Representing Latin America through Pre-Columbian Art

Political Correctness and the Semantics of Othering

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Abstract

Latin America has often been represented by images of pre-Columbian artifacts and artwork on book covers and in other printed materials produced by Latin American studies. This article tries to show that there are strong connections between this type of representation and the semantics of Latin America both in everyday English language and in the discourses of the social sciences. First, the author reviews the history of the concept of Latin America in everyday English language, showing how it has been defined as the opposite of a glorified collective self-image of America, in cultural, temporal, and racial terms. Next, chief approaches of Latin American studies (modernization theory, studies of corporatism, and the present-day textbook literature) are examined, focusing on how social scientific discourses have defined Latin America. Before returning to the topic of pre-Columbian representation, the covers of the best-selling present-day textbooks are surveyed to show how these pictorial representations reproduce the cultural and temporal perceptions of otherness already present in the texts, plus a racial perception that is mostly absent in them. The author argues that the pre-Columbian representation reproduces the three aspects of Latin America's othering in a powerful and synthetic way. Last, the results of the present analysis are evaluated in the light of some contributions to postcolonial theory, visual culture studies and picture theory.

Key words

asymmetric counterconcepts ■ culture ■ Latin America ■ race ■ United States

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FROM 1966 to 2002, *Latin American Research Review*, a leading periodical of Latin American Studies in the English-speaking world and the official publication of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), sported a very interesting cover. On it, the title of the publication stood between two figures, both looking explicitly pre-Columbian even to the untrained eye. It is rather obvious that those figures had the communicative function of representing Latin America on the cover. Curious to know the reasons they were chosen to be on the journal's cover, I sent an email message to one of the editors of LARR asking about their meaning. After a couple of days a gracious reply arrived in my mailbox saying that the figure on the top, seated on a straw mat, was an Aztec woman, and the one on the bottom was a royal Inca messenger, known in Quechua as a *chasqui*. My intuition was confirmed: they were indeed pre-Columbian 'art work'. The most interesting part of the editor's reply, however, was not the identification of the pieces but the way he referred to them as 'two of the great pre-Columbian civilizations of the Western Hemisphere: the Aztec and Inca empires'.

That answer also raised other questions and doubts in my mind. I sensed that there was some hidden meaning in this reply that I could not yet fully understand. By that time, early 2001, I was conducting research on the history of the concept of Latin America in the US, which focused on the social scientific discourses produced by the Latin American studies literature. As the work progressed, and I got a better theoretical insight on the subject matter, the editor's answer started to make more sense, and I could see how that type of representation – pre-Columbian art – could work as a powerful and synthetic way of conveying a perception of Latin America that has been widespread in North American society as a whole, including the Latin American studies establishment. In this article I intend to uncover the connections between the pre-Columbian representation of Latin America and some powerful discourses on Latin America articulated both in everyday English and social scientific languages. I will start by showing evidence that the pre-Columbian representation of Latin America has become quite pervasive within Latin American studies nowadays. Next, I will sort out the semantics of the concept of Latin America both in everyday language and in social scientific discourse through the analysis of textual and pictorial materials. In order to understand how the act of representation that constitutes the subject matter of this inquiry is nowadays performed, we have to first grasp the semantics of the concept of Latin America in historical perspective, that is, uncover the meanings that have been commonly associated with it through time. With that background information in hand the main hypothesis of the present essay, that the pre-Columbian representation can work as a powerful and synthetic signifier for Latin America, can be then fully examined and justified. Finally, I will conclude by establishing connections between the present essay and post-colonial theory, visual culture studies and picture theory.

Pre-Columbian Latin America

The claim that the pre-Columbian representation of Latin America has become widespread within Latin American studies should be sustained by empirical evidence. It is not easy, however, to produce this kind of evidence for such a broad institutionalized field of inquiry such as Latin American studies, which is made up of academic professional associations, journals, book series, job lines, university programs, grants, etc., each one of these activities producing their own texts and sometimes pictorial representations of Latin America. Of course some indicative evidence can be promptly adduced such as, for example, the use of pre-Columbian representation on the cover of wide-circulating textbooks on Latin America such as Benjamin Keen's *Latin American Civilization: History and Society, 1492 to the Present* (2000) or Howard Wiarda and Harvey Kline's *Latin American Politics and Development* (2000), and also of lesser known ones, such as Randall Hansis' *The Latin Americans: Understanding Their Legacy* (1997). But more systematic evidence can be presented too. While attending the XXIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), in Washington, DC, in 2001, I collected a series of publication catalogues from academic presses that attended the conference's book fair, which occupied a big room in the hotel where the event took place. There, each publisher had a stand with its books on Latin American studies and several promotional materials such as leaflets, catalogues, flyers, etc., on display. Although the book covers were designed according to a variety of styles, the book catalogues displayed astounding similarities in the way they represented Latin America. These are the pictures found on the cover of catalogues of Latin American studies collections:

- Cornell University Press – pre-Columbian artwork
- University of California Press – pre-Columbian art
- Routledge – Aztec stone relief
- Rowman & Littlefield Publishers – Aztec art
- University Press of Florida – pre-Columbian statue
- University of Alabama Press – Aztec art
- Smithsonian Institution Press – photograph of a South American Indian
- University of Indiana Press – photograph of an indigenous woman holding agricultural goods
- Stanford University Press – photograph of an indigenous girl
- North-South Center Press / University of Miami – photograph of indigenous children in traditional clothing
- Rutgers University Press – a black girl in a semi-rural setting
- Smithsonian Institution Press – a black woman, probably a slave

Pre-Columbian representation was also used in materials produced by other academic institutions that deal with Latin America, and thus can also be considered part of the Latin American studies establishment, such as the leaflets of:

- The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars – pre-Columbian artwork
- The Congress of Latino Psychology – pre-Columbian artwork

Not only are these academic presses amongst the most prestigious and active in the area of Latin American studies, but also the catalogues listed above comprise 90 percent of the catalogues available in the book fair.

Why is the pre-Columbian representation so ubiquitous? How can it convey Latin America? Or better, what does it convey as a symbol of Latin America? Other related questions also could be asked. Are the other figures present in the sample (indigenous children, an indigenous woman and a black woman and girl) in any sense related to the type of representation performed by pre-Columbian art? In order to try to answer these questions we have to survey the semantics of Latin America in North American society as a whole and more specifically in social scientific discourse.

