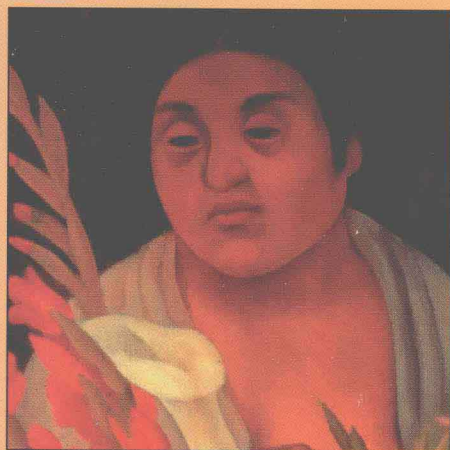
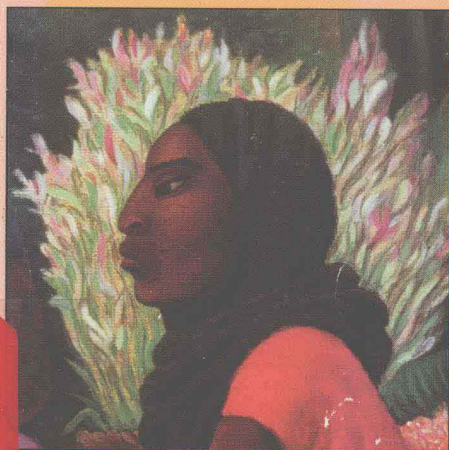
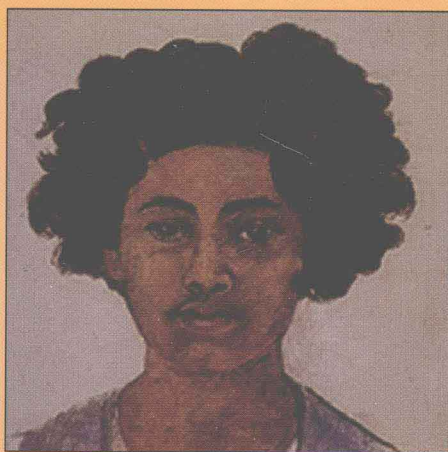
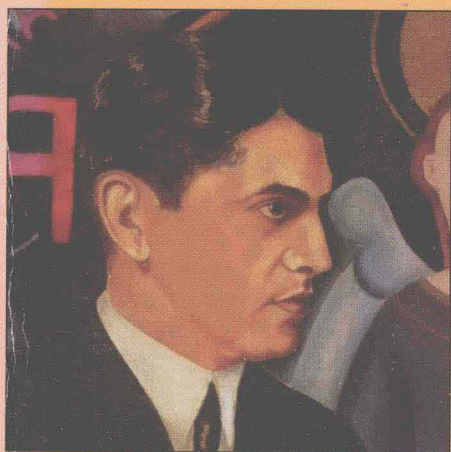


UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY

LATIN AMERICA



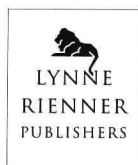
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UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICA



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■ Preface ■

This volume is the product of the collaboration of eighteen Latin America specialists whose enthusiasm and diligence manifest an abiding commitment to education about Latin America. It was clear to all involved in the project that expanding academic, business, and policy interests require a basic introduction to this complex and significant area. The increasing number of scholarly studies analyzing the region's socioeconomic and political conditions amply attests to the importance of Latin America in the contemporary world. However, comprehending these studies presupposes some degree of expertise and experience. In contrast, *Understanding Contemporary Latin America* is intended for the many "beginners" who wish to learn about Latin America.

