

THE CULTURAL ELITE IN LATIN AMERICA

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Seminar on Latin American Elites,  
Montevideo, Uruguay, June, 1965  
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University of California, Berkeley;  
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## CULTURAL ELITES IN LATIN AMERICA\*

by

Frank Bonilla

From the moment that the handful of scholar-soldiers who led Latin America into formal political independence passed from the scene, the fortunes of intellectuals have fallen and risen with the alternation of military and civilian power in government. The history of the region supports only too well the proposition that there exists some root incompatibility between men of ideas and men of action that makes clashes of temperament between the soldier and the intellectual inevitable.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising then that at a time when the number of military regimes in the region seems

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<sup>1</sup>In Venezuela, where the independence struggle ended with intellectuals largely relegated to the sidelines, the creation of an effective and stable civil counterbalance to military power is still short of consolidation. The antipathy between military men and men of letters in the last century is aptly pictured by Simon Rodriguez: "Rare indeed is the military man who can distinguish among men of letters, but rarer still is the literary man who will do justice to a soldier. For the military man without talent, all literary men are philosophers, and that is because subsumed within the idea of philosopher is the idea of cowardice. The vulgar man of letters views all military men as ignorant and pitiless." ("Raro es el militar que sepa distinguir de literatos; pero, es más raro aún, el literato que quiera hacer justicia a un militar: para un militar sin talento todos los literatos son filósofos; y es porque en la idea de filósofo va envuelta la de cobarde. Los literatos vulgares tienen a todo militar por ignorante o desalmado.") Introduction to "Defensa del libertador" in Escritos de Simon Rodriguez compiled by Pedro Grases, 3 volumes, Caracas, 1954-58.

The historical development of relations between the military and intellectuals in Brazil is a special case within the region though it has moved very sharply toward the common pattern within the last decade.

to be approaching a new peak, intellectuals should find themselves under strong attack and in a state of disarray and dependency.<sup>2</sup> The point of this observation, as the rest of this paper will make clear, is not to suggest that all military regimes are implacably anti-intellectual nor even that most of the difficulties faced by Latin American intellectuals are to be laid at the door of the military services. However, the ascendancy of military figures has by and large meant the eclipse of all but a few favored intellectuals as well as diffuse constraints on intellectual activity. As the principal focus of cleavage in the nation and the most visible and articulate voices of divisive party contention, intellectuals are to the military political evil incarnate. The situation of the intellectual, not only as a political actor, but within his own defined spheres of special competence, is thus inextricably linked in history to the area's record of militarism--to the prevalence of the threat of force and the use of armed power as essential instruments of social control.<sup>3</sup> The number of military regimes in the region at any given time remains a serviceable indicator of adverse change affecting almost all those who may appropriately be thought of as among the cultural elite.

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<sup>2</sup>Edwin Lieuwen (Generals vs. Presidents, New York: Praeger, 1964) describes seven major coups over the period from 1962 to mid 1964. Countries in which the military are overtly in control include Argentina, Peru, Guatemala, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Paraguay. Periodic and apparently well-founded rumors of incipient coups or potential military takeovers have repeatedly been reported during this period from Venezuela, Colombia, Salvador, and more recently, even from Uruguay and Chile.

<sup>3</sup>On the "antipolitics" of the military see Morris Janowitz, The Military in the Political Development of New Nations, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Because intellectuals for the moment symbolize disunity (and not only to the military), they are, among all the elite groups singled out for attention in this conference, in the most controversial position. Without pausing to deal with problems of definition or the degree to which the social groups under scrutiny may overlap, all seem clearly in a more favorable or hopeful situation than cultural elites.<sup>4</sup> While probably all the elite groups noted can be said to have some cultural functions and most would figure among intellectuals however defined for any country, insofar as their designations do set them off from these more generic categories, the labels themselves point to positive features of change in elite structures. That is, as newly invigorated, specialized groups, practically all can be said to be expanding in numbers, competence, and political influence. All are frequently said to be evidencing a fresh capacity and disposition to contribute to the solution of national problems. But the aura of optimism that embraces these technical, professional, managerial and investment-oriented elites does not extend to the residual group, heavily freighted with those intellectuals whose concerns are primarily cultural. The intellectual is assailed from every quarter. Even the abuse heaped on intellectuals from their own ranks is rarely perceived as a sign of healthy self-criticism. It is taken rather as added evidence of fragmentation, dogmatism, and petty vindictiveness in the intellectual world. To the long-standing charges against cultural elites of barren sycophancy, imitativeness, and disconnection from local realities has been added the more contemporary one

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<sup>4</sup>The preliminary program announces papers on military, industrial, administrative, technical, peasant and urban labor elites.

of disloyalty and deliberate subversion. The intellectual at the moment commands more attention as a potential terrorist than as an active agent of desired cultural change or an established influence in politics.

### Culture and Development

The question of the precarious status and perhaps pre-insurrectionary posture of Latin American cultural elites is of considerable importance from a variety of perspectives. Large scale disaffection among intellectuals has, of course, been widely pointed to as a major symptom of imminent social upheaval.<sup>5</sup> More important in the present context is to bring out the basic contradiction in Latin American society that is expressed here.

