

DEMOCRACY'S LOST TREASURE

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DEMOCRACY IN THE AMERICAS: STOPPING THE PENDULUM. Edited by Robert A. Pastor. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1989. Pp. 262. \$49.50 cloth, \$24.50 paper.)

QUEL AVENIR POUR LA DEMOCRACIE EN AMERIQUE LATINE? Edited by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1989. Pp. 248.)

PARTY POLITICS AND ELECTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA. By Ronald H. McDonald and J. Mark Ruhl. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989. Pp. 386. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

URUGUAY, DEMOCRACY AT THE CROSSROADS. By Martin Weinstein. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988. Pp. 160. \$29.95.)

POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN BRAZIL. By Wayne A. Selcher. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986. Pp. 272. \$26.50.)

After the dark 1970s, most Latin American countries returned to constitutional rule in the 1980s amidst high expectations and considerable uncertainties. By now, neither the worst fears nor the most optimistic expectations about the early stages of redemocratization seem to have materialized, not yet anyway. Among the fears was the concern that when faced with economic crises and unreconstructed military establishments, most Latin American countries would return to authoritarianism, and perhaps sooner rather than later. Among the hopes was the wish that constitutional rule would bring not only free elections but full respect for human rights and better living conditions for Latin Americans. As one Latin American president used to say, "Con democracia, se come."

Twelve years after the first wave of redemocratization, Chile and Paraguay have joined the family of democratic nations, while in Central America the allegedly totalitarian Sandinistas have shown that a revolution can, under certain conditions, lead to democracy after all. As of mid-1992, only Haiti and Peru have returned to dictatorships. Yet their governments remain isolated from the international community, and there is still hope that they too may return to democracy in the not-too-distant future.

But in most Latin American countries, even in those with relatively successful economies, standards of living remain lower than they were ten years ago. Almost three-quarters of four hundred and fifty million

Latin Americans live below the poverty line. In many countries, state provisions in areas like health, education, and social security have deteriorated, affecting the traditional poor but also a new and growing class of urban poor as well as large sectors of the lower middle class. On human rights, the *Amnesty International 1991 International Report* records gross abuses in many Latin American countries including Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

The five books under review here cover the first years of redemocratization, up to the late 1980s. Some deal with the region as a whole, while others focus on specific countries. None of the authors, however, attempt a general interpretation of the process of redemocratization comparable with Guillermo O'Donnell's works on "bureaucratic authoritarianism." The books also differ in their scope and aims.

The two more general books will be reviewed together. *Democracy in the Americas: Stopping the Pendulum*, edited by Robert Pastor, is explicitly policy-oriented. Among its contributors are some of the best-known specialists on the region, prominent human rights activists, and some well-known Latin American politicians, including former presidents Raúl Alfonsín, Osvaldo Hurtado, and Nicolás Ardito Barletta. The contributors to *Quel Avenir pour la démocratie en Amérique Latine?*, put together by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), are mostly French and Latin American academicians. Their diverse approaches reflect current concerns among French intellectuals regarding matters of political culture, ideology, and discourse. Both volumes focus on the political rather than the economic aspects of redemocratization in Latin America. They thus represent a shift away from the more economic approach favored by Marxists and developmentalists alike in the 1960s and 1970s. Among the issues explored are the root causes of Latin American authoritarianism, internal and external conditions for democracy, and practical ways to ensure its future.

The Historical Roots of Authoritarianism: "The Wrong Kind of People"

The suspicion that Hispanic America was populated by "the wrong people" for democracy was a theme that recurred in the writings of nineteenth-century Latin American politicians and intellectuals from Domingo Sarmiento and General Juan Bautista Alberdi in Argentina to Lucas Alamán and General Anastasio Bustamante in Mexico. In the twentieth century, this bias was employed to justify ideologically the "fraude patriótico" in Argentina in the 1930s and support for authoritarianism among the "liberal" politicians of the União Democrática Nacional in Brazil in the 1960s.

Ideological use of the argument that "O povo não está preparado para votar" (as the Brazilian military used to say) does not mean that the study of the cultural conditions of authoritarianism and democracy should not be addressed. Pastor's introduction explores the different paths to

political development taken by the United States and Latin America, retracing the varying colonial eras in the two regions. Pastor points out what he calls the “convoluted irony” of settlers in the United States creating a more equal and democratic society by killing the Indians or pushing them westward while settlers in Mexico and South America developed a more stratified, authoritarian system by replacing the leaders of stationary civilizations. Pastor encapsulates the differences between the region’s two histories in the emblematic figures of George Washington, “one of the founding fathers,” and Simón Bolívar, “the Great Liberator.” Washington was a “practical man” who became a reluctant president and Bolívar, a disillusioned dreamer who sought a presidency for life.

