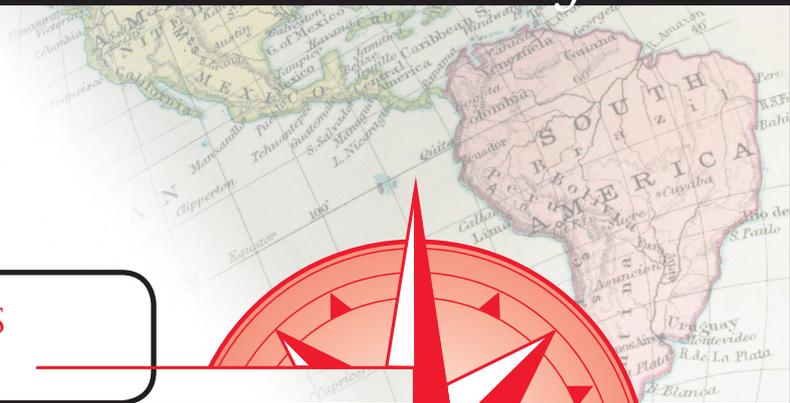


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BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA



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Dear Fellows,

This newsletter focuses on the bicentennial celebrations currently underway in many Latin American countries. Like most anniversaries and special dates, these celebrations offer an opportunity to assess the past and reimagine the future. We invited our fellows to reflect on the ongoing or upcoming bicentennial celebrations in their countries. Fellows from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico and the United States discuss the meaning of the commemorations, reflect on the histories of their countries and assess the present in view of past ideals.

Their reflections evoke a shared vision, rooted in the past, of a hemisphere in search of its own course in history: Most countries in the region will celebrate the bicentennial of their independence during the next 20 years. The fellows point out the challenges involved in creating independent states and their institutions. During the past 200 years, the region has experienced a dramatic transformation from weak statehoods that lacked participation of actors such as the indigenous populations and the descendants of African slaves, to relatively stable democracies. Nevertheless, much progress is still needed in the social, political and economic spheres.

These articles remind us that bicentennial celebrations are collective acts, as was the search for independence and self-determination. This newsletter responds to the need to collectively analyze this important moment in our shared history.

I want to thank all of you who contributed to this newsletter with thoughtful articles that put Latin America's bicentennial celebrations into perspective. For the fall 2010 edition, we would welcome your reflections and analyses regarding global energy trends. We are especially interested in receiving contributions from our Canadian, Mexican, Brazilian and Venezuelan fellows. The newsletter provides a space for you to share your thoughts and knowledge on this significant topic, which is critical for our region and our planet in general.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter,

Erika de la Garza
Program Director
Latin American Initiative



spring 2010

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Independence and autonomy: A reflection on Argentina

By Argentine fellow Pablo Ava ('08)

In Argentina, the bicentennial celebration commemorates a series of events known as the Week of May 1810. During this week, the so-called Revolution of May 25 took place in Buenos Aires, which led to the establishment of the first native government or First Junta. This revolution was influenced by other juntas, such as the Juntas of Mexico (1808), Montevideo (1808), Quito (1809), the Revolution of Chuquisaca and the Junta of La Paz (1809).

The events of May 1810 represented, in sociological terms, an urban movement of the economic elite in the city of Buenos Aires who were affected by the political and trade restrictions of their mother country, Spain, and by the changes caused by the Napoleon invasions. These situations opened the door to greater decision-making autonomy in the colonies, which — influenced by the ideas of philosophers Francisco Suárez¹ and Jean-Jacques Rousseau — acquired theoretical and political fundamentals.

The “criollos,” as the first generation born in the New World were called, demanded a greater say in the fate of the Rio de la Plata Viceroyalty and its affairs, in order not to depend on the Cádiz Junta, which was established as the government of resistance to Napoleon in Spain. These demands had a precedent in the organization of the defense of the city against the first British invasion of Buenos Aires in 1806. This invasion caused the local Spanish authority to flee, which made the local elite aware of the need and the possibility of having their own organization that could respond to their needs and interests.

The process of independence from Spain concluded in 1816 with the Declaration of Independence by the Congress of Tucumán. However, one of the main components of true independence was still missing: their own government framework.

Independence in the Americas involves two simultaneous processes: independence from the mother country and a defined, autonomous political organization — that is to say, independence from someone else's project and the definition of one's own project. Without the completion of both processes, one cannot speak of independence.

