

C. 2: Geographical and Early Historical Background of Latin American Studies: Setting the Context

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May 6, 2009

Why Geography and History Matter: Identity and Trajectory

In this chapter, we review the basic geographic, historic, and demographic context of Latin America. In later chapters, we cover the issues of migration and women's rights in greater detail. Geography is used here to mean the physical and demographic features of a particular region. In Latin America, as elsewhere, geography has had a decisive role in the region's development. If we think first of all about the term Latin America, we can make a few interesting observations. First, America was the name given to the region found by Columbus, who first mistook it for India, thus calling the natives there Indians. America itself is a term after Americo di Vespucci, an explorer of the period. Thus, America itself, like its native population, represents a new, unknown quantity from the European perspective. American remains to be defined. Latin, of course, is the mother tongue of the Roman Empire, and correctly reflects the colonization of most of the area by the Spanish and Portuguese, whose languages derive from Latin. Thus, we can make the initial observation that using the term "Latin" is an attempt to impose a sense of order, a Spanish and Portuguese order on America, an unknown territory.

Latin America's history is partly one of a struggle for identity from its inception. The struggle for identity, that is, defining what it means to be Latin American, continues today, as we shall see throughout this book. For starters, the indigenous groups in many parts of the region continue to represent separate cultural groups, to varying degrees. Thus, they have never fully become a part of a European nation. This same example brings up the question of exclusion in Latin American societies. Latin America's history is filled with the question of how to incorporate an impoverished, often culturally differentiated majority in a way that is acceptable to the minority who control most of the resources. Our third main theme is the question of external domination of the region. By definition, Latin America is set up as a branch of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires, thus external domination is in the seeds of the region's history. Moreover, Latin Americans may tap their indigenous roots, but most of the intellectual and cultural life has developed around European forms. In many ways, Latin America has sought, with varying success, to shape its institutions and identity around borrowed models, from the U.S. Constitution to the latest patterns in consumption. Yet, we should not ignore the fact that internal manifestations of the same phenomena can vary enormously over time and space. The last theme of our book is the search over Latin American history for economic and political stability and growth. Many observers become initially fascinated with Latin America because of the volatility of the region. Seemingly prosperous periods seem to follow strong stagnation, and stable democratic periods have been interrupted by dictatorship. Rather than patronize Latin Americans as less capable or ineffective, we should instead seek to understand the complex struggles involved, and admire the numerous variations of solutions attempted. It is only in our attempt to see the world from Latin American eyes that we can have the possibility to understand the region.

Geographical Highlights of Latin America

As you begin this section, take a quick look at a topographical map of North and South America. You can find one through an internet link with the University of Texas library at: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas.html>

Latin America's incredible geographic diversity is often underestimated as a factor in its development. In strong contrast to many European countries, Canada, and the U.S., geography has played a strongly inhibiting role in achieving stable and lasting growth. The mountain chains that line Mexico, create volcanoes in Nicaragua, and divide the Andean countries from the countries in the Rio de la Plata subregion have created obstacles to national consolidation. In combination with the large tracts of jungle in the Amazon and elsewhere, and desert regions in northern Chile and Mexico, governments in Latin American have often found it difficult to establish firm control of their territory. If we are talking about the guerrilla war presently occurring in Colombia, or the Zapatista uprising in Mexico, we must acknowledge that ubiquitous importance of geography to Latin American issues.

The geography of the region lends itself to internal divisions. Using the geography, we can divide the region into several different sub-regions. The first sub-region would be Mexico, with its northern border with the U.S., and heavily mountainous northern area. Southern Mexico and Central America form a second sub-region, one with a large indigenous population, and a tropical climate interspersed with some mountains. The third sub-region is the former Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, including Cuba and the Dominican Republic. These nations share a common tropical climate to Central America, but their separation has lent itself to a distinctive historical development. The fourth sub-region are the Andean countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. All of these countries have a mixture of inhospitable jungle from the Amazon, tropical coast like Central America (except Bolivia), and high central mountains that divide the country. The fifth sub-region could include Chile, a country isolated by desert to the North, and the Andes mountains to the East and South. The sixth sub-region would be the river plane of the Rio de la Plata, which shapes the countries of Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay, and large parts of Brazil, including the temperate agriculture areas of Southeastern Sao Paulo state and outlying areas. However, the rest of Brazil could be considered a seventh and final sub-region, inasmuch as it is a motley mixture of the Amazon to the Northwest, a tropical coast in the Northeast extending to Rio de Janeiro, which has somewhat similar characteristics to Central America and the Caribbean, and the sparsely populated central West highlands of the capital of Brasilia.

