

# LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY – 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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**Overview** The history of Latin America was shaped by massive political and ideological “sea changes,” many of which began in the nineteenth century with independence from Spain and Portugal. Power struggles resulted in conflicts over equal access to political rights and the ownership of property. In many countries, two opposing ideologies resulted in extreme and often repressive governments. For the most part, they were portrayed as either fascistic or communistic, but such a simple characterization does not capture the complexity of the relationships of the people and the enduring influence of the church and the persistent ties to those who were originally granted power and privilege by the colonizing countries. The waves of economic prosperity (the mid-century “Boom”), pulses of instability, and the ability of technology to give voice to a diverse population resulted in the flowering of the arts and literature, as well as a complex political structure that found strength in its multi-cultural blended roots.

## POLITICAL HISTORY

### GOVERNMENT

**Democracies:** The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of revolutions as the ruling elites were viewed as corrupt and oppressive, and also did not allow land ownership, voting rights, or open commerce. The revolutions were struggles over economic control as well as for freedom of expression. The first in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Mexican Revolution. The democratic form of government that resulted centered on a detailed constitution and a separation of church and state.

**Military Dictatorships (Juntas):** The revolutions that shook the young countries in Latin America often resulted in a uniquely Latin American military dictatorship. The military dictatorships of Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay (Stroessner), Chile (Pinochet), differed from the military dictatorships of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 20<sup>th</sup>-century military dictatorships were able to garner outside support by playing into Cold War politics, and they utilized brutal techniques to maintain control. Argentina was not the only country where many thousands of youth “disappeared” never to be seen again. They were tortured and then murdered. Military dictatorships were stunningly long-lived, which demonstrates the level of complicit favoritism on all levels of society.

**Communist Dictatorships:** There was little difference between a Communist dictator and a military dictatorship, except for ideology and the ownership of the countries means of production and land. In a Communist government, the government seized all assets, thereby making all land, equipment, and means of production chattels of the state, and in theory, owned communally by everyone. In practice, the ruling elite controlled the assets of the land, which looked strangely feudal rather than communal. Communist dictatorships were in place in Chile (Allende), Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Nicaragua, and famously, Cuba.

**Doomsday Cult:** An echo of the utopian experiments in the nineteenth century, cults took advantage of the fragile (and easily corruptible) legal systems to set up communities that were often nominally religious, but more often about the twisted vision of a charismatic leader who obtained funds through his followers, whom he entrapped both physically and psychologically. The best-known was Jim Jones’s The People’s Temple in Guayana, which ended tragically with the mass suicide of all its followers.

### Discussion/Questions

Independence from Spain did not mean that all groups had a voice in the government. In fact, it simply reinforced the fact that the indigenous peoples, women, and slaves had no voice at all. Finally, however, times changed. Revolution meant that dreams of inclusion could become a reality. Describe some of the ways in which revolution meant more participation for the previously disenfranchised groups.

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## MILITARY

**Guerrilla Warfare:** Guerrilla warfare was developed into an art form by Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution. He would not obey the traditional rules of engagement, but would attack by night, using the element of surprise. They would not use uniforms, but would dress as ordinary civilians, which increased the likelihood of unintentional slaughter of civilians and war crimes. It was, however, a good way to fight an asymmetrical war, where one side greatly outnumbered the other. Guerrilla warfare came to be practiced in many countries.

**“Desaparecidos”:** The military dictatorships of Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina responded to the guerrilla tactics of the Marxist rebels by secret, nighttime arrests that were effected without due process, and which amounted to kidnappings. The goal was to penetrate the Marxist rebel groups by taking the key members and then torturing them until they produced the information they needed. What happened in reality was that many young students who followed Marxist fashion and became involved in street protests were arrested, tortured, and killed, never to be seen again. Many were buried in mass graves or their bodies were dumped in the ocean. The goal of this tactic was to allow the dictator to maintain total control.

**Domestic Terror:** Embassies were bombed in Colombia and in Argentina. At first the attacks seemed to be motivated by conflicts between factions of the military. But, the reality was that they were attacks against the countries perceived to be financing one faction or the other. In Argentina, the Israeli Embassy was bombed. In Colombia, the American Embassy was bombed.

