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Beyond Renewal? Colonialism, the Canon, and the Challenging Spaces between Martí and Chakrabarty¹

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In his seminal essay “Our America,” José Martí wrote, “The history of America from the Incas to the present must be taught in clear detail and to the letter, even if the Archons of Greece are overlooked. Our Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours.”² Martí’s call to arms, written in the twilight of Spanish Empire and just before the United States would impose its will on the shape and outcome of Cuba’s thirty-year independence struggle, took on new meaning for me last year while teaching in one of the few remaining required core curricula in the United States.

To a historian of Latin America, the prospect of narrating “western civilization” from Plato to the present is daunting in its own right; making good on Martí’s exhortation while doing so seems all but impossible.

¹ I would like to thank Greg Dawes, José Carlos de la Puente, Jaymie Heilman, Fred Hoxie, Coll Thrush, and the anonymous reviewer for all of their help, insights, and critiques.

² José Martí, “Nuestra América,” *La Revista Ilustrada* (New York), 1 January, 1891. English translation at: www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art111/readings/JoseMartiOurAmerica.rtf (accessed October 15, 2013).

Reading and teaching the European-U.S. canon from Latin America also forces one to confront the “everyday paradox” famously described by Dipesh Chakrabarty: “We find these [western works] in spite of their inherent ignorance of ‘us,’ eminently useful in understanding our societies.”³ As a white-skinned historian born, raised, and working in the United States, I do not claim the “we” or “us” in the sense that Chakrabarty intended. But as a Latin Americanist teaching a course comprised almost entirely of European and U.S. “classics,” I had plenty of opportunities to reflect on the relationships shared by the western canon, higher education, and Latin America, and on the productive, perhaps surprising, tensions between Martí’s anti-colonial tract and Chakrabarty’s commentary on postcolonial thought.⁴

In the pages below, I will suggest that thinking about the histories of “civilization” and the canon from a Latin American/ist perspective requires two epistemological shifts. First, and perhaps not surprisingly, narrating “Western civilization” from Latin America necessarily involves a deep and thorough discussion of the way that ideas traveled from Latin America to Europe. (As many readers are no doubt well aware, a number of scholars have already made this point.) Second, any hope of realizing the projects laid out by Martí and Chakrabarty rests on our ability to engage both authors critically and for historians to not only chart the way that ideas traveled east across the Atlantic, but to also trace the lives and experiences of Native Americans who traveled to Europe during the colonial era. I

³ Emphasis in the original. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 29.

⁴ For overviews of post-colonial studies and post-colonial history in Latin America, see, Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, eds., *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Mark Thurner and Andrés Guerrero, eds., *After Spanish Rule: Postcolonial Predicaments of the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Barbara Weinstein, “Erecting and Erasing Boundaries: Can We Combine the ‘Indo’ and the ‘Afro’ in Latin American Studies?,” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, 19:1 (2008-2009): 129-44. For a related discussion of subaltern studies in Latin America, Florencia E. Mallon, “The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History,” *American Historical Review*, 99:5 (December 1994): 1491-1515. While there are too many works to cite here about core curricula in general, very few are told from a Latin American/ist perspective. For an important exception, see Joan L. Brown, *Confronting Our Canons: Spanish and Latin American Studies in the 21st Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010).

discuss these shifts and the important, challenging questions they raise first by addressing wealth and literacy, two perennially misconceived topics that arise again and again in “classic” works, and then through an extended discussion of a Brazilian text written in 1937 that presented some radical, if also problematic, ideas about Native peoples and the relationship between America and Europe. Before concluding I discuss how the canon’s myths and blind spots feed into a larger negation of race and racism as central aspects of “Western Civilization.”

By using Martí and Chakrabarty to frame the discussion, I hope to explore the value as well as the dangers and seductions of post- and anti-colonial critique. Together, their works beckon an approach to history and literature that at once engages and dislodges European and North American “centers” and that promises the kind of South-South dialogue that we so often seek. At the same time, it is not clear that Martí or Chakrabarty—alone or together—direct us towards a truly inclusive global project. For that we may turn to insights from the African diaspora, which, I will suggest at the end, may provide the most fitting approach to the many challenges bequeathed by colonialism, the canon, and those who have challenged both.

Contemporary Civilization

The course that I taught, officially “Introduction to Contemporary Western Civilization” and often referred to as “Contemporary Civilization” or “CC,” was created in the aftermath of World War I. Its original aim was to familiarize students with current global issues and debates, and in its earliest iterations the class included no material from before 1871.⁵ In today’s version, “contemporary” has a quite different meaning. The readings begin with Plato and do not reach the twentieth century until deep into the second semester. But the larger goals are roughly what they were a century ago. A university website describes the course’s desire “to introduce students to a range of issues concerning the kinds of communities—political, social, moral, and religious—that human beings

⁵ Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 34.

construct for themselves and the values that inform and define such communities; the course is intended to prepare students to become active and informed citizens.”⁶ CC is also pitched as an introduction to the history of western thought—a class about the most important ideas that shaped our world and a road map for “how we got here.”

In 1885, two years after the university admitted its first female students, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* became the first text written by a woman to be included on the syllabus of Literature Humanities (Lit Hum), a companion to CC. When I taught CC, it was not until the second semester, when we read Mary Wollstonecraft, that students were first exposed to a female voice. Only weeks later did we encounter our first book written by a person of color: W.E.B. DuBois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*. The results are easy to discern. Students learn that the world’s first great thinkers were Greek and Roman men. Centuries later women put women’s issues on the table. Race came next. In its presentation of a cohesive, linear history of western thought and western civilization, the Core is a fine example of the kind of historicist thinking critiqued by Chakrabarty. The curriculum’s regional focus all but reaffirms the place of Latin America and other non-western areas in the “imaginary waiting room of history” to which John Stuart Mill (another curriculum perennial) consigned them.⁷

Both Martí and Chakrabarty reject the notion that Europe alone is theoretically and historically “knowable.”⁸ But Martí’s desire to replace the European (Greek) with the American (Incan) is somewhat at odds with Chakrabarty, who does not seek to “reject or discard” European thought, which he considers “at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations.” Instead, he suggests that we explore “how this thought—which is now everybody’s heritage and which affects us all—may be renewed from and for the margins.”⁹ Here, I weigh the potential of doing just that. But

⁶ <http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/conciv> (accessed June 29, 2013).

