

PART I: INTRODUCING LATIN AMERICA: "THE SLEEPING GIANT"

Generalities cannot really hold the complex face of Latin America (Central, South and the Caribbean). Perhaps the one thing the Latin American countries truly hold in common is the Spanish language (with the exception of Brazil and the Caribbean), and the fact that most of the countries were conquered and colonized by Spain, Portugal and England. However, there is a somewhat common history for a large part of the continent, certain common traits of the various lands rising out of that history, and the commonness of issues manifested in any developing nation --the plight of the poorest of the poor is a similar plight anywhere in the globe.

A. Overview

Latin America: lands of extreme variation, from highly mountainous areas to fertile plains, to occasional desert and plateau and massive rain forests. Its people number over 256 million. Though much is rural, a surprising growth of the urban has taken place within the last decade: Argentina is more than 50% urban, Brazil 59%, Chile 76%, Mexico 60%, Peru 55%, and Venezuela more than 75%. Guatemala and Jamaica are now over 30% urban.

Although more advanced in development than a continent like Africa (with its problems of mass hunger, massive resettlement due to war and famine, and large-scale armed conflict), it is still vastly under-developed, particularly in relation to the mass of people.

Poorest of the countries of Latin America are Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, The Dominican Republic and Haiti. Some countries have indicated over the past few years a more favorable economic situation.

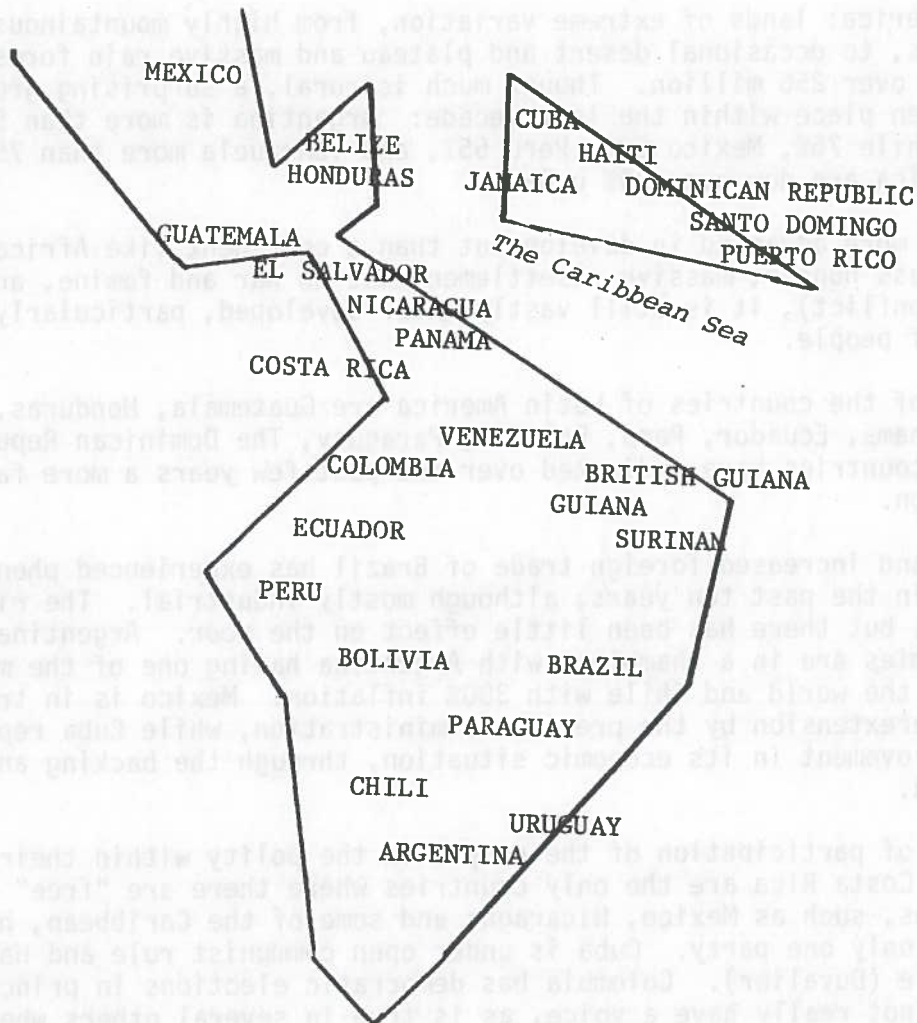
The GNP and increased foreign trade of Brazil has experienced phenomenal economic growth in the past ten years, although mostly industrial. The rich have become richer, but there has been little effect on the poor. Argentina and Chile's present economies are in a shambles, with Argentina having one of the most unstable currencies in the world and Chile with 300% inflation. Mexico is in trouble because of overextension by the previous administration, while Cuba reports a continual improvement in its economic situation, through the backing and resources of the U.S.S.R.

