

Urban History, 28, 2 (2001) © 2001 Cambridge University Press Printed in the United Kingdom

How green was my valley? Urban history in Latin America*

MICHAEL DERHAM

Dept of Modern Languages, University of Northumbria, Newcastle, NE1 8FT

The history of Latin America has been dominated by ideas of order and progress. Unfortunately those ideas have not always been of regional origin. In the colonial era the conquest and conversion of the native peoples was seen as progress by the Europeans. The imposition of order was aided greatly by urbanization sometimes symbolically on the ruins of Indian cities such as at Cuzco and Mexico City. Cities became the point of cultural and economic articulation between the barbaric hinterland and the civilization of Europe. Freedom from the Spanish yoke gained in the Independence wars was similarly seen as progress, at least by the ultimately victorious creole 'patriots'. It was here, however, that notions of national identity, modernization and economic success became intertwined to produce the conflicts which still inflame the region today. The paramount question has remained: whose order and concept of progress should be imposed?

Philosophically the twin goals of order and progress were crystallized with the appearance of Positivism. Developed initially in France by social misfit August Comte, it drew on the ideas of the Enlightenment to propose that science and rationality held the key to future success. In its more extreme versions it carried racial implications by counterposing civilization (positive) with barbarism (negative). To justify their post-colonial ascendance the generally lighter skinned creole patriots had to

* Jeremy Adelman, *Republic of Capital: Buenos Aires and the Legal Transformation of the Atlantic World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. x + 376pp. 5 maps. Bibliography and index. £35.

John C. Cross, *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. x + 272pp. 9 figures. 2 tables. Bibliography and index. £35 hbk, pbk price not stated.

Gabriel Ramón Joffré, *La muralla y los callejones: intervención urbana y proyecto político en Lima durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX*. Lima: SIDEA/PROMPERU, 1999. 239pp. 9 tables. 10 figures. 5 maps. Bibliography. Paperback. Price not stated.

Arturo Almandoz Marte, *Urbanismo europeo en Caracas (1870–1940)*. Caracas: Fundarte/Equinoccio, 1997. 368pp. 17 figures. Bibliography. Paperback. Price not stated.

Juan José Martín Frechilla, *Planes, planos y proyectos para Venezuela (1908–1958): apuntes para una historia de la construcción del país*. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1994. 446pp. 15 figures. 27 tables. 288 photographs. Appendix and bibliography. Pbk Bolívares 3900 (approximately £3.90).

portray themselves and their new regimes as superior to the Habsburg mixed-race legacy they had inherited; in the literary sphere this was done most notably by Domingo Sarmiento in his novel *Facundo: civilización y barbarie*.¹ The new, impoverished republics could not initially afford grand works of infrastructure and anyway had decades of warfare between competing regional barons (*caudillos*) to contend with first. They could, however, dispose of the 'backward elements', which they considered to be the degraded, degenerate *mestizos*, the violent, unstable blacks and the lazy, uncivilized Indians.²

As the European Industrial Revolution took off there was a need for imports of primary products. The new Latin American republics were ideally blessed to provide them. Just as in colonial times, cities were the focus of this trade: financing, collecting and exporting the products of the interior and importing technology and ideas from Europe and North America. In the nascent republics unsecured frontiers were weak frontiers and it was believed that *gobernar es poblar* (to govern is to populate). Consequently, with Argentina leading the way, in the second half of the nineteenth century there began a massive importation of European migrants to service the export boom and to *blanquear la raza* (whiten the race).³ The vast majority of them remained in the urban areas creating a national dichotomy between the white, modernizing, cosmopolitan cities and the mixed race, 'backward', nationalist interior. This of course is a gross generalization, but forms the basis of Nicholas Shumway's *The Invention of Argentina*, an analysis of Argentine society which sees two distinct nations (the urban and the rural) within the same national territory.⁴

Throughout the twentieth century Latin America has witnessed the rise of identity politics to combat the influx of European and North American influences. Given the situation described above the rural areas have been seen as the preserve of the authentic national culture while the cities have been demonized as the ports of entry for foreign values and lifestyles and the home of the traitorous (*vendepatria*) middle classes. Latin America was a predominantly rural society until the 1940s when urban migration increased so as to change the face of the region for ever. Land invasions and squatter settlements upset the delicate balance of national economies already devastated by disadvantageous terms of trade. The newcomers were largely indigenous and mixed race and their difficulties in finding work led many to the informal sector of the economy. Thus in the eyes of the urban residents informality was inextricably linked to backwardness, land invasions and the non-white

¹ D.F. Sarmiento, *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (Madrid, 1970; 1st pub. 1845).

