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# *Chasing Che*

INTRODUCTION TO *GLOBAL LATIN AMERICA*

*Jeffrey Lesser and Matthew Gutmann*

The puzzle that inspired *Global Latin America* was, Why did we find Che Guevara's image everywhere we went in the world? Why was a Latin American revolutionary of the 1950s and 1960s so popular among so many people around the globe in 2016? Why was Che easily the most famous Latin American outside the region? Sure, images of the bearded face and beret were often devoid of deep meaning, but there was his image, and we wanted to make sense of it. Trying to understand global Che led us to the larger meanings of global Latin America.

Jeff thought Che was following him in a hipster coffeehouse in Oaxaca City, Mexico, shouting the slogan, "Café para todos." Matt realized that he was following Che when he interviewed Zhu Wenbin, a professional matchmaker who each weekend works the crowds of parents in Shanghai's People's Park looking for a mate for their daughter or son. When Matt asked Mr. Zhu why he wore Che on his cap (see figure 1.2), he laughed and said he thought it looked good on him. Who knew that Che would become a beacon of sartorial splendor among Mexican baristas and Chinese matchmakers?

Jeff and Matt together followed Che to yet another part of the world, to Palestine, where we saw many young men playing soccer in their Che T-shirts in Ramallah and elsewhere on the West Bank. Well known among rebellious youth when he was alive, Che Guevara became truly famous after he died. Ernesto (Che) Guevara was born in Argentina in 1928 and played a leading role in the 1959 Cuban Revolution. He tried to launch another revolution in the Congo in 1965, before he was killed by CIA-backed troops in La Higuera, Bolivia, in 1967. A former medical student in Argentina, Che may be known to some readers for a famous road trip immortalized in the movie *The Motorcycle Diaries*. That film stars the man who might be the most globally



FIGURE 0.1. Cartoon of Che Guevara from a coffee shop in Oaxaca, Mexico.

famous Latin American in 2016, Gael García Bernal, interviewed by the journalist Alma Guillermoprieto in the final chapter of this book.

Today, Ernesto Guevara has become Che, the Guerrilla Fighter Action Figure; Che, the Target of Capitalist Conspiracy; Che, the Hipster Hunk; and Che, the Ultimate Rebel with a Cause and Champion of the Underdog. *Global Latin America* thus took shape as we asked ourselves, What is it about Che that led him to take root anywhere, even while representing something different almost everywhere? What allowed a single image to be filled with different meanings? Chasing the vagabond rebel Che reminded us of Latin America's enormous impact on the globe in ways political, social, economic, and cultural.

Interactions between peoples, economies, and cultures from different parts of the world are nothing new. Global migrations, exchanges, and communications have been taking place since humans emerged from Africa



FIGURE 0.2. Palestinians wearing Che Guevara T-shirts.

Credit: Picture taken by Justin McIntosh, August 2004. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palestinians\\_wearing\\_Che\\_Guevara\\_tshirts.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palestinians_wearing_Che_Guevara_tshirts.jpg)

millennia ago. As the Mexican anthropologist Lourdes Arizpe has noted, “We humans are the most wandering species on earth.” In the twenty-first century, Latin America is a central player in every kind of global interaction and all manner of tensions between global and local economies, populations, and politics.

### *CONQUEST, COLONIALISM, AND CHRISTIANITY*

We are often more familiar with the impact of the world *on* Latin America than with the impact of Latin America on the world. The three C’s—Conquest, Colonialism, and Christianity—provide a tortured, if better-known story, about how some parts of the world have exercised control over other parts. When Columbus “discovered” the New World in the late 1400s and the Spanish and Portuguese Conquest of the Americas began, indigenous peoples all over the continent began living under colonial rule. They had to contend with strange languages, religions, and diseases.



Demographers estimate that, depending on the region, within decades of Columbus's arrival, as many as 90 percent of the indigenous peoples died as a result of violence and smallpox and other diseases. Millions of inhabitants living on the vast lands that later came to be called *Latin America* ceased to exist (or were never born), and with their demise the memories of their histories and cultures often disappeared. The Christianization of the Americas resulted in the often-forced conversion of most indigenous peoples and the millions of Africans brought to the region as slaves. Newly imposed brutal working conditions transformed the lives of the conquered and enslaved subjects. This was the situation for hundreds of years, from the early 1500s until the wave of independence movements that began in Haiti in 1803 and picked up steam across the continent in the next decades. Yet even independence did not end the three C's—as new powers, from Asia, the Middle East, and North America, have continued to seek to dominate the region.

Latin Americans have always been intertwined in wholly uneven global relationships that have encompassed every aspect of their lives. As teachers about Latin America, Matt and Jeff know a great deal about the influence of Europe and the United States on Latin America, and in our classes we often focus on the ambition of outsiders to exploit what the Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano famously called “the open veins of Latin America.” Gold, bananas, oil, labor, and more gold have filled the coffers of many a foreign company at the expense of the peoples residing between what is today the U.S. Southwest and Patagonia north of Antarctica.

Although the significance of Latin America for the rest of the world is not new or sudden, it is ever more apparent. The impact that Latin America has had in the other direction, even though unmistakable, has never been as familiar a narrative. This volume, like the others in the *GLOBAL SQUARE* series, seeks to remind us that regions are not just victims but also global players.

Latin America in 2016 is home to emerging global powers. In 2016, even despite massive downturns economically, Brazil had the seventh largest economy in the world and Mexico was poised to break into the top ten. Latin America is tightly bound to regions from Asia to Africa, from the Middle East to Europe, through commerce and trade, migration, and the arts. In political and economic terms, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico are world leaders, part of the Group of 20 (G20) countries that have greatly expanded membership beyond the old geopolitical leadership of Europe, Japan, and the United States.

In Realpolitik, Latin American leaders from Argentina's Carlos Menem to Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to Venezuela's Hugo Chávez have

proposed that they are uniquely able to help to resolve global problems, from conflicts in the Middle East to energy to climate change to participatory democracy. Heavy manufacturing in Latin America is reshaping global auto, weapons, and airplane industries. Environmental measures in the enormous Amazon region, positive and negative, are central to global discussions of climate change. Truth commissions formed to document the abuses of past dictatorships in Latin America have become vital reference points for similar efforts from South Africa to Rwanda to Cambodia.

Power has also moved in other, new directions. China has begun to play a larger role economically and financially in Latin America and the United States a reduced one. Trade between China and Latin America went from around \$12 billion in 2000 to \$289 billion in 2013. Trade between the United States and Latin America, in comparison, went from \$380 billion in 2000 to \$850 billion in 2014. This is important in its own right, and it is also a good indication of the sway of Latin America in China today, as shown in chapters in this book on the arts (Maisonave) and the environment (Neill and Macedo).

Today Latin America is a model, in ways good and bad, in public health. For example, when Brazil's government turned the tables on the global pharmaceutical industry and refused to pay what the companies wanted to charge for HIV antiretroviral therapies, the rest of the world not only took note, but many followed suit. Brazil's steps toward the prevention and treatment of sickle cell anemia are creating new global prototypes. Medicines first developed by indigenous healers from the Andes and Mesoamerica, once mocked as backward and unscientific, are now intensively studied by pharmaceutical corporations.

*Global Latin America* is for students, business leaders, policy makers, and global travelers interested in better understanding Latin America's deep entanglements with and influence on our interdependent world. Chapters by academics, politicians, activists, journalists, scientists, and artists shine light on Latin American history, society, and culture. For those who want to appreciate the diversity and global relevance of Latin America in the twenty-first century, this volume collects some of the top scholarship and social analysis about global Latin America today and historically.

#### THE WORLD IS NOT FLAT

The authors and editors of *Global Latin America* do not subscribe to a self-serving view popular in the United States that argues that factors like

information technologies and rapid transportation have for the first time in the history of humanity “flattened” the global landscape. We do not see “impact” as the end of unequal international relationships or as the creation of new level playing fields on which young and globalized entrepreneurs compete simply on some objective notion of merit.

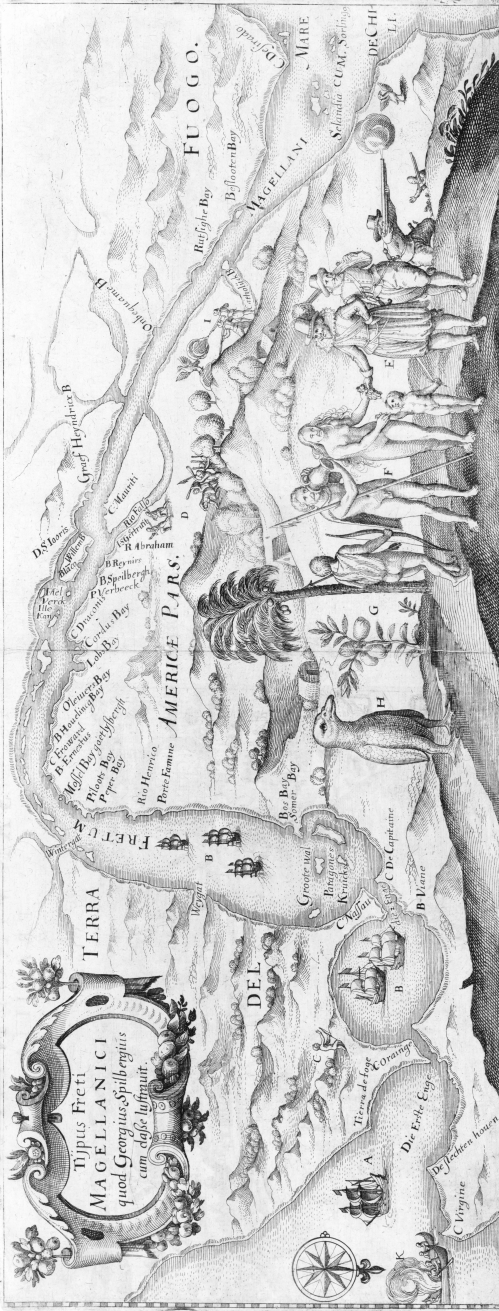
The naive “the world is flat and a free marketplace” position, most famously argued by the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, is seductive for many reasons. Based on the expansion of the gross numbers of the middle class in places like India, Korea, Mexico, and Brazil, many want to believe that we are headed away from rampant global inequalities and toward a future that is more prosperous, equitable, and just. Yet the Flat Worlders are too sanguine about persistent and growing poverty and disparities of all kinds. Widening fault lines in the twenty-first century represent more jagged social lives and an ever fiercer scramble for resources, including basic natural resources like water, that many in Europe and the United States might have sworn were globally abundant.

Flat Worlders might point to our story of Che as evidence of a new world order, of how one image, often missing its historical meaning, is replicated in so many places and in so many ways. See? Since all sorts of people endorse Che, we must all be the same. It is a nice pie-in-the-sky story of one big happy global middle class, with the Internet and laptops and cell phones linking humanity around the globe. But simplistic truisms about upwardly mobile global villages and heartfelt sentiments that wish gaping inequalities were no longer characteristic of the world do not stand up to the magnitude and messiness of actual global connections. Che’s image, then, is not evidence of a generalized, flattened world but of a more specific world that we are calling Global Latin America.

The chapters in *Global Latin America* present a nuanced and grounded assessment by showing that people often understand the globalized world in local ways. Indeed, they often engage in global activity without perceiving it as such because they have taken something as simple as a smart phone and changed its significance, for example, from a communications tool to a bank. Each chapter is packed with concrete examples showing widening fissures and the emerging social struggles that challenge them.

