

ON PARADIGMS AND THE PURSUIT OF THE PRACTICAL

THE IDEAL OF THE PRACTICAL: COLOMBIA'S STRUGGLE TO FORM A TECHNICAL ELITE. By FRANK SAFFORD. (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976. Pp. 373. \$15.00.)

A book of this kind is eloquent testimony to the continuing power of the self-serving dogma on development constructed in the North Atlantic over the course of the last three centuries. Whether under the rubric of the Black Legend, the White Man's Burden, Manifest Destiny, or the pseudoscientific abstractions of post-World War II "modernization theory," the assumptions of that dogma have been the same. Development in what is today called the Third World has been thwarted by a premodern cultural and institutional legacy that impedes receptiveness to, acquisition of, and propagation of the modern values that would foster a process of change recapitulating the developmental success story of the capitalist nations of the North Atlantic Basin. Safford confronts this dogma on what would seem to be its strongest ground. His case study focuses on Colombia—that most traditional and Catholic of the major Latin American nations—during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period of economic malaise and political chaos. The result is an important and richly detailed study that largely succeeds in demonstrating, in Safford's cautious words, that "value attachments in Latin American society have been more ambiguous than they are generally represented to be" (p. 11). Put more forcefully and positively, Safford makes a strong case for the proposition that economic, geographic, and social structures themselves help to mold the values often attributed solely to institutional and cultural legacies in Latin America, and that it is these structural conditions that exercise the strongest influence on the success or failure of elite efforts to foster technological progress.

Safford builds his case through a survey of technical education in Colombia from late colonial times through the nineteenth century. A short epilogue sketches twentieth-century trends. The argument is both enlightening and, to me at least, disturbing. We learn that despite formidable structural obstacles, progressive men in Colombia imbibed and participated in the new science associated with the Enlightenment, that following Independence concerned Colombians (especially Conservatives) recognized the geographic and social obstacles to technological progress and sought to attack the problem of what we today call underdevelopment through the only feasible means at their disposal, through fostering technical education for workers and elites. We learn how these projects—and those of Colombian Liberals, who sought to attack the problem structurally by facilitating the expansion of market forces—were bedeviled by geographic and social constraints, but most of all by fiscal restraints and political turmoil in a nation being wrenched more tightly into the orbit of an industrial capitalist

system (these are my words, not Safford's). We appreciate how the development of the export economy in Colombia, especially the growth of the coffee economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, provided the economic leavening and fiscal wherewithal to promote technological and industrial progress and fostered the institutionalization of technical education and an engineering profession in the country. Finally, we are told that by the mid-twentieth century Colombia possessed a core of "substantial manufacturers, engineers and economic planners," but this technical elite, in Safford's words, "remained consumers rather than creators of technology." Although the technical elite served the country's development "as mediators in the adoption and application of foreign technologies," we are left with the impression that this is not enough (p. 226). Lacking are organic links between "high level experts" and lower-level technicians and manual workers who "still lack status." Safford concludes his study with these revealing sentences:

Many manufacturing enterprises are weakened by lack of close direction from their elegant administrators, who form part of a bureaucratic culture rather than a shop culture. And it is doubtful that any member of the upper class or of the struggling white-collar group would consider overhauling a motor even as a hobby. As mandarinism persists, so too does its corollary, technical weakness at the middle and lower levels. Much of Colombia's upper class is now technically trained but still affected by aristocratic values (p. 242).

So values, after all, are important. In fact, Safford implies, traditional values continue to flaw seriously Colombia's developmental potential. What then has Safford argued in his study?

