

**JUAN JOSÉ ARÉVALO (1904–1990)**  
***THE SHARK AND THE SARDINES (1956)***

In your hands you hold a controversial book—a book that speaks out against your State Department’s dealings with the peoples of Latin America during the twentieth century. It intends neither insult nor offense to the United States as a nation [nor to] cast blame on the North American people—who, like us, are victims of an imperialist policy of promoting business, multiplying markets, and hoarding money.

Very different was the ideology of the men who first governed your country. It was as thirteen widely varying former colonies inspired by ideals of individual freedom, collective well-being, and national sovereignty that the United States came into existence in the world. . . . But as the twentieth century was dawning, the White House adopted a different policy. To North America as a nation were transferred the know-how, sentiments, and appetites of a financial genius named [John D.] Rockefeller. Grandeur of spirit was replaced by greed. The government descended to become a simple entrepreneur for business and protector of illicit commercial profits. From then on, accounting was the science of sciences. The new instrument of persuasion was the gunboat. Now the United States had become different. It was neither a religious state nor a juridical state but rather, a mercantile state . . .

The immediate victim was Latin America. To the North American millionaires converted into government, Latin America appeared an easy prey, a “big moneymaker.” The inhabitants of this part of the world came to be looked upon as international *braceros*. The multiple-faceted exploitation was carried out with intelligence, with shrewdness, with the precision of the clockwork, with “scientific” coolness, with harshness, and with great arrogance. From our southern lands, the river of millions began to flow northward, and every year it increased. The United States became great while progress in Latin America was brought to a halt. And when anything or anyone tried to interfere with the bankers or the companies, use was made of the Marines. Panama, 1903. Nicaragua, 1909. Mexico and Haiti, 1914. Santo Domingo, 1916.

Along with the military apparatus, a new system of local “revolutions” was manipulated—financed by the White House or by Wall Street, which were now the same. This procedure continued right up to the international scandal of the assault on Guatemala in 1954 . . .

We Latin Americans, who, more than anybody else, suffered from this change in political philosophy and its consequences, could no longer be friends of the government of the United States. The friendship certainly could be reestablished. But to do so, it would be necessary for the White House to alter its opinion of us, and it would be necessary for its conduct to change. We expect a new political treatment. We do not want to continue down this slope that takes us straight to colonial status, however it may be disguised.

We Latin Americans are struggling to prevent the business mentality from being confused with, or merged into, statesmanship. The North American example has been disastrous to us and has horrified us. We know that a government intimately linked to

business and receiving favors from business loses its capacity to strive for the greatest possible happiness for the greatest number of its people. When businessmen become rulers, it is no longer possible to speak of social justice . . .

If you want to be our friends, you will have to accept us as we are. Do not attempt to remodel us after your image. . . .

These lines, my North American friends, are meant to explain why I wrote the fable of *The Shark and the Sardines*. . . . It declares that international treaties are a farce when they are pacted between a “shark” and a “sardine.”

**Taken from Juan José Arévalo, “The Shark and the Sardines,” in John Charles Chasteen and James A. Wood, eds., *Problems in Modern Latin American History: Sources and Interpretations* (Lanham: Scholarly Resources, 2004), 196–201.**