**Cartel Warfare:** Essentially a war for control of trade routes and the sources of supply (of people for human trafficking and of drugs for narco-trafficking), the tactics include kidnapping, symbolic ritual mutilation (with bodies dumped where most likely to be seen in order to communicate a terror-inducing message), money laundering, guerrilla warfare, and the misuse of the military in order to protect illegal (and immoral) activities. Cartel warfare has been a significant problem in Mexico, Honduras, and Colombia.

## WARS

**Mexican Revolution (1910 – 1920):** The revolt against elitism that characterized much of the world manifested itself in Mexico as well. Anarchist, socialist, and communist ideologies united in order to oust the repressive regime of Porfirio Diaz, and to break up the stranglehold that a few families had on the nation’s resources. The result was a country with a Constitutional democracy and separation of church and state.

**Colombia-Peru War (1932):** The control of resources (rubber, oil and gas, lumber) was at the heart of the border conflict.

**Chaco War (1932-1935):** This war, which took place in the Chaco Desert of Paraguay and Bolivia, was over the control of land expected to be rich in hydrocarbons. Ironically, nothing economic has ever been found in that area. The war was brutal, with thousands of soldiers dying of thirst, and black dogs feasting on

their cadavers at night. The war gave rise to many revitalized Guarani folktales, particularly of the “luison” or the black dog werewolf, often seen on nights with full moons in the

**Peru Civil War (Sendero Luminoso):** This ongoing civil war that took place throughout the 1970s and 1980s was an outgrowth of the Cold War, as communist guerillas united under the banner, “Sendero Luminoso” (the Shining Path), and followed the teachings of Mao Tse Tung.

**Falklands War (1982):** The Argentinian military dictatorship decided to retake the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands), largely because of the discovery of oil and gas in territorial waters. They miscalculated the response of the British, who dedicated all resources necessary to sink Argentine ships and to win the land war, the “Battle of Goose Green.” The Falklands stayed in the British Empire, with an economy fueled by wool, fishing, rockhopper penguin photography, and outfitting scientists heading to Antarctica.

**Drug Wars:** Cartels, narco-trafficking, and human trafficking (and kidnapping) account for a large portion of the unofficial gross domestic product (informal economy) of countries such as Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, Honduras, and Peru. As a result, turf wars have erupted, often with government military involvement, often because government officials are a part of a particular cartel and they use the military to dominate the market. The wars started in the early 1980s, and continue to the present day.

#### Discussion/Questions

The so-called Drug Wars of Latin America are in reality trade wars in the informal economy. Explain why they are difficult to resolve, and explain the role of corruption and why the national military is often involved.

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## **SOCIAL HISTORY**

### SOCIAL STRUCTURE

**From Peon to Patron – Land Reform and Upward Mobility:** In the twentieth century, major reforms led to more opportunities for individuals who had never had access to land to become landowners and “patrones” instead of “peones.” In Mexico, the 1934 Agrarian Code involved the expropriation of American-owned agricultural property. The land was divided and given to citizens in the different Mexican states. This change was not always an easy one, because even though the poor now owned land, it did not mean that they had enough for it to support their family, and nor did it mean that they would be able to afford equipment, seeds, or storage facilities. The dilemma of the smallholder was captured in Juan Rulfo’s short storied, *Nos Han Dado la Tierra*. Later in Mexico, with the 1970s Land Reform, there was another surge of repatriation of foreign-owned private farms. The farms were placed in the name of community members.

These collectives were called “ejidos,” and they became increasingly contentious after a generation and more collective owners between the children (additional heirs).

**Entrepreneurs:** An important new social class emerged in the twentieth century throughout Latin America. Entrepreneurs encouraged investment and growth in all sectors of the economies, particularly after the privatization of public utilities and services. Entrepreneurs were a strong force for positive growth, but in countries where there did not exist a strong anti-monopoly framework, unscrupulous entrepreneurs often emerged as possessing control of the market, reducing the situation to essentially a one-source oligopoly.

#### Discussion/Questions

When land reform first took place in Mexico, big blocks of land that had previously been controlled by the viceroy were deeded to families that were long-established in a community. Suddenly, instead of simply working for a wealthy landowner, they had the chance to become self-sufficient. However, there were challenges. The first was the problem of investment capital. The second was the problem of inheritance, and the fact that the blocks of land had to be distributed among the heirs, resulting in small chunks of land that were often isolated and too small for raising crops or establishing businesses. So, your chance at upward mobility (moving from a landless peon to a landed patron), could evaporate like a light rain on cactus. What would you do? In such a situation, how could you marshal forces and make your dream of ascending in society a reality? If you were one of the class who recently lost your land, how could you make the best of the situation? Would you team up? Or, would your class prejudices block you?