Latin America in Everyday Language

The double approach proposed here – surveying both everyday and social scientific languages – needs some further justification. The first and most obvious one is that the focus of this essay is the pre-Columbian representation of Latin America exhibited in catalogues of Latin American studies book series. Thus, establishing a relation between what is written in the books, or more generally, the social scientific discourses on Latin America put forward by Latin American studies, and such mode of representation seems to be a quite evident and necessary analytical measure. But why relate this representation also with the semantics of Latin America in common language? Because book catalogues and book covers with pictures on them usually appeal to a wider audience than the specialist clientele. Specialist readers are often more interested in specific content than in colorful covers with appealing pictures. But that might not be the case of the non-specialist reader. Furthermore, the discourses of Latin American studies do not occur in isolation. They have a social and political environment with which they often communicate, through newspaper articles, lectures, undergraduate classes, grant proposals, texts for general readership, etc., and this environment speaks the everyday language. The concepts appropriated by the social sciences, such as citizen, democracy, society, politics, Latin America, etc., already existed in everyday language before they were taken up by the 'technical' vocabularies of professional academia. Thus, grasping the tension (if there is any) between the semantics of a concept in specialized and common languages may be a productive way of checking the specific contribution of social scientific discourse in shaping worldviews, institutions, policies, etc. Furthermore, this tension is in part generated by the different linguistic, moral, and political parameters governing each linguistic realm. While ordinary language is explicitly loaded with prejudice and stereotypes everywhere, social scientific rhetoric, particularly its American brand, posits itself as value-free enlightening objective knowledge.[1]

The analysis of the semantics of Latin America in everyday English language spoken in the United States in historical perspective shows that the concept has been used very frequently as an asymmetric counter-concept of America (the United States). Reinhart Koselleck defines asymmetric counterconcepts as dichotomous conceptual dyads used to denote collective identities in which one element of the dyad is adopted by a group as its own identity and construed as a set of positive attributes while the other element is used to refer to the ones outside the naming group and to endow them with characteristics that are the opposite of those of the naming group (Koselleck, 1985). The qualifier 'asymmetric' denotes that the action of naming is taken just by one side, the one that ascribes itself an identity endowed mostly with positive attributes, while the ones that are named are either in the margin of the naming community's society and politics or even outside it. Koselleck examines three historical examples of such conceptual formations: Greek/barbarian, Christian/pagan, and Aryan/non-Aryan. Reviewing his contribution in the light of the theory of recognition, I have shown elsewhere that asymmetric counterconcepts have a deep semantic structure that escaped Koselleck's analysis of the three historical cases.[2] Reconstructing the historical narrative of the pair Christian/pagan and Aryan/non-Aryan, I identified three thematic cores around which semantic asymmetric oppositions concentrate. They are:

- cultural asymmetric opposition: the other is defined as having habits, values and institutions that are the opposite (negation) of those of the naming collective self;
- temporal asymmetric opposition: the other is defined as being in a time different from that of the naming collective self, or as not being synchronous to its own present – an operation that Johannes Fabian (1983) has termed lack of coevalness;
- racial asymmetric opposition: the other is defined as lacking the psychological and physical traits that pertain to the naming collective self (Feres Jr, 2006).

Historical cases of asymmetric counterconceptualization do not necessarily contain all the three types of opposition, but whenever these conceptual dyadic formations occur, their semantic field is always made of one or a combination of two or three of them.[3]

There is enough evidence to demonstrate that, in everyday English, America/Latin America make up a pair of asymmetric counterconcepts, in other words, that Latin America is very often perceived as having the opposite attributes that define a laudatory collective self-image of America (the US). Furthermore, the semantic field of Latin America in everyday English contains all three forms of asymmetric opposition: cultural, temporal, and racial. Unfortunately, this article has no space for a full-fledged historical analysis of the semantic evolution of the concept of Latin America in the United States.[4] Thus, I will limit myself to presenting indicatory evidence.

Latin America is an expression that started being used in English only at the turn of the 20th century (Simpson and Profitt, 1997), and it was adopted as a synonym of Spanish America, a term that had been in use for at least a hundred years. The study of the history of a concept requires a certain amount of onomasiology, that is, the study of the words related to that concept, particularly of synonyms, antonyms, and terms with similar semantic fields. Thus, Spanish America is an obvious choice for starting the analysis, given that it was, according to the OED, the term most commonly used to refer to the United States' hemispheric neighbors up to the early 20th century. For example, evidence of the semantics of Spanish America in the early 19th century can be found in a letter dating from 1821, written by John Adams:

> . . . a free government and the Roman Catholik religion can never exist together in any nation or Country, and consequently that all projects of reconciling them in old Spain or new are Eutopian, Platonik, and Chimerical. I have seen such a prostration and prostitution of Human Nature to the Priesthood in old Spain as settled my judgment long ago, and I understand that in new Spain it is still worse, if that is possible.[5]

Here we have a clear example of cultural asymmetric opposition, with Spanish America (New Spain) being implicitly opposed to America and blamed for having all the wrong cultural values derived from the Catholic religion.

In this passage by John Calhoun, from 1848, another element is added to the picture:

> We have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race – the free white race. To incorporate Mexico, would be the very first instance of the kind of incorporating an Indian race; for more than half the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes. I protest against such a union as that! Ours, sir, is the Government of a white race. The greatest misfortunes of Spanish America are to be traced to the fatal error of placing these colored races on an equality with the white race.[6]

Racial asymmetric opposition appears here in an overt comparison with the United States. It should be noted that while the positive element of the comparison is clearly defined, 'the free white race', the negative element is just the opposite of white, that is, non-white, be it Indian or mixed.

A temporal element was added to the conceptualization of Spanish America with the advent of the Manifest Destiny ideology, which appeared around the mid-19th century and became a staple of American nationalistic discourse, as in the passage below in which Senator Albert Beveridge comments on the fate of former Spanish colonies after the Spanish-American War of 1898:

> God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and

> self-admiration. No! He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns. He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth. He has made us adepts in government that we may administer government among savage and senile people. Were it not for such a force as this the world would relapse into barbarism and night. And of all our race He has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world. This is the divine mission of America, and it holds for us all the profit, all the glory, all the happiness possible to man. We are the trustees of the world's progress, guardians of the righteous peace.[7]

In the passage above, the temporal tone is given by a combination of secular elements, such as progress and right government, with theological ones, such as God's will, mission, and the regeneration of the world.