In terms of participation of the people in the polity within their nations, Venezuela and Costa Rica are the only countries where there are "free" elections. Several nations, such as Mexico, Nicaragua and some of the Caribbean, have free elections but only one party. Cuba is under open communist rule and Haiti, under one family rule (Duvalier). Colombia has democratic elections in principle, but the people do not really have a voice, as is true in several others where democratic elections are only "on paper." In Guatemala, the U.S. helped the regime

to put down any election attempts, supporting the strong Rightist control.

Most of the nations live under military rule. The turn to military control throughout most of Latin America's history may well be due to the fact that no other disciplined political body has risen within the nations, with the exception of the strong network of village cadres created by Romulo Betancourt in Venezuela earlier in the century, and the huge peasant movement in Honduras.

The tremendous diversity of the Latin American nations, their continuous political coups, economic mismanagement and limited or short-term social reform has succeeded in preventing any image of national unity.

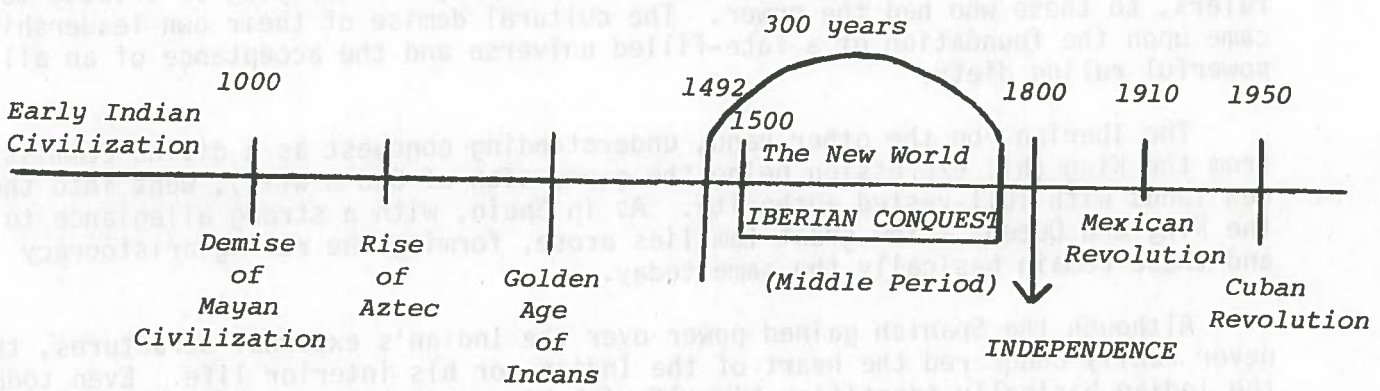


B. History

Although its historical timeline often is shown dating back to a mere 1,000 A.D., there is evidence of an ancient Indian civilization as old as 20,000 years before the conquests of the white man. The years 1000 to 1492 held the eventual demise of the Maya civilization, the rise of the Aztec, and the golden age of the Inca.

*"Nature, being blind,
mingles the good
with the bad.
It showers, wetting you,
dirtied your skies,
it's true,
Yet reared a rainbow arch
of triumph over you."*^a

This picture was radically changed in 1492 by the Iberian conquest, when the next 300 years of Spanish rule brought to an end the Indian civilization as it had been known. Out of Isabella's determination to begin a new world trade -- to help Spain regain her status and economic power, and with subjects who understood they were under a great mandate, the Iberians penetrated the Indian lands, overcame the Indian leadership, and redirected Latin America's economy toward Europe.



