Labor and the Course of American Democracy: US History in Latin American Perspective


The American hemisphere is now more tightly interconnected than ever before, with the trend toward greater economic, social and cultural integration apparently certain to continue. In this landmark text, Charles Bergquist offers a fresh interpretation of the historical background to this integration from the unusual perspective of labor. Focusing on slices of US history, and built around critiques of a handful of classic and influential texts, his five essays form not a conventional narrative history but rather a study in the construction of historical meaning, and an invitation to make use of history in the forging of a new, more democratic understanding of politics in the Americas.

The book opens with an illustration of how the different labor systems of colonial America best explain the great disparity in development and power between the US and Latin America today. It goes on to link the origins of US imperialism to labor's democratic studies at home, and to explore labor's role in the Latin American social revolutions, before presenting an analysis of popular culture in the Americas in which Donald Duck is revealed as the representative of all workers. Will Donald rewrite the history books and, in our post-Cold War era, realize his democratic potential? Or will he bungle the job and succumb to the postmodern confusions of the capitalists’ “New World Order?”

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