*Global Latin America* listens to the voices of citizens on the ground and those who have governed, people who are country specialists and regional generalists, anthropologists, biologists, poets, and other critically engaged observers of emerging global trends. Readers will see that even with a seem-

II  
DELINEATIO FRETI  
MAGELLANICI



Exhibet hæc figura delineationem freti Magellanici, quem admodum à Georgio Spilbergen in hac navigatione exploratum fuit. Litera A. est vna nauium quam peridi Nauæ abduxerunt. B. Sunt reliquæ naues quinque secundo cursum ingredientes. C. Est homo in litore aliquoties appa- tent. D. Barbari clausi suis Hollandos trucidantes. E. Barbari in litore Hol- landos peregriua lingua alloquentes. F. Vinum Hispanum Barbaris exhibi- tum, quod placere sibi figmis ostenderunt. G. Rubræ bacce boni laporis, que abundanter eo in loco proueniunt. H. Est Pinguinis, quorum ibi ingens multitudo. I. Hollandi (Glopius) suis aues petentes.

K. Naucularum figura & modus.

FIGURE 0.3. "Delineatio freti Magellanici." Plan of the Strait of Magellan with south at the top. Includes European men with muskets or guns greeting native Americans, scenes of hunting and warfare, spears, bow and arrow, drinking vessel, birds, dwellings, ships, fruit tree, compass rose, and some topographical details. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

ingly enlarged middle class, Latin America has been far from flattened. Indeed, the region has as many peaks as it did historically, as the divide between haves and have-nots continues to expand. Most of all, *Global Latin America* shows a new appreciation for the contention that Latin Americans and Latin American nations have as much impact on the rest of the world as the other way around, and that Latin America's global connections are creating local futures everywhere on earth.

#### WHAT'S INSIDE GLOBAL LATIN AMERICA?

The first part of the book, "The Latin American Past in the Global Present," begins with an original interview with Chilean former president Ricardo Lagos as he contemplates the relation between past and present in Latin America. As many readers will know, a 1973 military coup d'état in Chile led by Augusto Pinochet was backed by the U.S. government of Richard Nixon. On 11 September of that year, the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende was overthrown and the country plunged into years of brutal dictatorship. More than any other individual, Ricardo Lagos represented the opposition to the Pinochet dictatorship, never more than when on national television in 1988 he pointed his finger at the television camera and denounced the "tortures, murders, and human rights violations" of the dictatorship. (A photograph of this famous finger is reproduced in chapter 1.)

In his interview with Matthew Gutmann, President Lagos considers the history of colonialism in Latin America, the region's contemporary relationships with Africa, and the export of global Latin American democracy and social change not only to other parts of the Global South but also to Europe and the United States. He argues that these factors were essential in creating a vibrant Latin America whose voice in the world is unmistakable and powerful. Like other chapters in the volume, the interview with President Lagos highlights a contemporary appreciation for multiculturalism as a positive social, economic, and cultural characteristic that allows many Latin Americans to see themselves as especially able to integrate with diverse populations across the globe. The president's idea about heterogeneity, what the Mexican philosopher and politician José Vasconcelos called "the cosmic race" in 1925, is an example of the positive interpretation of racial and ethnic mixing. Yet mixing (both real and imagined) has been anything but smooth or



problem-free. Even so, it is often used as a counterexample of the cultural and social uniformity and conformity preached and practiced elsewhere.

Perhaps no Latin American in 2016 stands out more than the Argentine pope Francis, whom the anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes met in 2015. A chapter written with the historian of religion Jennifer Scheper Hughes draws out the impact of the first Latin American (and Global South) pope, including the past and future role of women in the Catholic Church. At the same time, they delve into the impact of Argentina's Dirty War on Pope Francis and by direct extension on the world in the twenty-first century.

In "Fidel Castro: The First Superdelegate," the historian Greg Grandin updates a provocative piece he wrote originally for TomDispatch.com, in which the outsized impact of an island not too far from Miami is shown to be as long-lived as it is irksome to those presiding in the halls of Washington, DC. For more than fifty years, Cuba has figured more prominently in U.S. politics than almost any other nation, and Fidel Castro excelled at influencing (even if often negatively) more U.S. policy decisions than almost any other leader in the world.

Interspersed throughout the volume are poems by the scholar-poet Renato Rosaldo, whose work reminds us that this particular art form has had a global impact, brilliantly exemplified by the Chilean poet-diplomats Pablo Neruda (1904–73) and Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) and the Mexican poet-diplomat Octavio Paz (1914–89). Remarkable for their engagement in politics as well as letters (how many diplomats from the United States are famous for their poetry?), each of the three also won the Nobel Prize in Literature. (See Ilan Stavans's chapter for more on Latin American literature, politics, and the world stage.) In his first poem, "Cruces de fronteras / Border Crossings," for example, Rosaldo traces how Mexicans cross borders that earlier in history crossed them, drawing on popular imagery and personal accounts, both comic and tragic. In later poems in this volume, he captures and unleashes the illegal, the profane, and the confidential secrets of global Latin America.

The sociologists Gabriel Hetland and Peter Evans next describe how democratic practices developed first in Brazil are today implemented in cities far outside Latin America. This is noteworthy in its own right, especially given the habit of politicians and policy wonks in Western Europe and North America to preach about democracy even when they do not practice it. Hetland and Evans overturn this claim and demonstrate why the world is learning from Latin America when it comes to citizen rights and participation in governance and political decision making.

We come back to Che Guevara at the end of this part with an excerpt from the original Japanese biography of Che that uses manga, a transnational graphic style that emerged from Japan. Kiyoshi Konno and Chie Shimano illustrate how images ebb and flow around a Latin American guerrilla fighter whose biography is far less recognizable than his face and grin.

### *Tongues and Feet*

Part 2, “Tongues and Feet,” begins with an exploration of languages by the sociolinguists Paja Faudree and Daniel Suslak. Most readers will know that when the Portuguese and Spanish invaded and occupied what became Latin America, they brought and imposed their own languages. This is why Portuguese is today the language of Brazil and Spanish is used in most of the other nineteen countries of the region. While it might appear that language use has been a one-way process for centuries, Faudree and Suslak show the impact of *Brazilian* Portuguese and *Latin American* Spanish on Portugal, Spain, and the rest of the world and how indigenous languages from Latin America have also influenced and shaped other languages across the globe.

In the first of two chapters on the reception of Latin American music in other parts of the world, the anthropologist Michelle Bigenho reveals, through “love, protest, dance, and remix,” why exoticism and nostalgia are part of the appeal of Latin American music for world audiences. So, too, the politics of contemporary social movements and more long ago sounds conjuring up days of slavery and colonialism.

Undoubtedly the most global of sports, *fútbol/futebol*/soccer was, as described in the chapter by the historian Brenda Elsey, “created in England but perfected in South America.” The mutual influence of one part of the world on another, in terms of player rosters and style of play, has been circuitous: after a century of international matches it is often hard to trace who started what change in the game and where. What Elsey does show is how Latin America has transformed the racial, gendered, and class character of global football.

Of all the things that those in the United States might take for granted, food from “South of the Border” surely ranks high. The literary critic Sarah Portnoy and the historian Jeffrey Pilcher take us into the world of the raw and the cooked, sensory material that considers how Mexico, Peru, and Korea come together in the food truck movement of Los Angeles and what



this means for global Latin America. Tacos, for example, have become a staple in the United States, Italy, Brazil, and China, and Latin American cuisine has only just begun to leave its mark on taste worldwide.

### *Science, Technology, and Health*

In part 3, the world is turned on its head as the environmental biologists Christopher Neill and Marcia Macedo discuss how natural resources like soybeans have become a de facto twenty-first-century legal currency. And that currency in a sense is none other than water: what Brazil has in abundance and China so badly lacks has made soybeans a transpacific trade staple. And, of course, the amount of Brazilian soybeans sold to others globally depends on how much water there is, which is dependent on how many Amazonian forests remain in the future.

If anyone thinks that the effect of Latin America on the rest of the world refers primarily to its impact on the United States and Europe, the sociologists Wendy Wolford and Ryan Nehring give us an important example of development projects shared between Latin America and Mozambique. Using insights gleaned from their study of South-South foreign assistance projects, we learn of Latin American experts and the transfer of technical knowledge to this Portuguese-speaking African country.

Few readers will fail to recognize Latin America as the origin of much of the world's illegal drug trade, from cocaine to cannabis. But drugs' Latin American origins need to be questioned. The historian Paul Gootenberg provides an insider's glimpse into how street drugs and illicit economic ties around the globe have created a demand that Latin America has fulfilled over the past several decades. As drug reforms spread globally, we would do well to learn more about this part of the history of global Latin America.

### *Communities*

Part 4 showcases Latin American models of belonging that are not exclusively national or ethnically based. For example, the children of indigenous Central American migrants to the United States often learn Spanish as a local language in places like Atlanta and Houston. The low cost of communications has meant that families once permanently separated by migration now have daily spoken and visual connections "back home," creating new communities in which actions are expressed without direct face-to-face experience. Who

would have thought in 1975 that migrants from Central America would Skype back to their villages of birth to participate in local decisions about road repairs and who should be elected mayor? At the same time, new configurations of everything from sexuality to religion move back and forth across space.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchú addresses what indigenous peoples in the Americas have contributed to knowledge and well-being in the world overall. Far from accepting the label of victim, Menchú shows in her award speech how social movements among native peoples in Latin America have responded to centuries of colonialism, racism, and impoverishment with determined social movements demanding rights and community control. She also spells out clearly the enormous contributions of indigenous peoples to human understanding, from the zero value in mathematics to the creation of great works of engineering and art.

In the following two chapters, anthropologists look at two distinct yet interrelated populations and social relationships. Denise Brennan explores how people around the world have looked to Latin American sex worker organizing as a model for labor efforts in their own countries. From links to nongovernmental social support organizations to public health institutions across the continent, sex workers in Latin America have demonstrated how through knowledge and activism their rights and well-being can be won and expanded.

Next, Florence Babb examines how tourists look to Latin America for their personal edification and amusement, including but of course not limited to sex workers. For many readers of *Global Latin America*, tourism may be the means of connecting with the region, and it is often as tourists that they see the influence of their homelands on Latin America rather than vice versa. One way Babb reverses our orientation is to look closely at preconceptions about Latin America and how these may reflect as much about where people come from as where they visit.

In a whirlwind tour of his own, one of Brazil's leading intellectuals, Ruben Oliven, provides a keen sense of the multiple meanings of global and local communities from a Latin America–outward perspective. Race, economics, religion, and inequalities of all kinds provide the backdrop for this chapter that situates Brazil, and by extension all of Latin America, in a dynamic global context, full of aspirations and challenges. Oliven helps us to understand why it is worth paying attention to Latin America as the tenor and scope of protest and demands for inclusion are shared globally.

## *Art Moves the World*

The impact of Latin America on global art can be seen in everything from music to graffiti to photography. This volume, however, focuses on familiar and less expected arenas. The final part of *Global Latin America* shows how far the image of Latin American culture has changed from Carmen Miranda–like women dancing with tropical fruit on their heads. Although we still see stereotyped narco drug lords on television and in the movies, where Latin American culture begins and ends is no longer nearly so clear as it once might have been.

The literary scholar Ilan Stavans analyzes Latin American literature’s “boom heard round the world” by detailing the multiple personal and aesthetic connections between legendary Latin American authors—Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes—in Europe and in virtually every corner of the literary world. Yet Stavans worries that the very worldliness of Latin American authors might be smoothing too many of Latin America’s wrinkles out of the region’s fiction, something he calls “the drawback of internationalization.”

Without a doubt, more people in more places around the world have learned what they know about Latin America from *telenovelas*, the region’s hyperpopular and influential “soap operas.” *Telenovelas* are not exactly the same as the soaps in the United States—they last for months and not decades; they are shown at night, not during the day, and as a consequence, they are watched by men as well as women. Originally from Ecuador, the social scientist Hugo Benavides investigates the huge global market in *telenovelas* in locales as far flung as Africa and the Middle East. Why they are so well liked similarly reveals as much about global viewers as about Latin America.

Next, the Brazilian journalist Fabiano Maisonave explores the bossa nova singer Lisa Ono’s popularity in China. Singing the archetypal Brazilian music from a bygone era, Ono is in fact better known in East Asia than she is in her native Brazil. And that is the point: Latin American music goes through a global metamorphosis so that Chinese audiences come to believe a Brazilian musician is from Japan, singing in a foreign language (in this case Portuguese) that could be English as well as anything else. And the musical voyage lingers on.

