Revised Edition

THE LATIN AMERICANS

Their Love-Hate Relationship with the United States

CARLOS RANGEL

New Postscript by the Author

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For, and because of, Sofia

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Foreword

This is the first contemporary study of Latin-American civilization that discusses that continent in truly original and, to my mind, accurate fashion. Like any accurate assessment, it begins by doing away with the false interpretations, trumped-up images, and easy excuses that are common coin today. It follows that *The Latin Americans* is required reading for anyone who wishes to understand not only Latin America but also that much larger area of the contemporary world that exhibits the same failures, the same impotence, the same illusions. We can read Rangel's book either as an in-depth study of a specific civilization, or as the model of a more widespread phenomenon; a study contrasting what a society really *is* with its self-image. How far can a country allow the gap to grow, between what it is and what it thinks of itself, before it loses its grip on reality? This is the question that the history of Latin America, and the confrontation of its "myths" and "realities," allow us to answer.

Alien observers are chiefly responsible for the myths of Latin America. Europe has been the most prolific myth-maker in this case, and no wonder, since the colonizing power that shaped Latin-American society was European. Today, Europe no longer sends over its soldiers and priests, but it continues to send over its own obsessions.

For the Europeans have not been primarily concerned with understanding the two Americas; they have used the New World for their own ends. Their needs have been economic,

imperial, ideological; they have craved adventure, dreams, the picturesque; they have needed to convert, to encourage, or to hate; and their narcissism has created an untold number of false images along the way.

These images are projections of ourselves; it was Europe that peopled the American continent, governed and directed it for centuries, brought African slaves to it, took over control of the Indian populations, or massacred them. Thus, we want to forget that the American civilizations, as they exist today, are the outcome of European colonialism, either of conquest or of what we may call imperialism-by-flight: the imperialism of millions of immigrants driven from Europe by hunger and persecution.

Whatever the blend of competitiveness, inferiority complexes, and smug paternalism that has gone into our conception of the two Americas, we must admit that in general this kind of mixture tends to engender myths. At the same time, a powerful mental block keeps even the most basic information about these countries from reaching us. In the twentieth century, we may simplify the picture by saying that the myths have crystallized around two main axes: North America is reactionary; Latin America is revolutionary.

It is true that the "myths and realities" of *North* America are constantly under discussion, so that some measure of reality, some sound perceptions, manage to survive. But *Latin* America is almost exclusively the domain of legend. From the start, the wish to know these societies, to understand them, or simply to describe them has been crushed under the need to use them as handy props for the European visionary's crystal ball.

The harm done would not be quite so great if, all along the path of history, our legends had not become a drug on which the Latin Americans we observed have loved to feed. Not that they are innocent of making up and propagating their own myths. But they are enormously encouraged in such counterfeiting when the figments of their imagination and their illusions about themselves are sent back to them duly authenticated, bearing the stamp of recognition bestowed by the high priests of the European intelligentsia.

My trouble in writing this foreword at the author's friendly request stems from the fact that I know I owe him whatever I shall think of Latin America from now on. Usually, forewords are written by the masters, not by the disciples.

Perhaps the following quote from a letter Carlos Rangel wrote me while he was working on his book and coming to

grips with his basic theory will be more helpful than my own Eurocentric comments:

"As I told you when we met in Caracas, a job of demystification needs to be done. Not that every single thing one hears about Latin America is untrue: but the sum of it gives a false impression. . . . Columbus himself laid the first stone of this house of myths; his own reasons for his quest and his first relations of it bear witness to this. We know he thought he had discovered the Earthly Paradise. Then came Father Las Casas and other monks who built up the image of the 'noble savage,' still much alive today, and launched the 'Black Legend' of the absolute evils of Spanish colonization. This proved useful to Holland, England, and France, the powerful rivals of Spanish colonization, as a tool in criticizing Spain: a job made simpler by the fact that until 1800 the Spanish did all they could to isolate the American provinces from the rest of the world."

Whatever its excesses and abuses may have been, it is untrue that Spanish colonization was nothing but one endless chain of oppression lasting over three centuries. Alexander von Humboldt, who visited the Spanish empire in the last years of his life, was surprised by the degree of progress, culture, and knowledge that he found in a city as unimportant as Caracas was at the time. This explains why here, as elsewhere on the continent, there should have arisen men as exceptional as Bolívar or Miranda. When discussing their thought, Carlos Rangel shows that they were on a par with the most remarkable contemporary theoreticians and statesmen of Europe and North America. But in Europe and North America, the new ideas generally gave rise to institutions, mores, methods of government. This development failed to take place in Spanish America.

