A Continent of Immigrants: Postcolonial Shifts in the Western Hemisphere

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Latin Americans usually conceive the Western Hemisphere as a single continent. Geographically, the notion is no more, or less, arbitrary than Anglo-Americans’ mapping of two continents separated by the Panamanian isthmus. But the Latin American viewpoint highlights the most basic and distinctive historical commonality of the Americas: they are a “New World,” a continent populated by arrivals from all the other continents. Its “indigenous” population came from Asia long after the rest of the globe had been settled by hominids, including *Homo sapiens*. About 15,000 years later, others began to arrive from the opposite direction. Close to three million came from Europe between the beginning of the colonial enterprise in the Americas in 1492 and its near end in 1820. Three times as many were brought against their will from Africa during the same period.¹

¹. Some 450,000 Spaniards are estimated to have come to the Indies before the seventeenth century; Peter Boyd-Bowman, “Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the Indies until 1600,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 56, no. 4 (1976): 580–604. Data for the rest of the colonial period are scarce, but rough estimates rarely exceed half a million. Estimates of Portuguese emigration to Brazil hover around half a million, with the bulk arriving during the gold boom of the first half of the eighteenth century. James Horn and Philip D. Morgan recently estimated that 1.04 million Europeans (three-quarters of them British and the rest mostly from German states) reached the British domains in the mainland and the Caribbean before 1800 (about a quarter of these arriving in the United States after independence); “Settlers and Slaves: European and African Migration to Early Modern British America,” in *The Creation of the British Atlantic World*, ed. Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2005). Estimates of the African slave trade range between 9 and 11 million, with 46% of these going to Brazil, 22% to the British colonies (three-fourths of them to the West Indies), 17% to the French West Indies, 17% to Spanish America (more than half of them to Cuba), and 4% to the Dutch colonies; calculated from figures in Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 210–11.
Although humans have been moving across continents ever since our direct ancestors came out of Africa about 100,000 years ago, the transatlantic wave that came next was historically unprecedented in its dimension. This movement began modestly after the end of the Napoleonic/Latin American wars of independence, gathered steam after midcentury, reached massive proportions after the 1870s, and lasted—with a pause during World War I—until the Great Depression. In the process, more than 51 million Europeans (and about 2 million Asians) arrived in the New World. Nothing remotely resembling this massive movement had ever happened before anywhere on the planet. By the outbreak of World War I, more people had come to the New World during the preceding decade than had done so, from both Europe and Africa, during the entire colonial period. Indeed, by then more Europeans had disembarked in the port of Buenos Aires alone during the previous three years (1.1 million) than had arrived in all of Spanish America during more than three centuries of colonial rule. Nothing like it would happen again until a second wave of global migrations began in the last decades of the twentieth century, when the intensity of the pre–World War I years was matched in absolute numbers, but not proportionately to the world’s population.

Historians on both sides of the “pond” (and the contributors to this issue are no exception) have normally dealt with this vast transnational phenomenon from a national perspective. At one point, this may have reflected visions of national (particularly North American) exceptionalism. These notions have not disappeared, although they are increasingly more likely to originate in scholarly parochialism than in nationalist visions. But today, the principal reason for the persistence of national perspectives is more mundane, having to do more with academic institutional inertia than with ideological blinders. Despite the postmodern fascination with the transnational, we continue to be trained not as historians of social processes (in this case migration) but as historians of countries, or at best “areas” (e.g., Latin America). This disciplinary particularity (not shared by the social sciences or cultural studies) has its virtues. It makes historians particularly sensitive to local specificities. We would not presume to study, say, the political economy of two dozen countries where we have never been and whose languages, cultures, and histories we are not familiar with (a common practice in other disciplines).

The approach, however, has many drawbacks. It focuses exclusively on the receiving country as if immigrants were tabula rasae whose history began only after they got off the boats or crossed a border. This leads to a form of hyper-environmentalism that attempts to explain everything in reference to the host environment, while disregarding the premigratory cultural background and the modes of migration, both of which greatly affected the adaptation of arrivals to their new surroundings. The host-nation-centered approach also treats migration as a one-way flow, when in reality it represents a series of movements that included permanent and temporary settlement, return, back-and-forth traveling between sending and receiving societies, and relocation from one destination to another outside the place of origin.

The resurgence of interest in political and intellectual history in the last two decades has tended to reinforce the myopia of the nation-centric approach. Immigration to Latin America, in particular, is routinely attributed to the racism of the region’s elites and the national policies they implemented. During the nineteenth century, and in particular during the peak of liberal activism after the mid-1800s, formulating schemes to import Europeans did become a regular endeavor among ruling classes from Mexico to Chile. But elite desiderata had actually little to do with the inflow of people. Porfirián científicos concocted all sorts of plans—from giving free passages to granting free land—to recruit Europeans as an antidote to “native indolence.” In contrast, their counterparts north of the Rio Grande tended to disdain the new arrivals and favor the native born. Yet more Europeans arrived in the United States in a busy week than arrived in Mexico during the entire 35-year-long Porfiriato. The científicos’ contempt for the indigenous masses and their efforts to attract Europeans were echoed by politicians from Guatemala to Bolivia. But all of these countries together received fewer immigrants in a century of national history than a single Argentine province in a month. And most of the newcomers to the latter country arrived when its political class had long ceased to intone the Alberdian dictum “to govern is to populate” and other old chants about the civilizing force of immigration and had instead turned rather xenophobic. The “whitening” and “civilizing” rhetoric of Latin American leaders obviously has more to do with the intellectual history of the region’s elites—not a particularly understudied topic—than with the demographic and sociocultural history of its peoples. Political rhetoric, like bananas, is sometimes just that, and migration clearly obeyed mightier laws than those produced in national legislatures.

This introductory article aims to place the three case studies in the present issue in the broader context of these “mightier laws.” Mass migration resulted from, and formed part of, vast transformations that remained mostly Atlantic-based during the nineteenth century and later became global. Indeed, these
transformations produced (to borrow the title of Ken Pomeranz’s recent book) the “great divergence” in socioeconomic development between the Atlantic world and the rest of the globe. They also produced an equally great divergence, or shift, within the Western Hemisphere.

The most primary of these transformations had to do with human reproduction: the transition from a demographic system of high birth and death rates to one of low fertility and mortality in Europe during the long nineteenth century. This transition produced—as mortality fell faster than fertility—the first sustained population explosion in human history. The continent’s population tripled, from 140 million in 1750 to 430 million in 1900, and its share of the world’s inhabitants rose from 17 to 25 percent. This was not just a continuation of previous trends whose genealogy can be traced back in time. It was an unprecedented phenomenon in the history, and apparently prehistory, of our species. Before the eighteenth century, growth had been slow (around 0.2 percent per year) and intermittent (with growth spurts rarely lasting more than two decades). The aptly named Vital Revolution involved not only high growth rates (more than 1 percent per year in Europe during the nineteenth century) but also, for the first time in human history, continuous, unbroken expansion virtually unchecked by decimating plagues or—as long as the Pax Britanica endured—devastating wars. This “revolution” directly fed the massive transatlantic exodus. It also facilitated that exodus indirectly by creating a vast market for New World temperate foodstuffs that had not existed in the colonial period. Migration and trade became intimately tied. Europe exported people mostly to the regions from which it imported grain and, later, meat. Indeed, over 90 percent of the 56 million Europeans who left their native continent during this period headed for those wheat- and beef-exporting regions.