We close with an original interview by the renowned Mexican journalist Alma Guillermoprieto with the Mexican movie star Gael García Bernal. From *Amores Perros* to *Y tu mamá también* and *The Motorcycle Diaries* to the

Jon Stewart–directed *Rosewater*, García Bernal has changed how people around the world see Latin America, and this chapter changes how we understand the influence of cinematic global Latin America. Idealistic, rebellious, genial, and always entertaining, this Mexican actor is, like Latin America, rooted in but defined by far more than nationality.

The central premise of *Global Latin America* then is quite simple: Those in the rest of the world have much to learn from Latin America. Readers from the United States and Europe may find that the authors of this volume present much more sophisticated answers to pressing challenges than those that come from Washington, Paris, London, and Berlin. As editors, we hope that these chapters will lead you to share our appreciation of how differently things can and should look when viewed from Latin America out toward the rest of the globe.

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# Inventing Latin America

## The Paradox of North America

In the following poem, “To Roosevelt,” Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (1867–1916) strikes out at the paragon of imperialism in the early twentieth century, President Theodore Roosevelt. Darío catches the ambivalence of Latin Americans toward North America, at once admiring of the march of progress and inventiveness and shuddering at the sacrifice of soul and religion. Read Darío for the sense he transmits, and for how Latin American intellectuals felt toward the United States in the early twentieth century. In Darío’s poetry we see the invention of the new Latin America, a people set apart from North America by culture, religion, and history.

### TO ROOSEVELT

The voice that would reach you, Hunter, must speak  
in Biblical tones, or in the poetry of Walt Whitman.  
You are primitive and modern, simple and complex;  
you are one part George Washington and one part Nimrod.  
You are the United States,  
future invader of our naive America  
with its Indian blood, an America  
that still prays to Christ and still speaks Spanish.

You are strong, proud model of your race;  
you are cultured and able; you oppose Tolstoy.  
You are an Alexander-Nebuchadnezzar,  
breaking horses and murdering tigers.  
(You are a Professor of Energy,  
as current lunatics say.)

You think that life is a fire,  
that progress is an irruption,  
that the future is wherever  
your bullet strikes.  
No.

The United States is grand and powerful.  
Whenever it trembles, a profound shudder  
runs down the enormous backbone of the Andes.

If it shouts, the sound is like the roar of a lion.  
And Hugo said to Grant: "The stars are yours."  
(The dawning sun of the Argentine barely shines;  
the star of Chile is rising.) A wealthy country,  
joining the cult of Mammon to the cult of Hercules;  
while Liberty, lighting the path  
to easy conquest, raises her torch in New York.

But our own America, which has had poets  
since the ancient times of Nezahualcóyotl;  
which preserved the footprint of great Bacchus,  
and learned the Panic alphabet once,  
and consulted the stars; which also knew Atlantic  
(whose name comes ringing down to us in Plato)  
and has lived, since the earliest moments of its life,  
in light, in fire, in fragrance, and in love—  
the America of Moctezuma and Atahualpa,  
the aromatic America of Columbus,  
Catholic America, Spanish America,  
the America where noble Cuauhtémoc said:  
"I am not in a bed of roses"—our America,  
trembling with hurricanes, trembling with Love:  
O men with Saxon eyes and barbarous souls,  
our America lives. And dreams. And loves.  
And it is the daughter of the Sun. Be careful.  
Long live Spanish America!  
A thousand cubs of the Spanish lion are roaming free.  
Roosevelt, you must become, by God's own will,  
the deadly Rifleman and the dreadful Hunter  
before you can clutch us in your iron claws.

And though you have everything, you are lacking one thing:  
God!<sup>1</sup>

The Wars of Independence released new energies and promoted new ways of thinking, as Latin Americans examined themselves to determine who they were and where they were going as a distinct civilization. The first important novel in Latin American literature was produced during the wars. Written by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, *The Mangy Parrot* (El periquillo sarniento) appeared in 1816 in Mexico, condemning many social wrongs of the day through the picaresque adventures of its hero. Lizardi's life



transcended the epoch, because he began his writing career during the vice-royalty and lived to 1827. Not a revolutionary, he nonetheless was an ardent reformer and satirist. Lizardi condemned the excessive powers of the church, defended freedom of the press, and was often in trouble with the Spanish authorities.

Others were to search more deeply for the Latin American heritage soon after the wars were over. If Spanish things—the monarchy, the Inquisition, despotism—were to be rejected, then an alternative culture had to be discovered or invented. This became one of the principal goals of Latin American intellectuals for the rest of the century. The influences shaping the search for identity were many. Latin America is a large area with many different cultures, from the slaves of Bahía in tropical Brazil to the indigenous people of highland Mexico to the privileged Creole elites of Santiago in temperate Chile. The colonial hispanic legacy, the intellectual influences coming out of nineteenth-century Europe, and the growing power and materialism of the U.S. all shaped the search for identity as well. The impermanence and political instability made cultural inventiveness and creativity difficult in the early to mid-nineteenth century, leading Latin Americans to look abroad for intellectual and cultural values, especially to Europe. This tendency often suffocated the earnest attempts of Latin Americans to explore and define their own native culture and to establish their own national identities. But, by midcentury, political order and economic progress brought with it a flowering of new voices seeking to define the nations of the Americas. As they engaged in this nation-building project, these voices drew from the past and from the region's diversity while looking to the future to identify what was unique about Latin America in an increasingly modern world.

## MENTAL EMANCIPATION

We shall be Argentines when we feel in ourselves the attachment to the soil that the Indian had, making it the source of his art and myths; when we feel the urge to create civilization which the Spanish founders of cities possessed; when we feel the plasticity of the gaucho on the limitless pampas and his inspiration to rise above his environment and to tell of it in song; when we have the capacity for disciplined work, like the gringo; when we are neither Indians, nor gauchos, nor Spaniards, nor gringos, but Argentines.<sup>2</sup>

So wrote Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the great Argentine man of letters, educator, and political leader of his generation, as he sought to give form to the new nation of Argentina. Contemporaries across Latin America echoed Sarmiento's concerns as they faced the task of creating and defining a national consciousness and a national culture—a national identity—to accompany the political emancipation that the wars themselves achieved.

In moving toward this goal, many Latin Americans repudiated their Hispanic heritage with scorn. Catholicism and feudalism were vilified as twin evils inherited from Spain. One of the champions of this anti-Hispanic view created a tremendous stir in 1844 when he delivered an address before the University of Chile entitled "Investigations of the Social Influence of the Conquest and the Colonial System of the Spanish in Chile." José Victorino Lastarria minced few words in this famous polemic: "'The Spaniards conquered America, soaking its soil in blood, not to colonize it, but rather to take possession of the precious metals that it produced so abundantly.' America was just a booty of war. . . . When Spain attempted to colonize it, it transplanted into Hispanic America 'all the vices of her absurd system of government, vices that multiplied as a result of causes that had their origin in the system itself.'"<sup>3</sup>

Lastarria's thinking was echoed by fellow Hispanophobes, such as Sarmiento himself in Argentina and José María Luis Mora in Mexico. Mora, a priest and historian, hotly criticized the clergy and the military of Mexico for prolonging the crisis that followed Mexico's independence, labeling both institutions as hopelessly archaic. Furthermore, he faulted the tendency to sacrifice the national interests to those of corporations whose structure was inherited from Spain and the colonial world. A corporate view and structure of the world simply meant that individuals were not as important as the corporate entity—the church, the military, the merchant guild, or the Indian village—to which they belonged or with which they identified. Mora argued that this corporatist legacy of the colonial era continued to block the modern changes that would free Mexico from its backward past and allow it to become a truly modern, liberal, independent nation.

Sarmiento raged with venom, and not a little humor, against the Spanish legacy. Citing the physiological fact that little-used organs tend to wither and grow weak, Sarmiento said that the Spanish brain had not advanced since the fourteenth century, when the Inquisition began. He added that the nineteenth-century Latin Americans' ability to deal with the concepts of liberty and freedom was almost dead from lack of practice.

Other potshots were leveled at all things Hispanic across the Americas. In Mexico, poets, composers, and writers creatively condemned the inheritance of Spain, which they typified as being made up of equal parts avarice, inhumanity, and bigotry. The Mexican composer José Mariano Elízaga dropped the title "don" from his name because it was an ancient Spanish practice that denoted a gentleman. Others argued successfully to change the spelling of "Méjico" to "México," figuring that the letter *x* was more truly Mexican and Indian than was the Spanish *j*.

Not everyone was as quick to condemn everything Spanish. In the search to forge the new Latin American identity and culture, one simply could not ignore three hundred years of history. The blood, language, and faith of Spain coursed through Latin America, a fact that the intellectual Andrés Bello recognized

### An Indictment of Spain and Hispanicism

Javier Prado y Ugarteche (1871–1921), a Peruvian educator and politician, condemned Spain for much of Peru's backwardness. In the following passage, Alejandro O. Deustua reviewed the 1941 edition of Prado's book, which originally appeared under the title *Estado social del Perú durante la dominación española: Estudio histórico-sociológico* (Lima, 1894):

Politically, it [the colonial period] bequeathed to us the vices of totalitarianism, the enemy of all social liberty. . . . We have received traditions of incorrigible bureaucratic abuses in public administration; bribery nourished by avarice and impunity that extended even to the highest officials; and, as Prado puts it, "a sick obsession with wealth, no matter how acquired, that became an all-pervasive and incurable disease. . . ."

What has been our inheritance in the economic order? As Prado explains it, "The immediate exploitation of our sources of wealth without long-term planning and with only immediate results in mind." In short, we have inherited a most pernicious system that in Peru has produced abominable and destructive habits persisting even to the present day because of the immutable law of psychological inheritance.

The colonial ecclesiastical heritage has left in our church officials an unbridled ambition to govern, even in the temporal order; an intransigent fanaticism, developed to the most refined point of cruelty by the Holy Office of the Inquisition . . . clergy, whose individual morals are weakened by the abundance of pleasures attaching to their positions. . . . All they did during three hundred years was to abuse their power. As teachers, they suffocated the spirit of scientific investigation. As models of perfect men, they served only to weaken the ties of social morality. They poisoned the atmosphere with superstition, pride, wrath, impurity, and their terrible train of consequences. Cloaked in a primitive doctrine of charity and chastity, they proceeded actually to institute a policy of hatred, extermination and profligacy. . . .

Under colonial influences, intelligence atrophied and the practical spirit of work and economy disappeared, along with concern for political rights. All that remained were absurd ideals, aggressiveness, hallucinatory fanaticism, and a reverential form of homage to the king and his government. Such was the spirit of the race to which the conquerors belonged. Such was the spirit that they imparted to the blood of our creoles.

Quoted in Frederick B. Pike, ed., *Latin American History: Select Problems, Identity, Integration, and Nationhood* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), pp. 199–200.

quite well.<sup>4</sup> Bello was a Venezuelan by birth who spent many years in Chile; he also served as teacher to Simón Bolívar for a time and accompanied him on his trip to London in 1810. Many revered him as an educator, philosopher, poet, and statesman.

To Bello, the evidence of the positive Hispanic heritage was perfectly clear. One had but to consider the sacrifices, the nobility, the courage, and the steadfastness shown by the patriots during the Wars of Independence to witness the strength and virtues that Latin Americans had inherited from Spain. The very

ability of Latin Americans to rise up and overthrow Spain was an ability born within the Hispanic bosom. The vices attributed to the Spaniards—injustice, treachery in war, atrocity—were vices common to humanity, and certainly not uniquely Spanish.