The three forms of asymmetrical opposition are also found in pictorial representations of Spanish and Latin America from the turn of the 20th century all the way to the 1970s, as John J. Johnson has extensively documented in his work *Latin America in Caricature* (Johnson, 1980). The cartoon in Figure 1 is just one example.

Figure 1 Room for All, If They're Careful
Source: William Allan Rogers, *New York Herald*, 1904. In Johnson (1980).

In it, the US is represented as an adult, Theodore Roosevelt, who is commanding over children who represent the 'Latin American' republics. The image of a child in this context is a clear temporal marker that denotes immaturity, and consequently irrationality, lack of responsibility, and as such it justifies the fact that a mature character, the US president, is disciplining the other characters in the picture. The racial component in the cartoon is quite obvious. The children are either black, Indian, or mestizo, while the American president is white. The cultural flavor is given by the way they are dressed. While Roosevelt dons some sort of sports clothing, the children wear traditional garments, 'funny' hats, and other accessories that denote their non-Western origin (Johnson, 1980).

Other evidence that contributes to the reconstruction of the semantics of Latin America in everyday language is provided by a nation-wide poll done by the Office of Public Opinion Research Survey in 1940, in which respondents were asked to choose what adjectives they thought would best describe Latin Americans. The results are shown in Table 1.[8]

With the exception of 'friendly', all attributes of the column on the left are negative. The most common qualifier chosen by respondents was 'dark-skinned', which interestingly denotes neither black nor Indian, but a generic characteristic of being non-white, a datum that fits perfectly racial asymmetric opposition. Temporal opposition is clearly denoted by 'backward'. 'Emotional', 'religious', 'lazy', 'ignorant', and 'proud' can also be associated with pre-industrial, pre-modern modes of existence and values, and thus carry a temporal flavor. In turn, 'emotional', 'backward', 'religious', 'lazy', 'ignorant', 'proud' and 'dirty' can be perceived as characteristics derived from culture, a culture very much opposed to the image of Protestant self-control, rationality, and industriousness. Of course all these negative features can be alternatively derived from a basic perception of racial inferiority, but it would not be prudent to try to interpret them further and in a more clear fashion given that the survey results do not offer contextual elements. It is important to note, however, that the same semantic

Table 1 What adjectives best describe Latin Americans?

Dark-skinned	80%	Imaginative	23%
Quick-tempered	49%	Shrewd	16%
Emotional	47%	Intelligent	15%
Religious	45%	Honest	13%
Backward	44%	Brave	12%
Lazy	41%	Generous	12%
Ignorant	34%	Progressive	11%
Suspicious	32%	Efficient	5%
Friendly	30%	No answer	4%
Dirty	28%	No opinion	0%
Proud	26%		

elements that appeared elsewhere, in the discourses of politicians and public figures as well as in cartoons, are also present here: temporal, cultural and racial semantic oppositions.

Latin America in Social Scientific Discourse

Some commentators suggest that Latin American studies have existed as an academic activity since the late 19th or early 20th century (Berger, 1995; Johnson, 1985; Martz, 1971). This is a rather imprecise claim. The number of academic texts on issues pertaining to the countries south of the US border published in English before the turn of the 20th century is diminutive, and, strictly speaking, they contain no reference to Latin America.[9] Furthermore, these pieces were neither written by specialists nor directed at professional academic audiences. In sum, this incipient literature was not Latin American studies as we know it: a professional activity supported by an extensive institutional network formed by specialists, university programs, research centers, journals, publishers, associations, conferences, grants and funding structure, and so on. More importantly, this literature produced no theory about or social scientific approach to the study of Latin America. In sum, calling it 'Latin American studies' is a double presentism: a concept and an institutional practice of the present are projected onto a past circumstance in which they did not exist.

As late as 1965, Kalman H. Silvert complained of the dominance of history in Latin American studies, adding that even though political scientists had recently become interested in the subject, many academics writing on political affairs in Latin America were still historians (Martz, 1965: 1). According to John Martz, before the Second World War 'area studies in general remained in a depressing condition' (1971: 75) – an affirmation with which Mark Berger entirely concurs (1995: 31). In his review of the literature Rosendo Gomez finds that political scientists produced on average only one article per year on the subject 'Latin America' from 1920 to 1945 (Gomez, 1967).

This trend of neglect was rapidly reversed after the Cuban Revolution. In 1959, the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council established a joint Committee on Latin American Studies, which expressly aimed at improving communication among those interested in research on Latin America, planning future academic developments, and administering grants for research. The Committee received additional financial aid from the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and the Council on Higher Education in the American Republics (see Johnson, 1964).[10] While the number of course offerings in Latin American studies per college was practically the same in 1949 as in 1958, by 1969 it had doubled. This trend was practically the same across the disciplinary spectrum – except for sociology courses, which increased by a factor of four (Needler and Walker, 1971). Completing the consolidation of Latin American studies, the Latin America Research Review was created in 1966,

following the foundation of the Latin America Studies Association (LASA) in that same year.

The social scientific discourse on Latin America differs from everyday language in several important aspects, among them its reliance on a rhetoric of value neutrality, and its obsession with presenting Latin America as a coherent and stable object. One difference is particularly meaningful for the purposes of the present essay: racial asymmetric opposition is almost absent from the texts produced by Latin Americanists while, as we have seen, it is pervasive in everyday linguistic sources. On the other hand, cultural and temporal asymmetric oppositions abound in all key approaches to the study of Latin America: modernization theory, political stabilization, studies of corporatism, and even in textbooks published today. The only true exception to this 'trend' seems to have been dependency studies. In social scientific texts, the connection between cultural and temporal asymmetric oppositions is tight, but often culture appears as the determining cause.

The first approach to address Latin America as a stable object of research was modernization theory. Even before the Cuban Revolution some authors were already engaged in assessing Latin America's capacity to modernize. Their findings were, however, grim. For example, John Gillin, one of the first sociologists to delve into this problem, concluded that 'the controlling concept of the soul is . . . logically and emotionally connected with the pattern of personalism in Latin America'. Caught in the interstices of his inwardness, the Latin American is unable to develop an interest for the study of concrete things: 'the pragmatic, empirical investigation of premises and of data is not congenial, or highly motivating, to the Latin America'. Gillin argues that, contrary to the North American and his practical point of view, the Latin American is 'primarily interested in spiritual values' (Gillin, 1955: 492). The same inwardness that hampers pragmatism in the Latin American spirit produces an affection for idealistic and transcendental world views.[11]

In a similar fashion, Thomas C. Cochran argues, in 'Cultural Factors in Economic Growth' (1960),[12] that Latin American entrepreneurs do not behave like their North American counterparts. This is because Latin American culture is unfavorable to economic development. The 'Latin entrepreneur' enjoys talking and abstract speculation but not action. He strives for social status that is not based on business success, a practice that stops him from dedicating all his efforts to economic progress. Leaning on the 'findings' of John Fayerweather, Cochran claims that Latin American individuals 'place more emphasis on the forms of politeness and obedience than on the facts of behavior' (see Fayerweather, 1959).

