

## WILLIAM WALKER AND THE HISTORY OF NICARAGUA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

- WILLIAM WALKER. By ENRIQUE GUIER. (San José, Costa Rica: Tipografía Lehmann, 1971. Pp. 355).
- FREEBOOTERS MUST DIE! THE LIFE AND DEATH OF WILLIAM WALKER, THE MOST NOTORIOUS FILIBUSTER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. By FREDERIC ROSENGARTEN, JR. (Wayne, Pennsylvania: Haverford House, 1976. Pp. 226. \$12.95.)
- THE SOUTHERN DREAM OF A CARIBBEAN EMPIRE, 1854-1861. By ROBERT E. MAY. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973. Pp. 286. \$10.00.)
- THE NICARAGUA ROUTE. By DAVID I. FOLKMAN, JR. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1972. Pp. 173. \$7.50.)
- EL FILIBUSTERO CLINTON ROLLINS. By ALEJANDRO BOLAÑOS GEYER. (Masaya, Nicaragua: Published by the author, 1976. Pp. 147).
- CON WALKER EN NICARAGUA. Translated and edited by ALEJANDRO BOLAÑOS GEYER. (Masaya, Nicaragua: Published by the author, 1977. Pp. 316).

Few figures in Latin American history have attracted more attention from North American biographers than the mid-nineteenth-century filibuster William Walker. This restless product of the Tennessee frontier studied medicine and law in the United States and Europe before turning to journalism in New Orleans in 1849. A tragic romance contributed to his decision to leave the Crescent City to join the rush to California in 1850. Neither law nor business nor journalism satisfied him there, however, and he soon became involved in filibustering schemes, first to Mexico and later to Central America. Before a Conservative Central American army defeated him in 1857, Walker had made himself military commander and president of Nicaragua and embarked on a conscious policy of "Americanization" and "democratization" of that state's institutions. Expelled, he conspired repeatedly to return to Central America, only to die before a Honduran firing squad in 1860. Most of the details of the Walker episode were long ago recorded and published by Central and North American historians. Few works, in fact, have improved upon William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers* (New York: Macmillan, 1916). Yet new volumes on the man and his times continue to appear.

Undoubtedly one of the attractions of Walker is the variety of historical approaches or conceptual frameworks in which his filibustering forays can be placed. He is either an agent of "manifest destiny" or of "yanqui imperialism" for many. But he also is very much a part of the Liberal-Conservative struggle for control of Central America, as well as a major participant in the Anglo-American rivalry for control of an interoceanic canal route. At least one historian has found him a suitable subject for a psycho-historical approach.<sup>1</sup>

The works reviewed here reflect the continued interest in Walker during this decade, both in the United States and Central America. Perhaps significantly, several are by nonprofessional historians, although all are serious works in their own way. Into that category falls the descriptive narrative of Enrique Guier, who completed his *William Walker* only days before his death in 1970, after a distinguished career as a Costa Rican attorney and judge. Guier's account is thoroughly documented and based on published primary and secondary sources in both Spanish and English. Liberally interspersed with excerpts from the writings of contemporaries (especially from Walker's own work), Guier is more impartial than most Central American historians have been about the filibuster. He offers the most detailed description of Walker's life and exploits yet available in Spanish.

Frederic Rosengarten, Jr., a retired businessman with long experience in Central America, has reflected the continued North American romantic fascination with Walker in his colorful and lively *Freebooters Must Die*. Although undocumented except for the credits for more than 150 illustrations and maps, this popular history is based on extensive research in archives and libraries across the United States and Central America. While Rosengarten does not enter the historiographical debates referred to above, his text, sprinkled with amusing and revealing anecdotal accounts, offers an accurate and interesting overview. The lavish illustrations, mostly taken from contemporary documents or publications such as *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, and his vivid descriptions of the people involved add immeasurably to the utility of this attractive volume.

Robert May, in a more conventional scholarly work, has added significantly to the literature on Manifest Destiny with his *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, in which he describes southern expansionist interest in Middle America during the decade before the Civil War. In addition to two chapters devoted to Walker and his appeal to the slave-holding states, May describes other filibustering and expansionist moves supported by Southerners in Mexico and Cuba, concluding that the failure of the Confederacy brought an end to that sort of North American expansion in Middle America. May pays virtually no attention to the internal situation of Nicaragua, however, and while he has researched a very large volume of North American sources, he has ignored Central American sources completely.