The massive European flow that, after the mid-1800s, replaced the African slave trade as the dominant type of transatlantic crossing formed part and parcel of a wider process that included a series of other revolutions. The industrial one


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fueled the exodus in a variety of ways. During its early stages, it displaced more workers than it could employ. It promoted internal mobility and urbanization, which often served as a stepping-stone to overseas movement. Urbanization, in turn, further increased the demand for American staples, as fewer people grew their own food. Industrialization made possible the general international division of labor that underlay the commercial integration of the Atlantic world. It created direct demands for a variety of American raw materials: hides for machine belts and tallow for soap and lubricants from the huge feral cattle herds of the River Plate early in the century; cotton from the U.S. South; wool from Argentina (which had the largest sheep flock in the world by the 1880s) after the industrialization of woolen production in the mid-1800s; natural rubber from the Amazon after Charles Goodyear developed vulcanization around the same time; timber from Canada; copper from Chile, northern Mexico, and the U.S. West; flax for textiles, oil paints, and printer’s ink from the pampas and the prairies. The increasing variety of articles churned out by industry generated a different set of demands and desires, particularly among the young who would form the principal font of transatlantic migrants. Contemporary popular theater in Europe abounds with characters who blame the exodus on this consumer culture—on the younger generation’s acquisitiveness and their cravings for factory-made shoes and garments instead of homespun espadrilles and blouses, for watches, guns, phonographs, bicycles, and other gadgets of the industrial age.

Emigration “fever” (a metaphor that surfaced in the nineteenth century across Europe from Russia to Scotland) spread mostly through primary transnational social networks, but it could not have diffused so far and so deep without technological and organizational transformations in communication. The appearance of the telegraph (1844), the photograph (1840s), machine-made wood-pulp paper (1850s), modern mail systems and postage stamps (1850s), typewriters (1860s), the Universal Postal Union that unified international postal regulations (1875), the telephone (1876), photoengraving (1880s), the linotype—considered the most important advance in printing since the invention of moveable type four hundred years earlier (1886)—and the radio (1895) spawned a veritable revolution in mass communication that made the mass movement of people possible then and not before. As the Italian parliamentarian Enrico Ferri put it during a trip to Argentina, “the most powerful immigration agent” was not the army of recruiters that governments and companies sent, but “the postage stamp.” Family letters and photographs carried the information and the images of material success that fired the fever “across the pond.”

The mail system and the telegraph facilitated the circulation of another
essential connective element in mass migration: money. Immigrant remittances flowed eastward and paid for the passages of new streams of people moving westward. European financiers sent much of the surplus capital generated by the industrial revolution to the countries where the remittances were coming from. These investments and loans stimulated economic growth in the receiving countries, which in turn stimulated more emigration to them and more remittances from them. It is no coincidence that the four most important receivers of European immigrants in the nineteenth century (the United States, Argentina, Canada, and Brazil) also became the four most important recipients of British investment and the four fastest growing economies in the Western Hemisphere.

Mass transoceanic migration required, however, inexpensive means to move not only information, photographs, and dreams but also people. The special demands of industrial trade provided the impetus for technological innovation. As long as specie and spices remained the main articles of exchange, galleons, the sextant, and the marine chronometer sufficed. As heavy and bulky items with a low ratio of value to mass or weight (such as coal, iron, machinery, timber, cotton, or wheat) became the main commodities of trade, advancements in the means of transporting them became a necessity. The technological innovations that the industrial revolution unleashed made these improvements possible. From the mid-1800s on, steamships increasingly replaced sailing vessels, the screw propeller supplanted the cumbersome paddle wheel, and iron (and later steel) hulls superseded wooden ones. Meanwhile the sequential introduction of the double-expansion, triple-expansion, steam turbine, and diesel marine engines cut both fuel consumption and transit times. Refrigerated ships made possible the export of South and North American beef and mutton to Europe, which previously had been limited to standing cattle. Trains extended the pool of prospective emigrants from a few port areas into the European hinterland. Trains then dispersed them across the American continents. In both cases, railroads pushed the boundaries of the Atlantic world inland, making places like Chicago, Toronto, Warsaw, and Mendoza (Argentina) part of this world. Trains allowed the riverless Argentine pampas to become the second major exporter of cereals in the world, with most of that grain shipped across the Atlantic along the same routes, and often in the same ships, that brought the millions who would farm it. The nineteenth-century innovations in marine and land transportation were thus a sine qua non of both massive transatlantic trade and massive transatlantic migration, movements that were intimately connected.

The connections between liberalism and migration were equally multifaceted. Although protective tariffs survived and at times even increased in vari-
ous countries during the nineteenth century, mercantilist restraints tended to diminish overall—the abolition of the British Corn Laws in 1846 being a signpost in the process. The impressive expansion of transatlantic commerce after the 1860s would not have been possible without a significant level of political commitment to free trade. Neither would have the massive human exodus been possible without a similar level of political commitment to freedom of movement. On the western shores of the Atlantic, liberalism provided the ideological fuel for the independence movements that ended the entrance restrictions put in place by colonial gatekeepers. On the other side, liberalism lifted the exit restrictions in one European country after another, in what Aristide Zolberg has called “the Exit Revolution.”

By strengthening property rights, lifting restrictions, and promoting competition, liberalism stimulated the privatization of commons and the commercialization of agriculture in the Old World. This, in turn, encouraged transatlantic ties in various ways. It created a demand for New World fertilizers such as Chilean nitrates. It encouraged migration as a means of earning cash to purchase private land plots in the Old Country. It created, in general, greater opportunities and greater insecurity in the European countryside—elements that normally lead, and led in this case, to increased population movement across the land and across the ocean.

These interrelated processes of demographic expansion, transatlantic crossings, technological innovations, and economic transformations dramatically raised the relative importance of the North Atlantic in the world. Demographically, Europe’s and the Americas’ proportion of the globe’s population increased from 24 to 35 percent during the nineteenth century, while Asia’s and Africa’s proportions declined from 65 to 57 percent and from 11 to 8 percent.

6. Aristide Zolberg, “The Exit Revolution,” in Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation, ed. Nancy L. Green and Francois Weil (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, forthcoming). Probably the first attempt to lift the restrictions on emigration characteristic of ancien régime Europe appeared in the new French constitution of September 1791. The first “natural and civil right” it guaranteed—listed before the rights of freedom of speech and of assembly—was the freedom “to move about, remain, and depart.” That right to depart spread to the rest of Europe, mainly from the north and west to the south and east, as the nineteenth century matured: Britain (1820s); Sweden, the German states, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Swiss Confederation (1840s); Spain and Portugal (1850s); and Russia (1890s). John Torpey, “Leaving: A Comparative View,” in Green and Weil, Citizenship and Those Who Leave; Moya, Cousins and Strangers, 20; Mervyn Matthews, The Passport Society: Controlling Movement in Russia and USSR (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 10–11.
respectively. When the European expansion into the Americas began in 1500, only one of the world’s ten largest cities (Paris, number nine) was in the Atlantic world. In 1800, seven of the top ten were still in Asia. By 1900, nine of the largest ten were in the North Atlantic, and Buenos Aires would soon join that group. The economic shift was equally drastic. In 1800, Britain, France, and the United States together accounted for less than one-tenth of the world’s manufacturing, while China alone produced one-third. By 1900, the share of the three North Atlantic countries had increased to almost one-half of the world’s output, while China’s had decreased to a mere 6 percent. As Bin Wong, Ken Pomeranz, Richard Von Glahn, and other historians of the “California School” have argued, the “Great Divergence” in economic development between the North Atlantic and the other advanced regions of the world (such as the Yangtze Valley in China and Gujarat in India) emerged in the nineteenth century.  

