years in Latin America--surely long enough to learn about its problems. Second, he had attained a basic ability to understand and to speak Spanish and had had intimate acquaintance with the Mexican culture of the southwestern United States even before he went to his first post. This important preparation is documented in the early diaries, as follows.

On October 20, 1886, upon returning to New Mexico after five weeks in Michigan, he wrote:

A quiet but pleasant time have I passed in Taos since I arrived. I was taken into the bosom of a Mexican family to hear Spanish spoken. I thought that in a very short time I would be able to speak the language fluently but alas! how deceived was I!²

Nevertheless, his descriptions of the "Mexicans" (after 1848 they were legally "Americans") reveal that he did progress with their language since he had daily contact with them for at least two years (1886-1887) and closely observed political, religious, legal and social customs and procedures. For example, Fraser, the Anglo-American rancher with whom McCreery was staying in New Mexico, was a Republican and roasted a steer to influence Mexican voters before a local election. McCreery eagerly helped serve and noted that on the Boleta (Ticket) Republicana only the candidate for the most important position, Delegado al Congreso, was an Anglo; the other eighteen were Mexican. In his diary on October 31, 1886 he said:

There are many manners of reaching and controlling the Mexicans in a political way but in the main they are the same methods employed in the East. To be truly practical one has to buy them or tickle their palates with food or whiskey--3

Soon thereafter Fraser's young son by his Mexican "woman" (not his wife) died, and nearly at the same time a ten-year-old sister of Fraser's "woman" also died of complications of rape. McCreery comments:

Fraser seems completely overcome with grief. I have seen so much sickness and death at home that I am stony. This morning loud lamentations and mournings are carried on-- and it seems to be the Mexican custom to make as much noise as possible....

The Mexicans seem to be unable to control their grief or else the noise is an essential part of the ceremony. As we descend from the most cultivated to the most ignorant people we find that grief is less controlled and that

sincere sorrow is more present. Or else in the first case grief gnaws inwardly and in the latter finds vent in wailings. As an old unsympathetic miner said; 'A bellowing cow soon forgets her calf.'

At 2 P.M. the funeral occurred without priest or hearse. The priest charges so outrageously that only the very wealthy can employ him.⁴

McCreery went on to say that the funeral procession reminded him of passages in the Bible. He described everything in a spirit of respect, if not of reverence.

In a lighter vein, McCreery revealed in the diary entry of January 14, 1887 that his command of Spanish was sufficient for courting:

This place is only 18 miles from Santa Fe and I would have ridden farther had it not been for a certain Mexican female at Bouquets. Now and then one sees a very pretty Mexican girl.⁵

McCreery was very interested in the court proceedings in that small New Mexico town. He described witnessing the acquittal of an Indian in a murder case, in which the Indian was obviously guilty of killing a herder's son. The lawyer had directed his argument to the Mexicans on the jury, not the Anglos, and had used religion. He had convinced the Mexican jurors that if they sentenced the Indian to death they would be hounded forever by his ghost. McCreery notes:

....What a foolish argument would the above have been to an intelligent jury. But Reed appealing to the Mexicans, as one of them, struck their most tender cord [sic] --the religious one.⁶

While living in California in 1887 McCreery expressed to his diary his now well-developed cultural perspective:

Now speaking of Mexicans--there be many Americans who take much pleasure in calling them dogs, curs, fools, etc. [and say] that they come from a mixture of many bloods. Now, my positive American, how many bloods run in your veins? Ah! You did not think of it? Then let me tell you, you are the offspring of an American family--that is a family having in its veins the blood of all civilized peoples, of the Indian and the negro. You turn up your nose at the latter? No necessity [sic] for it, my positive man, for it is truth. Among the upper class of Mexicans [,] those educated [,] you find people most cultivated who will compare favorably with the elite of any American city. The lower class you say are drunken, cowardly dogs? So they may be but, my friend, would you go into a Bowery saloon to find a 'representative' American?'

Still in California in 1888, he described reading a difficult novel by a Spanish author of that time who is now considered one of the greatest:

I have become quite interested in a Spanish novel--Pepita Jimenez by Juan Valera and have been hard at work with a dictionary unearthing the beauties of the book. It is a story of a young man about to enter the Priesthood. It gives his arguments for and against, the amount of good he could probably do in the cloister and in the world. Pepita finally convinces him that the world is his field and he takes unto himself a wife rather than [sic] wed the Church. It is a remarkable book in its way and if translated would, no doubt, be much read.⁸

Fenton McCreery, then, first came into contact with Hispanic culture as a young man of twenty and, like many other young men, in the earlier diaries he made many rash judgments. Most of his later observations, however, were perceptive and interesting.

Throughout the diaries, it will be seen that McCreery is obviously often confused: first, as his personal values clash with the traditional values of Hispanic culture, and later, as his own modified values clash with those of traditional Anglo-American culture. His attitudes often seem contradictory, as he alternates between rejection and tolerant understanding of, for example, Hispanic religious customs and class structure. His attitudes towards the issue of economic development and modernization for Latin America are also definitely contradictory, as will be noted.

It should be emphasized that McCreery had necessarily been influenced by the prevailing climate of opinion with regard to the development of Latin America and the part the United States should play in it, before he ever had direct contact with that region. For example, while his father William McCreery was consul in Chile, the elder McCreery summarized his own impressions of South America in a letter to an ex-Governor of Michigan, revealing a very representative North American perspective:

You asked me about South America. The climate is all that could be desired, but this is not our country nor our people.

The good Lord has undoubtedly visited at some remote period these shores, but so long a time has elapsed since the visit and it is so uncertain as to whether he will ever come again, that it makes one long for a sight at [sic] the country where he is ever present. In some respects I like the country but there is no country like the United States. There is any amount of valuable timber and mineral wealth in South America but in most cases it is remote from transportation and not easy of access, but the day will come when it will all be wanted. Already English and German syndicates are prospecting the country and securing favorable locations,

expecting to await a time when railroads penetrate the interior of the country. Bolivia is exceeding rich in timber, minerals, agricultural lands and climate.

The country is I suppose in most respects like Mexico, rich in all respects, but awaiting the advent of a new civilization and a new development.⁹

One wonders whether the "new civilization" that William McCreery was referring to was perhaps to be the result of the movement described by the Reverend Josiah Strong in his book Our Country, published in 1885:

Having developed peculiarly aggressive traits calculated to impress its institutions upon mankind, [the United States] will spread itself over the earth. If I read not amiss, this powerful race will move down Central and South America, out upon the islands of the sea, over upon Africa and beyond. And can anyone doubt that the result of this competition of races will be the 'survival of the fittest?'¹⁰

The theory of the "Manifest Destiny" of the United States to civilize and develop Latin America had immense popular appeal, but the optimistic visions it engendered were greatly misleading. The younger McCreery, as will be seen, was to experience a much more difficult reality.