Such diagnosis was repeated in other texts written by authors engaged in similar pursuits, including Seymour Martin Lipset's *Elites in Latin America* (1967), which is considered by some commentators to be the most influential piece of modernization theory on Latin America.[13] In that work one finds the following line of reasoning:

> The relative failure of Latin American countries to develop on a scale comparable to those of North America or Australasia has been seen as a consequence of variations in value systems dominating these two areas. The overseas offspring of Great Britain seemingly had the advantage of values derivative in part from the Protestant Ethic. . . . Since Latin America is Catholic, it has been dominated for long centuries by ruling elites who created a social structure congruent with feudal social values. (Lipset, 1967: 3)

In this 50-page 'classic', Lipset uses the term 'traditional' 63 times to refer to Latin America and its 'qualities'. According to him, the main cause behind Latin America's incapacity to progress, to modernize, is cultural, more specifically the fact that it is Catholic. In other words, temporal asymmetric opposition – Latin America not being in the same historical stage of development as the US – is explained by cultural asymmetric opposition, the fact that Catholic values are the opposite of America's Protestant ethic.

The historian Richard Morse started writing on Latin America several years before the appearance of the studies of corporatism, an approach that acquired prominence in the mid-1970s. As the passages below demonstrate, his ideas were not very different from those of modernization theory:

> A Protestant civilization can develop its energies endlessly in a wilderness, as did the United States. A Catholic civilization stagnates when it is not in vital contact with the diverse tribes and cultures of mankind. (Morse, 1964: 176)

> The Hispanic American continued as if no change had taken place. And in truth none had. Nothing real or conclusive seemed to have been gained. Meanwhile, the rest of the world marched forward, progressed, and made history. Hispanic America continued to be a continent without history, without a past, because the past was always present. (Morse, 1964: 169)

In other words, in Morse's account, there is a tight connection between temporal and cultural asymmetric oppositions. An entire brand of Latin Americanists, the students of corporatism, echoed throughout the 1970s and beyond the diagnosis that Latin America's historical paralysis was caused by its cultural pathology. Actually, in the language of corporatism, cultural values were often translated by expressions such as 'institutions' or 'structures' for the same effect: justifying Latin America's radical cultural otherness and lack of coevalness with the US.

The following passage by Howard Wiarda, the most prominent author of the studies of corporatism, written almost ten years after the publication of Morse's piece, echoes that author's ideas:

> The same traditional hierarchical, corporative, elitist, and authoritarian orientation and structure is also still present today, modified by twentieth-century changes but by no means destroyed by them. . . . The personnel of government may shift, new groups and ideas may be assimilated, and the elites may rotate in power (thus giving the appearance of change more than

> its substance); but the essentials of the socio-political order and the base on which it rests must remain steadfast. (Wiarda, 1973: 223)

Despite their similar conceptualization of Latin America, the authors who endorsed the studies of the corporatism approach were often very critical of modernization theory. According to them, modernization theory understood Latin America in wrong terms, or better, in American terms, projecting over this 'cultural other' expectations of material and institutional development that were entirely strange to Latin America's own proclivities. Wiarda, for example, criticizes modernization theory for projecting a model of European and American development to Latin America, and consequently overlooking the fact that Latin societies are quite distinctive (Wiarda, 1973: 208). Another author of the same approach, Ronald Newton, rejects modernization theory's claim that 'Latino' middle-sectors have been a reformist force in Latin American history. According to him, this is another product of North American myopia, which is based on 'culturally-derived premises concerning the "natural" behavior of matured middle classes'. In fact, he argues, these middle sectors have been bound to the same ascriptive particularistic corporative practices that dominate Spanish American society, and hence, incapable of producing 'horizontal solidarities' (Newton, 1970: 1–2). In sum, two approaches, the same diagnosis, but two different conclusions. While modernization preached economic development through a process of acculturation in which the Latin American traditional society would shed its Catholic values and acquire modern, Western, and sometimes explicitly American values, studies of corporatism often warned their American readers that Latin America could not be changed, that it was always true to its corporatist nature (which also meant historical paralysis), even concluding that authoritarianism was natural to such societies (Newton, 1974).

Studies of corporatism in Latin America disappeared as a social scientific approach around the mid-1980s, when the so-called Latin American countries started adopting liberal democratic regimes. Its strong deterministic culturalism seemed unable to explain why these countries were going through such 'unnatural' transformation. Latin American studies has grown enormously since its 'foundation' in the 1960s, and since the demise of the studies of corporatism there has not been a single approach dominating the scene. Nonetheless, in social scientific discourses Latin America kept most of the meanings that modernization theory and the studies of corporatism helped to propagate. Although an analysis of the semantics of the concept in the various sub-fields of Latin American studies is not viable here, the continuation of such semantic development is readily identified in the literature of introductory textbooks to Latin American studies.

It is through college education that most Americans are presented to the academic study of Latin America. The task of introducing someone to

the systematic study of an object that is also conceptualized in everyday language must happen in a conversation between 'scientific knowledge' and everyday notions; that is, between social scientific language and everyday language. Through the textbook literature one catches a glimpse of the ways everyday prejudices against Latin Americans relate to social scientific notions about them.

College education is a major force in the social circulation of the concept of Latin America. Social scientists, writers, journalists, bureaucrats, business people, and other professionals who deal with things 'Latin American' in American society, are educated about their object in the classrooms of universities, frequently through courses of introduction to Latin American studies, where these textbooks are employed. Thus, knowing what these people are taught is crucial for understanding the present perceptions and representations of 'Latin America' in the United States.