The first of these processes advanced with great speed. The battles for independence spread across the continent, and the armies behaved as if they represented one nation because the goal was to set the Americas free. The armies of General José de San Martín left Argentina and fought in what is currently Chile and Peru. The army of Simón Bolívar left Venezuela and fought in Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia. In less than 10 years, most of the colonies were freed from the Kingdom of Spain. The goal of spreading independence across the continent was achieved.

The civil wars that followed would be longer, bloodier and more costly than the wars of independence from Spain. Throughout the continent, independence from the colonies unleashed local interests. In 1853, 43 years after the May Revolution, the process of creating institutions led to the establishment of a constitutional framework that organized the territory and defined the social and economic goals for the development of society.

Two hundred years after these struggles for independence, we view both processes as interdependent. There is no chance of consolidating our nation's identity without recognizing that of other nations, and that of the collective project of a single America.

The Organization of American States, the economic regional integration agreements, the Summit of the Americas and the Inter-American System of Human Rights have promoted institutional agreements that lead to dialogue and accords. But there persists a risk of new forms of colonialism, present in a growing economic and financial dependence on other countries. Foreign companies are now a strong presence in Latin America; it seems that the region's economic independence is in jeopardy once again. In addition, strong local leaders and a disregard of continental agreements conspire against the integration of the Americas.

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Bernardo de Monteagudo, one of the main theoreticians on the confederation of the Americas, demanded, shortly after the fight for independence began, the establishment of a continental Congress that gave an organizational shape to the entire region:

“Independence, peace and guarantees: These are the great results we must expect from the continental assembly ... Its original idea is the same one we are discussing now: Form a light source illuminating the Americas; create a power uniting the forces of fourteen million people; strengthen the relations of all Americans, uniting them by the great bond of a common congress, so that they learn to identify their interests and literally form one single family.”²

The bicentennial must be an opportunity to define a new institutional framework for the Americas, to take one more step toward a model of confederated integration, and, above all, to define goals and common projects for the region.

¹ A Spanish priest, philosopher and author of the “Spanish Scholastic School” (1548-1647).

² Bernardo de Monteagudo, “Essay on the need for a general federation amongst the Hispanic American states and a plan for its organization,” in “Explaining Argentina, Fundamental Essays,” ed. Jorge Lafforgue (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2009).

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Bolivia: The incomplete history

By Bolivian fellow Marcelo Quiroga ('08)

“Perhaps the fate of man is not to fully fulfill himself in justice, but to live perpetually hungry and thirsty for justice. However, this is always a great fate.”

— Aldo Moro, 1934

In May 1809, the independence process in Latin America began with the first “cry for freedom” in Bolivia. The Spanish Crown and the “criollo” rebels initiated a struggle for political power, and neither faction took into account, other than for utilitarian purposes, the great indigenous majority living in this region of the continent. Today, 200 years later, Bolivia re-elected an indigenous president to a second term with 65 percent of the vote. How far we have come!

There is no doubt that Bolivia has made strides in the inclusion of indigenous people. However, it is harder to claim that it has advanced in other areas, such as guaranteeing the enforcement of laws and the stability of legal institutions, or the political freedom and economic prosperity of its citizens. As stated by Manuel Suárez, a Ph.D. in political science and a 2003 Americas Project fellow, “In Bolivia, there is no State.”¹ Why have we not advanced in these other areas?

As noted by University of Georgia political science professor Howard J. Wiarda, “Latin America is a fragment of the Europe between 1492 and 1570 (the Conquest Era), and a fragment of a special part of Europe, the Iberian Peninsula. It is a fragment of the medieval Europe of its time, Catholic, corporate, Roman, semifudal and a reflection of the main institutions of Spain and Portugal, not of France, Germany, Great Britain or other northwestern European countries.”² This description is accurate and helps to explain Bolivia.

In Bolivia, in the words of doctor of law Joan Prats, “It is not the law that assigns positions but the arbitral, and to a great extent, arbitrary power of the presidency.”³ The president of the country, therefore, is a kind of chieftain of the colony or a leader of the independence process. This means that, as proposed by Suárez, it is the “lack of objectivity in the domination of the State that generates a highly subjective power in the enforcement of the law and the rule.”⁴ This renders Bolivia an inefficient state in the task of guaranteeing the enforcement of the law and the stability of its legal institutions, as well as the political freedom and economic prosperity of its citizens.

During the era of Brazilian president Evo Morales, ideas and beliefs that had appeared in the struggle for independence and the subsequent revolutionary processes — such as the concepts of popular sovereignty and nation — again surfaced and were used as a tactic for the taking of power. Thus, as explained by Suárez, “nationalism can be understood as the last ethical option for the political — to date.”⁵ However, so far, these “nationalistic” ideas and beliefs have not been able to legitimize the consolidation of the nation-state in Bolivia.