In the face of the area's chronic economic and political insolvency, Latin American self-esteem has leaned heavily on a sense of moral and cultural superiority to the United States. The high purpose and seriousness of Latin American society according to this particular myth is manifested in the lordly status and deference given learning and intellectual work. Inefficiencies in the economy and the machinery of government no doubt produce material disadvantages and inconveniences, but these are lightly borne by a people well disposed to pay a reasonable price so that the things of the spirit may flourish. Poverty, backwardness, corruption, and gross inequality are present but are substantially palliated by the wide scope given to individuality, the rich affect of family and friendship, the high priority over any practical consideration given to truth, morality, and beauty. However, since there is little at home to sustain the positive side of this

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<sup>5</sup>Crane Brinton, Anatomy of Revolution, New York: Norton, 1938.

idealized image, the evidence remains largely negative. Latin America, say the proponents of this view, is less materialistic than her northern neighbor because Latin America is poor; social relations in the region are more humane because white North Americans hate and exploit Negroes.

The issue at stake here has only marginally to do with the relative cultural achievement or decency of social relations in the two areas. Nor would the matter be of great consequence if it merely reflected a widespread, self-comforting delusion. The more arresting question lies in assessing the meaning for Latin American society of the jarring discrepancies between this culturally valued self-image and the apparent facts of social organization, power, and value dominance. The alleged primacy of cultural values has been readily accepted despite the slender evidence pointing to an effective priority concern of this kind at any level or in any department of social life. In Latin America, as elsewhere, apart from the extensive effort to diagnose educational problems, little serious attention has in fact been given to the role of culture and cultural elites in the process of social change and national development. Few writers have gone beyond noting the existence of a diffuse and obstructive traditionalism presumably deeply rooted in the value system.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>José Medina Echevarría (Aspectos sociales del desarrollo económico en América Latina, Vol. II, UNESCO, 1963, p. 46 ff.) reviews the main issues as presented in recent writings on the role of intellectuals in development as these relate specifically to the Latin American situation. Several broad scale efforts to analyze the process of cultural transformation required for effective national integration have come from the work of the now disbanded Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB). See Alvaro Vieira Pinto, Ideologia e desenvolvimento nacional, Rio de Janeiro: ISEB, 1960; Helio Jaguaribe, O nacionalismo na atualidade brasileira, Rio de Janeiro: ISEB, 1958; Candido Mendes de Almeida, Perspectiva atual da América Latina, Rio de Janeiro: ISEB, 1960 and his Nacionalismo e desenvolvimento, Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Estudos Asio-Africanos, 1963. Preliminary work toward a normatively anchored and

Current efforts to define and obtain measures of the attitude patterns through which this diffuse traditionalism manifests itself are refocusing attention on cultural aspects of change. Development, we are now told, since it requires a major restructuring of values and attitudes, is to be seen fundamentally as a cultural process. But is it the same to say that the development process is cultural as to say that cultural elites must take the lead in producing desired transformations? Is the modern intellectual really as crucial a figure in national development as Schumpeter's entrepreneur is taken to be for economic growth?<sup>7</sup> If the intellectual is to serve as an anchor of stability and a source of creative change during the transition to a higher order of national integration, what are the minimum conditions required for a nationally fruitful organization of intellectual work? What can the role of the intellectual actually be in societies where conflicts of ideas are viewed with greater suspicion and intolerance than conflicts of interests?

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empirically tested model of political development has begun at the Center for Development Studies of the Central University of Venezuela. See Jorge Ahumada, "Hypotheses for the Diagnosis of a Situation of Social Change: The Case of Venezuela," International Social Science Journal, Vol. XVI, No. 2, 1964.

<sup>7</sup>Refer to John Friedmann, "Intellectuals in Developing Societies," Kyklos, Vol. XIII, 1960, Fasc. 4. Friedmann argues persuasively that intellectuals must be seen as key figures in mediating change and describes a four step process of intellectual revolution that has interesting implication for the Latin American case. The intellectual, says Friedmann, departs from a position of moral superiority and moves toward a stage in which he undertakes experimentation with formerly rejected barbarian means, having come to believe that these innovations can be incorporated into the superstructure of his own thought and culture without too disruptive an impact. The largely frustrated concern with rationing, subduing, or exorcising technology is a related and persistent preoccupation among some Latin American intellectuals (See William S. Stokes, "The Drag of the Pensadores," in Foreign Aid Reexamined, James W. Wriggins and Helmut Schoeck, eds., Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1958.)



The emphasis on cultural factors raises even broader questions for theory and policy. The newly mounted search for the cultural foundations of the successful industrial and democratic society implies that the hope of achieving major and lasting change through economic innovation or re-shufflings of the political order is diminishing. The revival of the idea that a society cannot be more efficient or moral than the individuals who make it up may prove a useful counterbalance to theories that see the economy or political system as the main engines of change. However, the concern with education and socialization can prove a blind alley for policy to the degree that it becomes merely a way of skirting what may momentarily seem more intractable problems of economic and political reform. There is, in point of fact, no true refuge for policy-makers here, whatever may be said about the attraction for conservatives of educational as against other forms of planned change. For it is specifically in the area of attitude formation and change--socialization, education, mass media effects, the creation and dissemination of ideologies, the search for non-coercive methods of mass mobilization--that theory is weakest, payoffs least predictable, and success most dependent on the support and effectiveness of a divided and refractory sector of the elite.

It is precisely the elaboration of more extensive and effective means of such non-coercive cultural control--of cybernetic (i.e., internalized and self-adjusting mechanisms)--that Talcott Parsons sees as denoting the primacy of the cultural factor in development.<sup>8</sup> This higher order of social governor resting on the capacity to control information, communication, and

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<sup>8</sup>Talcott Parsons, Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives, New York: Prentice Hall, 1964.

standards of judgment is seen as superordinate to wealth and power. The main lines of modernization are to be observed in the gradual process of differentiation of the cultural system, a first shearing off of religion from the social system followed by the successive secularization of aesthetics, politics, science, and law. Modern society in this sense is taken to have emerged only once, in Western Europe, all other cases being modern by diffusion.