Mass European migration, and the accompanying transition from mercantile capitalism and colonial status to industrial capitalism and republican semidependency, also shifted the social, economic, and political centers of the Western Hemisphere. Before 1800, the colonial success stories had been based on a combination of indigenous labor and precious metals, or African slavery and tropical cash crops. The silver of Zacatecas and Potosí had turned Mexico and Peru into the shining stars in the firmament of a Spanish Empire that spread from the Philippines to the Netherlands—the first empire over which the sun truly never set. The Spanish American viceroyalties had become a synonym of wealth in European languages, as when some characters in Mozart’s 1790 opera Cosi fan tutte exclaim “Ah, questo medico vale un Perú [Ah, this physician is worth a Peru]!” Sugar and slavery had turned Saint Domingue into one of the richest colonies in the world in the eighteenth century, worth many times more to the French than the great expanses of Quebec or Louisiana. Cuba’s per capita GDP had been 167 percent that of the U.S. in 1700 and still 112 percent in 1800. Barbados was more profitable for the British than all the 13 mainland colonies put together; and within the latter, the South was richer than the North.

The nineteenth century drastically changed this situation. Prosperous Saint Domingue fractured its transatlantic connections as it became poor and isolated—although also less exploited—Haiti. Postindependence Mexico sank into political chaos and economic decline, from which it recuperated only toward the end of the century. So did postindependence Peru, a country that was more urban in the eighteenth century than it would be in the nineteenth.

The new economically booming and socially developing foci surfaced precisely in what had been the most marginal and least successful corners of the European empires: temperate North and South America. The economic gap between Mexico and the United States is illustrative. For most of the colonial period, the former was actually richer than the latter. By 1800, U.S. per capita GDP already doubled Mexico’s. But the big chasm developed in the ensuing decades. By 1870, the United States had become seven times richer than its southern neighbor, a ratio that remains to this day.

Of the old colonial centers, only Cuba managed to retain, and even enhance, its prominent position in the Atlantic world during the nineteenth century. Indeed, although the island was one of the oldest colonies in the Americas and had been at the center of imperial trade since the beginning because of its strategic location, it developed a plantation complex quite late. Before the middle of the eighteenth century, it had been an entrepôt between the silver of New Spain and the metropole, with a rural hinterland settled mainly by Spanish farmers and ranchers. The growth of sugar production and exports, particularly after the collapse of the sugar economy in Haiti during that country’s revolution (1791–1804), shaped a peculiar form of capitalism during the nineteenth century that combined the labor relations that had come to represent the polar opposites of backwardness and modernity in the political imaginary of the age: African slavery and European wage labor, with an intermediate form to boot, Chinese coolie labor. The slave trade lasted longer in the island (until the mid-1860s) than anywhere else in the Americas, Abolition occurred later (1886) than in any other country except Brazil (1888). But after midcentury, Cuba also became the sixth-largest receiver of European immigrants in the world and the largest employer of Cantonese coolies. Social relations of production seemed to combine those of the seventeenth-century Dutch East Indies (the originators of


the Chinese coolie trade), eighteenth-century Saint Domingue, and nineteenth-century Uruguay.

This mixture of “archaic” and “modern” labor arrangements within a dynamic economy was not limited to Cuba in the nineteenth century. Louisiana and the most economically vigorous regions of the U.S. South fit the model before the American Civil War. Cuban hybrid capitalism, however, is remarkable for the vitality of its quasimodernity and the prominent place it gave the island within the Atlantic world. At the start of the nineteenth century, Cuba was already the most urban region in that world, surpassing the Netherlands and England, and three times as urban as the colony’s Iberian metropole. By the end of the century, it was still the sixth most urban country in the planet. The early introduction of the steam engine in 1794 and its wide use in sugar mills propelled the island into the forefront of the industrial revolution. The technological innovations of the Atlantic world’s nineteenth-century modernization reached the island amazingly early. Macadamized roads appeared in 1818, only two years after John McAdam himself had first built them in Bristol and a dozen years before they were built in the United States. A year later, the first steamboat service in Latin America connected Havana and Matanzas, only a dozen years after the inaugural voyage of Fulton’s Clermont between New York and Albany. The railway appeared in 1837, only a dozen years after its English debut, seven after its arrival in the United States, and a dozen before it would reach the imperial motherland. It was the first railway in Latin America and the seventh in the world. Telephone service came to Havana in 1881, just five years after Alexander Graham Bell had patented it, and the gadget itself may have been invented there three decades before by an Italian immigrant who would later sue Bell over the patent. Other goods of nineteenth-century

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14. Antonio Meucci, who had arrived in Cuba from Florence in 1835 to work as a theater stage technician, lost his 1886 legal demand against the wealthier Bell. But the U.S.
modernity, from electric lighting and trams to medical treatises and baseball, reached the island equally early.

Economic growth in temperate South America took off somewhat later than in temperate North America and Cuba—after the middle of the century. But it was as dramatic. The River Plate area occupied by eastern Argentina, Uruguay, and southern Brazil had formed, for much of the colonial period, a backwater of the Iberian empires. By 1900, it had become the most developed region of Latin America. In 1800, Europeans were still using “worth a Peru” or “rich as Potosí” to imply great wealth. By 1900, these set phrases survived only in old books and had been replaced orally with “rich as an Argentine.” Economic statistics support the expression. By the early 1900s, Argentina’s per capita income equaled that of Germany and the Netherlands, and it surpassed not only that of southern European countries like Spain and Italy but also that of northern countries like Sweden and Switzerland. The South American nation had become by then the eighth-richest country in the world.

This leap rested precisely on the country’s deep integration into the Atlantic economy: on the inflow of European capital, technology, manufactured goods, and labor; and the outflow of the agro-pastoral bounty of the pampas. The country became the second most important receiver of European immigrants in the world after the United States. As late as 1870, Argentina imported most of its cereals. By 1914, it had become the second-largest exporter of grains in the world, after the United States. Its foreign trade surpassed Canada’s. It imported more goods per capita than any other country in the world, with the exception of entrepôts such as Belgium and the Netherlands.