The resounding electoral victory of Evo Morales in December 2009 opened the possibility that the government will increase its power and impose the recently approved constitution legally and coercively. That is to say, unlike what happened in recent years, the government has the legitimacy to enforce the law — but not any law, its own law. It could ratify a constitution that is not the product of an agreement between the main political forces, but the product of the victory of one and the complete defeat of others. The criollos defeated the Spanish Crown and imposed their own laws; a similar situation is developing today as a powerful group of peasants with indigenous origins from western Bolivia face the corporate bourgeoisie from the eastern part of the country.

This increase in government power does not necessarily include the possibility of consolidation of the nation-state in Bolivia, and it is very likely that subjectivity in law enforcement will remain. Furthermore, the absolute control of public institutions by the central government opens the possibility of excesses that could detract from the rule of law. As mentioned by Prats, “Without the actual rule of law, without independence of the judicial power, and without the executive power having respect for the functional autonomy of the legislative power, it is very unlikely that we’ll be able to build the rule of law.”⁶

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Have we really made progress? After 200 years, the indigenous people are no longer a marginal, under-represented group. They form part of Congress, lead the ministries and even the presidency. But these are just symbolic details. The reality of indigenous peoples, and not just in Bolivia, in many ways mirrors the early days of the republic. Citizens cannot trust justice because there is no guarantee that their rights will be respected; political freedom is not guaranteed because the institutions are not upholding the law; and, above all, a great majority of citizens still live in extreme poverty. Therefore, we still face the challenge to build the state.

¹ Manuel Suárez, "Nation and Political Theology, Statehood in Bolivia" (Madrid: Sequitur, 1999).

² H.J. Wiarda, ed., "Politics and Social Change in Latin America. Still a Distinct Tradition?" (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

³ Joan Prats, "Experiences in Legislative Modernization in Central America and the Dominican Republic," Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, Series on Parliaments and Governability, Ibero-American Institute on Human Rights, 1997.

⁴ Suárez, "Nation and Political Theology."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Prats, "Experiences in Legislative Modernization."

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Mexico: Two hundred years in search of our fatherland and freedom

By Mexican fellow Alberto Capella ('09)

This year, Mexico celebrates 200 years of independence from the Spanish monarchy and the 100-year anniversary of the revolution against the dictatorship of Mexican president Porfirio Díaz. These two historical events have played a major role in shaping the identity of the Mexican people; their main players are and will be considered the heroes to whom we owe our fatherland and freedom.

Among those worthy of mention are the father of the country, the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, who earned this title by calling for rebellion on Sept. 16, 1810, taking command of an army of approximately 6,000 indigenous peasants and becoming the first leader in the fight for independence; and the servant of the fatherland, José María Morelos y Pavón, considered one of the main heirs and idealists in the armed fight initiated by Miguel Hidalgo after his death on July 18, 1811. These men, among many others, sacrificed their lives and wrote the history of the independence of Mexico, whose first chapters began in 1810.

This was a time when the monarchy and the wealthy class had complete control over the less privileged, and slavery became the mainstay of the colonial economy in the new Spain. Over the years, the situation provoked a deep discontent and social rancor due to the constant abuses and excesses against the less-privileged social classes. The social revolutions in the United States and France very likely influenced those known as the “Conspirators of Queretaro,” so called because it was in this city where the meetings to prepare for independence took place. Queretaro offered the security of the city’s mayor, or “corregidor,” who was one of the conspirators; other conspirators included lawyers and the military and tradesmen, such as the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, the military figure Ignacio Allende, the small-scale industrialist Juan Aldama, and, as was mentioned earlier, the corregidor of the city José Miguel Domínguez and his wife Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez.

After 10 years of civil war and the death of their most important leaders, Hidalgo and Morelos, the pro-independence movement was very weakened and close to failure. The rebels were facing the harsh Spanish resistance and the apathy of the most influential “criollos” in the colony. Troops under the command of Agustín de Iturbide fought insurgents under the command of Vicente Guerrero in the southern part of the country. Not until 1821, after Iturbide offered Guerrero the Plan of Iguala — a political pact that satisfied liberals and conservative Catholics — was the first independent government achieved.

One hundred years later, the first steps in the Mexican Revolution were taken; the purpose was to defeat the 30-year dictatorship of President Díaz. Francisco I. Madero, an entrepreneur and politician from the state of Coahuila, challenged the legitimacy of the elections and enacted the San Luis Plan which, among other things, nullified the rule of Díaz. Madero then provisionally assumed the presidency of the republic.