Why the failure? For we must make no mistake on this score. Latin America's history since the beginning of the nineteenth century is a story of failure, just as the history of North America is a story of success. Why this difference? This is the question Rangel sets out to answer; for failure and its causes have perpetuated themselves to the present day, even though the myth that was at the origin of the first misunderstanding has evolved: the myth of the noble savage has developed into the myth of the good revolutionary.

The significance of this book reaches well beyond the borders of Latin America. Surely, Latin America is in itself a distinct, significant, and interesting field of study, but its problems and its fantasies are common to other continents as well.

Its resentment and fear of the United States are an exacerbated version of passions that Europe shares. Latin America's difficulties in fitting liberal democracy to local conditions; the failure of Chilean "democratic socialism," the resurgence of "national-military socialism," which helps to disguise and gain acceptance for a new form of *caudillismo*—all these conditions parallel those in other parts of the world. Will Latin America, with its Western cultural heritage and its relatively favorable position, be able to find workable solutions to its problems without giving up the ideals and gains of the great liberal revolution? Its failure to do so would be a bad omen for the rest of the world: it would imply that the greater part of humanity cannot be governed other than by authoritarianism and terror.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS REVEL

In politics and history, if one takes accepted statements at face value, one will be sadly misled.

JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

The [true] revolution—which under varied names has been moving man since the dawn of history—aims at freeing man from the myths that oppress him, in order that he may attain full being. . . . Propaganda, on the contrary, aims to enslave man . . . to alter him, to alienate him. We are told that the goal is Revolution or freedom, but the result is paralysis, domination, slavery.