Although Pastor does not elaborate on the significance of Latin America’s cultural inheritance for its history of authoritarianism, François Xavier Guerra addresses the issue in more depth in his contribution to the CNRS volume. His essay draws on one of the paradoxes of Latin American political history: the fact that although democratic institutions have been enshrined in the continent’s constitutions since the era of independence, they have seldom been respected in practice.

Guerra begins by pointing out that most political struggles since the French Revolution have been fought in the name of “the people.” He traces different meanings of *el pueblo* in Spanish, colonial, and postindependence America and shows how it became the nexus of various forms of political identification. Guerra argues that the nineteenth-century liberal Latin American constitutions’ concept of “the people” as an ensemble of individual citizens was divorced from the reality of traditional societies based on collective or “holistic” identities. This cultural gap created a schism between modern forms of legitimacy enshrined in the constitutions, based on citizens’ rights and the free association of individuals, and societies structured along traditional (noncontractual) bonds and personalistic forms of representation as embodied in the relations between rural caudillos and their followers. Because “the real people” (those in the villages and the countryside) did not correspond to the liberal elites’ idea of “rational citizens,” enlightened urban elites replaced them with a democratic fiction. The elites thus redefined democracy not as majority rule but as the “rule of reason”—in whose name they asserted their own right to dominate.

Thus “civilization and barbarism” became the first great political dividing line, the ideological barrier that in the name of democracy excluded the majority of the population from any form of political participation other than armed rebellion. The “barbarous” rural masses were the first of the many big “others” defined by the liberal elites who controlled the state. But the inner logic of the political boundary between those entitled to rule in the name of reason and the disenfranchised majority was inherently unstable—not the negation of democracy but its deferment. Exclusion of the majority from electing the rulers was allegedly only a

temporary recourse until immigration, education, socioeconomic development, and all the rest would bring about the “right conditions” or rather “the right people” for democratic participation.

Guerra’s account of the origins of the Latin American “democratic fiction” applies to more than the nineteenth century—it also sheds some light on more contemporary problems. Jorge Hernández Campos argues in his contribution that Hispanic American culture is still split by an unfinished struggle between “modernizers” and “traditionalists.” This confrontation has taken different forms in each country. He claims that the Mexican Revolution was divided between a Northern “modernizing” liberal elite represented by leaders like Francisco Madero and a “traditional” peasantry led by caudillos like Emiliano Zapata. The traditionalists’ utopia was not a modern liberal state as envisaged by Madero and others but a return to the holistic traditions of New Spain. According to Hernández Campos, this division between “modernizing liberals” and “nostalgic populists” has persisted in the great postrevolutionary struggles from Plutarco Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas to the present. If this is the case, it would be possible to claim that a strong continuity connects Mexico’s nineteenth-century liberal elite with the Porfiriato and the PRI: all three have considered “the people” not yet ready to fully assume their democratic role. Over the years, Mexican leaders have maintained that it was imperative first to educate the people and develop the country before freeing them from the tutelage of the “men of reason” who still govern in their name via electoral fraud.

The Elusive Meaning of Democracy

Samuel Huntington’s essay in the Pastor volume, “The Modest Meaning of Democracy,” attempts to fix precisely the meaning of the term once for all. Huntington argues that *democracy* has both denotative and connotative meanings. At the denotative level, he claims, democracy can be best understood as a type of institutional arrangement for choosing rulers. At the connotative level, the significant implications of democracy are largely limited to the political sphere, but they are crucial in that arena.

Huntington then surveys briefly the changes in the meaning of the word *democracy* from its reemergence as a significant political term in the revolutionary upheavals of the late eighteenth century to its almost universal acceptance after World War II. He argues that universal support for democracy came at the price of almost universal disagreement over its meaning. Huntington asserts that the ambiguity and imprecision of defining democracy in terms of sources of authority or purposes have increased emphasis on its institutional meaning. He therefore concludes that democracy has a useful meaning only when defined in institutional terms.

Huntington could not be more forthcoming in attempting to fix the

meaning of democracy to its alleged denotative (or Schumpeterian) definition: "The institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which the people acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote" (p. 15). Huntington backs his quest with an argument that seeks to be authoritative but is in fact strongly authoritarian: "That debate is now over. Schumpeter has won. His concept of democracy is the established and the Establishment concept of democracy" (p. 15). For support, Huntington lists such established figures as Robert Dahl, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Bingham Powell, and himself.