This social revolution, which was characterized by constant alliances, divisions and betrayals of the main players who wrote this significant phase of Mexican history, led to the start of grassroots political movements. In particular, local leaders like Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa formed the armies of the North and South that played a key role in the outcome of the social uprising.

Almost 20 years after the start of the revolution in 1910, political destabilization in the country was a constant feature, with many leaders and grassroots political movements feeling worthy of holding power. For that reason, in 1929, Plutarco Elías Calles founded the Revolutionary National Party (Partido Nacional Revolucionario, or PNR). Calles brought together political forces that were constantly fighting to maintain power, thereby creating a state party which, years later, would become the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI). For more than 70 years, the PRI ruled contemporary Mexican politics with a near-absolute control of the country’s institutions. From the start, the PRI created a political class that was primarily based on the corporatism of new workers’ and peasants’ unions, and commanded by small groups of military figures and chieftains of several regions of the country.

To the generations that lived the intensity of PRI-ista absolutism, democracy and political freedom were concepts with little or no real-life application.

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It was during these 70 years of one-party rule that the PRI promoted a public school curriculum that continuously highlighted the historical events of Sept. 16, 1810, and the Mexican Revolution of Nov. 20, 1910. It would seem that by promoting the historical events that give us our identity, the government aimed to remind Mexicans that we lived in an independent country with freedoms we owe to our heroes of 1810. Also, that we were enjoying the political rights that the players of the revolution of 1910 had attained with their sacrifice, a concept which, in my view, is truly far from the truth.

After a series of social and political events in the 1980s and 1990s that occurred in the quest for political equality and support of democracy at the polls, finally in the year 2000 an opposition party to the PRI won the presidency of the republic, with Vicente Fox Quesada at the head of the ticket. It was in the first years of this new government when more persistent talk about the celebrations of the bicentennial of independence and the centennial of the Mexican Revolution started.

The arrival of these historic anniversaries could not have been timelier, especially considering the social and political realities facing our country. Many Mexican historians, journalists, pundits and politicians have stated in the past few months that this should be a time for reflection more than a celebration of the arrival of the bicentennial and centennial — a time to analyze what we have achieved as a nation, to assess if we have completely fulfilled and upheld the fundamental principles that 200 years ago motivated the heroes of our independence to offer their lives and that of millions of Mexicans in the fight to abolish slavery, promote freedom and give birth to our fatherland.

Today in Mexico, many believe we live in a weak democracy. We have a democracy of political parties, which only expresses itself by respecting the results of each election, and in fact has turned the leaders of political institutions into the lords and masters of the most important decisions regarding the fate of our country. Nowadays, the enormous corporate capitals, which have mostly developed thanks to government concessions, play a key role in government decisions. In the last decades, these capitals have managed to acquire significant economic control in Mexico.

As a nation, we live a reality that is definitely not enviable. The violence generated mainly by organized crime has reached never-before-seen levels, and shows not only the deep corruption that for decades has infiltrated government institutions, but also the deep incompetence — and in many cases, the indifference — of many leaders who have failed to address this scourge.

The world economic crisis that has wreaked havoc in Mexico has shown us the economic fantasy we have lived for decades, and that to a large extent was based on oil production. In Mexico, an oil country, we pay gasoline prices that are among the highest in the world, and our telephone and telecommunication services are the most expensive in the Americas.

The fierce struggle for power that the political parties have engaged in these past few years is a clear example of the voracious behavior of those who aspire to rule us. It is the search for power, for power itself.

Faced with this reality, I wonder: Is this the vision of a free and independent nation that motivated Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla to promote the war of independence? Is this the country of freedoms that José María Morelos y Pavón envisioned? Is this the fatherland free of dictatorships and the absolute political control of a few that motivated Francisco I. Madero to start the Mexican Revolution? Is this the peaceful nation of solid institutions promoted by Venustiano Carranza? Is the current Mexico able to honor with its example the thousands of heroes who sacrificed their lives to give us our fatherland and freedom?

I believe that as a nation, we still need more effort and sacrifice to be the free, sovereign and democratic nation that most of our national heroes envisioned, and for which they gave their lives. This is the reason why this celebration, this bicentennial year, is an excellent pretext for reflection. It will allow us to determine a social and political pact so that we may become the prosperous and peaceful nation Mexicans desire.

