

THE GEOGRAPHY OF  
DEVELOPMENT OR THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF GEOGRAPHY:  
Recent Texts on Latin America

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*THEATRES OF ACCUMULATION: STUDIES IN ASIAN AND LATIN AMERICAN URBANIZATION.* By WARWICK ARMSTRONG and T. G. MCGEE. (New York: Methuen, 1985. Pp. 269. \$40.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)

*LATIN AMERICA: CASE STUDIES.* Edited by RICHARD G. BOEHM and SENT VISSER. (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hunt, 1984. Pp. 300. \$24.95.)

*SOUTH AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT: A GEOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION.* By ROSEMARY D. F. BROMLEY and RAY BROMLEY. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. Pp. 128. \$9.95.)

*INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA.* By ROBERT N. GWYNNE. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. Pp. 259. \$30.00.)

*LATIN AMERICA* By PRESTON JAMES and C. W. MINKEL. Fifth edition. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1986. Pp. 578. \$36.50.)

*SOUTH AMERICA.* By ARTHUR MORRIS. Third edition. (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1987. Pp. 285. \$24.95.)

*LATIN AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT: GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES.* Edited by DAVID PRESTON. (Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex, U.K.: Longman House, 1987. Pp. 262. \$28.95.)

Of the 4,915 U.S. residents listed in the *National Directory of Latin Americanists* (1985), only 253 (5.1 percent) classified themselves as geographers, a decline of 25 percent since 1966. Of the 5,718 members of the American Association of Geographers registered in 1987, only 561 (9.8 percent) claimed Latin American specializations, a decline of 10 percent from 1978. These trends, and their implications for contemporary geographical scholarship on Latin America by scholars based in the United States, should come as no great surprise to professional geographers and faithful readers of *LARR*. In the last review essay on Latin American geography texts in 1981, Rolf Sternberg remarked that "[o]ne of the telling features of the books under review here is that they are predominantly by British and German authors."<sup>1</sup> The field of geography in the

United States over the last twenty years has become a Medusa's head of highly specialized and sometimes parochial subfields, while non-U.S. geographical scholarship on Latin America maintains a predominance based on its steadfast focus on important questions of human and economic interest.

Of the seven volumes under review here, five were written by geographers based outside the United States. All were published with university markets in mind, although some may find their way into popular bookstores as well. The first part of this essay will review two recent editions by old friends of the regional geography tradition, Arthur Morris and coauthors Preston James and C. W. Minkel. The second section will compare three systematic texts by David Preston, Rosemary and Ray Bromley, and Richard Boehm and Sent Visser. The third section will examine two theoretical syntheses and case studies of industrialization and urbanization in Latin America by Robert Gwynne and Warwick Armstrong and T. G. McGee. One conclusion is inescapable: U.S.-based geographers are continuing to lose ground in expertise on a world region where geopolitical considerations would suggest U.S. supremacy.

### *Regional Geography Texts*

Preston James first introduced North American college students to the physical and human diversity of Latin America in 1942. His *Latin America* has exemplified the descriptive regional geographical approach for over forty years and is now a twentieth-century classic. The fifth edition, which was coauthored with C. W. Minkel, closely follows the format of its predecessors. The generally recognized subregions of Latin America are treated in separate sections progressing from north to south, followed by a final series of chapters on Brazil. Except for the sections on Brazil and the Antilles, each chapter is devoted to a single country and follows a similar organizational format: description of the major physiographic features, historical settlement patterns, political organization, and current economic and political situations. Visual aids are generous, with more than 75 black and white plates and 150 maps emphasizing essential physical characteristics, political units, and population distributions. Every chapter begins with a useful country statistical fact sheet, generally current to 1985. The twenty-two-page bibliography, organized by country headings, is followed by a guide to pronunciation and a short index covering about half of the text's prodigious subject matter.

Like its antecedents, the fifth edition of *Latin America* is an encyclopedic work, bursting with current facts on Latin America. The narrative is lucid, and the book's organization follows a reasonably consistent

pattern. James and Minkel successfully insert key historical events into associated spatial contexts and diplomatically treat competing theoretical interpretations of those events.

This text nevertheless demands much of both student and instructor. Its nearly six hundred pages include redundant physiographic description as a result of the longitudinal country-chapter format. After decades of exposure to geographical television documentaries, many students have little patience for wading through such lengthy written physiographic descriptions. Too few textual references to places of historical importance are depicted on the maps. Finally, the volume's abbreviated conclusion cannot adequately synthesize the vast body of information presented into clear basic themes. Consequently, students using this text to meet nonmajor or distributional requirements will likely struggle through it in considerable agony. *Latin America* nevertheless remains a legend in regional studies for the avid Latin Americanist beginner.