² A. Uslar Pietri, *Half a Millennium of Venezuela* (Caracas, 1992).

³ For an excellent coverage of (Spanish) immigrants in Buenos Aires see: J.C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires 1850–1930* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1998).

⁴ N. Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1991).

population. Recently, for foreign, liberal commentators these marginal groups represent the authentic face of the nation, suffering urban decadence and state repression. This has led to a conception of cities and urbanization as being at the root of the region's problems. Anthropological and sociological studies have mushroomed but urban history has been under-researched. In fact, Latin American Studies as an international academic discipline only really took off after the Second World War.⁵

Initially on independence agricultural problems preoccupied the largely rural new republics. Continuing attempts at nation building did not allow the admission of urban:rural disparities. Since the idealism of the 1960s many studies, picking up on the indigenist writings of the early 1900s, have sided with the indigenous population of the interior and lamented the disappearance of traditional lifestyles. The city and its supporters in the state have been at war with the authentic nation, never more so than in the case of the Sendero Luminoso in Peru whose philosophy is based on Mariátegui's indigenist publications from the 1920s. However, the real danger posed by the Peruvian guerrillas to established urban 'democracy' and the supremacy of globalized capitalism seemed to alienate scholars from their attraction to the militarized 'other'. Under the neoliberal Washington Consensus attention has moved to the study of business, development and microeconomics, government and diplomacy, minorities, ethnic rights and linguistics. Postmodernism has embraced and glorified societal fragmentation. Consequently it has become possible to look seriously at the urban history of the Latin American republics for the first time.

The alienation and isolation of the city from the interior is captured both academically and symbolically by Gabriel Ramón Joffré's *La muralla y los callejones*. Based on the author's Ph.D. thesis, the proof reading was excellent and the photographs left me wanting more. On the other hand the maps and plans were unreadable. Having lived in Lima for a year I was fascinated by this account of the city centre which could be one of the most stunning in the world. A lover of city walls I was at that time disappointed to find that they had been demolished over a century ago. For the first time this text has given me an insight into their existence and disappearance, dispelling forever the illusions of grandeur and architectural majesty which I had carried with me for ten years.

As well as being an urban history the work is a history of the Positivist drive for domination by the elites. One function of regeneration is to fight backwardness, filth and barbarism (p. 18). In other words the city is seen as a museum symbolizing the political projects under way. Initially in the colonial period this was translated into protecting the city not only from the interior and its inhabitants but also from foreign powers for

⁵ M.T. Berger, *Under Northern Eyes: Latin American Studies and US Hegemony in the Americas* (Bloomington, 1995).

which the British naval presence was a powerful symbol (p. 28). Capital cities and major ports even then were windows on to the world and had to conform to certain international expectations just like today (p. 28), but rural migration and the ruralization of urban areas were problems in the aftermath of the 'civilizing' Independence wars. This civilization had to extend throughout society and found its expression in the philosophy of Positivism.

In early nineteenth-century Lima the exodus of the colonial elite and the influx of rural migrants caused multi-family occupancy of old buildings. City authorities had no resources to deal with the migration, which settled initially in the centre and then the periphery but always in poverty and 'sin' (p. 31). Besides which there were always greater problems on the national front to worry about than the poor and their housing. The rich and middle classes hated the anarchic atmosphere created and moved to particular districts to try to escape it. They built parks and avenues to make the city healthier and statues to engender national identity. Streets were renamed after Independence figures and as a rupture was needed with the colonial past any new building took on European styles (p. 32). As civic authority slowly established itself with government encouragement and the guano boom, the walls served as protection for the civilizing city from the barbaric bandits outside. The economy favoured the elite and middle classes, but the poor saw no improvement. There was increasing polarization in society, but the wealthy wanted control to be able to insert the city into the world economy as the flagship of the state (pp. 48–9).

'Progress' was now shown by foreign influences and professionals. Traditional styles were overturned in the drive for symbolism showing elite solidarity and power (p. 70). European middle-class morality was adopted by the elite and translated into a civilizing mission of public space which began in the Plaza Mayor, the symbolic centre of the city. The ordinary people, their market, celebrations and everyday activity were civilized, i.e. removed. The urban environment was controlled with railings and the creation of districts (*barrios*) for easier policing. Statuary glorified the Independence heroes. As the century progressed the walls became less for military defence and more for customs duty and to aid police activity against criminals living outside them. Yet again they represented concepts of civilization against barbarism but they were in a surprisingly disgusting state: infested with robbers, dead animals and ramps of rubbish all contrasting with the veneer of middle-class civilization. In the 1870s they were finally knocked down to encourage an expansion which never came due to economic crisis and war (pp. 74–91). Attempts by the elite to impose a post-colonial national identity were shown in the war to have been a failure among the lower classes, principally due to elite hypocrisy and intolerance of popular culture and their inability to impose it by force.

