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Latin American Urbanization: Historical Profiles of Major Cities, by Gerard Michael Greenfield

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Book Reviews

General

Latin American Urbanization: Historical Profiles of Major Cities. Edited by GERALD MICHAEL GREENFIELD. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994. Maps. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xvii, 536 pp. Cloth. \$115.00.

Urbanization has been a defining force in the development of Latin America. From indigenous settlements to colonial cities to the current megalopolises, the *municipio*, either alone or through its relationship with the countryside and external markets, has been a critical component of the Latin American experience. A comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon is sorely lacking, a gap this reference work intends to fill.

The volume, intended for a general audience, endeavors to synthesize existing knowledge of Latin American urbanization patterns from pre-Colombian times to the late twentieth century. Sixteen U.S. and Latin American authors, most of them geographers or other social scientists, have contributed succinct urban histories for 90 cities and 21 countries. An exceedingly brief overview of urbanization, an assortment of maps and population tables, bibliographies, and a cumulative index complement the essays.

In varying degrees, the chapters emphasize spatial and demographic aspects of urban development with only cursory examination of the social, economic, and political processes that have shaped national and local urbanization patterns. Reflecting their respective disciplines, most of the authors stress the changing physical environment and the topographical or structural factors that have influenced the emergence and growth of cities, a rather limited approach that provides no historical understanding of contemporary urban problems. Pollution, poverty, crime, and shantytowns receive sporadic and inconsistent coverage. Several essays, particularly those on Brazil and Colombia, are more comprehensive in scope and are

based on the latest scholarship; but others, especially the chapter on Mexico, have not incorporated the major works and themes of urban history. The book also could have benefited from a tighter editorial hand. Not all essays include citations; some, but not most, have topographical maps; and country maps do not always identify all the major cities discussed in the national overviews.

Despite the varying quality of the essays, however, this volume can be useful to the nonspecialist; particularly, as the editor claims, the general reader seeking limited information about one country or city. Specialists in Latin American urban history may find this volume valuable because it pulls together demographic data that heretofore were scattered. Those expecting a deeper understanding of the Latin American urban experience, however, will likely be disappointed by the one-dimensional definition of urbanization presented in this handbook.

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Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference. By AMARYLL CHANADY. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. Notes. Index. xlvi, 254 pp. Cloth, \$44.95. Paper, \$18.95.

Identidad y pluralismo cultural en América Latina. By GUILLERMO BONFIL BATA-LLA. Río Piedras: EDUPR, 1993. Index. 209 pp. Paper.

The problems of difference and identity have long been central to Latin Americanists. These two works proceed from the recognition that a major part of the Latin American people is composed of a number of hybrid, heterogeneous postcolonial societies; they examine a diversity of ways to face the problems posed by the quest for identity.

The work edited by Amaryll Chanady contains 11 essays by 10 educators from the disciplines of philosophy, ethnography, and literature. In her valuable introduction, Chanady sets forth the major theme, presenting a people in large part Indian, black, and halfbreed: "the colonized Other" (p. xxv). They express themselves by rejecting the colonial cultural dominance of the "external Other"; that is, the Western world (p. xxx). In other words, as contributor Alberto Moreiras points out, "identity has always been political" (p. 210), and political too is the tone of this book.

The problem is how to attain identity independently from external values, a problem aggravated by the geographical, racial, and social divisions of the Latin American continent. Still, the contributors here point to positive patterns that may eventually lead to a unifying identity. One writer states that the Latin Americans of today continue to nationalize universal symbols as they have since the Columbus invasion. For a literary example, a book revered by Latin Americans is now receiving an entirely different interpretation: taking up the discussions set forth by José Enrique Rodó in *Ariel* (1900), writers now side with the semibarbarous