But as Laurence Whitehead argues in the same volume, in a region notorious for extremes of social inequality and uneven and incomplete provision of citizens rights, democratic forms of government cannot be taken at face value. He draws on the example of El Salvador, a country that in the 1960s and 1970s held competitive elections and had an "admirable" constitution. Yet Whitehead claims that labeling it as a "democracy" would have been a highly partisan act. On a more general note, it can be shown that on many occasions throughout history, elections have been used in Latin America as a form of *ex post facto* legitimization of authoritarianism rather than as a means for choosing political leaders freely.

Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan agree with Huntington that the meaning of democracy is mainly political. In their essay in the Pastor collection, they argue that this limitation has beneficial effects: claims to ruling authority based on democratic procedural origins rather than on governmental performance constitute an insulating factor against regime collapse. They are probably right in stressing that the political perception of desired alternatives has greater impact on the survival of democratic regimes than economic and social problems *per se*.

Linz and Stepan as well as Huntington may all be correct in emphasizing the limited economic achievements of democracy. But they underestimate a crucial ideological element that is part of its universal appeal. Rightly or wrongly, for most of the people of the Third World and the former Socialist bloc, Western democracy is associated not only with political freedom but with the high standards of living and welfare provisions of industrial democracies. The fact that the two do not necessarily come together is a painful lesson that Latin Americans have learned in the 1980s and citizens of the former Eastern bloc are beginning to find out.

Democracy as a Myth

Although Huntington's "modest meaning of democracy" is problematic, it is useful as a benchmark. Its relevance for what it includes and what it leaves out is illustrated by a country study in the CNRS volume. Marilena Chau's analysis of the Brazilian transition to democracy is in its curious way both simplistic and perceptive. Her account is at times an

oversimplified version of Brazilian politics that (like many others) comes dangerously close to being a canonical left-wing version of Brazil's history: a country divided between a powerful, homogeneous, manipulative elite and an equally homogeneous *povo* deprived of any means of influence and representation within the institutional framework.

According to Chauí's account, Brazil's transition to democracy amounted to little more than the transfer of state posts from one elite group to another. During this process, everything worked more or less accordingly to a grand plan devised by the military well before the election of Tancredo Neves as president. Even General Golbery do Couto e Silva, the mythical master-puppeteer of Brazilian history since 1964, is conjured to bolster this quasi-conspiratorial view. The name of the game, according to Chauí, is "conciliation from above," a term that openly evokes Barrington Moore's "modernization from above," a concept dear to many Brazilian social scientists as an explanatory model for their country's ills.

Never mind the fact that (as Paul Cammack has pointed out) the period from 1974 to 1985 was marked by defeat after defeat for successive military governments and that the military eventually acquiesced to the election of Neves not because it was a triumph for a strategic program of withdrawal but because the disarray of their own forces and the upsurge of democratic opposition left the military with no other option.¹ The problem with this version is that it underestimates the significance of the democratic gains made by the Brazilian people while obscuring more deeply rooted shortcomings. Chauí downplays the political importance for democracy of the process that led to the election of Neves, and she also exaggerates the genuine importance of the residual powers and laws of the military.

Yet once Chauí sets political dogma aside, her analysis of the relationship between legality and legitimacy in Brazil is illuminating. She shows how the rule of law in Brazil has not been carried out as a means of equality for protecting the citizens' rights but has been systematically used as a mechanism for excluding and marginalizing the poor. Manifestations of this debasing of the rule of law abound, ranging from the traditional Brazilian ways of "dando um jeitinho" (finding a way to get around the law), to the impunity of northern rural landowners who resort to violence in land conflicts, to police connivance with death squads in the poor suburbs. In sum, Chauí does not consider postmilitary Brazil to be a democracy. She ends by accusing the New Republic of criminal responsibility for making Brazilians believe that they live in a democracy.

Chauí's dismissal of political democracy in Brazil raises the question of the relevance of Huntington's narrow definition of democracy. Despite Brazil's appalling social problems and dismal human rights record in mat-

1. See Paul Cammack, "Resurgent Democracy: Threat and Promise," *New Left Review*, no. 157 (May-June 1986):121-28.

ters like urban and rural violence, Brazil *is* a democracy in a way that it was not before 1984. It is, however, a sad and wretched democracy in the same way that Brazil is a wretched capitalist economy. It is certainly much less democratic than, say, Sweden or Costa Rica, but it is a democracy nonetheless. To deny this fact is not only empirically wrong and theoretically flawed but politically counterproductive. If there is no difference between the military and the “New Republic,” if “the people” are always being manipulated by the elites and excluded from participation and representation, then the only alternative to defeatism is to retreat into a kind of “política de base” that abandons any hope of reconstituting the public realm.

