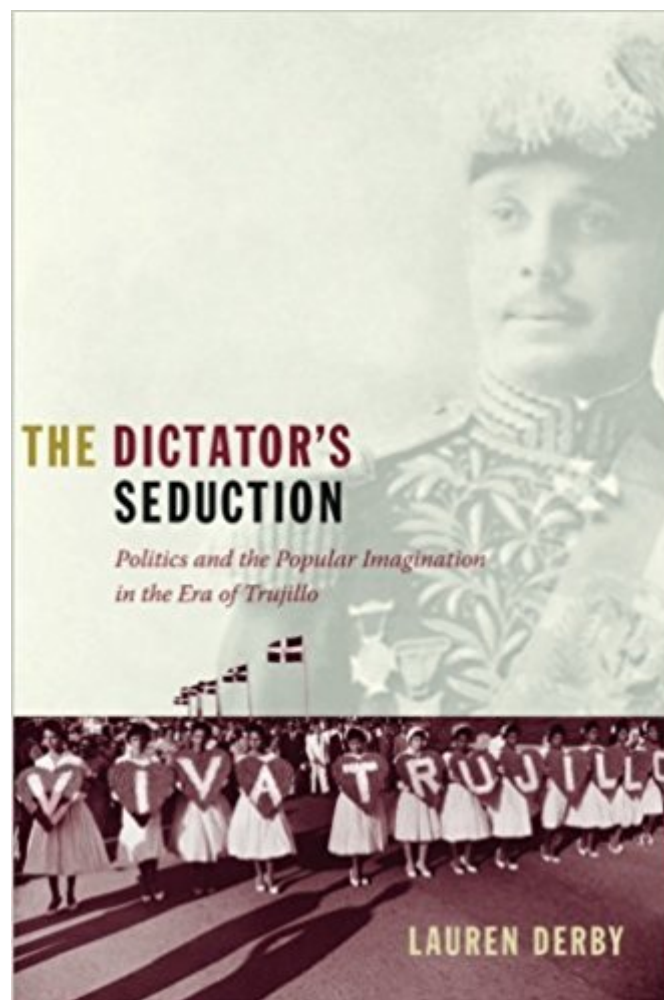




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# The Dictator's Seduction: Politics And The Popular Imagination In The Era Of Trujillo (American Encounters/Global Interactions)



## Synopsis

The dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, who ruled the Dominican Republic from 1930 until his assassination in 1961, was one of the longest and bloodiest in Latin American history. *The Dictator's Seduction* is a cultural history of the Trujillo regime as it was experienced in the capital city of Santo Domingo. Focusing on everyday forms of state domination, Lauren Derby describes how the regime infiltrated civil society by fashioning a "vernacular politics" based on popular idioms of masculinity and fantasies of race and class mobility. Derby argues that the most pernicious aspect of the dictatorship was how it appropriated quotidian practices such as gossip and gift exchange, leaving almost no place for Dominicans to hide or resist. Drawing on previously untapped documents in the Trujillo National Archives and interviews with Dominicans who recall life under the dictator, Derby emphasizes the role that public ritual played in Trujillo's exercise of power. His regime included the people in affairs of state on a massive scale as never before. Derby pays particular attention to how events and projects were received by the public as she analyzes parades and rallies, the rebuilding of Santo Domingo following a major hurricane, and the staging of a year-long celebration marking the twenty-fifth year of Trujillo's regime. She looks at representations of Trujillo, exploring how claims that he embodied the popular barrio antihero the *tigüere* (tiger) stoked a fantasy of upward mobility and how a rumor that he had a personal guardian angel suggested he was uniquely protected from his enemies. *The Dictator's Seduction* sheds new light on the cultural contrivances of autocratic power.

## Book Information

Series: American Encounters/Global Interactions

Paperback: 432 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books; 1st Edition edition (July 17, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0822344823

ISBN-13: 978-0822344827

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #527,346 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > History >

Americas > Caribbean & West Indies > Dominican Republic #286 in Books > Politics & Social

