

CONCISE
HISTORY
OF THE
MODERN
WORLD



A HISTORY OF MODERN LATIN AMERICA

1800 TO THE PRESENT

Second Edition

TERESA A. MEADE

WILEY

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For the best sister ever
Martha G. Meade (1957-2012)

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Cubans as patriotic, hardworking, and peace loving, cheering amidst a sea of flags, machetes, and doves. On the street in front of the billboard, a pre-1959 US automobile in remarkably pristine condition stands as an ironic symbol of revolutionary Cuba's conflicted relationship with the United States. (Martin Benjamin photo).

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American naval forces gathered with the focus on building a hemispheric coalition for mutual defense and cooperation. This photo was shot a month before the abortive coup against Chávez, which the United States supported. Despite periodic tension between leaders of the United States and Venezuela, the two countries maintain commercial and diplomatic ties. (Martin Maddock, USN, photo).

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Preface to the Second Edition

This book covers well over 200 years of Latin American history, and while the history of the early centuries has changed little in these pages since the first edition appeared in 2010, the account of recent events reflects the considerable changes that have taken place since that edition was published. The December 17, 2014, announcement of the opening of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba after over 50 years of embargo and isolation illustrated three significant changes. First, the United States was ending the last vestiges of a failed Cold War policy. As President Barack Obama noted, “I do not believe we can keep doing the same things for over five decades and expect a different result.”¹ Secondly, many Latin Americans were aware, if most people in the United States were not, that Cuba enjoyed a warm relationship with the left-of-center, and even moderate, governments of the hemisphere. At the 2012 Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, Colombia, the Latin American and Caribbean heads of state voted to invite Cuba to the 2015 meeting in Panama. Opposed only by the United States and Canada (a country that nonetheless has long held relations with Cuba), the vote indicated that the rest of the Americas were prepared to hold the meeting without the hemisphere's most powerful member. This was a considerable departure from America's “Big Stick” wielding days of not so long ago. And finally, both Obama and Raúl Castro, who spoke simultaneously in Cuba on December 17, credited Argentine Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope, with pushing each side to an agreement. The late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, Cuba's most outspoken defender in the last few decades, may have

smiled from his grave at this turn of events, but the rest of Latin America relished the signs of a new era.

The history of Latin America in this text begins with a brief summary of European colonialism, laying the groundwork for the succeeding chapters on the history of the independent nation-states. Presenting such a history is not easy: Latin America is immense and diverse; events that have a huge impact on one nation or region (such as the US war with Mexico in the 1840s) may affect others only tangentially, or not at all. Moreover, textbooks such as this one inevitably experience a crucial conflict. While the text should present a broad, general interpretation that makes sense of many disparate details and events, it is impossible to explore fully each and every event undergirding the big picture. Another inevitable tension is chronology (time) versus topics, as well as time versus place (country or region). Since historical events build on and grow out of whatever comes before, and lead into and influence that which comes after, it is very difficult to extract a happening from its context, especially given the many cultural, social, economic, and political contexts surrounding every historical moment.

Historians must always grapple with this dilemma of presentation: the author can stick to certain themes and relay a general analysis fitted roughly into a chronology or, alternatively, can relate the history of one country, or group of countries, one at a time. The country-by-country approach is often more precise, but difficult to use in the standard history class, while covering many nations in one full sweep can become confusing. Ultimately neither approach succeeds if the end product is stripped of the fascinating stories of people and events that make up the overall narrative.

In this text modern Latin American history is viewed through the prism of social class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Specific historical events and trends – such as the slave revolt in Haiti, the patriarchal rules governing marriage in Brazil, construction of the Panama Canal, or the Mexican Revolution – are explained according to this interpretive approach. The seemingly unconnected events in the histories of Latin American societies make up an account that is more than the sum of its parts; rather the parts, selected for their explanatory value, help us understand the whole. Thus I present examples of what transpired in a single nation at a specific time as representative of wider phenomena that serve as a window into the ideas, conflicts, social movements, cultural trends, and ascribed meanings that have made an appearance on Latin America's historical landscape.

This book relies on many texts, monographs, document sets, and journalistic and fictional portrayals of Latin America's rich history; however, it was necessary to allow one event to serve as the archetypical illustration of wider trends. For example, a discussion of Argentina's labor movement is used to reflect the struggle between workers and owners that unfolded under specific conditions but also took place in many countries. Labor in other areas is then covered in broad strokes, with the assumption that readers and instructors will draw on other examples to fill in the historical blanks. I settled on this approach after more than 20 years of teaching, mainly in a small liberal arts college, where it soon became apparent that students are better able to grasp the big picture when given smaller, concrete incidents to illustrate broader interpretations. Relying solely on “big theories” and moving from country to country and event to event, makes students' eyes glaze over, and note-taking turns to doodling. Blame could be placed on poor training in geography, the ethnocentrism of