Although the strategic geopolitical relevance of the region has been recognized throughout history, and an increasing volume of trade has begun to significantly affect hemispheric development, Latin American attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding the conduct of politics, business, and life in general remain vastly and profoundly misunderstood by many. The media has sensationalized such issues as political corruption and instability, narcotics trafficking, and immigration problems, overshadowing attempts to promote democracy, trade and development, tourism, and regional cooperation. But, the long-term health of inter-American relations is contingent on accurate awareness and mutual understanding. In this context, *Understanding Contemporary Latin America* introduces fundamental background, issues, themes, and directions in countries within the contemporary region. The book is designed as a basic interdisciplinary resource for use in college and university classrooms, foreign service seminars, and corporate training programs, as well as by interested individuals. Its wealth of graphic and textual information, presented in a straightforward style, is intended to enhance clarity, comprehension, and appreciation of the traditions, influences, and commonalities underlying varying cultural orientations within this vital area.

The facts alone are insufficient for a complete understanding of contemporary Latin America. Insight and empathy are required for overcoming stereotypical characterizations and cultural biases. It is precisely this mix of knowledge and appreciation that is inherent in each chapter's treatment of Latin America's complex setting and challenges. After the first chapter's brief introduction outlining the scope and themes of the book,

the second chapter describes the rich diversity of Latin America's human and physical geography. Legacies of the colonial era that continue to influence current realities are analyzed in the third chapter on the historical context. Chapter 4 discusses how these legacies affect ongoing political institutions, including the military, which, due to its singular importance in the region, is also treated separately in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter investigates the area's economic transformation over time, culminating in a discussion of current problems. Some of these problems are covered further in Chapter 8, specifically those dealing with environmental degradation, population expansion, and rapid urbanization. Chapter 7 examines international relations among countries within Latin America as well as with the rest of the world. Patterns of ethnicity and class are explored in Chapter 9, the role of women in Chapter 10, and the relationship between education and development in Chapter 11. These chapters offer a human face to the problems and challenges detailed in other parts of the book, as do Chapter 12 on religious beliefs and Chapter 13 on literary expression. Finally, Chapter 14 examines where the region has been and in what direction it appears to be going.

Far from a definitive closure of these matters the book is designed to be an open-ended resource for provoking greater interest and raising even more questions about a vital, complex, and increasingly important region of the modern world.

* * *

I am grateful to all of the authors for finding time during busy academic schedules to participate in this collaborative effort, and for making my tasks as editor intellectually fulfilling and enjoyable. The cross-fertilization of ideas and knowledge inherent in this project is testimony to the highest academic ideals.

The programs and institutions that made *Understanding Contemporary Latin America* possible are deeply appreciated. The Fulbright Scholars Program granted me awards in 1987, 1992, and 1996 that supported my research and allowed me to teach and live in Latin America. The School of International Studies at the Central University in Caracas became my "home away from home" during these study tours. My home institution, St. John Fisher College, supplied a 1995 Summer Research Grant that allowed me to complete work on this project. The United Nations Photographic Library and the World Bank Photographic Department gave me the opportunity to select most of the photographs that appear throughout the text.

A special note of thanks is due to several individuals who played important roles in helping to make this project a success. Dean David Arnold has been influential in enhancing a campus academic environment con-

ducive to creative work. Lynne Rienner and Don Gordon offered indispensable encouragement throughout the lengthy planning and development processes.

John Bogdal created the excellent maps that appear in the book. Steve Barr provided excellent advice during the copyediting and production phases. Anonymous reviewers and editorial assistants made sensible suggestions that enhanced the readability of the manuscript. Lin Mocejunas cheerfully provided crucial secretarial services even during stressful moments. Finally, without my entire family's moral support, I never would have been able to complete this project.