Geographical Problems of Latin America

William McCreery noted that the climate of South America was "all that could be desired," while at the same time stating that the considerable timber and mineral wealth was "remote from transportation and not easy of access." In this hasty and contradictory judgment the elder McCreery was typical of many North Americans, and especially those from the northern States, who, still today, commonly fall into

several serious misconceptions as they visit Latin America. First, they too readily interpret the pleasantly warm temperatures of the principal Latin American cities as being typical of the whole region, ignoring the fact that, from Mexico to Patagonia, the extremes of tropical heat or mountain cold are far more common. Tropical rain forests, deserts and uncomfortably high mountains predominate, with relatively few grassy plains or areas that are easy to cultivate. Moreover, throughout Latin America, there is a pervasive problem of either inadequate or excessive rainfall. As Bernard P. Kiernan has stated,

the pattern of rainfall in many places is inimical to efficient agriculture, with long dry seasons alternating with heavy rains, when excessive water leaches the land of necessary nutrients.¹¹

The aspect of the geography that is perhaps most significant is also described by Kiernan:

The climate of tropic zones is ill-suited to a rhythm of disciplined work and individual enterprise; and the tropics have long been cursed, with a high incidence of endemic diseases.¹²

Even when North Americans like the McCreerys recognize that the difficulties posed by jungles and high mountain ranges exist, they often compartmentalize their thinking and fall into the second mistaken belief; that the "laziness" of the Latin Americans is the chief obstacle to progress. In his diaries, Fenton McCreery often seems to recognize that the climate is the determining factor in the lack of economic development. Yet, again and again, he apparently dismisses that idea and asserts or implies that the one thing needed is enterprising, energetic people from northern countries

who will show the sluggish Latins the error of their ways and never be influenced themselves by the heat or the thin air of the Andes. Thus, one of the diaries' most common themes is that of the clash between the values of the hard-working Yankee and the lack of enterprise or downright laziness of the peoples of warmer climes.

This note was once sounded, in fact, regarding his own countrymen, as McCreery traveled for the first time to the southern United States. His own conflict of values was apparent as, in the diary entry for November 5, 1887 he stated:

This morning we were in Louisville, having been just 12 hours from Chicago. As soon as the Illinois or Indiana line is crossed the difference between Northern enterprise and Southern methods becomes apparent. In Louisville there is an air of sleepiness even on the principal business streets. There is not that bustle and business rush that you find in Northern cities. Shopkeepers stand in their doors with hands in pockets or sit out on the sidewalk apparently having no business to worry them. But, of course, there is much business done in Louisville, but a Southern man when not positively occupied is taking rest or recreation, while a Northern man is always busy, even when there is no absolute necessity for his being so. For my part, I am in favor of the Southern way.¹³

Previously, while traveling through Panama and observing the canal workers he had remarked, "The negroes as a rule are too lazy to work though most of the laborers are colored." And, speaking of the stevedores in the Bay of Panama, he observed:

The laborers employed are all Negroes. They make an awful noise--each one talking independent of all others. They talk a sort of a jabber of Spanish and English but they swear most profusely in English. When they leave their work at night

they get into large row-boats holding about 20. They start out a jolly lot--one of them extemporizing a song and all joining in the refrain. It was really charming--something like a college glee-club yet not as refined in execution. There was something wild, weird, almost enchanting about their song--aside from their singing which was very fine. Back they come in the morning always jolly and not seeming to think that working in this climate was either difficult or dangerous.¹⁴

During the same voyage McCreery briefly visited Mazatlan, Mexico:

We went on shore at 6 A. M., not waiting for breakfast which came not till at 12 noon. There were many boats and boatmen to carry people on shore--but we noticed that they were more energetic, more wide-awake than those farther South. It is a rule, I think, that the farther North one goes from the Isthmus the more enterprising and active the natives are. For the climate of Central America is so debilitating that natives become as lazy as a farmer's dog...¹⁵

Back in New Mexico in the fall of 1886, McCreery comments on the Mexicans there:

The harvesting and threshing season is a merry one for the Mexicans. While they are generally lazy they seemed to be happy at work these days. You can always see a broad smile of contentment on the face of the Mexican as he trudges along behind his burro that carries a load of grain to market.¹⁶

One finds in McCreery's diaries the conflicting tendencies, first, to idealize the primitive life of the natives, implying that they would be best served by being left uncivilized and without economic development, and, conversely, to try to promulgate modernization under the tutelage of aggressive northerners. Chronologically, we again note the following observations.

On his first trip to Chile in 1890, McCreery's ship traveled from Guayaquil, Ecuador up the river towards Quito.

He comments:

Along the wharves runs a street lined with building [sic] of wood built in the pillared Grecian and Venetian style. A goodly city is Guayaquil, the commercial metropolis of the Republic of Ecuador. To be sure, her people are somewhat lazy but we can attribute that to the climate... Its buildings are dingy and sadly need paint and its street are laden with filth. Yet much business is transacted here; many foreign houses are here located; many lines of steamer touch here. The journey to Quito the capital occupies about 14 days. You proceed up the river on steam-wheel steamers and then go mule-back over the mountain trails. There is good alligator shooting aways up the river off in the bayous and marshes, but we could not arrange a party to hunt. Ecuador is well mortgaged to foreigners like most republics of Latin-America. The postal concession is sold to Frenchmen and the inscription on the postage stamp is in French. The city is enterprising and has all modern improvements. The street cars were built in the U. S. and are operated by an American company. The fire engines are American. The city is well lighted by gas....

There is a people, almost a separate race, that live on rafts among the bayous and marshes of Ecuador. Here was a family on a raft made of logs tied together with strings of hide and surmounted by a hut of branches and thatch. There was the father and head of the tribe wearing a pair of pantaloons and poleing the raft along; and here was mamma with a calico gown open at the body holding a suckling babe to her breast while she sat in front of the hut, bareheaded, barefooted, eating a piece of half-cooked fish. Two or three children dirty as a political record on the raft; also a monkey and a black razor-backed hog tied to a log with an enormous chain; a parrot and captive stork complete the list of the family. There they were; a fire cooking some badly dressed fish, throwing light upon the woman's face that made her look much like the monkey. These raft-tribes live upon fish and fruit; their wants are are (sic) few; they know no changing fashions; nor easter bonnets: So they live floating out with the tide, every want supplied, and coming back upon the

returning tide happy, ignorant, dirty and no doubt honest. Do you think brethren, that their chances of salvation are equal to those of Deacon Smith who sits upright in the front pew of a Sunday morning and whose wife is Honorable Secretary of the Lambezi Soul Saving Society? I say brethern (sic) think it over!¹⁷

Later, on the same trip, McCreery spent a few days in Peru and was able to form a definitive judgment--to the opposite effect!