David Folkman confronts Walker in his descriptive analysis of the conflicts and events surrounding efforts to contract an interoceanic transit route across Nicaragua in the 1850s. *Nicaragua Route* blames Walker's filibustering activities not only for termination of the transit route early in 1857, but also for engendering "such a deep hatred in Central American minds that fears of another invasion totally frustrated all attempts to revive the transit" (p. 125). Although an excellent and well-documented study of the financial and maritime aspects of the transit, Folkman plays down excessively the Anglo-American rivalry for control of the route, and overlooks entirely the internal political struggle that allowed Walker to enter Nicaragua. Finally, he seems reluctant to conclude what his own evidence makes clear: that once the railroad across

Panama was completed in 1855 the Nicaragua route was not a feasible competitor. Folkman's work, nevertheless, provides an excellent description of the transit route, its operation, and the intrigues of the men involved in its control. Useful appendices indicate the sailing dates of ships and numbers of passengers during the years 1848–68.

Probably no one has done more voluminous research on the Walker episode than the retired physician, Alejandro Bolaños Geyer, of Masaya, Nicaragua. Bolaños has gathered from archives and libraries across the United States and Central America an enormous collection of Walker documentation. The results of this work have now begun to appear in print, first through the excellent historical series published by the Fondo de Promoción Cultural of the Banco de América in Managua,<sup>2</sup> and more recently in his own publishing venture, the two books mentioned above. In the first, Bolaños skillfully and thoroughly analyzes Clinton Rollins' *Filibustering with Walker*, which originally appeared in 1909–10, serialized in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Earlier Walker biographers often cited Rollins as an important contemporary chronicle,<sup>3</sup> but Bolaños now exposes him as the invention and pseudonym of an early twentieth-century journalist, Henry Clinton Parkhurst. There was no Clinton Rollins with Walker, and Parkhurst's sensational articles were simply based on Walker's own chronicle, *The War in Nicaragua*.<sup>4</sup> Bolaños' most recent work is a translation of an authentic contemporary account by James C. Jamison.<sup>5</sup> But this handsome volume is not merely a Spanish version of Jamison, for Bolaños has painstakingly embellished the work with explanatory and bibliographical footnotes, illustrations, maps, documentary appendices, chronology, bibliography, an index, and a brief biography of Jamison.

In addition, at least one recent doctoral dissertation, by James T. Wall, "American Intervention in Nicaragua, 1848–61," (University of Tennessee, 1974), has dealt with this topic. While it tells us little that is new about the Walker episode, it is informative regarding his less well-known rival on Nicaragua's eastern shore, Henry L. Kinney. Wall based his dissertation principally on New York newspapers and State Department records, pointing to the scarcity of contemporary Nicaraguan records owing to the destruction of Nicaraguan archives. Yet the works of Bolaños, Rosengarten, Folkman and May all suggest a variety of other historical sources for nineteenth-century Nicaraguan history that should yield much more than what they have provided on the Walker invasion. While the fascination with Walker is not likely to end soon, it is time that these and other available sources are tapped to produce a much-needed social and economic history of Nicaragua. An excellent beginning and an illustration of the potential use of extant historical materials on Nicaragua is found in Alberto Lanuza's thesis for his *licenciatura* at the University of Costa Rica, "Estructuras socioeconómicas, poder y estado en Nicaragua, de 1821 a 1875."<sup>6</sup> Lanuza has compiled an impressive array of economic and social data, enabling him to make significant observations regarding production, economic activity, and social structure in Nicaragua during the mid-nineteenth century and to elaborate on the nature of the hegemony of Granada. It is only through such

studies on the internal development of Nicaragua that the long-term effects of the Walker episode and other external factors can truly be measured.

RALPH LEE WOODWARD, JR.  
*Tulane University*

NOTES

1. Albert Z. Carr. *The World and William Walker* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).
2. Bolaños collaborated in the publication by the Fondo de Promoción of the Banco de América of Managua of the following: *Diario de John Hill Wheeler, Ministro de los Estados Unidos en Nicaragua, 1854–1857* (1974); *Documentos diplomáticos de William Carey Jones, agente especial de los Estados Unidos ante Costa Rica y Nicaragua, 1857–1858* (1974); *Documentos diplomáticos de don José de Marcoleta, Ministro de Nicaragua en los Estados Unidos, 1854* (1974); *El testimonio de Scott, declaración del Capitán Joseph N. Scott, como testigo de la defensa en juicio entablado por el depositario de la compañía accesoria del tránsito contra Cornelius Vanderbilt, en 1861, en Nueva York* (1975); and *La guerra en Nicaragua según Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper y Harper's Weekly* (1976).
3. Guier, *William Walker*, cites it more than forty times, referring to Rollins as the "Bernal Díaz del Castillo de la expedición filibustera" (p. 64). Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, however, made no reference to Rollins.
4. (Mobile: S. H. Goetzel and Co., 1860).
5. *With Walker in Nicaragua, or Reminiscences of an Officer of the American Phalanx* (Columbia, Mo.: E. W. Stephens Publishing Co., 1909).
6. Serie Tesis de Grado, No. 2 (San José, Costa Rica: Programa Centroamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 1976).