Richard S. Hillman

■ Contents ■

List of Maps, Tables, and Figures	ix
Preface	xi
1 Introduction <i>Richard S. Hillman</i>	1
2 Latin America: A Geographic Preface <i>Stephen R. Pelletier</i>	9
The Geography of Latin America	
Climate and Population Distribution	
Latin America's Natural Resource Base	
The Peoples of Latin America	
3 The Historical Context <i>René de la Pedraja</i>	27
The Conquest	
The Colonial Period	
Portuguese Brazil	
The Bourbon Era	
Independence	
Conclusion	
4 Latin American Politics <i>Thomas J. D'Agostino</i>	51
The Postindependence Era	
Early Modernization and Dictatorial Rule	
The Modern Era	
Revolutionary Change	
The Rise of Bureaucratic Authoritarianism	
Democratization	
Conclusion	
5 The Military <i>Paul Zagorski</i>	95
Early Civil-Military Relations	
Early Professionalism	
Political Development and the New Professionalism	
The National Security State	
The Postnational Security State	
Conclusion	

6	The Economies of Latin America <i>Richard K. Harper & Alfred G. Cuzán</i>	119
	The Pre-Columbian Economies	
	The Colonial Economies	
	From Independence to the Great Depression	
	ISI, Economic Nationalism, and Populism	
	The Lost Decade	
	Turning the Corner—the 1990s	
	Indicators of Economic Development	
	Latin America in the World Economy	
	Regional Integration and Trade Associations	
	Conclusion	
7	International Relations <i>Cleveland Fraser</i>	151
	Organizing Concepts	
	Historical Legacies	
	The Cold War Era	
	Dependency and Debt	
	The 1980s	
	The Post–Cold War Era	
	The Future	
8	The Environment, Population, and Urbanization <i>Roberto P. Guimarães</i>	177
	The Environmental Formation of Latin America	
	Patterns of Occupation of the Territory	
	Demographic Dynamics and Urbanization	
	Economic Growth and the Environment	
	Regional Features of Global Ecological Disorder	
	Conclusion	
9	Patterns of Ethnicity, Class, and Nationalism <i>Kevin A. Yelvington</i>	209
	Defining Key Terms	
	Foundations of Ethnicity, Class, and Nationalism	
	Contemporary Patterns	
	Conclusion	
10	The Role of Women <i>Susan Tiano</i>	237
	Production, Reproduction, and the Gender Division of Labor	
	Women in Latin American History	
	Women in the Formal Labor Force	
	Women in Latin American Politics	
	Conclusion	

11	Education and Development	<i>Robert F. Arnove, Stephen Franz, Kimberly Morse & Carlos Alberto Torres</i>	271
	Changing Notions of Development		
	Education and Technology		
	Expanding Educational Opportunities		
	Education and the Debt Crisis		
	Popular Education and Other Educational Innovations		
	Mass Media and Education		
	Education and Democracy in Latin America		
	Conclusion		
12	Religion in Latin America	<i>Michael Fleet</i>	295
	Catholicism		
	Protestantism		
	Spiritism		
	Conclusion		
13	Latin American Literature		
	<i>David H. Bost & Margaret V. Ekstrom</i>	321	
	The Colonial Heritage		
	The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries		
	Magical Realism and the Boom		
	Brazil and the Circum-Caribbean		
	Popular Culture		
14	Trends and Prospects	<i>Richard S. Hillman</i>	345
	List of Acronyms	351	
	About the Authors	353	
	Index	355	
	About the Book	373	

■ Maps, Tables, and Figures ■

■ MAPS

Map 2.1	Indian Migration Routes and Empires	10
Map 2.2	Climates and Vegetation	11
Map 2.3	Latin America: Countries and Capitals	12
Map 3.1	Eighteenth-Century Colonial Latin America	31
Map 3.2	Early Independence Movements	42
Map 3.3	Later Independence Movements	43
Map 7.1	Boundary Disputes Since Independence	152

■ TABLES

Table 4.1	The Countries of Latin America, 1995	53
Table 4.2	Nonindependent Territories in Latin America, 1995	54
Table 6.1	Indicators for Selected Latin American Nations	130
Table 6.2	Income Quintiles by Nation	133
Table 10.1	Participation Rates for Prime Age Groups	248
Table 11.1	Percentage of Total Public Education Expenditure by Level in Five Latin American Countries, 1965 and 1970	276
Table 11.2	Enrollment Numbers and Percentages by Level in Latin America, 1960 and 1970	276
Table 11.3	Latin American Repetition and Completion Rates in Primary Education, 1989	279