⁷ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8. On page 6 Chakrabarty defines historicism as “the idea that to understand anything it has to be seen both *as a unity* and in its historical development.” (Emphasis mine.) He provides a longer explanation on pages 22-3.

⁸ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

what exactly does it mean to renew the canon from and for Latin America? We may begin with two simple answers—*renewal from* means greater insight about the North and *renewal for* means a better understanding and more equitable representation of the South. As we will see, when placed in conversation, Martí, the western canon¹⁰, and postcolonial theorists such as Chakrabarty raise as many questions and challenges as answers. If in the end a full realization of Chakrabarty and Martí's respective projects seems elusive, the paths that both authors point us down are nonetheless full of promise, insight, and more than a few obstacles.

Money and Indigeneity

While teaching CC, the idea of renewal for or from Latin America often seemed like a fantasy. European and North American voices dominate the assigned texts so thoroughly that even a basic reading threatens to consume anyone with fruitless tasks—constantly scrambling to incorporate counter-examples and alternative voices and in the process almost inevitably reproducing a tired Us-Them dichotomy; or, playing factual fireman charged with dousing the seemingly endless line of historical distortions and fictions about Latin America, race, gender, etc. Asking students to think about why those fictions and distortions have been engrained in our cherished texts and in our thinking can be a productive exercise, but also a difficult and tiring one if repeated (for students and instructors alike) too often.

A good example of the kind of fiction engrained in the literature comes in the common misconception, reproduced by John Locke and others, that America's native people were anathema to money and wealth and therefore also outside of civilization and history. In *The Second Treatise on Government* (1691), Locke elaborated ideas that would become building blocks of political and legal thought in the United States. Like many of his contemporaries in Europe, when Locke looked across the Atlantic he saw a window into the past. "In the beginning," Locke wrote in

¹⁰ For the purposes of this article, I have used the university's Core syllabi (available at < <http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/>) as a loose delineation of the canon.

an often-cited passage, “all the world was America.”¹¹ Little critical attention has been paid to the second half of this famous declaration, which in its entirety reads, “In the beginning all the world was America, and more so than that is now, for no such thing as money was anywhere known.” The idea that history could be traced through the development of money—and the perceived equivalence of progress, material wealth, and modernity—found another mouthpiece years later in Adam Smith, who lay out the path to development in clear, unwavering terms: “The Natural course of things is first agriculture, then manufactures, and finally foreign commerce.”¹²

Both Locke and Smith saw in America an early, underdeveloped version of Europe and also a missed opportunity. Surveying Europe’s American colonies, Locke had an easy explanation for what happened, or, more precisely what did not happen, there. “For want of improving [their land] by labour,” Native Americans had squandered a priceless chance. “[They] have not one-hundredth part of the conveniences we enjoy; and a king of a large and fruitful territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-labourer in England.”¹³ Smith drew an equally desultory conclusion, though he placed blame on the colonizers, not the colonized. On the final page of *The Wealth of Nations*, he excoriated “the rulers of Great Britian,” who had “amused the people with the imagination that they possessed a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic. This empire, however, has hitherto existed in imagination only. It has hitherto been, not an empire, but the project of an empire; not a gold mine, but the project of a gold mine.”¹⁴

¹¹ John Locke, *John Locke: Political Writings*, edited by David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 285.

¹² Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 411.

¹³ Locke, 281, 285. For discussions of Locke and America—but especially North America—see, David Armitage, “John Locke: Theorist of Empire?” in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 84n1; William G. Batz. “The Historical Anthropology of John Locke,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1974): 663-70; Herman Lebovics, “The Uses of America in Locke’s Second Treatise of Government,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47.4 (Oct.-Dec., 1986): 567-81; Vanita Seth, *Europe’s Indians: Producing Racial Difference, 1500-1900* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), esp. 74-8; Craig Yirush, *Settlers, Liberty, and Empire: The Roots of Early American Political Theory, 1675-1775* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. 5-6n16, 129-38.

¹⁴ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1028.

Locke's and Smith's depictions of America derive power, at least in part, from the fact that they are ancillary. That is, both authors are primarily interested in "larger" concerns: global politics and economics. To a student reading Locke for the first time and attempting to understand the difference between his view of man's natural state and Hobbes's, for example, or trying to grasp the details of Locke's "contract," the assertion that native people were anathema to labor and wealth may seem tangential and unimportant. The fact that similar assumptions remain embedded in scholarly and popular imaginations only makes things worse. When asked to comment on the significance of the fact that Locke's text, a foundation of our political system, depicts Native Americans as a kind of "people without history,"¹⁵ one student demurred, rejecting the premise behind the question. "But," he said, "Indians *were* people without history then." When asked to explain what he meant and how he knew what he thought he knew, the student responded that Native Americans did not have money "back then" and were therefore unable to develop sophisticated, European-style societies.¹⁶

Chronological, geographical, and racialized delineations of wealth were much less clear to British colonists than to Locke (or my student). Colonial texts are marked by contradiction, ambiguity, and misdirection, and notions of wealth were hardly stable or singular in Europe or America. Alexandra Harmon writes, "Wealth was an elemental concept in early seventeenth-century England, though one that had multiple and indefinite

¹⁵ Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

¹⁶ The student might have defended his point using any one of a number of other authors on the syllabus, where related assumptions about progress and civilization are legion. To cite just a few: Mill wrote, "The greater part of the world [i.e., everywhere but Europe] has, properly speaking, no history." Charles Darwin likened alligators to "Indians in a war dance." And Friedrich Nietzsche reasoned that in the past pain might "not hurt as much as it does now; at least that is the conclusion a doctor may arrive at who has treated Negroes (taken as representatives of prehistoric man—) for severe internal inflammations that would drive even the best constituted European to distraction—in the case of Negroes they do *not* do so." Emphasis in the original. Philip Appleman, ed., *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 115-16; John Gray, ed., *John Stuart Mill: On Liberty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79; Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, Walter Kaufman, ed. and trans., R. J. Hollingdale, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 68.

meanings.”¹⁷ As a result, and due also to the complex interests and relationships that marked their interactions in America, colonists’ assessments of native wealth, like their own definitions of it were “contradictory and ambiguous.” They “wrote with varying motives” and their interpretation of native “behavior varied, not only from person to person, but as circumstances changed.”¹⁸ Colonists often sought to drive down the value of local goods, masking their desire for copper and pearls, for example, with the hopes of securing both for a pittance. Native people, for their part, valued many of the same objects that the British identified with wealth, and, like the colonizers, also maintained political and social hierarchies by acquiring, accumulating, and exchanging those objects. “Thus,” Harmon writes:

while the colonists were assessing the Indians’ economic status, Indians were measuring their prosperity against that of the intruders, and both groups hoped to improve their fortunes by drawing their new neighbor’s resources and desirable possessions into their own exchange networks. At first, both groups also had realistic hopes of gaining materially from relations with each other, and each had cause to feel richer than the other in important respects.¹⁹

