

SURVEYING THE PAST:
Latin American History Textbooks and Readers

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- LATIN AMERICA: A CONCISE INTERPRETIVE HISTORY.* By E. BRADFORD BURNS. Fourth edition. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986. Pp. 336. \$18.95.)
- MODERN LATIN AMERICA.* By THOMAS E. SKIDMORE and PETER H. SMITH. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984. Pp. 419. \$22.50 cloth, \$12.95 paper.)
- A SHORT HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA.* Edited by BENJAMIN KEEN and MARK WASSERMAN. Second edition. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984. Pp. 544. \$19.95.)
- SPAIN AND PORTUGAL IN THE NEW WORLD, 1492–1700.* By LYLE N. MCALISTER. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Pp. 585. \$35.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.)
- LATIN AMERICAN CIVILIZATION: HISTORY AND SOCIETY, 1492 TO THE PRESENT.* Edited by BENJAMIN KEEN. Fourth edition, revised. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986. Pp. 425. \$42.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)
- CITIES AND SOCIETY IN COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA.* Edited by LOUISA SCHELL HOBERMAN and SUSAN MIGDEN SOCOLOW. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986. Pp. 350. \$30.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)
- READINGS IN LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY. Volume I: THE FORMATIVE CENTURIES; Volume II: THE MODERN EXPERIENCE.* Edited by PETER J. BAKEWELL, JOHN J. JOHNSON, and MEREDITH D. DODGE. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985. Pp. 464, 428. Per volume, \$32.50 cloth, \$14.75 paper.)

The introductory survey of Latin American history is the most challenging course a historian of Latin America can teach because it offers the best, and often the last, opportunity to influence college students' perceptions of Latin America's past. Despite the efforts of even exceptional teachers, most students who enroll in the survey will not go on to more specialized courses, and the survey will likely remain their most important frame of reference for understanding what they hear and read about Latin America during their adult lives. Thus the survey

offers the opportunity to shape the way these adults will respond to Latin America in the coming decades.

Constructing a well-designed and stimulating introduction to Latin American history presents a daunting practical and philosophical challenge. How does one convey the stunning diversity of the various Latin Americas and simultaneously construct a coherent vision of Latin America as a viable unit of analysis? How does one survey the history of twenty or more nations across five centuries and leave students with a clear sense of common patterns as well as regional variations? Although dynamic lectures and audiovisuals are essential in capturing the attention of college students raised on a steady diet of television, radio, and movies, the reading list for the survey course remains crucial to its success or failure. Teachers may entice students with attractive appetizers and glamorous desserts, but the readings (along with lectures) provide the main course. What kind of text is appropriate? What kind of printed readers are available? To what extent do they fit the instructor's vision of Latin America and the structure of the course? Is a textbook really necessary, or is it better simply to select a series of primary and secondary sources tailored to the unique needs and nuances of one's own approach to the course?

The pursuit of the perfect text and reading list is elusive and never-ending. Putting together a well-crafted Latin American history text for the college survey course is a difficult and underappreciated task. Over the past half-century, numerous historians have grappled with this task, and their works reflect various approaches to teaching the survey as well as the changing nature of the field.

Textbooks have generally taken one of two approaches. The first attempts to be encyclopedic, beginning with an overview of the colonial era and then covering the region, country by country, through the national period. Dana Munro's *The Latin American Republics: A History* (1942) was an early example of this genre.¹ In the 1950s and 1960s, the widely adopted works of John Fagg and Hubert Herring also followed this format.² The second approach consciously avoids efforts to reproduce the parade of generals and presidents in all countries, seeking instead to interpret the major themes of Latin American history through a select group of nations. Sacrificing detail and comprehensiveness, these textbooks stress patterns and processes in politics, economics, society, and culture. Donald Worcester's and Wendell Schaeffer's *The Growth and Culture of Latin America* (1956) was an early example of this approach.³