In the period after the War of the Pacific the elite tried again to cement their control via a national reconstruction which involved an attack now on private space using the excuse of public health. Throughout the century the population had increased but not the built space. Lima was not a city of multi-storey buildings as a result of the danger from earthquakes. Elites left the city after Independence and the poor (blacks, coolies and *serranos*) arrived. The result was subdivision and over-occupation of available space in old colonial housing. As rents increased *callejones* (multiple rooms off a single corridor) were developed in all areas of the city, even the centre (pp. 134–8).

By the second half of the nineteenth century the middle classes had to impose their order and civilization on the poor as their misery was a potential and even real health hazard. They had to save the poor to save themselves and their sanitization of 'the other' meant state penetration of the home (p. 147). Health care became part of the elite Positivism allowing access to previously impenetrable areas in the guise of health checks (p. 167). Poorer areas were the most unhealthy and ill health was also blamed on race as the Indians were the most vulnerable to disease (pp. 172–3). The fear of contamination of the upper classes led to attacks on people's lives and belongings and the dehumanizing of the poor (pp. 180–3). The foreign ideals of wide, healthy avenues as in Paris took over and the early twentieth century saw the forced destruction of Chinese *callejones* amidst accusations of opium smoking, prostitution and dirtiness (pp. 209–10). This mirrored legislation in many countries to control slum areas in the context of massive European immigrations. The same reasons of sanitation and police control were always given (pp. 211–12). Social housing was proposed in 1871, but it was not implemented until the turn of the century as the elites continued to copy Europe in this respect.

In the early twentieth century the elite once again left the centre of Lima. They still owned the property but headed for Miraflores on the way to the old aristocratic resort of Chorrillos. They were heading for a new civilization leaving behind the now barbaric city (p. 215).

Just as in Peru's national renovation of the late nineteenth century, other countries were to undergo the same transformation of urban image into middle-classdom (*ciudades burguesas*), their increasing exports making acceptance by the world community essential (p. 14). Venezuela was no exception and the period is dealt with by Arturo Almandoz Marte in *Urbanismo europeo en Caracas (1870–1940)*. Like other countries Venezuela suffered horrendously from the ravages of the Independence wars. Unlike some capitals Caracas also suffered earthquake damage in 1815. Travellers' tales give testament to the impoverishment of the city. The condition was exacerbated by the constant *caudillo* wars which continued throughout the nineteenth century and arguably until at least 1935, the year which saw the death of long-time dictator Juan Vicente Gómez.

Venezuela had never been a rich part of the Spanish Empire and Caracas had not had the spectacular buildings of Lima: Almandoz refers to it as the Cinderella of South America (p. 23). After independence it looked more like a squatter settlement than a capital city. Statements of intent to import European immigrants were made to populate the deserted interior but few were attracted. A colony of Scots at Topo had to be sustained by the locals until they could be relocated to Canada. Canarians were particularly welcome as it became obvious that mainland Europeans preferred other destinations. So, despite the same Positivist desire to *blanquear la raza* as existed elsewhere, there was never a mass immigration of Europeans until much later (1948–60).⁶

Throughout Latin America, the renovated, modern cities threw off their Spanish colonial heritage but the influences were still European. British utilitarianism and French culture were combined as the role models for the new regional elite, what we would today refer to as the political class (p. 14). The influence of Hausmann and the French *Beaux-Arts* tradition conditioned the renovations of the *ciudades burguesas*, although detailed investigations of this theoretical transfer only exist in a couple of cases. Almandoz sets out to illustrate the European (French) influences on the literary and urban elites until the Americanization of the twentieth-century oil boom (pp. 16–17).

