

Preface- Latin American Issues for a New Generation

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Why read this primer?

If you are reading this book, you are already interested in development generally, and Latin America in particular. This book is designed as a supplemental text for those who are interested in understanding the fundamental political, economic, and social issues of Latin America at the dawn of a new century. The book is designed more as a primer, so that instructors and students can use it to supplement the contextual and issue-oriented background with further articles, texts, literature, films, and speakers of interest. I particularly encourage them to use original source material in their courses; this primer can help to structure their readings. Unlike most books which are edited volumes by different authors, this primer is designed specifically to summarize the context of ongoing issues and to introduce new issues in Latin America, such as free trade, globalization, and social movements that are generally not covered elsewhere. Also, unlike most textbooks on Latin America, I alone have written this book, weaving together several key themes so that there is a coherence and consistency to the text. In this sense, I do not shy away from adding interpretation to the thematic information. This is important for students to see how to develop their own chain of logic than can lead to solution-oriented analysis. Regardless of the instructor's point of view, the material herein will allow instructors to briefly bring their students up to speed on the contemporary issues in Latin America. I have included some brief suggestions on exercises that enable students to actively develop their own informed opinion alongside the text. The key themes of this book are *questions of identity, exclusion, external and internal interactions, and economic and political instability and weak growth* in Latin America. These symptoms have reflected to a continual inability to solve basic problems of poverty, political discontent, and antipathy towards Latin American institutions by the majority of the population.

By the end of this text, you will have a good understanding about how these themes play themselves out in Latin American political, economic, and social spheres. More importantly, you should walk away from this text with better tools of analysis. In many ways, understanding the patterns behind the news through analysis is the most valuable tool you can gain from your education. By learning how to analyze, you will be able to move beyond just expanding your knowledge base (what and how things are) to why issues play out the way they do in Latin America, and what is a feasible strategy for changing them. Analysis in this sense is a far more enlightening goal than description, judgment or stereotyping. Analysis alone can help us move towards actually solving problems in a realistic fashion rather than simply bringing attention to the symptoms. You will begin your learning process by understanding the traditional ways as well as my own view of how to analyze LA issues, and the policies that these imply. But the main idea is for you to come up with your own analysis and solutions. You will get practice at analysis through the exercises in this book and your own discussions in the classroom and

with your classmates. At the end of this preface, you will find a list of mostly free, web-based sources that you can use to follow the news in Latin America for your analyses and discussions.

Plan for the book

I will provide you a very basic analytical toolkit in Chapter 1 that we will then apply throughout the textbook. Chapter 1 also contains a *glossary* that will be helpful to you in your study of Latin America. As we become more sophisticated in our understanding of the world through education, we begin to realize that learning is a journey rather than a destination. If you approach with this attitude, you will begin to see that there is much more to Latin American, and other issues, than meets the eye. You may begin to find the analyses of the two traditional sides of politics, left and right, do not really capture the new issues at hand. This is precisely my motivation behind writing this book- to move beyond an outdated generation's view of simple dichotomies, towards a more complex and appreciative perspective of problems. Where the last generation taught principles on either side, we shall seek to teach analysis, so that each individual can reach their own educated judgment. Where the last generation sought easy answers in "revolution" or "market principles," we will not shy away from contingency, incrementalism, feasibility, the idea of trade-offs, and short- vs. long-term goals and strategies in pushing forward our progressive ideals.

Though our goals and *modus operandi* are contemporary, we shall begin our enquiry into Latin American issues by establishing a strong interpretative base of knowledge. We cover some basic geographical and historical background of Latin America in chapter 2 for readers new to the region. We see here the deepest parts of the roots of contemporary issues in Latin America.

We will find in Chapter 3 that many of the contemporary issues are much less open to quick fixes than we would hope. Using the Mexican, Cuban, and Nicaraguan Revolutions as case studies, we will examine how the themes of our book have been confronted in the past. We will find that Latin America presents a number of different, and often conflicting, identities that reinforce an internal fragmentation in society, making solution of basic public policy problems seem intractable at times. Only by understanding the roots of the problem can we move forward in a realistic fashion to understand what policies can be adopted to alleviate or solve them. By understanding the depths of the problems, we can understand the very mixed results of revolution in Latin America.