The colonists’ ambiguous, fluid, and intentionally constructed definitions of native wealth assumed remarkable definition when they cast their eyes south to the Spanish and Portuguese empires. John Smith lamented his own poor luck by way of contrast with the Iberians, who, he thought, had stumbled upon a land inhabited by industrious, knowledgeable, and wealthy people. Latin America, Smith maintained, was blessed not just by natural riches but also by the fact that its inhabitants were not as savage and barbarous as those who Smith encountered. Rare was the Spanish or Portuguese explorer who saw things the same way. Portugal did not find significant stores of precious metal in America until the end of the seventeenth century. But long before that its explorers depended on native knowledge, wherewithal, roads, and trade networks in order to extract and export lucrative timber and exotic birds, none of which

¹⁷ Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

prevented Europeans from creating their own version of an idyllic native world where wealth and property did not matter or even exist. After witnessing a procession of native people in France in the early sixteenth century, one man observed, “They know nothing of bread, wine, and money.”²⁰

As in North America, definitions of wealth in Latin America overlapped with and also diverged from those brought by Europeans. A text written in 1615 by Guamán Poma (Don Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala) includes several illustrations of Andean officials using *kipus* (knotted cords) to collect tribute payments, take inventories, and display wealth and power through dress and other familiar outward displays. Other examples emphasize distance rather than proximity. One illustration depicts an Andean nobleman, plate of gold in hand, asking a Spaniard what his people eat. The conquistador answers by pointing to the plate.²¹

The example of money and indigeneity makes it easy to see how Latin America can renew (and correct) the western canon. Any serious study of colonial sources makes clear that Locke’s and Smith’s formulations are simply incorrect. It is much less clear how reading either author can foster renewal *for* America. The depth and complexity of American definitions of wealth, and the ambiguity of European views, are all but invisible in their works, which were conceptualized and are understood as treatises about politics, economics, and society in Europe and, later, the United States, and which nonetheless end up “teaching” students about the perceived proclivities and practices of America’s “pre-” (“pre-capitalist,” “pre-conquest,” “pre-European”) people. Indeed, after grappling with Locke and Smith it is tempting to simply choose Martí over Chakrabarty and give up on the global north altogether.

²⁰ Quoted in Affonso Arinos de Mello Franco, *O Índio Brasileiro e a Revolução Francesa: As origens brasileiras da teoria da bondade natural* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1937), 66. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

²¹ Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno*. The entire text is available online at <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/en/frontpage.htm> (accessed June 29, 2013). Examples in the paragraph above are found on pages 352, 362, 371 of the digitalized text.

Europe, the Andes, and the Meanings of Literacy and Writing

Before acting on that temptation it is worth recalling Chakrabarty and other postcolonial theorist's insistence on the importance of studying the colonizer as well as the colonized. The idea is somewhat at odds with Martí, who clearly states that teaching American history "in clear detail and to the letter" may mean "overlooking" European history. But is it even possible to narrate a faithful, accurate history of the Americas while ignoring Greece and Rome?

In *On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru*, Sabine MacCormack answers with a resounding "no." She writes:

Roman and classical literature provided a framework not simply for the comprehension of empires, Inca and Spanish, in their mutual and contrapuntal resemblance to Rome, but for the construal of historical experience itself... In short, the emergence of the land of Peru, understood both geographically and conceptually, reveals the classical and Roman themes that pervade our texts to have been more than instruments of description and analysis. Rather, they also become constituents of collective consciousness and identity.²²

MacCormack shows how indigenous elites, Spaniards, and American-born *mestizos* melded European and Andean traditions and ideas as they shaped a nascent Peruvian body politic. Rather than simply emphasize European power and influence, MacCormack describes how American power brokers exercised creative force to mold and adapt classical European texts. Those texts, MacCormack argues, were not only influential, but also foundational; we cannot understand the Andes or any other region without a firm grounding in them.²³ Without rejecting the argument outright, I would like

²² Sabine MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), xv.

²³ In a similar vein, but with more emphasis on American agency, see Alcira Dueñas, *Indians and Mestizos in the Lettered City: Reshaping Justice, Social Hierarchy, and Political Culture in Colonial Peru* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2010), 93-112. Though less explicitly interested in agency, and while focused on a smaller, whiter, American-born set of writers in Brazil and a different set of European texts, David Treece embraces a frame similar to MacCormack's. Treece shows how Brazilian politicians and men of letters appropriated and adapted European ideas and also crafted their own "Indianist" traditions that would imbue Brazil with a national ethos to rival Europe and the United States. David Treece, *Exiles, Allies, Rebels: Brazil's Indianist Movement, Indigenist Politics, and the Imperial Nation-State* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000). In examining how Americans appropriated and shaped European ideas, MacCormack, Dueñas, and Treece follow in a long line of scholars writing from various places in the Americas. Enrique Florescano, for example, writes,

to suggest the need for tempering it with the two epistemological shifts mentioned earlier—thinking more seriously about the way that ideas flowed east, and exploring the unwritten histories of Native Americans who traveled to Europe during colonial times.

Scholars such as Walter Mignolo and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra helped advance the first shift in the 1990s and early 2000s by examining (from different points of view) how European-style writing came to subordinate other forms of communication and record keeping.²⁴ More recently Andeanist anthropologists and historians have pushed their ideas in new directions. Despite Mignolo's and Cañizares-Esguerra's interventions, it is still often said that the absence of writing in pre-1492 America leveled its inhabitants a double blow, facilitating European victory and leaving the pre-conquest past all but inaccessible to historians. As one review of MacCormack puts it, "any attempt to create a history of Inca Peru free of Spanish intellectual influences is doomed to fail. The only available materials about that world came through the Roman-Christian lens."²⁵ Jared Diamond treats the apparent lack of writing in the Andes as an explanation for Spanish victory. Of the written word, he states simply, "Spain possessed it, while the Inca Empire did not."²⁶

But the matter is hardly so straightforward. Frank Salomon explains the difficulty he has when students ask him, "Could the Inca write?" Potential answers seem inadequate: "'Yes [they wrote] but not in any way we can explain.' Or, 'No, but they behaved like a literate society

"American soil was not a passive recipient of the historical traditions of the Old World, but, rather, a powerful revitalizing agent of those traditions." Enrique Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico: From the Aztecs to Independence*. Translated by Albert G. Bork with the assistance of Kathryn R. Bork (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 69.