Peru is naturally in minerals (sic), in woods, in drugs, in agricultural possibilities is certainly the richest country in the world. If an emigration of active, pushing, enterprising people sets out towards Peru it will certainly have a grand future. The present landed proprietors are like the noblemen of Southern Europe: they make no improvements, embark no money in manufactures or machinery, do not educate the 'peones.' A little less romance blood, a little more saxon-- a little less superstition, a little more education will make Peru le grande Republique of South America.¹⁸

A touch of sober reality is noted in the entry of June 10, 1890, however:

Mr. Stiles J. Stanton, an American resident of Valparaiso, has been very unfortunate. He is a man of fine physique, fine-looking, tall, very intelligent, remarkable memory. He is a charming conversationalist and has travelled through the almost unexplored portions of Bolivia and the Argentine. He was a freighter and the effect of spending one day in tropical climes and the next in mountain snow as he journeyed from the La Plata to Bolivia was to deprive him of sight. He has been a miner, his principal and almost only income coming now from mining shares. His stories of the fabulous wealth of Bolivia are most interesting. His faithful wife, who married up after he became blind, attends him. Everyone hopes that Stanton will recover.¹⁹

Yet one is never certain that McCreery seriously modified his excessive optimism that American technology and enterprise could easily conquer the geographical difficulties involved in Latin American development. Nor did he appear to notice the logical incompatibility of this attitude with his romanticizing

of the life of the "natives." Witness the same tendency as he was en route back to Chile in April, 1891, and briefly visited Guatemala:

Went ashore...and took the 9 A.M. train for La Ciudad de Guatemala 75 miles from the coast. The R.R., a narrow-gauge, is owned by the poverty-stricken Crocker-Huntington crowd of San Francisco. In these 75 miles an elevation of 6000 feet is reached...The road at first runs through jungles of vegetation so dense that in order to pass through or make a path you must use the axe and saw. Now and then there peeps out the cane hut with thatched roof with half (or more properly wholly) naked natives lolling about the doors, the customary pig chained to a neighboring tree. What incentive is there for hard labor or the rush after fame when all the requisites of life are at your door? The banana, the pineapple, the cocoanut can be had for the picking, so that the mind is relieved of the cares of a French cook or the petty worries of housekeeping. The costume of the natives is not over ponderous, the men wear light colored pants with a gayly colored sash and hat and on a cold day they don a shirt. The women, a gay skirt and a slight chest protector, barefooted. Once I saw a woman with a hat made of a calabash or one half of a gourd just large enough to answer the purpose. The simplicity and honesty of these people is something wonderful, the stranger's life and belonging [sic] being often much safer than in his own country. These are the common people not sullied by mixture of blood with the Spanish tyrant--almost the pure Aztec or Toltec--speaking their own Indian tongue and bad Spanish in addition. The upper classes like all Spaniards are proud and aristocratic--live in princely mansions with armies of retainers. The common people, having few luxuries and all the necessities of life at their doors have no incentive to theft and dishonesty or rather they are not sufficiently civilized to envy their friends' success or to covet their neighbor's ox and ass and all the rest of it. These people are all good Catholics and devout but they need no dogmas or creeds or church laws to teach them uprightness and honesty, to be brave, to be a true friend, for their simple customs and just unwritten laws embody all that our commandments contain....20

Political Problems

The Latin Americans had achieved their independence from Spain approximately fifty years after the United States and, in their struggle for autonomy, had been decisively influenced by the French and American revolutions. Then, their leaders proceeded to model their constitutions after that of the United States, even though the entirely different conditions prevailing in these countries were to prevent the practical application of most of the provisions of those constitutions. More than three hundred years of Spanish rule had left the Latin Americans totally unable to govern themselves after the North American liberal democratic pattern. As Carlos Rangel, a contemporary Venezuelan scholar notes in 1977,

The United States freed itself from its political link with Great Britain without breaking with the positive aspects of English political and cultural tradition. It remained part of this tradition, which it went on to improve....The Spanish Americans' accession to independence, however, occasioned a profound moral, intellectual, and spiritual crisis, a denial of their own national character as it had been forged by Spain.²¹

The Latin Americans tried to reject their most natural political model, Spain, and to profess a republicanism which they could not possibly put into practice. There was apparently as strong an element of optimistic fantasy in the Latin American belief that they could copy our institutions and culture as there was in the "Manifest Destiny" thinking of many North Americans. Rangel describes

the manner in which Latin America in the nineteenth century viewed the United States:

With some exceptions, the ruling classes as yet felt no reservations toward the 'Yankees'; they were prey to 'Nordomania,' a blind and excessive admiration for anything North American, which manifested itself in formal imitation of North American federalist constitutional thinking. In 1889, the Latin-American governments had welcomed the North American government's intention of forming a 'Pan-American Union,' with its seat in Washington, based on the Monroe Doctrine--that is to say, on an assumed community of interests between all the American countries governed along republican lines, with North American power guaranteeing security for all.²²

Remarkably (from the vantage point of the 1980s), the great Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario had written, in honor of this Pan-Americanism, the following lines:

Be welcome, magical Eagle with your vast and
powerful wings!
Come and cover the South with your great continental
shadow,
In your claws in which rubies shine, bring us a palm
of glory bearing the
colors of limitless hope
And in your beak the olive branch of a long, fertile
peace.

Sure of yourself, you have striven over the world's
conquests.
Sure of yourself, you have had to bear the antique
arrow.
If your open wings forever proffer peace,
Your claws and your beak are ready for necessary wars.

E pluribus unum! Glory, victory, work!
Give us the secrets of the hard-working North
And may our sons, forsaking the Latin heritage
Learn tenacity, vigor, strength of soul from the Yankees.
Tell us, illustrious Eagle, how to become a multitude.

Eagle: behold the Condor. He is your brother of the
heights.
The Andes know him and know that, like yourself, he
fixes the sun in flight.
May this grand Union have no end! Says the poet,
May you in fulfillment unite your brotherly efforts...²³

The political realities of most Latin American nations in the nineteenth century, however, absolutely precluded their quickly developing free, democratic institutions. And, as we have seen, realities of geography and climate precluded, to a great extent, the work ethic natural to cold northern lands. Fenton McCreery's diaries are an excellent source of information about the political realities, just as they were for the geographical ones.

When he first arrived in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, in 1910, McCreery unwittingly identified what is perhaps the key symptom of the enduring political problems of Latin America:

I wake up about 6 o'clock and sally forth into the City. In the Plaza is an equestrian bronze of a soldier, Morazan, one of the heroes of Independence. Well might it be a statue of Marshal Ney or Wellington. The old parish church, with its two bell towers [,] has been newly whitewashed. The streets are narrow, paved with cobblestones, few of which are flat. The buildings are generally of one story, the occasional two-storied edifices standing like guardians above their lowly fellows. The general atmosphere is depressing, there seems to be no life, no fountain of force, nowhere from whence effort may come. All seems passive. It is possible to imagine a momentary ripple, a spasmodic effort, a revolution [,] but the next act must be passive, submission, rest. Continued, carefully directed effort does not seem possible here.²⁴

McCreery's perception of Latin America's fundamental passivity recalls Bolivar's pessimistic analysis in 1812:

Our destiny has always been purely passive, our political existence has never been real, and it has been all the more difficult for us to achieve Liberty because (until 1810) we were relegated to a position even lower than that of slaves....America was in every way dependent upon Spain, while at the same time Spain deprived it of the benefits and practice of self-determination...²⁵

Victor Alba, a European who has lived in Mexico for twenty years, explains that the passivity remarked upon by Bolivar and McCreery is the manifestation of one side of the Latin American personality, the other side of which is verbosity or violence:

[T]he average Latin American has never had the power to decide his own destiny. Deprived of the opportunity to act, he has taken refuge in word and thought. If he cannot act, he can compensate for this by talking, and in Latin America this has given the word greater importance than it has elsewhere.