All Latin America (along with all other post Renaissance societies with Western European roots) is, by this definition, culturally modern. Parsons' formulation does not at this point discriminate sharply among varieties of the modern though, of course, he has extensively analyzed the U.S. case.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, these ideas provide suggestive points of reference for assessing the relative weight of the cultural sphere in Latin American society and arriving at some sense of the nature and importance of cultural elites in regional life.

#### Assessing the Role of Culture and Cultural Elites

Whatever the importance assigned to the cultural factor in any development theory, the question as to the actual dominance of cultural concerns and the relative power and prestige of cultural versus other specialized elites in any specific society remains an open and extremely difficult one to answer. At the heart of the vocation for culture, the humanist tells

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<sup>9</sup>See especially Structure and Process in Modern Society, Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960.

us, lies man's passion for truth and delight.<sup>10</sup> In more directly sociological terms, culture constitutes systems of belief and expressive symbols. Culture defines what is true and what is pleasurable; it provides canons for the discovery, creation, and evaluation of new truths and new forms of beauty and self-transcendence. Culture is manifest as objects (symbolic meanings) toward which action is oriented, as internalized components of individual personality, and as institutionalized normative patterns.<sup>11</sup> Cultural elites are the elites par excellence in that the qualities required for high achievement seem to be rare, requiring long and concentrated cultivation to perfect. Moreover, the standards for creativity or virtuoso performance tend to be demanding.

One additional step of preliminary conceptual mapping will help to organize the subsequent discussion. A variety of ad hoc schemes for classifying types of knowledge and other cultural products have been offered, among which Scheler's typology ranging items along a scale of artificiality is probably the most elaborate.<sup>12</sup> The typology presented below, though clearly not exhaustive, has the virtue of being systematically derived and almost

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<sup>10</sup>John U. Nef (Cultural Foundations of Industrial Civilization, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958) like Parsons traces the main impulse to modernization in Europe to the Renaissance. According to Nef, the drive to productivity, scientific endeavor, and improved technology was primarily aesthetic (rather than commercial) and was only subsequently turned to industrial purposes. Even then, the continued primacy of aesthetic concerns on the continent led to an initial emphasis on high quality production as contrasted with the British quick entry into the production of cheap goods for mass consumption.

<sup>11</sup>Refer to Talcott Parsons, The Social System, Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951, especially chapters 8 and 9.

<sup>12</sup>Max Scheler, Die Formen des Wissens und die Bildung, Bonn: F. Cohen, 1925. Arrayed from the least to the most artificial Scheler's classes include: technology, philosophy and metaphysics, mysticism, religion, folk knowledge, myth and legend.

fully satisfies the limited needs of this paper.<sup>13</sup> Each field of knowledge or culture is defined by three elements. Thus science is seen to be concerned with existential propositions about the empirical world which are to be merely accepted or rejected (i.e., these are "truths" which have relatively low gratificatory significance and do not ordinarily require a response of strong commitment). Religion, on the other hand, deals with evaluative propositions about non-empirical matters in which a high priority is given to commitment as a response.

Figure 1

	EXISTENTIAL	EVALUATIVE	EXPRESSIVE
EMPIRICAL	SCIENCE	IDEOLOGY	AESTHETICS
NON-EMPIRICAL	PHILOSOPHY	RELIGION	MYSTICISM
	ACCEPTANCE	COMMITMENT	APPRECIATION

As has been noted, one would expect to find elite elements in each of these fields among those doing the principal creative work or performing with greatest skill. To the degree that each activity engenders a specialized organizational apparatus, one would also expect to find a segment of administrators, who might themselves possess little creative or performing talent, but would nevertheless figure in elite circles. In a similar situation would be a small number of critics, presumably equipped by

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<sup>13</sup>Though it does not appear in precisely this form in that volume, the typology presented in Figure 1 is taken directly from chapters 8 and 9 of Parsons' The Social System.

their special knowledge and sensibility to orient public taste and monitor cultural production. A most relevant sector not brought into focus in the typology are communicators as a class, particularly owners and administrators of mass media and other generalized communications facilities. This sector stands in a crucial relation to cultural elites but is in a borderline position with respect to the basic value orientations of the cultural sector as a whole.<sup>14</sup>

From this point of departure a variety of questions can be raised that may help us focus on cultural activities and institutions and arrive at some judgment as to their true place in Latin American society. One may ask what evidence of high achievement in the cultural sphere can be mustered, how many individuals are primarily occupied in such activities, what part of the society's resources go into such work, what degree of specialization and differentiation is manifest within the cultural sphere, how general are concerns with cultural values at all levels of the society, to what extent do uniquely cultural values spill over into and shape behavior in other spheres, how autonomous are cultural institutions, how much does cultural achievement or the control of cultural resources weigh in fixing individual prestige? Plainly only very approximate answers can be given to most of these questions. It should be plain as well that not all of them are equally relevant as indicators of the importance of cultural activities as such or for all types of cultural activity. Finally, of course, the questions themselves reflect culturally determined notions about how the importance of social facts may be established. Nevertheless, if Latin Americans as a people can in any

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<sup>14</sup>Since there are separate contributions to the conference on the teaching profession, educational elites will only be tangentially considered. For the same reason, only passing mention will be made of university problems.

meaningful sense be said to be centrally committed to values of truth, beauty, harmony and a richly textured individuality, one should reasonably expect to find important manifestations of that primacy in at least some of the aspects of cultural effort alluded to in the questions.