The initial efforts to synthesize Latin American history in the 1930s and 1940s stressed the institutional approach, with an emphasis on political, diplomatic, military, and intellectual history that resulted in a strong narrative structure and a focus on elites. In addition to stress-

ing the conquest, the colonial period, and the connections between Anglo and Latin American history, the early textbooks mirrored the main directions of work in the field prior to the 1950s, including the powerful influence of Herbert Eugene Bolton and his students.⁴ Since 1970 a number of new textbooks have appeared, using variations on the encyclopedic and interpretive approaches, and they have reflected both the dramatic shift and the boom in Latin American history since the 1950s. These newer works eschew the old institutional stress on politicians, diplomats, generals, and intellectuals. They stress instead socio-economic interpretations influenced by dependency and world-systems theories. These textbooks place more emphasis on the national period and less on the colonial period than their predecessors and make conscious efforts to incorporate social history into the analysis of larger structures. They also demonstrate the diminished influence of the Boltonian tradition and its emphasis on a history of the Americas, although their definitions of Latin America often stretch beyond the traditional unit consisting of the eighteen Spanish-speaking nations, Brazil, and Haiti.

One of the first of the new textbooks to appear was Bradford Burns's *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History* (1972), a text whose popularity is evidenced by the recent appearance of a fourth edition (1986).⁵ The strengths of his volume are its clear thematic continuity, provocative analysis, and vigorous narrative. The number of chapters has expanded from seven to ten, with the latest edition incorporating new material on Central America and the debt crisis. After two chapters on the pre-independence period, Burns devotes roughly four chapters to the nineteenth century and four to the twentieth. Despite the additions over the years, the book is still an extraordinarily concise 350 pages. Avoiding the encyclopedic approach, Burns illustrates his major themes with cases. No other Latin American history textbook does a better job of integrating the Brazilian experience with the Spanish American and the traditionally neglected cases (Haiti and Paraguay, for example) with the histories of the larger nations. His inclusion of the independent nations of the English-speaking Caribbean and Surinam, although dealt with very briefly, extends the concept of Latin America beyond the traditional bounds. Four-fifths of the text covers the period since independence, making the book more appropriate for a course on the national period rather than a full survey.

Arguing that the struggle for development forms the leitmotif of contemporary Latin America, Burns presents the reader with an enigma: poor people inhabiting rich lands, poverty amidst plenty. He offers a dependency framework to explain this enigma. Although Latin America has experienced economic growth over the past five centuries, it has not developed, that is to say, the majority of the population have

not benefited from the fruits of that growth. He attributes this outcome to one complex cause: traditional elites in control of land (and labor) have dominated the economy, maintained political power with the assistance of the military, and perpetuated updated versions of the old colonial institutions. Although independence severed elite ties with Spain, Great Britain stepped in to establish a new form of economic and political dependence (neocolonialism) with the cooperation of Latin American elites. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Europeanized elites forced modernization on the largely rural masses (the folk) who resisted, at times with extraordinary tenacity. By 1900, however, the tide had definitively turned against traditional folk society, and new forces had emerged on the scene. Dependence shifted from Great Britain to the United States, and the middle class began to emerge as a new force playing a crucial role in attempting to dismantle the old institutions through reform or revolution.

Burns emphasizes the need to recognize the desires of Latin Americans to change their society and to avoid viewing the region as simply a battleground between communists and anticommunists. Despite the failure of many reformist and revolutionary movements in recent years, he argues that Latin America can achieve development through internal changes that shift political power to the people, land to the masses, agriculture toward domestic consumption, and the economy toward rational national planning. Having indicted capitalism for many of Latin America's problems, Burns proposes democratic socialism as a viable and desirable alternative. The Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions also receive very favorable portrayals. Although the book offers provocative and controversial interpretations, it also provides students with a strong framework for analysis and debate and exposes them to the roles of both elites and masses. Students will get a feel for the major features and patterns in Latin American history. Burns's *Latin America* is not the textbook for those interested in detailed case studies, however.