The Iberian Conquest journeyed through three basic phases: Phase 1 - the conquering of two major civilizations: the Aztecs in Mexico, by Cortez in 1521, and the Incas in Peru, by Pizarro in 1533; Phase 2 - the exploitation of all economic, political and cultural aspects of the Indian life, and the entry of the Jesuits in 1607. Colonial policy and laws were set by 1680 and the Spaniards were in firm control of Latin America; Phase 3 - the decline of the Iberians, with the Jesuits expelled from every Spanish colony by 1757. The British gained control of Trinidad in 1797, coming in the midst of the breakdown of the Iberian hold on Latin America.¹

The middle period of history, from around 1500 to 1800 (300 years) was probably the most critical moment in Latin America's history. It was a time of collision of two established cultures: those who came to open a new world for the crown and to evangelize a "barbaric" people, and those who had to accept a new civilization overlay while struggling to reassert the power of their local roots.

¹Timeline and phasing from paper by The Ecumenical Institute, "Latin America: Middle Period", March 4, 1972.

Economically, the Spanish conquest was an experiment in the "ideal" feudal system which was based upon race separation, with the Spaniards gaining the land and those upon it becoming their servants. Politically, the Spanish rule exploited the masses by the power of the oligarchy, the few holding economic, and thus political, power in a radically hierarchical social system. Culturally, the Spanish Church, defensive and authoritarian, encouraged the tribal isolation which resulted from the vast geographical differences, and through the centuries aligned itself with the oligarchy.

The Indian life style, prior to the Spanish, created an ideal setting for conquest. Much of the Indian culture had already been destroyed by the Aztecs and Incas before the Spanish ever arrived. The totalitarian and hierarchical leadership of the Indian culture, with its intense localism (The Incas, at first, accepted the Iberians as those who would help them defeat other tribes.) in the midst of a centralized system of government encouraged the paying of tribute to rulers, to those who had the power. The cultural demise of their own leadership came upon the foundation of a fate-filled universe and the acceptance of an all-powerful ruling deity.

The Iberian, on the other hand, understanding conquest as a divine commission from the King (his expression being the expression of God's will), went into the new lands with full-vested authority. As in Spain, with a strong allegiance to the King and Queen, a few great families arose, forming the ruling aristocracy -- and these remain basically the same today.

Although the Spanish gained power over the Indian's external structures, they never really conquered the heart of the Indian, or his interior life. Even today the Indian basically identifies himself with his ancient past rather than with those of the Spanish conqueror or the conquest.

In this strange new mingling of two basic peoples, through the centuries neither culture has completely dominated the other. Instead, an interweaving took place. Both cultures understood basic care through small community units (i.e., Spanish barrios and Indian tribal units). In technology and the arts, Spanish pragmatism united itself with Indian artistry. The Spanish Church's symbols were honored superficially by the Indian while the Indian stood present to his own internal reality; and the Spanish incorporated Indian symbols into the church's calendars and saints. Gradually, a strange integration of race took place in the midst of a tremendous social class system which put Europeans at the top, Indians at the bottom of the hierarchy, and raised into some respectability the result of the merging of the two (the mestizo).

C. The Present Situation

*"No man of all my race
has ever wept;
Of steel were they."*

U.S. Dominance

The U.S.A.'s power has been strong in Latin America for years: economically, politically, and, more recently, culturally. In 1967, Latin American investments by American business totalled \$10 billion, with increments growing at a rate of \$400 million yearly.² U.S. direct investment has constituted well over 50% of

²"Pax Americana", by John M. Swomley, Jr.--article from Methodist magazine (no date).

net U.S. financial flow to Latin America in recent years. Politically, it has supported most Latin American dictators and even trained their armies. It has exercised control over other countries where American investments have been strong in relation to that country's economic relationship to any country in disfavor with the U.S. (such as Cuba).³ Culturally, the U.S. mindset and style more and more dominate, particularly with the small and rising middle-class and the young. For the past ten years or so, the struggle to break out of U.S. dominance has continued, with the Latin American countries having little power of their own to break the bond.