²⁴ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, Second Ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003 [1995]).

²⁵ James Muldoon, "Review: On the Wings of Time." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 38.4 (spring 2008): 605.

²⁶ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 78; Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 91.

anyway.”²⁷ South Americans have long rejected the notion that writing was new to them, pointing out that they had been “reading” things like petroglyphs and spoors for ages.²⁸ But that did not make European letters any less foreign and strange. “Many Andean persons,” Salomon explains, “perceived European writing as a member of some larger familiar class of legible signs, but a strikingly deviant member.” Our inquiries and studies should be about “*kinds* of graphic system, not the *presence or absence* of them.”²⁹

Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins also critique the equation of European-style writing and civilization:

Too often, the process of acquiring literacy is understood as the process of shifting from an oral to a written culture, such that a native person becomes learned in the European textual tradition... Native literacies emerging out of the colonial context were richer than mere adaptations to European practices of reading and viewing; they also transformed then, spawning intertextual readings that interacted with indigenous forms of recording and representation, including knot records (khipus), textiles, and sacred geography.³⁰

In Europe and America, literacy and legal culture relied on important oral, visual, and ritualistic components. *Pregoneros* (town criers) belted out edicts and pronouncements, and royal subjects displayed their loyalty to the Crown by kissing manuscripts emblazoned with the royal seal and then placing them on their heads. Colonial America was full of “educated, highly literate, and cosmopolitan” natives and mestizos who mastered and helped shape multiple forms of literacy and communicated directly with officials and royalty in Europe.

Questioning or challenging the primacy of European writing is no easy task, especially for students raised on the classics. In addition to CC, I

²⁷ Frank Salomon, *Cord Keepers: Khipus and Cultural Life in a Peruvian Village* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), xvii.

²⁸ Plenty of Latin Americans also embrace the idea that writing is anathema to Andean culture, often as a means for highlighting the violence of European conquest. For example, José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, Marjory Urquidi, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 187; Alejandro Ortiz Rescaniere, *De Adaneva a Inkarrí: Una visión indígena del Perú* (Lima: Retablo de Papel, 1973), 148.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23, 25. Emphasis in the original.

³⁰ Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City: Indigenous Literacies in the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 10.

have taught Latin American Humanities (Lat Hum), a two-course sequence that is part of the university's "Global Core," a large, somewhat unwieldy collection of non-western courses meant to complement CC and Literature Humanities. Unlike CC and Lit Hum, where the instructor has very little choice in which texts are assigned, the material for Lat Hum is selected entirely by the professor. In an end-of-the-year evaluation for Lat Hum a student expressed dismay with my choices:

While some of the readings are good, most of them reach into the tangential. This class is meant to be Latin American Humanities II—a name that implies that we'll be reading really great works. The biggest book we read this semester was an obscure interview with a Mapuche Feminist. . . That doesn't make sense. When we aren't reading Fuentes, Allende, Machado, Vargas Llosa, you can't stick that kind of obscurity into the syllabus.³¹

In my defense, I could say that the syllabus included Gabriel García Márquez, José Enrique Rodó, and other "masters," but that would be missing the point. The course also accounted for the rise, especially important in the last several decades and stimulated in great part by Rigoberta Menchú, of testimonial literature, which has helped expand the shape and boundaries of literature, though not without forceful pushback. As the student's comment suggests, Latin America's canon, like its U.S. and European counterparts, is built on a clear understanding of who comes first and who comes next. More to the point, the canons themselves are all predicated on a remarkably narrow understanding of literature.

Other examples push even harder against old ideas about literacy and writing. *The Huarochirí Manuscript*, an extraordinary document compiled around the turn of the seventeenth century by a Spanish official bent on cataloguing and then ridding the Andes of non-Christian traditions, lays waste to the idea that pre-1492 history is inaccessible. Salomon, the editor and translator, calls the text "alone of all colonial sources [to record] a prehispanic religious tradition of the Andes in an Andean language."³²

³¹ The "obscure interview" in question was Rosa Isolde Reuque Paillalef, *When a Flower Is Reborn: The Life and Times of a Mapuche Feminist*. Edited, translated, and with an introduction by Florencia E. Mallon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

³² Frank Salomon and George L. Urioste, eds. and trans., *The Huarochirí Manuscript: A Testament of Ancient and Colonial Andean Religion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 1.

The manuscript provides a unique perspective of the colonial encounter and of the way that native and mestizo mediators held onto and transformed religion and culture in the face of Spanish persecution. It is a challenging text—the chapters are not ordered in a straightforward or chronological fashion, and there are many unanswered questions regarding its sources and about the kind of editing that went into it. In other words, it opens just the kind of questions and puzzles that, for the most part, remain hidden in the works of the “usual suspects” employed to discuss Spanish-Native relations within the confines of the canon.³³ In what ways did Latin America’s native peoples shape, resist, and participate in the construction of European colonial orders? What kinds of negotiations, silences, and exclusions are part and parcel of *any* written text?

In addition to beckoning readers towards these lines of inquiry, *The Huaro chirí Manuscript* provides a window onto pre-colonial, inter-regional alliances and contentious rivalries, many of which were reordered or smashed apart after the arrival of the Europeans. Indeed, the text gives an idea not only of how the arrival of the Spanish looked at from native perspectives, but also of the diverse reactions that Andean peoples had towards an earlier set of conquerors, the Inca. Successive waves of colonization and empire wrought complex results, evident in the life and ideas of Don Cristóbal Choque Casa, a political ally of the Spanish official who helped compile the manuscript and one of the text’s main figures. In one passage, Don Cristóbal lauds the Spanish defeat of native deities, and in separate dream sequences imagines himself locked in battle with those same deities. Though he wins in the end, the dreams themselves are testament to the persistence of the practices and figures that the Spanish

³³ In CC, we read Bartolomé de las Casas, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and Francisco de Vitoria. The first two, especially, were influenced by Aristotle and are often treated as links in a chain that stretches across more than a millennium. But the idea that there is an unbroken line of thought from ancient Greece to sixteenth-century Spain to today is a fanciful one. Florescano’s suggestion that Sepúlveda and others “*unearthed* Aristotle to affirm the subjection of the imperfect to the more perfect, to justify the use of force” is surely a more accurate account. (Emphasis mine.) Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 78. On a related point, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), especially 12, 20-22.

and their intermediaries hunted and wished to destroy.³⁴ Don Cristóbal's complex relationships with Europe and America—while loyal to crown and church, he remained haunted by local beings and traditions—are hard to find in the canon, which, compared to *The Huarochirí Manuscript*, offers decidedly oversimplified, often caricature-like models of both colonizer and colonized.