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A new independence and a new revolution for Mexico

By Mexican fellow Roberto Grajales ('08)

“This antagonism between victors and vanquished, between privileged and victims, between haves and have nots, was the decisive and determining factor of the war. Around it political motives and resentments gathered, aspirations of the most learned men for democracy and free determination; but what drew the masses, hungry for justice, to the movement was the pressing yearning to conquer it, to enforce respect for infringed-upon dignity and human rights; for this they resorted to force, the supreme and only recourse after being denied a lawful and peaceful one.”¹

—Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama

This year, Mexico celebrates the bicentennial of the independence from Spain and the centennial of the revolution against the autocratic rule of President Porfirio Díaz. This is an excellent opportunity for deep reflection that allows citizens and foreigners to become aware of this country’s current reality as an independent nation and to outline expectations for the future.

Mexico’s wealth is evident and widely known worldwide. Our beaches, our plains and the kindness of our people, among other characteristics, have distinguished us as a nation worthy of being known by citizens around the world. Other international cities look to our great capital city as a point of reference due to its high level of development. However, it must be pointed out that our nation is much more than Mexico City. We have numerous communities far from civilization that may lack adequate urban infrastructure, but are worthy of being explored for their landscapes and great natural riches.

On this matter, I would like to place particular emphasis on municipalities such as Jopala in the northwestern hills, an indigenous area in the state of Puebla where I have gone several times with the intention of helping residents find better living conditions. This area has a great natural wealth that can only be accessed through unpaved roads; it is endowed with clean rivers and unparalleled fauna and flora, away from civilization.

At times I am tempted to wonder if, 200 years after our independence, it is worth it to provide what is necessary to bring progress to certain communities that, in terms of urban infrastructure and equipment, draw them closer to civilization — especially considering pollution in large cities and excessive and disorderly urban growth that is detrimental to the quality of life and that result in urban poverty. It is a sensitive problem that is very hard to address.

However, my response to the fostering of development is always positive, but with a caveat: generate sustainable urban development. In that sense, isolated communities have a great future advantage. They can benefit from the experience, successes and failures of the current urban centers. In this regard, I am highly optimistic because I see Mexico as a country that advances with a firm step, generating public policies that in terms of urban, environmental and social development are increasingly more suitable to the deep-rooted habits and customs of our citizens. Despite the advances made these past few years in terms of infrastructure and social development, links between the governmental spheres and the citizens in our more isolated communities are missing.

If the 2000 election of a new ruling party had not brought a change in social politics and government actions, Mexico would be on the brink of a new revolution. Although there are opposing opinions, our country is on the right path and it is not possible to revert decades of backwardness in just one decade. It is true that the people cannot wait. Our communities are in urgent need of solutions in the short, middle and long term. That is why I constantly make an appeal for a conscience revolution; for starting a war against conformism, mediocrity and the lack of commitment. This path will lead us to an end in which all of us win.

Let us be a generation that caused a revolution much more complex than any armed war. Such a revolution requires true leaders and it involves the participation of all Mexicans, bar none. To talk about an armed revolution is to think small. Those who promote a new armed struggle are placing their name in history as shortsighted citizens. Those of us who propose a revolution of conscience envision a much harder and longer struggle, but one that will continue to bear fruit for generations to come. The answer is in us, in this generation.

¹ Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama and P. Castro, “Historia del Agrarismo” (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana: Iztalapa, Mexico, 2002).

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Commemoration, reflection and paradigms: The bicentennial of independence in the Republic of Colombia

By Colombian fellow Julio César Puentes ('08)

“The bicentennial is more a commemoration than a celebration that provides us with an opportunity to reflect. And if we talk about reflection, one of the things that I want to share with all Colombians is that in history, what is important is not celebrating or remembering a time gone by, but letting this reflection be a driving force to create paradigms based on the experiences acquired.”¹

— Raúl Cuero

I admit that when I was asked to write on the bicentennial of Colombia, I really did not realize the magnitude of this project. Now, after learning how the government plans to commemorate the bicentennial, after two months of intense reading about the historical context in which the independence movement took place, after multiple conversations on what was gained and lost after July 20, 1810, and after heated discussions on where we are and where we are headed, there are definitely many more questions than answers for me to share, because there are more than 200 years of history and events of which, in my opinion, we have not truly become aware.

Government plans for the bicentennial celebration

In Colombia in 2008, the president abolished the High Presidential Commission for the Management of International and Economic and Social Cooperation Agreements and created the High Presidential Commission for the Bicentennial of the Independence.² Months later, he appointed the Commission of Honor for the Bicentennial, led by the first lady, former presidents and a group of distinguished representatives from different sectors of the country.