Such integration would not have been possible in 1800, and a list of the obstacles can highlight, by contrast, the great transformations of the Atlantic world in the following century. In 1800, Europe had not yet accumulated enough surplus capital or surplus labor to usher in an age of global financial capitalism and mass migrations. That continent’s mostly peasant, and still relatively small, population could not have supplied the farm laborers that the thinly populated temperate plains of the New World required for market production, nor could it provide a significant market for the potential products of the American flatlands. Even if they could have, mercantilist restrictions on the flow of people and goods on both sides of the Atlantic would have prevented it. And even if

such political restrictions had not existed, technological ones would have stood
in the way. Ox carts and sailing vessels could not have taken millions of people
and millions of tons of cereals, beef, and mutton from the hinterland to the
port and then across the Atlantic. Without refrigerated ships, meat could have
only been transported “on the hoof” or salted—the jerked beef that had been
sent to plantation societies where slaves had little gastronomic choice but had
failed to sell in Europe, even among the urban poor. The feral bovine stock of
the grasslands provided lean and hard meat, while their ovine neighbors offered
short and rough fleece, both with limited external demand. They roamed free
through the fenceless plains, making crop farming impossible. And much of
the grasslands were still in the hands of seminomadic indigenous people who
had no need or desire to exchange their ways for the regimentation of market
agriculture.

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, these obstacles were
steadily surmounted. The introduction of the repeating rifle, the telegraph,
and organized national armies after the middle of the century made possible
the conquest of the last “Indian frontiers” in the Western Hemisphere (the
southern reaches of Argentina and Chile and the West in the United States).
Railroads facilitated this expansion, while wire fences facilitated the demarca-
tion of property rights, selective breeding of animals, and the spread of com-
mercial livestock and crop production. The dramatic growth of the European
population, its increasing urbanization, the emergence of consumer societies,
industrialization, steamers, and the lifting of mercantilist restrictions on trade
and migration overcame, as we noted before, many of the other obstacles to
postcolonial Atlantic integration.

The socioeconomic shift produced by European migration in the West-
ern Hemisphere in general during the nineteenth century can be detected also
within specific countries. Within the United States, the South, which until the
1830s, had been the richest region in the country, ended up as the poorest, left
behind by the immigrant-fueled industrialization and population growth of the
Northeast and Midwest. In Argentina, the once affluent Andean region linked
to the colonial silver economy of Upper Peru stagnated, while the Atlantic-
oriented littoral became one of the ten richest regions in the world by 1900. In
Brazil, the economic center moved from the old sugar-rich Northeast, to the
diamonds and gold region of Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century, to the
temperate South in the nineteenth.

These regional shifts and differences complicated racial inequality within
the three countries. Most of the population of color (blacks in the United States
and Brazil, and mestizos in Argentina) resided in the once-affluent colonial
regions of plantations and mining. Their penury there had been caused not by economic scarcity but by politically sustained maldistribution. Chattel slavery and the semibondage labor arrangements of Andean Argentina had been, after all, legal practices instituted and upheld by the force of government. By itself, the abolition of slavery and coerced labor in the nineteenth century might not have narrowed racial inequalities in a significant way, even if the old colonial regions had retained their economic prosperity. A free market—even if it were truly free—might not have erased inequalities that had been originally produced and maintained not by market relations but by political power. Legal equality and the more open and competitive postabolition economic system might not have equalized the “playing field,” when the starting points had previously been set so far apart by law and force. In the absence of any political rearrangement of the starting line, old inequalities were indeed preserved and reproduced by accumulated privilege, accumulated disadvantage, and unofficial discrimination. But the economic stagnation or decline of the old colonial regions worsened the situation by fusing problems of distribution and scarcity. In the colonial period, one could have characterized the nonwhite population in the three countries as poor people living in rich regions. The nineteenth century lifted the legal shackles that had kept them poor or enslaved but also turned them into poor people living in poor regions. Regional inequality became a structural reinforcer of racial inequality.

The relative lack of intraregional mobility further buttressed such inequality. Spontaneous migration depends on the cumulative development of social networks and social capital. Freed bonded laborers—whether ex-serfs in the Old World or ex-slaves and ex-*mitayos* in the New—rarely migrated in large numbers during the generations immediately following emancipation. Before World War I, therefore, most of the population of color in Argentina, Brazil, and the United States remained in what had become the poorest regions of their respective countries. Meanwhile, European immigrants were heading directly toward the most dynamic regions, precisely at a time when labor was scarce and wages and economic opportunities high. Blacks and mestizos moving to São Paulo, Chicago, or Buenos Aires after World War I and the Great Depression became “the last arrivals”—in itself a disadvantage—and encountered less auspicious economic conditions. Divergent regional rates of urbanization during the nineteenth century bolstered the link between regional and racial inequality. The population of color continued to be mainly rural, while European immigrants increasingly moved toward the New World cities that their presence helped to expand.

Although the integration of the Western Hemisphere into the Atlantic
division of labor relied on the export of raw commodities, this stimulated sufficient activity in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the domestic economies to produce the fastest rate of urbanization in the world. In 1800, only one of the 36 cities in the world with populations exceeding 100,000 was in the Americas (Mexico City). By the time the liberal period of free migration and trade came to an end with the Great Depression, the Western Hemisphere contained 162 of the world’s 678 cities with over 100,000 inhabitants. Its proportion of the globe’s largest cities had thus gone up from 3 to 24 percent, the only continent to experience a proportional increase. This growth also shifted the distribution of urban centers within the Western Hemisphere.

Before 1800, urban development in the Americas had concentrated in the Iberian domains. Those of the Spanish crown contained 37 (almost three-fourths) of the hemisphere’s 50 largest cities around 1790, Brazil had 7, the United States 5, and French Saint Domingue 1. The 10 largest were within the old colonial cores, with economies based on silver mined by indigenous labor or plantations worked by African slaves: Mexico City (131,000), Salvador da Bahia (60,000), Puebla (57,000), Lima (53,000), Havana (51,000), Rio de Janeiro (50,000), Guanajuato (45,000), Antigua (43,000), La Paz (40,000), and Potosí (37,000). This was a time when Caracas and Cuzco were still more populous than New York and Buenos Aires and when all U.S. cities, other than Philadelphia and New York, were still surpassed by what now would seem as relatively obscure places such as Ayacucho, Cochabamba, Arequipa, Maracaibo, Oruro, Chuquisaca (Sucre), Morelia, and Recife. As the eighteenth century reached its end, Mexico City alone had a larger population than the largest five U.S. cities combined.

The mass arrival of Europeans would change this dramatically. By the 1820s, New York had already become the largest city in the hemisphere. By

1860, a 200-mile-long coastal strip of the northeastern United States contained the four largest cities in the New World (New York, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, and Baltimore). In that same year, Saint Louis, Missouri, had more than six times the population of San Luis Potosí, Mexico, which as late as the middle of the eighteenth century had been larger than any U.S. city. On the southern end of the hemisphere, Buenos Aires—which had been a minor town for most of the colonial period and still ranked sixth among Ibero-American cities as late as the mid 1800s—had become the leading metropolis in Latin America by 1890. Similarly, Uruguay (another marginal area during the colonial period) had become the second most urban country in the world, after England.