My major complaint with the fifth edition is that much of the literary color of James's original narrative has been edited out, ostensibly to make its language conform to the "scientific" (that is, sterile) stylistic standards of geographical narrative currently in vogue in the United States. This approach may be appropriate for scholarly works but is unfortunate for a basic pedagogical text. Consider the following quote from the 1942 edition (deleted in the 1986 edition), in which James records his observations about life in the Brazilian Amazon. "[T]he history of man in the North [Amazon] of Brazil can almost be described as a caricature of the Brazilian economy. In this region the temporary, exploitative character of Brazilian economic life is carried to an extreme; here we find again and again illustrations of the disaster which follows the attempt to collect the fruit without planting the tree; here is a land abundantly endowed with resources only waiting to be collected."<sup>2</sup> *Amazonistas* will recognize that this less than dispassionate, but accurate, description conveys as much truth today as it did in 1942 and captures the reader's imagination as well.

Arthur Morris's third edition of *South America* differs from the James and Minkel volume in several fundamental ways. First, as the title indicates, the scope of this regional overview is confined to South America (excluding Panama). Second, the Morris volume is divided into two complementary parts, one systematic and the other regional. The initial systematic part devotes separate chapters to the physical and historical dimensions of South America and its European settlement, followed by systematic discussions of the key issues of agriculture, industry, population, politics, and development. This format is loosely replicated in each of the country chapters that follow in the regional part. The regional part places country chapters in sections based on

physiographic groupings (for example, "The Highland Core," consisting of Peru and Bolivia). This approach avoids much of the redundancy of physiographic description found in James and Minkel's straight country-by-country approach. Another difference from the James and Minkel volume, which contains more regional detail and a larger more up-to-date bibliography, is that the major themes initially laid out by Morris do not become lost in his subsequent regional discussion. *South America* does not require a companion systematic text for classroom use as does the James and Minkel book. Although the Morris text has considerably fewer visual aids (forty-three black and white plates and fifty-seven thematic maps and diagrams), they are thoughtfully integrated into the text and are accompanied by informative captions.

Two features of *South America* make it an exciting textbook: first, it is elegantly written and interesting to read. Morris adds depth to his presentation by frequently quoting primary sources. Some readers may quibble with his penchant for long, complex sentences, but his impeccable English makes pleasurable reading nonetheless. Second, the book's economical organization and short, punchy chapters rarely leave the reader groping for a handle on the key issues undergirding the book's central themes on economic and social development.

These regional texts are intended for the undergraduate college market, yet they will likely find a broader readership among practitioners (from foreign service students to serious travelers). Both presume a rudimentary familiarity with the lexicon of physical and economic geography, and both belong in a geography curriculum. In terms of their respective length, *Latin America* may be more appropriate for a semester schedule whereas *South America* would easily fit into the quarter calendar.

### *Systematic and Quasi-Systematic Texts*

The second group of volumes, those by Preston, the Bromleys, and Boehm and Visser, seek to review the current state of knowledge on selected issues concerning the social and economic development of Latin America. These volumes are distinctively systematic in nature (excepting that by Boehm and Visser) and are intended for the academic market, although each is based on different pedagogical aspirations.

Preston's edited volume, *Latin American Development: Geographical Perspectives*, contains nine essays written by some of the United Kingdom's best-known geographers (although the editor is based in Australia). This volume is one of a series prepared by the Developing Areas Research Group of the Institute of British Geographers and represents a prodigious amount of research that has been competently condensed.

*Latin American Development* initially follows a loose historical pro-

gression, beginning with the pre-Columbian civilizations at conquest and the subsequent emergence of the extractive American colonial society. Richard Smith provides a comprehensive review of the origins and contemporary relevance of pre-Columbian agriculture (an unusually detailed survey for this kind of volume). In the two chapters on industrialization, John Dickenson focuses on the origins and development of manufacturing from the colonial period to the First World War, and Robert Gwynne skillfully navigates the reader through the two major stages of Latin American industrialization, import-substitution and export-promotion. The remaining chapters address regional development policies (Arthur Morris), urbanization (Alan Gilbert), the agrarian sector (Janet Townsend), and population mobility (David Preston). The contributors succeed in challenging their readers to question many aspects of conventional wisdom on economic development. To their credit, they avoid lengthy intellectual isometrics and deal tersely and fairly with the divergent ideological perspectives on the "development debate."