The matter of achievement is among the most difficult to judge, both in terms of the absolute standards of individual or collective accomplishment as with respect to the significance for the society as a whole of exceptional performance by individuals. With respect to any given field of knowledge the second issue of recognition versus achievement arises. In a period when phrases such as cultural imperialism and cultural terrorism form a standard part of the lexicon of social analysis in the region, there is widespread sensibility regarding the international stratification of intellectual work and the distribution of honors for scholarly or artistic achievement. Plainly, the cultural product of the dominant countries has an unequal chance of prevailing by monopolizing attention and rewards.

What does it mean then that there has been only one Latin American Nobel Prize in science since the awards were first given in 1901?<sup>15</sup> Answers come more readily in this sphere since Latin American claims in the scientific field are modest when not actually disdainful. Scientific research, outside of the field of medicine and in all but a handful of model institutions maintained as national showcases, is largely formalistic and

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<sup>15</sup>An Argentine, Bernardo Houssay, in 1947 received a Nobel Prize in medicine and physiology. The Chilean poet, Gabriela Mistral, and the Spanish-born Puerto Rican, Juan Ramón Jiménez, received awards in literature in 1945 and 1956 respectively. Another Argentinian, Carlos Saavedra Lamas won a peace prize in 1936.

ornamental. As recently as 1962 universities from the entire region reported a total of 939 graduates in natural science for that academic year. The equivalent figure from the same tabulation for the United States was 56,712.<sup>16</sup> The power of science is recognized and inspires awe, but this reverential attitude is balanced by a frank skepticism that often seems to border on contempt.

But what is to be made of the fact that only three of the 158 saints canonized since the fifteenth century are Latin Americans? If science has flagged because its relativism, pragmatism, and subservience to industry and war have repelled a people sentimentally tied to a loftier universalism and other-worldliness, is it reasonable to expect stronger evidence of religious and mystical virtuosity?<sup>17</sup> But it is not only saints but also theologians and outstanding Church administrators that have been in notably short supply in the region. The more dramatic expressions of religious fervor are by and large throwbacks to more primitive forms of fundamentalism, marginal to or outside of the Catholic framework. Even when within the Church, they tend to be viewed with trepidation and reserve by modern Church leaders.<sup>18</sup> The low estate of the

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<sup>16</sup>América en cifras, Vol. V, Organization of American States, 1964. A more comprehensive picture of contemporary capability in Latin America for research in the physical and life sciences is given in David Bushnell "The United States Air Force and Latin American Research," Journal of Inter-American Studies, Vol. VII, No. 2, April, 1965.

<sup>17</sup>The factor of international stratification is probably not to be lost sight of even with respect to sainthood. Italy, France, and Spain alone account for 130 of the 158 saints canonized in the last six centuries. See John Coulson, ed., The Saints, New York: Hawthorn Books, 1958.

<sup>18</sup>Brazil probably presents the richest variety of syncretist and aboriginal cults. Protestant fundamentalist sects are also making inroads throughout the region.

clergy--in numbers, quality of training, and cultural status--is one of the major problems of reorganization facing the Church. Catholicism temporarily manifests greater vitality as a fountainhead of social ideology than as a spiritual force.

Thus, within these two most universalistic cultural fields--science and religion--where international communication is high, agreement on standards of performance well established, and the desire to distinguish outstanding Latin Americans no doubt present, regional achievement must by any criterion be seen as disappointing. Moreover, and particularly with respect to science, prospects for the future are not bright. As scientific endeavor moves increasingly into fields requiring the massive mobilization of resources and complex institutional arrangements, the prospect that regional scientists will somehow come into their own and take their place on an equal footing in the world community seem increasingly remote. Scientific manpower is meagre in numbers and becoming more rather than less dependent on international opportunities for training and meaningful research. The possible impact of scientists as carriers of a new national or regional ethos seems slight indeed.

Science and religion, forming part of universalistic systems that have been highly elaborated within the mainstream of Western culture, perhaps lend themselves less than other fields of cultural effort to distinctive innovation or readaptation within the West itself. That is to say, the fact that both Catholicism and science represent in essence well established bodies of dogma and method with an institutionalized evaluative apparatus, makes them less permeable than other fields of knowledge or cultural activity to being transformed in accord with individual and regional



taste. Philosophy, ideology, and aesthetics have by contrast been more often defined as areas in which a people might legitimately search for those truths that could be regarded as uniquely their own. Though exhortation to a use of both science and religion that would be more affirmative of regional and national realities has not been absent, the main pressure in this regard has been on social thought and artistic creation.

The history of social thought in Latin America can without too much unfairness be characterized as the baffled search for a distinctive and compelling synthesis of ideas that might give sense, coherence, and dramatic expression to regional life for more than a select minority.<sup>19</sup> The exaltation of indigenous cultures as a means of affirming unique regional values and achievement has never implied a high valuation of the social or human worth of contemporary Indian populations. The persisting frustration in these efforts to formulate a social vision embracing all in the nation can be inferred from the recurrent and extant charges against writers and artists of lack of authenticity, "cultural transvestism," and other forms of subservience to foreign models and powers.<sup>20</sup> That Latin American intellectual life has been touched by every ideological and aesthetic current flowing from Europe and

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<sup>19</sup>See, for example, Harold Eugene Davis, Latin American Social Thought, Washington, D.C.: The University Press, 1961. Also William Rex Crawford, A Century of Latin American Thought, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961 (revised edition). Note especially his extensive bibliography. The literary histories by Pedro Henriquez Urefia, Arturo Torres Riosco are helpful. Principal sources for Brazil are the works of Nelson Werneck Sodré and João Cruz Costa. John J. Johnson ed., Continuity and Change in Latin America, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1964 has informative articles on artists and writers.