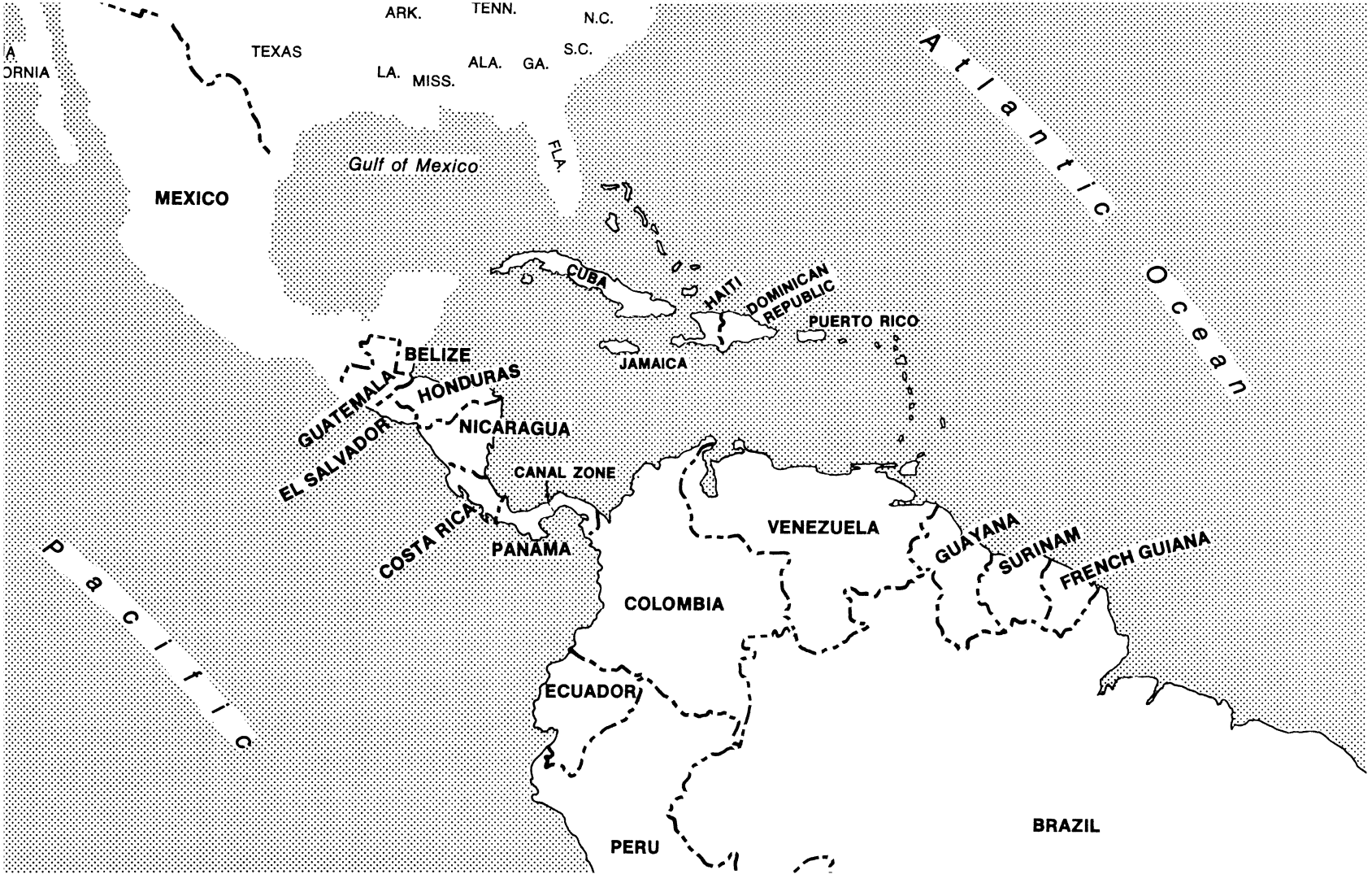
HECTOR A. MURENA

I am appalled that the ideas that the rest of the world has about the United States are to such a great extent false; this injects a dose of error into every aspect of life on earth, so that men therefore (although not only for that reason) live in a state of permanent misunderstanding.

JULIAN MARIAS

In Spanish America . . . the political lie established itself almost constitutionally. The moral damage it has caused is incalculable; it has affected profound areas of our existence. We move about in this lie with complete naturalness. . . . Hence the struggle against the official, constitutional lie must be the first step in any serious attempt at reform.

OCTAVIO PAZ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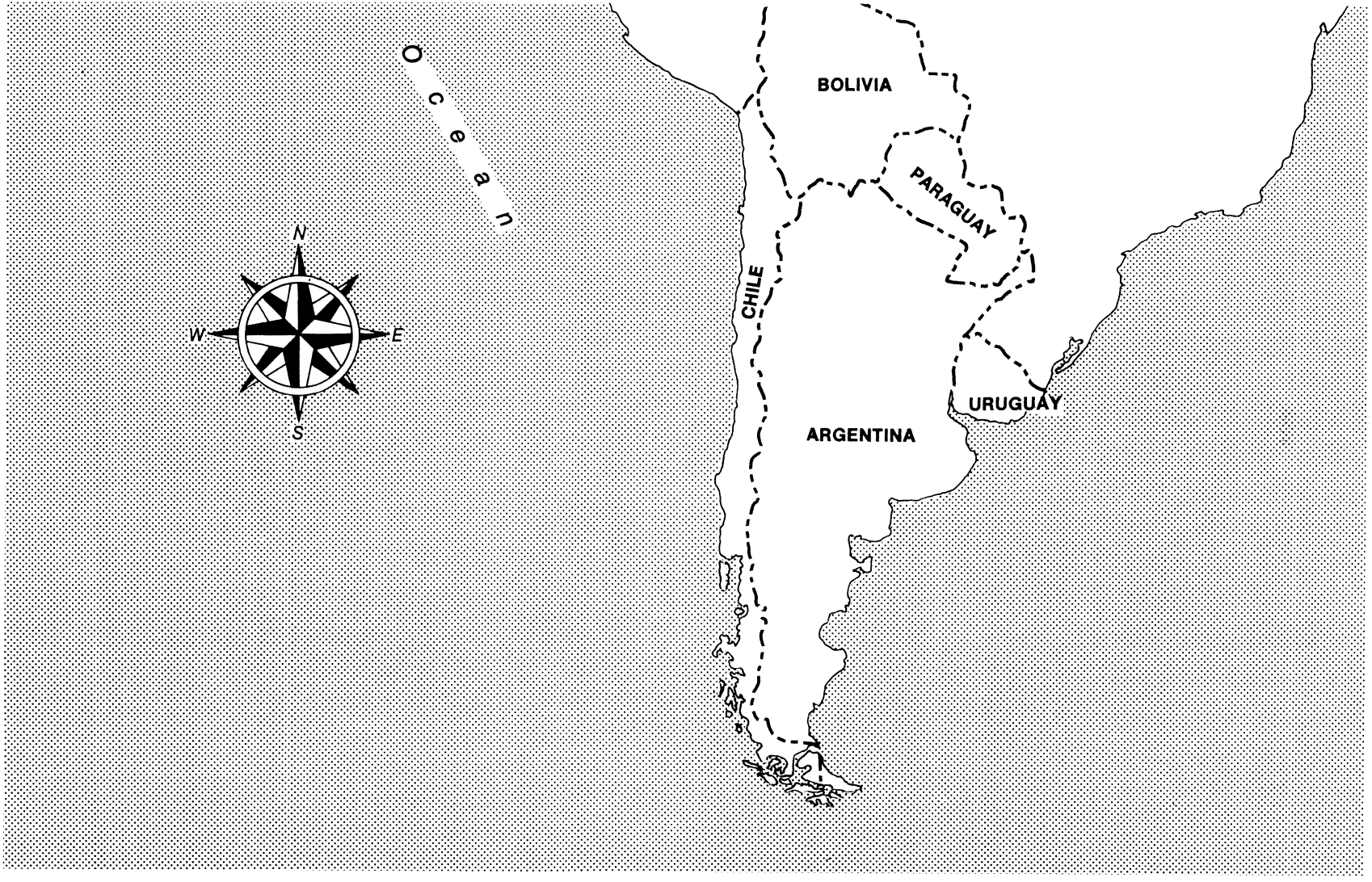
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THE LATIN AMERICANS