The semantic elements found in previous approaches to the study of Latin America are also present in the bestseller of the textbook literature, *Modern Latin America* (2001), by Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith.[14] After clearly stating the cultural difference between Latin America and the US, the authors write:

> Despite the differing forms of political conflict, old social and economic structures have persisted. Even where modern revolutions have struck, as in Mexico (1910) and Bolivia (1952), many aspects of traditional society survive. The Cuban Revolution (1959) seems at first an exception, yet even in Cuba the pull of history has continued to be strong, as we shall see. (Skidmore and Smith, 2001: 5)

The expression 'pull of history' is the temporal marker informing the readers that, differently from the US, Latin America has been caught in its own past – a temporal asymmetric opposition. A very similar picture is presented by another bestseller, Keen and Wasserman's *A History of Latin America*:

> For most North Americans, perhaps, the colonial past is a remote, picturesque time that has little relevance to the way we live now. The situation is very different in Latin America. . . . In Latin America the colonial past is not a nostalgic memory but a harsh reality. . . . These feudal characteristics, admixed with some capitalist elements, formed part of Spain's (and Portugal's) legacy to independent Latin America and help explain the tenacious hold of some anachronistic institutions on the area today. (Keen and Wasserman, 1988: 8)

Here the expression 'pull of history' is replaced by 'tenacious hold of some anachronistic institutions' for the same effect, and the opposition to North America is more explicit.

The fifth edition of Paul B. Goodwin's *Global Studies: Latin America* (1992) surpasses the competition when it comes to stereotyping. References

to irrationality, which are common in everyday language and in the writings of modernization theorists, reappear in his text:

> . . . because in their urban environment Latin Americans are in close contact with many people, appearances are important to them. There is a constant quest for prestige, dignity, status, and honor. People are forever trying to impress one another with their 'public worth.' Hence, it is not unusual to see a blue-collar worker traveling to work dressed in a suit, briefcase in hand. It is not uncommon to see jungles of television antennas over shantytowns, although many are not connected to anything. (Goodwin, 1992: 4)

The otherness of this cultural setting dominated by appearance and irrationality expresses itself also through conceptions of time:

> The historical memory, from a North American or Northern European perspective, is faulty. From the Latin American perspective, however, it is the perception of the past that is important, regardless of its factual accuracy. Myth and reality, appearances and substance, merge. (Goodwin, 1992: 6)

The comparison between the semantics of Latin America in everyday language and in social scientific discourses reveals interesting findings: in both, temporal and cultural asymmetric oppositions abound. However, it is equally important to notice that racial asymmetric opposition is mostly absent in the latter. That is, in the writings of Latin Americanists, Latin America's temporal and cultural pathology is not explained by the Latin Americans' supposed racial inferiority, an argument commonly found in everyday-language representations. Things become different, however, when one considers the pictorial representation of Latin America on the covers of present-day textbooks of introduction to Latin American studies.

Let's start with the bestseller, *Modern Latin America*. The cover of *Modern Latin America's* fifth edition sports the reproduction of an oil on canvas by the Guatemalan Mariano González Chavajay called *Mercado de Noche*. The painting depicts a group of 16 people, most of them engaged in trading activities in a place that appears to be a street market. They all have very similar faces and the same golden-brown skin color. Most probably, the persons in the picture belong to a Guatemalan Indian pueblo. However, the picture is not representing that pueblo on the cover of the book –there is no reference to Guatemala or to the pueblo's name in sight – but Latin America as a whole. Every time the readers reach for their books, they are reminded of the Latin American appearance: non-white, Indian, dark-skinned. The picture is also loaded with temporal asymmetric oppositions, as the characters look backward, underdeveloped, semi-rural, agricultural, pre-capitalist to the 'modern' eye. Cultural asymmetric opposition is present through elements such as non-Western clothing, pre-capitalist activities, and the fact that the characters are easily identified as Indians. Adding some ironic overtones to the whole ensemble, the allusion to historical paralysis is reinforced by the contrast between the title of the book, *Modern Latin America*, and

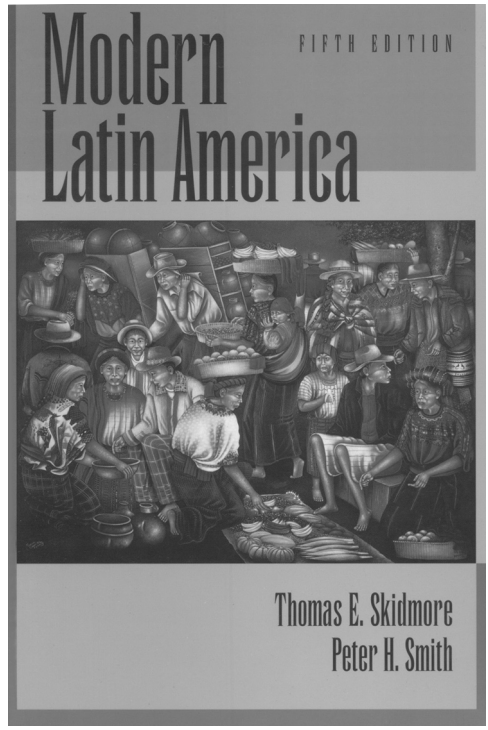

Figure 2 Cover of *Modern Latin America, 5th edn* (Skidmore and Smith, 2001)

the scene that seems perfectly un-modern – the average reader would easily assume that those people have been doing this from time immemorial since it is almost impossible to place the situation in historical time, and yet they are there to represent 'modern' Latin America.

Despite the fact that *Modern Latin America* is the bestselling textbook, the type of representation of Latin America on its cover would amount only to anecdotal evidence if it were not corroborated by almost all its competitors in the market. The cover of Keen and Wasserman's *A History of Latin America* sports a reproduction of an oil on canvas entitled *Revolucionarios*, by the Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco (1930). This picture is similar in many ways to that on the cover of *Modern Latin America*. This time, however, the dark-skinned people wear peasant clothing and carry guns, a probable allusion to violence, constant civil strife, and irrationality that is not uncommon in the Latin American studies literature. The painting on the cover of John Charles Chasteen's *Born in Blood and Fire* (2001) also sports Mexican peasants in arms, this time with an angry look on their faces – a perfect illustration of the title and a powerful synthesis of the book's introduction, which defines Latin America as a region ridden with violence. *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History* (Burns and Charlip, 2001), and *A History of Latin America* and *A History of Latin America (Volume 2):*

Independence to the Present (Keen and Haynes, 2004), also have pictures on their covers with dark-skinned Latin Americans wearing 'traditional' clothes in rural or colonial settings. Nonetheless, this time they are not fighting but playing musical instruments and dancing. Although the situation here seems nicer if compared to other covers, the image of abandonment to the pleasures of music and dance also alludes to irrationality, to the incapacity of controlling one's own inclinations, impulses, and desires, and to a lack of disposition for hard work – an echo of the cultural opposition that pervades the semantics of Latin America in English.