■ FIGURES

Figure 10.1	Female Labor Participation Rate by Age	250
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■ 1 ■

Introduction

Richard S. Hillman

Two basic questions establish a point of departure for our study: first, What constitutes Latin America, and second, Who are the Latin Americans? Responses to these questions are far more complicated than they may appear at first. There are a variety of ways, for example, to define Latin America as a region. Some definitions are based on geopolitical and strategic concerns, others on common languages and cultures. Some include only Hispanic countries, excluding the Anglo-Caribbean, the francophone countries, and Brazil; whereas others include these areas as well as French Canada, part of Louisiana, southern Florida, and the southwestern United States because of their “Latin” influence and cultural connections.

Similarly, many theories have been advanced regarding the inhabitants of the Americas. The most widely accepted view holds that initially, groups of Asians crossed the Bering Straits, migrated south, and settled in North and South America. Another suggests that these groups crossed the Pacific Ocean on rafts. Yet others maintain that human life originated in South America. José Vasconcelos, a Mexican intellectual, posited in 1948 that Latin Americans had become a “cosmic race” combining the strengths of different ethnic groups that have inhabited the region. Each theory is based on a plausible interpretation of certain aspects of the available evidence, and each definition has its own logic; thus I believe a comprehensive approach is required to respond adequately to what are actually complex, rather than simple, questions about the nature of the area and the people we seek to understand.

Let us begin to formulate a response by considering one of the first encounters between a Native American and a European in the early sixteenth century. Montezuma, leader of the Aztec civilization, is reported to have told Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés that “we have known for a long time, from the chronicles of our forefathers, that neither I, nor those who inhabit this country, are descendants from the aborigines of it, but from strangers who came to it from very distant parts” (Keen 1966:47). According to

Cortéz's account in his letters to the king of Spain, Montezuma then related an ancient story that legitimized Spanish sovereignty in the Americas. But Montezuma added a comment that would have portentous significance in subsequent history: "Look at me," he said, "and see that I am flesh and bones, the same as you, and everybody, and that I am mortal, and tangible" (Keen 1966:48). Since the first contact between Europeans and Native Americans, Latin America has been in the process of continuous self-definition. Who would govern this New World inhabited by the progeny of "strangers"? What kind of world would it become?

The story of Latin America's Indian origins, conquest by European powers, struggles for independence, and twentieth-century search for political and economic stability is interesting and revealing. Moreover, the historical and increasing contemporary importance of Latin America in world politics makes it essential for every citizen to understand how this story is rooted in a complex and turbulent past. Popular discussions of Latin America and inter-American affairs, however, are generally charged with a high level of passion and scanty knowledge, resulting all too often in mutual misunderstanding. For example, North Americans have argued vehemently about their need to protect themselves against violent Latin American revolutionaries who threaten political stability in their backyard, illegal immigrants who steal jobs from U.S. workers, and narcotraffickers who poison American youth. And Latin Americans have feared the malevolent intentions of a "colossus of the North" that has seemed to intervene continuously in their domestic affairs.¹ They exhibit a strong tendency to resent U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere and blame the violence occasioned by drug cartels on the strength of the U.S. market. Yet Latin Americans continue to seek upward mobility in the United States, thereby causing their "love-hate" relationship to confound many observers.

During the Cold War many U.S. citizens excitedly propounded the merits of military incursions or covert operations in places like Grenada, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Chile, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. When asked to locate these countries on a map, name their major cities, account for their economic status, or place them in historical context, however, they were left in a quandary. Far too many Americans are apt to locate Cuba in Central America or Argentina in the Caribbean and to assume Brazilians speak Spanish. Moreover, public opinion on many issues in both the United States and Latin America has become profoundly divided in the post-Cold War era. The plight of Cuba is a case in point. To many observers, the U.S. economic embargo and diplomatic isolation of Cuba have constituted a misuse of power to the extreme detriment of masses of Cubans who must endure suffering and hardship as a result. Many others believe Cuba's development problems should be attributed solely to Fidel Castro's adoption of the socialist model. In either case, ideological dogmatism has been reinforced by insufficient understanding and vilification

of U.S. foreign policy on the one hand or of Castroism on the other. Could it be that this is not a mutually exclusive proposition, that, in fact, both sides have contributed to the dilemma?