Introduction

"Spanish" America, Not "Latin" America

We Latin Americans are not happy with ourselves, with what we are. But, then, what are we? And what do we want to be, what do we want to become? There is no agreement among us on these questions. This Latin-American world of ours, stretching from the Rio Grande to Patagonia, just exactly what is it? One possible answer is that there is not one Latin America, but about twenty, including Brazil as one of the different parts, and even Haiti. But the fact is that any *Spanish* American knows perfectly well that Brazilians are different from us, and that we and they look at the world from different and even potentially incompatible perspectives. On the other hand, where Spanish America is concerned, the ten thousand kilometers that separate the northern border of Mexico from the southern tip of Chile and Argentina are a geographic distance, not a spiritual discontinuity.

It is true that the Spanish American countries contain a number of marginal peoples who live as strangers within the dominant culture. These are the descendants of the pre-Columbian population, of the "legitimate owners" of the land; the blood of these slaves runs in the veins of an enormous proportion of the Spanish American population, and is therefore one of the main components of the vast ethnic mix that is Latin America. Like their ancestors, they are the victims of foreign conquest and domination. All these factors have tended to blur the continent's self-awareness by giving rise to myths—myths that encompass and apologize for a tendency to

racism, guilt, inferiority complexes, and other self-deceptive reactions.

We may for the time being limit this urgent issue, which has tortured Latin America since the Conquest, by stressing that its discussion has been carried on by *Spanish* America only: the indigenous civilizations and the individuals who are heirs to those civilizations have stood by passively.

The conscience (one might say the *bad* conscience) of Latin America depends to a significant degree on the treatment of these native inhabitants, the Indians. There are several reasons for this. The Indians were, of course, witnesses to the discovery of the continent; many elements of their culture were assimilated, often unwittingly, by the Hispanic societies that developed through conquest, colonization, and evangelization; they contributed to forming the mestizo stock; and, finally, they have endured and are still on the scene. But the cult of the native, now in fashion, must not hide from us the fact that Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Uruguay, and Venezuela all belong to a single, Spanish American culture, which has now been implanted in eighteen independent nations plus one commonwealth (Puerto Rico) that is politically under the tutelage of the United States.

On landing, the Spaniards found the continent occupied by native societies in various states of evolution, some quite advanced. They then imported African blacks. Later, immigrants from different European countries were integrated in various proportions, to form the populations of each of the countries. The Anglo-Saxon hegemony in the Western Hemisphere (and later in the entire world) has had a deep impact on Latin America—an impact that was felt everywhere, though it varied from one country to another. Notwithstanding these variations, there is but *one* Spanish America, and we may look on it as a unit, not as divided into twenty or even into three or five different parts.

On the other hand, when we speak of one "Latin America" it is awkward to think of it as including Brazil. Brazil is set apart from Spanish America, not only by its Portuguese origin and language, but by other factors as well: by the manner of its conquest and colonization; by the fact that for many years it was the metropolis of the Portuguese empire; by the methods through which its separation from the empire was achieved—a non-traumatic experience, a governmental decree that left in-

tact the political and administrative structures set up by the metropolis from which Brazil was freeing itself.

In short, Brazil and Spanish America have points of resemblance and a certain kinship, but the points on which they differ are far more significant. This is particularly evident if we consider the astonishing consolidation of Brazil into one giant nation bordering on all the Latin-American countries of South America except Ecuador and Chile: a sharp contrast to the fragmentation of Spanish America into nineteen pieces.