As we already know, Latin America's initial attraction to the Spanish and Portuguese was the incredible wealth of its mineral resources. In many ways, the region has been shaped by outside forces seeking to exploit the region for minerals and agricultural production. The exploitation of these resources has shaped the identity and historical development of these regions. Ecuador and Venezuela's economies are closely tied to petroleum. Much of Central America, the Caribbean, and tropical parts of the Andean countries and Brazil have been organized around mono-crop agricultural export

production. Bolivia, Peru and Chile, have all been dominated by the development of mining. The Rio de la Plata sub-region is the granary and cattle area of the region. Of the countries of the region, only Mexico and Brazil seem to have developed promising diversification away from simple exploitation of natural resources that create economic and, in turn, political instability.

Turning now to location, unlike the Middle East or Africa, Latin America is in close proximity of the U.S., and so, as the U.S. developed into a superpower, it came to dominate the region. Through direct annexation (in the case of Mexico); direct military action (eg Nicaragua); and indirect economic pressure, the relationship with the U.S. has been a ubiquitous feature of the region, and one which we shall explore in detail in a subsequent chapter. However, we should note for now that the degree of U.S. influence has varied with both the size of the country and its distance from the border. Thus, we find that Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean nations have experienced far more interference than the countries of South America. In many ways, large parts of the Southern Cone of South America (Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay), seem to have a distinct historical trajectory because of this difference. Students should remember that domination is a fact throughout history. US domination, while lamentable, is no different than small states next to other large powers, such as Russia (Armenia), China (Tibet), and the UK (Ireland), and so has to be understood in historical context as symptomatic of a bigger problem of international relations.

Demographic Highlights of Latin America

ethnicity

The varying ethnic mix of different areas of Latin America helps to reinforce the internal divisions created by geography. Indigenous populations vary considerably by region and due to history, so they have had considerably less influence in large parts of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean. However, except for Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia, geographically large concentrations of populations derived from imported African slaves continue to influence national identities and issues. Yet in many of the countries of the region, by sheer size and geographic concentration, economic exploitation, and cultural influence, indigenous and African groups have shaped identity and development. The problem of how to synthesize or create cooperation among the distinct cultures, European, indigenous, and African has never been really been solved. The first and strongest instinct, as reflected in the attempts at the introduction of Catholicism, was to convert or wipe out the indigenous groups into the European culture. While this process is ongoing, it seems unlikely that indigenous cultures will ever be wiped out. The second instinct was to romanticize the indigenous past, and was reflected in the literary and artistic movements called *indigenismo*, which reached their apex at the beginning of the 20th century. Proponents of this movement claimed that Latin America was a fusion of the different cultures. Brazil, for example, was and has been idealized as the great synthesis of all three cultures. In recent years, this story has received a harsh rebuke from social scientists,

native and African-derived groups that demonstrate that cultural differentiation strongly continues.

We should recognize the serious problems in identifying and counting ethnicity, especially in Latin America, where ethnic lines in many countries are severely blurred. However, it is clear that the ethnic mix varies considerably from one country in Latin America to another, and that in some countries, the ethnic mix is considerably more mixed as compared with the U.S. and Canada. Indigenous populations are most concentrated in Mexico and the central Andean countries- Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador. African-based populations are heavier in tropical areas, where slavery made economic sense, such as Brazil, Central America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Andean states of Venezuela, Colombia, and parts of Ecuador.

population growth

Latin America, like other developing areas, is or has gone through a period of rapid demographic expansion. Many demographers believe that there is an upside down U curve of rapid population growth following improvements in infant mortality, which slowly reduces over time. The idea is that as modern medicine is introduced population expands rapidly, but as urbanization and female education improves, the size of families begins to reduce. The historical statistics on population growth seem to back up this hypothesis and are reproduced in Table 2.2 below. In line with the rapid population growth, Latin America has also become the most urban region in the world. Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro are among the top 10 largest cities in the world, and the region as a whole has a very high proportion of its population in urban areas.