Together, *The Manuscript* and the work of Salomon, Rappaport, and Cummins suggest that renewal for and from Latin America is not only viable but also productive. In this case, an American perspective teaches us about both the colonizer—their ideas about writing, like those about wealth, were neither as fixed nor as unique as we are led to believe—and the colonized, a diverse, internally differentiated group with sophisticated and powerful means of communication. Above all, Latin America renders unviable the old idea, engrained in the very concept of a “great books” course, that it is possible to understand “contemporary civilization” through western-style writing and literature alone.³⁵

“Indians in Unexpected Places”

The epistemological shift towards broader definitions of writing and literacy leaves no doubt about what renewal from and for Las Américas can look like—a more nuanced understanding of Europe and Latin America, and a sophisticated global history of the means of communication. A second equally ambitious but still incomplete proposal was issued in the book *O Índio Brasileiro e a revolução francesa: As origens brasileiras da teoria da bondade natural* (The Brazilian Indian and the French Revolution: The Brazilian Origins of the Theory of Natural Goodness), written in 1937 by the Brazilian author and statesman Afonso Arinos

³⁴ The Huarochirí Manuscript, 101-10.

³⁵ Gary Urton's Khipu Database Project (<http://khipukamayuc.fas.harvard.edu/>) and any one of a number of Latin American codices and manuscripts could be used to make similar points to the ones I have highlighted here. It is worth noting that music and art courses are often used to complement the letters portions of core curricula. But those courses also tend to reproduce a west-vs.-the-rest outlook, and the segregation of literary and non-literary sources belie the complexity and fluidity described by Salomon, Rappaport, and Cummins.

(Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco).³⁶ On the one hand, Arinos's text foreshadows MacCormack's arguments about the interrelatedness of Europe and America, and on the other hand it flips the entire question on its head. Rather than asking how the classics transformed America, Arinos set out to describe how America shaped Europe and the classics. He sought to "contribute, with a Brazilian work, to a certain genre of literary research very seriously considered in Europe and the United States, and to show to Brazilian readers the importance of our country in the field of the history of ideas."³⁷ In painstaking detail, he attempted an exegesis of the concept of "natural goodness," Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory that human beings are by nature good and ultimately corrupted by society. That idea, Arinos boldly declared, was born in Brazil.

Arinos hardly upended Europe's perceived intellectual supremacy. Nor did he challenge the teleological historicism critiqued by Chakrabarty. Nonetheless, suggesting Brazilian origins for a European idea demanded a conceptual reordering along the lines of the one described some years later by the Mexican scholar Edmundo O'Gorman, who, in arguing that America was "invented" and not "discovered," found it "necessary to devote some prior meditation to the value, meaning, and scope of historical truth."³⁸ Arinos asked his readers to do the same and argued, "the figure of the American Indian, understood as natural man, came to exercise a decisive influence on the progress of revolutionary ideas."³⁹ In some instances, Arinos went beyond the sphere of ideas and referred to actual people—as opposed to "figures"—though the line he used to separate the two is hardly clear. His text is peppered with references to "our Indian" (*nosso índio*)

³⁶ The text was republished in 1976 and again in 2000, but it remains largely unknown, even in Brazil. See Libertad Borges Bittencourt. "Resenha: Franco, Afonso Arinos de Melo. *O índio brasileiro e a Revolução Francesa*." *História Revista*, 6.2 (July-December, 2001), 184-5. Also, Peter M. Beattie. "Illustrating Race and Nation in the Paraguayan War Era: Exploring the Decline of the Tupi Guarani Warrior as the Embodiment of Brazil," in *Military Struggle and Identity Formation in Latin America: Race, Nation, and Community During the Liberal Period*, eds. Nicola Foote and René D. Harder Horst (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 177.

³⁷ Arinos, *O Índio Brasileiro*, 6.

³⁸ Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 3.

³⁹ Arinos, *O Índio Brasileiro*, 33.

and the diminutive (and thoroughly insulting) *nosso indiozinho* (“our little Indian”).

In Arinos’s account, Brazil’s native people represented a kind of gift to the country and the world, a possession and a force for a postcolonial nation attempting to rewrite its own history and tweak global hierarchies. The era in which he wrote saw the consolidation and rise of the idea, later known as “racial democracy,” that Brazil was home to a unique collection of black, white, and native people who had mixed in relative peace and produced a new tropical race. As the idea gained steam, Brazil’s indigenous people, depicted by nineteenth-century writers as a sort of national mascot, fell increasingly from view.⁴⁰ Around the same time that Arinos was writing *O Índio Brasileiro*, a combination of cultural, industrial, and military projects helped secure for Brazil greater global standing, if not permanent exit from history’s “waiting room.”

Arinos went to great lengths to demonstrate Brazil’s global significance. In subtle, even unseen ways, the greatest European thinkers had been influenced not only by “the American Indian” but also specifically by “our” Brazilian native. In distinguishing “nosso índio” from indigenous people elsewhere, Arinos challenged the coherence that Martí saw in *nuestra América*. Arinos found the idea of regional unity almost laughable: “[I] cannot help smiling at the forced synthesis of such disparate elements, of civilizations so distinct and, in a certain way, even antagonistic.”⁴¹ If Europe viewed pre-colonial America as one massive, undifferentiated Eden, Arinos sought to delineate the Brazilian particularities that made the land and its people the true progenitors of some of the most important currents in continental philosophy.

To make that claim, Arinos emphasized the way that explorer accounts of Brazil shaped European formulations of “natural man.” Thomas More’s *Utopia*, he argued, was inspired by an island off the

⁴⁰ See Beattie, “Illustrating Race and Nation”; Kaori Kodama, *Os Índios no Império do Brasil: A etnografia do IHGB entre as décadas de 1840 e 1860* (Rio de Janeiro, Editora FIOCRUZ, 2009); Marcos Morel, “Cinco imagens e múltiplos olhares: ‘Descobertas’ sobre os índios do Brasil e a fotografia do século XIX,” *História, Ciências, Saúde—Manguinhos* vol. 8 (suplemento) (2001): 1039-1058; Treece, *Exiles, Allies, Rebels*.

