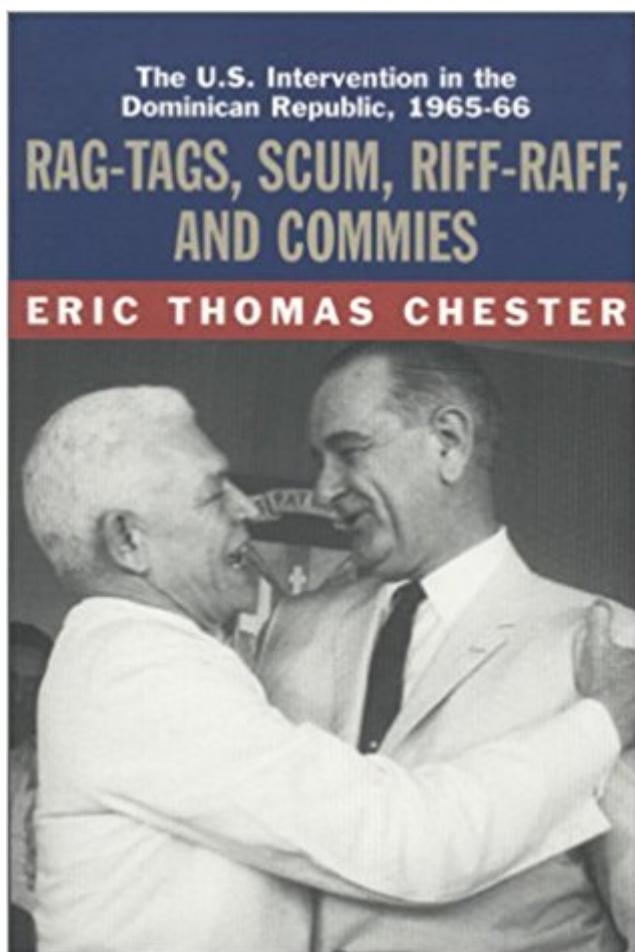


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# Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff And Commies: The U.S. Intervention In The Dominican Republic, 1965-1966



## **Synopsis**

In April 1965, a popular rebellion in the Dominican Republic toppled the remnants of the U.S. backed Trujillo dictatorship setting the stage for the master tinkerers of America's Cold War machine. In this groundbreaking study, Eric Thomas Chester carefully reconstructs the events that followed into a thriller of historical sweep, and creates a stunning portrait of how the U.S. government--from President Lyndon Johnson on down--used the Dominican Republic as a tool of its imperial arrogance. Eric Thomas Chester explains how the U.S. intervention was in the tradition of gunboat diplomacy as well as a consequence of Cold War ideology, and the Cuban Revolution. After the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Haiti in 1934 and the initiation of Roosevelt's so-called "good neighbor policy," the United States had refrained from sending its own troops to intervene in Latin America. The 1965 invasion broke this pattern and reinitiated an era of direct armed intervention in Latin America. The result was that by early May, with more than thirty thousand troops deployed, there was a greater U.S. military presence in the Dominican Republic than in South Vietnam. In this fascinating account, Chester makes extensive use of recently declassified diplomatic and intelligence documents to offer a nuanced and textured study of the workings of covert as well as diplomatic initiatives and provides a thorough analysis of U.S. Cold War foreign policy in the region.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Eric Thomas Chester was assistant professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and, later, lecturer at San Francisco State University. In the 1960s, Chester was active in the

civil rights movement and Students for a Democratic Society. He has worked as a cab driver, union organizer, and substitute teacher. He remains an activist in the trade union solidarity movement and the Socialist Party, and was the Socialist Party's vice-presidential candidate in 1996. He is the author of *Socialists and the Ballot Box*. His essays have appeared in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, *Critique*, *Z*, *Insurgent Sociologist*, *Resist*, *Public Finance*, *Changes*, and *Against the Current*.

I am Dominican and I can tell you that all the bibliographical references match the historic events and give you clear understanding of the events as they unfolded 50 years ago. Chester paints the facts without tainting them with opinions. Excellent!! Brilliant!!

Fascinating update on the 1965 US invasion. The parallels between the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian uprising and US behavior in Santo Domingo were always obvious. What emerges in this retelling, with access to new sources, is the outright betrayal of social democrat Juan Bosch by those he thought his best North American friends: not only Lyndon Johnson, but former US Ambassador Martin and liberals like Justice Abe Fortas. Bosch spent the rest of his long life in exile, soured on democracy itself. One can understand why after the holy water of "free elections" sanctioned satellite ruler Joaquin Balaguer, installed by US bayonets. Johnson's outright lying as to the real events in the DR should have been a wake-up call as Vietnam's icy grip tightened over his administration. Yet as we know, a generation's worth of lies and interventions later, the self-deluded are the most deceived.