The mission of the commission has been to advise the government on plans, programs and projects for the bicentennial. It has also been in charge of coordinating the bicentennial plans and programs of Colombia's various ministries. Naturally, this includes organizing competitions and commemorative acts, in keeping with the president's instructions.

So far, one of the most outstanding acts is the creation of the “2019 II Centennial Colombian Vision,”³ an ambitious plan for Colombia's future led by the National Department of Planning. This plan is based on two principles. The first consolidates a deeply democratic political model and is based on the principles of freedom, tolerance and fraternity. The second principle reinforces a socioeconomic model without exclusions that is based on equal opportunities and a state that guarantees social equity.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism wanted to join this initiative with “The Liberation Road,” which would allow tourists to follow the trail taken by the army during the Liberation Campaign of 1819. But after the arduous task of planning and designing the project, a conclusion was reached: Despite enormous strides in turning the long trail into a tourist attraction, it was not ready for the public. Many stretches run through areas of low socioeconomic development, and the lack of roads and other obstacles make the Liberation Road a long-term project that will continue past the bicentennial.⁴

The Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications has developed a series of initiatives such as a Web page devoted to the bicentennial, audio and video presentations, dramatizations, printed materials, a series of conferences and commemorative stamps. All of these efforts are aimed at disseminating and promoting further our magical realism, our unique history.⁵

Historical framework of Colombian independence

Three strong historical precedents set the ideological course for independence in Latin America: the events that led to colonization of the territories in Latin America; the Enlightenment movement and the French Revolution centuries later; and the early independence of the United States.

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The circumstances under which the territories were colonized undoubtedly set the way in which social relations in the region were established and merged. While the English Puritans fled religious conflict and sought a fresh start in the New World, the Spanish wanted to finance the consolidation of an empire. The Enlightenment — with the ideological underpinnings of the rights of men, the notion of equality before the law for all citizens and deism — was the basis of the beliefs of the leaders of our independence. Lastly, the independence of the United States, among the countless lessons it generated, showed that a break from Europe might be possible.

In the early 1800s, Spain was going through hard times. French expansionism, the conflict with England and Portugal, and the diminished military power after Trafalgar led Spain to need more resources to guarantee its future. But Spain's response — a tax hike in the colonies — exacerbated the "criollos" nonconformity and sparked the revolutionary events that followed. Until then, the only thing they were demanding was greater representation before the Crown.⁶

The discussion on what was gained and lost with independence is far-reaching and endless. There is no question that freedom and autonomy from Spain, as well as self-determination, were gained. Moreover, independence ended the practice of paying tributes to the Crown; this implied a tax reduction and allowed the possibility of more freedom in international trade. However, human lives and capital were lost. A fledgling economy and a framework to produce goods and services were completely destroyed. Additionally, thanks to the independence movement and all its battles, we incurred a foreign debt that could not be paid and we are still in debt.

Let us reflect on three topics: unity, rights and equality. Despite our independence in 1810 and the ideological foundations on which it was based, the unity and the dream of an integrated nation was the first thing that was lost. Initially, the first republic, known as "La Gran Colombia," was composed of the union of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Panama. However, 20 years later, the separation of Venezuela and Ecuador took place. Unity is precisely what has been the most elusive to Colombia. After the war of independence, the country went through at least eight armed conflicts, including the Civil War of the Thousand Days, the war against Peru and the Massacre of the Banana Fields. The conflict with guerrilla forces has been ongoing for over 50 years now — exactly a quarter of the period that has elapsed in these 200 years.

As for the rights of citizens, during the first years as a free republic, only free men who were over 21 years of age, married and owned property could vote. Slaves, a majority of the population in those days, did not have this right. Only in 1853 was slavery abolished and former slaves recognized as citizens. Likewise, the democratic election mechanisms were true to the principles of the Enlightenment, where only the most notable and learned persons were elected. To be allowed to vote, a citizen had to know how to read and write, as well as have an annual income and/or properties. Direct election of the president, by all who considered themselves citizens, was only established in 1910. Women started to exist politically only 53 years ago, in 1957, when they were granted the right to vote. Only 24 years ago the popular election of mayors and governors was established in Colombia.

The issue of equality has not been resolved in Colombia. Despite unwavering struggles to close the gap, there are still great social differences. Today, 46 percent of the total population lives in poverty, earning less than four dollars a day; only primary and middle school education is free. Health care is still far from being a right for the disadvantaged.