<sup>20</sup>Nelson Werneck Sodré, Historia da literatura brasileira, Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1940. Also by the same author Raizes históricas do nacionalismo brasileiro, Rio de Janeiro: ISEB, 1960.

the United States in the last two centuries seems beyond question. In a few countries, such as Chile and Argentina, the impact of formal ideologies on party organization and the process of government is plainly visible; more commonly the history of ideas concerns itself with the intellectual byplay within small coteries of writers, artists, politicians, and social analysts. Chile is not alone in having been called a burial ground for ideologies, in the sense that all ideologies come to uneasy rest there. The prolonged skirmishing over ideas that have never been concretely directed to national problems and have long since been superseded in the social situations that gave them life is only too often the best evidence that can be mustered to demonstrate the zeal of Latin Americans for ideas.

Ideological failure has stemmed not only from the disconnection with reality but from a failure of faith. Even the handful of luminary pensadores who have most thoughtfully speculated regarding the identity and fate of Latin America have alternated between a black pessimism and an ingenuous ufanismo; there has never been more than a faltering conviction among her intellectuals that Latin America was truly a promised land. But ideology has been at the center of attention because the society has always been trying to transform itself--to locate the source of its chronic malaise and generate the courage to take some prescribed cure. Because ideology, to return for a moment to the paradigm in Figure 1, is both empirical and evaluative, it not only defines the meaning of past and present. It is subject to partial verification and must therefore submit itself to some canons of proof.<sup>21</sup> To succeed, an ideology must not only be viable--i.e., propose imperatives for action that are realistic and produce results--but must have capacity to charm, that is, must create a future vision that captures the

imagination. In this sense ideology is as much to be discovered as fashioned to please.

This polarity between the grim reality and the future vision has never found a happy resolution in Latin American thought. Only recently has the social scientist begun to replace the man of letters in providing the checks on reality or the diagnostic base for the work of constructing ideologies. The results to date have not been such as to establish beyond dispute the superiority of the approach of the technician over that of the artist or the working politician.<sup>22</sup>

The ideological demands on the artist have also been severe though countered by the mandate to transcend the limits of his own milieu and the commitment to a search for a vision at once more private and more encompassing than that of the ideologue. Even before the emancipation of art and music from the salon, academy, and traditional conservatory, the impact of outside currents was easily traced as were the several efforts to turn art to social and political purpose. Today, major exponents and distinguished

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<sup>21</sup>On the impact of the ideology of science on the building of national ideologies, see Apter's interesting essay in Ideology and Discontent (David E. Apter, ed., London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964). Clifford Geertz' "Ideology as a Cultural System" in the same volume emphasizes the opposing pull of cultural symbolism, figurative expression and style in the formulation of ideological communications. The intricate balance between the "truth claims" and the more subjective elements of ideology is explored in most of the ISEB publications cited earlier. Refer especially to Michel Debrun, Ideologia e realidade, Rio de Janeiro: ISEB, 1959.

<sup>22</sup>The most systematic effort to apply an interdisciplinary approach to the derivation of a national ideology of development is found in the work of ISEB. (See Frank Bonilla, "Brazil: A National Ideology of Development" in Kalman H. Silvert, ed., Expectant Peoples, New York: Random House, 1962). Though the Isebistas departed from a thorough diagnosis of the Brazilian situation, practically all of their predictions about how the complex array of interests they perceived to be at work would operate have, at least in the short run, proven inexact. The work of CEPAL, BID and other similar agencies is another locus of pragmatic efforts to define realistic paths

practitioners of every contemporary literary genre and art style are to be found in the region. But the expectation that the aesthetic revolution manifested in the post-war explosion of artistic production, the rising tide of international recognition of literary and artistic work, the appearance of a broader and more discerning public, the establishment of museums as vigorous centers of creative activity--that all of these were a prelude to and a major resource for development on other fronts has not been fulfilled.

In short, it seems difficult to build a convincing case for the primacy of cultural values or concern with creativity or expressiveness in the cultural realm as a distinctive mark of Latin American society. Neither art, science, ideology, nor religion can be said to be decisive sources of motivation for change nor focal anchorages of institutionalized power turned importantly toward specifically cultural purposes. This is, of course, not to deny any role at all to ideas and especially not to ignore the social and political significance of religious sentiment or of the Church as an institution. The point is rather that in all these departments of cultural action achievement has been spotty, the investment in human and material resources slender, institutions weak and dependent (including those features of Church organization most directly tied to strictly religious functions). The prime values of culture are neither pervasive nor compelling, and the social status of all but the most distinguished actors in the cultural sphere quite insecure.

#### Some Fragmentary Data on Cultural Elites

Conventional usage has tended to view all with university training in Latin America as within a superior class culturally and to equate higher

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to national development and regional affirmation based on hard-headed assessments of economic and political realities.

education with intellectual status. If the guidelines for identifying cultural elites set down in the foregoing pages are followed, the numbers within this elite circle in Latin America would be substantially narrowed. In fact, one of the virtues of the scheme is that it demonstrates how few of those commonly viewed as culturally elite in Latin America are more than marginally dedicated to cultural functions as defined in the paradigm. Friedmann, for example, using Brazilian data from the 1950 census counts some 130,000 persons with advanced professional degrees as among the intellectuals. Even by his generous definition, the group represented 0.5 percent of the population over 20 years of age, a ratio of one intellectual for every 200 adults. By this standard there would be one intellectual for every 20 adults in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

A more recent analysis from the same Brazilian census shows some 362,000 persons ten years and older in technical, scientific, artistic or similar activities. This number included 185,000 women of whom 75 percent were school teachers and 15 percent nurses. The principal professions among males after that of teacher (16 percent) were physician, lawyer, dentist, pharmacist, and engineer (all in the neighborhood of 8-11 percent).<sup>24</sup> A partial confrontation of the two sets of data suggests a further problem with respect to the use of educational data as a way of estimating the approximate size and composition of the population of intellectuals. Some substantial differences emerge depending on whether one sees the ascriptive mantle of education or the active

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<sup>23</sup>Friedmann, *op. cit.*, p. 520. The author argues both that the status of intellectuals is an ascribed characteristic of all those with professional training in developing societies and that professionals in such societies are by and large concerned with ideas to a far greater extent than is usual in the more developed West.