There is yet another type of representation of Latin America that can be found on the cover of textbooks as exemplified by the fifth edition of Howard Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline's *Latin American Politics and Development* (2000). This book cover does not depict human characters – dark, brown or white – no scene, no traditional garment or accessories, nothing of that sort. There is just a monochromatic scheme of geometrical patterns that looks like a stamp (see Figure 3).

Despite all the elements on the other covers that are lacking here, this picture is able to convey the three asymmetric oppositions synthetically. In cultural terms, this artwork is clearly non-modern, decorative, and most readers would immediately ascribe to it an Indian origin. The temporal

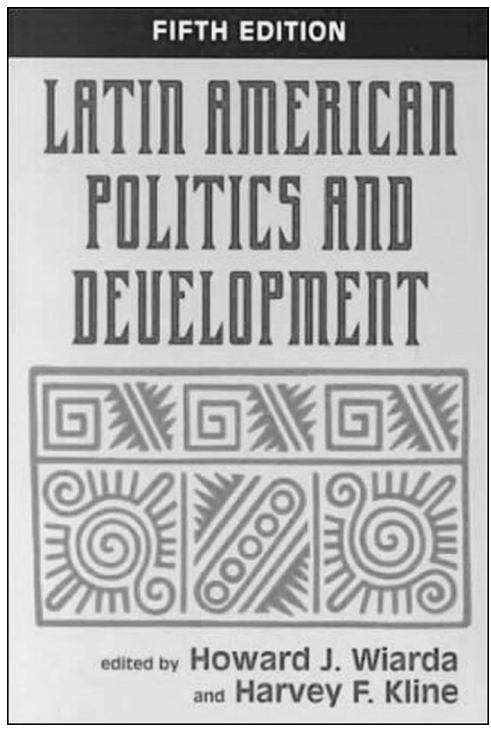

Figure 3 Cover of *Latin American Politics and Development, 5th edn* (Wiarda and Kline, 2000)

markers are here close-knit with cultural perceptions, as the artwork appears uneven, thus handmade, a product of an agricultural, rural culture; underdeveloped, at any rate. A more trained observer could even link it directly with pre-Columbian civilizations. Finally, the racial element conveyed by the picture is also linked to its identification with an Indian origin. The white West does not produce things of this sort nowadays. Thus, such artwork must be either from primitive cultures of the past or from non-Western (i.e. non-white) cultures of the present.

The cover of Wiarda and Kline's textbook brings us back to the fad of representing Latin America through pre-Columbian artifacts, with which this article started. But now we are well-equipped to answer the question: What does it convey? Why is it so ubiquitous? My hypothesis is that this type of representation has become so common because it conveys perfectly and synthetically the semantic elements that have structured the social scientific discourses on Latin America plus the racial element that has been repressed on the textual level but has continued to be present in everyday language and on pictorial representations of Latin America used by an important branch of the social scientific literature: introductory textbooks.

But that is not all. The answer the editor of the LARR gave me carried yet another element, another message. The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) has traditionally been on the 'left' side of the American political spectrum at least since the early 1970s.[15] And the editor's answer does reveal a leftist tone, once we pay attention to his reference to the 'two great pre-Columbian civilizations of the Western Hemisphere: the Aztec and Inca empires'. This is not only a descriptive statement. His intention, it seems to me, was to highlight the grandeur of the Latin American past: the fact that Latin America had produced at least two great civilizations of its own. But he did not seem to realize the great irony lurking behind his statement. An irony that is present not only in the statement, which translates perfectly the concept behind the cover of LARR, but also in all books, catalogues, and other material objects that represent Latin America through pre-Columbian art and artifacts: Latin America is represented by something that is explicitly pre-Latin, i.e. something that was produced before colonization of the New World by Portugal and Spain started.

That is actually a double irony, cultural and temporal: the Latin is represented by the pre-Columbian, and present-day Latin America is represented by an immemorial past – Aztec, Inca, or generically Indian (as on the cover of *Modern Latin America*). Thus, through this type of representation, the name Latin America itself is turned into an oxymoron, a paradox, a misnomer at least.

But the irony behind this representation is not unfounded or devoid of meaning. Quite the contrary, the pre-Columbian representation synthesizes the diagnosis of Latin America advanced by Latin American studies from modernization theory to the present-day: the historical experience of Latin America since the arrival of the Iberians has been a total failure; nothing of value, no progress, no freedom, no happiness has been produced.

Independence added nothing to the oppression of the indigenous people, or to the decadence and stagnation of the colonial institutions.

As Skidmore and Smith put it:

> The Conquest began a tradition of political violence that has erupted in coups, assassinations, armed movements, military interventions, and (more rarely) social revolutions. Ideological encounters between liberalism, positivism, corporatism, anarchism, socialism, communism, fascism, and religious teachings of every doctrinal hue have sharpened the intensity of struggle. Despite the differing forms of political conflict, old social and economic structures have persisted. (Skidmore and Smith, 2001: 5)

In their condemnation of 'Latin' historical experience, Latin Americanists from both left and right join forces. But the lefties, the dominant faction, have added a twist to it: a politically correct identification with the oppressed, the subaltern, in the form of a praise of the Indian, of the great pre-Columbian civilizations, which are actually dead: they were destroyed by the evil Spaniards and Portuguese.

One of the main problems here is that this politically correct identification with the oppressed has the function of overlooking actual politics: how social movements and groups in the countries that fall under the Latin American label have acquired rights and political voice within their own national communities, how they have struggled for and gained recognition from societies that are in constant change, and how they have contributed to the democratization of their countries. It overlooks the fact that the vast majority of the 'subalterns' and 'oppressed' in 'Latin America' are not 'Indians' living in remote areas, who speak a non-Western language, and possess an immemorial non-Western culture and religion, but urban dwellers who are mostly Christian and only speak Spanish or Portuguese.

This is an example of American political correctness revealing itself as a discourse entirely in tune with American imperialism: a discourse that reduces the 'Latin American' object to a failure incapable of moral and political autonomy, and thus of historical agency. Latin American studies seems to be plagued by the same historical handicap that it identifies in its own object. Can it ever change?