The Economic Crisis

The world economic recession hit Latin America hard, causing widespread unemployment. In addition, the drought of 1976 cut farm output in much of Central America. The social dynamics which have risen out of the historical situation of Latin American reveal most serious depth issues. "Latin America is a sleeping giant, which can only be awakened by radical change."⁴

Economically, foreign investment benefits the few. The oligarchy of aristocracy, church and military, consisting of about 5 percent of the Latin American population, owns 90 percent of the land, under a feudal system of large land holdings and disproportionate taxing structures. Lack of technical know-how and the use of cheap native labor, with very little reinvestment into that which directly benefits the countries themselves, has encouraged a resource drain on the continent. By and large, with few exceptions, the mass of the peoples receive only meagre benefit from the economic systems of their nations.

In the past ten years, the flood of population from the rural sector to the city has been remarkable. (The slums of Venezuela are less than 20 years old.) In most countries, unrest is located in the slums of the urban, primarily by the second generation. The first generation, although living in the most adverse circumstances, feel they are much better off than when they lived in the impossible poor rural area that they are not as restless as their offspring.⁵

The real heart of the economic problem lies not so much in the lack of capital or natural resources for most of the countries, but in the inability to mobilize the natural and human resources already present.⁶ Most countries lack adequate systems, structures and services of distribution to the masses. What little there are basically serve the elite. In fact, when an effective system of service to the people is put into effect, it is not unusual for the elite to attempt to gain control.⁷

³The U.S. government forbade Belgian company with 65% American stock from selling to Cuba. (ibid.)

⁴Santa, Ana: The Latin American Masses: The Unsatisfied Ones

⁵George West, Institute of Cultural Affairs, in a personal interview

⁶George Evans, Inter-American Foundation, in a personal interview

⁷When the Inter-American Foundation funded a New Workers Bank System in Bogota, Colombia, the immediate and rapid swelling of local depositors revealed the need for such a system and the presence of resources to use it; the resulting profit made it unnecessary to receive further outside financial assistance. Because it is now "good business", subtle efforts are being made by the elite to gain control of the system.

The local people are generally alienated from any systems that do exist. They usually cannot meet whatever criteria is demanded (since the criteria is set up to reflect the educated elite) nor do they even know how to gain access to the system. At the local level, there are few organizations representing the local people.⁸ This coupled with lack of educational skills, lack of awareness of resource availability, and lack of the knowledge of how to put together what will work for them, perpetrates the subsistence level of existence and the self-depreciation of the masses.

At the national level, very little has happened in the past decade to deal with this major contradiction. Even when resources are made available, the mechanisms for getting anything to the local level are almost non-existent. Governmental departments of service, although often having good objectives for the provision of services to the poor, lack the money means and know-how, and carry very little power to affect real change.

The gap between rich and poor is ever-widening, even in Brazil which has the highest rising GNP of the continent and one of the highest in the world. Venezuela and Ecuador, with recently changed economic futures through the discovery of oil, have yet to experience the effect of that added resource, particularly in relation to the masses of the people. Brazil, whose economic progression has come from industrial activeness, has more broadly manifested the results. Even with these countries, however, benefit primarily comes, as it does to the poorest of the countries, to those few already holding the economic power.

Polity Dynamics

Nearly all top government positions during the colonial period were held by the Spanish and other colonists. Through this a tradition of executive domination of government remains in nearly all of Latin America. Political parties have tended to form around dominant political and military leaders. The majority of Latin American nations received their independence from the Spanish through military operations resulting from political developments in Europe rather than from pressure within the colonies. Most all nations achieving their independence experienced the first 50 years as marked with civil war, lawlessness and anarchy with the exception of Chile, which immediately administered with a strong stable government, and Brazil, in which the Portuguese imperial rule was replaced by Brazilian monarchy.

Politically, the Western democratic forms used in Latin America have often merely been "show-piece constitutions" having little resemblance to reality in how those forms actually operate. The "unholy trinity" oligarchy of the Church, the Aristocracy and the Military, which has dominated Latin American polity in a feudal alliance, has persisted through the centuries.