Table 2.2: Historical Population Growth Rates in Selected Latin American Countries

| Population Growth | | | |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 1900-10 | 1950-60 | 1970-80 |
| Argentina | 45.7% | 20.2% | 17.3% |
| Brazil | 23.5% | 35.8% | 26.5% |
| Chile | 13.1% | 25.1% | 17.4% |
| Colombia | 22.3% | 33.1% | 24.2% |
| Mexico | 10.2% | 33.2% | 33.5% |
| Peru | 6.2% | 24.8% | 32.2% |
| Venezuela | 10.3% | 48.8% | 40.8% |

Source: Rosemary Thorp, *Progress, Poverty, and Exclusion: An Economic History of Latin America in the 20th Century.*, Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, 1998.

Still, we must remember that even where a relative decline in the growth rate has taken place, such as in Brazil, the present growth rate relates to an expanded overall base of population, i.e. including the millions of new entrants from the last generation. Therefore, dramatic slowdowns in population need to take place before we can start to

reduce the incredible strain that adding so many new entrants every year adds to the national workplace and environment. While we simply do not have time to examine this issue, there is a large literature on the topic. Much of the literature points out the population explosion occurs in good part when infant mortality rates decline with the introduction of modern medicine, but birth rates do not follow suit as quickly. As urbanization and reductions in infant mortality take place, the large optimal size of a rural family also declines dramatically, but changes in the sizes of families may take much longer to follow suit. A lot of the literature points to a strongly shared conclusion that the best way to reduce population growth rates is to increase opportunities for women to work, learn, and otherwise acquire some degree of independence.

We also must remember that whereas when Europe went through a population explosion earlier in history, North America and Australia were destinations for migration that released pressures. In today's world, there is no comparable place for refugees. Still, as we shall see in Chapter 7, the flows of both intra- and extra-Latin American migration are already high and growing in volume.

Interpreting History

In this television age, students often exaggerate the importance and acuteness of current problems. Perhaps this is natural for those who reside in the Canada or the United States, where history is only some 200 years old, and therefore something one reads rather than lives. In some ways, Latin America has an even more recent history, if one considers that independence occurred in most Latin American countries only in the mid-19th century. It can be argued that a number of Latin American nations do not yet have a strong sense of nationalism or national solidarity. For example, some Argentines are more likely to consider Argentina a nation of European immigrants than one with a clear separate identity. On the other hand, colonialization of Latin America began 300 years earlier, and, unlike Canada and the U.S., Latin America contained 3 very large and well-organized indigenous civilizations, the Maya, the Aztec, and the Inca.

Therefore the question in beginning serious study of Latin American issues is the amount of time to which we should invest in exploring historical trajectories vs. focusing on the contemporary dynamics of the problem. Does history occur as a straight line trajectory, a patterned series, or something, along the lines of chaos theory, including elements of both the old and the new. This text makes the explicit claim that a number of the contemporary problems Latin America faces today have very deep roots, and that a survey of Latin American history will reveal that certain types of problems tend to come up on a regular basis in the region. While I do not claim that the recurrence is exactly the same, there is a recognizable general pattern. Understanding this pattern, therefore, will be vital to our overall task of finding ways to alleviate or solve these issues. This will be the task of the rest of this chapter, not a thorough history of Latin America. When you look in the selected bibliography for this chapter, you will find a number of historical references to get you started on building up your knowledge of Latin American history.