Unfortunately, stereotypes and myths that have fostered public impressions as well as political actions are deeply embedded in popular culture. Frederick Pike (1992) has amply documented the pervasiveness of this type of thinking, from the speeches of early statesmen like Thomas Jefferson and Simón Bolívar to the virtually continuous references in literature, art, cinema, and the media. According to Jefferson, for example, the superior U.S. culture would supplant the inferior Latin American culture. He held that "it is impossible not to look forward to distant times when our rapid multiplication will expand itself . . . and cover the whole northern, if not the whole southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws" (Pike 1992:19). Such thinking has fueled historical U.S. imperialism, as well as contemporary reactions to waves of Hispanic immigrants such as the "English only" movement. Ironically, Bolívar predicted the U.S. would "afflict Latin America in the name of liberty" (Pike 1992:18), leading Pike to conclude that "the degree to which American stereotypes of Latin Americans are reinforced by—and perhaps sometimes even originate in—Latin Americans' stereotypes of themselves [is impressive]" (Pike 1992:116).

Impressions reflected in advertising and the popular media perpetuate myths. In a free association of ideas, what are the first images that come to mind when identifying Latin Americans? If you think of the silly *frito bandito* or *el exigente* whose favorable judgment of a coffee bean results in an instant *fiesta* for a whole village, you are not alone. Nor would you be unique in conjuring up the idea of the "Latin lover" or the romantic revolutionary. Regarding politics, a U.S. traveler in Latin America reported that "the value of stability in government is something they [Latin Americans] cannot be made to understand. It is not in their power to see it, and the desire for change and revolution is in the blood" (Pike 1992:68). Similarly, *machismo* is equated with the oppression of women, the *siesta* with laziness, music and dancing with today, work and planning with *mañana*.

Many Latin Americans also hold distorted perceptions of the United States and its citizens. These views vary from the vulgar notion that all *gringos* carry guns and walk on gold-paved streets to the more sophisticated analysis of the United States as a materialist and mercenary culture of acquisition devoid of the higher virtues of family loyalty, honor, and personalism. In this regard, José Enrique Rodó of Uruguay wrote *Ariel* in 1900 as a glorification of Latin America's superior cultural sensitivity. His ideas influenced other Latin American critics of the United States, such as José Martí of Cuba and Rubén Darío of Nicaragua, thus contributing to an anti-*yanqui* sentiment. Hence, mutual misperceptions, stereotypes, and myths abound, making a more penetrating and realistic portrayal of the region

particularly important in an era of global change. The basic problem, according to Pike (1992:364), is that "Americans remain reluctant to accept the fact that their country has become a frontier for Latin Americans. For generations, after all, Americans had assumed that Latin America was their frontier. Old myths, like hoary stereotypes, die hard."

Recognition of the highly misleading and counterproductive nature of portrayals of Latin America as somehow more "natural" and uncivilized than the developed North is essential for understanding the region. This book is an attempt to promote such recognition through exploration of basic ideas and information that will contribute to debunking various myths about contemporary Latin America. The fundamental theme of "unity in diversity" provides a comprehensive organizing concept. Using this approach, the authors emphasize the significance of the area as a whole with ample references to the individual countries within the region and their history, geography, and political culture. Our examination encompasses all territory in the Western Hemisphere south of the United States. (Latin American enclaves within North America can be understood in the context of their ties to the region.) Hence, areas within Latin America include Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. Countries within these areas form part of Ibero-, Luso-, Indo-, Afro-, and Hispano-America. Subareas such as the Anglo, French, and Dutch Caribbean are also included because of underlying similarities that transcend apparent differences.