Bello, Sarmiento, and others such as the Mexican conservative historian Lucas Alamán were not content with a simple condemnation of Spanish culture and practices, which, despite widespread resentments against the former colonizer, they saw as being just as fundamental to the creation of Latin America as the region's indigenous roots. After political emancipation had been achieved through the Wars of Independence, they sought what the modern Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea called "mental emancipation." It proved to be a difficult task, because one is never truly freed of one's past; rather, the search for identity was a creative process spanning the nineteenth century and beyond, in which an array of Latin Americans participated in forging a distinct consciousness and culture.

## INVENTING TRADITIONS

The search for identity led Latin Americans to concern themselves for the first time with the region's unique cultural, racial, and intellectual features. As governments became more stable and states became stronger, the need to identify habits, culture, and symbols that could unite the people as a nation grew more important. It was not an easy task, since the region was so diverse and elites so distanced from the masses. Many struggled with how to celebrate what was American while rejecting what they saw as the region's backwardness and brutality. The first generation of writers to engage in writing the nation, to create what scholar Doris Sommer termed "foundational fictions," were heavily influenced by the romanticism that emerged out of the Enlightenment, though they were not always strictly romantics in the intellectual sense.<sup>5</sup> Rather, for many, their message was often explicitly political and favored American themes. These themes were based in the realities of nineteenth-century life, though they were reinvented to fit the nationalist purpose and recast as historical traditions and symbols that united the people of the nation in a single community.

Rejecting forces that ran against this nationalist project was part of their mission. For example, although the Argentine poet and writer Esteban Echeverría sought during his life to be a romantic, he is best remembered for a work that appeared posthumously, a quickly written piece of prose fiction with a political message. Echeverría's *El matadero* (The Slaughter Yard), composed about 1840, was a thinly disguised attack on the Rosas regime. The story is best synopsisized by Jean Franco:

It relates an incident at the abattoir [slaughter yard] in Buenos Aires where, during the slaughtering of the animals, a bull escapes, killing a boy as he does so. The bull is recaptured and the butchers, excited by the thrill of the pursuit and capture, make a bloodthirsty ritual of the killing. As they finish off the animal, a refined-looking young man passes on horseback. They turn against him, drag him down from his horse and torment him. The youth struggles valiantly against the attackers but has a hemorrhage and is left for dead. The reason for the attack on him is that he is "unitarian" (that is, in opposition to Rosas and the federalist party). The butchers know this because their victim carries no outward sign of support for the Rosas regime and also because he rides with a foreign saddle. He is thus identified with an "un-American" way of life. Echeverría's own sympathies are not left in doubt. He is unmistakably on the side of refinement and civilization, against the native "butchers."<sup>6</sup>

Even more well known for his attacks on Rosas was Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. In his novel *Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism* (1845), Sarmiento told the story of the rise and fall of an Argentine gaucho caudillo named Juan Facundo Quiroga. Facundo represented all that was rough and wild and untamed in Argentina. Opposed to Facundo were the forces of civility, education, and progress, represented by Buenos Aires and the civilization from abroad that inspired it. *Facundo* is Sarmiento's statement of the classic battle between civilization (the city, education, and European influences) and barbarism (untamed nature, unbridled passions, and the gauchos) that he felt Argentina, and indeed much of Latin America, was fighting. To Sarmiento, who later became president and worked to implement his vision of a progressive, modern society, Rosas, Facundo, and other caudillos had to be destroyed or, at the least, reined in, if Latin America was ever to rise above the political anarchy that tore it apart in the first part of the nineteenth century.

In *Facundo* and other works, we see the power of creation at work. Although *Facundo* and *The Slaughter Yard*, for example, borrowed from the romantic style, they were essentially American works, inspired by the strengths and failures of their traditions, describing the sweep of plains and mountains and forests and their inhabitants in a vital, American prose. *Facundo* went through several editions and was translated into English, and its impact on nineteenth-century Latin America was long-lasting.

Not all Argentines were so quick to condemn the gauchos. Instead, they sought to create a tradition around the gaucho way of life as a way to build a common identity and history for Argentina. For example, in response to the denigration of the gaucho and his way of life, José Hernández wrote *Martín Fierro* (published in two parts in 1872 and 1879), the greatest epic poem in Argentine history. It depicted the gaucho as a victim of the new, modern world that was gradually stripping him of his freedom and way of life. Fences, railroads, unscrupulous politicians, and greedy ranch owners drove gauchos such as the hero of the poem, Martín Fierro, to become an outlaw. In the poem, Hernández especially protested the sending of gaucho conscripts to fight on

the Indian frontier, depriving them of their rights and denying them of their traditional livelihoods, which sprang from being born on and living freely in the wide expanses of the pampas.

Hernández wrote *Martín Fierro* as the gaucho himself might have spun his story, in a language familiar to most Argentines, interlaced with idioms, proverbs, and folk imagery. It became immensely popular, from being read by wide sections of the public to being recited in remote farmhouses. It reached across the country as no other work had before it, and helped Argentina identify and celebrate a common and unique tradition and history.

Other writers, such as Ricardo Palma of Peru, found equal inspiration in the rich past of their homelands. Palma wrote his *Tradiciones peruanas* (Peruvian Traditions) over the course of forty years, from the 1870s to 1910. They were stories based on his intense curiosity about the human condition in the colonial period. Still the most widely read of his country's writers, Palma ransacked libraries and archives for the manuscripts that illuminated the viceroyalty's past, filled with stories of glory, intrigue, debauchery, love, and murder, all drawn from true life and rewritten by Palma for his readers. Palma is, in fact, credited with creating this new genre of literature, called "the traditions," although it was a genre not unknown both in Spain and Latin America before him. Yet, perhaps even more important, it was an American theme, and an American form that Palma dealt with and created, respectively. He provided for his people a continuity with the past, looking to the viceroyalty not as an iniquitous period of Spanish occupation, but rather as the cradle of Peruvian traditions. Many of these traditions include miracles and incredible acts that contradicted the laws of nature. In some ways, then, they prefigured the literature of magical realism of the mid-twentieth century, which earned Latin American authors praises and prizes from around the literary world for creativity and genius.

As elites attempted to forge new, modern nations, they ran up against the fact that the majority of Latin Americans lived impoverished, illiterate, and often brutally short lives. Just as the presence of the rural, uneducated gauchos so preoccupied Argentine poets such as Hernández, so Peruvians and other Latin Americans were concerned about the deplorable condition of the indigenous people in their homelands and what it said about their chances to be a modern nation. The ennoblement of Indians as a major and positive contributor to Latin American civilization would not reach full-blown proportions until the twentieth century, especially after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. But already in the late nineteenth century, writers were being drawn to the subject, sparking an entirely new intellectual trend that was a precursor to *indigenismo*.

The most acerbic and polemical of these writers was the Peruvian Manuel González Prada. After a sojourn in Europe, González Prada returned to his native Peru a confirmed anarchist and atheist. Unlike Ricardo Palma, González Prada attacked the colonial heritage and became a radical defender of Indians.





**Figure 10.1** Clorinda Matto de Turner was the author of *Aves sin nido*, the first Indianist novel of Peru that presaged the rise of indigenismo, or Indianism, across Latin America in the twentieth century. This movement, given power by the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), elevated Indian culture to equal status with the reigning Hispanic values inherited from Spain. Courtesy Wiki Commons.

He advocated a thorough purge of Peru by destroying the old system of social order and economic privilege, and he championed Indians as the truly dynamic and potentially redeeming force in Peruvian society. Untouched by the greed of capitalism and made virtuous by a collective lifestyle that emphasized sharing and the well-being of the community rather than the individual, Indians represented the ideal to González Prada.

As González Prada was extolling the virtues of the indigenous population, a compatriot who was considered a naturalist writer, Clorinda Matto de Turner, published *Aves sin nido* (Birds without a Nest) in 1899. It was the first Indianist, or *indigenista*, novel. With its forthright description of the plight of Indians, Turner's book earned her the contempt of the Catholic Church and Peruvian elites, both of whom were held to account for the oppression of Indians. But the novel became a landmark in the Indianist movement. A short novel published in Colombia in 1896, *El alma de Pablo Suesca* (Pablo Suesca's Soul), belonged to the same genre. Its author, Enrique Cortés Holguín, shared the sentiments of the better-known Peruvian Indianists.



Brazil's struggle to resolve the conflict between past—embodied in rural and traditional lifestyles—and future found its greatest expression in the naturalist and realist Brazilian writer Euclides da Cunha (1866–1909). Da Cunha wrote *Os Sertões* (Rebellion in the Backlands, 1902), considered to be a classic in Brazilian letters. It is the story of the government suppression of a commune in the backlands (the rough, arid interior regions of northeast Brazil called the *sertão*) at the end of the century. Like Sarmiento's *Facundo*, it is a story of the epic conflict between civilization and barbarism.

Da Cunha was born in Rio de Janeiro. He was trained in the army as an engineer but in 1896 mustered out and took up journalism. As a correspondent for the prestigious newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, he was assigned to cover the last stages of a remarkable conflict between peasants, led by their messiah, Antônio Conselheiro, and the federal government, represented by the army. From this conflict da Cunha spun out the story that emerged as *Rebellion in the Backlands*.

Conselheiro was born into a middle-class family that had fallen on hard times. After running afoul of local authorities and losing his wife, he began to wander the Brazilian backlands. He lived off charity and preached folk religious sermons to anyone who would listen. Because most villages in the interior had no priest, Conselheiro (a pseudonym meaning “the Counselor”) became a religious messenger. By the early 1890s he had gathered a small following, and he settled on an abandoned ranch called Canudos. Gradually his fame as a healer and provider spread, and peasants by the hundreds flocked to join his informal congregation. A description of Conselheiro in 1876 was included in *Rebellion*. “In the year 1876 . . . the ‘Counselor’ made his appearance in the town of Itapicurú de Cima. His renown at this time was already very great, as is shown by an account which was published that very year, in the capital of the Empire”:

There has appeared in the northern backlands an individual who goes by the name of Antonio Conselheiro, and who exerts a great influence over the minds of the lower classes, making use of his mysterious trappings and ascetic habits to impose upon their ignorance and simplicity. He lets his beard and hair grow long, wears a cotton tunic, and eats sparingly, being almost a mummy in aspect. Accompanied by a couple of women followers, he lives by reciting beads and litanies, by preaching, and by giving counsel to the multitudes that come to hear him when the local Church authorities permit it. Appealing to their religious sentiments, he draws them after him in throngs and moves them at his will. He gives evidence of being an intelligent man, but an uncultivated one.<sup>7</sup>

Da Cunha's own powerful and evocative description of Conselheiro highlights not only the mystical power of Conselheiro but also the brilliance of da Cunha. He draws upon contemporary scientific theories, including positivism and social Darwinism, and his own native insight to portray the ways of Conselheiro, and especially the willingness of peasants to be controlled and led by such a person.

It is not surprising, then, if to these simple folk he became a fantastic apparition, with something unprepossessing about him; nor is it strange if, when this singular old man of a little more than thirty years drew near the farmhouses of the *tropieros* [ones who drive a packhorse or mule], the festive guitars at once stopped strumming and the improvisations ceased. This was only natural. Filthy and battered in appearance, clad in his threadbare garment and silent as a ghost, he would spring up suddenly out of the plains, peopled by hobgoblins. Then he would pass on, bound for other places, leaving the superstitious backwoodsmen in a daze. And so it was, in the end, he came to dominate them without seeking to do so.

In the midst of a primitive society which, by its own ethnic qualities and through the malevolent influence of the holy missions, found it easier to comprehend life in the form of incomprehensible miracles, this man's mysterious way of living was bound to surround him with a more than ordinary amount of prestige, which merely served to aggravate his delirious temperament. All the legends and conjectures which sprang up about him were a propitious soil for the growth of his own hallucinations. His insanity therewith became externalized. The intense admiration and the absolute respect which were accorded him gradually led to his becoming the unconditional arbiter in all misunderstandings and disputes, the favored Counselor in all decisions. . . . The multitude created him, refashioning him in its own image. . . . The people needed someone to translate for them their own vague idealizations, someone to guide them in the mysterious paths of heaven.