This wide continental extension of Brazil has in itself great significance and now holds the seed of ever-greater differences and even possible conflicts between Spanish America and Brazil. If we wish to understand Latin America, we can no more leave out Brazil than we can disregard the United States. But to Spanish America, Brazil appears as a neighbor—potentially friendly, potentially threatening, but in any case different, a distinct entity, whereas Spanish America's own vast extension and apparent heterogeneity do not keep it from being an identifiable whole, displaying common traits and a basic unity, a clear and distinct division of the globe.

Spanish America can be seen as a whole because its parts share the stamp of the same conquerors, colonizers, and evangelists. There is no agreement concerning the exact number of these "Pioneers of the Indies," the handful of sailors, soldiers, and churchmen who brought about this extraordinary development. But what is certain is that in fewer than sixty years, from 1492 to 1550, this small band of men (no more than thirty thousand) explored vast territories, vanquished two empires, founded almost all those cities still extant today as well as others that have since disappeared, and spread the Catholic faith and the language and culture of Castile in a manner more than merely durable—indeed, ineradicable.

The name "Latin America," fashioned by Frenchmen or Anglo-Saxons, has imposed itself to such a degree that it would be pedantic either not to use it or to insist at every step that it does not encompass Brazil. Let the reader be warned, however, that unless I specify otherwise, the "Latin" America that I am concerned with is the Spanish-speaking area of the continent.

From Failure to Compensation Through Myth

Almost five hundred years have elapsed since 1492: half a millennium. If we try to summarize those five centuries of

Latin-American history, going to the heart of the matter and leaving analyses, anecdotes, controversies, and inferences for later, one all-encompassing fact stands out: the history of Latin America, to the present day, is a story of failure. I am not saying this to be shocking. It is the simple truth, and we Latin Americans are quite aware of it. It is a truth that hurts and that we seldom mention, but it crops up whenever we take an honest look at ourselves. We perceive our history as one of frustration. Simon Bolívar, Latin America's greatest hero, wrote in 1830:

"I was in command for twenty years, and during that time came to only a few definite conclusions: (1) I consider that, for us, [Latin] America is ungovernable; (2) whosoever works for a revolution is plowing the sea; (3) the most sensible action to take in [Latin] America is to emigrate; (4) this country [Great Colombia, later to be divided into Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador] will ineluctably fall into the hands of a mob gone wild, later again to fall under the domination of obscure small tyrants of every color and race; (5) though decimated by every kind of crime and exhausted by our cruel excesses, we shall still not be tempting to Europeans for a reconquest; (6) if any part of the world were to return to a primeval chaos, such would be the last avatar of [Latin] America."

These six pithy sentences summarize in the most lucid fashion the Latin American's pessimism and the jaundiced view he takes of his own society. Some of Bolívar's prophecies came true to the letter—and even if we consider them to reflect the depressive mind of a man advancing in years, disillusioned, and embittered, they also show the clarity of the Liberator's sociological insight and his political realism.

Since Bolívar formulated so succinctly his views on the political future of Latin America, the picture has been expanded by additional facts and points of comparison: (1) the disproportionate success of the United States in the same "New World" during a parallel period of history; (2) Latin America's inability to evolve harmonious and cohesive nations, capable of redeeming, or at least reasonably improving, the lot of vast marginal social and economic groups; (3) Latin America's impotence in its external relations—military, economic, political, cultural, et cetera—and hence its vulnerability to outside action or influences in each of these areas; (4) the notable lack of stability of the Latin-American forms of government, other than those founded on dictatorships and

repression; (5) the absence of noteworthy Latin-American contributions in the sciences or the arts (the exceptions I could quote merely prove the rule); (6) its population growth rate, the highest in the world; (7) Latin America's feeling that it is of little if any use to the world at large. In moments of depression (or insight) we suspect that the rest of the world would hardly be affected if the ocean were to swallow up the Latin-American continent overnight.

