

SELECTED GEOGRAPHY TEXTS ON LATIN AMERICA

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FISCHER LÄNDERKUNDE, LATEIN-AMERIKA. Edited by GERHARD SANDNER and HANNS-ALBERT STEGER. (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, 1973. Pp. 444.)

LATIN AMERICA: A REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY. 3rd ed. By GILBERT J. BUTLAND. (London: Longman, 1972. Pp. 464.)

ECONOMICS AND SOCIETIES IN LATIN AMERICA: A GEOGRAPHICAL INTERPRETATION. 2d ed. By P. L. ODELL and D. A. PRESTON. (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1978. Pp. 289.)

LATIN AMERICA: GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES. Edited by HAROLD BLAKEMORE and CLIFFORD T. SMITH. (London: Methuen, 1974. Pp. 600.)

Textbook writing by Latin Americanist geographers for college and university audiences continues at a moderate pace. In the U.S., the field was held by three books, of which only *Latin America* by P. E. James (4th ed., Columbus, OH.: Charles E. Merrill Pub. Co., 1969) is still used actively (the books by Jones and Carlson have been out of print for some time). The cyclical trends in the educational system, the modishness of regional interests, and the rising costs of publishing books in general—and geography texts in particular because of their dependence on maps, graphs, tables, and illustrations—tend to make publishers reluctant to venture readily into regional geography texts. To this may be added a decided emphasis upon the systematic, conceptual approaches, as opposed to regional studies; a change in student enrollment follows, and the audience for regional texts declines, with the result that publishers respond to the changed curriculum needs, supporting the publication of fewer regional texts.

One of the telling features of the books under review here is that they are predominately by British and German authors. Are the Europeans so interested in Latin America, or is this a coincidence of publication schedules? The British works are in their second or third edition, indicating something about their general acceptance in Great Britain. Availability of the books may have encouraged study of the region, and because of growing interests, publishers may have been agreeable to

revisions within a short time. The study of the region's physical base and the location of things needs continual reappraisal in order to understand the emerging changes. These books make a contribution towards that effort.

The books reviewed here differ in scope and purpose: the least accessible, because of language (*Latein Amerika*), is the one that might have the greatest appeal because it is interdisciplinary in scope; Butland provides the fundamentals of the physical world that contribute to an understanding of the human use (abuse) of the earth; Blakemore and Smith is more comprehensive in scope and analytical in approach, although some elementary facts are taken for granted (something Butland does rarely); and Odell and Preston assume that the student knows the physical realm, therefore they present their work in the physical-spatial context without repeating explanations on climate, soils, flora, fauna, etc.

Butland presents each country's major regional mosaic to help the student grasp the meaning of regional individuality. Historical geography is developed with care in relation to the physical world, something that should be of great use to most students. Regional and historical geography are best studied at the same time, hence Butland performs an important service for both student and teacher. The book is in six major sections, an introduction and five key regions. One third of the text is given over to Central and Caribbean America, as the author considers this region suffers from general neglect. West and Angelli's important work tends to correct this point of view (*Middle America: Its Lands and Peoples*, 2d ed. [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976]); and the choice has been further enlarged with Blume's book (*The Caribbean Islands* [London: Longman, 1974]). The other four regions comprise the North Andean lands, the Pacific republics, the Plata republics, and Portuguese America. The author is stingy with words, which should please both students and professors, but this economy carries over into the maps. At this level of instruction, maps should be as large as possible; the map editor should have seen to it that more local detail was included and less peripheral space.

At a time when regional planning is considered a necessary tool for the future, Butland offers a clear model of what constitutes a region. The examples are many and varied so that the micro and macro scales can be understood readily. He might have included more physical detail at times, at the expense of some social aspects, so as to present the novice with varied approaches to regional assessment. Those who wish to introduce the student to more detailed regional analysis can point to Webb's *The Changing Face of Northeast Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974) or Henshall and Momsen, *A Geography of Brazilian Development* (London: Bell, 1974).