The "Left" has basically failed in providing an image of success, with the possible exception of Castro in Cuba. Even in his case (with the exception of the Caribbean which has been stimulated by visits from enthusiastic Cubans, who spread the story of success), it is difficult to tell whether he has provided any real image of possibility to the rest of Latin America. Communistic experiments throughout most of the other nations have proved to be too "European", and the Democratic philisophies too abstract and unfocused in terms of any serious social change.

⁸Evans, ibid.

Most of the Latin American countries are not prepared to participate in the North American concept and forms of democracy -- nor are they necessarily "sold" on the communistic system.

Many factors have blocked local participation in the political life of the nations. The tendency of the Indian has been to focus his loyalty around the tribe and his village, and their long history of operating only in very small groups has made it difficult for any government to draw them into larger supportive communities. At the same time, the Spanish aristocracy, living out of the context, life style and values of Spain or England, has made little attempt to develop local commitment of anything beyond the village.

The tradition of irresponsible charismatic leadership and military power, always subject to the next coup, and having little ability with long-range planning, has benefited the masses very little.

Regionalism, in which the Mestizo found his sphere of power over the local Indian who has no loyalty to the Spanish, often divides the nations with factionalism and in-fighting.

The Indian Culture

The Indian of Latin America, a "forgotten person" suffers from the loss of his culture. The Aztec and Incan, for instance, destroyed all other Indian cultures they came into contact with. When the Aztec conquered other villages, they would kill off the story-tellers, and then move the entire village to a totally new geography, thus successfully cutting them off from their story of who they were and the space their culture had grown in. The Spanish, during their 300 years of conquest, completed the job of cultural destruction.

Socially, no one seems to quite know how to deal with the Indian, who still remains basically separated from the 20th century, living in closed villages, deprived communities and antiquated tribal understandings. Efforts to modernize the Indian life styles are painfully slow, as Indians cling to traditional customs. In the early years of conquest, the R.C. Church has had the only success in drawing the small tribal units into larger communities, by building a church building and then organizing a village around the structure and its rites.

The Indian culture suffers from the collapse of an adequate self-story out of the years of conquest and subservience. Indian rituals are carried on, but often without conscious meaning. The Indian priest's role has weakened with the continued encroachment of the 20th century Western civilization. The Indian's self-deprecating stance in relation to himself, his community and his culture is that the Spanish have a more powerful culture than the Indian one. His social

masks⁹ of stoicism, humility and dissimulation act as shields to hide his defiance.

The Education System

Patterned after the old European style, designed to weed out most and produce the elite, perpetrating the images of class and the unworthiness of the Indian, the education system throughout most of Latin America provides few opportunities for the masses. When offered there is low participation from the local people. The curriculum is formal and not geared to most people's cultural and social backgrounds. Economically deprived and self-depreciating, they find themselves unable to take the time from work required for formal education.

Most governments are without adequate funds for mass education, although, within the past decade, some state-run vocational education systems have been created. Still, these are set up in such a way as to provide only for the few. The masses still remain untouched.

The Church's Role

From its earliest years religion has been a powerful influence in the lives of the Latin American, for the Indian as well as the Spaniard. Since the conquest, the Roman Catholic Church has played a predominant role in the formation and sustaining of the social structures throughout the lands (with the exception of Haiti, in which the Protestant fundamentalists have played the larger part).

The Roman Catholic Church, whose style was that of medieval hierarchy operating as if there had been no Reformation or Counter-Reformation, and the Protestant Church, which awakened indigenous pastors to 19th century fundamentalism -- have both preserved the status quo and spoken out against the status quo.

"A new movement of "popular religion" has risen which Church leaders believe is the key to both a religious and political reformation in Latin America... The upsurge of interest in popular religion in the R.C. Church, and the unbelievably rapid rise of the Pentacostals has coincided with...the exodus of priests and nuns to impoverished rural areas and slums, and the rise of military dictatorships.