Almost a century and a half after Bolívar, Carlos Fuentes, one of the foremost Spanish American intellectuals of our day, could write:

"A much more alarming prospect exists [for Latin America]: as the gap widens between the technocratic world, which grows in geometric progression, and our ancillary societies, which grow in arithmetic progression, Latin America gradually becomes a *useless* entity in the eyes of imperialism. Traditionally, we have been exploited societies. Soon we will not even be that: it will no longer be necessary to exploit us, because technology will have learned (and it has already learned to a high degree) to manufacture industrial substitutes for the poor offerings of our one-crop economies. Will we stretch out our hand to pick up the crumbs of North American, European, or Soviet charity? Will we then become the India of the Western world? Will our economy be a simple fiction, kept alive out of sheer philanthropy?"[1]

Like Bolívar's, Fuentes's pessimism is more than the self-esteem of Latin Americans can bear. He moves from these sobering remarks to a defense of revolutionary action. Only through such action can Latin America hope to redeem or to create its own true personality, develop its own program of action, and someday play, in the world at large, if not an indispensable or even distinguished role, at least the role of an independent entity.

At any rate, from Bolívar to Carlos Fuentes, any Latin American honestly facing up to the problem has either admitted or at least marginally alluded to the failure of Latin America throughout its history.

Human societies confronted with the achievements of rival societies will tend either to emulate them or to deprecate the values that have made them possible and that they envy. If

1. *La nueva novela hispanoamericana,* Mexico, Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1969.

they have tried the way of emulation and failed, they may seek consolation in a mythology that will explain their own failure and hold out the prospect of some miraculous future reversal of action. This is the case in Latin America.

1

From Noble Savage to Good Revolutionary

The Indies as the Earthly Paradise

The basic myths of America are not American, but have sprung from the imagination of Europeans. Take one further step and you can trace them to Judeo-Christian or Asian antiquity, reformulated by Europeans in their delight at having discovered a "New World."

When the peoples of Latin America awoke to national consciousness in the nineteenth century, they found a ready-made mythical base to help them claim the pre-Columbian past as their own. Later the same myth was to help them excuse or cover up the relative failure of Latin America, the land that is daughter to the noble savage, wife to the good revolutionary, predestined mother to the new man.

Once they had charted their inland sea and sailed on beyond Gibraltar to discover the ocean, the Mediterranean peoples intuited that there must be something beyond these seemingly endless waters. This is clear from Plato's well-known Atlantis, "an island greater than Libya and Asia together," as from Seneca's prophecy in his *Medea:* "In some years a day will come when the Ocean will open the gates of the world and reveal a land unknown; Tethys will then reveal a new world to us, and Thule will no longer be the end of the earth."

The fifteenth century could hardly fail to know that the Indies—that is to say, the Far East, including China, Japan, Malacca, Java, and Sumatra—lay at the other side of the world. As early as two thousand years before the discovery of America, the Greeks had observed that ships setting out to sea

disappeared beyond the horizon, while to the seaborne traveler the earth seemed to sink away. Similarly, they noted that during eclipses of the moon, the earth's shadow fell as a circle on its satellite. They had guessed that the earth was round.

It followed that to reach the East, a ship could sail into the setting sun or into the rising sun. But the distance westward was reckoned, rightly, as much greater. If there was only water between Europe's western coast and Asia's eastern coast, sailing such light vessels through so immense an ocean understandably seemed sheer madness.

Christopher Columbus, following his intuition, persevered in holding out, against the generally held opinion, that the earth was not only round (which was not seriously in dispute), but also very much smaller than it really is. He set sail for certain death, and accidentally discovered America.

The New World: Utopia

The Europeans' initial illusion that they had reached Asia did not stay long with them. Had Columbus not been so set in his conviction, he would have inferred from what he could see and touch that he had accomplished far more than reaching the Old World in a new way. Believing himself near Japan, he viewed as illusory or supernatural certain signs that, had they been interpreted by a less medievally circumscribed mentality, would have told him he was near a vast new continent.

"When he reached the mouth of the Orinoco, he thought he had reached the Earthly Paradise. . . . The violent stream of fresh water that almost destroyed his caravels in the Gulf of the Whale, with its Serpent's Mouth and its Dragon's Mouth, should have led him to infer that he was near large forests and mountains. . . . He thought instead that he was near the fountain that springs from Earthly Paradise. . . . For theologians affirmed that God had not destroyed Paradise, but removed it to a land or Blessed Isle which knew neither sickness, nor old age, nor death, nor fear."[1]

At the meeting point of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, it was quite possible for medieval-minded men like Columbus to find and to see with their own eyes things foretold by the learned authorities and duly recorded by them in their books.