Like the Burns textbook, Thomas Skidmore's and Peter Smith's *Modern Latin America* is a one-volume treatment that focuses principally on the years after independence, particularly the twentieth century. The authors borrow from modernization and dependency theories and set out their conceptual framework explicitly in an excellent prologue entitled "Why Latin America?" They "take the causal premise that economic transformations induce social changes which, in turn, have political consequences" (p. 11). Skidmore and Smith argue that a country's place in the international division of labor defines the paths available to it and that Latin America's location on the periphery of capitalist expansion is the key to its economic transformations. Being on the periphery produces economic and social changes very different from those in the

North Atlantic nations, shaping the opportunities of political leaders and helping to explain the persistence of nondemocratic regimes in Latin America. But unlike many dependency theorists, Skidmore and Smith believe that such an approach becomes more difficult to apply and more problematic as one goes further back into the past. Despite their emphasis on economic transformations, they argue for a multi-causal analysis.

The first chapter synthesizes the key features of Latin America up to the 1880s, and the second surveys economic transformations during the last century. The next eight chapters provide case studies of six countries and one region: Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Cuba, and Central America. Although less interpretive than Burns, Skidmore and Smith opt for a set of illustrative case studies rather than attempting individual chapters on all the nations in the region. This approach leaves out important cases (like Colombia, Venezuela, and Bolivia), but the authors argue that they cover more than 80 percent of the population of Latin America in these eight chapters (Skidmore and Smith's Latin America includes twenty-five nations—the traditional twenty plus Belize, Guyana, Surinam, French Guiana, and Puerto Rico). Diverging from the history of generals and presidents found in the more traditional textbooks, these chapters carefully scrutinize the social classes and political patterns of each case. The chapters on Brazil and Argentina are especially good, but the chapter on Central America is weak due to the attempt to cover six countries in one chapter. Although Skidmore and Smith note the achievements of the Cuban Revolution, they are much more critical of the revolution than is Burns.

After the case studies, Skidmore and Smith return to a regional focus with a chapter entitled "Latin America, the United States, and the World" and a stimulating epilogue, "What Future for Latin America?" In the epilogue, they systematically survey the social and political situation in each of the case studies and provide excellent diagrams of political alignments. While acknowledging the immense difficulties of predicting the future, Skidmore and Smith are bold enough to venture some general predictions about Latin America's future. They see little hope for the "revolutionary option" or for the triumph of socialism, believing it more likely that Latin America will continue to evolve under forms of "hybrid capitalism" characterized by the interaction of private national, state, and foreign (multinational) capital and a variety of political regimes. Their brief statistical overview, a list of heads of state, and suggestions for further reading make the book a useful tool for the classroom. Skidmore and Smith's detailed cases studies may please those who find Burns too thin on details, but the case studies will present problems for the instructor whose syllabus does not cover the same cases.

Benjamin Keen's and Mark Wasserman's *A Short History of Latin America* (originally published in 1980) is also written from the perspective of dependency theory, although it is less self-consciously theoretical and more traditional in approach than either the Burns or Skidmore and Smith texts. Except in a few brief sections (notably the preface and "The New Colonialism"), dependency theory rarely intrudes into the text. The book's more than five hundred pages make it long when compared with those of Burns and Skidmore and Smith but short by the standards of more traditional works (such as Herring or Fagg). Unlike the other two volumes, *A Short History* is a more complete survey of Latin American history, with one-third of the text devoted to the period up through the wars of independence, one-fifth to the nineteenth century, and one-half to the twentieth. The only one of the three texts with a bona fide colonialist author, *A Short History of Latin America* easily provides the best coverage of the colonial period. Much like Burns, Keen and Wasserman employ an interdisciplinary approach emphasizing Latin American civilization and incorporating extensive references to cultural issues.

Keen and Wasserman's volume is divided into three parts, each with an excellent introductory summary. In the first part, Keen provides a masterful synthesis in eight chapters of Amerindian and Hispanic societies, the conquest, the social and economic institutions of colonial society, the Bourbon reforms, and the wars for independence. The second part surveys the nineteenth century in three chapters, two on selected countries and a third on society and culture. Like Skidmore and Smith, Keen and Wasserman use case studies in the national period to illustrate their interpretations, selecting Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile prior to the twentieth century as the best representatives of "the major issues and trends of the period." The third part devotes separate chapters to Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil, with the added cases of Peru, Cuba, and Central America. The chapter "Latin American Society in Transition" and another on U.S.–Latin American relations complete the survey.