The same origin helps to account for other Latin American traits: the tendency to spend rather than to save for the future, and the fondness for gambling and betting...The Latin American tends to let chance decide his destiny, as if he were so convinced that outside forces determine his life that he wants to emphasize this by playing his own game of chance.

At the same time, the Latin American quickly resorts to violence in an attempt to solve his problems. Latin America has a long tradition of violence, going back to the colonial period. Today, the demonstrations that end in fights with the police, the bloody strikes, the elections accompanied by bullets are not rare. It is not that the Latin American is more bloodthirsty or cruel than other peoples, but that since the paths of action are closed to him--the means of resolving his problems, collective or personal, by law or the normal play of pressure and counterpressure--he is compelled to resort to drastic expedients, that is, to express in shouting and shooting what he is unable to express through legal means.²⁶

The historical reasons for the formation of this personality have to do with the political problem present from the moment of independence. First, traditional and economic power resided only in the small class of landowners, the "Creoles," or white descendants of Spaniards born in the New World. There was no real middle class, only a very small group called the "middle sectors," and most of these were mestizos. The vast majority of the populations, mestizos and pure Indians, were completely outside the political process. Living in a subsistence economy, mostly on the great haciendas as virtual serfs, their attitudes were those of the medieval European peasantry.²⁷ Second, independence from Spain had actually been desired only by the Creoles and very few mestizos from the middle sectors, who became leaders of the revolt. But these leaders very often disagreed among themselves, and the wars were in fact civil wars between factions of Creoles as much as rebellions against Spain. That, at least, is the opinion of Rangel:

Very few native Spaniards took part in the fighting, but a hundred years went by before anyone dared say what everyone had known all along--that these confrontations were nothing but civil wars between Spanish Americans.

In certain regions, the rich Creoles lost control of the situation, so that the war and the social convulsions that followed (and lasted for a good part of the nineteenth century) left a wake of blood and destruction....

In other regions, the war destroyed the imperial Spanish sovereignty without social upheaval; Creole oligarchies succeeded in simply replacing the proconsuls from abroad, and in instituting a traditional and hereditary form of power that in some cases has survived to the present day.²⁸

Chile and a few other countries were those in which a minimum of civil strife took place. The majority of the nations, however, followed the pattern of continual upheavals, often bloody and always destructive, led by "strong men" war-lords, or caudillos. Either way, under mostly peaceful Creole dominance or under the persistent turmoil of the chieftains, the continuance of a "heavily centralized, pyramidal system of social relations"²⁹ was insured. In the volatile areas,

Each single country, each region, even each village, was able to re-establish peace only by appealing to a caudillo for protection....

At the start, there were as many caudillos... as specific geographic conditions permitted, each lord exerting his authority over a limited territory. Strong men emerged among them and brought larger areas under their control, so that a regional structuring emerged; this led to nation-wide rule by supercaudillos, each suppressing or subduing regional caciques [chiefs], much in the manner in which the kings of medieval Europe subdued or eliminated lesser feudal barons.³⁰

McCreery had first-hand experience of such petty "strong men" during his two years in Honduras from 1909 to 1911. He described the details of a revolution:

General Dionisio Gutierrez, the Vice President, left to-night for the North Coast with his 'gente' [gang]. Every leader has a number of people who will take up arms at his call. 'Nicho' is said to have taken 500 with him. They were young men and boys from the City and surrounding country. They looked upon the expedition as a pleasant outing apparently. Their straw sombreros bore new ribbons, many wore kaki suits and many pants [parts?] of uniforms. The Commander appeared at several nearby fincas [farms] and demanded mules and horses. At the farm of Jerry Brooks, an American negro, they met with a rebuff and decided not to buy his animals. These bands move across the country taking whatever may be needed for their subsistence, giving of course, a receipt, but the owner must wait years for his money. During these civil wars the troops of both parties live off the country, many outrages are committed and devastation follows in their wake.³¹

When one of the successive rounds of fighting was over, McCreery remarked:

Estrada and Chamarro reached Managua yesterday. They were frantically acclaimed by the populace. General Mataz, one of the revolutionists, committed suicide upon being arrested charged with conspiracy. A Cabinet has been appointed. Changes of Fortune are sudden and violent in Central America. It seems to be a sort of football field for political ambitions, but instead of taking the chance of a broken leg or arm or black eye you take the chance of receiving a bullet or being indefinitely imprisoned.³²

Earlier, it had been McCreery's misfortune to be in Chile when, for the first time since 1830, the Chileans fell into a disastrous and bloody civil war, apparently because the elected President, Balmaceda, had taken power from the Congress, thus offending the traditional ruling class.³³ McCreery wrote the following about the horror of the war:

The Chilians are great soldiers...and are physically superior to any other class of people in South America. They seem almost to be fatalists and will follow their leaders, who are fine officers and gallant almost to rashness, to certain death. The revolution was instituted and backed by the best men in the county [sic], and I think that they will now do all in their power to adjust matters as quickly and amicably as possible. There is talk of a new constitution that will diminish the powers of the president and vest them in congress.³⁴

Later, McCreery continued in the same vein:

The Chilian soldier fights like a demon. He is a fatalist and believes that when his appointed time arrives then he will die but before that he is under the special protection of the Creator whether he be on the sea or in battle. When he puts his sabre bayonet on his repeating rifle, his convo, a long carved knife between his teeth and rushes into the fight, throwing away coat, hat and all equipments except those of destruction, with his fatalistic belief and his rashness and crazy valor, he is

certainly to be dreaded. When Chilian meets Chilian as at Primitiva it is not strange that of the 4000 engaged 40 per cent were killed.³⁵

In Central America McCreery alternates between extreme discouragement and a kind of "sporting" interest in the political chaos. On one occasion he described a kind of prototypical revolution:

Well, we shall see whether Don Manuel will make a dash for some Port of Honduras or whether he will disband and begin anew his plans for the recovery of his Satrapy. Why should he not plan? Was he not chased from Tegucigalpa by the soldiers of Zelaya? Was he not replaced by a Provisional President who was afterwards made a Constitutional? And would his recovery of the Presidency not be like unto a return to his own after a three years vacation? So it goes in Central America. The game of Politics down this way makes me think of the childrens' game, 'what goes up must come down.'

My Sunday excursion, my reading, all interrupted because of the revolutionary game. And yet it is more interesting than life in Europe and the round of social pleasures.³⁶

Conversely, a week later he wrote:

I am impressed by the ridiculousness of affairs in Honduras. Why should I pass my time in struggling to advance our interests in the midst of plots and conspiracies and revolutions and insurrections? Here I am exiled from what is most worth while in the world and all because ambition spurs me on. It is a queer situation and I am queer also.³⁷

And three months later:

I am enjoying Shakespeare again. What a delight is he and how 'he looks quite through the deeds of men!' 'The Taming of the Shrew,' 'Antony and Cleopatra' and 'Julius Caesar' have given me a renewed pleasure. How truly Shakespeare presents the motives and weaknesses of men comes home again to me in Central America where there has been many a Caesar drunk with power and many an Antony mad with women. In the mad kaleidoscope of Central American politics I find relief and rest and profit in Shakespeare.³⁸