<sup>24</sup>"Estudos Demográficos, No. 265," Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística--Conselho Nacional de Estatística (mimeo, no date).

exercise of a profession as decisive in establishing intellectual status.

Where are the 15,000 lawyers who are not practicing law, the 7,000 engineers with other occupations? How many of them are to be accounted as intellectuals?

Table I

HOLDERS OF PROFESSIONAL DEGREES  
AND PERSONS PROFESSIONALLY ACTIVE

BRASIL, 1950

	a. Holders of professional degrees	b. Reported as principal occupation	Percent a/b
Doctors and dentists	43,000	40,447	92%
Engineers	20,400	12,785	52%
Lawyers	31,300	15,556	48%

Nevertheless, if one accepts a university education as an indispensable credential for culturally elite status, it is apparent that the recruitment base for elites remains heavily weighted with individuals with training in traditional professions (medicine, law, engineering) and those who prepare for teaching through broad acquaintance with the humanities and social science. In the figures given below for Latin American university graduates in 1962, there is substantial variation from country to country in the two categories just mentioned but hardly any at all with respect to the proportions graduating in science or the fine arts (including architecture).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>América en cifras, op. cit.

Table II

UNIVERSITY GRADUATES 1962

	Latin America		U.S.A.	
	#	%	#	%
Medicine, law, and engineering	25,915	42.2	81,149	16.5
Natural science	939	1.5	56,712	11.6
Fine arts and architecture	1,546	2.5	18,223	3.7
Humanities, education, etc.	33,029	53.8	334,544	68.2
	61,429	100.0	490,628	100.0

A small study in Mexico focusing on a more narrowly selected group of intellectuals provides some corroboratory as well as additional suggestive details about the composition of cultural elites and their situation in at least one Latin American country. The 179 subjects were selected through what has been called the "snowball" technique. Interviews were undertaken with a list of 75 individuals who seemed unequivocally among the more prominent intellectuals in the nation, and each of these was asked to name three other persons whom they considered to be intellectuals. A deliberate effort was made to secure a broad spectrum of political opinion in the basic list.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>The study was part of a large four country effort. The preliminary report (K.H. Silvert and Frank Bonilla, Education and the Social Meaning of Development: A Preliminary Statement, New York: American Universities Field Staff, 1960) did not include data on the intellectuals. The actual instructions to the core sample read as follows: "We have begun our survey with a small group of intellectuals whose deep concern for national problems is well known. Taking into account the very special nature of the intellectual community, we have chosen to leave to our first respondents the definition of who really forms an effective part of the intellectual group in Mexico. For this reason we ask you now to indicate the names of three persons that you know and feel merit the designation of intellectuals, keeping in mind

The group turned out to be entirely university trained; nearly four in five had university degrees, another ten percent had some university training. The median age of the group was about 43, about five years younger than a careful sample of Mexican legislators taken simultaneously. About one in five were women, this being nearly four times the proportion of women who had penetrated the legislative ranks. The proportion of bachelors (26 percent) was also substantially higher than among legislators (6 percent). The median income of the intellectuals (\$400 per month) was about \$150 less per month than that of legislators, who, of course, do not represent the top of the political elite in Mexico.<sup>27</sup>

In terms of social origin, the Mexican intellectuals interviewed came largely from business and professional families (in contrast to the legislators who have strong rural contingents), and parallel data on Chilean university professors suggests that this pattern has some generality. New business elites, if a Brazilian sample of managers can be taken to reflect broader trends in the region, are emerging heavily from business and secondarily from working class backgrounds.

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that we are interested in consulting principally those persons who best express or have greatest influence on the formation of Mexican thought in all its varied forms with respect to contemporary social, economic, and political problems.

<sup>27</sup>The comparisons with legislators are given to provide some anchorage or point of reference with a specific group in Mexico itself. That has not been the main line of analysis in the original research. Details regarding the sample design for all groups shown in this paper can be found in K.H. Silvert and Frank Bonilla, op. cit.



Table III

FATHERS' OCCUPATIONAL FIELD FOR  
SEVERAL LATIN AMERICAN ELITE SAMPLES

	Mexi- can legis- lators §	Mexi- can in- tellec- tuals §	Univer- sity of Chile profes- sors §	Catholic Univer- sity (Chile) profes- sors §	Brazil- ian mana- gers §
Professionals	15	31	20	26	9
Business	22	30	49	36	54
Agriculture	42	11	6	13	9
Political- military*	8	10	5	8	2
Arts, communi- cation, enter- tainment	-	7	2	-	1
Service and manual	13	11	18	17	24
(N) =	(96)	(179)	(85)	(82)	(174)

\*About half came from each in every sample.