"Previous to this, Latin America's Catholic Church has been "too European, too elitist," ignoring the rich vein of religious feeling in the Latin American cultures. In denigrating popular cults as ignorant or unimportant, the institutional Church...alienated vast sectors of the population...European missionaries helped create the psychological conditions for fatalism (in which saints or the souls

⁹ "With a local friend I...walked about La Charneca, one of those ugly Caracas slums surrounding gigantic ultra modern glass and steel skyscrapers interconnected by huge spider webs of multi-storied concrete highways. We were able to start a conversation with a small mild-mannered man...who told us that three families with a total of 16 children lived in his one room shack made up of discarded or stolen planks. It was a hot and humid day, and almost automatically we began to stare with him at a 50 foot wide Coca-Cola advertisement that stood out at the foot of the slums hill. 'None of us in this house has ever drunk Coca-Cola,' he said softly. 'One day we will kill those who make them.'" (quote from The Great Fear in Latin America, by John Gerassi, page 39).

of the dead were manipulated to change the situation and blamed when the situation was not changed), by destroying the indigenous people's culture and imposing the religion of the Spanish conquerors upon them...Initiative was taken away; the people were not expected to react...In this very narrow relationship, there is no possibility to change, because authority and tradition are accepted without criticism...The challenge, according to Latin American bishops, is to encourage the people to...alter the fatalistic aspect of devotion."¹⁰

During this century, from country to country, the Church's role varies tremendously in its relation to human rights and freedom. Its strong position in the country has allowed it to maintain the present systems and have the freedom to speak out against injustice with authority, where other voices would have been quickly silenced.¹¹ Its historical role has allowed priests and their followers to do what many cannot do. Some of the most innovative and progressive small projects, for instance, will have priests present in them. This has been particularly true of the Roman Catholics of Central and South America.

In the Caribbean, where the Protestants are the most influential, the Church exists with little overt relationship to the political, working only for "religious purposes."¹² However, throughout most of the rest of Latin America, any organization wishing to work in its countries would have to take obtaining the authorization of the Roman Catholic Church as seriously as obtaining the authorization of the government!

D. The Poorest of the Poor

Hunger, malnutrition, poor housing, poor health, inadequate farming methods, lack of vocational training and continued illiteracy plague the largest part of the people of Latin America. Rural life is unbelievably hard. Schools are primitive, and those children who attend spend only half the time needed for education, resulting in high semi-literacy. Few infrastructures exist, if any. Only 48% have access to clean water in most rural areas, resulting in worm infections, tuberculosis and other diseases.

*"And there were youths who shook
themselves like wolf cubs
And their sharp teeth tore
our shame to shreds."C*

As in many other developing nations, an overwhelming number of people, dissatisfied with poverty rising out of poor land distribution, concentration of political and economic power in the hands of the elite, and inadequate training to overcome the problems of the soil, are leaving the countryside for the city. In the slums of Salvador, Brazil for instance, 60% of the slum inhabitants were found to be rural immigrants. As many as 80% of the rural youth flee to the city. Rural to urban migration puts a tremendous strain on the city's infrastructure - sewage, water, electricity and transportation - often pushing even the most modern

¹⁰Penny Lernoux, "The Church in Latin America", RF News

¹¹Cardinal Silva in Chile has openly opposed repression and violence, aligning himself with the common people; however, has recently been ordered to silence with the exception of conducting the Mass.

¹²Evans, ibid.

city to the "breaking point." Inability to reorient to the city, particularly for the second generation, and the worsened economic conditions there, have only created a deeper sense of failure, frustration and hopelessness. The rural elite are interested in keeping the status quo, since their land holdings assure their continued position; and, as if blind, the urban elite live side by side with abject poverty.

The history of social injustice in Latin America is now approaching a crisis point in the situation of exploited populations at large in both the rural and urban sectors. A revolutionary consciousness has been developed through the years in the common people, and articulated to the world through their writers and poets. In some countries, such as Honduras, the peasant population is forming itself into an active movement of insistence and protest. If total collapse is to be staved off, then structural justice must arise out of the elite leadership and the middle class mestizo, who has been given a place in society in which to act.¹³ More and more, the cries of the people are being heard. Here and there, consciousness of other possibilities is encouraging the masses to demand radical solutions for long-standing and increasingly complex problems. They lack the power and the know-how for moving on those problems.

