

SECOND EDITION

Latin America

Its Problems and Its Promise

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY
INTRODUCTION



EDITED BY
JAN KNIPPERS BLACK

Second Edition

LATIN AMERICA, ITS PROBLEMS AND ITS PROMISE

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY
INTRODUCTION

edited by
Jan Knippers Black

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**LATIN AMERICA,
ITS PROBLEMS AND
ITS PROMISE**



The Western Hemisphere

Reprinted, with permission, from Margaret Daley Hayes, *Latin America and the U.S. National Interest: A Basis for U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984).

To my parents
JUDGE OTTIS J. KNIPPERS
and
OPAL MOODY KNIPPERS
of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee

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INTRODUCTION: APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF LATIN AMERICA

JAN KNIPPERS BLACK

To the student who must launch his or her exploration of Latin America through the eyes and ears, the assumptions and perspectives, and the theoretical and ideological filters of others, it would be useful to know something of the intellectual paths that have been traveled by the specialists in the field. Those paths have circled, dead-ended, and U-turned, merged and diverged; they are now, as always, subject to turns in new directions. The attempt to understand social relations, especially in an area so diverse and complex as Latin America, can never be a simple matter of learning "the facts." There will always be many facts in dispute; answers depend on the nature of available data, on the interests of the sources consulted, and on how questions are asked. Confronted, as one must be in a multi-authored text, with differing points of view and, thus, differing interpretations of the same historical and social data, the student may find it worthwhile to begin the study of Latin America with a study of Latin Americanists.

It is to be expected that interests and interpretations of social phenomena will vary from one discipline to another. The geographer may find, for example, that soil quality, climate, and topography determine settlement patterns and socioeconomic relations, which in turn configure political systems. The anthropologist may find explanation for social harmony or social conflict in ethnic and cultural patterns. The economist may find that political trends derive from economic ones, while the political scientist may see power relationships as overriding. In the study of Latin America, however, there has always been a unifying theme.

From the perspectives of U.S.- and European-based scholars, as well as from those of Latin America's own creative and scholarly writers, the study of Latin America has been approached as the study of a problem, or set of

problems. The problems might be capsulized as underdevelopment and political instability or, more simply, as poverty or inequality and the failure of democratic systems to take hold. The search for the roots, causes, and progenitors of these problems has generally led in one of three directions: to the Iberians—the conquistadores and the institutions, attitudes, and cultural traits they brought with them to the New World; to the Latin Americans themselves—the alleged greed of the elites, absence of entrepreneurship in the middle classes, or passivity of the masses; or to the United States and the international capitalist system it promotes and defends.

Long before U.S. scholars began to direct their attention to Latin America's problems, the area's own intellectuals were absorbed by the question of where to place the blame. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and other nineteenth-century intellectual and political leaders of cosmopolitan Buenos Aires blamed the cycles of anarchy and tyranny their newly independent country was suffering on Hispanic influences.¹ Sarmiento in later life directed his scorn toward Latin America's own "melting pot." Influenced by social Darwinism, he diagnosed "the decadent state" of Argentine society as deriving from its racial components of Spanish, mestizo, Indian, and Negro.

Turning the tables at the turn of the twentieth century, José Enrique Rodó, Uruguay's foremost literary figure, urged the youth of his country—in his masterpiece, *Ariel*—to shun the materialism of the United States and to cling to the spiritual and intellectual values of their Spanish heritage. A strong current of Latin American social thought, reflected in art and music as well as literature, that gained momentum a few decades into the twentieth century has touted the strengths of native American cultures and blamed both Hispanic and North American influences for the prevailing instability and social injustice. Likewise, in the Caribbean, the Black Power movements of the sixties and seventies called Europe and Anglo-America to task for the region's underdevelopment.

Latin American studies as an interdisciplinary field in the United States and, by extension, the coming of age of analysis of Latin American social and political systems are clearly the illegitimate offspring of Fidel Castro. Prior to the Cuban Revolution, historians, anthropologists, and literary scholars had generally pursued their studies of Latin American subjects in disciplinary isolation. Political analysis had been largely limited to formal-legal studies highlighting the fact that Latin American regimes rarely lived up to the standards, borrowed from France and the United States, embodied in their constitutions. Such studies generally drew their explanatory theses from the distinctive historical and cultural traditions of the United States of North America and the disunited states of Latin America and, in so doing, contributed to the mystification of the political process in both areas.² The Iberian heritage of feudalism, authoritarianism, and Catholicism was seen as the major obstacle to democratic and socioeconomic reforms.

The surge of interest in Latin America on the part of U.S. politicians and academics (encouraged by newly available government-funded fellowships and contracts) that accompanied the Cuban Revolution followed closely upon

the expansion of attention to the Third World generally by the previously parochial disciplines of economics and political science. Thus, development and modernization theory, formulated to address change processes in other parts of the Third World, came to dominate the study of Latin America as well. Studies falling under these rubrics generally posited that either the economic and political systems of Latin America would increasingly approximate those of the United States and Western Europe or the area would be engulfed in violent revolution.

The invalidation of many of the assumptions of development and modernization theorists by the onrush of events—particularly by the fall of democratic regimes and their replacement by military dictatorships—resulted in a theoretical backlash as well as in long overdue attention to the work of Latin American theorists. The backlash was expressed in a reassertion of the tenacity of tradition, of the fundamentally conservative character of Latin American society. This perspective has been endowed with greater theoretical and conceptual sophistication in studies using the corporatist model. Corporatism stresses the hierarchical organization of modern institutions and the persistence of control from the top.