Old colonial cities that were able to reconfigure their Atlantic ties and received significant numbers of European immigrants (such as Rio de Janeiro and Havana) were able to expand during the nineteenth century. But most of the expansion occurred in cities that had been unimportant in the colonial period or had not even existed. In one of the most spectacular urban leaps anywhere, São Paulo went from a town of about 20,000 inhabitants in 1870 to a city of over 600,000 half a century later, overtaking in the process all the once-dominant cities of the Northeastern plantation complex (Salvador, Recife, Olinda, Fortaleza, São Luis, Belem). Buenos Aires’ leap was, if anything, more spectacular: it moved up from 19th to 3rd place among the cities of the Atlantic basin during roughly the same period. Elsewhere in Argentina, waves of European newcomers turned Rosario, a village of 3,000 people in 1850, into a city of close to a quarter million by the outbreak of World War I. Known locally as the Argentine Barcelona because of the militancy of its labor movement, it had become by then the second-largest city in the country. On the way, it had left behind all the once-dominant towns of the indigenous northwest that had thrived during the colonial past as satellites to the Potosí silver complex. So did other cities of immigration, such as La Plata, Santa Fe, Bahia Blanca, and Mendoza.

Meanwhile in the north, the most spectacular case rose (literally, since the city invented the skyscraper) on the shores of Lake Michigan. Chicago went from a hamlet of 350 souls in 1830 to a town of 30,000 by the middle of the century to a metropolis of 2.2 million by 1910, when it stood as the second-largest city in the hemisphere. Meanwhile, Charleston, South Carolina, which had ranked 4th among U.S. cities at the end of the eighteenth century, had dropped to 22nd by the middle of the nineteenth and would drop to 68th by the end of the century.

European immigration thus reversed the urban rank in the Western Hemisphere during the nineteenth century. Of the 50 largest cities in 1790, 32 would drop from the top 100 by 1910. Inversely, 79 of the largest 100 cities in 1910
were not among the largest 50 in 1790, either because they did not exist then or were just rural hamlets. This caused a dramatic regional change. In 1790, Latin America had contained 45 of the 50 largest cities in the New World, and the United States only 5. By 1910, Latin America had 23 of the hemisphere’s 100 largest cities and the United States had 72, with Canada holding the remaining 5. In 1790, the United States did not have a single city ranked among the top 10; by 1910, it had 7, including the top 3. The largest, New York, now had more than ten times the population of Mexico City, which had dropped to 12th place.

Whether in South or North America, nineteenth-century urbanization was fueled by European immigration. By 1910, the largest 11 cities in the Americas, and 81 of the top 100, were cities of immigrants. And the five most urban countries (Uruguay, Cuba, Argentina, the United States, and Canada) were the ones with the highest proportion of European immigrants in their populations.

Insofar as modernity, whatever its definition, is unfailingly situated in urban spaces, one can argue that the sites of “the modern” in the Western Hemisphere shifted, during the nineteenth century, from the Indo-mestizo and Afro-American colonial cores to Euroamerica, the temperate ends of the hemisphere that had also been its socioeconomic margins, and to Cuba. Only the blinders of U.S.-centrism can obscure the fact that, before 1776, the principal sites of modernity could be found not in Boston or Philadelphia but in places like Guanajuato and Salvador (in terms of the technology and market orientation of production) or Mexico City and Lima (in terms of books, theaters, architecture, music, and other cultural products). And only the most equivocal definition of alternative modernities can conceal the evident relocation to places like New York, Chicago, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and São Paulo that occurred during the nineteenth century.

Modernity shifted not only its spatial orientation but also its internal content. Economically, it shifted—in the new nodes of modernity in the Americas—from growth to development, to use the distinction made by dependency theorists. The affluence of the old colonial centers had been based on natural endowments and the hyperexploitation of labor. This represented the most rudimentary form of economic growth: increase in output with some investment in productive infrastructure but no investment in social development. If anything, these regions had been “mis”-developed. Their social structures became too

unequal and vertical to provide a sound foundation for either nation building or a consumer economy. And the abrupt introduction of liberal capitalism in the nineteenth century often exacerbated these inequalities. In this regard, the colonial “failure” of marginal areas—such as Canada, the U.S. Northeast and Midwest, eastern Argentina, southern Brazil, and to a lesser degree Costa Rica, Chile, and parts of Cuba—proved to be a blessing in disguise. Rather than misdeveloped by hyperexploitative colonial social relations, they were simply left less developed. These regions’ sparse populations, due to the lack of dense indigenous populations and the limited importation of African slaves, increased the cost of labor, and thus wages. Even Cuba—which, like the United States and Brazil, is a country with a dual heritage of plantation/slavery and European settlement—had some of the highest wages in the Western Hemisphere during the nineteenth century. Working-class wages in Argentina were 11 times higher than in Mexico. They were even higher in the United States and Canada.

Mass migration, and the economic transformations that went along with it, also had an enormous impact on the sociocultural content and diffusion of modernity. The early modernity of the colonial period had been a veneer that covered a thin social slice. Before 1800, it remained more project than reality, a mixture of ideas and ideals derived from Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment that circulated among a small proportion of the New World’s population, the bulk of which was rural and illiterate. Although the nineteenth century did intensify modernity as an elite project and ideology, in many regions of the Americas it remained monophonic and mainly within the discursive realm. In others, however, it became polyphonic and transcended the discursive realm to affect every aspect of life by 1900.

In these places, the depiction of modernity as a metanarrative of progress, instrumental rationality, scientism, and a particular political project that has been produced by postcolonial critics is so reductionist that it does not even approach the level of caricature. Belle époque modernity there encompassed a dizzying array of voices that ranged from the hyperrational to the sensualist, from primitivism to futurism, from egoism to collectivism, from Marxian materialism to Kardesian spiritualism. The term *modernism* (which had rarely, if ever, been used for a movement before the 1880s) became self-consciously applied to the Catalan architectural trend associated with Antoni Gaudi, to the Spanish American literary movement associated with Rubén Darío, to postromantic writers and neoromantic composers, and to Brazilian literati of the 1920s, among many other diverse, and even antithetical, trends. The three decades after 1890 produced more *-isms* than the previous three centuries. The proliferation of the prefixes *neo-* and *post-* in this plethora of *-isms* offered further
evidence that, discursively, modernity had evolved not into the monotonic and Whiggish celebration of progress that postmodernist critics describe but into the decentered cacophony that postmodernity supposedly represents. Indeed, in modernity’s intrinsic need to challenge and exceed itself just to keep being, by definition, modern, in its relentless rush toward the neo-, the post-, and the edge, postmodernism became the only impossible post-.

More important than these discursive transformations (although related to them), mass migration and its accompanying processes massified modernity, turning it from elite ideology into a general way of life. Cosmopolitanism evolved from posture to practice, from ideological pose related to the universalist pretensions of the Enlightenment to quotidian behaviors and encounters in the multinational neighborhoods of New York, São Paulo, or Montevideo. These and other immigrant cities of the Americas became linked to the new Atlantic world by the massive circulation of people, goods, technologies, ideologies, text, images, institutional and organizational models, highbrow art and popular music, and anything from recipes for chicken soup to recipes for anarchist bombs. In terms of the density of connections and the proportion of the population that it connected, this new Atlantic was indeed a far cry from the old colonial Atlantic of galleons, silver, sugar, and slaves. The broad and incessant circulation of people and material and cultural goods through places like New York and Buenos Aires embodied the two most distinguishing characteristics of the modern: the intense connection of the local and the global, and massification. Mass mobility, mass communication, mass consumption, mass culture, mass politics—in a word, the formation of mass societies—became, unarguably, the trait that most clearly differentiated the modernity of 1900 from that of the colonial period and the “early modern” world.