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Conclusion

The starting point of any paradigm is becoming aware of the situation and recognizing the experience that has been acquired. The challenge is to break out of the usual circle of celebration or remembrance and implement actions leading to deep and true changes. Colombia has undergone a long and painful learning process. The 21st century appears to be promising. Major changes have been achieved in the past few decades and everything points to our being able to establish a new paradigm. Sometimes the news seems to mar the outlook, however. But when Bolívar's heirs want to emulate the dream of perpetuating themselves in power, I remember that, fortunately, for each Bolívar there will always be a Santander. Francisco de Paula Santander was a close collaborator of Bolívar during the quest for independence, and served as the first vice president of La Gran Colombia. Over time, their political ideologies diverged: Bolívar was pro-military and Santander, more pro-civilian. Santander came to be known as the "Man of the Laws," and he is remembered through a quote etched into the walls of the Colombian justice building: "Colombians, arms gave you independence; the law will give you freedom."

¹ Raúl Cuero is a Ph.D. in microbiology who graduated from Strathclyde University. He received countless awards for his inventions in the field of science and biotechnology, and has been recognized by NASA. The quote is taken from an op-ed published in 2009 on the bicentennial Web page. The link to the document is: <http://www.bicentenario.gov.co/> (op-ed #3). For more information on Cuero's life, please visit http://www.raulcuerobiotech.com/spanish/sobre_el/biografia.html.

² The High Presidential Commission for the Bicentennial of the Independence has a user-friendly page online, where more detailed information can be found on this topic: <http://www.bicentenarioindependencia.gov.co/Es/Paginas/Consejeria.aspx>.

³ For more information on the 2019 II Centennial Colombian Vision, visit: <http://www.dnp.gov.co/PortalWeb/PoliticaddeEstado/VisiónColombia2019/QuééslaVisiónColombiaIICentenario2019/tabid/195/Default.aspx>.

⁴ The presentation of what the initiative is or was intended to be may be consulted and downloaded from: <http://www.bicentenarioindependencia.gov.co/Es/Otras/Paginas/MinComercio.aspx>.

⁵ I am particularly drawn to the following site because of the amount of material available, and also because it made possible the publication of a series of op-eds that are quite out of the ordinary. See <http://www.bicentenario.gov.co/>.

⁶ Excessive tax burdens should be added to trade restrictions and the lack of economic freedom to complete the recipe for the explosive cocktail of independence in Colombia.

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BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

Two hundred years of solitude: Toward regional integration by catalyzing democratic change in the Americas

By American fellow Julia Roig ('09)

200 years of solitude

Some have argued that Gabriel García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude" can justly lay claim to being the greatest of all Latin American novels. Appropriately enough, the story of the Buendía family is a metaphor for the history of the continent for the first century after independence from Spain.¹ Regrettably, the next 100 years have not fared better and have been immersed in solitude as well. In his December 1982 Nobel lecture, "The Solitude of Latin America,"² García Márquez reflectively indicates that the crucial problem with Latin Americans has been a "lack of conventional means to render our lives believable ... this is the crux of our solitude." Márquez pleaded that it was not yet too late to engage in the creation of a new and sweeping utopia, where the races previously condemned to 100 years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on Earth. More than 35 years after his famous lecture, and in the midst of the regions' bicentennial celebrations that began in 2009, Latin America takes stock of 200 years of solitude,³ seemingly still to be looking for a "magical realist" blueprint that reveals the mysterious elements hidden in everyday reality⁴ that are necessary for the region to engage in the creation of a new and sweeping utopia, for now a third opportunity on Earth.

Toward regional integration

The very real and complex challenges facing the Americas in the 21st century call for stronger regional cooperation at both the governmental and nongovernmental levels. The recent debate on Cuba's admittance into the Organization of American States (OAS), the political crisis in Honduras, the polarizing regional debates over the promise of social justice of "the Bolivarian axis" and the effect of a worldwide economic recession have brought to light the interdependence of the region. These issues have also made clear the need to find collective solutions to protect democratic principles that provide for more respect of human rights, sustainable human development and human security.

Moreover, in recent years stability has been tested by polarizing structural processes of change in which governments are legitimized through electoral referendums or constitutional reforms to the detriment of existing democratic institutions, by subregional groupings and alliances that are constantly being re-formed, and by the levels of poverty and social inequality in the region that continue to rise in many countries. These changes and shortfalls bring about high levels of conflict that directly threaten democratic governance and the rule of law of the region.