The author portrays a very fascinating brief experiment in American support of politicians in the Third World who were mild social democrats. The Dominican exile Juan Bosch and his Social Democratic party the PRD received a great deal of CIA support from 1959-62. The U.S. had decided to withdraw its support from the barbarian dictator Rafael Trujillo who had been in power since 1930. Trujillo had risen to the leadership of the Dominican army during the very brutal U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic of 1916-24. They could not gain any sort of support whatever in the hemisphere against Fidel Castro if they continued to support Trujillo. The U.S. tried, without disrupting the power of the military or the landed oligarchy, to get rid of Trujilloism in the DR, particularly after Trujillo himself was assassinated at the end of May 1961. Bosch assumed power through a democratic election in February 1963 and spent most of his time trying not to upset the military. It was no use. Bosch granted considerable freedom for unions to organize. Thus, for

instance the U.S. owned La Romana sugar refinery, the largest in the DR, was forced to grant a 30 percent increase in wages. He also made lofty plans to redistribute to the poor the vast estates held formerly by Trujillo and his associates but only redistributed them to about 600 families. He made the mistake of telling the U.S. ambassador John B. Martin that he planned to place limits on land ownership and redistribute land held over those limits to the poor. He also wanted to place a twenty percent tax on the large landholders. Martin denounced this plan and Bosch withdrew it but it was one more sign to U.S. policy makers that Bosch was very unreliable. The Dominican military finally overthrew him in late September 1963, just eight months into his term. This coup had tacit U.S. support. The new military junta proceeded to set loose death squads on the opposition. The U.S. was quite fine with this. Now we come to April 1965 and the main focus of this book. Late in that month military officers calling themselves the constitutionalists launched a rebellion with the stated aim of restoring Bosch to power. The U.S. then invaded a few days later for the purpose of preventing this rebellion which was just about to succeed in taking over the country. Chester goes over laboriously U.S. actions over the next few months. The first stated reason for the intervention was to protect U.S. and other foreign nationals caught up in the fighting. Thomas notes that the U.S. had already been conducting an airlift of foreigners out of the country without an invasion and that this process could have handled the 2000 or so who remained to be evacuated. There is no evidence that these people were actually under any danger. After this excuse lost whatever power it had, there was the old communist card. LBJ believed at first that the rebellion was a plot directed by the Soviet Union but then came to realize along with his more liberal cabinet members that it was a true homegrown revolution. The pro-Soviet and Maoist parties were minuscule participants in the rebellion. The de facto leader of the rebellion Francisco Caamaño was an officer who had supported Bosch's overthrow but had been disgusted by the corruption of the military junta which replaced it. His father had been a general who had led Trujillo's massacre of twenty thousand Haitian migrant workers in 1937. U.S. leaders tried desperately to find evidence of his connection to communism. The U.S. tried other excuses such as that their intervention was "peacekeeping" to prevent a huge bloodbath. LBJ cynically cited the 1500 deaths in the slums of Santo Domingo as a rationale for intervening. Chester notes that indeed 1500 people were killed but by the U.S. backed Dominican military whose planes were supplied with fuel by the U.S. and who were being violently urged on by U.S. military commanders. The U.S. used this occasion to set up a cordon, an "international security zone" that effectively divided the rebels of Northern Santo Domingo from those in the inner city. They provoked several battles with the rebels and allowed passage of the Junta's troops and supplies through its cordon; all the while the Americans claimed to be

neutral between the two sides. Well, the U.S. managed after several tries to set up a provisional government largely excluding any sort of liberals or leftists. The U.S. had continually been sending negotiators to Bosch in his Puerto Rican exile to badger him into agreeing to U.S. demands. The U.S. was deeply disturbed that Bosch and his PRD would only agree to monitor communists and other forces that the U.S. defined as part of the "radical left" and only arrest them if they actually broke the law. An election was held in June 1966 between Joaquin Balaguer, a who fronted as president for Trujillo in the dictator's last years, and Bosch. Bosch supporters were subjected to massive terror in the countryside away from media scrutiny in the year before the election. The number of voters had shown an implausible thirty percent increase since the 1962 election. Balaguer insisted that the rules be changed so that women over twenty five did not have to show any identification while voting, ensuring that, older women, his base of support could could vote many times. And there was ballot stuffing on a grand scale. The activities of Norman Thomas and Sacha Vollman as portrayed in this book are certainly interesting. The author writes that in the first decade or so of Balaguer's rule, the DR became an "economic miracle" as unions were crushed, dissidents killed by the thousands and multinational corporations flocked to the slave labor in the special "enterprise zones". U.S. military and economic aid dramatically increased. Ten percent of the population would leave the country between 1966 and 1990 too seek a better life..

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