Between 1870 and 1888 Venezuela experienced for the first time a leader strong enough to rise above the morass of *caudillo* conflict, the Europeanizing Antonio Guzmán Blanco. Wealth came from agriculture and was more restricted than in other countries; however, the developments of the era can be compared with the *ciudades burguesas* elsewhere. Almandoz claims that the *Belle Époque* in Caracas outlived the European version and lasted until ‘Yankee bad taste’ took over with the petrolization of the country by the 1920s. On the other hand, due to the long years of dictatorship under Gómez, it is often claimed that Caracas suffered a ‘long nineteenth century’, a dark age through which the city slept, wakened only by the cries of the torture victims (pp. 21–2). This misrepresentation of dictatorship in Venezuela was the work of the incipient ‘democratic’ groups for their own ends. Although recently in the process of being dismantled, the black legend of *gomecismo* and dictatorship more generally has prevented a proper study of the period in question.

I thoroughly welcome this book by Almandoz which certainly paints a more positive and believable picture of Caracas around the turn of the century under dictatorship. Lacking the size and majesty of other cities the author points to a lack of obvious architectural and infrastructural

⁶ A. Pellegrino, *Historia de la inmigración en Venezuela, Siglos XIX y XX* (Caracas, 1989); M. Derham, ‘Immigration, assimilation and nation building in Venezuela: the Marcos Pérez Jiménez regime and its aftermath’ (University of Liverpool, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 2000).

Europeanization (apart from the Capitol complex of the Guzmán Blanco period) and so searches for cultural and intellectual influences from the old continent to represent the culmination of a lengthy francophile period rather than the beginning of a short-lived dalliance. His apparent approval of the Europeanizing tendency, at least compared with the later Americanization, seems to be at odds with his claim that the 1950s mass immigration programme returned Caracas to a 'pre-1870 state of semi barbarism'; however, it is interesting to note the Positivist intonation of the claim (p. 23).

The author works at the Simón Bolívar University in Caracas, an elite establishment. Like many Venezuelans from the cultural and intellectual elite he has worked and studied extensively abroad, in his case in Europe. He has a Ph.D. from the Architectural Association in London where he has also been visiting lecturer. He has studied and been visiting lecturer at the Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública in Madrid and has published in that country. His secondary reading for the text includes a great deal from Europe such as French studies on urbanization and Foucault's approach to discourse studies. He is perfectly placed to comment on foreign influences as he is one of the people bringing European influences to bear on the cultural and intellectual life of Caracas. His primary historiographical sources are fourfold: legal, political and administrative texts, novels and chronicles from Caracas, travellers' tales and technical works on urbanization. In this way he hopes to tie together these four voices to create a work where 'the gaze of temporary visitors can be contrasted with the resentments and frustrations of the characters of urban novels, at the same time as government projects are evaluated in terms of the available expertise' (p. 29). In my opinion he is more successful with the latter strand than the former.

The major figure of the years 1870–1940 was President Juan Vicente Gómez. He was and continues to be a cause of controversy and opposition. Not only was Caracas changing from a sleepy backwater to the capital city of an oil state but it was also witnessing the concomitant emergence of an urban middle class looking for political representation. Prominent in this group were several novelists who suffered political exile at one time or another including Rómulo Gallegos, Miguel Otero Silva, Laureano Vallenilla Lanz jr and José Rafael Pocaterra who was involved in armed uprisings against Gómez and went to gaol. Gallegos was the first president of democratic Venezuela, installed as the result of armed revolution in 1945. Otero Silva was an important newspaper editor and Vallenilla Lanz was a member of the social elite and of the Marcos Pérez Jiménez government of 1953–58. Together with Rómulo Betancourt these figures not only dominated much of the history and politics of the time but they also, and more importantly, dominated the documenting of history and politics. They were not impoverished but dedicated representatives of the mass of the people describing their

environment faithfully as they saw it, but rather they were powerful national players with a determination to achieve power, even at the point of a gun. Gallegos' *Doña Barbara* is a classic of Positivist fiction and recent work shows Gallegos to be extremely ambiguous about his own mixed race people.⁷ In my view it is impossible to see these authors as simply chroniclers and novelists. In the context of the times they were revolutionaries and politicians. They did not represent Caracas but merely the elite and middle-class sectors of society, and using their work leads to verisimilitude rather than truth. It is rather more enlightening that Juan Vicente Gómez hated and distrusted Caracas, its society and machinations and moved his seat of power to the city of Maracay.

This book is well written, well proof-read and is substantially referenced, but would have benefited from more illustration especially for the foreign reader. The subject matter is interesting and topical, but I found that the controversies of the literary sections detracted from the success of the technical investigation. In fact both 'sections' seem to give rise to opposing conclusions. From the technical aspect dictatorship led to order and progress, and could even be considered a success given the context of the times. From the self-interested literary aspect of the political classes it was just the opposite. Maybe that is exactly what we should expect.