And so the evangelist arose, a monstrous being, but an automaton. This man who swayed the masses was but a puppet.<sup>8</sup>

The rebellion that Conselheiro led was essentially one of resistance by peasants and backlanders to conformity to a "civilized" standard. Organized in small communities, they raided neighboring landowners, evaded taxes, and refused to submit to the authority of the Catholic Church. Four expeditions were sent by the government in the 1890s, and only the fourth succeeded in quashing the rebels in their stronghold of Canudos. It was with this fourth expedition that Da Cunha arrived to observe the final defeat of the rebels.

*Rebellion in the Backlands* is above all else a first-rate narrative that draws the reader into the world of the sertão, a story told with full attention to the geographic and political setting before it focuses with clarity, and not without sympathy, on the protagonist Conselheiro. The book obviously champions the forces of light and civilization over the ignorance and brutality that the rebellion represented. Da Cunha is quite clear on this.

This entire campaign [to destroy Canudos and the rebels] would be a crime, a futile and a barbarous one, if we were not to take advantage of the paths opened by the artillery, by following up our cannon with a constant, stubborn, and persistent campaign of education, with the object of drawing these rude and backward fellow countrymen of ours into the current of our times and our own national life. . . . We are condemned to civilization. Either we shall progress or we shall perish. So much is certain and our choice is clear.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Da Cunha is ambivalent about the forces of modernity and what he sees as their brutality and irrationality. He does not spare the barbarity shown by the

### **Machado de Assis and Self-Definition**

The struggle to define the nation was, for many intellectuals, also a struggle to define the self. Considered one of the greatest writers in Brazilian history, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839–1908) remains today a world-respected writer. He was a monarchist who, despite his distaste for republicanism, largely stayed out of politics. Yet his writings reflect the reality of a complex civilization and nation that was emerging in modern Brazil, a fascinating amalgamation of different cultures and peoples.

Machado de Assis was born to a mulatto housepainter and a Portuguese mother in Rio de Janeiro in 1839. He was an avid reader and educated himself at the library. He became an apprentice typographer early in life and rose through the government bureaucracy to eventually help found and become the first president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1897. He married a refined Portuguese woman and lived a modest middle-class life, superficially humdrum and perhaps even boring. Yet his liabilities—having been born a mulatto in a racist society and subject to epileptic seizures—affected his literature profoundly.

He began writing poems when he was sixteen, and by the end of his life, his works filled thirty-one volumes. He pointed out the follies and foibles of his world with wit and sarcasm. A near-total disillusionment with humankind produced few “good” characters in his books; most of his characters were tormented by doubts and demons, caught in a web of fears and dreams. His finest work is considered to be *Dom Casmurro* (1900). It is the classic story of the husband who suspects adultery and of his obsession with revenge: on his wife, her lover, and his son, who may or may not have been the son of the lover. The novel is told by the tortured narrator himself, and its involved and ironic style of writing presaged the brilliant flowering of the Latin American novel in the twentieth century. So eminent was his writing that the Brazilian Academy of Letters created a prize in his honor.

army in its extermination of the Canudos rebels, nor does he fail to point out the grandeur of Conselheiro, a man whose life both attracted and repelled him.

Da Cunha’s ambivalence crops up in other great literary interpreters of national developments in the nineteenth century. Although a commitment to progress and change is quite evident, there is also an unwillingness to forego the bittersweet, powerful, and earthly life of gauchos and peasants, of Indians and mulattoes. The vastness and wildness of the land profoundly shaped the lives of people with its own nature. These elements were not so easily dismissed by writers who wished to both send a message of culture and civilization and also represent life for what it was: still wild and even unknown in many parts of Latin America. In the end, all of these authors, whether critical of the gaucho or

Indian habits and lifestyle, or celebrating them as the true souls of the nation, were grappling with what it was to be American.

## MODERNISMO

*Modernismo* was a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary movement in Latin America closely identified with the beginnings of a true Latin American literature. Emerging out of European romanticism, it was a complicated movement whose goal was to revolutionize the form and content of both prose and poetry as a means to challenge naturalism and Western materialism and to raise culture to a higher level in Latin America. It was an intellectual awakening in Latin America with a profound political and economic impact. Its guru was Rubén Darío (author of “To Roosevelt,” which opened this chapter), who not only coined the term “modernismo” but also inspired a generation across Latin America. Most modernists, including Darío, traveled to Europe and North America and borrowed modernist art forms from abroad, especially from France, but also from writers like Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman. Yet, most found their themes and their inspiration at home, in the pampas of Argentina, in the islands of the Caribbean, in the backlands of Brazil—wherever their ideal views of art and life clashed with the reality of their homelands. While modernism was a wide-ranging global intellectual trend, modernismo was uniquely Latin American, and as a movement, it wrestled with the very real challenges facing the region.

The Cuban poet and revolutionary José Martí best personified the combination of artist and activist in the late nineteenth century. His poems inspired modernismo and his polemics fomented revolution. Martí was born in Havana in 1853 of Spanish parents. An eager learner, he was writing and publishing poems and essays as a teenager and was soon involved in anti-Spanish activities, espousing the liberation of his homeland from Spain, which still held Cuba as a colony. He dedicated his life to this cause, for which he would eventually die.

In 1871 he was arrested for revolutionary activities, among them founding a political newspaper, *The Free Fatherland*. He was imprisoned for six months and exiled to Spain. There he continued his education, receiving a degree in law and philosophy from the University of Zaragoza, but also keeping up his revolutionary polemics by publishing a pamphlet on the political prisons in Cuba. He left Spain in 1874, traveled through Europe, and met the elderly Victor Hugo, who was considered the apostle of French letters in the nineteenth century. Back in the Americas, he landed in Guatemala where he wrote his first book, *Guatemala*, dedicated to a girl he secretly loved. In 1878 he returned to Cuba but was soon forced into exile again. In 1881 he arrived in New York and passionately recommitted his life to Cuban independence. He traveled widely

from his base in New York and wrote for prestigious Latin American newspapers, such as *La Nación* of Buenos Aires.

During his years in exile, Martí produced some of his most memorable poems, especially *Ismaelillo* (Little Ishmael, 1882), dedicated to his young son, and *Versos sencillos* (Simple Verses, 1891), which dealt with themes such as friendship, love, sincerity, justice, and freedom. His poetry revealed his ambivalence about his homeland and its Spanish heritage. He did not hate Spaniards; he hated the tyranny that they practiced in Cuba. In his poems, he expressed a love not only for things Cuban and American, but also for things Spanish. The following excerpt attests to this love.

For Aragon in Spain, I hold  
 A debt for values true  
 With loyalty and courage bold  
 She did my soul renew.

And if a fool should ponder why  
 This place so claims my soul.  
 This Aragon, I would reply  
 Made love and friendship whole.

In Aragon the flowered vale  
 Saw scenes of fierce defense  
 A people's longing to prevail  
 Though death be recompense.

Should magistrate or king provoke  
 The simple man's reply:  
 Take up his musket and his cloak  
 With willingness to die.

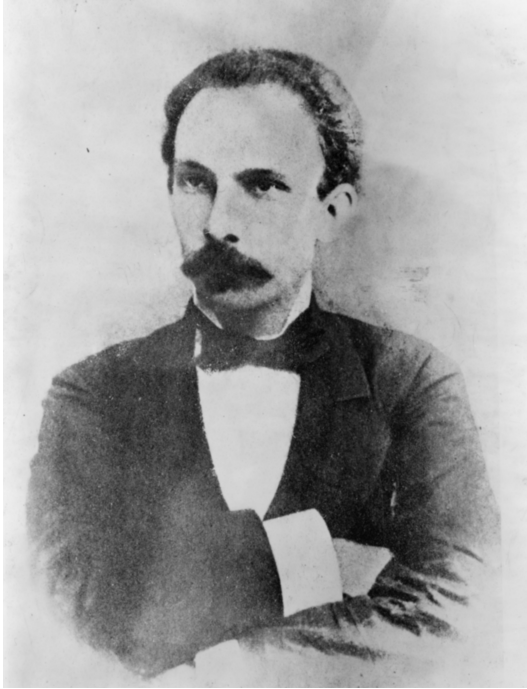
That yellowed land I now recall  
 The Ebro's muddy banks  
 The Virgin's shrine—adored by all  
 And noble heroes' ranks.

I esteem the tyrant's foe  
 If he be Cuban bold  
 And if from Aragon, I know  
 The same esteem I hold.

I still recall the shady court  
 Where beauty binds the stair  
 Of silent naves I can report  
 And somber convents, bare.

That Moorish-Spanish land I love  
 That flowered land so fair;  
 The meager bloom of my life's trove  
 Began to blossom there.<sup>10</sup>

Not just a writer, Martí is perhaps most remembered as a revolutionary, political commentator, and social observer. After his beloved island, the United



**Figure 10.2** José Martí was a Cuban writer who inspired his fellow citizens with his patriotism and poetry to fight for independence from Spain. He was killed in 1895 while participating in the movement that eventually led to the Cuban-Spanish-American War of 1898 and Cuban independence. Courtesy Library of Congress.

States most attracted his attention. Martí was ambivalent toward the United States. An ardent admirer of its political democracy, he was also appalled by its system of economic monopoly and big business. On the one hand, he saw political freedoms and individual rights guaranteed under a constitution that worked. On the other hand, he was disgusted by the economic exploitation of the poor, especially the masses of immigrants whom he saw arriving daily in New York. He wrote, “The Cubans admire this nation, the greatest ever built by freedom, but they distrust the evil conditions that, like worms in the blood, have begun their work of destruction in this mighty Republic. . . . They cannot honestly believe that excessive individualism and reverence for wealth are preparing the United States to be the typical nation of liberty.”<sup>11</sup> As we will see in chapter 11, Martí merged his love of Cuba, his hatred of its subjugation to the Spanish, and his ambivalence toward the United States to build a movement to free Cuba in the 1890s, one that sought to unify all Cubans through its rejection of European culture and influences, for its celebration of the island’s racial diversity, and for its commitment to full independence from all foreign powers.

In 1900 the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó published an essay that embodied the movement of modernismo, entitled *Ariel*, which became extraordinarily popular throughout Latin America. Borrowing from the symbolism

employed by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, Rodó represented Latin America as Ariel and the United States as Caliban in his story. Ariel is the “noble and winged part of the spirit,” whereas Caliban represents materialism and grossness.<sup>12</sup> At the simplest level, Rodó pictured Latin America as a land where spiritual harmony, ethics, and aesthetics still prevail, whereas the United States is not only given to materialism but also governed by the mundane priorities of the present, with little or no sense of the past or future.

In *Ariel*, which essentially was written in the form of a revered master distilling for his young disciples the essence of his wisdom, humanity is constantly being tugged apart by the opposite forces of spirituality and sensuality. *Ariel*, through which Rodó counseled the youth of Latin America, calls upon young people to live by a morality and for a beauty that transcends the moment. Art, science, religion, and other matters of the spirit should always be governed by a morality founded firmly in eternal principles. Contrasted with this view are those people who follow the utilitarian way of life, who put a premium on the present, on the accumulation of material goods, on the satisfaction of carnal and ephemeral needs. Basically, Rodó called upon Latin Americans to pursue unselfish ends and to cultivate an ideal that transcended material goals. Otherwise, they were condemned to embrace vulgar materialism, just as had occurred in North America, and people’s spiritual needs would go begging.

Rodó left a mixed legacy. His views, as interpreted and perpetuated by others, encouraged the myth that Latin Americans possessed a spiritual superiority over North Americans. The lack of culture and the greedy materialism of these northerners crippled their civilization, in spite of its extraordinary economic and political accomplishments. In a more positive vein, Rodó encouraged a whole generation of Latin American intellectuals to embrace the notion that ideas and ideals *can* shape and reform societies. This notion gave rise in the twentieth century to important movements to use education to uplift the masses and to change the political and social life of Latin America.