McCreery, then, had intimate experience with the fundamental political pattern in Latin America. It was similar to the "bossism" of the large American cities of the time, but it was "bossism" carried to extremes of tyranny which often included widespread torture and murder, in addition to constant civil wars. The rural masses were uneducated and economically enslaved to the hacienda system, the middle sectors were insignificant in numbers and weak at best, and the landowners willingly allowed the caudillos and their coteries to handle the day-to-day business of governing the nations, since they, the patricians, were secure in the knowledge that their interests would always be considered first. The peones of the countryside, though the majority, were completely outside political life, and the city people, as McCreery noted when he commented on the entrance into Managua of the two conquering generals, were consistently enthusiastic in welcoming each new "boss"--since the spoils of office would continue to be spread around among the friends of first this one, then that one. As Rangel sums it up,

In reality, all the revolutions were no more than power struggles for the same unchanging prizes: control over government and the public treasury, the only reward understood in politically backward societies.³⁹

Unfortunately these same features persist in most of the Latin American countries today. As John Mander, an Englishman, has observed, politics in Latin America "is not the pragmatic horse-trading we are familiar with; it is the offering of personal loyalty to a chieftain from whose strong right arm benefits can be expected."⁴⁰

In any case, in McCreery's time as at present, the constant political upheavals in the Caribbean region, especially, were of grave concern to the United States government. In 1904 that government proclaimed the Theodore Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which stated that Latin American governments in political disarray could force the United States to intervene as an international police power. This new declaration was motivated chiefly by the necessity for defending the Panama Canal site, which had been acquired by the United States in 1903 and in which construction was proceeding, from possible European encroachment.⁴¹ The United States strongly feared that European countries such as Great Britain and France, whose bankers had loaned Caribbean governments huge sums, would have an excuse to intervene and take control of those countries when they inevitably defaulted on re-payment of the loans. Such control, it was believed, could lead to the taking over of the Canal.

The problem of the debts owed European banks by Caribbean nations was resolved by a procedure in which the government of the United States, working with American banks, supervised the collection of customs duties in those countries, and saw to it that a certain part of the money was paid to the foreign bankers. This issue is part of the economic problems of Latin America, which are inextricably related to the political problems under discussion, and which should be given more specific consideration at this time.

Economic Problems

It is difficult for North Americans to understand why the majority of the commerce and industry of Latin America was and is, even today, carried on by foreigners. McCreery, it will be recalled, made several references to this when he first visited Ecuador and Peru. On first arriving in Chile, as well, he noted:

South America is in the hands of foreigners. Their [sic] are no native importing and exporting house [sic] of any importance. The foreign colonies have their entertainments and society and 'circulos,' living almost entirely apart from the natives.⁴²

In 1924 a Latin American politician quoted by Rangel stated that

Where industry was more than the sum of small manufacturers and cottage industries, it was in the hands of foreign capitalists. The same was true of the basic infrastructures-- the railroads, port installations, et cetera-- and the export of both agricultural and industrial goods.⁴³

In fact, the pattern of commercial and industrial activity was intimately tied to the political pattern, and also requires some historical explanation. E. Bradford Burns offers the "classic" reason:

A major paradox has always characterized Latin America: the potential richness of the land and the abject poverty of the majority of the people who work it. The contrast between what could be and what is confounds all careful observers and begs explanation. Luis dos Santos Vilhena, a Portuguese professor of Greek who resided twelve years in Salvador da Bahia at the end of the eighteenth century, posed the sad question about Brazil, 'Why is a country so fecund in natural products, so rich in potential, so vast in extent, still inhabited

by such a small number of settlers, most of them poor, and many of them half-starved?' He answered his own questions frankly, putting the blame for underdevelopment on slave labor, the latifundia, and inefficient or obsolete agricultural methods....

Independence provided no panacea for Latin America's economic ills. The trend established during the colonial period to subordinate the economy to Europe's needs continued unaltered. In fact, during the nineteenth century, if anything, Latin America's economy became increasingly and more inextricably integrated into the widening network of international capitalism.... External factors, over which the Latin Americans had little or no influence, determined whether the economies prospered or vegetated.... Responding to the needs... of Europe and the United States condemned most of the area to remain on the periphery of international capitalism.⁴⁴

Rangel explains in more detail how this situation came about:

Monopoly practices, privileges, restrictions placed on the free activity of individuals in the economic and other domains, are traditions profoundly anchored in societies of Spanish origin.... The discriminatory measures against individuals also extended to goods....

To the retrograde, mercantile Spanish mind, the Middle Ages had remained the absolute model; this mentality neither understood nor approved capitalism... Individual economic pursuits were viewed as almost sinful; at any rate, they constituted a reprehensible practice that deserved to be taxed at every turn of the road and at the crossing of every river.... [There was an] all-embracing prejudice against everything that does not originate with the state, or is not authorized or supervised (that is, meddled with and hindered) by the state.⁴⁵

Furthermore, when the state consisted of a caudillo and his followers, any businessman was doubly discouraged from trying to sell fairly and make low profits on extensive dealings. Instead, he found himself required to partake in the customs of the selling of privileges, the corruption of civil servants and fiscal fraud.⁴⁶ The basic paradox in Spanish thinking here is that

[T]he governments heir to the mercantilist Spanish tradition naturally tend to intensify controls, multiply restrictions, raise taxation, without ever considering that there may be as many corruptible men among those who enforce restrictions and regulations as among those who suffer them.⁴⁷

Thus, discouragement of business was built into the official mentality of the Latin American states, and it was complicated by the official corruption of the transitory, caudillist governments. Perhaps the most important of all the many factors which retarded the rise of a class of businessmen in Latin America was, however, the mindset of the latifundistas, or great landholders, who have always held the permanent power in the region. Their prejudices, as a class, against business and indeed against any kind of manual labor, go all the way back to the tenth century. It was then that the Christian Reconquest of the Spanish Peninsula from the Moors began, and the only two revered masculine activities were fighting and saying mass:

Rejecting labor as we conceive it, men lived on bounty extracted from Moorish territory-- or, later, from the Americas....The setting in which the newly landed Spaniard found himself in the New World--a slave society served by Indians and blacks--exacerbated these negative character traits to a monstrous degree.⁴⁸

The latifundistas have always wanted, above all else, to maintain the status quo. Even though the governments now want modernization, the landowners consistently use any excess capital to buy more land, rather than to invest in the development of mineral resources or industrialization. Then, they often prefer to let much of the arable land lie fallow, simply because they personally do not need any more income. Thus agriculture continues to be the primary economic activity of Latin America. Unfortunately, even if all the arable land were cultivated, it would still be an agriculture so hindered by the problems of terrain, soil and climate mentioned previously that it could not even produce enough to feed Latin America's burgeoning population properly, much less provide a surplus for the economic growth of the nations as a whole.⁴⁹ Because of the geographical problems and of the attitude of the latifundistas, therefore, the Latin American governments have been forced to borrow from foreign sources and to invite foreign businessmen and industries into their countries, offering sometimes outrageously high profits. Technicians and skilled workers have also had to be imported, because there has been no educated work force. This also stems from the latifundistas' power: They have opposed education for the masses because they want to keep the peones ignorant and docile.⁵⁰