Pre-Colonial Latin America

The estimates for the overall population of colonial Latin America, and even those of the well-organized empires, vary greatly. However, it is generally agreed that the majority of pre-Colonial inhabitants of Latin America were parts of small tribal groups. A good number of these groups were involved in hunting and gathering. The large empires, the Maya, the Aztecs, and the Incas, were all created as agricultural and tributary systems. That is, their primary economic basis was agriculture and trade, and they were all empires created by force by a dominant tribal group. As in any large political organization, the benefits were less clear than the costs. The costs included conquest of outlying areas, human sacrifices as part of the religion, and tribute payments in the form of goods, currency, and military manpower. In this sense, colonization, or external domination, begins well before European arrival. Violence, brutality, and political domination are not exclusively European phenomena.

For a long time, the Maya have been considered the most mysterious of the 3 empires, simply because the Maya civilization collapsed before the Spanish arrived. Endless accounts of abandoned ruins have long attracted tourists and archaeologists to the Maya region. The Maya empire occupied an area in southern Mexico and Guatemala. There are a number of theories about why the civilization collapsed, including natural disasters, such as a meteor, environmental mismanagement, overpopulation for ecological resources, and/or internecine war. A more interesting observation is that the descendants of the Maya are very much alive, and that Maya-derived traditions continue in these areas.

The other interesting issue for our purposes is to ask what happened to create the precipitous collapse of the Aztecs and Incas. The legendary stories of Cortes and Montezuma and Pizarro and Atahualpa, the Spanish conquistadors of the Aztecs and Incas, respectively, are of highly crafty and resourceful, if nefarious small groups able to topple large empires. Yet there were other short-term and long-term factors at work here. First, in the short-term, a number of historians point out that both empires were already in decay and disarray at the time the conquistadors arrived. The Inca Empire was actually in the midst of a civil war. Unrest from outlying tribes who were tired of paying tribute had been mounting. Second, the superior weaponry and tactics of the Spanish, particularly the fact that they alone possessed both firearms and horses, overwhelmed native warriors. Even when natives learned to use guns and other armaments they had limited capacity to mass produce them. Third, the Spanish used the lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown to their advantage, as evinced by the famous fact that both the Aztec and Inca religions had portended white gods coming back to visit one day. In the long-term, both empires arguably were quite susceptible to internal collapse due to their highly centralized nature. As the emperor was considered to derive directly from heaven, both Cortes and Pizarro were able to throw the empires into paralysis by capturing, but not killing, the sacred leaders. Both also brilliantly gained allies from within the empire of unhappy groups. Cortes' famous march was made possible through the help of the legendary *La Malinche*, the woman from a non-Aztec tribe who served as guide and translator to him. Both needed local help not only for reinforcing their military bands, but also for the basic requisites of language, maps, understanding the empire's structure,

etc. In the end, we must still marvel at the stunningly rapid collapse of the empires which had grown over hundreds of years.

If the initial resistance was feeble, there were a number of subsequent efforts at indigenous rebellion through the coming centuries. The most famous of these was the revolts by the Tupac Amaru groups in Peru shortly after the conquest. However, the bottom line is that all of these efforts failed because the indigenous population was suffering from a number of destructive maladies. The first, as mentioned above, was the far superior technology and organization of the conquerors. The second was the incredibly destructive effects of famine and particularly disease, including smallpox, for which the natives had no immunity. Some estimates put the number at millions who died from European-borne diseases. The third was the cut off of indigenous groups from their economic means of well-being, i.e., agriculture. The best lands were seized without compensation and, for a long time, indigenous groups were placed in either forced labour or indentured servitude. We can also mention, if not measure, the overall psychological devastation that must have occurred from a total collapse of their civilization and the imposition of a new one within short order.