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#### GENDER

**Frida Kahlo:** Artist, writer, and cultural icon, Frida Kahlo embraced the indigenous cultures and made their artisan items a subject of formal art. She painted many self-portraits in which she explored the complex and often conflicting identities found within the Mexican culture. She painted herself as a blend of cultures and genders, many times with a Mexican rebozo (shawl), traditional hairstyle, flowers, earrings, and a small moustache and thick eyebrows. Living a life marked by harrowing pain due to childhood polio and then a vertebrae-shattering bus accident, Kahlo painted in a remarkable “outsider” style that brought together all the paradoxes of her life: joy, pain, masculinity, femininity, self-taught art, repression and extreme self-expression, Mexican traditional dress, and western men’s suits.

**Manuel Puig:** *Kiss of the Spider Woman*: Argentine fiction of the mid-twentieth century began to incorporate coded homosexuality, and to bring a taboo subject into the open. Perhaps the most well-known example is Manuel Puig’s *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* that dealt with not only repressive dictatorships, but also the fact that homosexuality was deeply hidden and considered shameful in a typically macho Latino culture.

**“Travesti” Culture:** The taboo against homosexuality resulted in a great deal of repression and an underground culture of cross-dressing and gender ambiguity. Men who assumed ultra-feminine roles were generally shunned by society, resulting in deep poverty and a sub-culture that involved prostitution and

sexual violence. Works of art and cinema began to include the “travesti” culture in the 1990s. They include the Mexican film, *Danzon* (1991) as well as Argentine writer Manuel Puig’s *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1976) and Brazilian writer Adolfo Caminha’s *Bom-Crioulo*.

### Discussion/Questions

In Latin American literature, film, and art helped express the previously taboo areas of gender identity. For example, Frida Kahlo appears in photographs dressed in men’s clothing, and in her self-portraits, she gives her attributes of both the male and the female. Later in the century, author Manuel Puig incorporated gender-ambiguous men, and directors explored the underground culture of transvestites. What has the overall impact been? Is the depiction of gender ambiguity truly a recognition of essential truths about human nature, or does it more align with a tendency to produce spectacles in order to commodify “difference” with the result that human beings are further objectified? Take a position and provide examples to support your points.

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## **ECONOMIC HISTORY**

### INNOVATION

**Ecotourism:** Because of the many miles of seacoast, the unique tropical rain forest ecosystems, dramatic mountains, Latin American countries have been in the forefront of developing innovative tourism, including eco-tourism and cultural tourism. Costa Rica was one of the first countries to basically convert the entire country into an ecotouristic center, which meant that real estate and recreation development had to be strict, transparent, and uniformly enforced. Other countries that have made eco-tourism an emphasis include Brazil, Belize, Guatemala, Mexico, and Argentina. Argentina’s Patagonia region attracts tourists due to its proximity to the South Pole. Mexico has developed a protected regions that are supported by the government. Many are offshore, but others are in delicate ecosystems such as hot springs and waterfalls. The ecotourism is usually coupled with efforts to protect specific species, such as the endangered sea turtle, and with scientific research.

**Medicinal plants and herbs:** Many experiments have been conducted with fruit, plants and herbs of the Amazon rain forest and in subtropical rain forests of Latin America. Some of the results of the experiments have become household names and widely adopted products, including lapacho bark, stevia (used as sweetener and in anti-diabetes), yerba buena, yerba mate, and more.

**Magical realism:** One of the innovations of the Latin American literary world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the development of the genre, magical realism. It is a philosophically based approach to narrative which juxtaposes a detailed, realistic setting and characters with the supernatural. If there are antecedents in literature, perhaps the most obvious one would be Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and the introduction of Prospero’s books and Caliban. Alejo Carpentier, coined the term, “lo real maravilloso” which aligned itself with surrealism. But magical realism is much deeper than that, and often the juxtapositions of realism and

magic give rise to critiques of the status quo, namely fascist dictatorships (which is why so many purveyors of magical realism ended up in exile).