There existed a large body of literature by Latin Americans, dating back to “the black legend” of Spanish rule, to support the historical and cultural explanations for the failure of democracy. But the trends that had dominated the social sciences in the major Latin American countries were variations on the Marxist themes of class conflict and imperialism. One such body of thought, known as dependency theory, has come to rival development and modernization theory for predominance among U.S. specialists in Latin American studies. Dependency theory assumes that Latin American underdevelopment cannot be understood without reference to the international capitalist system.

These theoretical trends and approaches have permeated all aspects of Latin American studies, because—to a far greater extent than in Europe or the United States—philosophy, literature, the arts, and other pursuits of the intelligentsia in Latin America tend to reflect national or regional concerns. It could hardly be otherwise; the cataclysmic episodes of insurgency and repression, revolution and counterrevolution, leave no one untouched.

BLAMING THE IBERIANS: CORPORATISM AND CULTURE

The historical-cultural approach to the study of Latin America and its problems draws attention to the persistence in contemporary Latin America of attitudes, institutions, and social relations that are said to have been characteristic of the Iberian peninsula in medieval times.³ According to this view, the Spanish conquistadores, crown officials, and Roman Catholic missionaries transplanted in the New World a social system firmly based on elitism, authoritarianism, and militarism.

The Portuguese legacy differed from that of Spain in its greater tolerance of racial and cultural diversity, but, like the Spanish, the Portuguese inculcated

in their New World offspring a rigid sense of social, political, and cultural hierarchy. The patriarchal view, deriving from Iberian monarchism, held that culture and personality were functions of education and that the uneducated man was incapable of participating in the dominant political culture. (That women, educated or otherwise, were to be seen but not heard was taken for granted.) The uneducated man was expected to accept his status in society as a function of a divinely ordered hierarchy. However, as the uneducated were not expected to be responsible for their own welfare, the dominant class was obligated to contribute to the amelioration of their suffering. Public morality was an integral part of the political culture, and the Catholic Church, also hierarchical in structure, absolutist in doctrine, and authoritarian in practice, shared with the institutions of government the responsibility for the maintenance of the political and moral order.

During the early colonial period, a great debate raged among intellectuals and governmental and spiritual leaders in Spain and its colonies as to whether native Americans were fully human. It was finally concluded that the Church's Christianizing mission implied recognition of the fundamental human attributes of the Indians. But in much of the empire, the slaughter or enslavement of the Indians proceeded nevertheless, and it is clear that many contemporary Latin Americans continue to see the Indians as belonging to a lesser order of humanity.

Corporatism

The corporatist model, drawn primarily from medieval Catholic thought and observed, to some degree, in Spain under Franco and Portugal under Salazar, has been found to "fit" contemporary Latin American politics to a greater degree than some of the models derived from development and modernization theory. The model, elaborated in works by Wiarda, Schmitter, Malloy, Erickson, and others, has called attention to the tendency to vertical, as opposed to horizontal, organization among politically active groups in Latin America.⁴ Such groups, in corporatist systems, are controlled and manipulated by authoritarian governments so that communications and power flow from the top down rather than from the bottom up.

Corporatist forms of organization are easily identifiable in a number of Latin American countries, but they have been particularly well studied in Brazil. Under Brazil's *Estado Novo* (New State), a dictatorial system imposed by Getúlio Vargas in the late 1930s, institutions and interest groups were required to secure government "recognition." The government's power of recognition thus made all formal groups dependent. Such means of manipulation were retained and refined by the military government that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

Few Latin Americanists would dispute the observation that vestiges of medieval Iberia are still to be found in Latin America. Nor is the existence of corporatist tendencies a subject of great controversy. The point at which many Latin Americanists depart from the findings of some scholars pursuing historical-cultural or corporatist approaches is the supposition that contem-

porary manifestations of elitism and authoritarianism are due primarily to colonization by Spain and Portugal.

Critics note, for example, that some countries recently under fiercely authoritarian, military rule (Chile and Uruguay, for example) had enjoyed constitutional and more or less democratic rule throughout most of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile) was among the areas least influenced by colonial Spain. In Argentina, descendants of Italian immigrants, who arrived in great waves around the turn of the twentieth century, now outnumber the descendants of Spanish settlers. Surely some common denominators of vintage more recent than the colonial period are needed to explain the resurgence of authoritarianism in Latin America in the late twentieth century.

In addition, corporatism has tended to remain descriptive—a model rather than a body of theory—and its contribution to explanation of social and political change is limited. For those of its elaborators who attribute its workings to the institutions and experiences peculiar to the Iberian peninsula, the larger perspective afforded by models and theories applicable to all countries and regions is lost. The parallels, for example, between the co-optative practices of right-wing authoritarian regimes in Iberia and Ibero-America and the practices of authoritarian regimes elsewhere in countries with comparable levels of economic development have generally been overlooked. And the qualitative difference between traditional corporatism and the modern bureaucratic-technocratic variety has often been understated. By the end of the 1980s, the popularity of the corporatist paradigm appeared to be waning, and some of its former proponents, including Howard Wiarda, had turned to an emphasis on cultural causation.

Cultural Causation

The late 1980s saw a revival of interest in the explanatory power of culture as an independent variable. Samuel Huntington, noting that contemporary concepts of modernization and of Westernization are beginning to diverge, suggests that development and modernization may be distinctively Western goals. He alleges that aspirations to wealth, equity, democracy, stability, and autonomy emerge from Western, particularly Nordic, experience, and that other cultures may prefer simplicity, austerity, hierarchy, authoritarianism, discipline, and militarism.⁵ This view represents a considerable retreat for a theorist who once believed Western-style modernization to be irresistible.

BLAMING THE LATIN AMERICANS: DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION THEORY

Whereas analyses of contemporary Latin America based on the traditional, or historical-cultural, approach tended to have a static quality, development and modernization theory introduced a new dynamism into the field. The new approach highlighted the facts that for better or worse, social change