Modes of Transition, Political Actors, and Regime Types

Several essays in the Pastor and CNRS collections examine the conditions required for consolidating democracy in Latin America. These issues include the mode of transition from authoritarian rule and the role of political actors as well as questions of policy and of regime type. On modes of transition, Guillermo O’Donnell draws the familiar distinction between transitions “by collapse” and “by transaction.” His essay in the Pastor volume argues that democratic governments resulting from a transition by collapse have fewer constraints on the policies they undertake than those resulting from a transacted transition. Yet governments produced by a transition by collapse tend to be more seriously threatened in their survival by powerful, disaffected actors who (in contrast with the transacted case) have not had some of their crucial interests accommodated adequately in the new situation.

Addressing the issue of the political regime best suited to democracy, Linz and Stepan strongly advocate parliamentarianism. Their essay in the Pastor collection argues that parliamentary regimes make the distinction between the democratic regime itself and the government of the day more visible (p. 57). They claim that fixed terms in office, a characteristic of presidential systems, are likely to be more frustrating for the opposition, particularly if the circumstances that facilitated the election of the incumbent and the exercise of executive authority have changed sharply.

Linz and Stepan’s arguments do not lack foundations. Yet as Whitehead points out, while parliamentarianism may have advantages, presidentialism is not necessarily a fatal impediment. Perhaps what is necessary for good governance is to ensure that governments have working majorities in parliament. Parliamentarianism is not the only means of achieving them. Moreover, it does not always ensure a stable majority and can be a recipe for permanent instability.

Countering those who trace the problems of democracy in Latin America back to the Hispanic heritage, substantive policies, or institutional forms, Whitehead argues in his contribution to the Pastor collection

that democratic consolidation may be compatible with a surprisingly wide range of policy choices, provided that agreed-upon procedures are observed in making such choices. He regards the passage from transition to consolidation of democracy as one of internalization and sedimentation of democratic practices of negotiation and competition within the framework of increasingly stable institutions. It is a process in which key actors in Latin American societies—such as the military, the business sector, centrist politicians, and the revolutionary left—strike the balances and compromises needed to persuade them to support democratic rule. According to Whitehead, this process requires an open strategy of confidence building to create a democratic polity rather than one in which a single bloc of “true democrats” impose their blueprint on the rest of society.

The Military Threat Remains?

Whatever the degree of sincerity of the Latin American military's claim to have converted to democracy, many contributors still regard the armed forces as the main threat to democratic stability. To establish a sound military policy, it is crucial to understand the military way of thinking. This is the goal of Isidoro Chereski's contribution to the CNRS volume. He focuses on the Argentine military uprising of April 1987 to analyze the government's and the military's contending claims over sovereignty. He argues that the uprising was less an armed confrontation (force played a relatively minor role in the conflict) than a showdown between two closed and irreconcilable systems of belief coexisting in newly democratic Argentina.

The military rebels' political *imaginario* was a corporatist belief system that was totally alien to concepts of citizenship, individual responsibility, and democracy. This system of belief was not limited to a handful of maverick soldiers but was shared by virtually the entire Argentine military officers corps. The rebels did not accept individual responsibility for acts they had committed during military duty and thus rejected on principle the legitimacy of civilian courts to try individual members of the armed forces. According to their thinking, the principle of equality before the law did not apply to the military because its members as custodians of the nation were guided by higher principles than those of the rule of law. In this sense, being a “soldier” precluded being a “citizen” by virtue of belonging to a higher category. In the rebels' view, by allowing the trials to proceed, the army high command had forfeited any right to represent the armed forces and to be obeyed by them.

The forced coexistence of the two belief systems—the military and the democratic—did not place them on an equal footing. It became clear during the confrontation between the Argentine government and the rebels that the place of the military's political *imaginario* in Argentine society had changed: what was once a dominant belief system had become a

subordinate one. The rebels could not state openly that their aim was to take power, as their predecessors had done so often throughout Argentine history. An old-fashioned proclamation of the military "will to rule" had become ideologically unspeakable in the Argentina of the late 1980s. Thus the rebels were forced to pay lip service to the now hegemonic democratic discourse and to present their demands as purely internal military matters, based on universal values of "fairness" and "justice."

