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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

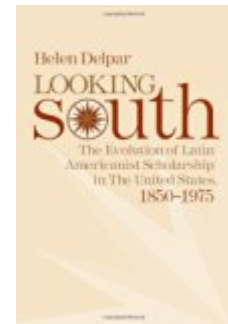


**Helen Delpar.** *Looking South: The Evolution of Latin Americanist Scholarship in the United States, 1850-1975.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008. xiii + 241 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1594-8; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8173-5464-0.

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In her book, *Looking South*, historian Helen Delpar insists that U.S. scholarly work on Latin America is always tied up with domestic concerns. From the early years of the Republic, through the beginnings of the Cold War in the twentieth century, economic, military, and social interests often “dictated the nature and intensity of academic interest” in the region (p. x). Building on the secondary works of previous scholars, and in consultation with several manuscript collections, Delpar’s book serves as an introduction to the development of Latin American studies.

Delpar begins with a short chapter on the “amateur” historians of the early nineteenth century. The push for Latin American independence during the 1810s and 1820s sparked many Americans’ interest in the region to their south. Writers such as Washington Irving and William Hickling Prescott published popular studies of prominent individuals and conquests, while early anthropologists and archeologists traveled through Latin America, collected artifacts, studied the inhabitants, and composed scholarly tracts of their findings. These early endeavors, with a tendency to link Latin American studies with U.S. history, Delpar contends, laid the groundwork for later generations of professionally trained academics.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the interest of U.S. citizens in the region mushroomed once again. New economic and commercial ties opened as business sought to take advantage of Latin American resources. The Spanish-American War; the long Mexican Revolution; and the establishment of Cuba, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti as protectorates of the United States generated more knowledge of Latin Amer-

ican affairs. Americans began traveling south, engendering a plethora of travel literature along with calls for more professionalized studies of the region. Fortuitously, at the same time, academic disciplines were maturing, establishing organizations, university presses, and journals to disseminate their research. Generous donations allowed select libraries to purchase materials on Latin America, which, coupled with greater opportunities for funding, contributed to the “emergence of Latin America as a subject worthy of study in the American university” (p. 31).

Funding, critical to the expansion of Latin American studies in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, came from both public and private institutions. After World War I, the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council were both established with funding by the Rockefeller philanthropies. The Carnegie Institution of Washington also helped with individual funding, supplying select researchers with grants to study in foreign counties. Indeed, Delpar claims that from the mid-1930s through World War II, an extraordinary expansion in the study of Latin America took place. Policymakers began to see the importance of the region in terms of national security and sought to establish more friendly relations with the counties to the south. Latin Americanists found jobs within the government, while funding avenues continued to expand. Yet even with these financial opportunities and the burgeoning interest in the region, advances at this time were limited to the disciplines of anthropology, history, and geography, while economics, political science, and sociology lagged behind. With the onset of the Cold War, however, all disciplines soon faced a downturn in support and in-

terest as national concerns turned elsewhere.

Delpar does stray from common portrayals of this period's Latin American scholars. Some contemporary authors claim that the expertise of Latin Americanists on the region developed in tandem with the political and economic ambitions of the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century. Acting as agents of U.S. imperialism, recent critics argue, these early academics went on to propagate the racist assumptions of government policymakers. Delpar, however, takes issue with this line of thinking, admitting that a number of early Latin Americanists worked for the U.S. government, yet she insists only a handful were actively employed at any given time from 1895 to 1935. Previous interpretations portray early twentieth-century scholars as a monolithic group, she maintains, ignoring that some researchers spoke out against U.S. policy, asserting the need for a Latin American viewpoint in diplomatic and economic matters. She does not consider these individuals as all-out rebels, but "neither were they unthinking mouthpieces for official U.S. policy" (p. 107).

Government policy remained important for the study of Latin America, though, as the lull period of the 1950s ended with Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba. Castro's economic and ideological ties with the Soviet Union piqued the interest of U.S. policymakers. Furthermore,

the Kennedy administration's "Alliance for Progress," coupled with the establishment of the Peace Corps and its goal of promoting economic and social reform in Latin America, generated sustained interest in the region. Once again, funding increases from the federal government and private philanthropies—such as the Ford Foundation—propelled research, helping to establish both a scholarly journal, the *Latin American Research Review*, and a national organization, the Latin American Studies Association. By the mid-1970s, Delpar maintains, the "boom" in Latin American studies had clearly waned, yet there was no "bust" reminiscent of the post-World War II years. Despite some financial cutbacks, "hundreds of specialists created by the boom of the 1960s were now entrenched in their academic bailiwicks and could not be dislodged" (p. 174).

Delpar's book is undoubtedly important for anybody who is interested in the development of scholarly work on Latin America. Yet it is also essential for those interested in topical trends in higher learning. She clearly and succinctly demonstrates the ebb and flow of academic curiosity in the particular region, while continually keeping in mind the broader context of governmental and private interests. For those concerned with individuals, Delpar's coverage of personalities and divisions within particular disciplines will be of particular use.

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