

Portland State University

PDXScholar

International & Global Studies Faculty
Publications and Presentations

International & Global Studies

5-2000

Book Review of, La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America

Shawn Smallman

Portland State University, drss@pdx.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/is_fac



Part of the [International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Citation Details

Smallman, S. Book Review of Brian Loveman, *La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America*. Published in the *Hispanic American Historical Review*. (May 2000): 365-366.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in International & Global Studies Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America. By **Brian**

Loveman. Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1999. xxvii,

Photographs,. Illustrations. Maps. Tables. Figures. Glossary. Bibliography.

Index. Cloth, \$60.00. Paper, \$23.95.

Drawing largely on secondary sources, Brian Loveman has written a careful history of Latin American militaries, in which he seeks to explain their involvement in civilian affairs. Loveman begins with historical factors, such as the Reconquista, which shaped how Latin American armies viewed their roles. He then uses nationalism and nation-building as unifying concepts to discuss the nineteenth century. Throughout his work, Loveman illustrates the extent to which the experience of Latin American militaries parallel each other. For example, in his section on foreign military missions, Loveman carefully explains why military modernization throughout Latin America was accompanied by the armed forces' increasing use of apolitical and often anti-democratic rhetoric throughout Latin America.

The recent wealth of new sources has permitted recent authors to undertake a critical reevaluation of the military. Loveman describes the common experience of these armed forces without either accepting the wealth of myths that these militaries have created around their history, or depicting them as monolithic

institutions. In outlining the complex political machinations in which Latin American militaries became involved between the Great Depression and the Cold War, he details the internal divisions, personal foibles, ideological contests, and pervasive corruption that shaped military affairs. Loveman also discusses subjects such as military terror (an often overlooked topic) without allowing his work to degenerate into a polemic. This careful, dispassionate approach creates an insightful study, which sheds light on such key topics as state formation and economic modernization.

Loveman's work is particularly strong in chapters seven and eight, in which he captures the naivete and paternalism that colored the U.S. relationship with Latin America throughout the Cold War. This ignorance sometimes permitted Latin American militaries to manipulate the U.S. to achieve institutional goals. With the end of the Cold War, U.S. interest in Latin America rapidly waned, and authoritarian regimes abandoned power to democracies. Regional militaries believed that they had been victorious. Loveman explains how these armies justified their role in the "Dirty War," as they came to rethink their role in the new international context. He also accurately describes how Latin American militaries are coming to see the United States, their former ally, as their new enemy. This fear of the United States (as well as the United Nations and NGOs) is a truly regional perception that unites officers from Argentina to El Salvador. It is also

the most important change in military thought since the onset of the Cold War. In his conclusion, Loveman examines how these militaries face modern challenges from globalization and neoliberalism. This survey allows Loveman to present a balanced look at democracy's prospects in Latin America.

For all its assets, however, this book could have been strengthened by more information comparing Brazil's history with that of Spanish America. For example, in his brief reference to the creation of the Brazilian empire, Loveman seemed to equate the political chaos that followed independence in Spanish America, with the experience of Brazil. This section might better have contrasted how Portuguese America gained its independence with the violent process in neighboring republics, to explain Brazil's relative stability. In the broader context of this work, however, this is only a caveat.

Loveman's work is an insightful, jargon-free, carefully organized, and well-written study that should become a staple in undergraduate classes on Latin American politics.

Shawn C. Smallman, Portland State University.