If the military's political mind-set were to remain a closed system, there would be no hope of converting the military to democracy. But no political imagery is so fixed that it lacks ambiguities or cannot be subverted from without. As Chereski suggests, although the values of Western civilization and Christianity were appropriated by the military to legitimize the "dirty war," democracy and human rights are also part of the same tradition. As "floating signifiers," the values of Western humanist thought could be rearticulated into new military doctrines that would allow members of the military to view themselves as both soldiers and citizens.

Democracy and Political Discourse

Whatever the failures and shortcomings of Raúl Alfonsín's government, his 1983 electoral campaign was by any account a brilliant piece of political workmanship. Silvia Sigal's essay on Alfonsín's electoral discourse contributes to the analysis of political discourse in the new democratic regimes. Her contribution to the CNRS volume also demonstrates that discourse analysis can be both illuminating and jargon-free.

Sigal shows that Alfonsín's electoral strategy was a textbook example of discursively redefining political boundaries. Alfonsín based his political strategy on blurring Argentina's traditional dividing lines between parties. Instead of creating a contest between Peronists and Radicals, in which his Radical party had historically been in the minority, Alfonsín discursively redivided the political field between those favoring the "new democratic Argentina," which he claimed to represent, and the "old" corporatist and authoritarian Argentina embodied in an alleged Peronist-military pact. Denouncing that pact became the core of Alfonsín's electoral campaign. It allowed him to link "decadence," "authoritarianism," "the past," "the military," and leading figures of the Justicialista party. This strategy put the Peronists totally on the defensive and led to their defeat.

A New Democratic Consensus?

In the last three essays of *Democracy in the Americas*, Tom Farer, Thomas Skidmore, and Pastor suggest various ways to secure democracy. Their ideas represent what can be regarded as the "liberal-centrist consen-

sus" that currently dominates academic thinking on Latin America. Farer explores possible multilateral arrangements for defending democracy, while Skidmore and Pastor summarize a number of specific proposals for strengthening democracy and preventing regression to dictatorship.

While democracy can be secured only internally, external factors are likely to play increasing roles in deterring the internal forces that may be tempted to conspire against the constitutional order. Perhaps Pastor's most interesting suggestion is to revive the doctrine of Rómulo Betancourt of withholding recognition from governments that come to power by force. The doctrine was never favored much in Latin America, for good reasons as well as bad. As Pastor recalls, the United States first opposed the doctrine in the 1960s because it would have led to condemning some right-wing dictatorships who were allies. The United States later made a beleaguered attempt to resuscitate the doctrine to use against Cuba. At that time, however, most Latin American countries rejected the doctrine on the principle of nonintervention and out of the fear of the United States trying to impose its will. It is a measure of the changes in Latin American attitudes toward democracy and in the international environment that the Betancourt doctrine may find a new consensus thirty years later.

Political Parties and Party Systems.

Although the work of nongovernmental organizations and the strengthening of domestic and international civil society play key roles in consolidating democracy, political parties will remain crucial actors in any democratic regime. Yet despite some recent valuable contributions, literature on political parties in Latin America is still scarce. Thus Ronald McDonald's and Mark Ruhl's *Party Politics and Elections in Latin America* should be regarded as a general introduction to the subject of party politics, elections, and electoral behavior in Latin America. The book outlines each country's experience with parties and elections, interprets experience, and summarizes findings. Even those limited objectives were not easy to achieve: McDonald and Ruhl claim to have surveyed 19 countries, more than 365 political parties, hundreds of elections (285 have been held since 1946 alone), and countless political leaders.

Party Politics and Elections in Latin America does not attempt to provide a "general theory" of Latin American parties. The first chapter introduces analytical elements meant to structure the presentation of the country studies. The chapter starts by assessing the significance of political parties in Latin America (less significant than in Western Europe and the United States but varying widely from country to country) and their various functions, which include political recruitment, political communication, social control, and government organization and policy-making.

In a highly compressed account, McDonald and Ruhl trace the his-

tory of Latin America's party systems from the rival post-independence aristocratic elites and the competing Liberal and Conservative parties of the nineteenth century to the middle-class radical forces of the turn of the century and from the first Marxist groups to the populist forces that shaped so much of Latin American politics between the 1920s and 1950s and beyond.

The supposedly common characteristics of Latin American political parties are listed rather than explained. Elitism, factionalism, personalism, organizational weakness, and heterogeneous (as opposed to class-based) mass support are regarded as the basic features of Latin American political parties. The last three are considered to be the ones that differentiate Latin American parties from their Western European counterparts.