Great diversities of peoples, institutions, and geography in Latin America coalesce in common historical, social, political, and developmental patterns. Various combinations of these patterns, similar socioeconomic problems, and analogous cultural expressions permit a unified vision of Latin America. Therefore, each chapter in this volume draws examples from several countries within the various areas of Latin America, thus allowing the text as a whole to offer a balanced representation of the entire region. The authors use a variety of specific cases to illustrate their general overviews of the geographic setting, historical context, political evolution, and political issues; the role of the military; the ways in which economic systems function; the impacts of urbanization, demographic trends, and the environment; the influences of ethnicity, class, and nationalism; the role of women; the relationship between education and development; the impact of religion and of cultural and literary expressions; and the ways international relations have contributed to new trends and prospects for the future. In sum, the book is designed as a core text that introduces students to Latin America as a diverse yet inclusive region facing crucial issues in the advent of the twenty-first century.

Among the major issues discussed in the text, the most prominent are those related to socioeconomic and political development, debt, immigration,

narcotics trade, and inter-American affairs. These are understood in the context of a background strongly influenced by European, Native American, African American, and the “fused” cultures of the New World, as well as by the legacies of colonialism and the predominant impact of the United States. We introduce the reader to the area by providing basic definitions, outlining major issues, discussing relevant background, and illustrating the manifestation of these considerations in countries within the region. Thus, the text employs both thematic and case study approaches. Each chapter contains general discussions, key concepts, ongoing questions, and references to bibliographic resources.

Rather than attempting to bring these issues and considerations to closure, this text is designed to generate knowledge and stimulate interest and discussion. Therefore, the contents are neither all-inclusive nor deterministic. They are selective and exemplary based on the basic premises that (1) common themes tie diverse countries together in a vital region, (2) misunderstanding can be overcome through awareness, and (3) a need exists for innovation in domestic and international policymaking, as well as in education. Since stereotypes are based on partial truths distorted by ignorance and bias, a more adequate comprehension of contemporary Latin America requires that distortions be overcome and that the region be appreciated as a distinctive culture encompassing great diversity, unique amalgamations, and increasing global importance.

Latin America’s nearly 500 million people account for approximately 8.5 percent of the world’s population, a figure that is projected to increase to 10 percent by the year 2000. Latin Americans outnumber North Americans and will outnumber them two to one by the turn of the twenty-first century. They live in a geographic region that encompasses 15 percent of the world’s land surface with vast differences in terrain and climate—ranging from tropical rain forests, swampy lowlands, grassland plains, and deserts to mountainous highlands, island chains, and cays. Increasingly, demographic concentration in urban areas, especially in very large cities, has reaffirmed some cultural traditions and torn down others. European-style central cities have become surrounded by shantytowns occupied mostly by migrants displaced from rural agrarian society. These and other demographic trends have presented a variety of difficult socioeconomic challenges.

Issues relating to the environment, economic growth and distribution, and political and developmental concerns also must be understood in historical perspective. The area has an extremely interesting past in which three major ethnic groups have simultaneously clashed with each other while forming unique fusions. Much of the Latin American story is one of confrontation and accommodation among Native Americans—the Aztecs, Maya, Inca, Taino or Arawak, Carib, Aymará, and Quechua; Europeans—

the Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, and Dutch; and Africans—Yoruba, Mandingo, Fulani, Hausa, and other groups. The interaction among the European conquerors, Indian civilizations, and imported black African slaves during the colonization period left a legacy that has profoundly influenced subsequent development. Later, immigrants from many nations contributed to the multiplicity of groups interacting in the region.