Rodó had a vision of a unified Latin American culture, not one divided by nationalities and regions, each one distinct from the other. He, in effect, encouraged Latin Americans to think of themselves as being culturally unified. Although the pan-American movement was as old as Simón Bolívar, it was given a new impetus by Rodó and others. And it came at a time when Latin America’s neighbor to the north, the United States, was extending its reach more forcefully in the region. The intermingled destinies of these parts of the Western Hemisphere are considered in the next chapter.

## CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

The search for Latin American culture and identity—for the soul of Latin America—preoccupied elites concerned with forging new nations and civiliza-



tions out of the ashes of colonialism. If Latin Americans were not simply Spanish, or Indian, nor African, who were they? Trying at once to shed their colonial past, to grapple with their largely impoverished and uneducated populations, and to distinguish themselves from an encroaching U.S., intellectuals worked to identify or invent the traditions, values, and habits that would define them as Argentines, Nicaraguans, or Peruvians. Latin Americans, such as Rodó in *Ariel*, Hernández in *Martín Fierro*, and Martí in his poems and essays, examined their reality and explained it with passion. Sarmiento's great work, *Facundo*, delved deeply, for example, into the very nature of Latin American civilization, which, according to Sarmiento, was a warring ground between the raw forces of nature and civilization. By the end of the century, they had created an entirely new literary movement—modernismo—which, while drawing from U.S. and European influences, challenged the foreign materialism and excess that seemed to threaten the very values, identity, and cultural autonomy of these new nations.

### Discussion Questions

How and why did intellectuals seek mental emancipation from their Hispanic past?

Why was the invention of traditions so important in nineteenth-century Latin America?

What role did the gaucho and Indian play in the invention of traditions?

What was modernismo?

How did *Ariel* embody the modernismo movement?

Why were many writers, including Rubén Darío and José Martí, so concerned with U.S. influence by the end of the 1800s? What types of ideas about Latin America did they foster in order to challenge the U.S.?

### Timeline

1816	<i>The Mangy Parrot</i> (El periquillo sarmiento) published
1820s–1870s	Romantic movement in Latin America
1838 and 1840	<i>El matadero</i> (The Slaughter Yard) published
1845	<i>Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism</i> published
1872 and 1879	<i>Martín Fierro</i> published
1870s–1910	<i>Tradiciones peruanas</i> (Peruvian Traditions) published
1880s–1910s	Modernismo movement in Latin America
1899	<i>Aves sin nido</i> (Birds without a Nest) published
1900	<i>Ariel</i> published
1902	<i>Os Sertões</i> (Rebellion in the Backlands) published

### Keywords

<i>Ariel</i>	modernismo
<i>Aves sin nido</i>	<i>Rebellion in the Backlands</i>
<i>Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism</i>	sertão
gaucho	

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## *Borges's Library*

LATIN AMERICA, LANGUAGE, AND THE WORLD

*Paja Faudree and Daniel Suslak*

The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries. . . . The Library is total and its shelves register . . . Everything . . .

JORGE LUIS BORGES, "The Library of Babel"

IN THE FAMOUS STORY BY THE Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, the Library of Babel contains every book ever written and destined to be written, in every human language. The entire linguistic history of humanity is contained in that magical library—a vast hexagon that remains hidden, perhaps, somewhere in a forgotten quarter of Buenos Aires. It is an apt metaphor for Latin America itself: a living repository of global conversations and a catalog of human lives and encounters. And like the relationship between the words preserved in the Library's books and what is said beyond its mirrored walls, Latin America's linguistic biography is always being rewritten.

To better understand the linguistic legacy of Latin America and its contribution to our shared global lexicon, we start with the corner of the library dedicated to Latin America's pre-Conquest roots and the linguistic consequences of the colonial legacy, tracing the movement of people in and out of this region and the words that made the journey with them. We focus on three key communication practices, beginning with how the indigenous residents of the Americas and the European colonizers named the new things they encountered. We then consider how they put to work both indigenous modes of writing and European alphabetic writing to capture language and reach out to (or exclude) new and larger audiences. Finally, we discuss how five centuries of engagement generated distinctively Latin American varieties of Spanish and Portuguese, fundamentally changed how indigenous Latin

American languages are spoken, and gave birth to wholly new languages, such as Haitian Kreyòl. Along the way we also highlight the importance of religion and religious institutions in shaping Latin American ideas about language.

In the second half of this chapter we turn to the area of the library where new acquisitions are kept. Here we find evidence of the growing presence of Latin American languages around the world, as their speakers travel and their cultural productions circulate ever more widely. We pay particular attention to Latin American entanglements with their Anglophone neighbors in the United States. We also pause to consider what the future holds in store for Spanish and Portuguese, as American varieties of these languages further outpace their European counterparts in numbers of speakers and political influence.

As we explore the mirrored halls of this library, we celebrate the myriad ways that Latin American languages have influenced how people speak in other corners of the globe. The collection of stories filling its shelves demonstrate how language and conflicts about language have played essential roles in shaping this region's complex history, giving voice to its politically fraught current condition and foretelling its future, which will continue to be one of porous and shifting borders, dynamism, and global engagement.

FROM INCAS AND AZTECS TO ARGENTINE  
NOVELISTS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA'S  
LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

*Names*

The very name “Latin America” weds geography and language. The region is generally defined as consisting of those countries in the Americas whose official languages are descended from Latin. In the colonial period, those languages were Spanish and Portuguese; later, other languages—such as English and French—would complicate this picture. Even so, Latin America's coherence as a region today is largely linguistic. The Río Bravo—which north of the border becomes the Rio Grande (with a silent *e* and no accent)—is not only a political boundary but also a linguistic one, at least in the national mythologies that have sprung up on either side of it.

The dominance and prevalence of Spanish and Portuguese in the region stem from the discovery of the Americas by the Catholic kingdoms of Spain

and Portugal at the end of the fifteenth century and their subsequent efforts to conquer and colonize those lands. Pope Alexander VI brokered treaties between Spain and Portugal that divided the globe in two. Portugal was awarded evangelical responsibility for a territory stretching from the eastern shores of South America to Japan, and Spain a swath of the world stretching from Florida to the Philippines. Echoes of this treaty can be heard today in the names of cities like Los Angeles and Bombay (from Portuguese *bombaim*) and in words like *arigato* in Japanese (from Portuguese *obrigado*, “thank you”) and the English word *peon* (from Spanish *peon*, “footman or footsoldier”). As is well known, large swaths of the New World, from New Spain to the Amazon, were named after Old World locales and myths. But at times the politics of naming was more complex. In 1510, for example, the Spanish writer Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo—his head filled with reports from Columbus and Cortés—wrote a popular novel featuring a warrior queen named Calafia, from a mythical island in the Indies named “California.” That evocative name, in turn, is thought to be the source of the name given to the long stretch of the North American Pacific coast running from the U.S. state to the tip of the Baja peninsula. Today, like countless other Latin American place-names, it has been taken up in names for public places and businesses found across the world.

Well over a thousand distinct tongues were spoken in Latin America when the first Europeans arrived on its shores, all of them radically different from the languages spoken in Europe. During the Conquest, an immense communication gulf existed between the Europeans and the American indigenous peoples. Miscommunications abounded. One such storied case involved the name Yucatán, which now refers to a single region of Mexico but initially designated a vast stretch of Spain’s New World discoveries, extending from Mexico to Panama. The Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés claimed that the name for this marvelous land was mistakenly derived from a Maya expression meaning “I don’t understand”—a reply by Maya locals when newly arrived Spaniards asked what their homeland was called. Some modern scholars have taken a similar view, while others have claimed that Cortés’s story was itself probably based on a bad interpretation. In either case, accounts agree that none of the multiple possible sources for the name correspond with any Maya place-name. Countless other misunderstandings of this sort are lost to history. Colonization decimated many indigenous peoples, who took their languages with them to their graves. Nevertheless, several hundred indigenous languages are spoken today. At Conquest, two of

the most widely spoken were Quechua (principal language of the Inca Empire) and Nahuatl (principal language of the Aztec Empire); several million people speak modern varieties of those languages today. You can learn to speak them, too, in courses offered at universities across the globe.

### *Grammars, Alphabets, and Writing*

Catholic priests did much to bridge the communication gap between the Old World and the New. They studied indigenous Latin American languages intensely, turning to them as objects of epistemological inquiry and tools for evangelization. They focused especially on widely spoken languages like Quechua, Nahuatl, Yucatec, and K'iche' Maya—languages that were also granted legal and administrative standing in colonial Spanish courts and government offices. This engagement by colonial authorities irrevocably changed Latin America's indigenous languages. They were soon pervaded by Spanish and Portuguese loanwords and began to undergo more profound grammatical transformations as a result of the forced imposition of new legal and religious discursive norms. At the same time, colonial legal institutions were forced to accommodate to indigenous norms as well, as when royal courts accepted as legal documents pictorial texts written in a mixture of Latin characters and Mesoamerican glyphs.

The formal study of the world's languages was, in many ways, hatched in Latin America. The creation of the first modern grammars is often attributed to the Spanish grammarian Antonio de Nebrija, whose 1486 grammar of Latin was followed by one for Castilian in 1492. He reputedly presented the latter to Spain's Queen Isabella with the fateful phrase, "Majesty, language is the perfect instrument of empire." And, indeed, language contact formed a crucial front in Spain's overseas expansion: Catholic priests were charged with learning Amerindian languages and using them as instruments of conversion and colonization. A lesser-known part of this story, however, is the fact that many of the grammars that followed were studies of indigenous languages like Nahuatl, Zapotec, and Guaraní. These works became the foundation for the modern study of languages across the globe while helping to cement the ongoing influence today of particular languages. Guaraní, for example, is one of Paraguay's official languages and continues to be spoken by a majority of its population. English and other languages have acquired a number of words from Guaraní, including *tapir*, *piranha*, and, most recently, the trendy berry *açai*.

Latin America also became “Latin” America via the use of the Latin alphabet. The production of written texts—religious, legal, scholarly—was central to the colonial enterprise. But writing in the Americas has a previous history as well: several of the world’s oldest and most sophisticated writing systems began developing some twenty-five hundred years ago in Mesoamerica (roughly, Mexico and Central America). Many were still widely used upon the arrival of the Spanish and for many decades after. But as colonial rule took hold in the Americas, the Spanish launched concerted efforts to gather and destroy texts written in indigenous languages, viewing them as idolatrous. Although this savage repression of indigenous religion nearly wiped out the region’s ancient writing traditions, the remaining texts have come over the past century to attract widespread attention. The Mesoamerican codices that survived the purges ended up stashed in libraries in Paris, London, and elsewhere in Europe. Yuri Knorozov, the man who cracked the “Maya code,” was born in Ukraine and studied ethnology and Egyptology in Moscow. His seminal work on Mayan writing, published in 1952, was based on codices that the Soviet Red Army snatched up from Berlin’s national library in the aftermath of World War II. Knorozov’s work also drew heavily from the writings of a sixteenth-century Spanish bishop named Diego de Landa. De Landa helped purge the Yucatan of Mayan writing, but in an ironic twist, his notes provided the key to rediscovering its lost meaning. Four and a half centuries later, Mayan communities in Mexico and Guatemala have reclaimed their symbols and now put them to use in street signs, logos, and other displays of local identity—everything from tattoos to online avatars. And the millions of tourists from around the world who visit the Mayan region every year take pieces of that ancient writing home with them, as Mayan glyphs emblazoned on T-shirts, jewelry, and other souvenirs.

### *Linguistic Contact and Borrowing*

Contact between Iberia and the Americas transformed the linguistic character of both. Spanish became what it is today largely through engagement with Latin America. Across Europe, local vernaculars took the place of Latin as languages of authority. As the outlines of modern Spain coalesced behind the Kingdom of Castile, its royal house became the Spanish Crown. Castilian—only later known as “Spanish” in many parts of the world—became the language of that emerging nation and was carried with colonists to the Americas along with novel ideas and goods. Speakers of Amerindian languages had to



invent new words for these. One strategy was to extend the meaning of already existing native words, such as using the word for “deer” to refer to horses as well. In a number of cases, speakers distinguished native things from imports by adding *castellano* to the name. For example, in the Mexican language Mazatec, the word for “bread”—a food dating from colonial days—is *ñoxtila* (Castilian tortilla); the word for “chair,” a type of furniture likewise of colonial provenance, is *yaxile* (Castilian wood[en thing]).