Party systems are classified according to Douglas Rae's index of party fractionalization and are also categorized as one-party, two-party, or multiparty systems. Unfortunately, as with many other aspects of the book, the rapid changes in the political systems of many Latin American countries make classifications likely to become outdated rapidly. For example, Mexico and Paraguay are no longer single-party systems, as listed in the Rae index, but multiparty ones.

Most of *Party Politics and Elections in Latin America* is devoted to surveying the individual party systems of Latin American countries. Each country study consists of a fairly useful account of its party system and electoral history. The different electoral systems and voting patterns are described succinctly but adequately. Long-term trends and perspectives are also discussed. Unfortunately, however, the book is not entirely reliable. The authors candidly acknowledge in the introduction that despite best efforts, errors remain, and they encourage readers who find them to send corrections for future editions. Although such openness in acknowledging possible errors is commendable, factual inaccuracies can be a major drawback in an introductory work meant to appeal to nonspecialist readers.² In brief, *Party Politics and Elections in Latin America* is a useful introduction to Latin America's party systems in a single-volume summary format. But until the errors are corrected as promised in a future edition, the book should be read with a healthy dose of skepticism.

2. Factual mistakes abound, but I will cite only a few empirical errors. The chapter on Mexico makes no mention of the presidency of Abelardo Rodríguez during the "Maximato." There never was a "Feminist Peronist party" in Argentina, as the authors state (p. 152). In Uruguay, the Consejo Nacional de Gobierno, the plural executive that replaced the presidency, was installed in 1952, not in 1954. The Tupamaros were never part of the Frente Izquierda de Liberación (FIDEL), an umbrella organization of the Communist party. In Brazil, Getúlio Vargas's opposition was called the União Democrática Nacional (UDN), not the "União Democrática Brasileira" (UDB). The military coup that overthrew President João Goulart occurred on 31 March 1964, not on 9 April (p. 262). The Partido da Frente Liberal (PFL) did not gain control of Congress in the 1986 election. Congress was dominated by a coalition of parties made up of the PFL, the Partido Democrático Social (PDS), and the right-wing faction of the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), the "Centrao."

The Uruguayan Path to Democracy

Martin Weinstein's *Uruguay, Democracy at the Crossroads* focuses on a country having little literature in English. The first two chapters summarize the country's social structure and historical background. The following chapters address the evolution of the political system from the seminal "early Batllista" period at the beginning of the twentieth century to the crisis of "Uruguay Batllista" in the 1960s. The subsequent slide into authoritarianism and the years of military dictatorship are also analyzed. The final chapters cover the transition to democracy and its challenge. But Weinstein's account is more than an introduction to Uruguayan politics. His view of Uruguay is close-up testimony by a witness who knows many of the country's leading politicians and can convey their "warts" along with the "dirty streets, broken sidewalks, uncollected garbage, frayed clothing, and rotting teeth" that reflect the economic deterioration of the country and its population's standard of living.

Weinstein is an affectionate witness toward some of the characters of his book, particularly the late Blanco leader Wilson Ferreira Aldunate. But Weinstein's sympathy clearly extends beyond individual figures toward the country and its people, whom he describes as "cultured," "socially and politically conservative," and "fiercely middle-class." One main question arises from studying Uruguay: why has a country with well-established democratic traditions, a large, well-educated middle class, and a decent and reasonably able political elite (in which corruption has not yet reached the endemic levels of other Latin American countries) not done far better politically and economically over the last thirty years?

Weinstein's answer is partly to stand the question on its head and suggest that what has to be explained is not why the Uruguayan political system broke down in 1973 but why it lasted so long: "That Uruguay remained a democracy in the face of the economic and social crises of the late 1950s and 1960s is a tribute to its political culture. That it returned to a constitutional system . . . is a confirmation of that democratic heritage" (p. 125). But this explanation is only half of the answer. It still has to be explained why, over the last thirty years, the Uruguayan political system has failed utterly to reverse the country's economic decline, leaving Uruguayans "negative and dispirited." Weinstein places the burden of this failure on Uruguayan political culture. He claims that it stresses democracy and individual freedom over national unity and fails to identify individual or factional interests with the national interest: "The failure to have a vision of the nation that includes everyone has haunted Uruguay since the economic decline set in thirty years ago" (p. 133). In other words, the national failure is that the will of all has not turned into a general will.