1. Angel Rosenblat, *La primera visión de América y otros estudios*, Caracas, Ministerio de Educacion, 1965.

But the perenniality of ancestral myths manifested itself equally in the thought of those of Columbus's contemporaries who had moved beyond the medieval level and looked at the future through Renaissance eyes. Thomas More, in his *Utopia,* took his point of departure in the age-old story or myth of the Blessed Isle, as reinvigorated by Columbus's discovery. More's fiction combined the vision of Plato's *Republic* with enthusiasm over a New World as yet uncorrupted by civilization. This was where the ideal society might be found or else be launched, with its promise of eternal bliss, peace, equality, plenty, freedom, security. The title of the book clearly reflects the modern skepticism of Henry VIII's Chancellor, but its contents attest the hold of old illusions, especially as taken up and reactivated by that catalyst, the New World.

The Fountain of Youth, the Amazons, El Dorado

Soon after their arrival, the conquistadors exerted intense and poignant efforts to find the Fountain of Youth. This was an old myth, which has much in common with that of the Earthly Paradise; the Tree of Life can be identified with the Fountain of Life, immortality, beatitude. Belief in it fills a need that rises out of the subconscious, a symbolic identification of life itself with fountains and springs, with "the eternal human thirst for pleasure, youth, and happiness as the visionary realization of man's power over death and destiny."[2]

As they did with the better-known myth of El Dorado, the American natives, realizing that the white invaders were seeking a magic fountain, nourished this illusion in order to lure them on ever farther from their bases.

The conquistadors were no less myth-driven when they set out on their search for the Amazons. Two names on the map stand as reminders of their obstinacy in finding in the West Indies what medieval tradition placed in the true Indies, in the Far East. One of the books of Amadis of Gaul tells us that "to the right hand of the Indies an island is to be found, called *California,* neighboring on the Earthly Paradise, peopled with black women, manless, and whose style of life much resembled that of the Amazons . . . for their tall stature, their generous and warm hearts, their great strength. . . . Their weapons were all of gold, as was their horses' tackle . . . for in all the island there is no other metal. . . ."

2. *Ibid.*

The navigators and conquistadors who came after Columbus eagerly sought these fabled Amazons and their country full of gold. We see that the myth of El Dorado is linked to very ancient legends. In this as in other instances, the discovery of America brought nothing to European mythology that was not already there; it only rekindled old dreams of a Golden Age and the State of Innocence that preceded the Fall. It fed the equally ancient hope that Paradise had not been lost, but only removed to an unknown place; perhaps to the fatherland of Prester John, that legendary Christian emperor of an old Oriental kingdom; perhaps to "the Indies." There still dwelt men free from original sin, whose touch could help sinners redeem themselves far more surely and rapidly than through the anguish of awaiting the distant resurrection promised by Christ.

The Noble Savage

The newcomers, in their search, created the most powerful myth of modern times: that of the noble savage. This is the "Americanized" version of the myth of man's innocence before the Fall, and that new version of the ancient myth was to have an immense impact on the history of ideas.

The myth of the noble savage responded far more adequately to the characteristic anguishes of Western European, Christian, traditional civilization than earlier myths of a related nature. The belief that man is innately good and that civilization corrupted him, that there was once a Golden Age followed by the present-day Age of Bronze or Iron, would find its confirmation in the discovery of men allegedly living in a state of nature, uncorrupt and uncivilized.

It was in these terms that Columbus saw the natives of the Caribbean Sea, and so he described them in his letters to the Catholic Kings: "I certify to their Highnesses that there is no better land anywhere, that there are no better people: they love others as themselves and speak the sweetest language in the world."

One native, to whom Columbus was offering his sword, could not understand what this object was: he seized it by the blade and cut himself, which led Columbus to conclude that these people knew neither weapons nor war. Their readiness to give

away gold trinkets made him think that they were equally ignorant of avarice.[3]

The conquistadors endowed even the land with supernatural qualities. Soon after the year 1500, a Sevillian priest, following Columbus's reports and also quoting him, informed his readers that the New World appeared to have been made in the image of its inhabitants. The steep mountains, which even today stand as an often insurmountable obstacle, he describes as being "very tall," or "elevated." But he interprets this adjective in the sense of "grand," which they certainly are, and imaginatively assures the reader that they are "quite traversable." The trees are so tall that "they seem to touch the sky"; as they never lose their leaves, the Sevillian concludes that the weather is invariably like Europe's in the month of May. "In the island [of Hispaniola] there are pine woods, cultivated fields and pasture . . . mines of gold-bearing ore." And all this about a region that was as inhospitable then as it is now. Those Spaniards who, instead of dreaming about the New World without leaving Seville, decided to come and look for themselves, suffered the heat, the razor-sharp grasses, and the stinging insects, and they dubbed Columbus "Admiral of the Mosquitoes."