*Latin American Development* brims with facts and figures, although many of them are somewhat outdated (circa the late 1970s), and credits the reader with more than a rudimentary knowledge of Latin American geography. Aside from a few minor annoyances (lack of a basic political map of Latin America, no integrating conclusion, and an incomplete section on further readings), Preston has edited an otherwise exemplary collection of state-of-the-art essays that will probably find its way into many advanced undergraduate and graduate survey courses on Latin America.

Rosemary and Ray Bromley's *South American Development: A Geographical Introduction* will appeal to instructors of high school, upper form, and introductory college courses who wish to present a more stridently critical perspective on capitalist development in South America and related questions of social justice. The authors borrow heavily from the "world systems" lexicon to "provide a systematic human geography text on South America . . . , to develop a welfare approach, and . . . inject an element of political economy into geographical teaching on South America." This book addresses many familiar themes, including colonialism, agrarian conflict, dependent industrialization, urban growth, and resource frontiers. The "development" debate is more explicitly treated than in Preston, albeit at more elementary and ideological levels. Unfortunately, however, *South American Development* is meager in its references to the larger body of geographical scholarship on Latin America (of the forty "Further Readings" cited, only four are classified by the authors as "geography texts"). Also, the South American scope of this book (like the Morris volume) will limit its attractiveness to readers in the U.S market with its current heavy orien-

tation toward Central America. Nevertheless, this text has many admirable qualities. The writing style is fluid and comprehensible, and numerous photographs are used effectively to contrast scenes of prosperity with poverty in housing and lifestyle.

Richard Boehm's and Sent Visser's *Latin America: Case Studies* is more difficult to classify because its pedagogic objectives are less clear than the other books in this systematic group. The volume comprises eighteen contributions on disparate subjects written by junior Latin Americanist geographers in honor of their mentors. The original papers were presented at the 1979 annual meeting of the National Council for Geographic Education in Mexico City. The book is divided into three parts. The first part, "Cultural-Historical Environments," contains five diverse essays of exemplary scholarship: colonial religious missions (*reducciones*) in the Río de la Plata region; indentured labor institutions of the West Indies sugar economy after the abolition of slavery; ethnic minorities in Central America; changing religious patterns in Puebla, Mexico; and a descriptive account of life in a traditional agricultural village in Eastern Sonora, Mexico.

The work's potential focus as a systematic volume dissipates in the second part entitled "Issues in Modern Development." It contains twelve articles: seven on rural sector topics, two on urban themes, and one each on general demographic patterns in Latin America, highway transportation in South America, and hydroelectric development in Brazil. The result is that such important issues as industrialization, regional development, and environmental degradation are underrepresented in this collection. The third part is a regional geography of Puerto Rico that reviews the natural environment and major economic activities of the island's eleven physiographic regions.

It is evident that *Latin America: Case Studies* aspires to use in the college classroom. Its introduction includes a section on recommended classroom uses, and extensive appendices present various statistical tables and outline maps of the major regions and countries of Latin America that are solely for pedagogical purposes. Successful systematic case studies perform an important function in geographical education by adding depth and vitality to major theoretical themes that are often treated superficially in regional texts. But the success of a case-study volume largely depends on its representativeness, that is to say, the extent to which the topics chosen reflect the key themes and issues present in the larger body of scholarly research. With respect to the first part of their compendium, editors Boehm and Visser state that the topics covered "would normally receive little attention in a traditional text." This characterization should actually be applied to the book as a whole. The reader is left to infer that the intention of the distinguished mentors (who apparently selected the volume's contributors) was to



illustrate the diverse intellectual pursuits of the younger vanguard of Latin American geographers. Unfortunately, one outcome of this exercise in the celebration of diversity is the sacrifice of unity. Where are the key unifying themes to guide the reader to the confluence of geography's substantial contribution to Latin American studies? *Latin America: Case Studies* is really a conference proceedings, not a systematic classroom text or a systematically constructed case study. Given its content and the varied writing styles of its contributors, I suspect that many geography instructors will have a difficult time fitting this volume into either a systematic or a regional curriculum.