But national interest is a tricky concept, particularly regarding economic matters. Large private fortunes have been made everywhere in its

name, in many cases at the expense of fellow citizens. Moreover, Uruguay is one of the most homogenous Latin American societies. Its problem often seems to stem from Uruguayans' inability to accept diversity rather than from their failure to achieve national unity. Although the traditional division between Montevideo and the "interior" still holds, no strong regional differences exist, and despite variations in popular support in different parts of the country, all Uruguayan political parties are national rather than regional forces. Uruguayans also have highly egalitarian values, if not necessarily equal incomes. It can be argued that perhaps their reluctance to let elections and market forces determine political and economic winners and losers may explain social resistance to political and economic reform. Perhaps what Uruguay needs more than a homogenous vision of the national interest is to establish clear and stable rules to determine among a plurality of conflicting views and interests how they should all compete to produce both public goods and material wealth as well as who will pay the costs of the enterprise and how.

Brazil: From Liberalization to Democratization

Political Liberalization in Brazil, edited by Wayne Selcher, covers Brazil's long transition to democracy from the final years of President Ernesto Geisel to the first years of the "New Republic." Although this collection suffers from a lack of homogeneity and in-depth analysis inherent in edited books, this group of essays provides a fairly comprehensive view of the period.

If there is a common theme, it is how the military government became increasingly unable to control political events after what appeared to be a carefully devised plan of political liberalization and limited democratization. In this sense, the view of the process of liberalization as "replete with unexpected twists, ironies, ambiguities, contradictions and dilemmas" is worth contrasting with Marilena Chau's quasi-conspiratorial view of the same transition as a process of "conciliation from above," a plan devised by Geisel and Golbery do Couto e Silva in 1975 and largely accomplished by their successors (p. 11). The two most substantial essays are Enrique Baloyra's "From Moment to Moment: The Political Transition in Brazil, 1977-1981" and Selcher's "Contradictions, Dilemmas, and Actors in Brazil's Abertura, 1979-1985." Together, they reconstruct in considerable detail some crucial years in Brazil's contemporary history.

Baloyra covers political developments between 1977 and 1981, the period when "*distensão*" became "*abertura*." But his main hypothesis encompasses the entire period of military rule. He argues that the key to understanding Brazilian politics during these years lies in the contradiction between the military as an institution and the military participating in the government. In Baloyra's view, this contradiction made the Brazilian regime relatively unstable, particularly regarding presidential succession,

and has prevented it from emulating the “Mexican model,” in which a “party of the revolution” was able to settle the presidential succession. In Mexico, differentiation of functions was achieved between the military bureaucracy of the federal armies and a government bureaucracy that originated in the armies and finally created a party of the revolution. In Brazil, in contrast, military presidents never came to power by virtue of controlling the official party machine. This failure reflected the lack of legitimacy of the official party and its failure to win elections. As one Brazilian political scientist has observed, the main achievement of the Brazilian military regime was to create a “one-party state”—that of the opposition party, the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB).

Selcher’s essay maps the “abertura” according to the attitudes and actions of its main protagonists: political parties, social actors, and public opinion. Although narrated from a different perspective, his story is remarkably similar to Baloyra’s. In Selcher’s account, the government’s political strategy was a mishmash of ambiguous goals, muddled plans, and contradictory moves. He shows that the military regime’s strategy had a basic flaw: its attempts to use elections as legitimizing events, which after successive electoral defeats actually eroded its claims to legitimacy and forced a change. The series of electoral setbacks thus contributed to the government’s losing control over the political process and forced it to open a dialogue with the opposition. “Transition” became empty democratic rituals come to life, compliant political clients who challenged their patrons, and attempts by the government to change the rules of a game that it could no longer command or even arbitrate.

David Fleischer traces the changes in the Brazilian Congress during the transition, while Robert Packhenham analyzes changes in the country’s political discourse during this time. Packenham argues that a major shift in the intellectual culture occurred between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s—from Marxist hegemony to a more pluralistic discourse. He focuses on what Antonio Gramsci would call the country’s organic intellectuals, on social scientists and intellectuals rather than on practicing politicians. This approach fits because intellectuals in Brazil enjoy a higher social profile than in any other Latin American country, except perhaps in Mexico.

Donald Share and Scott Mainwaring compare the Brazilian and Spanish transitions as models of “transition through transaction.” They term such transitions cases “in which the authoritarian regime initiates the transition, establishes some limits to political changes, and remains a relatively significant electoral force during the transition” (p. 175). They stress that while *transaction* connotes negotiations, this kind does not occur among equals because during most of the process the regime remains in a position to influence the course of political change significantly. The last essay, Ronald Schneider’s “Brazil’s Political Future,” shows how painfully inaccurate political science still is at political forecasting.