**Mexican handcrafted toys:** Traditional Mexican hand-crafted toys are unique in the world because their inspiration dates back to the civilizations before the arrival of the Europeans. Mexican hand-crafted toys enjoyed a global revival in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as they were publicized in art exhibits (Museo de Arte Popular) and in magazines. The most popular and influential hand-crafted toys include the cup and ball, felt and yarn dolls and animals, miniature clay dishes, and miniature dioramas that include people, animals, Nativity scenes, and features of the countryside, such as fruit stands, open air markets, and more. The traditional toys became so popular in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that they were often exported for use as home decorations as well as for their intended use as toys.

**Mexican Handcrafted fireworks:** The Mexican Independence Day, patron saint days and religious festivals are almost always accompanied by evening spectacles of dance and then fireworks. The fireworks are not the type you'll see in China or in the United States, but are unique to Latin America. They are hand-crafted, and in Mexico, and the fireworks fit within different shapes of frames. The most common are the "torito" (bull), the "Castillo" (castle), and other shapes. The fireworks are mounted on the frames and then set off by hand. Needless to say, this is dangerous.

**Lithium Mining:** Lithium is produced from the salt brine in ancient lake beds. There is lithium in the salt lakes and flats of Nevada and Utah, but the largest reserves are in Bolivia, in the Salar de Uyuni, located in the southern part of Bolivia, in the Andes. To process the lithium it is necessary to extract the water trapped in gravel in the old lake bed, and Bolivian chemists developed a new way of concentrating the lithium from the brine. The implications for the lithium battery industry are staggering.

### Discussion/Questions

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were times of great political change as well as industrial transformation. Some of the ways in which Latin American innovations impacted the world had to do with improvements in industrial processes in mining. Later, new forms of political activism having to do with ecological activists helped spur on ecotourism. Describe the way in which Latin American natural resources have formed the foundation of innovation.

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### TRADE

**Free Trade with Capitalism /Democracies:** The revolutions that took place in many of the countries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were often economically motivated by the desire to expand networks and have access to markets, and to control production and trade. For example, the Mexican Revolution resulted in land reform, and more access to the economy and upward mobility. In addition to having a democratic form of

government, Mexico and other countries developed support for small-holder farms and small entrepreneurial businesses.

**Protectionism / military dictatorships:** Many Latin American countries with military dictatorships controlled the economy through a wall of tariffs. The Latin American dictatorships such as Chile under Pinochet, Paraguay under Stroessner, and Argentina under Peron, invented an economic system that centered on giant infrastructure projects that would modernize the country. The large infrastructure projects, such as the huge hydroelectric dam at Itaipú, generated electricity for the nation and to export. It also gave exclusive concessions to trade in state-owned or state-regulated commodities. Unfortunately, this economic system also included payoffs and sweetheart deals to family and political cronies. It also tended to foster an underground informal economy that included trade in contraband as well as drug cartels.

**State-Run, Centrally Planned Command Economies / Communist Dictatorships:** In the countries that embraced Communist dictators, such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Venezuela, a new type of centrally-run command economy was developed. Modeled after the Soviet paradigm, the South American command economies were also focused on the violent overthrow of governments, and how best to use economic factors as a weapon against the Western economies. They traded exclusively with each other, and sought to shore up the economies of countries such as Peru that were seen as able to set up guerrilla training camps. Trade consisted of selling arms, as well as exporting drugs to finance the training camps.

**Cartels:** Some economists assert that the underground economy of the cartels, which control human and drug trafficking, among other things, is in fact larger than the “formal” economy. The countries for which this statistic could hold true could be countries like Mexico, where the drug and human trafficking activities are interlaced with the formal government. The result is invariably tremendous economic insecurity, violence, and a lack of investment by the state in schools, medical services, and more.

#### Discussion/Questions

In certain parts of Colombia during the height of the cartels, the underground “informal” economy was much larger than the formal economy. What this meant in functional terms was that while there was some circulation of the money used in trafficking (money spent in food, fiestas, rent, clothing, transportation, etc.), the flows were not official, and it was impossible to properly apply an income tax or to assure that the business contributed to the general good. Explain why it is problematic for a country to have informal trade networks (cartels, etc.) and discuss how they can have a devastating impact on legitimate trade.

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## **CULTURAL HISTORY**

### SCIENCE

**Animal husbandry:** Beef became a main export in the early 20th century with the advent of new canning and freezing technologies. Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico were leaders in developing breeds of cattle with genetic qualities allowing them to resist heat and to gain weight quickly. Brazil quickly dominated the international beef industry, thanks to the vertical integration of the beef, from farm all the way to stockyard, slaughter, and packaging.