Despite all of this sobering analysis, we still have to ask, to what extent have the indigenous groups of Latin America really been conquered? If we consider the fact that huge numbers of indigenous peoples maintain some or large parts of their cultural way of life, we would have to say that the idea that Latin America is a European region, in these countries of concentration, is wishful thinking. On the other hand, there is no reason to buy into the notion that Latin America is a melting pot of different cultures as the U.S. claims to be. Rather, we can understand the current role of indigenous groups as one occupying a spectrum of positions. That is, indigenous individuals participate to a widely varying degree in the dominant European institutions and culture. The degree varies over space, time, and generation, and is reflected in the syncretic nature of Latin American Catholicism and cultural expression, which are rife with indigenous and African-derived undertones. It seems clear that this articulation, or differentiation of cultural backgrounds, will continue in Latin America for the indefinite future. The most hopeful, if ironic sign, is the coming of age of indigenous rights' movements in Latin America, which we discuss in chapter 7. I say ironic because indigenous groups heavily use funding, and political tactics, such as posting propaganda on the web, in good part from the U.S. and European sources. In this sense, the struggle for indigenous rights nicely echoes our previous hypothesis that the past repeats itself, but in a slightly new way. We should remember that civilizations, in the sense of interlocking social, economic, and political systems, are built up over hundreds of years, and that the process of Europeanization has not been very long by these standards.

Colonial Latin America

One inevitable issue that comes up to the intermediate student of Latin America is the comparison with the more stable and economically wealthy former colonies of Canada and the U.S. This leads one to confront the question, what if Latin America had

been conquered by the English instead of the Spanish. This issue is less naïve than meets the eye. We should point out that Spain was a very newly consolidated nation, with 1492 marking not only the arrival of Columbus but also the conquest of the last Moor stronghold in the Iberian peninsula. The re-conquest of the Iberian peninsula occurred in line, quite naturally, with a strong anti-Catholic purge, continuing from the infamous Spanish Inquisition. Many elements of this orthodox push are found in the initial years of the repression and conversion of the indigenous groups of the Americas. The Inquisition, according to a number of historians, in pushing out the Jewish and Arab population, also had retarding effects on the Spanish economy. Moreover, Spain and Portugal were among the last European nations to undergo the bourgeois democratic and Industrial Revolutions, and this backwardness was passed on to their colonies, in contrast to the U.S. and Canada. Many historians and analysts, in fact, believe ironically that the quick wealth from the gold found during the Conquest of the Americas delayed Spanish development by allowing them to purchase goods from Northern Europe, rather than producing them. Moreover, whereas in the U.S. and Canada family farms became part of the story of westward expansion, Spanish colonialism started the huge agricultural bequeaths that are at the heart of inequality in Latin America today. However, while the Spanish colonial economic system was one which discouraged local manufacturing, it was thus similar to the British system. It is interesting to note that Brazil, as a Portuguese colony freer to trade, developed at a faster pace in the early years. Still, ironically again, it was the lack of easy wealth in the form of mineral riches and differences in climate (size of farm needed for commercial agricultural production of different crops) that perhaps laid first the agricultural and then the industrial bases for the middle-class majorities of Canada, the U.S., and, in terms of agriculture, Costa Rica. Moreover, neither the Spanish nor the Portuguese colonial empires encouraged any form of democratic self-rule as occurred in the U.S. and Canada (but not other British colonies). In the end, we can point to a number of disadvantages that Latin America began with, but none that were of an inevitably permanent nature.

Latin America in the Age of Independence

Some of the most interesting issues of Latin American history come up with the early independence movements. We can pick up the thread of the previous discussion by pointing out the important differences between the U.S. and Canadian experience with independence and that of Latin America. We should first distinguish that the Latin American independence movement had quite a different purpose, dynamic, and outcome. Unrest centered in almost every place in the fact that the native born elite, the Creoles, had less privileges than the *peninsulares*, or the those who had been born in Spain. There was also some unhappiness due to the restrictions on trade, which had to go through Spain, which added a considerable mark up. Like the English and French colonies, events in Europe were the most important source of changes in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The change of the dynasty in Spain led to the Bourbon reforms, which attempted to rationalize the colonial bureaucracy, but failed to assuage Creole unhappiness.

Napoleon's conquest of Spain and Portugal was the key event actually created a de facto independence for Latin America. When Napoleon attempted to place family member Maximilian on the throne in Mexico, the result was a solidification of resistance against colonial control. In essence, the Napoleonic puppets had no legitimacy in the colonies. This led to a series of uprisings, most of which, outside of Buenos Aires, were suppressed for a time. We need to highlight three aspects of the Spanish colonies' independence movement for our purposes.