The rise of the United States may be the most visible result of this process in the New World, but the notion that the process was confined to the north of the Tropic of Cancer reflects little more than Anglo-American myopia. Havana, just south of that line, and Rosario, south of the Tropic of Capricorn, were both more modern and more closely tied to Atlantic circles during the nineteenth century than most cities in the United States and Canada. And more ships, goods, and people from Europe headed toward the River Plate region than toward the U.S. South. By any criteria of modernity—urbanization, mass mobility and mobilization, commercialization, density of connections to the outside world, literacy, media and income per capita, civic participation, membership in secondary associations, public health, mortality rates and life expectancy, and material and cultural consumption in general—the dividing line in the early twentieth century separated not Anglo from Latin America but the
new regions of European settlement from the old colonies of haciendas, silver, and plantations. It was this division, rather than neocolonialism or dependency per se, that separated the rich from the poor at the hemispheric level. After all, the richest and most economically democratic countries were precisely the ones that had the strongest social, cultural, and economic connections to the Atlantic world, countries so dependent on external factors that they even depended on imported labor.

This situation provides a broad context for the three articles in the present volume. The Hispanophobia that Pablo Yankelevich examines in revolutionary Mexico was shaped by that country’s limited immigration and modernization, while in Argentina the same phenomenon was shaped by large-scale immigration and rapid modernization.\textsuperscript{18} By the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, there were only about 30,000 Spaniards in Mexico, who accounted for only two out of every thousand inhabitants in the country. About the same time, there were 830,000 Spaniards in Argentina, representing over a tenth of the total population. European immigrants in general accounted for almost one of every three inhabitants in Argentina, versus about one of every three hundred in Mexico. Emigration to Mexico was not a mass proletarian movement but a thin stream of people with mercantile plans or aspirations. Workers would not move in search of employment to a country where labor was abundant and wages lower than in their homeland. Spaniards, like other European immigrants in Argentina, were underrepresented at the very top of the socioeconomic spectrum and, given the massive nature of their presence, the bulk concentrated in wage labor, including menial and unskilled occupations such as the domestic service, where they were heavily overrepresented. In Mexico, by contrast, Spaniards and other European immigrants were heavily overrepresented at the very top of the socioeconomic ladder and concentrated in the richest quartile.

Hispanophobia in Mexico, therefore, contained a marked element of class resentment that was absent in Argentina, where it had represented during the nineteenth century a form of elite contempt for the backwardness and obscurantism that Spanish culture had come to epitomize in the political imaginary of the Enlightenment and classical liberalism. For the Mexican elite of the same period, Spanish culture represented (as Romana Falcón has shown) civilization rather than backwardness, and \textit{anti-gachupinismo} was a more plebian phenomenon that embodied not contempt but resentment against perceived

\textsuperscript{18} For a discussion of Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia in Argentina, see Moya, \textit{Cousins and Strangers}, chap. 7; see pp. 363–66 for a comparison with Mexico.
arrogance. Mexican Hispanophobia bristled not only against Spaniards’ class hubris but also against their generalized sense of racial superiority in a country where over nine-tenths of the population was Indian or mestizo. In Argentina, massive immigration had turned a region that was sparsely populated to begin with into a country where over nine-tenths of the population was of European origin, diminishing the social value of whiteness in the process. Spanish conceit therefore rested on less perceptible markers, such as linguistic purity, which did not hold much currency because most of the immigrants came from non-Castilian-speaking regions. Moreover, the claims resembled not the arrogant assertions of superiority uttered by their compatriots in Mexico but the defensive mechanisms against derision by the local culture employed by other discriminated immigrants in Argentina and the United States.

By the time of the centennial celebration of independence in Argentina, which coincided with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, Hispanophobia had given way among the intelligentsia to Hispanism, a neoromantic and antipositivist reaction tied to cultural nationalism. In a country with few indigenous people, plenty of non-Iberian newcomers, and all the social tensions of an urban mass society, Hispanism became a form of nostalgia for an idealized premodern and pastoral past that embodied the autochthonous and genuine. In Mexico—a country with an indigenous majority and one that was struggling to enter modernity rather than coping with its challenges—antimodernist and anticosmopolitan reactions had little appeal, and Hispanism was more likely to represent the foreign than the native. As a result, nationalism emerged as antiliberal, elitist, Catholic, and Hispanophilic in Argentina (similar to the French variety) and as liberal, populist, secular—or even anticlerical, as the expulsion of priests discussed by Yankelevich indicates—and indigenist in Mexico (similar to the Italian variety). Even the xenophobic elements that they seem to share took different forms. In Mexico, it was directed, mainly from below, toward foreign imperialism and what were perceived as privileged foreigners. In Argentina, it came mainly from above and was directed toward radical working-class immigrants and Jews.

This explains the particularities of the expulsion policies studied by Yankelevich. The banishment of people from a realm is evidently an ancient practice. But the expulsion of targeted individuals on the basis of state membership—as opposed to the ostracizing of citizens, the transportation of convicts to colonies, or corporate expulsions such as those of Jews, Muslims, Irish Catholics from Ulster, or Jesuits—is a relatively recent phenomenon that emerged during the

period of mass migration. France pioneered the practice, expelling in a single year (1894) a larger number of foreigners (820) than Mexico deported during the 1911–40 period. Argentina followed suit, expelling about a thousand immigrants between 1902 and the early 1930s. Brazil, after 1907, and Cuba and the United States, mainly right after World War I, also expelled large numbers of foreigners. These deportations, however, were carried out from above, by the state’s security apparatus, without any input—and with little pressure—from the population, and almost all of those expelled were radical workers. Indeed, the legislation and government documents normally referred specifically to the “expulsion of anarchists.” Yankelevich also detects such cases in Mexico. But the majority of the cases there did not involve radical workers. As a matter of fact, he shows that much of the impetus for expulsions came from below in the form of social claims, fueled by class and even racial resentment. In this sense, the Mexican Revolution itself can be seen as a process of massification, a form of the popular political incorporation that was achieved in the more economically democratic immigrant-receiving countries through different mechanisms. In the United States, mass politics were channeled through liberal democracy and urban political machines; in Uruguay, through the first welfare state in the hemisphere; in Argentina, through a combination of middle-class populism (the Radical Party) and working-class mobilization (both through one of the largest labor movements in the world by the outbreak of World War I, and through a plethora of other civic associations).

The broader Atlantic context delineated in this article also explains much about the experience of the Lebanese in Mexico that Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp examines. Their relative late arrival reflects not a particular circumstance but a general pattern. Mass migration, and the transformations that went along with it, diffused temporally and spatially from northwestern Europe to Scandinavia, then to the southwest and east of the continent, and eventually to the eastern Mediterranean. The Syro-Lebanese were latecomers for the same reason that Armenians, Greeks, and Albanians were among the last to join the transatlantic exodus. Once they began leaving, however, the Lebanese arguably became the most widespread diaspora in the world. They spread throughout the Americas

22. Jews were probably even more widespread. However, unlike the Lebanese (who originated from a single, and small, region), Jews emigrated not from their original, and by
from Canada to Chile, West and North Africa, Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. What Alfaro-Velcamp identifies as their “positioning” in Mexico is a strategy of adaptation that takes remarkably similar forms in dozens of other countries. The peddling during the early stages of their migratory experience, the move into commercial ownership, the later insertion into the textile industry, and the entry of the second generation into the professions seems to be a script followed anywhere from Australia to Argentina and Nigeria to Nicaragua. Likewise, the claims to a Phoenician past and trading tradition to explain their commercial success that Velcamp detects in the “the construction of Lebanese Mexican identity”—has been an omnipresent discursive trope among Maronites for over a century everywhere in the diaspora and in Mount Lebanon itself.