Conclusion

There are obvious commonalities between the study of asymmetric counterconcepts, the way it is proposed here, and some varieties of postcolonial theories. The cultural complex of Orientalism, as Edward Said has defined it (Said, 1978), at least at the level of discourse formation, can be redescribed in terms of a set of asymmetric counterconceptualizations. Conversely, the representations of Latin America that I have been examining are only a part of a larger representational machine, formed by disciplines and institutions, and systems of authority that establish privileged loci of enunciation (universities, think tanks, policy specialists, etc.). That

is, the representational machine of 'Latin Americanism' is quite similar to that of Orientalism. So why not write this work in the same Foucauldian terms of Said's Orientalism? Because there are many ways to skin a cat, and exploring methodological alternatives is more intellectually rewarding than beating an old drum. Furthermore, the study of asymmetric counterconcepts proposed here is rather different from Koselleck's original formulation.

Some studies of Orientalism and of other colonial encounters also contain interesting parallels with the present effort. This is particularly true of the works of Timothy Mitchell (1998) and of Terry Smith (1998), who both focus on the analysis of visual representations in colonial processes. While studying 19th-century world exhibitions, Mitchell identifies the apparent realism of Oriental representations, that is, their 'strict' correspondence to the external world (Mitchell, 1998: 501). In the case of the representation of Latin America, this realism is guaranteed by the usage of artwork that is 'genuinely Latin American' – the cover thus appears to represent 'Latin Americans' the way they represent themselves. While surveying the 'visual regimes' used to represent aboriginal people in European maps and landscape pictures of Australia, Terry Smith identifies three practices: calibration, obliteration, and symbolization (aestheticization) (Smith, 1998). The latter two are particularly relevant to the representation of Latin America through pre-Columbian artwork, given that such representation functions as an aesthetic symbol for the whole continent, at the same time that it screens from view the vast majority of the actual people who fall under the category of 'Latin American'.

The works of Luz Elena Ramirez (2007) and of Ricardo D. Salvatore (2006) deal with subjects that are in many ways complementary to the history of the concept of Latin America sketched here. While I have dealt with the history of that concept in the United States, focusing on 20th-century social scientific texts and everyday language, Ramirez examines the representations of 'Latin America' in British literature, from the 16th to the early 20th century. She identifies a process of binary opposition, similar to the ones described here, in the ways 'Americanist' British writers disparaged Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in order to present the British colonial enterprise as more humane and civilized (Ramirez, 2007: 23–4). Ramirez adopts the notion of 'informal imperialism' to describe the British exploits in 'Latin America' from the early 19th century on which, according to her, were non-interventionist and driven by 'entrepreneurial interests rather than military ones' (Ramirez, 2007: 23–4). The same notion of 'informal imperialism' is used by Ricardo D. Salvatore to survey the knowledge about and representations of South America produced in the United States during the heyday of pan-Americanism, 1890–1945 (Salvatore, 2006) – a period which the present analysis covers very briefly, mostly because the concept of Latin America was not yet disseminated in the English language. The author gathered a variety of sources such as pictures from exhibitions, maps, photographs and texts from travelers, etc., whose analyses would certainly enrich and expand the pre and early history of the

concept of Latin America in the United States. Nonetheless, Salvatore is more interested in exploring the thesis of American informal imperialism than in delving into the interpretation of text and image (Feres Jr, 2008).

Other varieties of postcolonial theories can be used to illuminate the present study, although some important tensions should also be noted. For example, the analysis presented here is very much in line with Homi Bhabha's contention that cultures can only be posed as a fixed object of knowledge through a process of violent homogenization, which is operated through the election of representative symbols and icons (Bhabha, 1994: 20) – an argument that merges together the practices of obliteration and symbolization, as they were defined by Smith. Indeed, Latin America becomes a knowable object through such operation of leveling the actual lived experiences of different peoples living in widely diverse contexts. However, Bhabha is also interested in showing how the colonial discourse partially fails in the very process of its appropriation by the colonized, which always produces a mixture of mimesis and mockery (Bhabha, 1994: 115). This type of contention opens up the theoretical question of the third space and of border thinking; themes that have been taken up by several authors, including some reflecting on Latinos in the United States and subaltern identities in Spanish America (Anzaldúa, 1987; Mignolo, 2000).

The present work is not, however, about the problem of resistance. If its subject matter were the Latino response to stereotyping representations of Latin America in the United States, then we would probably identify forms of cultural hybridization or even of strategic essentialization – the way it is defined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1984–5) – as, for example, can be found in the work of Coco Fusco (Fusco and Wallis, 2003; Shohat, 1998). There is at least one important reason not to give prominence to resistance: most of the historical development of the semantics of Latin America took place during a period in which Latinos were still a relatively small community with little political influence in the United States. At the same time, the so-called 'Latin Americans' lived in contexts where American discourses on Latin America were perceived (when they were at all) mostly as a foreign product that did not necessarily impinge on their identities as Peruvians, Guatemalans, Argentineans, Brazilians, etc. This does not mean, however, that they did not suffer the consequences of such discourses, which were used to justify American political and military intervention (Schoultz, 1998; Smith, 1996), cooperation with dictatorial rulers (Schoultz, 1981), repressive police forces (Huggins, 1998), anti-democratic military and right-wing guerrilla organizations (Berger, 1995).

A comparison with the work of Arnd Schneider, *Appropriation as Practice: Art and Identity in Argentina* (2006), helps to clarify some other aspects of the present essay. Schneider's originality rests not only on his chosen topic, the construction of new identities by Argentine artists through the appropriation of indigenous and pre-Columbian art, but also on his disciplinary approach, which is a mix of anthropological and post-colonial theories, hermeneutics, and globalization studies.[16] The author investigates

how indigenous art (including pre-Columbian) started being used by mostly non-indigenous artists in Argentina with the aim of destabilizing national identity (which is dominantly white and European) and pejorative representations of the indigenous peoples, and construing what he sometimes terms 'new Latin American identities'. Borrowing the concept of hybridization from the writings of Nestor García Canclini, he concludes that these new identities are not essentialized but rather an assemble of diverse elements, 'a quarry of fragments, from which the artistic bricoleurs set out to work with' (Schneider, 2006: 32).

