CONCISE HISTORY OF THE MODERN WORLD

A HISTORY OF MODERN LATIN AMERICA

1800 TO THE PRESENT

TERESA A. MEADE

WILEY-BLACKWELL

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Covering the major regions of the world, each history in this series provides a vigorous interpretation of its region's past in the modern age. Informed by the latest scholarship, but assuming no prior knowledge, each author presents developments within a clear analytic framework. Unusually, the histories acknowledge the limitations of their own generalizations. Authors are encouraged to balance perspectives from the broad historical landscape with discussion of particular features of the past that may or may not conform to the larger impression. The aim is to provide a lively explanation of the transformations of the modern period and the interplay between long-term change and "defining moments" of history.

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1800 to the Present

Teresa A. Meade


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Preface

This book covers well over 200 years of Latin American history. It begins with a brief summary of European colonialism, laying the groundwork for the succeeding chapters on the history of the independent nation-states that make up modern Latin America. 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 of this sort inevitably experience a crucial conflict. The text should present a broad, general interpretation that makes sense of many disparate details and events, yet 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 it really doesn’t matter which approach is used if the end product is stripped of the fascinating stories and the lives of people who contribute to the overall narrative.

This book presents Latin American history as seen 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 come together in a narrative 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 a wider phenomenon and to 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. The resulting interpretation derives from a process of sifting and sorting through an immense amount of material; choices have been made as to what to include and, often with terrible regret, what to leave out.

Readers who seek a general level of analysis and broad historical narrative will find it here. The book refers to and describes major issues and events, drawing on many valuable texts, monographs, document sets, journalistic and fictional accounts of Latin America's rich history. At the same time, it was often necessary to allow one event to serve as the archetypical illustration of important 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 out the narrative. I settled on this approach after more than 20 years of college teaching, mainly in a small liberal arts institution, where it soon became apparent that students are better able to grasp the big picture when given smaller,

concrete incidents to exemplify the story on which the broader interpretation is based. Relying solely on “big theories” and moving from country to country and event to event makes students’ eyes glaze over and note-taking turn to doodling. Blame could be placed on poor training in geography, the ethnocentrism of US society, the internet, or what have you, but the truth remains that we often develop our understanding of history by building out from a specific example or single historical event. Similarly, the generalities of history often become clear when we focus on a concrete example, or a few examples, to illustrate the point.

Finally, history is based on original sources. The particular interpretation historians have drawn from those sources, even the conflicting conclusions they derive after looking at the same or similar documents, is the heart and soul of the enterprise. Interspersed throughout this narrative are first-hand accounts, documents, and excerpts from fiction, displayed in boxes. These boxes have two purposes. On the one hand, they can serve as the basis of discussion in a class; on the other, they demonstrate the kinds of materials historians draw on to construct a narrative, thereby allowing the reader of the text to critically judge the author’s interpretation. Although I am well aware that readers sometimes skip over this additional material, seeing it as irrelevant to the text, I am hopeful that instructors and students will pause to examine an original document, a quirky historical fact, and a literary comment, in the course of reading the broader narrative. The use of primary sources allows the reader and the student of history to take up the analytical process for her or himself. A Further Reading section at the end lists books chapter by chapter for ease of reference.

In addition to documents and first-hand accounts, I have also chosen to weave in historical, and also sometimes fictional, asides, from various authors, including the

Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano. Galeano compiled a three-volume “based on fact” fictional interpretation of major events in the history of the Americas from the pre-Columbian period to the late twentieth century. He did this, he anthropomorphized, because “Poor History had stopped breathing: betrayed in academic texts, lied about in classrooms, drowned in dates, they had imprisoned her in museums and buried her, with floral wreaths, beneath statuary bronze and monumental marble.”[1] As a historian and teacher, I naturally beg to differ a bit with his conclusion, since those of us who teach and write strive to present history as a lively narrative, not dull facts drowned in dates. However, Galeano is right when he exhorts us to rescue history from hero worship and to question the sources, since neither they, nor the facts they present, “speak for themselves.” In his trilogy *Memory of Fire*, Galeano freely and provocatively writes the history of the Americas. Drawing on documents, he creates a fanciful narrative of the past, which at points misses the mark and at others nails it precisely.