Juan José Martín Frechilla in *Planes, planos y proyectos para Venezuela 1908–1935: apuntes para una historia de la construcción del país* did not fall into the same trap as Almandoz. His chosen period overlaps that of the last text but encompasses the rule of two much criticized yet misunderstood presidents, Gómez and Marcos Pérez Jiménez. It is a work of revisionist history in which even in 1994 he risked the opprobrium of his peers for daring to question accepted wisdom and view positively the rule of Pérez Jiménez which ended with armed revolution by military factions incited and subsequently rewarded by 'democratic' politicians (p. 11). Focusing primarily on the governorship of Caracas of Guillermo Pacanins (1950–58) this work sets out to contextualize what had previously been viewed in isolation and dismisses as fantasy the deep ruptures between democracy and dictatorship on which most contemporary Venezuelan history is based (pp. 15–17). Almandoz chose to finish his work at the time of the 1939 Plan Monumental de Caracas, known as the Plan Rotival, whereas for Martín the plan and its most visible period of development form the core of his text.

As in so many areas of Venezuelan (contemporary) history primary documentation is thin on the ground. Even more scarce are documents permitting a faithful recreation of the past (p. 19). Much of the historical debate in Venezuela has been conducted around the opinions of the protagonists rather than the facts of the case. I have shown elsewhere how sometime president Rómulo Betancourt's *oeuvre* and especially

⁷ D. Yarrington, 'Populist anxiety: race and social change in the thought of Rómulo Gallegos', *The Americas*, 56 (1999), 63–90.

Venezuela: Oil and Politics began a self-referential spiral of insane proportions given the demagogic nature of his writing.⁸ On the other hand Pérez Jiménez only wanted to be judged on his concrete achievements, so much so that his rule became known as the 'bulldozer years'.⁹

As a nation Venezuela has lacked self-esteem throughout the whole republican period. An agricultural economy held sway until the growth of oil exporting in the 1920s under the auspices of the multinationals (pp. 144, 158). At the turn of the century Venezuela was so weak internationally that gunboats sent by the Great Powers were able to bombard the coast unmolested (p. 29). Internally *caudillo* warfare had set back any hopes of a truly national identity. Only with the arrival of Gómez to power (1908) and the discovery of oil (1914) did the heavily indebted country rise from its knees. Democracy was imposed by violence in 1945 but was removed in 1948 by a bloodless military coup amidst the chaos of political violence, demagoguery and incompetence which was the *trienio* of Acción Democrática and the two Rómulos, Gallegos and Betancourt. Military rule gave way to the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship of unequalled economic advancement, industrialization and stability. Territorially the Gulf of Venezuela dispute with Colombia (in which the United States is currently trying to involve itself) was resolved in Venezuela's favour by their navy (pp. 66–74). Thousands of European migrant workers arrived to carry out the construction work needed to turn Caracas into a worthy capital for a wealthy oil state and Venezuela into a beacon for the Caribbean (pp. 239–54). Rational development of the physical environment (p. 289) and the human resources (p. 336) would turn the country into the envy of the region, able to propose a development fund for Latin America years before the establishment of the Inter-American Development Bank by the United States. In the era of geopolitics (p. 109) military rule was carrying out an inventory of resources, with the aim of maximizing their potential, and minimizing danger from the real enemy, the United States (pp. 28–30, 41).

North American-style skyscrapers and highways, plus the presence of some 400,000 European workers would give a recognizable and therefore reassuring message to the northern neighbour. At the same time the statuary, of folk-goddess Maria Lionsa and La India for example, and a holiday village for workers helped boost national identification and pride. Martín begins his contextualization with this picture of a feeble Venezuela (pp. 23, 27) and continues with the history of state intervention in the economy as an expression of oil wealth and to achieve order and progress. It is amazing how Positivist analyses have retained their currency a century after Positivism is supposed to have lost influence. The third part of the book looks at the integration of national territory

⁸ R. Betancourt, *Venezuela: Oil and Politics* (Boston, 1979; 1st pub. Mexico City, 1956); Derham, 'Immigration'.

⁹ O. Castillo D'Imperio, *Los años del bulldozer: ideología y política 1948–58* (Caracas, 1990).

and of Caracas into the whole. The development of agriculture would be an important aspect of this and the (experimental) agricultural colony at Turén, the development of markets in Caracas and highway upgrading meant distribution networks could take on a more coherent form. Industry and agriculture had to be developed equally to ensure future independence (p. 305).