**Canning science:** Canning is a way to preserve and transport processed food in an airtight container. Canning technologies were developed in Argentina to export beef (primarily in the form of corned beef), and the double-seamed process was perfected with a double-coated liner to assure the integrity of the contents.

**Cataract surgery:** Cuban eye clinics are world-renowned for their state of the art technology for the diagnosis and surgical intervention for eye diseases including cataracts and glaucoma.

**Lithium mining:** The Uyuni Salar of Bolivia, with its lithium-rich brines that lie within layers of an ancient lake bed, has been the site of process innovation in the production and processing of minerals such as lithium. They are found dissolved in the salty brines of the lacustrine deposits.

**Astronomy:** The largest single-aperture telescope in the world was launched in 1963 in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican scientists, collaborating with scientists from around the world, developed new workflows and processes for using the telescope for radio astronomy, atmospheric science, and radar astronomy. Major breakthroughs were accomplished in the areas of detecting perturbations in the ionosphere, which would potentially portend the deployment of nuclear warheads, which made the Arecibo telescope a vital part of military defense.

**Color Television:** Guillermo Gonzalez Camarena, who lived and worked in Guadalajara, Mexico, is widely recognized as the inventor of the color-wheel type of color television. As both an electrical and mechanical engineer, Gonzalez Camarena was able to integrate the transmission system and the electronic production of images. His first patent for the system was awarded in 1942.

#### Discussion Question:

In the twentieth century, scientific and technological breakthroughs were often very futuristic and utopian, and their main justification for funding was the promise they held out of contributing to a better, potentially utopian, world. The inventions from Latin America have fit that set of parameters quite well. What are your opinions about them? How do the advancements in science and technology in Latin America in the twentieth century create solid scaffolding for a better world? When? Where?

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#### RELIGION

**A Religious War:** The failure to truly achieve a separation of church and state resulted in the violent Cristera War in Mexico. After that war, the government of Mexico officially declared that church and State must remain separate.



**Liberation Theology:** Politically active priests such as Romero in El Salvador, sided with Marxists rebels during the Cold War, resulting in clashes between priests, nuns, the Church, and fascistic right-wing dictators. The use of Christian doctrine to rise up against social inequality and fascism was referred to as “liberation theology,” and it was often mixed with the Marxist writings of Che Guevara and others.

### Discussion/Questions

The Conquest was a two-pronged effort with government / military on one side, and religion on the other. The most coordinated attacks occurred in the large religious centers, including Tenochtitlan, Cuzco and Quito, where the Church was quick to build over the temples. But, they did not succeed in eradicating the religions. Please describe how the ancient religions persist.

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### PHILOSOPHY

**Generation of 1900 (Generation of Founders) (1910 – 1940):** The “Generation of Founders” was a movement that reacted against the positivist philosophies of the time because they were seen as simply reinforcing the very rigid class hierarchy. Jose Enrique Rodo (1871-1917) published his seminal work, *Ariel*, in 1900, in which he argued that the world tended to see Latin Americans as “Caliban” in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but instead it should be an idealistic spirit, such as the character of Ariel. Other important members of this generation are Alejandro Korn (Argentina), Antonio Caso (Mexico), and Raimundo de Farias Brito (Brazil).

**Generation of 1915:** In this generation, the anti-positivist revolt continued. It was seen as a revolt against the social, economic, and cultural domination of the elites and a desire to recognize the indigenous peoples, and the poor mestizos. The underlying dream or vision was to create a new mixed race that would fuse all races and achieve peace and a restoration of ancient traditions. Jose Vasconcelos’s *The Cosmic Race* (1925) articulates the vision, and suggests that the 1910 Mexican Revolution was an enactment of the vision of creating a peaceful world through a new people. Interestingly, this also corresponded with the American writer, Jean Toomer’s mystical vision of a brave new race in *The Blue Meridian*.

**Generation of 1930:** Known for forging the framework of what was considered to be a new philosophical framework that was uniquely Latin America, and thus fused from multiple traditions (indigenous, African, European). Their main focus was on finding a new perspective, and they were deeply influenced by the work of the Spanish philosopher, Jose Ortega y Gasset, who encouraged looking at reality deliberately from a different perspective. Miro Quesada first used the term, “forjadores” (forgers) to describe the process, and he was accompanied by Samuel Ramos (1897-1959) and José Gaos (1900-1969) in Mexico; Francisco Romero (1891-1962) and Carlos Astrada (1894-1970) in Argentina; and Juan David García Bacca (1901-1992) in Venezuela.