In terms of subjective class identification, Mexican intellectuals, as do the Chilean academics, almost unanimously count themselves as professional and middle class.<sup>28</sup> More noteworthy, in view of the common lament that the material rewards of intellectual work are unfairly low, is the fact that one in four of the Mexican group and majorities in both samples of Chilean professors count themselves among the wealthy. There are no

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<sup>28</sup>The Catholic University professors include more individuals claiming upper class status than any other of the samples shown here.

peculiarities in the distribution of income within the Mexican intellectual group that explain why somewhat more of them feel they belong among the rich than do legislators, who in fact command substantially higher incomes.

Table IV  
SUBJECTIVE VIEWS OF CLASS  
OF SEVERAL LATIN AMERICAN ELITE SAMPLES

	Mexi- can legis- lators %	Mexi- can in- tellec- tuals %	Univer- sity of Chile profes- sors %	Catholic Univer- sity (Chile) professors %	Brazi- lian mana- gers %
<u>Class Identification:</u>					
Rich	15	25	51	58	9
Modest	80	69	28	33	82
Poor	5	-	-	-	3
None	-	6	21	9	6
Professional or proprietor	75	86	88	91	53
White collar (empleado)	11	11	11	7	45
Worker	8	-	-	-	-
None	6	3	1	2	2
Upper class	2	9	4	23	10
Middle class	96	86	89	69	86
Lower class	2	2	3	-	1
None	-	3	4	8	3
Aristocracy	1	3	3	12	4
Bourgeoisie	30	59	66	63	68
Proletariat	43	11	9	4	14
None	27	28	22	21	14
(N) =	(96)	(179)	(86)	(82)	(174)

Of these elite groups, only the legislators choose to place themselves among the proletariat, and they do so far in excess of what might realistically be expected in terms of their class origins and self-designation on the non-politically colored dimensions of class. The three samples of intellectuals

opt strongly for the bourgeois self-ranking or reject the political class scale entirely.

The predominantly middle class identifications and preoccupations of these intellectuals seem to be confirmed by other responses. In discussing the problems faced by people like themselves the principal themes dwelt on include the financial difficulties of raising a family decorously, the problems of obtaining better training, more regular promotions, and broader recognition for achievement. Other responses also seem to counter familiar stereotypes of the intellectual as a socially marginal man. These Mexican intellectuals display few signs of being at odds with their middle class world; in substantial majorities they report that they are happy, that they enjoy competition, and that they practice a religious faith. They do not seem to be any more preoccupied than the politicians or businessmen sampled about division within their own ranks.

Table V

SOME ATTITUDINAL CHARACTERISTICS  
OF SEVERAL LATIN AMERICAN ELITE SAMPLES

	<u>Mexi- can legis- lators</u>	<u>Mexi- can in- tellec- tuals</u>	<u>Univer- sity of Chile profes- sors</u>	<u>Catholic Univer- sity (Chile) professors</u>	<u>Brazi- lian mana- gers</u>
<u>Percent Saying They:</u>					
Are satisfied within own group	29	43	36	37	43
Are very happy or happy	86	78	79	88	91
Like competition	64	62	51	63	79
Practice and reli- gious faith	81	66	56	94	62
(N) =	(96)	(179)	(85)	(82)	(174)

The most dramatic signs of disaffection come forth in the sphere of politics--both in direct criticism of the political system but more unexpectedly in the low sense of political efficacy and the very substantial withdrawal from politics made patent in the responses explaining why their own political opinions are of no significance.<sup>29</sup> Four times as many intellectuals as do legislators affirm that the majority of Mexicans do not have an effective voice in government. Among the majority who feel themselves out of the picture politically, the explanatory responses take on a bitterness and animus absent anywhere else in the interviews.

Table VI  
POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR  
OF SEVERAL LATIN AMERICAN ELITE SAMPLES

	<u>Mexi- can legis- lators</u>	<u>Mexi- can in- tellec- tuals</u>	<u>Univer- sity of Chile profes- sors</u>	<u>Catholic Univer- sity (Chile) professors</u>	<u>Brazi- lian mana- gers</u>
<u>Percent Who Say:</u>					
Majority in nation do not have effective voice in government	15	64	-	-	37
Personal political views important	*	38	13	23	70
Worked actively in politics in last 6 months	*	30	10	12	7
Participated in a demonstration in last 6 months	*	18	22	16	15

\*Legislators were not questioned about political activities or efficacy.

<sup>29</sup>The sense of political efficacy of the intellectuals and the four samples of educators in Chile were the lowest reported and even lower than that of people living in favelas in Brazil.

The following are typical remarks: "In virtue of the fact that I am totally anti-political." "Because Mexico is a politically castrated nation." "Because politics are not governed by the opinions or activities of the people."

Preliminary data from a study of Venezuelan elites tends to confirm the over-all impressions given by the Mexican data. The cultural sector within this national elite is trained principally in law and secondarily in medicine and engineering (43, 13, and 13 percent respectively). Only 17 percent received their primary training in the humanities. All are important figures in the arts, sciences, education, and the mass media with a small sprinkling of prelates. They spring almost entirely from the middle class--all of their family ties, original and those acquired in marriage, are to middle class individuals of modest educational achievement. They begin their occupational careers on the lower rungs of government, communications, and education, working their way up laboriously to the positions of relative eminence they now occupy. Their high social mobility comes at a high cost; they emerge into the first ranks of their fields at a later age than politicians or businessmen. Even after achieving success, they remain dependent on salaries fixed primarily through decisions and allocations of resources made by political and economic elites. Organization and communications among them are feeble and show a similar dependence on the more powerful political and economic sectors. Except for that special communications elite that commands the mass media, and in effect straddles the world of politics, business, and cultural production--the cultural elite in Venezuela manifests in large measure a precarious hold on prestige and privilege, relative isolation, dependence, and profound frustration as actors within their own field and even more within the realm of national policy.<sup>30</sup>