⁴¹ Arinos, *O Índio Brasileiro*, 229.

northeast coast that Amerigo Vespucci, whose work shaped More's, visited. The intellectual roots of Voltaire, Montaigne, and others could also be traced back to Brazil. Samuel von Pufendorf, Arinos wrote, "could not escape the interest inspired by the supposedly natural and paradisiacal life of our aborigine."⁴²

In tracing the influence of Brazil's "aborigines," Arinos charted a winding path. For example, he noted that the "absolutely undeniable" and "decisive participation" of *nosso índio* began with Jean de Léry and André Thevet, was "transformed through the genius of Montaigne," and then finally shaped "into a revolutionary instrument in the Rousseauian conception of natural goodness." In some cases, the influence was unconscious and extended beyond the immediate bounds of natural goodness. In one passage, Arinos described how Brazilian Indians, by way of Rousseau, inspired the mother of Nobel Laureate Anatole France to nurse her son. The idea that European mothers should breastfeed their own children rather than employ wet nurses, Arinos explained, came first from Brazil. "What Anatole France does not say, or did not know, is that Jean-Jacques's theory was based in the information he read about the life of our poor Indians." Citing works by de Léry, Thévet, Claude d'Abbeville, Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, and Rousseau, Arinos cast maternal breastfeeding as one of the many gifts that Brazil's native peoples bequeathed to Europe—an example of the kind of Brazilian "natural life" practices that European "moralists and philosophers" embraced as they revolutionized continental "moral ideas" and "norms of social conduct."⁴³

Nosso índio's greatest impact was found in the work of Rousseau, the "great spirit" of the French Revolution. "We can affirm without hesitation," Arinos wrote, "that Rousseau, the principal creator of the myth of the 'noble savage,' entered into this intellectual utopia guided by the hand of our Indian." The theory of natural goodness, he held, "has an intimate connection" to the "basic trilogy of ideas of the French Revolution": liberty, fraternity, and equality. Over time, and through the

⁴² Ibid., 134, 217.

⁴³ Ibid., 138-42, 144, 288.

many texts that shaped Rousseau and the Revolution, “the Brazilian Indian” functioned as an “intermediary” and “exercised great influence.”⁴⁴

Like much of Martí’s own work, Arinos’s essay is filled with Indian caricatures, which makes it difficult to embrace what might be considered the most radical interpretation of the essay: that indigenous people themselves—not just cartoonish depictions of them—transformed European thought.⁴⁵ In his drive to demonstrate “the importance of our country in the field of the history of ideas,” and torn between a European tradition full of generic, cartoonish indigenous figures and a contemporary wave of Brazilian thought that was all but erasing similar figures from the nation’s historical pantheon, he arrived at a somewhat uncomfortable middle ground. On the one hand, he insisted that native Brazilians had “decisive participation” and exercised “a decisive influence” and “great influence” in Europe.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Arinos’s “Brazilian Indian” is as nameless, faceless, and generally blank as the figures conjured by Martí, Locke and others—less human actors than historical fantasy.

Though he stopped short of attributing real power to native people, or even depicting them as real people, Arinos clearly challenged the idea that philosophy and ideas flowed from Europe to America but not in reverse. His text may therefore be understood as precursor to the second, still incomplete epistemological shift. There is little research about Native Americans in Europe and those works that do address the subject tend to focus, like Arinos, on images and abstractions. Vanita Seth provides a compelling rereading of European thought by examining the way that Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and others understood the “new world” and its inhabitants. The lives, experiences, and impact of those inhabitants—as opposed to images of them—are beyond the scope of her study, and for good reason. As she explains, to Rousseau and others, agency was “the currency of bourgeois man.”⁴⁷

Like the Andeanists who have reshaped our understanding of literacy and writing, a handful of scholars have advanced the “Red Atlantic”

⁴⁴ Ibid., 227, 292, 296, 298.

⁴⁵ Admittedly, this does not seem to have been the reading that Arinos would have intended.

⁴⁶ Arinos. *O Índio Brasileiro*, 33, 288, 292.

⁴⁷ Seth, *Europe’s Indians*, 113.

as a heuristic framework meant to replace vague Indian “figures” with real, live human beings who traveled to Europe during the colonial era.⁴⁸ Jace Weaver, who helped coin the term “Red Atlantic,” refers to the ocean separating Europe and America as “a multilane, two-way bridge that American indigenes traveled back and forth in surprising numbers.”⁴⁹ Some native and mixed-race people who traveled or were taken to Europe throughout the colonial period are well known. Don Diego de Torres, born near Bogotá to a Spanish father and Muisca mother, made two trips to Spain, where he met his wife and executed the will of the grandson of Atahualpa, the last pre-Hispanic Inca ruler.⁵⁰ El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega was a prolific writer who traveled to and published in Europe. Others, like the group of Brazilian Tupinambá who appeared in the court of King Charles IX in 1562, where they met Montaigne, remain all but anonymous, though the historical record has left behind tantalizing fragments of evidence. Robert Stam and Ella Shohat write, “Montaigne’s unnamed Tupi interlocutors shifted his own thinking by posing corrosive questions based on their assumptions about what constituted a good society—in this case their own.”⁵¹ European explorers took hundreds (and likely many more) Americans to Europe as slaves. Other indigenous people traveled there as entertainers or diplomats. In 1505, two Brazilian Indians journeyed to France. One died en route. The other, Essomericq (later baptized Binot), married a French woman and died in France years later, leaving behind at least one son and grandson. In 1532, the Briton William Hawkins wrote of “one of the savage kings of the Countrey of *Brasill*” who traveled with him to England. In 1550, some fifty Native Brazilians participated in a lavish

⁴⁸ The Red Atlantic can overlap with but is not to be confused with Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s red, as in radical, Atlantic. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Jace Weaver, “The Red Atlantic: Transoceanic Cultural Exchanges,” *American Indian Quarterly* 35.3 (2011): 421. José Carlos de la Puente Luna’s recent dissertation leaves no doubt that there are not only rich source materials about Native Latin Americans who traveled to Europe, but that those materials can be used to re-envision Atlantic history. José Carlos de la Puente Luna, “Into the Heart of the Empire: Indian Journeys to the Habsburg Royal Court” (Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 2010).