The Latin American governments' borrowing from foreign sources, usually European, had thus begun almost immediately after independence. And, needless to say, repayment of such loans had been very difficult. As we know, France attempted

to take over Mexico in the 1860s with the excuse of recovering its money from defaulted loans. This caused the United States to watch carefully for similar problems with foreign debt on the part of Latin American nations, especially, as has been noted, in the Caribbean region while the Canal was being constructed. At that time McCreery held his most important diplomatic posts, in Santo Domingo and Honduras, and played a vital part in the United States supervision of the customs collections which was previously described. An article in McCreery's diary taken from The Record Herald of Chicago of November 20, 1909, discusses this procedure in detail:

....The peaceful and prosperous conditions in Santo Domingo are almost entirely due to the intervention of the United States in the financial affairs of that republic in 1905. Several foreign governments, particularly Belgium, Italy and France, having lost their patience because of the failure of Santo Domingo to pay its debts, made demonstrations of force to compel payment. By the invitation of the President of Santo Domingo the United States stepped in and assumed the responsibility of a receiver in bankruptcy. By a treaty negotiated by Secretary Root everybody concerned agreed that the customs revenues should be collected by Americans appointed by the President of the United States, and that the sum of \$100,000 a month should be deposited with the Morton Trust Company of New York for the benefit of the creditors, while the balance should be turned over to the financial department for the support of the government. This plan is working admirably. The effect has been peace and prosperity, due to the restoration of confidence...51

From this point on, political and economic problems will be considered together, as the focus of this study turns to the influence and involvement of the United States in Latin America.

United States Involvement in Latin America

Contrary to the optimism of The Record Herald, the history of the Caribbean area after 1909 was not one of "peace and prosperity." In several countries, whatever peace there was, was maintained by brutal dictatorships like those of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, Batista in Cuba, and the Somozas in Nicaragua, or by the presence of the United States marines. Alba, a presumably objective European, has recently described the frequent interventions of the marines, thus:

The pretext, and in many cases the true reason, for the United States interventions was the desire to collect debts, especially through the administration of the customs, and to 'restore order.' The point of departure was the hypothesis that if a social and political system was not capable of establishing order, that system should not be changed for a more effective one but should be maintained by force of arms and those who wanted to change it prevented from doing so. Thus American intervention was like a premium on incompetent government and dictatorship.⁵²

However, at the beginning of the era of the interventions, it seemed quite easy and logical to justify them. For example, McCreery quotes from an address which President Taft delivered before the Americus Club in Pittsburgh on May 2, 1910:

The course of our State Department with respect to certain small Central American States has been subjected to criticism, which to me seems wholly unwarranted. Turbulence and unstable conditions in Central America have been a perennial occupation to the Department of State. By the Washington Conventions, to which the United States morally has the relations of a party, it was sought to guarantee the neutrality of Honduras, because it has always been felt that a strong and stable Honduras stretching across the center of Central America would contribute more than anything else to the progress and prosperity of the five Republics,

the peaceful welfare of which the United States has always promoted. Honduras has a heavy foreign debt and its finances are disorganized. American citizens have now an actual interest in the railways and wharves of the country. An American banking house has finally undertaken to refund the debt, rehabilitate the finances, and advance funds for railway and other improvements contributing directly to the country's prosperity and commerce. Such an arrangement has long been desired and our State Department is cordially supporting the project.⁵³

The Honduran faction then controlling the government was apparently very happy about the above-mentioned agreement, as witnessed by an article on July 4, 1910 in La Prensa of Tegucigalpa, a translation of which appeared in The Daily Journal of Flint, Michigan of July 23, 1910:

....The United States, by practical example, has given to America more lessons in democracy than have all the theories advanced on the rostrums of France. For this reason America has become a fair constellation of republics. That the sun of peace may be diffused throughout them all they must draw inspiration from the example set by the older sister who as a symbol of the reign of order and liberty, displays to travelers across New York bay a lighted torch typical of civilization. The Republic should not be merely an empty name, exploited at will by false pretenders but an industrious and free collectivity which dignifies men. Turbulent, anarchic, impoverished and ignorant republics cry for a chief to lead them into the darkness of barbarism. Liberty, unless translated into civilization, is a useless thing in the labor of universal progress.

The great republic has ever used its good offices in favor of the countries of this continent; and its friendly intervention in Central American affairs in recent times must win the gratitude of these peoples and governments who will become convinced that our civil strife, offspring of impious ambition and mother of our retrogression, cannot end if that noble nation does not call us to concord...⁵⁴

Then, a speech by Secretary of State Knox, delivered at the University of Pennsylvania on June 15, 1910, seems to offer the final proof that at that time, at least, United States domination was a marvelous boon to the nations of the Caribbean:

The invariable and fervid and inherent sentiment for self-government has had a large part in this Government's sympathy with the recent eviction by their long-suffering fellow-countrymen of such tyrants as Castro [Venezuela], whose regime has given way to better things, and Zelaya [Nicaragua], whose cruel misgovernment it is hoped will soon be succeeded by a Government really responsible and republican.

By such advances the less fortunate republics tend gradually to a stature of equality as real as the equality of their sovereignty [sic], and to the high level of stability, justice, moderation, and mutual responsibility which characterizes their more fortunate sisters.

One of the aims of the diplomacy of the United States has been to contribute as much as possible in helpfulness to these ends. True stability is best established not by military but by economic and social forces.... The problem of good government is inextricably interwoven with that of economic prosperity and sound finance; financial stability contributes perhaps more than any other one factor to political stability...⁵⁵

However, if all that were true, why did Venezuela later suffer its longest and most infamous dictatorship, that of Gómez, and Nicaragua the monstrous tyranny of the Somoza dynasty? Whether the United States government has intended it to be so or not, the economic prosperity which has resulted from the influence of the United States in Latin America has been limited almost wholly to the already affluent classes. That is one of the main reasons why political stability has seldom been achieved.

For all the reasons set forth in the first sections of this paper, it would have been very difficult, at any time from Independence to the present, for the United States or any other power to bring true "peace and prosperity" to all the Latin American people. There have been efforts in the right direction, such as Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy, Kennedy's Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps. Too often, however, the United States has taken the wrong side in the countless political struggles of Latin America. It may be enlightening at this point to scrutinize more carefully the career of Fenton McCreery for possible insight as to why this has been true.

Nothing found by the writer in the McCreery papers could lead one to believe that Fenton McCreery was anything but honorable in his own dealings with the several countries where he served. For example, in his diary he deplored corruption on the part of the American officials supervising the customs collections even more than he deplored the same type of corruption on the part of the Dominican official involved:

Called on Velazquez. I fear that he has learned too many tricks from Dr. Hollander [an American]. He collected \$60,000 as commission for work done as Minister of Finance. He is one of the few men who work and is really the directing hand of the Government today....