Centuries of Moorish presence in Iberia also gifted Spanish and Portuguese with hundreds of Arabic loanwords from diverse realms of experience; from religion, *ojalá* (from *law šha’ allāh*, “God willing”); from architecture, *adobe* and *alcoba* (alcove); from material culture, *almohada* (pillow); from agriculture, *café*, *azúcar*, *zanahoria*, *aceituna*, and *algodón* (coffee, sugar, carrot, olive, and cotton, respectively); from politics, *asesino* (assassin) and *alcalde* (mayor); from mathematics, *álgebra* and *cero* (zero); and from commerce, *tarifa* (tariff). Many of these Arabic loans made their way into English, by way of contact with Spanish, and they were incorporated into indigenous Latin American languages as well. For example, the word for “coin” or “money” in many of these languages is derived from *tumn*, an Arabic loanword for “silver coin,” as in the Nahuatl word *tomín* or the Mixe word *meen*.

Meanwhile, different national varieties of Spanish emerged across Latin America as they acquired distinctive rhythms and vocabulary taken in from the indigenous languages spoken all around them. This, in turn, sowed the seeds of linguistic conflict, as the divergence of Latin American Spanish from its peninsular parent led to the formation of the Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy), which was charged with policing the language’s boundaries and codes of contact. Early contact between Spanish and Taíno (a language widely spoken in the Caribbean before Conquest) gave Spanish the words *canoa* (canoe), *barbacoa* (barbecue), *hamaca* (hammock), and *cacique* (chief, boss), not to mention the names of two essential global food staples: *maíz* (corn) and *patata* (potato). Nahuatl heavily influenced Mexican Spanish, which absorbed names for places (Tlaxcala, Acapulco), plants (*tomate*, *chili*), animals (*ocelote*, *coyote*), cuisine (*tamales*, *chocolate*), and other things previously unknown to Europeans, such as *hule* (rubber) and *copal* (the crystallized sap of a New World tree used as incense). A similar process took place with Quechua words adopted into Andean Spanish, among them *llama*, *jerky* (as in beef jerky, from Quechua *ch’arki*), *condor*, *puma*, and the fashionable grain *quinoa*. Che Guevara got his famous nickname from the interjection *che* (man! dude!) used in Argentine and other varieties of South

American Spanish. One popular but contested narrative holds that it, too, is an indigenous loanword, originating in Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche people of southern Chile and Argentina. In the territories controlled by Portugal, contact between Portuguese and indigenous languages such as Tupí was less extensive, although they nevertheless left an indelible mark on Brazilian Portuguese. Ponder that as you sit on the beaches of Ipanema (“fishless water”), drinking your *caipirinha* (“little hillbilly”).

Thus Latin American words have been exported out of the region for centuries and have taken up residence in languages around the globe. The Spanish colonizers brought many Taíno and Nahuatl loanwords with them to the Philippines, where they entered into Tagalog. American English absorbed a large number of indigenous terms as well, through contact with Mexican Spanish. The list of Nahuatl loanwords in English includes staple crops such as maize, potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco. Some of our favorite foods and drinks—such as guacamole, chocolate, and tequila—are also loans from Nahuatl. And there are other partially obscured Nahuatl gems in English such as Chiclet gum (from *tzictli*), chia pets (from *chian*), and shack—as in Radio Shack or “shacking up” (likely from *xacalli*, “hut”). Virtually all of these indigenous terms entered English indirectly, via Spanish. There is, though, at least one English word that possibly made the jump from an indigenous Latin American language directly into English via slave traders who passed through the Gulf of Mexico in the mid-sixteenth century: a sea creature with razor-sharp teeth that Mayans called *xook*. Today, English speakers call it *shark*.

### *Migration and the Slave Trade*

The colonial era ushered in other waves of massive migration and forced movements of people into and out of Latin America. Throughout the region, European colonialism was firmly harnessed to emerging forms of global trade. Eventually this led to the development of one of the most notorious, tragic institutions in human history: the transatlantic slave trade. The introduction of maize from the New World led to explosive population growth in parts of Africa, which in turn made it possible for millions of Africans to be captured as slaves and forcibly relocated to the New World. Today, the profound and far-reaching legacies of this history are most visible in the millions of Afro-descendant Latin Americans, with populations of varying size in every Latin American country. The Caribbean islands, whose indigenous

inhabitants were almost completely wiped out during the initial decades of Conquest, are now predominantly inhabited by Afro-descendant people. Brazil has a similar demographic profile: its small indigenous population, while politically and symbolically important, is dwarfed by Afro-Brazilians.

There are audible legacies of the slave trade as well. Creole languages are spoken throughout the Caribbean and coastal regions of South America. Combining elements of European, African, and Amerindian languages, these linguistic hybrids emerged directly out of the linguistic realities of slavery. Slave traders and owners tried to disrupt deliberately the transmission of African languages such as Igbo and Yoruba from one generation to the next by separating speakers of the same language. Hundreds of African loanwords—such as *marimba*, *merengue*, *mucama* (housemaid), *guineo* (banana), and *mandinga* (devil or goblin)—came to infuse not only Latin American varieties of Spanish and Portuguese, but eventually their European counterparts, too. And in Latin America's syncretic religions such as Santería and Candomblé, African languages and creolized varieties serve vital liturgical functions. In the wake of slave revolts and nineteenth-century wars of independence, a number of these creoles rose to become official languages of the new nations, such as Haitian Creole and Guyanese Creole. In the twentieth century, Jamaican Patwa—a rich blend of English, the West African language Akan, and parts of other African, European, and indigenous Caribbean languages—has had an enormous influence on global pop culture via the rise and spread of Rastafarianism and reggae music. A less well known but fascinating story is that of the Afro-Brazilian presence in Ghana. In the first half of the nineteenth century, several thousand former slaves returned to Ghana, bringing their variety of Portuguese with them. Still known today as the Tabom people (from Portuguese *ta bom*, “it's okay”), their Portuguese surnames are scattered across southern Ghana and the city of Accra. Contact between the Caribbean and West Africa is ongoing as Cuban medical brigades work with West African health officials to contain outbreaks of diseases like Ebola.

Over the past three centuries, developments in Latin America have shaped the world's linguistic landscape in other ways, too. Migrants from across the globe came to Latin America fleeing religious and political persecution or seeking economic opportunity. As a result, there are pockets of minorities across the region who speak languages that are neither indigenous nor stem directly from colonialism or the African slave trade. In the nineteenth century, for example, Tamil-speaking laborers were brought to Caribbean

French colonies, Hindi speakers to British Guyana, and Chinese laborers, both indentured and contract, to various parts of the region through the coolie trade; Chinese–New World culinary fusions—*chifa* food in Peru and *comida China-Cubana* in New York—represent a well-known legacy of this contact. From the Middle East, Lebanese descendants in Latin America include some of the region’s most influential people: from Mexico’s richest man, the Forbes list–topping billionaire Carlos Slim Helú, to the Colombian pop star Shakira. Diverse groups of Europeans also migrated to the region in sizable numbers, with linguistic consequences that continue today. In the 1860s and 1870s, several thousand Welsh nationalists moved to Patagonia to establish a colony there, far from the reach of the English-speaking world; Patagonian Welsh continues to be spoken in the Chubut province of Yr Ariannin (their name for “Argentina”). Communities of German speakers exist in almost every Latin American country, including Mennonites in Mexico and Paraguay and coffee plantation owners in Mexico and Guatemala. Buenos Aires became a global center for Yiddish theater in the first half of the twentieth century and today has one of the world’s few remaining daily newspapers in the language.

### *Language and Religion*

Not only a haven for religious minorities fleeing persecution, Latin America has also been the birthplace of new syncretic religions and a beacon for missionary and revival movements. Protestantism, for example, has had a deep and ongoing relationship with the region’s indigenous languages—which in turn has had a significant impact on Protestant missionary work in other corners of the globe, especially that pursued by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). The field arm of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, the SIL is a recognized authority on the world’s languages. In the process of attempting to translate the Bible into all living languages, the SIL has generated a vast trove of basic descriptive linguistic work that is global in scope. Yet many of the methods and approaches allowing them to accomplish this remarkable feat were forged and refined in Latin America. Its founder, a Protestant missionary named William Cameron Townsend, began his career as a Spanish-language Bible salesman in Guatemala. He soon realized that the Kaqchikel Maya speakers with whom he lived would be much better served by religious materials that they could actually understand and that “spoke to their hearts.” Initially the SIL focused on Mexico and the Amazonian areas of

Peru. By the 1960s it had placed Bible translators in communities across Latin America and had begun making forays into Africa and Oceania. Their work has played a crucial role in subverting “linguistic racism” based on beliefs that indigenous languages are inherently inferior to European ones. The SIL has also been an important if controversial force of change, participating in and making possible the dramatic rise of Protestant evangelization across Latin America over the past century.

Latin America’s linguistic influence on the world has been particularly tied to the evolution of the Catholic Church. Today, five centuries after the Catholic Church drew a dividing line through the Americas that granted one piece to Spain and the other to Portugal, the church has its first New World pope (see Scheper-Hughes and Scheper Hughes, this volume). He, like Borges, is Argentine. And like the renowned author, Pope Francis speaks a variety of Spanish that in many ways conforms to the standards promoted by Spain’s Royal Spanish Academy—whose motto, tellingly, states its goal to “Limpia, fija y da splendor” (Clean, set, and give splendor [to]) the Spanish language. Yet his Spanish also departs from those norms, as when the pope recently said, “Dios nos premerea,” drawing on *porteño* (Buenos Aires) soccer lingo, that could be glossed as “God goes out to meet us, he gets out ahead of us, he surprises us.” This reflects the Catholic Church’s ongoing reorientation over much of this century toward ideas and agendas anchored in Latin America.

The church was massively influenced by liberation theology; alternatively embraced and rejected by the church hierarchy, the movement originated in Latin America in the last half of the twentieth century and called for Christian teachings to be directed toward liberation from unjust social conditions. Pope Francis’s recent decision concerning the assassinated priest Óscar Romero reflects the power of Latin American concerns to shape the church’s direction: a Salvadoran and leading liberation theologian, Romero’s leftist views previously had been the grounds for church officials in Rome to block his beatification. This shift in the balance of power within the church, like the pope’s use of Argentine Spanish, is also part of broader realignments in the geopolitical order and their linguistic entailments: as some Latin American countries have moved past their former colonizers in the configuration of global power relations, New World varieties of Spanish and Portuguese have increasingly come to eclipse their peninsular counterparts in the global “marketplace of languages.” This has implications for the global

standing of Latin America's other languages as well. Since taking office, for example, one of Pope Francis's most remarkable decisions has been to approve a request from the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas (in Chiapas, Mexico) to officially approve the use of Mayan languages for mass, confession, and other Catholic rituals.

PAPAL *PORTEÑO* AND PRISON NAHUATL: LATIN  
AMERICA, LANGUAGE, AND THE WORLD TODAY

*The Circulation of Things*

Today, the reality of Latin America's national languages is one of global influence, and of crossing rather than remaining within national borders. This shift has been made possible by the circulation of people, ideas, and things—including a wide range of cultural goods tied to Latin American languages. These include music (Maisonave this volume), film (Guillermoprieto this volume), *telenovelas* and other television programming (Benavides this volume), cuisine (Portnoy and Pilcher this volume), artwork, dance forms, and literature (Stavans this volume). Even languages themselves have made a splash on the global stage, as when the story of Ayapaneco—a dying indigenous language spoken in the Mexican state of Tabasco—recently became the centerpiece of an advertising campaign produced for the German telecom company Vodafone. Peruvian Quechua, famously, made it to a distant galaxy far, far away when George Lucas appropriated it for an alien argot in the original *Star Wars* movie.