The Lebanese economic success in Mexico can be compared to that of the Spaniards in the same country and to that of the Lebanese in other relatively poor regions. As I said of the Spaniards, immigrants did not go to Mexico or other low-wage countries seeking employment in the general labor market. They went to work on their own or for relatives, with a clear plan to become independent business owners. Immigrants, in general, are not “the wretched refuse of teeming shores” that Emma Lazarus’s famous poem described. On the contrary, they tend to be of higher social and educational background than those who stay behind. But in the case of small currents to less-developed countries, the element of selectivity may be more pronounced. These emigrants were not looking for a job; they needed either some startup capital or access to it, commercial skills or aptitudes, literacy (or at least, numeracy), and enough determination to head for places where finding wage employment as a backup for commercial failure was a poor option.

The Lebanese, in particular, made a specialty out of this type of migration. The majority did head toward the major immigrant destinations—the United States, Argentina, and Brazil. But a disproportionately large number went to places such as Haiti, Jamaica, Colombia, Ecuador, West Africa, and even Mexico, where few others went. Even within the major immigrant destinations, the Lebanese often headed for the poorer regions that other groups

the nineteenth century symbolic, “homeland,” but from a large number of countries spread throughout Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Arab world. They formed thus not one diaspora, but many. Probably Hindu Sindhis are the only other group that can match the Lebanese in terms of their geographical dispersion. See Claude Markovits, The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
shunned, such as the Andean northwest in Argentina, the Northeast in Brazil, and Oriente province in Cuba. If part of their economic success rested in the self-selected nature of the group, the other rested on the weakness of the competition. These regions were not only poor but also had highly vertical social structures, small middle classes, even smaller mercantile bourgeoisies, underdeveloped or nonexistent secondary trade networks, equally weak credit systems, and little competition from other immigrant merchants. The Lebanese prospered in these regions by taking advantage not of a dynamic economy but rather of its absence. Levantine peddlers and merchants often created trading routes and introduced credit systems in rural areas where none had existed, profiting from their pioneering position and the near-monopoly privileges that this gave them for decades. The importance of their presence in the formation of consumer culture in rural Latin America has rarely been acknowledged.

By the post–World War II years, the ex-peddlers had accumulated enough capital, credit access, and business connections to take advantage of state-sponsored import-substitution industrialization. The degree to which they monopolized these opportunities, however, was in inverse relation to the size and strength of the local mercantile and industrial class of native or other immigrant origins. The less developed the host country was, therefore, the higher the concentration of the Lebanese in the upper economic strata was likely to be. Alfaro-Velcamp refers to the distinctions between what she terms the Lebanese Mexican elite class and their poorer co-ethnics. Surely, these humbler Lebanese are not likely to rub shoulders with Carlos Slim (recently re-ranked as the fifth richest man in the world). But one has to wonder about how many of them would actually rank in the highest decile of the Mexican population in terms of income and wealth. One could safely bet, however, that the proportion would be significantly lower than in, say, Haiti and Honduras, and significantly higher than in Argentina, Brazil, and the United States. One also has to wonder about how many of these “humbler” Lebanese share the sense of ethnoracial superiority vis-à-vis indigenous and mestizo Mexicans that Velcamp attributes to the elites but which Romana Falcón claimed Spanish immigrants shared regardless of their social class.

The political success of the Syro-Lebanese in Mexico that Alfaro-Velcamp demonstrates also fits in a broader comparative pattern that can illuminate Latin American particularities. That success has been shared in other Latin American countries. Carlos Menem, a second-generation Syrian of Muslim ancestry, converted to Catholicism and became president of Argentina. Julio César Turbay Ayala reached the same position in Colombia. Edward Seaga became prime minister in Jamaica and Paulo Maluf, mayor and governor of São Paulo.
In Ecuador, people who trace their ancestry to a handful of Maronite villages have been elected to so many local and national offices (including the 1992–96 vice presidency of Alberto Dahik, and the presidencies of Abdalá Bucaram and Jamil Mahuad) that rivals complained about the “Bedouinization of Ecuador.” Yet, the Lebanese have not shown a similar success in West Africa, where their economic dominance is, if anything, greater than in Latin America. Nor have other economically dominant ethnic minorities elsewhere, such as the Indians in East Africa and the Chinese in the Philippines and Indonesia.

The explanation for this may lie in diverging colonial experiences. Colonialism in Latin America was an earlier, longer, and deeper process than in the rest of the so-called Third World. Nowhere else did European culture penetrate so deeply, so broadly, and so early. Nowhere else did the colonizers and their descendants become such a large proportion of the local populations. Elites may have continued to be of European descent in postcolonial times, but so were anywhere from a tenth to nine-tenths of their country’s inhabitants. Moreover, in terms of language, religion, and general habits, these elites shared a hybrid Hispano-creole culture with the rest of the population—whatever their race—to an extent that was unknown among, say, the English in India or Nigeria or the Dutch in Indonesia. Racial hierarchies obviously continued. But racial lines were more diffused than elsewhere in the colonial world, and the multiracial nature of the population made phenotype a less reliable marker of national identity and citizenship. Carlos Slim is a just a Mexican to most Mexicans. His counterpart in Nigeria is clearly a Lebanese to most Nigerians, regardless of his country of birth, and so will be his descendants. A person of Irish and Spanish descent can become a Mexican president with a funny name. But that fox will immediately be defined as foreign in Bangladesh or Benin. These circumstances seem to explain why Foxes, Fujimoris, Menems, and Mahuads are elected to the highest offices in Latin American countries but not in the rest of the postcolonial world. They should also make us ponder about the wisdom of blindly applying Indian-derived postcolonial theories to the dramatically different colonial and postcolonial experiences of “the Indies.”