Had a good chat with Don Emiliano [former Minister of Foreign Affairs] who believes that a crisis is near at hand because V. [Velazquez] is now believed to be dishonest and has offended many people of influence. Don Emiliano has had a correspondence with the President recently relative to the payment of Dominican bank notes guaranteed in Mexico and in it he given [sic] expression to his ideas relative to the action

of V. in paying H. [the American, Hollander], \$100,000, Jennings \$150,000 and retaining himself a commission of \$60,000. Don Emiliano gave me a copy of the correspondence. He said that he hesitated to furnish ammunition to the enemy but he felt it his duty to point out a few act [sic] of the Government. Here will be the danger, the present administration has proclaimed its honesty. Should it be proved dishonest in certain acts a revolution may result on the ground that the Government is the prey of individuals as before and -- Why not give us our share? In the way of contracts I do hope that the road to personal gain has not been learned by Dominican officials. Much can be learned in New York, however. When I took leave of Don E. [McCreery was leaving Santo Domingo for good] he said, 'I sincerely hope that you will return to us.'⁵⁶

Apparently McCreery did not feel that he himself could do anything to stop the corruption on either side; he could merely gossip about it.

Inevitably, the American diplomat spends most of his time with other diplomats, domestic and foreign, with visiting Americans, mostly businessmen, and with members of the upper class of the host country. At first, McCreery found little to praise in this Latin American upper class. For example, in his description in his diary on June 16, 1890 of the Chilean capital, he says:

Santiago is a city of more or less 200,000 people and thoroughly Spanish in every particular. It is the Mecca of every Chileno who as soon as his stock of wealth is sufficient moves to Santiago and lives without labor or business. So it is [that] the town is made up of the wealthy, leisure class. Active exercises are little indulged in by the young, tennis and horseback riding very little, but there are bailes [dances] and tertulias [sessions dedicated to conversation], formal receptions, the drive in the park of the Alameda [,] late suppers, late rising, a life of dolce for niente. The Chilean is a natural born orator....Verbose...for the ideas and thoughts are not always as valuable as the word pictures are beautiful.⁵⁷

McCreery rather strongly criticizes upper class Latins because in his opinion they do not work enough and talk too much. These themes, along with a disapproval of excessive "elegance," can be noted repeatedly. On June 12, 1890:

After dinner we called at the house of Peter McKellar. McKellar came to Valparaiso years back in some way connected with the American navy. He is now the principal owner in the tug company and has made his millions. He married a native lady of the Carrera [one of the first Chilean presidents] family and has an interesting family. He lives in grand style in a patioed house with many servants. His family speak English and French. His wife is a veritable old Duchess, and to see her preside at 'tea' [--] the evening repast at 10:30 P.M. [--] is to see much grace and to hear the charm of a very diplomatic conversationalist. The Spanish custom of late suppers is the parent of laziness and inaction.⁵⁸

The following entry, of May 27, 1890, refers to a tour of one of the industrial centers of northern Chile made by the McCreerys when they first arrived:

The sr. de la Marca conducted us to the various works and smelters, introducing us to the managers. The Senor is of the Spanish Don type. Tall, straight as an arrow, handsome, he speaks all the modern languages, is posted on all topics of the day, conversant with scientific and religious doctrines, he plays the most classical music without notes. He is an artist in his dress, a polished cavalier in his manner and to see him daintly [sic] poising his gold cigarette holder and addressing some compliment to a lady is a sight to be remembered. He is a man of 45--looks 60, for his life has been that of a roué. He is a heavy stockholder in this steamship Company.⁵⁹

Finally, in Mexico on July 15, 1898, he expressed somewhat stronger disdain:

This evening dined with Count Hierschell de Minerbi, the Italian Minister... Stronge and Senor Valentin Gomez Farías, attaché of the Mexican Legation in London were there. Farías is rather entertaining, an example of the Latin American who has resided abroad 5 or 10 years, spent a considerable amount of money and returned to his country with many of the elegances of European society but with nothing practical and nothing that can help his countrymen.⁶⁰

It could be proposed that the key to the whole problem of United States relations with Latin America may be seen here, in Fenton McCreery's attitude toward the upper class. For McCreery, himself a decent and kind man, overcame his first democratic feelings of repulsion towards the ultra-refined upper classes and accepted the economic and social arrangements of the status quo. When confronted with the overwhelming poverty of the lower classes, he took refuge in the myth of the happy and noble savage. Perhaps at that time it was still possible to imagine honestly that economic development of the region by foreigners would later help the poor, carefully sidestepping in one's mind the problem of the distribution of wealth.

Most significant in McCreery's acceptance of the political dictatorships and the social injustice, however, was the vital connection between McCreery's principal task as diplomat--that of facilitating the growth of United States business--and the courting of favor with the upper classes. Witness the following declaration in The Daily Journal of Flint, Michigan of December 21, 1909:

During the ten years he was stationed at this post [Mexico City] Mr. McCreery became a warm admirer of President Diaz, whose friendship and esteem he enjoyed to a marked degree.⁶¹

McCreery obviously thought that the Díaz dictatorship was fine for Mexico, since it was excellent for American business interests, and had no inkling of the conflagration that was to occur in Mexico only a few years later. This can be seen in a report he made to the State Department from there:

While the Constitution of Mexico is modelled after that of the United States and has many identical articles, the power which propels the constitutorial machinery is sometimes produced in a different way and often the motive force is of a different character.

We must bear in mind the illiteracy of the people, the fact that of Mexico's population of 13,000,000, probably 9 millions are little better prepared to exercise in the American sense, the duties of a citizen in the political life of a Republic, than were their ancestors when Cortez landed. We should also bear in mind that the educated class, and the property holders, limited in number, exercise a dominating influence in affairs--the extent of which is not at once comprehended by an American in whose country education is general and property widely distributed.

So thoroughly has the Executive organized his scheme of government that no formidable opposition is to-day apparent. The Conservative press criticizes the so-called arbitrary acts of the Government and says that Diaz has become a Dictator and rules by force alone. But no open supporter of the old Conservative party holds a seat in Congress or a post in the Government. The Government justifies its policy by pointing to the rapid progress of Mexico and development of her resources. While it is expected that in the future the opposition will speak with louder voice it does not seem possible that there will ever be a return to the issues of the struggle between Church and State.

There is little of politics in Mexico in the American sense. For many years the country has been dominated by the will of a single man. There is but one party and that is the party which controls the Federal Government and State Governments. Diaz, the party and the man....The progress of Mexico has been so notable, its development so rapid that opposition must be on lines of personal hatred, religion or against the methods employed by the Governors....

Considering Diaz as a patriot with his country's interests near his heart and as knowing the revolutionary tendency of his people--the steps he has taken to withdraw his strong, guiding hand would seem to be wise and conservative.⁶²

One is very disappointed in McCreery here, on seeing that he sees "rapid progress" only in terms of industrial development and calmly accepts that the life of the poor is unchanged from the time Cortez landed. Apparently McCreery did not really

know what the situation in the countryside was like and was deceived like many others by what Rangel terms the "surface amenability" of Mexico during the long Diaz regime:

From 1910 onward, the Mexican Revolution constituted the most significant social upheaval in Latin America since the wars of Independence. It had been launched spontaneously on the modest slogan of 'Honest elections, no re-election (of the President),' issued at what proved to be the ripe time against a caudillo too long entrenched in power, whose autocracy had degenerated into a gerontocracy. The protracted, widespread, and bloody peasant insurrection unleashed by this apparently innocuous slogan confirmed that the surface amenability of Latin-American societies hid a constant, dormant resentment and a great potential for sudden violence, and that the agrarian problem--the latifundia and the status of the peons--had not been solved, but, rather, had deteriorated in the hundred and fifty years since independence had been established.⁶³

It seems as if McCreery could have found out what the situation was really like, if he had wanted to understand the complete reality of Mexico. But clearly, for him as for the many well-meaning members of the privileged classes, it was simply easier and less unpleasant not to investigate.