⁵⁰ Rappaport and Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City*, 1-3.

⁵¹ Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 7.

display to honor King Henry II and Catherine de Medici's visit to Rouen. For the most part, these stories have been told only in pieces, but there is no shortage of leads with which to begin tracing a more full history of Native Latin Americans in Europe.⁵²

If Arinos embraced rather than unsettled Locke's vision of a primordial America, his text still provides a lucid reminder of the many histories yet to be written and it might even inspire us to take seriously the idea that native people helped create and shape Europe and its canon not merely as avatars but active human agents. Taking this second epistemological shift to its end remains difficult, in part, because there are many fewer obvious sources with which to study Montaigne's Tupi visitors than Montaigne himself. Equally challenging is the fact that Native Americans in Europe represent one more case of scholarly blindness—a reticence to discuss, research, and ask questions about what Philip Deloria calls “Indians in unexpected places.”⁵³

Whether or not there was as much traffic on the “two-way bridge” that connected Europe with Latin America as there was on its northern counterpart, all histories of Native Americans in Europe hold revitalizing potential. Coll Thrush writes:

If Native histories of places like Portland, Oregon or Baltimore might reorient our understandings of American history, then

⁵² Ferdinand Denis, *Uma festa brasileira celebrada em Rouen em 1550*, trans. Eduardo de Almeida Navarro (São Bernardo do Campo: Bazar das Palavras, 2007); Olive Patricia Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage: And the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1984), 203-29; Harald E.L. Prins, “To the Land of the Mistigoches: American Indians Traveling to Europe in the Age of Exploration,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 17.1 (1993): 186-9; Alden T. Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11, 15-6.

⁵³ Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004). On the Iberian Atlantic, in addition to de la Puente Luna, see Howard F. Cline, “Hernando Cortés and the Aztec Indians in Spain,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, 26.2 (April 1969): 70-90; J.C.H. King, “Family of Botocudos Exhibited on Bond Street, in 1822,” in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. C.F. Feest (Aachen: Ed. Herodot, 1987); Leyla Perrone-Moisés, *Vinte luas: Viagem de Paulmier de Gonneville ao Brasil, 1503-1505* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992). For a guide to literature on Indian imagery in the British Atlantic World, which is more developed than the Luso-Atlantic literature, see Coll Thrush, “‘Meere Strangers’: Indigenous and Urban Performances in Algonquian London, 1580-1630,” in *Urban Identity and the Atlantic World*, ed. Elizabeth A. Fay and Leonard von Morzé (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 213-4, n4.

Native histories of cities like London, Paris, and Seville might reframe larger narratives of European, imperial, and even world or global histories by undermining the directionality of such narratives—the mistaken notion that power and agency moved only from European “centers” to Indigenous “margins”—as well as informing scholarly debates about the extent to which domestic European lives were shaped by the broader context and experience of empire.⁵⁴

With this in mind, and with the myths about wealth and literacy discussed above squarely in view, we can think of Arinos’s flawed but provocative text as an inspiration for future studies of Native Latin Americans who traveled to Europe and as one more way that Latin America can help simultaneously provincialize Europe and fulfill the spirit behind Martí’s rallying cry.

Race and Slavery as Tangents

Thus far we have seen how Latin American history can confront old, narrow ideas about wealth, indigeneity, and literacy, and promote more work on “Indians in unexpected places.” But these are only some of the issues that one confronts while immersed in the “classics.” In CC, I also had a firsthand view of the canon’s remarkable ability to not just silence non-white, non-male voices, but also to turn race itself into a sideshow. In 2007 (years before I arrived on campus), students responded to a spate of racist incidents and to the university’s expansion into Harlem with a hunger strike that received considerable attention and no small dose of scorn from fellow students and the media. The protestors named the Core Curriculum as a primary concern and critiqued it for “its marginalization of nonwhite peoples within the West” and its inability to help students grapple with “the issues of racialization and colonialism.”⁵⁵

Last year, I asked my students why they thought that we did not read more texts that dealt with race and why race seemed to be such a difficult topic to address in CC. Didn’t the fact that race and slavery only appear late and in passing undercut the course’s ability to truly teach us how we got here? By the time I posed the question, students had read *The*

⁵⁴ Coll Thrush, “Urban Indigenous Histories,” *Oxford Handbook of American Indian History*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Cited with kind permission from the author and editor.

⁵⁵ <http://cu-strike.blogspot.com/2007/11/demands-core-curriculum.html> (accessed July 10, 2013).

Souls of Black Folk, in which DuBois dedicates a chapter to the African American philosopher Alexander Crummell. “Crummell,” DuBois wrote more than a century ago:

did his work—he did it nobly and well; and yet I sorrow that here he worked alone, with so little human sympathy. His name to-day, in this broad land, means little, and comes to fifty million ears laden with no incense of memory or emulation. And herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor...not that men are wicked... Not that men are ignorant... Nay, but that men know so little of men.⁵⁶

Indeed. And how remarkable it is that DuBois’s chapter rings just as true today; needless to say, Crummell, who addresses many of the topics discussed in CC, is not on the syllabus.

In response to my question, one student gave an interesting, self-critical answer. She said that she and her peers tended to think about race as something separate from the “big” concerns that the course was supposed to be about—philosophy, morals, the self and its place in the universe. That idea—that race and racism are outside of, or can be cleanly separated from, “big” philosophical questions—is part and parcel of the perceived unity and exclusivity of western civilization. The student’s answer also bears the imprint of the kind of cognitive dissonance that fosters the clean separation of European literacy and wealth from American backwardness and that suppresses the kind of questioning of historical truth embraced by Arinos and O’Gorman. During the second semester, CC instructors are permitted to add a few texts to the syllabus. I made several changes, including the addition of Eduardo Galeano’s *The Open Veins of Latin America* and the decision to devote a full day each to Gandhi and Frantz Fanon, who were supposed to be crammed together into a single class session. On an evaluation, one student wrote of the additions, “though interesting they were generally irrelevant to the curriculum in that they either were tangential rather than related or not at all related to Western civ [sic].”

The student might have felt the same way about a figure I discuss in Lat Hum—Alonso de Illescas, a maroon leader who lived in Esmeraldas

⁵⁶ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 140.