The broader history of European migration to the New World can also provide a context for Lawrence Bell’s fine article on Jewish associations in Peronist Argentina. Jewish transatlantic migration in general, with the exception of sporadic crossings of Sephardim during the colonial period and of German streams from the middle of the nineteenth century, formed part of the “new”

migrations out of eastern and southern Europe that began around 1880, some
decades after the “old” waves from the western and northern regions of the
continent. But unlike Italian migration, which acquired massive dimensions in
Argentina before it did so in the United States, the Jewish movement to South
America took off even later than to the North. By 1890 only 5,160 immigrants
had arrived in Argentina from the Russian Empire, the principal source of the
Jewish exodus at the time, compared to a quarter of a million to the United
States. In the next decade 17,466 headed for Argentina and half a million for the
U.S. The yearly flow to Argentina first surpassed 10,000 in 1905, and the bulk
of the immigrants from Russia (141,000) arrived between the beginning of the
century and the outbreak of World War I.24

This late arrival impacted their adaptation in the host country. During
the early twentieth century, Jews and Middle Easterners (another late-arriving
group) exhibited the highest residential segregation rates among all ethnic
groups in Buenos Aires, where they mostly settled. They were twice as segre-
gated as Spaniards and French, and four times more segregated than Italians.
Jewish segregation rates, however, dropped in the following decades and were
significantly lower than those in North American cities, suggesting a greater
integration into the host society—at least at the residential level.25 Occupa-
tionally, their late arrival retarded upward mobility, and their large numbers
(the 1936 Buenos Aires census counted 120,177 Jews within the administra-
tive boundaries of the city) made concentration in the upper strata impossible.
Eugene Sofer has argued that “until 1945, at least, Jews did not experience in
Argentina the same degree of mobility that Jews are assumed to have enjoyed in
the United States.”26

The bulk of the Jewish community concentrated, thus, in the working and
lower middle class. Jews were, along with Catalans, the most overrepresented
group in the anarchist movement. And the most renowned working-class hero
in the country during the first half of the twentieth century was Simon Radow-
isky, an 18-year-old Yiddish-speaking mechanic born in a shtetl near Kiev, who
avenged a police massacre of workers during the 1909 May Day demonstration
by assassinating Buenos Aires’ chief of police. More than a dozen books and
thousands of newspaper articles and leaflets appeared in the following decades

24. It is estimated that about a quarter of a million Jews arrived in Argentina between
1880 and 1940.
25. Moya, Cousins and Strangers, 187, 481.
York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 128.
to eulogize “our Simón,” and in them, one cannot find the words murderer or assassin—the common terms employed in the “bourgeois” press. Radowisky was always the “avenger,” the “realtiator,” the “justice giver [el justiciero],” the “martyr of Ushuaia” (the town where the prison was located), the “libertarian saint [santo ácrata].” These eulogies and the general stereotype of Jews as anarchists could explain, I have argued elsewhere, the relative absence of working-class anti-Semitism in Argentina during the first half of the twentieth century.27

This attitude may have changed with the inroads of nationalism in the labor movement during the Peronist period, and the social composition of the Jewish community probably shifted. But its makeup was still more diverse than the memberships of the three associations examined by Bell, which are described as “middle-class businessmen and professionals” (the OIA’s); “the community’s social and cultural elite,” dubbed “the aristocracy” by a detractor (IJA’s); and the DAIA was a federation whose participating members were the leaders of the associations it grouped. Indeed, the Jewish community in Peronist Argentina was more diverse and divided in its class composition and interests than the Lebanese community in Fox’s Mexico, which Alfaro-Velcamp describes as particularly class-divided.

The principal function of the associations of these multiclass immigrant communities in Argentina, or elsewhere, was to provide spaces for sociability and insurance (medical, disability, and so on) in the form of mutual aid societies, rather than to lobby the national government or engage in local politics. The Peronist government promoted changes in this respect by its corporativist approach to popular mobilization, as Bell convincingly argues, and by expanding the role of the state as provider of the welfare services that private ethnic associations had handled before. But this transition could not have taken place overnight, and continuities must have been strong. Indeed, it is almost certain that the traditional, pre-Peronist functions continued to account for most of the ethnic associations’ activities. The relationship to the state was obviously the most visible but not necessarily the most important.

This can add an internal level of explanation to Bell’s emphasis on the external political milieu of Peronism and international Zionism. The OIA and IJA were founded as explicitly political organizations, so their positions are adequately explained by Bell’s approach. An institutional approach, however, can shed extra light on the internal workings of the DAIA. Large ethnic organiza-

tions, particularly the DAIA type of umbrella association or federation, rarely take strong positions on political or ideological issues unless the consensus on them is almost universal, because they cannot afford to alienate their component groups and risk dissension and splits. These types of organizations, therefore, are normally the most conservative and risk-adverse in the institutional spectrum of any ethnic community, regardless of the external situation. Their practices are cautious and their discourses bland because they are institutionally “programmed” to avoid internal conflict and controversy. They do not produce a hegemonic discourse in the Gramscian sense but simply reproduce it in a watered-down version. Their hegemony is thus more institutional (in the dictionary definition of the term hegemony) than discursive. This is true of the DAIA, as it was true of similar immigrant federations in Argentina before Peronism or in most countries of immigration for that matter.28

Students of Peronism may also underestimate the level of popular organization and mobilization and the political activism of civic associations in pre-Peron Argentina. By the early twentieth century, and due mainly to mass immigration, the country had one of the highest numbers of secondary associations and participation per capita in the world. These ranged from anarchist groups to sport clubs and from Landsmanschaftn (associations formed by immigrants from the same village) to the largest mutual aid societies in the Western Hemisphere. The majority of these associations did not normally engage in formal politics or lobby the government, because in the booming and liberal economy of the period the bulk of social resources were allocated (particularly for immigrants, whose rate of naturalization was less than 2 percent) through the market and secondary institutions rather than through the state. But voluntary associations could, and did, pressure the government when their interests were at stake. After all, the pressure of labor, ethnic, and other working-class organizations forced President Yrigoyen in 1930 to pardon Radowisky (the assassin of the highest representative of the forces of social control, no less), in spite of the intense opposition of the upper classes and of Yrigoyen’s fears (as it turned out, not unfounded) of a military coup d’etat.

Moreover, this level of civic activism both resulted from and was part of the mass migration movements and the related massification process that this article has examined. In Argentina and the other “new colonies” of European settlement in the Americas, the thousands of voluntary associations—from labor unions to neighborhood clubs—founded by the newcomers and their immedi-

ate descendants became veritable arenas of civic democracy. In these innumerable sites, millions of humble folk engaged in open deliberations and debates, the constitution of statutes regulating rights and privileges, elections, decision making based on majority rule, and other practices of quotidian democracy rooted in the notions of individual liberty and collective sovereignty. Through these performances, an increasing proportion of the population acquired the social and narrative resources for democratic citizenship, and routinization turned the practices into ingrained habits.

These habits did not always transfer to the formal political realm in Latin American countries of immigration. Indeed, as Carlos Forment has argued, the very success of associative life may have encouraged participants to retain this activism at the horizontal level of secondary associations, rather than moving it vertically to less-receptive and more-authoritarian tertiary institutions. But as the Radowisky affair demonstrates, those habits did transfer to the formal political realm, even if not always through elections. This, along with the more democratic distribution of material and symbolic goods that immigration and massification promoted (in part through the devaluation of whiteness, as previously discussed), explains the otherwise inexplicable robustness of civil society in Latin American countries of immigration even during dictatorial periods. Not even the brutal military juntas of the 1960s and 1970s were able to break the backbone of labor unions and other popular civic “corporations”—in spite of the fact that this was, in large part, the raison d’être of these regimes. And in terms of social welfare, levels of empowerment, economic and cultural equity, and civic participation, one could argue that Uruguayan society was more democratic during military regimes than Guatemalan society during constitutionally elected governments. As I said of migration at the beginning of this article, “democracy” clearly obeyed mightier laws than those produced and enshrined in national legislatures and constitutions.