*Urbanization and Industrialization: Systematic Case Studies*

The third category comprises two books that integrate systematic and case study approaches to examine industrialization and the expansion of capitalism in Latin America. Both were written by well-known geographers outside the United States and present different perspectives on the co-phenomena of industrial growth and urbanization. In *Industrialization and Urbanization in Latin America*, Robert Gwynne's objective is "to link the distinctive process of industrialization to wider issues of urban and regional development in Latin America" (p. xii). This book is well organized for graduate coursework and reviews several important themes. The first part surveys different national industrialization strategies in Latin America and concludes that country size (that is, market size) has been the key predictor of success. Hence Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico (the largest countries in Latin America) have attained more advanced levels of industrialization, from consumer nondurables to capital goods sectors. Meanwhile, efforts by smaller countries to expand their market areas through regional integration have failed to induce any significant degree of industrialization beyond the manufacture of consumer nondurable goods. The second part of the work treats the spatial implications of the industrialization process. Gwynne's brief *paseo* through central place theory sets the stage for his succinct treatment of industrial concentration and decentralization. According to his view, the only tangible evidence of unplanned industrial decentralization in Latin America has been the spillover of industries from the primate cities, a recent phenomenon that only reinforces urban primacy. The third part presents a brief historical review of urbanization and a lucid critique of the "urban dual economy" model. Gwynne's short discussion of the Caracas *bibliotecc* industry (which produces modular furniture) illustrates that the dividing line between formal and informal sectors or upper and lower circuits in the urban economy is a murky one because considerable overlap and interaction occur. The final part of *Industrialization and Urbanization in Latin America*

is a case study of industrialization and regional development in Chile during the twentieth century.

Gwynne's enthusiasm for export-led industrialization as the route to economic growth remains undaunted by the limited success of industrial development in Latin America. Brazil, rather than Chile, offers the prototypical model of export promotion in Latin America. Yet Gwynne's references to the Brazilian program fail to mention its tremendous subsidies. For instance, in 1982 Brazil's Banco Central lent nearly nine billion U.S. dollars to exporters subsidized at approximately 75 percent of the market rate of interest, an amount equaling 44 percent of the total FOB value of all Brazilian exports that year. How many of Brazil's neighbors in Latin America have the financial resources to replicate the expensive Brazilian model? Moreover, while some evidence suggests that Brazil's export promotion program increased industrial-sector employment, it is unclear whether many new industries were created. Export promotion in Brazil beginning in 1967 was largely intended to make fuller use of idle industrial capacity developed during the preceding period of import-substituting industrialization. Recent breakthroughs in computer and information industries reflect the selective continuation of protectionism, not the success of export promotion. The Brazilian experience suggests in part that industrialization, whether achieved by import substitution or export promotion, is an uneven process in which some sectors develop faster than others linked to them. The resulting intersectoral imbalances in capacity and demand can be very costly to rectify, a prospect that may preclude widespread adoption of export-led industrialization strategies in Latin America.

Finally, Gwynne's outright dismissal of "agropolitan" development models as irrelevant to now-urbanized Latin America underscores his unwavering conviction that the urban megalopolis in Latin America continues to provide the appropriate setting for national development. Unfortunately, Gwynne's discussion raises more questions than it answers. The reader is left to guess what type of industrialization strategy he would recommend for smaller countries or what kind of strategies for managing urban growth should be pursued by the large countries.

*Industrialization and Urbanization in Latin America* provides a well-written review of many current issues of geographical interest on industrialization. But because it lacks a carefully developed analysis of urbanization, the book fulfills only half of its stated objective.

The main shortcoming of Gwynne's book is a major strength of Warwick Armstrong's and T. G. McGee's incisive *Theatres of Accumulation: Studies in Asian and Latin American Urbanization*. This book's mission is to emphasize the "role of the Third World city, first as the principal theater of action for those decision makers concerned with the operation of capital, corporate business and the state . . . , then secondly . . .



as the focal points of the capital accumulation process which stretches to the most remote rural parts of Third World societies" (p. xiii).

In the first of the book's three parts, Armstrong and McGee synthesize a considerable literature on the functions of urban centers in expanding capitalist relations of production within the spheres of production, circulation, and consumption. At the core of their analysis is the role of cities as diffusers of modernization ideology and Western consumption needs, while simultaneously centralizing the means of production to service those needs. The dissolution of traditional values and institutions follows from this expansion of consumer ideology, yet some noncapitalist social forms are conserved "because it is in the interests of the prevailing system to allow them to continue." Hence dissolution and conservation are both complementary and contradictory processes.