In the end, we are all interpreters of history, trying to make sense of our own past and our place within the era in which we are living; and for that we rely on books and the explanations contained within them. Although this *History of Modern Latin America* is a very small contribution to that daunting enterprise, I hope readers will find the events and people who comprise the narrative of Latin America’s past interesting, the explanation of that history understandable and enlightening, and the interpretation challenging. History should be nothing less.

Acknowledgments

In the course of writing this book, I have been assisted by many colleagues whom I am happy to acknowledge. Christopher Wheeler, now at Oxford University Press, first talked to me about this project over a drink at the American Historian Association conference where we discussed our mutual admiration for the work of Eric Hobsbawm. I have never met Mr. Hobsbawm, but I want to thank him for his many inspiring and profound insights, as well as Christopher and Tessa Harvey at Blackwell for the conversation that pulled me into this book. Many thanks to Peter Coveney, my editor at Wiley-Blackwell, who saw the book through to completion, and to his assistants Deirdre Ilkson and Galen Smith, who competently and cheerfully answered my millions of queries along the way. My special thanks to Caroline Richards for copyediting.

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Alison Raphael applied her copyediting wizardry to the first draft and improved the prose. Working with Alison, whom I have known since the mid-1970s when we met researching our dissertations in Rio de Janeiro, was a special treat. My

sister, Martha Meade, read the entire manuscript from start to finish, offered comments based on her years of teaching high school history and caught a number of errors. My family, Darren, Claire, and Andor Skotnes, provided expertise with computers, photographs, and technical and editorial advice. Andor, especially, I can never thank enough.

It is impossible to acknowledge all the people who contributed to this book, mainly because the process of writing a textbook draws on the resources of an entire profession. My debt is primarily to the many scholars who have explored, analyzed, photographed, mapped, and charted the history of Latin America. Compiling a narrative from mountains of books, articles, web pages, and news articles was both an inspiring and a humbling experience. The scholarship on Latin America is truly impressive; whatever errors and inadequacies remain in this text are my own.

About the cover image

The painting on the cover is *Cánto a la Naturaleza* (*Song to Nature*) by Paula Nicho Cumes, an indigenous Kaqchikel Maya Indian from San Juan Comalapa. One of the foremost Maya female artists in Guatemala today, Nicho Cumes' work is noted for original and unusual themes, reflective of an authentic, self-taught, style.

For more about Paula Nicho Cumes and other Maya artists, see the web site http://www.artemaya.com/.

1

Introduction to the Land and Its People

Latin America is a vast, geographically and culturally diverse region stretching from the southern border of the United States to Puerto Toro at the tip of Chile, the southernmost town of the planet. Encompassing over 8 million square miles, the 20 countries that make up Latin America are home to an estimated 550 million people who converse in at least five European-based languages and six or more main indigenous languages, plus African Creole and hundreds of smaller language groups.

Historians disagree over the origin of the name “Latin America.” Some contend that geographers in the sixteenth century gave the name “Latin America” to the new lands colonized by Spain and Portugal in reference to the Latin-based languages imposed on indigenous people and imported African slaves in the newly acquired territories. More recently, others have argued that the name originated in France in the 1860s under the reign of Napoleon III, as a result of that country’s short-lived attempt to fold all the Latin-language-derived countries of the Americas into a neocolonial empire. Although other European powers (Britain, Holland, and Denmark) colonized parts of the Americas, the term “Latin America” generally refers to those territories in which the main spoken language is Spanish or Portuguese: Mexico, most of Central and South America, and the Caribbean islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. The former French possessions of Haiti

and other islands of the Caribbean, French Guiana on the South American continent, and even Quebec in Canada, could be included in a broadened definition of Latin America. However, this book defines Latin America as the region that fell under Spanish and Portuguese domination beginning in the late fifteenth and into the mid-sixteenth centuries. The definition also encompasses other Caribbean and South American countries such as Haiti and Jamaica among others, since events in those areas are important to our historical narrative. This definition follows the practice of scholars in recent years, who have generally defined Latin America and the Caribbean as a socially and economically interrelated entity, no matter what language or culture predominates.