**Generation of 1940:** Philosophies of norms and institutions. This group of philosophers turned to the universities and state-supported institutions of culture and education to solidify and codify what was considered to be a uniquely Latin American philosophical perspective. The Latin American philosophy continued to emphasize a fusion of indigenous mindsets, as well as deep questioning of the European social fabric. In many ways, this group put together a framework that made universities not only bulwarks of identity, but also the muscle behind future revolutions or paradigmatic upheavals later in the 1960s and 1970s. It is important to note that these institutions were state-supported and access was free to qualifying

citizens, which allowed greater diffusion within society. Philosophical thinkers included Risieri Frondizi (1910-1985) and Augusto Salazar Bondy (1925-1974) in Argentina; Miguel Reale (1910-2006) in Brazil; Arturo Ardao (1912-2003) in Uruguay; and Leopoldo Zea (1912-2004) and Luis Villoro (1922- ) in Mexico.

**Generation of 1960: Liberation philosophies.** Philosophy manifested itself in social upheavals and political action in this generation. Marxist ideologies found receptive hearts and minds in the universities and public institutions that had been focused on the efforts of looking at the world through uniquely Latin American lenses. Thus, Marxist and deconstructivist philosophies that emphasized discovering the often hidden hegemonic and self-interested forces that determine (and enforce) a socially constructed notion of reality, were welcomed because they could find many examples in Latin American daily social, economic, and political daily life. Further, ethics and issues of the rights of the indigenous, women, and issues of protecting the environment were incorporated. Key thinkers include Paulo Freire, Arturo Andrés Roig (1922-2012), Enrique Dussel (1934- ), and Horacio Cerutti Guldberg (1950- ). Most were imprisoned or fled in exile due to the fact that their ideas were destabilizing for the dictators that ruled their countries.

**Generation of 1980 and Beyond:** The ideas of the Europeans, primarily Rorty, Habermas, Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida, were extremely influential in the 1980s and beyond, since they provided a framework upon which the ideas of globalism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism could rise. Feminist thought, which expanded into a general notion of the phenomenology of oppression, and the exposure of the webs of exclusion based on gender, class, ethnicity, language, sexuality, and level of “otherness” was powerful. Many authors (along with artists) focused on the ways in which otherness manifested itself. They opened the door to an examination of how existing power structures tended to fall into a state of decadence instead of finding ways to adapt or grow. It is useful to note that the “Power/Decadence” decline happens to all, regardless of how “pure” the original philosophy might have been. Important thinkers include Raul Fornet-Betancourt, Walter Mignolo, María Lugones (1948- ), and Susana Nuccetelli (1954-) from Argentina; Jorge J. E. Gracia (1942- ) and Ofelia Schutte (1945- ) from Cuba; Linda Martín Alcoff (1955- ) from Panama; and Eduardo Mendieta (1963- ) from Colombia. One example is Luis Villoro (1922-2014) a Mexican philosopher who explored the metaphysical concept of Otherness, the limits and extents of reason, as well as the link between knowledge and power. Completed an important study about Indigenismo in Mexico, which he called ‘The Revolution of Independence’, after the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1994.

### Discussion/Questions

Costumbristas recognized and documented indigenous cultures and folklore, along with mestizo traditions. The 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers took it a step further and made a conscious effort to incorporate indigenous beliefs into a philosophical framework. Explain how the 20th century philosophers incorporated older ideas and traditions with the new ideas coming from Europe.

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## ART

**Avant-garde:** All art is political and has an agenda that involves convincing the viewer of the validity of the world it represents. It may be produced to supplant existing belief systems, and also to illustrate social norms and aspirational goals (sometimes tangible in the here and now; but more often pointing to a glorious afterlife). Dramatic art production was also used to overwhelm the masses with the sheer sensory overload of the cathedrals and churches, to reinforce the spiritual and governmental powers. In the twentieth-century, art was charged with open subversion; social change that went far beyond the independence of the nineteenth-century, which left the church and the class system brutally in place. The anarchist (and later Bolshevik) political movements in Europe found artistic expression in Futurist, Vorticist and Dadaist art. In Mexico, the Mexican Revolution was accompanied by art that demanded action and also envisioned social justice.