The book's second part (Chapters 4 and 5) provides a transition between the theoretical first part and the case studies that follow in the third part. Chapter 4 examines the impact of the spread of international capitalism following World War II on urbanization in Latin America. In this historical treatment, Armstrong and McGee return to their major theme: "The issues facing Latin American societies are thus wider than those of commercial dependence or the domination of consumer demand: the diffusion of modern lifestyles and the manipulation of consumer demand further deepen the existing technological and financial dependence" (p. 81).

The process of capitalist expansion began much earlier in Asia than in Latin America and reflects a more heterogeneous experience. In Chapter 5, Armstrong and McGee outline characteristics of industrialization and the recent transformations in Hong Kong, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. They also describe the prominent role played by transnational capital in alliance with state policy.

The third part of *Theatres of Accumulation* provides three country case studies: Ecuador, from the perspective of producers (Chapter 6) and then from that of the "accumulators" (Chapter 7), followed by studies of hawkers in Hong Kong and female factory workers in Malaysia. The Ecuadorian cases convincingly demonstrate the spatial hierarchy and institutional mechanisms that facilitate the diffusion of consumer ideology to the hinterland and the appropriation of producer surplus to the regional and national urban centers. An interesting section on the Catholic Church as a modernizing agent and successful participant in the industrial economy of the national bourgeoisie will undoubtedly raise some eyebrows.

The Asian case studies are less effective in supporting the main premise of *Theatres of Accumulation*. In the chapter on hawkers, the authors cautiously adopt the dualist framework (the two-circuit model),

but with so many valid caveats that the reader will wonder why they even bothered. Then follows a detailed longitudinal analysis of hawker characteristics, operations, and location within the urban district, most of which is extraneous to the authors' premises and draws on secondary sources published nearly a generation ago (circa 1971). The fact that the conclusion occupies one-fifth of the chapter forewarns that the analysis is in trouble. Although this chapter adds texture to knowledge of Third World urban street vendors, the authors' efforts to demonstrate the "conservation-dissolution" hypothesis are largely undermined by weak empirical underpinnings. The reader is thus left dangling in search of a convincing conclusion.

The chapter on Malaysian female factory workers is even less effective. Women are recruited from rural towns and villages to work as cheap labor in the multinational assembly plants that have located in the primate city of Penang, thanks to its being a free trade zone. Here Armstrong and McGee return to their theme of the urban function of ideological diffusion that supports the larger process of capitalist expansion and capital accumulation. Western factories diffuse Western materialist values to their underpaid female workers by sponsoring such activities as employee dances and personal grooming classes and contests, all of which contribute to the breakdown of traditional (precapitalist) institutions like the Malaysian extended family. While this interpretation may be true, Armstrong and McGee come up short on evidence. To affirm these assertions even minimally, the reader needs to be shown how female workers spend the surplus disposable income that they earn at the factory. What percentage of this surplus is spent on cosmetic products? How much of it is remitted back to extended family households in the countryside? These issues, which are left unattended by the authors, are critical to the defense of their thesis of capital accumulation by urban-based transnational elites. The major conclusion of this chapter reaffirms what we already know—that Third World women are exploited more than their male counterparts by the expansion of industrial capitalism in the Third World.

The empirical basis for the Asian case studies weakens the credibility of Armstrong and McGee's provocative and important theoretical contribution. The authors' awareness of this problem is evident in their admissions: "the rather 'soft' character of the data" (p. 192); "the survey data were particularly weak" (p. 195); and "the data is somewhat inconclusive" (p. 214). Although the authors have acquired considerable firsthand experience in both of these important Third World regions, they draw excessively on the empirical work of others, whose research may not have been designed with the same thesis in mind.

Despite the disappointing Asian studies, *Theatres of Accumulation* makes a significant contribution to the theoretical discussion of the pro-

cesses by which international capitalism has “inserted” itself into the Third World and the consequences of these processes on “traditional” relations of production. This book deserves a critical reading by Latin Americanists, who, I venture to predict, will find it stimulating in the advanced graduate seminar room and in more casual settings.

A diverse, but relatively small, group of authors mostly based outside the United States are carrying on the important geographical study of Latin America. Two main conclusions are evident from their latest works. First, geographers outside the United States have become increasingly interdisciplinary in their treatment of the complex human and environmental issues that have been the mainstay of geography as a discipline. Second, one wonders what path the U.S. branch of the discipline will pioneer. Is it a path that will guide us through our world or to another?

#### NOTES

1. Rolf Sternberg, “Selected Geography Texts on Latin America,” *LARR* 16, no. 3 (1981):272–75.
2. Preston James, *Latin America* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1942), 1:540.