Geography

Latin America boasts some of the largest cities in the world, including four of the top 20: Mexico City, São Paulo (Brazil), Bogotá (Colombia) and Lima (Peru). When defined by greater metropolitan area – the city plus outskirts – Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) join the list of the world's megacities, the term for a metropolis of more than 10 million people. Population figures, however, are controversial since most of these gigantic urban centers include, in addition to the housed and settled population, transitory masses of destitute migrants living in makeshift dwellings or in the open air. It is hard for census takers and demographers to obtain an accurate count under those circumstances.

Not only does Latin America have some of the largest population centers in the world, but its countryside, jungles, mountains, and coastlines are major geographical and topographical landmarks (see Map 1.1). The 2-million-square-mile Amazon Basin is the largest rainforest in the

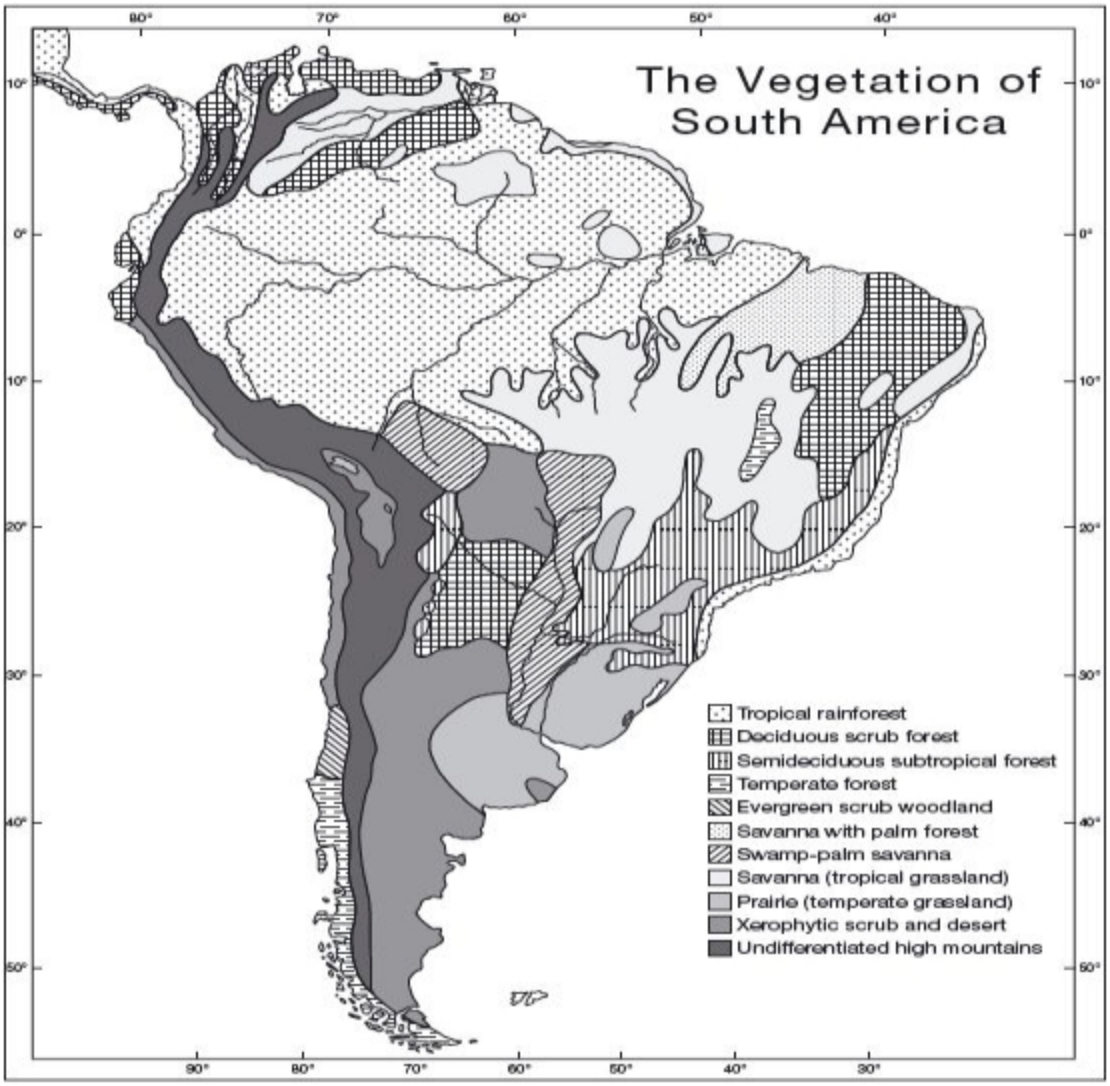
world. Spanning the far north of Brazil, stretching into Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela, it is home for approximately 15 percent of all living species on the planet. South and to the east of the Amazon Basin in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso lays the Pantanal, the world's largest wetlands. Other superlatives include the highest mountain range of the Americas (the Andes) that stretches nearly the entire length of the continent; second in the world to the Himalayas of Asia in height, the Andes are much longer, geologically younger, and very seismically active. The Andean peak Aconcagua in Chile is the highest mountain in the Americas, which at 22,834 ft. exceeds Dinali (Mt. McKinley) in Alaska by over 2,000 ft. The Atacama Desert, spanning Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, is the driest place on earth and the largest depository of sodium nitrates on the planet. Elsewhere in the Andean region is Lake Titicaca, the most elevated navigable body of water in the world. This huge lake forms the boundary between Peru and Bolivia, and the Bolivian city of La Paz is the world's highest-altitude capital city. Angel Falls in Venezuela is the highest waterfall in the world; at 3,212 ft. it is almost 20 times higher than Niagara Falls. Angel Falls connects through tributaries to the world's largest river (in volume), the Amazon. In its 25,000 miles of navigable water, this mighty "River Sea," as the Amazon River is called, contains 16 percent of the world's river water and 20 percent of the fresh water on Earth.