(northwest Ecuador) during the 1570s and '80s and communicated regularly with Spanish officials. De Illescas was raised on Tenerife, an Atlantic island that came under Spanish control during the early fifteenth century, and then lived for a time in Seville before coming to America. Like many runaway slave groups, de Illescas's maintained fluid, sometimes antagonistic relations with its neighbors. De Illescas wielded great influence in Esmeraldas, and in 1577 the Spanish offered to make him governor of the region in exchange for resettling his community. The deal fell through, and for the next decade he engaged the crown in a series of negotiations, which, after de Illescas's death, yielded Spanish recognition of the community's rights and liberties.⁵⁷

Edmund Burke, another canon stalwart, made an off-hand remark about individuals like de Illescas in his famous commentary on the French Revolution. Addressing a would-be foil, Burke wrote:

In order to furnish, at the expence of your honour, an excuse to your apologists...you would not have been content to be represented as a gang of Maroon slaves, suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage, and therefore to be pardoned from your abuse of the liberty to which you were not accustomed and ill fitted.⁵⁸

The passage is buried in a longer explication of the sanctity of inherited property. As with Locke's often-overlooked point about money, this one—tangential to the main argument and easy to pass over without comment or reflection—is indicative of larger, unspoken (and often unquestioned) assumptions built into the classics.

It would be impossible to craft a coherent history of any part of the Americas without a serious discussion of slavery, and yet that is exactly what the canon often encourages us to do. In critiquing mercantilism for the way that it helped devalue precious metals, Adam Smith hardly pauses to mention the forced labor that made hoarding possible. “By the abundance of the American mines, those metals have become cheaper...

⁵⁷ “Maroon Chief Alonso de Illescas’ Letter to the Crown, 1586,” in *Afro-Latino Voices: Narratives from the Early Modern Ibero-Atlantic World, 1550-1812*, eds. Kathryn Joy McKnight and Leo J. Garofalo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 30-7.

⁵⁸ Edmund Burke, L.G. Mitchell, ed., *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36.

With the same annual expence of labour and commodities, Europe can annually purchase about three times the quantity of plate which it could have purchased at that time.”⁵⁹ Smith, of course, makes no mention of the fact that forced labor helped keep costs in check. Like Burke’s feckless maroons and Locke’s money-less natives, slaves are simply part of the landscape, haunting the canon and courses like CC in unseen but undeniably powerful ways.

Conclusion

Despite their many shortcomings, I found something valuable and redeemable in the texts and course that I taught.⁶⁰ In fact, some canonical works lend themselves quite well to addressing the challenges discussed above. Though hardly enlightened on the issues treated here, Immanuel Kant and René Descartes, for example, propose a radical questioning of extant realities and ideas that is altogether in line with Arinos’s and O’Gorman’s dedication to thinking hard about “the value, meaning, and scope of historical truth.” Even Adam Smith, of all people, provides a useful critique. In *The Wealth of Nations*, he attacked the inertia that he saw in university education. Many institutions, he wrote, “have chosen to remain, for a long time, the sanctuaries in which exploded systems and obsolete prejudices found shelter and protection.”⁶¹ But Smith’s, Kant’s, and Descartes’s bright ideas and good intentions are rendered all but meaningless when read without a firm commitment to confronting the kind of ideas mentioned in passing in texts like *The Second Treatise*, which purports to be about one thing and ends up “educating” students about other topics altogether. Reading the classics from Latin America—provincializing without discarding—demands and suggests more. An Americas-centered analysis leaves no doubt about the impossibility of an exclusively letters-based history of “how we got here,” and, though we

⁵⁹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 476.

⁶⁰ For a persuasive, enthusiastic defense of core curricula, see Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 28-35. Somewhat less convincing is David Denby, *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and other Indestructible Writers of the Western World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 831.

certainly do not need Latin America to tell us this, no course that purports to help students “become active and informed citizens” can treat race or slavery as sideshows of western history.

Ultimately, Martí’s challenge to replace the Greek with the Inca should be thought of as both a provocation to be tempered with other insights and as a literal instruction to be followed to the letter. As a provocation, we are tempted to ask what happens when the U.S. and Europe are cut out of the picture. But Chakrabarty and close readings of Latin American history caution against doing that and, in effect, provide a strong case for moderating Martí. After all, keeping the global north in view is the only way to see the somewhat familiar story told by MacCormack and the much more surprising ones that may be derived from Arinos. By contrast, when understood as a literal instruction, Martí’s exhortation imparts quite a different lesson, one that guides us away from renewal and towards something more elusive and potentially more radical. In a critique of literature on the African Diaspora and the Atlantic World James Sweet provides a glimpse of what that might look like. Despite their important contributions, recent works tend to “mechanically insert [Africans] into historical processes that are predetermined by the boundaries of European empire and colonialism.” Sweet continues:

Africans are almost seamlessly woven into the narrative of Western democratic triumphalism, their political challenges framed as crucial to our understandings of liberty, equality, and freedom. All of this is well and good for our understanding revolutionary and emancipatory outcomes, but it does little to reveal the impacts of African institutions and ideas on the making of the Americas (let alone Europe)... [The] erasure of African categories of knowledge reduces the history of the Atlantic to a European-American anachronism, assuming that the only ‘Black Atlantic’ history worth telling is one in which African aspirations are expressed through colonial American languages and institutions.⁶²

Similar challenges confront anyone reading or teaching the canon from Latin America, or engaging the history of colonial Latin America or the Red Atlantic. In this sense, neither Martí nor Chakrabarty provide a perfect road map. The examples discussed here suggest that renewal for and from

⁶² James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2, 5.

America is possible and productive, but also inextricably entangled with the kind of colonial languages and institutions described by Sweet. And while Martí's call to arms is inspiring, its full realization seems all but impossible (and perhaps even misguided) due to the enduring power of those same colonial forces.

If insights from the African diaspora can help us incorporate and also move beyond Chakrabarty and Martí, perhaps no scholarly argument will help confront the kind of inertia described by Adam Smith. Just after I finished teaching CC, I attended Class Day, where the keynote speaker, a famous playwright and alumnus, reflected on his experience decades ago on campus. At the end of a frank, critical, and introspective lecture, especially by the standards of most graduation ceremonies, he paused to talk about the Core, which he called "the most perfect curriculum ever designed." The statement was met with silence by some in attendance. But a large number of students and a small, boisterous portion of the faculty and administration cheered loudly, their applause echoing off the face of the library behind them.

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