The first is Father Hidalgo's famous independence march in 1810. Hidalgo was a priest in a small town in Mexico, and had begun to voice his concern over the treatment of the natives, with some tacit support of the Creoles, who saw this as an instrument to begin a rebellion. Upon receiving no adequate response, Hidalgo began to organize an uprising of indigenous peoples. The uprising became a disjointed and untrained army through a natural but unexpected swelling. Hidalgo's poorly trained army had some initial military successes, which firmly put the Creoles back on the side of the ruling establishments. As Hidalgo came close to Mexico City, incurring increasing fire, he decided to give up the seizure. There is no clear explanation about why he decided to retreat, but this marked the turning point of the campaign. Hidalgo was defeated and the guerrillas remnants of the army were slowly wiped out. The central point of noting this story is that Hidalgo's moves foreshadow on of our themes, namely the demands of the majority to be included in the ruling apparatus and treated more fairly. Hidalgo's inclusion of natives scared his initial middle class allies, demonstrating the pattern whereby the fledgling Latin American middle class has tended to side with the more conservative elements of society, particularly in crisis.

The second interesting point to make from this period relates to the great icon of South American liberation, Simon Bolivar, who is universally hailed as the father of independence. However, Bolivar in reality is an interesting case of the sometimes well-meaning Latin American caudillo who goes awry after a time in power. Bolivar had been involved in the independence struggle for a long time, and, while in exile in the United States, had envisioned a Latin America that would follow the example of its democratic and constitutional rule. Bolivar's constitution for the new republic was thus adopted directly from that of the U.S. Unfortunately, in a pattern that would be repeated throughout Latin American history, neither Bolivar nor the now ruling Creole elite had any intention of creating a true democracy. Bolivar's rule ended up as a terrible dictatorship, in contrast to Washington in the U.S., though somehow Latin America seems to have forgotten this sad ending to the hero's life. It is interesting to further contrast Bolivar's career with that of San Martin, the independence hero from Argentina. San Martin gracefully faded from the scene once the battles were over.

Thirdly, Bolivar's other vision for Latin America was one that was united. Bolivar correctly observed that Latin America's main opportunity for insulating itself from foreign domination was internal unity. Initially, Bolivar was successful in created a Gran Colombia, including present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia. However, Bolivar's dictatorial habits and inability to create strong economic or political ties among countries that were both geographically and historically distinct led to a

break-up of the empire before long. The failure of creating any unity among Latin American states is a story that would be echoed throughout the region's history, from the breakdown of the Central American federation, to Chile's war to prevent unification of Bolivia and Peru in the late 19th century. As we will see on the chapter on Latin American economics, it is only with the MERCOSUR and the smaller economic integration organizations such as CARICOM, are there any truly promising steps being taken towards Bolivar's dream. It is this aspect of Bolivar's dreams that is being evoked at present by Hugo Chavez in his calls for LA unity against the US.

Brazil took a different trajectory as King João actually brought the Portuguese throne to the colony, and ruled from there. Eventually, his son took over as King of Brazil, thus ensuring a peaceful transition. We can argue that the strongly centralized government of Brazil is a legacy of this colonial period. Brazil's political culture of compromise around a centralized state, and working through informal political networks (*o jetinho brasileiro*) sets it apart from the rest of Latin America.

Latin America in the Time of Civil Wars

Latin America's early independence period, unlike that of the U.S., was marked by continual struggles throughout the 19th century that fell along two basic lines. The first line of struggle was marked by two camps were called the Conservatives and the second the Liberals, and the descendants of these two factions continue to be represented in Latin American political parties today. The Conservatives were closely allied to the Church, and favored a strong central government. The Liberals were inspired by the U.S., and favored a more secular state, and one that was more federal (granting a degree of regional autonomy) in nature. The second line of conflict was between that of the centralizing caudillo and the regional caudillo. In essence, as we mentioned previously, the Latin American state, both at this early stage and later in history, had no effective control over large areas of its territory. Large rural areas were controlled by feudal landowners, who often banded together to create a regional caudillo for a sense of security and to ward off the encroachment of other regional caudillos.