What is apparent upon reflection is that, however vigorous his objections to the a priori cultural assumptions of the traditional paradigm within which mainstream Western thinking has examined and explained the process of development, Safford accepts the fundamental assumptions of that paradigm. He never seriously questions the assumption, central to the paradigm, that modern values constitute the essential prerequisite for development. Yet most of his evidence and much of his analysis demonstrate that values change and modern institutions consolidate themselves as structural opportunities present themselves. Similarly, Safford never squarely confronts the issue of cultural diffusion from developed to underdeveloped societies, a process uniformly assumed in mainstream Western thought on development to operate in favor of the development process in Third World nations. Again much of Safford's information and not a little of his analysis suggest that the contrary is true. The process of closer integration into the world capitalist system during the nineteenth century, by destroying Colombia's (admittedly limited) national market, by casting Colombia in the role of a producer of primary export commodities, and by negatively affecting income distribution and thus intensifying elite control of economic resources, worked, on the whole, to reinforce structural constraints on the evolution of modern values. On the question of technological progress, Safford's special concern, integration into the world economy spelled the de-

struction of indigenous technology and the elimination of just those skilled artisans and small-scale manufacturers whose short supply in mid-twentieth-century Colombia, Safford believes (in this he follows the standard diagnosis of labor economists from the developed world), constitutes the primary obstacle to Colombia's future economic and technological development.

As the argument has already illustrated, Safford is not oblivious to the issues currently being raised by Latin American scholars working within what is called a dependency framework (although even such pertinent and potentially useful studies as those of Jorge Sábato and Natalio Botana [1968] and Edmundo Fuenzalida [1971] are absent from the bibliography). Furthermore, he is too good a historian to fail to appreciate many of the implications of the large volume of primary information he has unearthed in the archives. To give but one example, he documents the preference (despite much nationalist rhetoric) of Colombian engineers at the turn of the nineteenth century for foreign technology, much of which was inappropriate to the capital-short, labor-abundant Colombian economy.

But by choosing to address his problem within the basic conceptual framework of traditional thought on development, Safford neglects or downplays many of the insights generated by his study and ultimately succeeds in strengthening the traditional paradigm whose blatant ethnocentric cultural assumptions he finds so objectionable. True, because of his emphasis on structure he succeeds in depriving that paradigm of its currently unfashionable aura of cultural superiority. He demonstrates that nineteenth-century Colombian elites—even, and most especially, the Conservatives among them—in their pursuit of practical knowledge were not so unlike their contemporaries in the industrializing West. But because of his emphasis on values and his acceptance of the benefits of cultural diffusion from the developed West, he ultimately explains Colombia's continuing underdevelopment, not as a function of that country's assigned role in an international capitalist system, but as a consequence of a lopsided social structure and a "bureaucratic" culture inherited from the past. What Safford fails to acknowledge sufficiently—although this interpretation is fully consonant with his evidence—is that Colombia's skewed social structure, "bureaucratic" culture, and technological dependency were reinforced, if not to a significant degree created, by the economic and cultural forces generated by ever closer integration into the capitalist world economy. Viewed in this way, within an alternative paradigm that stands the fundamental assumption of traditional Western thought on its head, cultural diffusion and increased economic ties with the developed West have been detrimental to the development process in the Third World. The alternative perspective looks beneath the gaudy cultural shroud of the traditional paradigm to confront and challenge directly the body of thought that has served so long to rationalize and justify the functioning of an evolving world capitalist system, a system that has generated, over the last several centuries, an ever-widening gap between developed and underdeveloped countries.

The foregoing is meant in the spirit of suggesting a possible reinterpretation of Safford's main argument, but Colombianists and historians of nineteenth-

century Latin America will find much more in his book than either its title or this review has adequately suggested. Although the book is most detailed and authoritative for the period 1820–70, the focus of Safford's previous research and also the period for which Colombian historiography is perhaps most developed, the reader will find excellent synthetic sections on geography, social structure, and economic development (chapter 1), the Enlightenment in New Granada (chapter 3), railroad construction and expansion of foreign trade (chapter 8), and technical study abroad (chapter 6).