That McCreery was to a certain extent aware of the terrible injustice is made clear by an observation he made about the Mexican peons when on one occasion he went to an interior town, on July 3, 1898:

In the evening the band played in the Plaza and Cuautla the town walked round and round the Plaza and listened. In other Mexican towns I have noticed that, as a rule, only those who wore European clothes promenaded when the band played but here the sandaled and white trousered Indian boys walked with the apparent feeling that they amounted to something. I should say that this was a very good sign that the peones

begin to appreciate themselves, to understand that they are the mainstay of the nation, begin to throw off the awful weight of centuries of caste inferiority, [to] feel that the little teaching they now receive elevates. It seemed to me that I could discover this result in the peones walking about the Plaza at Cuautla.⁶⁴

Actually, since 1898 there has been some progress for the peons of Mexico, but not because of any good offices of the United States. The American business interests which McCreery--like all other American diplomats--served, have not really helped the poor of Mexico and the rest of Latin America. On the contrary. Richard Barnett's 1974 study of American global corporations revealed that:

For 40 to 60 percent of the world's population the Decade of Development [the 1960s] brought rising unemployment, decreases in purchasing power, and thus lower consumption. [A World Bank survey of income-distribution patterns in poor countries around the world showed] a 'striking' increase in incomes...for the richest 5 percent, while the share of the poorest 40 percent [was shrinking].... [For example,] concentration of income in Mexico ...has increased significantly during the 'Mexican Miracle.' In the early 1950's, the richest 20 percent of the population had ten times the income of the poorest 20 percent. By the mid-1960's the rich had increased their share to seventeen times what the bottom 20 percent received.⁶⁵

In conclusion, let us return to the question posed at the beginning of this study. Did the United States government or any influential group in America in the late nineteenth century seriously consider the economic and political progress of Latin America as a good to be sought, not only for the Latin Americans, but for our own best long-range interests,

as well? The answer suggested by this study of the diplomatic career of Fenton McCreery is a sad one. It has been seen that many Americans of that time--diplomats, politicians, and businessmen alike--obviously believed that merely by following their natural instincts in Latin America, and without bothering to study very deeply either the society and its problems or the probable results of American actions, they would improve conditions there while at the same time achieving their own goals of power or wealth. It seems clear, also, from newspaper accounts of the time, that public opinion in the United States shared the same belief. Unfortunately, all were wrong. The traditional ruling classes have indeed benefited from el imperialismo yanqui, but the lot of the vast majority has continued to worsen. Thus, relations with those countries have become more and more difficult, and the long-range security of the United States more and more fragile.

FOOTNOTES

¹Biographical History of Genesee County Michigan, (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen and Co., 1907), 104-108.

²Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, The McCreery Family Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton R. McCreery, Aug. 1886-May 1887.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., November 26, 1886.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., May 2, 1887.

⁷McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Nov. 1887-Feb. 1888, December 9, 1887.

⁸Ibid., January 31, 1888.

⁹McCreery Papers, Box 4, Scrapbook, Fenton R. McCreery, 1890-1891 concerning Chile.

¹⁰Quoted in E. Bradford Burns, Latin America (Englewood Cliffs, 1972), 145.

¹¹Bernard P. Kiernan, The United States, Communism, and the Emergent World. (Bloomington, Indiana, 1972), 132.

¹²Ibid.

¹³McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Nov. 1887-Feb. 1888, November 5, 1887.

¹⁴McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Apr.-May 1886, April 29, 1886.

¹⁵Ibid., May 13, 1886.

¹⁶McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Aug. 1886-May 1887, p. 5.

¹⁷McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Mar.-Dec. 1890, May 13, 1890.

¹⁸Ibid., May 21, 1890.

¹⁹Ibid., June 10, 1890.

²⁰McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, 1891-1892, April 10, 1891.

- ²¹Carlos Rangel, The Latin Americans (New York, 1977), 197.
- ²²Ibid., 32.
- ²³Ibid.
- ²⁴McCreery Papers, Box 6, Diary, Fenton, Mar.-Aug. 1910, March 3, 1910.
- ²⁵Quoted in Rangel, 198.
- ²⁶Victor Alba, The Latin Americans (New York, 1969), 44.
- ²⁷Harold E. Davis, Makers of Democracy in Latin America (New York, 1968), 45.
- ²⁸Rangel, 68-69.
- ²⁹Ibid., 220.
- ³⁰Ibid.
- ³¹McCreery Papers, Box 6, Diary, Fenton, Feb.-Sept. 1911, Feb. 6, 1911.
- ³²McCreery Papers, Box 6, Diary, Fenton, Mar.-Aug. 1910; Aug. 29, 1910.
- ³³Mario Barros, Historia Diplomática de Chile (Barcelona, 1970), 476.
- ³⁴McCreery Papers, Box 4, Scrapbook, Fenton, undated article from The Daily Journal of Flint, Michigan.
- ³⁵McCreery Papers, Box 3, Folder 90.
- ³⁶McCreery Papers, Box 6, Diary, Fenton, Mar.-Dec. 1910, July 24, 1910.
- ³⁷Ibid., August 1, 1910.
- ³⁸Ibid., November 17, 1910.
- ³⁹Rangel, 74.
- ⁴⁰John Mander, The Unrevolutionary Society (New York, 1969), 31.

- ⁴¹Rangel, 37.
- ⁴²McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Mar.-Dec. 1890,
June 5, 1890.
- ⁴³Rangel, 116-117.
- ⁴⁴Burns, 107-108.
- ⁴⁵Rangel, 204.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., 205.
- ⁴⁷Ibid.
- ⁴⁸Ibid., 192-193.
- ⁴⁹Kiernan, 139.
- ⁵⁰Victor Alba, The Mexicans (New York, 1967), 81.
- ⁵¹McCreery Papers, Box 6, Diary, Fenton, July 1909-Feb. 1910,
November 20, 1909.
- ⁵²Alba, Latin Americans, _____.
- ⁵³McCreery Papers, Box 6, Diary, Fenton, Mar.-Aug. 1910,
June 5, 1910.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., July 23, 1910.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., July 10, 1910.
- ⁵⁶McCreery Papers, Box 6, Diary, Fenton, July 1909-Feb. 1910,
October 6 and October 7, 1909.
- ⁵⁷McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Mar.-Dec. 1890,
June 16, 1890.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., June 12, 1890.
- ⁵⁹Ibid., May 27, 1890.
- ⁶⁰McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Feb.-Sept. 1898,
July 15, 1898.

⁶¹McCreery Papers, Box 6, Diary, Fenton, July 1909-Feb. 1910, January, 1910:

⁶²McCreery Papers, Box 3, Folder 95 (undated Embassy note which must have been written in 1904).

⁶³Rangel, 115-116.

⁶⁴McCreery Papers, Box 5, Diary, Fenton, Feb.-Sept. 1898, July 3, 1898.

⁶⁵Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Muller, Global Reach (New York, 1974), 149.

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