**Modernism in South America:** In Brazil, 1922 was a pivotal moment in art, which reminds one of the impact of the Armory Show in 1909 in New York City. For Brazil and the rest of Latin America, modernist art was not tied to political activism but was more of a celebration of the arrival of technology, with important developments such as electricity, telephone communications, dams, transportation systems, and more. In that sense, they were perhaps more aligned with the Italian and French Vorticists who sought to represent machine and electric energy on a canvas. As a result, the elements one sees in South American modernist art are of then geometric shapes representing wire, electricity, transformers, gears, and machines.

Modernist Ethnographies on Canvas: Inspired by Europeans Paul Gauguin and Henri Rousseau, whose art explored the primal, the exotic and the world of the imagination, Latin American artists turned to their own cultures. Their work may be said to explore the exotic (as did the Latin American modernist poets), but above all, it affirms the “Otherness Within” – and constitutes an auto-exoticization, which is to say that it “makes it new” and imbues a procreative mythos into what was previously relegated to a lower social class. Examples include the Uruguayan painter Pedro Figari (1861–1938) who painted numerous canvases that explored the Creole traditions of his homeland. The Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García (1874–1949), who later studied and worked in Barcelona incorporated pre-Columbian motifs into his constructivist works.

**Impressionism:** Latin American impressionism was influenced by the French Impressionists, but it focused less on the effects of building up the surface by applying paint with small brush strokes, and more explorations of color fields. For example, Venezuelan artist Armando Reveron painted white-on-white to represent a coastal landscape suffused in harsh light and haze. He also sculpted dolls that he used as models.

**Mexican Muralism:** The “big three” Mexican Muralists: José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), Diego Rivera (1886–1957), and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974), painted in a naturalist and representational genre that inspired many of the world’s reformist and utopian artists (Thomas Hart Benton is perhaps the distinguished in North America). The muralists were asked to paint murals on the walls of public buildings in Mexico in order to unite a fragmented post-Revolution Mexico, and to develop a coherent sense of Mexican identity. The philosophical underpinnings were spelled out in a 1921 manifesto published by Siqueiros, which suggests that public art should teach and engage (and in this sense is very much like the Renaissance philosophy of poetry – to delight and instruct - as expressed by Sir Philip Sidney)

**Frida Kahlo:** A talented diarist and artist and a passionate advocate of Mexican culture, Frida Kahlo dedicated herself to painting after she was gravely injured in a bus accident. She painted many self-portraits (55) as mirrors of her conflicted sense of identity as a Mexican woman. Her naive style, which some categorized as Social Realism, but which artist Andre Breton considered Surrealist, explored identity, gender, cultural heritage, life, death, myth and constructed narrative.

**Abstract Expressionism:** In Latin America, abstract expressionism took a different form, and began as Constructivism and then metamorphosed into two different movements: the “Concreto Invencion” (Concrete Invention), and then the “Neo Concretism” of Brazil and surrounding nations. Works from the later Concreto-Invención included shaped canvases by Carmelo Arden Quin (Uruguay), Lidy Prati (Argentina), and Tomás Maldonado (Argentina). Neo-Concretism emerged in Brazil with Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica as well as the kinetic and optical abstractions of Gego (Venezuela), Soto, and Carlos Cruz-Diez (Venezuela).

**Surrealism:** The most recognized Latin American surrealist painter was born in Barcelona, and moved to Colombia with his parents as a young child. Alejandro Obregon (Colombia) was unique among surrealists in that he explored the boundaries between surrealism and abstraction. Another surrealist, Roberto Aizenberg, was born in Argentina and his work is evocative of Andre Breton, Salvadore Dali, and Rene Magritte.

**Abstract / Color Fields:** Manabu Mabe (Japanese-Brazilian) began his work as an artist who painted silk ties. Later, he painted large canvases, becoming well-known for his bold brush strokes, dripping paint, bright colors and calligraphy.