Although well-written and more comprehensive than Burns or Skidmore and Smith, the Keen and Wasserman textbook also presents problems for use in the survey course. For those teaching a two-term survey, the section on the colonial era is excellent but too brief. For those teaching the one-term survey, it is too long. The selection of a handful of cases allows Keen and Wasserman to achieve greater narrative continuity than Skidmore and Smith but makes the textbook even more unsatisfactory for the historian interested in dealing with a broader range of countries in the survey course. Finally, those more oriented toward the present will welcome the heavy emphasis on the twentieth century, but those who see the nineteenth century as crucial

in creating contemporary Latin America will be disappointed with the brevity of that section.

Lyle McAlister's *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492–1700* surveys only the first two centuries of Latin American history. Written for the University of Minnesota Press series entitled "Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion," McAlister's synthesis represents a partial blending of the traditional historiography (before 1960) with the newer historiography. Trained at Berkeley in the immediate wake of the Bolton years, McAlister belongs to a different generation of historians than Burns, Skidmore, Smith, and Wasserman, who received their doctorates in the 1960s and 1970s. Like Benjamin Keen, McAlister had more than a decade of professional experience before dependency theories and social history became the darlings of Latin Americanists in the United States. But unlike Keen (and the post-1960 generations), McAlister sees little value in dependency theory, and his work follows more traditional themes and periodizations. Unlike the Boltonians, however, he has been influenced by the emergence of social history during the past thirty years, although his approach to social history emphasizes the formal and structural rather than the informal and inarticulate aspects of daily life. His emphasis on institutions, bureaucratic structures, and Hispanic culture place McAlister more clearly in the old school.

McAlister focuses on a set of themes that have little in common with dependency and world-systems approaches. He stresses the influence of geography, colonization, the development of bureaucratic structures, "the formation of American societies with their own reasons for being," contradictions and tensions among these processes, "the archaic qualities of American societies and imperial systems," and their great durability. McAlister's three sections present a brief seventy pages on Spain and Portugal before expansion, then roughly two hundred pages each on the implantation of colonial institutions (to the 1570s) and their consolidation and expansion (1570 to 1700). *Spain and Portugal in the New World* provides a masterful summary of the major issues and debates in the field, and the text is complemented by a fine fifty-page bibliographical essay. The epilogue, "European Reactions to Hispanic Expansion in America," is especially good in analyzing the "Columbian exchange" between the Old World and the New.

McAlister's work offers the reader an excellent example of traditional historiography influenced by newer approaches. Those more interested in a less traditional textbook synthesizing colonial Latin America from the perspective of social history would do better to turn to James Lockhart's and Stuart Schwartz's more comprehensive *Early Latin America*, written by two of the finest practitioners of social history.⁶ While McAlister emphasizes institutions and formal structures,

Lockhart and Schwartz connect structures with social organization and the routine of daily life. Blacks, Indians, the poor, women, and the masses play secondary roles in McAlister's survey but take a central place in the analysis of Lockhart and Schwartz. Both books are better suited to a course devoted entirely to the colonial period than to a one-term survey of Latin American history.

Finding supplemental readings to fill out the general introduction provided by a textbook is just as difficult as discovering the appropriate textbook. The availability and price of quality paperbacks, as well as the logistical and legal problems involved in photocopying, enhance the appeal of readers that cover a wide variety of topics well. Since its original appearance in 1955, Keen's *Latin American Civilization* has offered the finest selection of readings available for the survey course. Now available in a single volume, the fourth edition of Keen's reader offers selections on all aspects of Latin American civilization, from the conquest to the Malvinas/Falklands War and revolutionary upheaval in Central America. The two-volume 1974 edition has been pared down to some 425 pages, about half devoted to the colonial period and half to Latin America since independence. Keen's well-chosen selections emphasize primary documents, and his introductions and commentary are concise. Like fine wine, Keen's reader has aged well.