Conclusion: Democracy's Lost Treasure

The books reviewed here, published between 1986 and 1989, have dated unavoidably, although in various ways. Through no fault of the authors, the dating of these works has exceeded that normally created when time brings about unforeseeable events. The historical developments of the past two years have not only disproved the authors' facts but also rendered most of their underlying assumptions invalid.

Paradoxically, the cause is not that Latin America has changed in some unpredictable way. Against the odds, most of the region has remained extraordinarily stable in the last two or three years. But politics as a whole seems to have entered a new phase. If it is not "the end of history," it is certainly the end of historical narrative woven around the traditional political forces and antagonisms that shaped Latin America's history. Although new military upheavals cannot be ruled out, conflict in the future will probably take a very different form from the military takeovers and "pendular moves" of the past. In my view, three contradictory trends are currently shaping Latin American societies, and their interplay is molding the future of politics in the region in a very different way.

The first trend is political and economic homogenization. Its political form is liberal democracy and its economic logic, that of the market. Although one could say that market-oriented reforms have so far had mixed successes and the jury is still out, up to now they have benefited relatively narrow sectors of the population. But homogenization also has strong cultural connotations. Opening up the Latin American economies has brought internationalized forms of consumption: a Big Mac is a Big Mac is a Big Mac. Every evening, millions of tears are shed simultaneously in Mexico City, Medellín, and Montevideo over the misfortunes of the damsel in the latest Mexican soap opera.

The second force at work is exclusion, which affects the millions of Latin Americans who lack adequate housing, health care, potable water, and access to education. This mass now includes not only the traditional poor sectors from the countryside but the new poor city dwellers. Above all, exclusion affects the growing numbers of Latin Americans, particularly the young, who have no decent jobs and no hope of ever getting any and hence must fuel the erroneously romanticized informal economy.

The third force is fragmentation, which derives from the failure of the state in many Latin American countries to provide even a minimum standard of services but also from the failure of the political system to establish and maintain relatively stable social and political relations. Fragmentation is revealed in the shifting and precarious nature of current forms of political representation. Even the idea of "the people" in its old Jacobin sense (used by both populists and the radical left)—of a homogeneous mass political actor who can be mobilized against its common enemy,

whether “the oligarchy” or “the bourgeoisie”—is becoming implausible in a more fragmented society. In Latin America today, the politics of “exclusion and fragmentation” mean that the state and the political parties are increasingly unable to organize any long-term articulation to link “the public realm,” “the citizens,” and “the people.” The outcome of this failure is unlikely to be a return to the social polarization that led to the breakdown of constitutional order. It will probably lead instead to displacement of “the public” from the state (as in the current crisis of state institutions), the citizens from traditional party structures (as in recent shifts in political alignments and the rise of neopopulist outsiders or semi-outsiders), and the people from any grounding in stable social identities.

How do homogenization, exclusion, and fragmentation affect the debate about the future of democracy in Latin America? This question recalls Huntington’s essay on the meaning of democracy. Latin American democracies today have a “modest meaning,” a set of rules and institutions for selecting leaders via competitive elections. But contrary to his claims, their current success does not foreclose the question of the meaning of democracy but opens it up. Democracy can never be defined solely in procedural terms. One need not be a diehard poststructuralist to argue that any attempt to wrap the meaning of democracy around its “institutional core” will always leave a “surplus of meaning” in terms of ideals of justice, equality, and similar concepts. Indeed, the “literal” (institutional) signification of democracy depends on its metaphorical surplus-signification. In fragmented and exclusionary societies, if this “surplus of meaning” is not articulated by the institutions of liberal democracy, it will be appropriated not so much by political actors in the traditional sense as by outsiders or pseudooutsiders, civilian and military, who represent the new “anti-politics” of fragmentation and exclusion.

As for the traditional left, Latin American revolutionaries long “overawed” by the spectacle of mass poverty echoed Robespierre’s famous response, “La République? La Monarchie? Je ne connais que la question sociale.”³ Like their French counterparts, they disregarded the importance of constitutions and institutions. The novelty of the current democracies of Latin America is that in a social context resembling the one that set the course of the French Revolution, it is the institutional meaning of democracy born out of the “poverty-free” American Revolutionary tradition that is firmly established on the political horizon. If it remains so with no regard for its traditional reference to the “social question,” then Latin American nations may remain democratic. But in this case, to paraphrase Hannah Arendt, the outcome would be a democratic tradition that has lost its treasure.

3. As cited in Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 56.