By the end of the century, Latin America ended up with a mix of the Liberal and Conservative platforms, in the sense, that the Church's vast property holding were eventually broken up, but a centralized government was created. In many cases, such as Diaz in Mexico and Rosas in Argentina, a regional caudillo had been able to play off enough rivals and consolidate enough power to finally break through the factionalism. This is not to say that most of Latin America was constitutional, simply that it had achieved a stability on the basis of dictatorship. The dictatorships, including Paez in Venezuela, and Francisco Solano Lopez in Paraguay, never really solved the problem of inclusion that had been brought up by the attempt to create democratic constitutions. However, a more pressing problem came up to be resolved in the meantime- that is, the age old problem of succession of a dictatorship. In the next chapter on the Mexican Revolution, we will discuss the ways in which Mexico attempted to solve the problems of

inclusion and succession, where it succeeded and where it failed, and, most importantly, why.

Demographic and Socioeconomic Changes in Latin America at the Beginning of the 20th Century

By the 1920s, Latin America was in a serious state of transformation due to a number of factors. The first was a massive wave of European immigration, which hit the major Latin American countries, including large numbers from a few countries, including Spain, Italy, and Germany. In fact, a number of Latin American governments, such as Venezuela, consciously sought out European immigrants. Part of the reason is a sensible one, namely the desire to bring in new skills and knowledge, yet there was also an underlying tone of racism, in the sense that the new immigrants might possibly lift Latin American nations upward by virtue of their fair skin. These immigrants brought with them an intellectual and political revolution of ideas. The first organizations of workers, the first Communist and Socialist parties, and the first attempts at corporatist arrangements derived from European immigration. In mineral rich countries, such as Chile, the newly unionized workers provided a backbone for leftist parties. The workers also provided the later backbone for the industrialization of the large Latin American states, including Argentina and Brazil, shifting power away from the agricultural elite, a theme we shall detail in the chapter on Latin American economic development. These unions remain a significant force in Latin America today.

As the new wave of immigration and the beginnings of a middle class took shape, “radical” parties began to extend suffrage to these new groups. The changes in institutional rules in terms of voting, which eventually also included women, altered the face of explicitly elitist rule in Latin America. Instead of moving to stable middle class democracies, however, with a few exceptions, Latin America moved into a period of dictators who relied upon both the military and the middle class businessmen and workers to stay in power. The golden age of these populist dictators, such as Peron in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil, occurred just before and during World War II. As workers became more politicized and better organized, the stage was set for the attempt to move towards a socialistic state which would afford them more direct control of national resources. We pick up this line of the story in the chapter on international relations and revolutions.

Key terms: identity, path dependency, trajectory

Key themes/discussion items: historical legacy of colonialism- in what ways is it manifested and how does it reverberate today; origins of the names of places in Latin America; la Malinche and symbolic role for Latin interpretation of history

Discussion: Why did Latin Americans propose their development as meaning the creation of a “cosmic race?” Why has this dream come up short?

Would you favor the Conservative or Liberal view about the importance of a centralized state? What should the role of the Church be?

What happened to Bolivar's dream of a united democratic LA? What caused it to fall apart and what prevents greater unity now?

Suggested Exercises

The question of identity, particularly in regard to racial questions, has been a perennial part of Latin American history. The instructor can use a variety of historical and/or contemporary sources to highlight this debate, including Barolome de las Casas' efforts to secure protections for the "Indians;" the indigenist literature that both exposes abuses and glorifies the idea of a cosmic (mixed) race coming together in Latin America; and more recent reports of continuing racial discrimination within Latin America. Indigenous groups, including the Zapatistas, have also become increasingly well-organized throughout the region, and there are a growing number of analyses and web-sites on the topic.

In terms of demographic questions, there are a number of interesting projects related to population growth that can be used to bring the student closer to those issues. A quick review of projects by development agencies can bring forth some interesting project documents for discussion.

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