F. The Future

Certain trends are manifesting this readiness. A growing economic self-determination is evidenced by nations, with the nationalization of American industry in such countries as Mexico, Peru, Chile and Bolivia. Increasing trade relations with other nations are being pursued as the need for a pluralistic economy is made apparent in the face of potential disaster across lands under single-resource systems.

Increased economic autonomy, hard-won political security accompanied by an energetically nurtured sense of national pride and cultural identity by many of the Latin American nations reflects a recognition of a people's right to deal with their own affairs without American moral or material aid to the military institutions of their society.

Since 1960, both Latin America and the U.S.A. have increased their trade with other countries more rapidly than with each other. Still, to-date, the U.S. remains a far more important market to Latin America than the other way around.

Bilateral economic aid to Latin America peaked in 1966 and has headed downward since that date, although access to funds for Latin America has increased rapidly from the Inter-America Development Bank (IDB), Export-Import Bank, World Bank Group and others.

The sheer magnitude of U.S. direct investment, the growing nationalism of most major Latin American governments, growing opposition toward direct foreign ownership, the appearance of competition of European and Japanese investors, and the scarcity of resources and inadequate distribution within Latin America are all placing major demands for U.S. policy changes. Only a major new set of policies by the U.S. government--including greater access to U.S. markets, manpower training and placement, industrial planning, etc.--can provide a lasting basis for substantially and rapidly increased access by Latin America to the U.S. market. However, substantial liberalization of access to U.S. markets for industrial and

¹³Santa, Ana, ibid.

agricultural products of Latin America will be nigh impossible to achieve in the next 5 to 10 years unless accompanied by a domestic economic reform.¹⁴

President Carter has launched a Latin American policy with strong emphasis on human rights but enough flexibility to open traditionally closed doors, such as with Communist Cuba. It shuns the visions of lavish economic aid that ushered in the Alliance for Progress in 1961 and the oratory of Pan Americanism...it is not a single policy...but a series of approached to individual problems, many of which cannot be solved in the hemispheric context or through the machinery of the Inter-American system.¹⁵

Practical education and technical training are being demanded as the 20th century imposes itself upon the regional and local levels and small communities become conscious that they can no longer survive in isolation from the rest of the nation. Education proves to be a high priority for the poor wherever people are stimulated to work for themselves and their communities. As local people become more aware of what is possible for them to do, they also become aware of the need for the most basic skills and the demand for literacy.¹⁶

Certain popular dictators, as in Peru and Chile, made land reforms and nationalized economy and various social structures in the mose toward self-determination. The unstable political life of such countries, however, often has restricted further development, as in Chile with the assassination of Allende (who, by then, had made a shambles of the economy with his idealism and unrealistic strategies), and the take-over by the military regime (which, though acting in response to the great need for order and recovery, has since then become oppressive).

The process of social change accelerated since World War II. Modern communications helped to penetrate the isolation which had allowed outmoded social economic and political conditions to persist in remote areas. Some Latin American governments (particularly Mexico and Peru) have begun to show an increasing appreciation of contributions and heritages of early American civilization.

The future necessitates an intensification of such trends through serious and intentional long-range planning, additional resources to encourage the move toward self-sufficiency and independence, and encouragement with technical and educational assistance from the U.S. and other developed countries.

The cultural synthesization of Black, Indian, European and Mestizo, the high sensitivity to local mores and customs, and the sense of community which characterize the Latin American people and their countries need to be heightened for the sake of total renewal for every country.

*"I have invented new worlds. I have dreamed
Nights built out of ineffable substances.
I have made burning stars, subtle lights
Next to half-closed eyes."^d*

¹⁴Hansen, Roger D.: U.S.-Latin American Economic Policy: Bilateral, Regional or Global?

¹⁵Hovey, Graham: "Carter's Latin Policy: No Big Pledges but 'Honest Concern'" NY Times

¹⁶Evans, ibid.

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- ^afrom "The Guacho Troubadour" by Fernan Silva Valdes, Uruguay (1887 -)
- ^bfrom "Inheritance" by Alfonsina Storni, Argentina (1892 - 1938)
- ^cfrom "Harangue on the Death of Chayim Machman Bialik" by Cesar Tiempo, Argentina (1906 -)
- ^dfrom "The Birth of the Sun" by Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Nicaragua (1922 -)

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