Civilization as Corrupter

But Europe had set its mind on believing in the "noble savage," the native of a New World. By the middle of the sixteenth century the myth had taken root and was ravaging Europe far more insidiously than syphilis—another import, we are told, from the New World. Montaigne endorses the myth and puts the full weight of his authority behind it: "They are even savage,[4] as we call those fruits wilde, which nature of her selfe,

3. Why did Europeans not encounter the noble savage in Africa? Quite certainly because the African savages had been known since antiquity and were not, therefore, truly exotic. Europe found no noble savages in Africa because it was not seeking them there. And this is why the blacks were perceived by Western consciousness simply as savages—without qualification, in the exact, pejorative meaning of the word.

4. Montaigne is referring to the New World Indians, whom he calls cannibals without being unduly shocked. He even finds some good arguments for occasionally eating human flesh. He holds this a less reprehensible practice than the Europeans' custom of torturing to death their condemned criminals.

and of her ordinarie progresse hath produced. . . . In those are the true and most profitable vertues, and natural properties most lively and vigorous, which in these we have bastardized. . . . The lawes of nature doe yet command them, which are but little bastardized by ours . . . for me seemeth that what in those nations we see by experience, doth not only exceed all the pictures wherewith licentious Poesie hath proudly imbellished the golden age, and all her quaint inventions to faine a happy condition of man, but also the conception and desire of Philosophy. They could not imagine a genuitie so pure and simple, as we see it by experience; not ever beleeve our societie might be maintained with so little art and humane combination. It is a nation, would I answer Plato, that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie; no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kinred, but common, no apparell but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corne, or mettle. The very words that import lying, falshood, treason, dissimulations, covetousnes, envie, detraction, and pardon, were never heard of amongst them. . . . They live in a country of so exceeding pleasant and temperate situation, that as my testimonies have told me, it is verie rare to see a sicke body amongst them; and they have further assured me, they never saw any man there, either shaking with the palsie, toothlesse, with eyes dropping, or crooked and stooping through age. . . . Their language is a kinde of pleasant speech, and hath a pleasing sound, and some affinitie with the Greeke terminations. [They are] ignorant how deare the knowledge of our corruptions will one day cost their repose, securitie, and happinesse, and how their ruine shall proceed from this commerce."[5]

Rousseau had nothing to add to this two hundred years later. But it is even more surprising to meet in the same essay by Montaigne the idea that European society deserved a bloody revolution which would bring it back to its pristine state of natural goodness, to the Golden Age; or which, at least, would bring rightful restitution to the greater part of the people, wronged as they had been by the "antinatural" inequality to which civilization had led Europe:

5. "Of the Caniballes," in *The Essayes of Montaigne,* trans. John Florio, New York, Modern Library, n.d., pp. 163–64, 170. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

"They [three Indians come to the court of Charles IX in Roanne] had perceived, there were men amongst us full gorged with all sortes of commodities, and others which hunger starved, and bore with need and povertie, begged at their gates; and found it strange, these moyties so needy could endure such an injustice, and that they tooke not the others by the throte, or set fire on their houses."[6]

Because of this myth of the noble savage, the West today is afflicted with an absurd feeling of guilt, convinced that its civilization has corrupted the other peoples of the world, grouped as the "Third World," who, had they not been exposed to Western culture, would have remained happy as Adam and flawless as diamonds. But our present interest lies in retracing the road traveled in Latin America by this particular myth.

The Good Revolutionary

To understand how the noble savage was transmuted into the good revolutionary, we have to understand the supposed relation between man before the Fall and man after redemption. These two states are not merely related: they are *identical.* The stage in between is a parenthesis, an interruption in man's natural beatitude. The first days will be like the last; the end of history will be a return to the Golden Age.

Some of the first Christians were convinced that, after his second coming, Christ would establish a perfect Kingdom on earth, and that it would last a thousand years. Since then this millenarian expectation has been a recurrent fever in society. At a time when man's eternal myths have everywhere become degraded and desacralized, this millenarianism has evolved into a secular revolutionism, with the "Fall" consisting in the institution of private property. Before this "antinatural" institution existed, all men are supposed to have been happy and free; and so they will be again when private property has been abolished.

"Millenarian" (or revolutionary) sects invariably conceive redemption as absolute, in the sense that, through some transformation, life on earth will suddenly be changed, returned to the perfection it enjoyed before the Fall. Furthermore, millenarian outbreaks have invariably been accompanied by the sudden appearance of prophets and martyrs endowed with

6. *Ibid.*