Now more than ever, it is vital to strengthen the inter-American democratic system, which is led by the Organization of American States (OAS) and its declarations and agreements, such as the Inter-American Democratic Charter and the Declarations and Plans of Action of the Summits of the Americas. These instruments are vitally important to providing democratic stability in the continent. It provides a much-needed platform for the region's governments and civil society organizations to work toward joint solutions, promote democratic dialogue to resolve public conflicts, and hold each other accountable to the commitments and principles of the OAS member states. Civil society's positive role and involvement in the inter-American system has been clearly determined by various OAS action plans and declarations, as well as the designation of an OAS division dedicated to promoting participation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). However, lack of coordination among the civil society sector in the region has made that participation less effective. NGOs have not been able to play the strong advocacy role needed to promote and consolidate a shared institutional democracy and find creative solutions to the development challenges facing the region.

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Partners: Catalyzing democratic change in the Americas

Over the past 20 years, the organization Partners for Democratic Change (Partners)⁵ has established 17 independent national centers working in over 50 countries around the world to manage change and conflict, improve governance, create more inclusive societies, and promote sustainability and development in emerging democracies. The centers have developed into respected local institutions, providing a broad range of diverse programs in the government, civil society, and academic and market sectors; they offer highly sought-after interactive training, applied mediation and facilitation, and consultation services that assist thousands of NGOs, local and central governments, and business leaders. Often the first organizations of their kind in a country, the centers have modeled cutting-edge methodologies and professional performance. They have pioneered specialized fields, including ethnic and minority conciliation commissions, labor, environmental, and family mediation, anti-corruption and accountable governance initiatives, and a broad range of participatory cross-sector processes.

Toward the regional integration necessary for the creation of a new and sweeping utopia, the Partners network — through its affiliate centers in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Peru — is currently implementing the Catalysts for Democratic Change in the Americas (CDCA) program, funded by the U.S. State Department in collaboration with the OAS Department of Education and Culture. The CDCA has convened a group of civil society organizations from 12 different countries in the Americas⁶ in order to design and implement a curriculum that builds understanding of the Inter-American Democratic Charter among civil society, and to strengthen capacities to collaboratively defend and promote democracy. Additionally, Partners is promoting its cooperative advocacy methodology⁷ through the CDCA by conducting a series of training programs and convening dialogue processes to prepare stakeholders and facilitators to integrate dispute management, coalition building and strategic planning into advocacy processes, allowing diverse organizations to work more effectively around key democracy challenges.

A new magical realism: Revealing the blueprint

García Márquez's utopia will take some time to mature. As he pointedly argued regarding Europe and its history, "The quest for our own identity is just as arduous and bloody for us as it was for them. The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary."⁸ In this sense, the recently published *Latinobarómetro* report⁹ testifies to this, indicating that a typical Latin American's lack of knowledge about the bicentennial and the region's links to Spain speak highly about a lack of cultural awareness and national identity. However, the report does provide a blueprint of what Latin Americans value: institutions, presidents, the market and democracy, which now, more than ever, is preferable to any other type of government. But when it comes to breaking down what each component means and how each influences the other, the result is less clear.

The new magical realism will flourish once we are able to connect the dots and create a new mutually understandable future. Through bicentennial celebrations, projects like the CDCA will catalyze the changes necessary to reveal a blueprint that creates a new and sweeping utopia that enjoys at least 200 years of regional integration.

¹ Ian Johnston, "On Márquez's 'One Hundred Years of Solitude,'" (lecture delivered on March 28, 1995), <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/introser/marquez.HTM>.

² Gabriel García Márquez, "The Solitude of Latin America," (Nobel Prize lecture, presented on Dec. 8, 1982), http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture-c.html.

³ Michael Reid, "Latin America takes stock of 200 years of solitude," *The Economist*, Nov. 13, 2009.

⁴ Johnston, "On Marquez's 'One Hundred Years.'" Johnston explains that the term "magic realism" was coined by the German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 to describe a magic insight into reality.

⁵ Partners for Democratic Change, <http://www.partnersglobal.org/who/history>, accessed on Jan. 12, 2010.

⁶ Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

⁷ Partners for Democratic Change, <http://www.partnersglobal.org/how/participatory-processes/cooperative-advocacy>, accessed on Jan. 12, 2010.

⁸ Gabriel García Márquez, "The Solitude of Latin America."

⁹ *Latinobarómetro*, <http://www.latinobarometro.org/>, Dec. 11, 2009.

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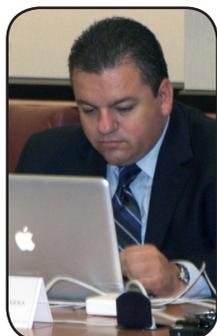
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