Schneider provides unmistakable evidence that his subjects were able to invest representations of pre-Columbian art and of Latin America with a positive sense, a practice that contrasts with the ways these representations usually operate in the United States, as I have shown above. This indicates that we can only study the meanings conveyed through symbolic and textual representations by placing them in their proper context and examining the ways in which they are employed – something that Alfred Gell has already argued regarding the social usage of art objects (Gell, 1998). In Schneider's case this context is the art establishment in Argentina and the discourses of artists and other sectors of Argentine society on national identity. In my case, the context is the textual production of Latin American studies and, more generally, the discourses on Latin America found in everyday English language. Thus, I assume here that the pre-Columbian images printed on book covers and in book catalogues have a conceptual function, working as symbols that represent Latin America as a whole – this relation can be immediately grasped through the interplay between pictures and the titles of books and catalogues. As Jacques Rancière puts it, 'the titles of films and books frequently create connections that confer meaning on the images' (Rancière, 2009: 33). In part, there is a relation of illustration in which the picture duplicates what is linguistically represented in the text, as in the cases of cultural and temporal asymmetric oppositions (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1990: 89). But there is also a relation in which the picture supplements the information given by the text, a process that Roland Barthes has termed relay (Barthes and Heath, 1977). This is the case of racial asymmetric opposition, which is ubiquitous in the images but mostly absent in the texts.

It should be made clear that I am not here trying to deny Foucault's contention that there is an infinite relation between image and text (Foucault, 1971). I do not intend to have exhausted either the interpretive possibilities opened up by the interplay between text and image in Latin American studies or the representational potential of pre-Columbian art. The present essay explores only some of these possibilities, ones that have not often been dealt with by the academic literature.

Picture theory and visual culture studies have struggled to find grounds between two extreme epistemological positions, one that assumes the separation between text and image as an 'a priori condition under which all ideas are formulated' (Deleuze, 1986: 60), and one that postulates that

this separation fails to grasp the 'unstable dialectic that constantly shifts its location in representational practices, breaking both pictorial and discursive frames' (Mitchell, 1994: 83). I am not subscribing to either of these positions here, but rather adopting a pragmatic approach of assuming some stability in the separation between text and image. This is justified in part by the type of material examined in this study. For example, differently from conceptual art and works of art that contain text and images, such as the material analyzed by W.J.T. Mitchell, the images used by Latin American studies were not composed with or for text, that is, they were produced independently and then re-produced on the covers.[17] Thus, without foreclosing the possibility of semantic shifts and instability, it is reasonable to assume that these images have a representational function that was not entirely blurred by a process analogous to Jacques Derrida's *differance*, and that that function can be apprehended, though imperfectly.

Some may contend that the pictures on the covers of books and catalogues are not chosen by authors themselves but by the editors of the various academic presses. This is certainly true, and it helps to strengthen the point I made here, which is not to peg the derogatory representations of Latin America on one author or a group of authors, but to study it as a discourse produced by an institutionalized activity known as Latin American studies. Thus, finding relations of commonality and complementarity between texts and images and between everyday and academic languages and representations are valid operations, analogous to Foucault's intertextuality, which help to reveal the discourse on Latin America as something that goes beyond the confines of what is commonly understood as academia.

Notes

1. A general historical overview on scientism and positivism in the American social sciences is found in Ross (1991). Gunnell (1986, 1993) and Ball (1993) deal rather critically with the issue of value-neutrality in the discipline of political science, while Packenham (1992) overtly advocates its adoption by the field of Latin American studies, given that it is, according to him, a hallmark of the American way of doing social sciences.

2. The full theoretical development of my approach to the study of asymmetrical counterconcepts is found in Feres Jr (2006), and its application in greater detail to the history of the concept of Latin America can be found in Feres Jr (2005a) or in Feres Jr (2008), the Brazilian and Spanish editions of my monograph on the history of the concept of Latin America in the United States, respectively. A short and preliminary version of that study was presented in Feres Jr (2005b). None of these pieces deals with the case of the pre-Columbian representation of Latin America.

3. For example, in the case of the pair Greek/barbarian, cultural asymmetric opposition is clearly dominant as the barbarians were indeed perceived as lacking the 'good' language, habits and institutions the Greeks ascribed to themselves, whereas perceptions of racial difference and temporal dislocation, although arguably not entirely absent, did not have an important role in their definition (Feres Jr, 2006).

4. Such analysis can be found in Feres Jr (2008).

5. Adams to Jefferson, 3 February 1821 (see Cappon, 1988: 571).

6. *Congressional Globe*, 4 January 1848, pp. 96–9. Quoted in Schoultz (1998).

7. *Congressional Record*, 9 January 1900, p. 711. Quoted in Schoultz (1998).

8. In the poll, respondents were asked to describe Central and South Americans, choosing from a fixed list of 19 words. For more information on the poll see Cantril (1951).

9. Searches for the term 'Latin America' in the titles of books published before 1900 in the catalogs of the Library of Congress and of the New York Public Library turned up no results, something that confirms the chronology of the term provided by the OED. According to the dictionary the expression 'Latin America' started being used in English only at the turn of the 20th century (Simpson and Profitt, 1997). The catalogue of the New York Public Library has only six entries for books with 'Spanish America' in their titles published before 1900, while the Library of Congress has ten such books. In the period between 1900 and 1950, this number increases to ten in the NYPL and 24 in the Library of Congress. This seems to be evidence that although Spanish America was the preferred term in the 19th century for referring to the United States' southern neighbors, as the OED informs us, it has never become the 'theme' of an extensive literature, be it scientific or otherwise.

10. For a detailed account of the growth of Latin American studies in the 1960s see Berger (1995).

11. Gillin does not bother to conduct original fieldwork or case studies to support his generalizations about Latin America.

12. 'Cultural Factors in Economic Growth' is a good example of an early modernization text on Latin America.

13. For a general evaluation of modernization theory in Latin America and the place of Lipset's contribution in it see Mattiace and Camp (1996)

14. A search for syllabi of university courses on Latin America on Google turned up 202 results containing Skidmore and Smith's *Modern Latin America*. The runner-up was Keen and Benjamin's *History of Latin America*, with 54 hits. Burns and Bradford's *Latin America: A Concise Interpretive History* came in third with 28 hits, Winn and Peter's *The Changing Face of Latin America* was fourth with 26, and Wiarda and Kline's *Latin American Politics and Development* was fifth with 18.

15. On this subject see Packenham (1992: 271).

16. Schneider puts it a little differently: 'anthropology of art, urban anthropology, and studies of ethnicity/identity and globalization' (Schneider, 2006: 4).

17. The Aztecs, Maya and Inca who made those drawings and objects could not possibly have Latin America in mind, given that the concept itself was entirely unthinkable in their own time. Most probably, neither Mariano González Chavajay nor the Mexican muralists, whose paintings were used on the book covers, were engaged in representing Latin America, but a certain type of Guatemalan and Mexican revolutionaries, respectively.

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