However, anyone interested in vegetation geography or soil characteristics had better turn elsewhere. Definitions of major vegetation associations are poor; this is true of *puna*, *pampa*, *yunga*, *selva*, and *chaco*. For example, what term would replace "hot forest" (p. 378)? If this is the *selva*, why change it? Reference here is to the humid tropical evergreen vegetation; palms should not be turned into trees (p. 386) and coffee bushes are just that, not trees (p. 39). A few maps of vegetation and keyed analysis for selected segments of the study region in a future edition, plus elimination of malapropisms, may be easily achieved.

The Fischer handbook is the product of the collaboration of geographers, historians, and sociologists. Compact in size and contents, the book is a reference work on population data, economic activity, major resource availability, political organization, and interregional organizations, to name a few aspects. A wide-ranging bibliography enhances the book's utility. The mood is set in chapter 2, "Perspectives on the Political and Social Development of Latin America," and is followed by a dynamic analysis of "Population Geography." Urbanization is synthesized next, then economic activities and economic integration are presented in figures, tables, and flow diagrams to assist in following post-WWII changes in the region. The first six chapters present a general survey, the remaining six are regional in focus.

The chapter on the urbanization process in the region is excellent. Sandner provides a panoramic perspective on the colonial, postrevolt, and twentieth-century urban realm. The roles of government, economy, and migration in the urbanization process are examined for their individual parts in the changing urban systems. And the contribution of interacting variables, such as immigration, agricultural production, infrastructure formation, and export activities, to the creation of urban tensions is examined. Especially impressive is the author's realistic assessment of the changing urban milieu as a result of internal migration and the irreversibility of the trends and stresses that are generated. In this connection, the assertion that large cities fail to radiate change, notably toward the interior, raises some important questions.

It is regrettable that this book has not been translated. It is concise, factual, and analytical. For anyone who reads German, this is a "handy handbook."

For those who like to work a little, Blakemore and Smith is highly recommended. It is best suited for senior students or graduate classes. Each chapter is a self-contained unit, thematically organized; there is no structural uniformity as chapter contents vary with the author's particular emphasis. Galloway's "Brazil" follows a traditional structure in which the physical characteristics are presented separately. "The River Plate Countries," by Crossley, are presented in a chronological context and the physical features are hardly appraised in the analysis. Both

authors use economic history as time-and-space frames for their discussions. Crossley's presentation of agricultural settlement of the Humid Pampa should include what criteria are used to delimit the region. To this reviewer, agricultural tools, barbed wire, crops and other innovations and their acceptance rates need discussion to familiarize students with the concept of innovation diffusion.

Odell and Preston's book may appeal to those who are problem-oriented in course presentation. The authors stress spatial order in the social and economic context, including development and underdevelopment. Physical aspects are not specifically treated as a separate topic, since students are expected to use this book after having completed a course on the general geography of the region. The maps in this text are by far the most useful among all the books reviewed here. The book says it addresses several important topics: (1) that most Latin American nations are large in area and contain extensive segments of under or unused land; (2) that urban analysis presented to date is weak; and (3) that spatial structure of the Latin American economy is presented here for the first time on a continental scale (p. 10).

The authors present themes such as "Social Geography," "Human Groups and Their Landscapes," "Types of Rural Environment," "Human Mobility," "Antecedents to Contemporary Geography of Economic Activity," and "Regional Imbalance in Economic Development." They advance certain ideas, some of which are commonplace, on how to help those on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic scale. For instance, land reform: to colonize or reform? If colonization is attempted, ecological problems arise; if reform is instituted, agricultural production tends to decline. The generalizations presented tend to be weak and there is an absence of census data, field data, or reference to data generated by planning studies. There are also some errors—the area of Buenos Aires is given as 120 km²; it is 188 km² for the city and 2,788 km² for Greater Buenos Aires—and the tables lack dates.

As a general text that is well-organized and not too large, Butland's work is a useful complement for general and interdisciplinary courses on Latin America. The book by Blakemore and Smith should at least be in the reserve reading room; better yet, use it as a text. And the Sandner-Steger book, though excellent, remains out of reach for most until it is translated.