The conquerors, who sought adventure and wealth in the New World, transferred a peculiar system of agrarian feudalism that was derived primarily from the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula after eight centuries of Moorish domination. The land and the Indians were divided among the colonizers, who created a hierarchical social order in which the landed aristocracy was supported by the church and protected by the military. Significantly, after initial settlement the colonizer was no longer a native European but was now a creole (*criollo*), a European born in the Americas. Although they were thoroughly “Spanish,” “English,” or “French,” for example, the creoles had often never even been to Europe. Similarly caught between two cultures were the *mestizos*, offspring of Europeans and Indians. Later, the offspring of Africans and Europeans identified themselves more with the *hacienda*, large socially self-contained ranches, than with the homelands of their forbears.

The plantation economy and *hacienda* life produced interactions and traditions that have continued to influence Latin American society. Moreover, the region is rich in many natural resources that have contributed to the global economy. Latin America has produced large percentages of the world supply of crops such as coffee, bananas, linseed, meat, cocoa, sugar, cotton, and others. Significant percentages of the world’s oil, nitrates, bauxite, tin, copper, gold, and silver, among other sources of wealth, have also been found in the region. Nevertheless, even after the colonial period ended with independence for the countries within Latin America, it was predominantly foreign capital that exploited, and foreign interests that profited from, these resources until they were partially displaced by attempts to promote national development and social equity through state planning and governmental enterprises.

The forging of new national identities and liberation from the oppressive colonial structures did not result in the rapid redefinition of political and social institutions leading to stable self-governance, nor did the economy develop self-sufficiency. To the contrary, confusion and disorder were manifested in *caudillo* rule, the control of military strongmen. Initially, authoritarian solutions to this anarchic and unstable situation prevailed, despite the democratic tradition of *cabildo abierto* (town meeting) and Bolivarian ideals of independence and order. To this day, the appeal of authoritarianism in the face of destabilizing political, economic, and social problems can be traced to the way the Catholic kings consolidated Spain under unified control. These traditions are reflected in ongoing Latin

American culture—in literary themes; in gender roles; in relations among ethnic groups, belief systems, and educational systems; and in political institutions and practices.

Latin American culture has been in transition. The combination of strong legacies of the past, many of which are worthy of preservation, and modern challenges to the traditional order has been explosive at times. Although the multiple forces operating in Latin American societies are complicated and the overarching political cultural context is far from constant, ignoring these legacies and influences is just as naive and misleading as accepting the myriad myths surrounding the area. Evolving fusions of religious beliefs, political and social forms, and even ethnic groups have yielded a whole that is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

After the end of the Cold War, the new world order that began to emerge in the last ten years of the twentieth century set into motion a process of realignment among the developed and developing nations. Latin America has not been immune to the emergence of competitive regional economics and the apparent collapse of authoritarian regimes that came to characterize the new international dynamics. Termination of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, the end of military rule in Brazil and Argentina, the negotiated truces that ended the wars in Central America, the restoration of an elected leader who had been ousted in a coup in Haiti, and fairly free elections in the Caribbean, Venezuela, and elsewhere seemed to indicate a trend toward democratization and the eventual amelioration of problems such as political corruption, massive poverty, monetary inflation, foreign debt, illiteracy, crime, and disease.

The complex dynamics on which these hopeful interpretations are based, however, raise a series of questions. How are the legacies of colonialism and nationalism being transformed in contemporary Latin America? What is the prognosis for further democratization, economic and social development, stability, and amelioration of serious crises? Is a hemispheric free-trading zone inevitable? Will regionalization help to resolve or exacerbate the problems facing Latin America? In short, where has this vital region been, and where is it going? The story is far from complete. Each chapter of this book focuses on a different, yet interrelated, aspect of these open-ended questions. If we are to understand Latin America, we will continue to seek answers to these questions; develop new insights, empathy, and appreciation; and raise new questions. Although to many observers the region and people are perplexing and unfathomable and their differences are profound, we ought to keep clearly in mind Montezuma's observation that ultimately we are all "flesh and bones, the same as you, and everybody . . . mortal, and tangible" (Keen 1966:48). This book is designed to clarify that proposition as it applies to Latin America and Latin Americans.