## Customer Reviews

“Beautifully written and meticulously researched, *The Dictator’s Seduction* is essential reading for scholars of repressive regimes and the machinery of violence that keeps dictators in power. Rafael Trujillo insinuated himself into his citizens’ public and private lives. Lauren Derby connects Trujillo’s backstage political machinations and private obsessions with his public image and spectacles.” —Denise Brennan, author of *What’s Love Got to Do with It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic* “Lauren Derby turns much of the conventional wisdom about Rafael Trujillo on its head, and she backs up her revision with powerful archival evidence. This fascinating book will also be regarded as a masterwork of comparative research on authoritarianism and the politics of innuendo, spectacle, and symbolism.” —Eric Paul Roorda, author of *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930–1945* “The character of dictatorship—with its paradoxical reliance on coercive excess and pandering to the demos—has fascinated generations of Latin America’s most exciting fiction writers, from Miguel Ángel Asturias and Alejo Carpentier to Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Ibarra, Alejo José Gato, and Mario Vargas Llosa. *The Dictator’s Seduction* is an historian’s counterpart to this literature. Lauren Derby develops the ideas of these writers, takes further insights from anthropologists who have worked on state magic, and produces a methodologically innovative and entirely fresh history of the Dominican Republic under Rafael Trujillo. This is one of the most exciting works in contemporary Latin American political history.” —Claudio Lomnitz, author of *Death and the Idea of Mexico* “Lauren Derby’s book changes our understanding of Rafael Trujillo’s infamous dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. . . . This is a creative, original, and ambitious book. It is full of insights and wonderful ideas. . . . Derby turns received historical interpretations upside down. She does not shy away from controversy; indeed, she seems to seek it. In my view that is what it takes to be a very good historian.” (Elizabeth Dore *American Historical Review*) “[T]his is an ambitious historical ethnography of the state by an accomplished cultural historian cum anthropologist that opens new paths to studying dictatorships and other political regimes. It is notable for the author’s extraordinary grasp of social theory

and comparative cases from the Caribbean, Latin America, and elsewhere, which she uses to make sense of this particular regime in its social and cultural context. . . . Not least important, it is engagingly written. • (Catherine C. Legrand Hispanic American Historical Review) • "The Dictator's Seduction is an outstanding and original book that is surprising in its originality and depth and displays a clear command of this period in Dominican history. Experts and beginning students of Dominican affairs will find this book a worthy read. • (Frank Moya Pons Americas Quarterly) • "Lauren Derby has written a fascinating cultural history of the brutal, three-decade-long Trujillo regime, illustrating the complex and complicit relationship between the dictator and the Dominican pueblo. • (Allen Wells The Americas) • "Derby has written a provocative book that will certainly find many readers. In addition to the insights it gives in recent Dominican history, it can also be read as a plea for a new kind of cultural studies. . . . [H]er book provides us with a very original, adventurous and highly readable analysis of a crucial period in Dominican and, we may add, Latin American history. • (Michiel Baud European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies) • "Derby's cultural history of the Era of Trujillo is a valuable contribution to the study of the regime. Her research, which is enhanced by her use of anthropological tools, should serve as a guide to historians as they reevaluate other twentieth-century Latin American dictatorships. An engaging and well-written study, The Dictator's Seduction will benefit scholars and students of Dominican history. • (Michael R. Hall Journal of Latin American Studies) • "Derby's cultural history of the Era of Trujillo is a valuable contribution to the study of the regime. Her research, which is enhanced by her use of anthropological tools, should serve as a guide to historians as they reevaluate other twentieth-century Latin American dictatorships. An engaging and well-written study, The Dictator's Seduction will benefit scholars and students of Dominican history. • (Michael R. Hall Journal of Latin American Studies) • "What is fascinating about Derby's study is her ability to pull from a variety of primary sources to support her methodology and topics addressed throughout text. Her study draws on several important and untapped archival documents from international and domestic repositories in addition to oral histories that reveal the voices of the popular masses. • (Christina Violeta Jones The Latin Americanist)

"Beautifully written and meticulously researched, "The Dictator's Seduction" is essential reading for scholars of repressive regimes and the machinery of violence that keeps dictators in power. Rafael Trujillo insinuated himself into his citizens' public and private lives. Lauren Derby connects Trujillo's

backstage political machinations and private obsessions with his public image and spectacles."--Denise Brennan, author of "What's Love Got to Do with It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic"

Absolutely superb, although a little too academic at times. Derby explores a broad range of topics from Trujillo's manipulation of public goods to the massacre of the Haitians (one of the most vicious mass murders in Latin American history) to the freewheeling sexuality of the regime. It is easy to see why this book won the highest honor from the Conference on Latin American History. She ends by exploring links between the Dominican poor, their religious beliefs (akin to voodoo) and their respect and fear of a man who sometimes dressed like Napoleon and committed barbarities without hesitation. Michael Monteon

This book can be a bit complicated to read, and is certainly very dense. However, it met my expectations and served my research paper well.

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