In *Cities and Society in Colonial Latin America*, Louisa Hoberman and Susan Socolow have put together another important and welcome selection of readings. This collection of original essays has been designed to introduce undergraduate and graduate students to research on urban and social history. The book reflects the emergence of social history as the dominant methodology among historians of colonial Latin America. Nearly all the contributors received their graduate training in the late 1960s and the 1970s and are now in their forties. Socolow's introduction and Hoberman's conclusion neatly summarize major issues in urban and social history and their development since 1960. Sandwiched in between are nine essays on social groups: large landowners (Susan Ramírez), merchants (Catherine Lugar), bureaucrats (Mark Burkholder), churchmen (Paul Ganster), female religious (Asunción Lavrin), military (Christon Archer), artisans (Lyman Johnson), suppliers, sellers, servants, and slaves (Mary Karasch), and the underclass (Gabriel Haslip-Viera). The essays combine findings from primary research with a review of the secondary literature. Notes have been kept to a bare minimum, but each essay is followed by suggestions for further reading (mostly in English). Although the focus is tilted more toward elites than masses, this volume provides a fine introduction to social groups and urban society for students in the survey course.

Readings in Latin American History, edited by Peter Bakewell, John Johnson, and Meredith Dodge, offers further testimony to the growing

sophistication of the field during the past two decades. The nearly one thousand pages of these two volumes attempt to provide the student with a sample of the best articles on Latin American history since the late sixties. Volume I, *The Formative Centuries*, takes a chronological approach with sections on "Contact, Conquest, and Settlement," "Consolidation to Maturity," "Eighteenth-Century Society," and "Political Independence." Volume II, *The Modern Experience*, takes a thematic approach with sections on politics, religion, race and class, women, and intellectual trends. The original notes have been trimmed to a bare minimum and replaced by suggestions for further reading at the end of each essay; consequently, students interested in the scholarly apparatus will have to turn to journals for the original work. The selections demonstrate the tremendous diversity and high quality of research in the field in recent years. Unlike selections by Keen and by Hoberman and Socolow, these readings were originally written for a highly specialized audience, and many instructors will probably be reluctant to assign them to freshmen and sophomores. Because there are no introductory comments or summaries to the individual essays, professors who assign them will have to prepare students carefully to integrate such specialized material into a general survey. Oddly enough, neither volume contains a single selection that fully addresses the themes and issues of dependency theory and its importance in the field.

Despite the many fine points of these readers and textbooks, the dilemma of those teaching the survey course remains. A region as large and diverse as Latin America will continue to challenge those of us who try to distill the essence of its history into a single course or a single volume.⁷ If anything, the challenge becomes more complicated and daunting as the years pass, and as the very definition of Latin America becomes more complex. Unless attempting the old (and outmoded) encyclopedic approach, no textbook can cover the entire region, and any selective or interpretive approach will leave many readers dissatisfied. The challenge is to produce textbooks and readers that are selective and held together by coherent and stimulating interpretive approaches. During the past fifteen years, the burgeoning monographic detail of researchers (especially in social history) has been pulled together by those employing varieties of dependency theory. Gone are the days of textbooks built around kings, conquistadors, bureaucrats, presidents, and official institutions. In the coming decades, the best textbooks will be those that succeed in combining the pioneering work of earlier generations on institutions and structures with the detailed social history of recent generations. These textbooks will bring together the larger processes of history and the routine of daily life, and they will no doubt be written by a generation that goes beyond the confines of dependency theories.

NOTES

1. Dana G. Munro, *The Latin American Republics: A History* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1942).
2. Hubert Herring, *A History of Latin America* (New York: Knopf, 1955; 3rd. ed., 1968); and John Edwin Fagg, *Latin America: A General History* (New York: Macmillan, 1963; 3rd. ed., 1977).
3. Donald E. Worcester and Wendell G. Schaeffer, *The Growth and Culture of Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).
4. See, for example, Charles Edward Chapman, *Colonial Hispanic America: A History* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).
5. For another early example, see *Latin America: The Struggle with Dependency and Beyond*, edited by Ronald H. Chilcote and Joel C. Edelstein (New York: Schenkman, 1974).
6. James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
7. For a sample of numerous and diverse efforts to construct courses on Latin America, see *Latin American History*, edited by John F. Bratzel and Leslie B. Rout, Jr. (New York: Markus Weiner, 1986).