

– ¡Américas Unidas! *Nelson A. Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs (1940-1946)*, edited by Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch. Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2012.

Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch are two of today's leading experts on the history and workings of the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), a federal agency established by Franklin D. Roosevelt to bolster Good Neighbour cultural and economic ties between the United States and Latin America and insure hemispheric solidarity during World War II. Their co-edited volume is an important and timely addition to discussions of the OIAA as an example of the United States' first full-scale effort at cultural diplomacy. Building their long-standing contacts with other academic specialists, the editors have succeeded in bringing together a collection of engaging, informative and well-written commentaries that analyse the agency's work in motion pictures, print and broadcast media, the arts, as well as in fields such as public health.

The editors' incisive introduction provides a historical context for the individual studies and addresses recent debates about the means and ends of public diplomacy and initiatives like the OIAA, which today are described in terms of soft power. However, the editors also call attention to the agency's oftentimes hard edge approach to cultural exchange – an exchange that, depending on the circumstances, could deliver a body blow to a na-

tion's economy. Depriving the Argentine movie industry of film stock and access to profitable Hollywood movies is one example of the economic hardball that the OIAA was willing to play to show its dissatisfaction with Argentina's neutrality during the war. As Uwe Lübken's shows in his essay on the Nazi threat in Latin America, given the 1936 non-interventionist agreement signed by all the Americas, the OIAA's 'cultural game' became an important means for the U.S. to continue to exercise its power and influence in the hemisphere.

What forms did that influence take? As Pennee Bender notes, the OIAA invested heavily in 16mm educational films to teach Latin Americans about the 'American way of life' and to instruct U.S. audiences about neighbours to the south. Similarities were touted over differences among the twenty-one republics with emphasis on the modern and progressive aspects of hemispheric life. While the 16mm project was under way, the OIAA sent goodwill ambassadors Walt Disney and Orson Welles to Latin America to meet people and make movies. Catherine L. Benamou analyses the different strategies of the two directors. While Disney made colourful cartoon features and shorts that charmed audiences with funny and endearing characters like Zé Carioca, Welles took to the streets of Rio de Janeiro to film carnival and made his way to the impoverished Northeast to recreate an epic journey on a raft by four fishermen. Disney's future 'magic kingdom' was secured because of his successful alliance with the OIAA/RKO Studios and other war-time agencies, whereas RKO cut Welles's funds for his documentary *It's All True* because of his focus on poor, dark-skinned Brazilians – an emphasis that also displeased Brazilian president-turned-dictator Getúlio Vargas, who preferred to project an image of Brazil as white and middle-class.

José Luis Ortiz Garza's essay is a compelling account of the OIAA's investments to modernize the Mexican press, and its questionable tactics to win over resistance and gain influence, including threats to cut off the nation's paper supply. Gisela Cramer examines in detail the agency's attempts to influence the Argentine airwaves in the face of resistance to certain OIAA programming that was unpopular with local audiences. She shows that, ironically, the battle for Argentine radio dominance came down to a struggle not between the Axis and Allied powers, but rather between the OIAA radio division and the BBC, which was losing ground to U.S. programming. In her essay on Brazil, Ursula Prutsch examines the extent to which the OIAA served the nationalist project or *brasildade* of Vargas, who negotiated the construction of the Volta Redondo steel mill and investments in public health in exchange for U.S. naval and air bases in the

Brazilian Northeast and access to rubber in the Amazon Basin. Several of the articles address the work of the agency's numerous regional coordination committees, whose membership was largely composed of U.S. businessmen who lived in Latin America. In his essay, Thomas M. Leonard provides important and little-known information on these committees in Central America and their use of mass media and special public relations projects to promote goodwill in the region. Catha Paquette's article comments on OIAA traveling exhibits of U.S. and Latin American art to forge better hemispheric relations; although there were differences of opinion within the agency about the desirability of showing modern urban images of Latin America over rural indigenous ones, the OIAA exhibits attracted large audiences both north and south and were helpful in demonstrating that the U.S. had interests beyond those associated with business and industry.

*¡Américas Unidas!* is an impressive work of scholarship and essential reading for specialists and students interested in U.S.-Latin American relations, World War II, the culture industry and foreign diplomacy. Although the book would have benefitted from an index, its availability in both English and Spanish-language versions (Madrid: Iberoamericana) is a boon for its many prospective readers.

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