Food terms like *chipotle*, which comes from Nahuatl *chili poctli*, “smoked chili pepper,” and *tapioca*, from Tupí, are not only part of our shared global culinary vocabulary; they also function as symbolic gateways, inviting people to explore Latin America in a deeper way. Musical language serves a similar role. The global circulation of Latin American music and dance means that names such as *merengue*, *tango*, *cumbia*, *calypso*, *bolero*, *bossa nova*, and *samba* have been absorbed into languages around the world. And because the music itself is circulated and performed in Latin American languages, they, too, have a global presence, even for consumers who do not understand them. The same is true of Latin America's vibrant tradition of literary, film, and television production. Even in translation, elements of the original language are preserved, broadening the global influence of Latin American languages.

## *Migration*

People have been moving to Latin America for centuries. Yet the region is more often portrayed not as a destination for migrants but as a mass producer of them. One of the best-known—and heavily stereotyped—vectors of Latin American linguistic influence on the world concerns this movement of Latin Americans into other countries across the globe. Latin Americans carry their languages with them on their journeys; badges of identity, they are also symbolic resources useful in establishing and maintaining connections in their destination countries. Latin American migrants have succeeded, to varying degrees, in preserving the use of their languages across multiple generations and in establishing public places for them. Pope Francis's family history exemplifies such trends. Born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Buenos Aires in 1936, he was a child of immigrants who fled to Argentina to escape the fascism of Benito Mussolini's Italy. And like countless Latin Americans, he has "returned" to a place where he has roots that are not only cultural and historical but also linguistic. As Latin Americans have moved in large numbers to countries where they share the national language—Peruvians and Ecuadorans migrating to Spain, Brazilians to Portugal—their movement mirrors in reverse colonial-era migrations from Europe to the Americas.

The pattern has been echoed by people with ties to countries other than the Iberian colonial powers. Thus today there are large groups of Spanish-speaking Argentines, Chileans, and Venezuelans in Italy, Germany, and France; in Japan, there are sizable numbers of Peruvians and Ecuadorans. Though many do not speak the national language of the destination country, they have nevertheless been exposed to it in myriad ways through the presence of languages such as German, Italian, and Japanese in Latin America. Borges's own history echoes similar engagements with other countries and their languages. The author was raised in a bilingual Spanish-English household (one grandmother was English) and spent his formative years at schools in Switzerland and Spain.

### *Latin Americans in the United States*

The country with the single largest number of Latin American migrants is the United States. This case exemplifies the dynamic flow of languages and ideas about them out from Latin America into the rest of the world. The history of U.S. influence in Latin America has often appeared—



notwithstanding official views to the contrary—to be little more than a new form of imperialism. But however one interprets U.S. political involvement in the region—from the Monroe Doctrine through the Cold War into the present—that history has positioned English as an invaluable linguistic resource across Latin America. While a relatively small percentage of Latin Americans speaks English as a first language, English has been of critical importance for Latin Americans moving back and forth between the region and the United States (and Canada) out of economic necessity. It has also played a crucial role in the lives of elite Latin Americans, who often pursue university education, shop, vacation, and do business in the United States. Within Latin America, English has been and continues to serve as a medium for political and economic transactions and as a gateway to Anglophone culture. Latin Americans have become adept at varying their spelling and pronunciation with great precision in order to indicate whether borrowed bits of English are meant to be understood as useful additions to local vocabulary or as evidence of American imperialism. It may be *Halloween* for a school lesson on American holidays, but it quickly becomes *Jalowin* in a sarcastic rant about the Americanization of Mexico's Day of the Dead festivities. Young people across Latin America ("fresas" in Mexico, "chetos" in Uruguay) pepper their speech with English slang in order to strike a cosmopolitan, upper-class pose. A wildly popular Mexican-Venezuelan children's television program called *La CQ* has teenage girls all over Latin America yelling, "¡Focus, chicos! ¡Focus!"

Anglo Americans do comparable symbolic work with badly mispronounced and ungrammatical Spanish. Often it gets used in clearly pejorative ways, as when a used car is sold "for pesos." Somehow a siesta sounds more decadent than an afternoon nap, a fiesta wilder than a festival. At other times, mock Spanish seems to evoke a fun-loving casual stance: "No problema, man" (the grammatically correct version is "No hay problema"). And of course, there is a long and storied association in the American imagination between Spanish and the "Wild West." This includes places, such as the Ponderosa and Laredo; people and animals, such as buckaroo (*vaquero*, "cowboy") and mustang (*mesteño*); and institutions, such as ranch, rodeo, and hoosegow (*juzgado*, "jail").

Diverse communities of Latin American migrants have played a prominent role in American public life. Over the past century, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Haitians, and Cubans have all migrated to the United States in large numbers for reasons ranging from political repression and upheaval to

economic necessity. Latin American migrants have a highly visible commercial presence, with restaurants and stores catering specifically to migrants and often targeting customers by country of origin; their influence is also felt through numerous cultural and religious organizations and events. Their existence has linguistic implications as well. Such businesses, institutions, organizations, and activities revolve around the use of Latin American languages. They create public spaces where using Latin American Spanish and Portuguese, Caribbean creoles, and Amerindian languages are legitimized and given value. This supports their transmission across generations and even recruits new speakers. Their use in the United States creates new spaces for linguistic mingling, where the dynamics of linguistic and cultural coexistence can be worked out in practice.

Immigrants are drawn to particular parts of the United States not only by networks of kinship but also by other forms of alliance that include sharing a language, even if not a country of origin. Thus most Portuguese-speaking immigrants to the United States moved to New England: initial migrants from Portugal, who arrived to work in the fishing and whaling industries, were later joined by migrants from Brazil, Cape Verde, and even Angola, all bringing along their own varieties of Portuguese as well as local creoles. Guatemalans and Salvadorans, for example, have tended to settle in regions with large communities of Mexicans and Mexican Americans—in a few cases, through connections made during their journey to the United States, which generally involves passing through Mexico first.

As the single largest group of Latin American immigrants to the country, the tens of millions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the United States are perhaps a special case. In some locales—California, Texas, and Florida, as well as major cities like Chicago and New York—their numbers are especially large. But there are also sizable populations in nearly every state. Their relationship to the United States is conditioned not only by complex political and economic dynamics but also by geographic ones born of sharing—and fighting over—a common border. Officially the dividing line where Latin America ends, the U.S.-Mexico border is also one of the longest, most politically fraught, and most economically unequal international boundaries in the world.

Yet in the context of lived daily experience, the boundary between Mexican immigrants and the rest of the U.S. population is largely marked—and politicized—by language. Most Mexican immigrants speak Spanish, relatively few arrive speaking English, and most will conduct the bulk of

their professional and personal lives in the United States in Spanish, even if they settle in the country permanently. The sheer size of the Spanish-speaking population in the United States makes this possible. Combined, Mexicans and other Spanish-speaking immigrant communities support a vast array of Spanish-dominant workplaces, businesses, service and cultural organizations, and media outlets. Their overwhelming numbers, geographic spread, public presence, and political prominence has made Spanish a de facto second language in the United States—a trend alternately lauded and attacked.

Lesser known is the extent to which many Mexican migrants are indigenous, and may speak little or no Spanish—sometimes resulting in tragic situations where individuals have been committed to mental institutions or denied legal rights. In other ways, however, indigenous Mexican languages have a demonstrable if modest public profile. The city of Los Angeles, for example, has both Zapotec and Mixtec newspapers and radio stations. And as with Latin American national languages, migration patterns between the United States and Mexico are shaped by indigenous languages: indigenous Mexicans overwhelmingly tend to migrate to areas where there are sizable groups of migrants who share their native language, as is the case with communities of indigenous Mexicans in Oxnard, Poughkeepsie, and Raleigh-Durham.

### *Language Debates*

Debates about the presence of Latin Americans in the United States have had an outsized effect on conversations about Latin America's engagement with the world. On the one hand, in American popular culture, Latin American languages and their speakers serve as stand-ins for the quintessential Other. Their use in American films is particularly evocative: in thousands of films, spanning decades, Spanish-speaking Latin Americans and Latinos are portrayed as villains. On the other hand, the presence of Latin American languages in the United States has been a tale of increasing acceptance. Spanish has permeated English to the point, for example, that "Hasta la vista, baby!" can be uttered without translation in a Hollywood blockbuster.

Yet the increasingly public presence of Spanish on everything from voting ballots to billboards has also been the target of pointed critiques. While such arguments may be undergirded by anti-immigrant or even outright racist sentiment, they take language use as an acceptable site for expressing xenophobic views. A widely circulating Internet meme has an image of John Wayne in front of an American flag saying, "Now just why in the HELL do

I have to press ‘i’ for English???” Language use is an arena where broader conflicts about immigration are waged, as reflected in debates about the acceptability of such phrases as “illegal immigrant” and “undocumented worker.” While the choice between them may be cast as a dispute about labeling, the argument is animated by deeply conflicting political views about the relationship between Latin Americans and the United States.

Sometimes these debates move in unpredictable directions and spawn unexpected consequences. One striking example involves the way that Mexican gang members in U.S. prisons use Nahuatl as a private form of communication and demand access to materials about the language on cultural grounds. Another relevant example concerns the deportation of people who arrived in the United States as children and have spent the majority of their lives there. Because they speak fluent and “unaccented” American English—often speaking it better than they do Spanish—they have become coveted employees for American companies seeking to cut costs by locating customer call centers outside the United States.

The circulation of things Latin American has boosted the worldwide influence of Brazilian Portuguese and Latin American varieties of Spanish. Though long treated as inferior to the versions one hears in Portugal and Spain, Latin American varieties now dominate second language instruction, bowing to the reality that 90 percent of the world’s Spanish speakers and 75 percent of its Portuguese speakers reside in the Americas. Each year, the Royal Spanish Academy’s dictionary includes an ever larger percentage of words with New World origins. When the Academy decided to add the term *espanglish* to its 2014 dictionary, advocates of this English-Spanish hybrid were pleased. But when they found out that the Academy intended to define it as “a form of speech used by some Hispanic groups in the United States, in which they mix deformed elements of vocabulary and grammar from both Spanish and English,” the reaction was swift and loud. The Academy finally relented and agreed to remove the word *deformed* from the definition.

One of the most distinctive features of some varieties of Latin American Spanish is the *voseo*—the widespread use of *vos*, “you,” as a formal second-person pronoun. It is a more archaic form than the *usted* form of “you” found in Caribbean and Iberian Spanish. *Vos* flourished, especially in South America, during an era of relatively little contact between the New World Spanish colonies and Europe. Something comparable happened with Brazilian Portuguese. *Vos*-filled Spanish is the style that Borges used in his writing and that Pope Francis has now brought to the Vatican. We live in an

era when the centers of linguistic influence have shifted from Madrid to Mexico City and Miami, from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro and New Bedford. If the Latin American *vos* eventually fades out of use, it will be because of the popularity of Mexican soap operas—and the *vos*-free variety of Spanish spoken in them—rather than the edicts of the Royal Spanish Academy’s “language cops.”

Language has shaped Latin America as a region and mediates its connections with the rest of the world. Heated debates about language—about what languages to speak and who should be speaking them—are taking place right now in Latin America, just as they are across the border in the United States and in places around the globe where Latin Americans reside. Should we raise bilingual children? How can we maintain the vitality of Latin America’s hundreds of indigenous languages? Is it okay to code-switch, use borrowed words, speak Spanglish or Portuñol, use *vos* rather than *usted*? Such questions are simultaneously about language loyalties and the social landscape writ large. The Latin American “Library of Babel” is kaleidoscopic, unpredictable, conflictive, and vibrant: an archive of Latin America’s history, it is also a story about the region’s globalized future, told in a thousand different tongues.

#### SUGGESTED READING

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