In Chapter 4, we will turn to the story of external domination of the region. Instead of presenting a diatribe against lamentable U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America, we will seek to explain it in more objective terms, using international relations theories from 2 different analytical angles. First, we will briefly look at contemporary international relations theories to see how well they describe interstate interactions in the region. We will find that theories can add a lot to *au courant* stereotypes of Latin America under constant imperialism. For example, external pressures from human rights groups have had tremendously positive benefits for the region. Second, we will look

beyond the external domination and dependency lens to see how each Latin American state actually chooses to deal with different external pressures. Third, we will update our understanding of Latin American international relations in light of the end of the Cold War, including the current concerns about narcotrafficking in general. In other words, if we want to know how to deal with the inevitable pressures from the “Colossus” of the North, the U.S., we should look at the situations where Latin America has been successful in negotiating a better outcome and reducing outside interference.

Chapter 5 follows naturally in the sense that we focus here on the internal development of Latin American political institutions and respect for human rights. In many ways, Latin America seems to have all the trappings of a Western democracy, yet the region has continually struggled with establishing stable democracies and basic respect for its citizens. We find here that the theme of inclusion and institutional development are important to understand this instability. We also return to our theme of identity to try to trace some of the roots of Latin American culture that seem to accept violence as a part of political and social life. Like the unanticipated fall of the Soviet Union, few analysts expected a wholesale return to democracy in Latin America. We survey the new democracies, revealing both their fragilities and promise. We close the chapter with a review of some ideas about what can be done to shore up human rights and democracy.

In Chapter 6, we turn to the question of why Latin America has never been able to sustain economic growth or equity. We begin with a brief review of Latin American economic history, looking towards the external and internal constraints on Latin American economic decision-makers on the one hand, and the ideas that they have pushed forward to solve them on the other. We then turn to the contemporary debates about neoliberalism, socialism, globalization, and corporate accountability. From our previous chapters, we shall see that these new problems also have old roots. We compare the leading economic perspectives on Latin America, and look at the solutions they propose for both equity and growth. More importantly, we provide a preliminary analysis of how these solutions have played out in the various Latin American countries, including Cuba and Chile, the two miracle economies of the two sides of the debate.

Chapter 7 looks beyond the well-developed contemporary analysis of Latin American issues towards old and emerging social issues, including a new set of ideas around civil society. We review the conditions and factors behind gender inequality and environmental movements. We explain here some of the basic ideas that the civil society and social movements analysts have used to explain very recent changes in Latin American societies, such as the Zapatista uprising in southern Mexico and the Landless Movement in Brazil. We look to see how well these new theoretical perspectives can help to explain the new social movements, and what the implications for public policy are. The civil society and social movements literature, in fact, has in mind a whole different way of organizing society. We will understand not only their recommendations, but also, through case studies and applications, the limitations so far of this new and exciting school of thought. We discuss Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and the turn to the left in several LA countries, and whether he represents a “new path” for LA. We end this

chapter with some discussion of how the research project on civil society can move forward in practice.

In the Appendix, I provide a brief discussion of career paths for Latin American studies majors. Keep in mind that the job market is always changing, but, when properly planned and considered, Latin American studies can provide not only a wider perspective on life and human behavior, but a useful combination of knowledge and skills for your professional future.

Selected Sources of News and Analysis on Latin America

Information Portals and Professional Associations

Canadian Association for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CALACS),

<http://www.calacs.umontreal.ca/>

LANIC, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/>

Latin American Studies Association, <http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/>

Latin American and Caribbean Economic Association, www.lacea.org

Paid News Sources

Latin American Weekly Report, see <http://www.latinnews.com/>

Latin American Database, see <http://ladb.unm.edu/>

Newspapers

Financial Times, www.ft.com

LatinFinance, www.latinfinance.com, previous issues are free

New York Times, www.nyt.com

Washington Post, www.washingtonpost.com

Academic Journals

Bulletin of Latin American Studies

European Journal of Latin American Studies

Latin American Perspectives

Latin American Politics and Society

Latin American Research Review

Third World Quarterly

Traditional Textbooks on Latin America

Peter Winn, *Americas: the Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean*, U. of California Press, 1999, 2nd ed., 2 copies F 1414 W56 1999

Michael B. Whiteford and Scott Whiteford, *Crossing Currents: Continuity and Change in Latin America*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998, GN 564 L29 C76 1998

E. Bradford Burns, *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990, 2 copies, F 1410 B8 1990

Richard S. Hillman, *Understanding Contemporary Latin America*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001, F 1408 U43 2001