Perhaps of greatest interest, however, is Safford's careful delineation (in chapters 2, 4, and 5) of the ideological and programmatic differences separating Liberals and Conservatives during the nineteenth century. He focuses on this topic through the lens of the parties' differing approaches to the issue of technical education and development, but his findings have much wider implications. He finds that Conservatives sought to inculcate technical skills—and insure social stability—through direct governmental action. They attempted to set up institutions that at one and the same time would imbue workers with technical skills, deal with vagrancy, and instill the lower class with a strong sense of Catholic morality. Similarly, Conservative efforts to promote elite interest in technical professions concentrated on institution-building and government regulation of advanced degrees. Their approach, although to my mind Safford does not sufficiently emphasize this point, was consistent with a view of man and society derived from Conservative and Catholic thought and particularly appropriate to social groups content with their position in society. For Conservatives society was like an organism, composed of hierarchically structured, organically related groups, each with its special function, duties, and rewards. Of course the duty of the Conservative elite was to direct society; the reward, the knowledge and honor of governing in the interest of the social good. Liberals, on the other hand, like their counterparts in other areas of the West, saw society as an agglomeration of juridically equal individuals. Their efforts to promote development, as their reforms of the 1850s and 1860s indicate, were aimed at fostering general primary education and, most importantly, at freeing individual enterprise from the restraints of institutional and bureaucratic control. Liberals, whose reforms culminated in a bloody transformation of Colombian institutional and juridic life, were less concerned with the problem of social control, and had as their primary objective the freeing of market forces from the restrictions inherited from the colonial period. Liberal ideology was attractive to upwardly mobile, ambitious, but relatively less well-situated members of the Colombia upper classes. Safford illustrates that despite their differing strategies, neither group was very successful in promoting technical education or development until export agriculture expanded to the point that both approaches enjoyed the structural preconditions necessary to success.

In stressing ideological and programmatic differences, Safford has modified his earlier emphasis on the congruence of liberal and conservative values with regard to commercial and economic affairs. Both Liberals and Conservatives may have favored technical and economic progress, but they had radically different strategies for achieving these ends. These differing strategies and ideo-

logical orientations undoubtedly have their roots in the divergent social and economic status of the Colombian upper classes inherited from the colonial period and complicated by the powerful intellectual, political, and economic currents generated by Colombia's closer integration into an Atlantic economic system. Exactly how these convergent and conflicting forces, complicated still further by the clientelist politics of Colombia's two-party system, translate into the historical reality of Colombia's turbulent nineteenth-century history is a question that will not be answered until much more work on the period is available. But Safford's study is an important addition to the literature in the field. However one chooses to interpret the evidence he marshals in favor of his main thesis—a question involving, as all paradigm choices do, ideological, political, and theoretical commitments in addition to simple matters of fact and logic—this is an important study that merits the attention of all Latin Americanists concerned with the problem of development.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: In addition to the studies by Sunkel, Furtado, Cardoso, and Gunder Frank often cited and discussed in the pages of this journal, the alternative paradigm has been recently and provocatively applied to the analysis of Third World and European development in the extraordinary works of Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale*, 2 vols. (New York: Monthly Review, 1974) and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974). A fruitful application of Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts to the field of development studies is Aidan Foster-Carter, "From Rostow to Gunder Frank: Conflicting Paradigms in the Analysis of Underdevelopment," *World Development* 5, no. 3 (March 1976):167–80. The studies on technological dependency referred to are Jorge Sábato and Natalio Botana, "La ciencia y la tecnología en el desarrollo en América Latina," *Revista de la Integración* 3 (November 1968), reproduced in Amílcar Herrera, ed., *Ciencia y tecnología en el desarrollo de la sociedad* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1970), pp. 59–76; and Edmundo Fuenzalida, *Investigación científica y estratificación internacional* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1971). In a way that formal social science can never approximate, the human dilemmas and social contradictions of Latin American technological dependence in an evolving world capitalist system are masterfully portrayed in Gabriel García Márquez' epic Colombian novel, *Cien años de soledad* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1967).