People

The sheer diversity of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean has made the region extremely interesting culturally, but has also affected the level of economic and political equality. Latin America is exceedingly diverse, a place where the interaction, cross-fertilization, mutation,

interpenetration, and reinvention of cultures from Europe, Asia, Africa, and indigenous America has produced a lively and rich set of traditions in music, art, literature, religion, sport, dance, and political and economic trends. Bolivia, for example, elected an indigenous president in 2005 who was a former coca leaf farmer. President Evo Morales won easily with the backing of poor and indigenous Bolivians but has met hostility from wealthy and middle-class citizens who benefited from the country's natural gas exports and follow more "Western" traditions. Thus ethnic and racial strife has accompanied synthesis and cultural enrichment as cultures continue to confront each other more than 500 years past the original fifteenth-century encounter. (See Map 1.2.)

Map 1.1 The vegetation of South America. (Courtesy Cathryn L. Lombardi and John V. Lombardi, *Latin American History: A Teaching Atlas*, ca. 1983. By permission of The University of Wisconsin Press.)



In Bolivia and Peru people who trace their ethnicity back to the pre-Columbian era constitute the majority, while in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Venezuela people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry, known as mestizos, constitute the majority. Africans were imported as slaves from the sixteenth until the mid-nineteenth centuries, and their descendants still comprise over half of the population in many areas. People in the Caribbean islands of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, as well as in many South American nations, especially Brazil, are descendants of a mixture of Africans and Europeans,