Constraints on Elite Action

How is this statistically generated image of a fractious Babbitt to be squared with the multiple and more generous images of intellectuals prevailing in the regional folklore? Where is the man of letters, ornament of the Republic, abandoning his private labors to lead the nation through a moment of crisis? Where is the committed militant turning his back on the bourgeois securities of career and family to make his life among the down-trodden? Where is the eloquent polemicist, burning conscience of the nation? All exist, and no one who has spent any amount of time in Latin America can fail to name intellectuals of high accomplishment, self-abnegation, and profound social conscience. The point is that the Latin American intellectual has by and large never abandoned his middle class roots. His political rebelliousness and protest, even his acts of insurgency and terror, are forays from a private world of submissiveness to heavily sentimentalized bourgeois concerns with the proprieties of family life and social decorum as well as material comfort. It is a dizzy plunge in Latin America from the upper middle class to the bottom, and there is nowhere for the declassed to go.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>This very impressionistic summary draws heavily on preliminary analyses of the Venezuelan data by Prof. Julio Cotler of the Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo of the Central University of Venezuela. Much qualifying and specifying detail is required to place these impressions more concretely within the Venezuelan context. A description of the total research effort and some first findings will appear in a forthcoming issue of América Latina (Frank Bonilla, Julio Cotler, and José Agustín Silva Michelena. "La investigación sociológica y la formulación de políticas.")

<sup>31</sup>A poignant account of one young man's unsuccessful effort to navigate the distance is given in Eugenio Gonzalez, Hombres, Santiago, Chile: Ed. Ercilla, 1935.

This bourgeois anchorage has made the social control of intellectuals, whether by military or civilian regimes, far easier than the region's record of instability would suggest. Though the roster of intellectuals who have given their lives in behalf of political principle is not inconsiderable, few have lived or worked for long periods under genuinely totalitarian controls. The black chronicle, past and present, of torture, arbitrary imprisonment, and other abuses of civil rights notwithstanding, these have not been the most characteristic means of cutting off elite dissent in Latin America. The intellectual confronts not highly organized repression but a diffuse and suffocating authoritarianism. The dictablanda is permissive, pluralistic, shies away from total mobilization or ideological orthodoxy, allows considerable freedom of expression, practices cooptation with great refinement, prefers to grant a gilded exile to well-connected dissidents rather than to publicize internal rifts, remains forever open to quick and generous reconciliation. It rewards expertise and respectability.<sup>32</sup>

The intellectual effervescence of the early fifties raised the hope that the cultural elite in Latin America was finally to come of age, that it was about to take command of its own process of development and place this new capacity behind the larger project of national emancipation. The moment of self-discovery and regained self-confidence was said to be at hand. Cultural elites were to legitimize the social revolutionary ideal by formulating a convincing national ideology that would bind all in the nation

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<sup>32</sup>Juan Linz in "An Authoritarian Regime: Spain" (Cleavages, Ideologies, and Party Systems. Contributions to Comparative Political Sociology, ed. by E. Allardt and Y. Littunen, Helsinki: Transactions of the Westermarck Society, 1964) paints a full-scale portrait of this type of regime, which he sees as a distinctive form, neither an imperfect democracy nor a weakly organized dictatorship.

together during the anticipated crises of national transformation.<sup>33</sup> These predictions now seem overly sanguine. The clear ascendancy of the soldier and the technocrat, with the partial admission into the inner circle of power of the social scientist turned social engineer, are perhaps the most direct testimony of this failure. The flight to international organizations of the social technician committed to profound change is but another avenue to frustration; he neither escapes politics nor gains added footing by working on his country instead of in it. The path of revolution or terror, whatever its inspiration, is in essence an abdication of the intellectual role and an even graver symptom of the intellectual's dislocation in a society that pretends to prize his function.

If the task of national development truly hinges on a massive work of cultural reconstruction--educational, ideological, moral, and scientific, and the present assessment of the status of cultural leadership is approximately correct, the prospect is disheartening indeed. The cultural elite is perhaps more obsolete than any other and being displaced from leadership even in its most sacred redoubts.<sup>34</sup> Yet it is only within some fragment

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<sup>33</sup>See the works cited in footnote 5.

<sup>34</sup>"The pivotal force in the development of culture is now in the hands of doers rather than the thinkers and the centers are now the great corporations rather than the universities. It is in these new centers that new directions are charted. The danger that the entire culture may become technological is obvious. Even in the recent past the intellectuals, the professional intellectuals, knew they were the leaders of thought. But the doers are assuming this role and doing a better job than the intellectuals." (Eli Ginzberg, Technology and Social Change, New York: Columbia University Press, 1964). Though the quotation refers principally to the U.S., it is apropos in the present context, especially with regard to the isolation of the university from the councils of policy. The charge of obsolescence has been stated by Sergio Bagu, Acusación y defensa



of the present cultural elite or that in formation that one can expect to find the combination of skills, normative emancipation, and motivation to create the ideological and moral instruments for the region to transcend its inglorious history of failure in achieving so many long held goals. Whatever the immediate historical constraints on autonomous economic growth and political affirmation may be seen to be, the process of cultural transformation must begin within the intellectual himself. As long as he remains politically radical and socially conservative, he gains no true leverage over the shape of his own life, that of his class, or his society.

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del intelectual, Buenos Aires: Colección Nuevo Mundo, Editorial Perrot, 1959. Bagu further charges intellectuals with lack of political skill, weak organization, feeble commitment to social reform, uncritical acceptance of slogans, and not meeting their obligation to heterodoxy.