

*Literature and Culture* deserves appreciation as it equates American racial history with a palimpsest and thus leaves open the possibility of further exploration of this fraught area of knowledge.

*Bankura University*

JOYDEEP CHAKRABORTY

*Journal of American Studies*, 57 (2023), 5. doi:10.1017/S0021875823000488

David Johnson Lee, *The Ends of Modernization: Nicaragua and the United States in the Cold War Era* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2021, \$54.95/£45.18). Pp. 188. ISBN 978 1 5017 5621 4.

The US pursued programs of socioeconomic and political development in the global South, conceived as “modernization,” during the Cold War as a key method of safeguarding US national security by preventing radical revolutions and fostering the evolution of friendly but authoritarian regimes towards more democratic and stable forms of government. David Johnson Lee’s *The Ends of Modernization* is a significant analysis which provides a fresh perspective on this project in two ways. First, his focus on the perspective of elites in Nicaragua and their interaction with US development projects, rather than the conceptualization of development in Washington, provides a more “bottom-up” view of development. Second, he analyses shifts in development policy toward Nicaragua from the 1960s to the 1990s, rather than homing in on one era of policy only.

In six chronological chapters, the author examines the impact of key shifts in US development policies: from the state-centric Alliance for Progress of the 1960s, to a doctrine based on human rights and basic human needs in the 1970s, to a shift toward a neoliberal model of development which appeared in the 1980s and was applied more fully in the 1990s. He argues that Nicaragua played an important role in catalysing shifts in US development doctrine over this period, most significantly during the 1980s.

The book is strongest when considering the interaction of Nicaraguan elites with US development programs and imperatives. Lee goes beyond a simple dynamic focussed on elite “collaboration or resistance” regarding US power (11), as incarnated in development projects, to focus on “history as a dialogue” (3) between American and Nicaraguan actors. Nuanced analysis shows how different elite factions often sought to co-opt these projects to achieve their own political aims. Lee examines actors often underrepresented in the historiography of US–Nicaraguan relations, going beyond consideration of the Somoza dictatorship and the leftist Sandinistas to focus on the role of Nicaragua’s anti-regime conservatives. This analysis is well supported by Nicaraguan sources and even an interrogation of the literature produced by this group. Lee convincingly shows that opposition to the Somoza regime’s acceptance of some US development programs was a key factor in forging a right–left alliance which led to the Sandinista revolution of 1979 and demonstrates the importance of conservatives to this process.

There are also several threads running through the chapters of interest to those focussing on the US implementation of development programs. First, Lee shows that increasing US development funding for Nicaraguan civil society organizations was an attempt to resolve a key tension: while US development programs ostensibly aimed at fostering democracy over the long term, they tended to strengthen dictatorship by building the capacity of the state over the short term. Using civil society organizations as conduits for aid was an attempt to bypass this issue by diminishing the

state as the locus of development (74–75, 88–89). Second, building on this, US development policy followed an evolution from strong engagement with the central government and hands-on involvement in redesigning cityscapes and agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s to a more hands-off approach in the 1990s which aimed to discipline Nicaragua's rulers through the operation of macroeconomic forces.

The book can also be read as a critique of successive US development policies and their interaction with each other. Each new iteration of development, rather than encountering a Nicaraguan *tabula rasa*, had to contend with the intended or unintended impacts of previous projects. For example, 1970s approaches aimed at supporting human rights and basic human needs aimed to respond to a growing insurgency by reducing the Somoza regime's abuses and fostering development which assisted local populations; but these programs were necessary because development under the Alliance for Progress during the 1960s had led to greater levels of centralization and repression under the regime. Therefore examination of multiple eras of development in one state allows the reader to consider the extent to which each development era shaped political, economic, and social conditions in that state, and so reshaped the subsequent application of development.

Thus Lee makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the impact of successive shifts in US development practices on Nicaragua and the reactions of Nicaraguan actors to these shifts. However, some points would benefit from further elaboration or analysis. While Lee convincingly examines Nicaraguan agency, the limits of this agency could be assessed more clearly. While the US was not always able to impose its preferred solutions, ultimately its ability to provide, withdraw or condition aid provided it with significant influence over the conditions in which Nicaraguans acted. In addition, the argument could be made more strongly that events in Nicaragua were key to catalysing the shift in US development towards a more neoliberal approach, focussed on democratization and a free-market economic model during the 1980s. It could also be further disentangled from the Reagan administration's preexisting ideological neoliberalism, and the impact of other events which may have contributed, such as the perceived need to launch a propaganda/political campaign based on these themes against the Soviet bloc. Finally, the conclusion is rather short, consisting of a paragraph at the end of an epilogue focussed on Nicaragua's current dilemmas. A longer conclusion which summarized the key themes of development, political stability, and Nicaraguan agency discussed over the six preceding chapters would be useful.

However, these are minor points. The author has written a pathbreaking study which provides fresh perspectives on US–Nicaraguan relations and US development projects as they were implemented, contested, and sometimes co-opted at the country level. This book will undoubtedly be valuable to anyone examining Latin American history, US foreign policy, and the history of development.

*Independent scholar*

ROBERT PEE