

Paul Gootenberg, Luis Reygadas, eds.. *Indelible Inequalities in Latin America: Insights from History, Politics, and Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. 248 pp. \$22.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8223-4734-7.



Reviewed by Arthur Schmidt

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Commissioned by Dennis R. Hidalgo (Virginia Tech)

This carefully crafted collection of essays derives from the Durable Inequalities of Latin America project at Stony Brook University between 2003 and 2006. Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, this multidisciplinary endeavor brought together U.S. and Latin American scholars to explore the enduring levels of inequality in Latin America. In a statement that Alexander von Humboldt could have made in the early nineteenth century in his *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811), Eric Hershberg remarks in the foreword to *Indelible Inequalities* that “Latin America is a wealthy region in which resources are horribly distributed” (p. xiii). In the midst of “an era of unprecedented social, political, and economic opening,” Latin America endures the “paradox” of “longstanding, deeply entrenched dynamics of exclusion and inequality” (p. xi).

The editors present the perpetuation of Latin American inequalities as a vital challenge to scholars, one that involves “redressing social injustice” and offers an opportunity to which, in the view of Paul Gootenberg, “interdisciplinary Latin

Americanists may make a contribution as distinctive as the development thinkers of a generation before” (p. 15). As an initial approach to this tall order, Gootenberg introduces the thinking of the noted social scientist Charles Tilly, whose *Durable Inequality* (1998) serves as an intellectual toolbox for the essays in this collection even as they seek to go beyond his structural approach by bringing in cultural and historical perspectives. The contributors to *Indelible Inequalities* employ three of Tilly’s concepts in particular: categorical inequalities, “those that create, subordinate, and sustain ordered types of human beings beyond their transitory differences and identities” (p. 17); opportunity hoarding, the mechanisms by which members of a social group seek to monopolize resources and privilege; and situations where the internal categories of an organization, such as manager and worker, overlap with those of the larger society, such as white and black or male and female.

All inequalities, the editors emphasize, are relational. Luis Reygadas notes that Latin America’s

distinction as the most unequal region of the world applies to income inequality. The richest 10 percent of the population concentrates half of all income within its pockets. But if one takes this richest sector out of the equation, Latin America's distinctiveness disappears, and its patterns of income distribution are not out of line with many other parts of the world. "Therefore," Reygadas affirms, "unlocking the key to Latin American inequality requires one to understand how a small stratum is able to appropriate a greater amount of social wealth than its counterparts elsewhere" (p. 25). He rejects any explanation that rests on either a single factor or some primordial cause, emphasizing instead the long-term historical patterns that have reinforced social distances and enabled elite persistence even when the composition of that elite has changed over time. Establishing a tone of hope that pervades all the essays of the volume, Reygadas rejects any notions of fatalism, affirming income inequalities as historical creations that can be changed.

Following these two framing essays from the editors, five scholars contribute essays on different topics, each with the aim of presenting a "new methodological portal into the problem" (p. 20). In "Health Policy and the Historical Reproduction of Class, Race, and Gender Inequality in Peru," Christina Ewig skillfully employs Tilly's categories to demonstrate how over generations Peruvian governments created two different public health systems of differing quality that at once exemplified, reinforced, and modified racial, ethnic, class, and gender inequalities. Governments, both military and civilian elected, took advantage of the opportunity hoarding behavior of middle-class elements to engage in the politics of manipulation and social stratification.

Based on extensive fieldwork in the poor community of Pamplona Alta, Jeanine Anderson's "Incommensurable Worlds of Practice and Virtue: A View from the Shantytowns of Lima" carefully delineates the aspirations and initiatives of the ur-

ban poor. She argues that "the measurement of poverty and the framing of inequality constitute one more site for the exercise of oppression against subaltern groups" (p. 81). Definitions of poverty and antipoverty programs, whether the product of government or of nongovernmental organizations, have operated without reference to the values and self-images of the poor.

Lucio Renno, in "Inequalities of Political Information and Participation: The Case of the 2002 Brazilian Elections," finds that racial inequalities and particularly gender and class differences bias the distribution of political information and participation, even when he credits Brazil as having "made notable investments to attenuate informational inequality" (p. 128). He argues that differences in neighborhood income explain more about degrees of political awareness and participation than about individual household variations. Looking at the political gender gap, Renno notes that only well-informed women are politically active, while male activism operates more independently of informational levels.

Odetta Casamayor's essay, "Between *Orishas* and Revolution: The Expression of Racial Inequalities in Post-Soviet Cuba," examines black dissidence as expressed in painting and hip-hop lyrics. She wrestles with the thorny question of how racial inequality has reemerged in what she terms "postrevolutionary, post-Soviet, post-Cold War, postcolonial, and postmodern" Cuba (p. 139). She argues that the old racial categories persisted in cultural, emotional, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of the everyday lives of people even as the policies of the revolutionary state eradicated prejudice in education, employment, and public services. As state support receded with the disintegration of the socialist system in the 1990s, Cuban blacks found themselves "nowhere." As in the South Bronx, parts of Rio de Janeiro, and other areas excluded by economic globalization, dissident art and song sprang up as a "radical discourse of

cultural recognition” amid an environment of “neglect, rootlessness, and marginality” (p. 143).

In “How Latin American Inequality Becomes Latino Inequality: A Case Study of Hudson Valley Farmworkers,” Margaret Gray carries the discussion to international levels, in this case the farms of upstate New York. She combines farmworker interviews, theoretical insights from the scholarship on transnational labor migration and dual labor markets, and Tilly’s categorical inequalities to paint a convincing picture of “the reproduction of the painful elements of the American dream—sacrifice, adverse working conditions, low pay, overcrowded housing, and separated families” (p. 188). As both international migrants and U.S. workers, Latino farm laborers are the latest social group victimized by the “categorical inequality of employer-farmworker” that has operated in the United States since the nineteenth century (p. 189). Nevertheless, despite this sober reality, Gray concludes by holding out the possibility that new political opportunities for addressing farmworker inequalities may be emerging.

Javier Auyero concludes the volume with a short afterword entitled “Funes and the Toolbox of Inequality.” He employs Jorge Luis Borges’s tale of “Funes el Memorioso” to urge moving beyond a focus on the “objective unequal distribution of material resources” in Latin America to an appreciation of “the intricate subjective representations and lived experiences” that both “perpetuate inequalities” and provide at times “the seeds” for their contestation (p. 197).

One wishes for a more comprehensive concluding essay and for more attention to have been devoted to the contradictory ways in which middle-class elements have figured into the dynamics of Latin American inequality. Nevertheless, both in its superb choice of Natalia Igúñiz Boggio’s “Charo y Rosario” as a cover photograph for the paperback edition and in its selection of essays, *Indelible Inequalities* constitutes a coherent volume that fulfills its aim of underscoring the need

for serious new scholarly attention to Latin America’s long-standing patterns of stark inequality.

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