### Discussion/Questions

The Mexican Revolution occurred after years of dashed hopes as the Mexican Independence in the Nineteenth Century did little to level the playing field, but simply reinforced the power of the colonial families. Coincidentally, the same frustration was felt in Europe as Russian and Italian Futurists created art that simultaneously celebrated technology (electricity, motors, film) as it embraced the anarchist, avant-garde spirit of the times. The Mexican Revolution’s messages were reinforced by artists who embraced abstraction as well as the vibrant blends of typography, geometrical patterns, bold colors, and abstraction. Explain how political and artistic agendas merged in the twentieth century, and how Futurism, Vorticism, and Abstract from Europe merged with indigenous influences in Latin America.

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## LITERATURE

**Modernismo:** In Latin America, the movement that came to be known as “Modernismo” actually began in the late nineteenth century. It was deeply influenced by French symbolists and fin-de-siecle writers who rebelled against what they considered to be a limiting and materialist view of life (realism). Instead, they preferred to explore the hidden, the occult, and the transcendental, in the same manner as the French symbolist poets such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud. They focused on jarring metaphors and an emphasis on decadent sensuality to explore reality in a new way. Modernismo was forged by the Nigaraguan poet Ruben Dario, and deeply influenced by the literary journal, *La Revista Azul* (The Blue Magazine). He influenced other poets, including Antonio Machado, and the writers Juan Ramon Jimenez and Ramon Maria del Valle-Inclan. Amado Nervo, who was born in Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico, wrote intensely emotional poetry in the style of Modernismo. It emphasized the quest for peace after tragic loss, and was clearly impacted by the suicide of his brother and the death of his wife. For Nervo, the Modernist style aligned with his quest for spiritual peace and understanding.

**Before the Boom:** The beginning of the twentieth century saw the rise of “indigenismo” which referred to literature that focused on restoring and respecting indigenous cultures. It took the “costumbrista” tradition a bit further as it sought to validate and legitimize the culture of the indigenous peoples, long devalued and forced to occupy lower rungs on the social hierarchy. Writers included Jose Marti, and the Peruvians Manuel Gonzalez Prada and Jose Carlos Mariategui.

**Psychological Ficiton:** A type of literature that incorporated philosophical exploration was born with Jorge Luis Borges, whose works, most notably “Ficciones,” explored the nature of reality and consciousness, and aligned well with both minimalism and surrealist art trends. Other explorations of reality (of people and of civilizations) took shape in novels and short stories. They included Romulo Gallegos (Venezuela) and his novel, *Dona Barbara*. Other authors of fiction (both novels and short stories) who explored psychological states included Horacio Quiroga (Uruguay), Machado de Assis (Brazil), Juan Rulfo (Mexico), Alejo Carpentier (Cuba), and Mariano Azuela (Mexico).

**Boom:** The “Boom” referred to the time of economic prosperity after World War II, and it ushered in a time of remarkable literary innovation. In poetry, Pablo Neruda (Chile) developed a style of poetry that brought together earth, desire, and a sense of wonderment. Gabriela Mistral (Chile) and Mario Benedetti (Uruguay) addressed social issues, while Octavio Paz (Mexico) plunged into the heart of Mexican identity and history.

Novelists of the Boom were also recognized for their stylistic innovations as well as their willingness to explore non-linear narratives and fragmentations of self and identity. The most famous, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, received many accolades for his work, especially *100 Years of Solitude*. In it, he pioneered what came to be known as magical realism. Other authors such as Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru), Julio Cortazar (Argentina), Carlos Fuentes (Mexico), Augusto Roa Bastos (Paraguay), and Jose Donoso (Chile).

**Post-Boom and Beyond:** While the Boom explored magical realism with the goal of exploring the limits of the phenomenal world, the Post-Boom world embraced the world, often with the goal of satirizing it, or

reinforcing its essential gritty humanity. Authors include Roberto Bolano (Chile), Paulo Coelho (Brazil), Laura Esquivel (Mexico), and Luisa Valenzuela (Colombia). Authors also responded to the “dirty wars” and “disappearances” of the political dictatorships of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay with scathing novels, often written in exile. Authors included Ariel Dorfman (Chile), Eduardo Galeanos (Uruguay), Isabel Allende (Chile), and Clarice Lispector (Brazil). Transgressive fictions were explored by authors such as Jaime Bayly (Peru) and Fernando Vallejo (Colombia).

### Discussion/Questions

The twentieth century was a time of rapid technological, social, and communication change, all of which is explored in the literature of the century. Describe the types of writing that seem to be most extreme (social realism as opposed to minimalism, for example) and discuss how they could, despite their different modes of expression, be exploring the same basic questions about the human condition.

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