

What's the Matter With Latin America, and the Media?



Danelo Cavalcante while on the run

by Eric Rozenman

A straw in the wind may be only that. Or it may herald trouble. The news article headlined “In Latin America, Brazilian killer who eluded U.S. became cult hero,” certainly did.

This *Washington Post* human interest story featured the capture in Pennsylvania of killer Danelo Cavalcante after his September escape from prison and a 13-day manhunt. Other news outlets including *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and MSNBC picked it up.

Reporter Marina Dias noted that Cavalcante, 34, had just begun a life sentence for stabbing his former girlfriend to death, striking her nearly 40 times in front of her two young children. Then, he “staged a spectacular escape from the Chester County Prison, crab-walking up walls, scrambling through barbed wire and bolting across a roof.” It

took nearly 500 law enforcement officers, tracking dogs, helicopters, infrared technology and almost two weeks to find him.

As a result, Cavalcante, also wanted in Brazil for shooting a man to death, “transfixed Latin America, a region that admires U.S. strength while resenting its centuries of interference and exploitation.” How’s that again?

Modern Latin American, speaking Spanish and Portuguese, mostly if often nominally Roman Catholic, would not exist but for centuries of interference and exploitation from Madrid and Lisbon, and in Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century, France. Uncle Sam too left deep footprints, but he also—via the Monroe Doctrine—helped shield newly-independent Latin states from their former colonial masters. Washington’s sometimes heavy-handed diplomatic and military interventions frequently were as much about bringing stability if not progress to the region as they were intended to secure private U.S. interests, as epitomized by United Fruit Company.

No matter. Brazilian publicist Pires Braganca told *The Post* Cavalcante represented “a guy who escaped and is giving crap to people who have money and power. ... I like to see Americans in bad shape.”

A Brazilian psychoanalyst commented on popular social media videos about the killer’s disappearance, and daily media updates, including one under an *O Globo* headline: “Close to two weeks, escape of a Brazilian man embarrasses police in the U.S.”

Said Vera Iaconelli, “we are more likely to identify ourselves with the weaker side of the story, the man alone against the institution with more resources, intelligence, and weapons. But in this case, he is not just the weak side of the story, he is a Brazilian, a Latino ... He represents a region that historically has suffered in the hands of the U.S.”

Yet another Brazilian, Eduardo Carlos, “has been sharing 3D animations of Cavalcante’s escape on TikTok. ... His videos have drawn millions of views.”

Iaconelli nearly acknowledged the psychological *schadenfreude* humans enjoy at the suffering of those we tell ourselves deserve it, in this case the Norte Americanos. “What has to be clear is that, in the end, we wanted him to be captured.” But the Cavalcante saga “has all the fun of a soap opera, and we want to see all the episodes in detail”

Despite her analytical training, she did not—and neither did anyone else quoted by *The Post*—admit to the psychological projection at work. Latin Americans, perhaps especially many political leaders, have avoided introspection and deflected responsibility for their own shortcomings by blaming Uncle Sam.

Daniel Ortega, still invoking threadbare Sandinista imagery, undoes Nicaragua’s democratic progress by reimposing dictatorship. Nicholas Maduro, prolonging the disaster of Hugo Chavez’s anti-American socialism, impoverished Venezuela, causing millions to flee. Fidel Castro’s heirs to Cuban Marxism do the same while providing China a platform to spy on the United States. Russia and Iran also probe for advantage in Latin America. Apparently, not worth a TikTok video.

Meanwhile the Biden administration, rather than interfering and exploiting, in essence opens the southern U.S. border to millions, including countless unvetted single males, fleeing the region. Unvetted single males like Danelo Cavalcante, in the United States illegally, not that *The Post* or a number of other outlets mentioned that journalistic basic in first-day coverage of his capture.

It’s past time for Latin America, at least that represented in the article, to grow up and stop blaming Uncle Sam for its own

troubles while taking pleasure in the wealthy, ambivalent and often confused Big Gringo's mishaps. And time for news media stop abetting this mug's game.

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