Within the context of the twentieth-century history of Venezuela it is hardly surprising that military rulers made national survival and coherence a priority. In the age of geopolitics and US intervention image and strength were vital. Rational development was the key, but this was not always understood by democratic governments. In fact they destroyed Venezuela to such a degree that in 1998 the people voted the traditional parties out and installed as President Hugo Chávez Frías who a decade earlier had headed a military revolution. In Latin America appearances can be deceptive and preconceptions dangerous. To view the bulldozer years as merely representing the megalomania of a dictator, as most commentators have, is to misrepresent the decade tragically. Martín makes that point convincingly and in great detail. The photographs are very welcome, as is the 29-page bibliography. Heavily and usefully footnoted, there are 27 graphs and tables of varying detail and utility. The book is excellently written and there is a refreshing absence of even typographical errors. The only criticisms I can suggest are that the text is very dense and the non-chronological treatment can lead to some confusion. This is compounded by the fact that there is no index, an annoying omission in a work of such importance. This is a necessary addition to the bookshelves of postgraduate students and serious researchers of Venezuelan history.

In much the same way as Pérez Jiménez oversaw the construction of markets in the 1950s as part of a national plan to develop integration and distribution, so the same decade witnessed the massive expansion of state-controlled markets in Mexico. However, whereas in Venezuela there was an anti-political dictatorship in place, in Mexico the political environment was of one-party rule but with a lack of support in the capital city. John C. Cross in *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City* surgically removes the patina of political and establishment homogeneity in Mexico to reveal the worm-infested underbelly of national and local politics. To do this he undertook fieldwork among the apparently chaotic ranks of the ubiquitous street traders of Mexico City. Informality has been studied from the economic point of view most notably by Hernando de Soto (*El otro sendero*) for Peru, but this text looks at the close relationship between the traders and politicians. In addition to illuminating the murky world of street trading the text is a timely contribution to the wider debate on the crisis of democracy and the concomitant popularity of authoritarian rule, particularly in Latin America.

On the micro level the book is limited. It takes too long to say too little and has too narrow a focus. The author takes a liberal view of land invasions and informal trading which is overly simplistic. The views of the broader society remain unsolicited. Corruption is alluded to but the author remains excluded from real insider information. The overlong introduction has the feel of the master's degree dissertation it started out as. There is a great deal of uncomfortable English: 'commercialists' (p. 70), 'obligated' (p. 151) for which there is no need and which therefore grates. The text gives the impression of having been originally written in Spanish, e.g. in *the Mexico City . . .*' (p. 189), and the quotations are often badly translated. The text is dotted with typographical errors and displays an unnecessary level of political correctness, i.e. the use of 'her' when referring to an indefinite carpenter. There is a lack of citations, e.g. 'a broad literature deals with political mobilization by land-invasion groups . . . ' (p. 244), 'it has been said . . . ' (p. 228), 'some may lament . . . as some intellectuals and politicians in Mexico do' (p. 228) which adds to the impression of informality and lack of professionalism. The use of generalization, e.g. 'in this period' (p. 177), is, of course, not recommended. On the positive side the work proves the point that policy implementation is more important than policy creation and that local government records are totally inadequate for ensuring accountability and allowing research, perhaps another reason why urban history is under-studied.

However, on a deeper level the work is much more interesting once you are over the surface flaws. Despite its rather deliberate political correctness it actually demonstrates some of the reasons why democracy is in crisis and authoritarian rule is still popular. Authoritarian rule works and democracy is a corrupt farce. The one-party democracy in Mexico (overthrown in this year's elections) shows how the political structure in Mexico is organized vertically rather than horizontally. Each politician has his own group of followers, called *camarillas*, who rise and fall with their leader. Divisions between party and state are deliberately blurred and the party equates to democracy itself. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) is therefore a collection of individuals with their vertically-linked *camarillas* all looking for personal advancement. This vision is not a new one and has been proposed for Venezuela by Michael Coppedge. In fact it harks back to the nineteenth-century *caudillos*, men who lead through charisma, ability and valour. Once these attributes are lost they are discarded as they can no longer perform the role of the patron for their clients. Their leadership is premised on results, not words. This book shows how authoritarian rule at the city level in the 1950s and at national level in the 1990s allowed the street vendors to be controlled. In between, in the so-called more democratic phases, their presence spread uncontrollably beyond the markets constructed for them.

The secret of their success despite periodic attempts to control them was their access to the *camarillas* of politicians more powerful than the bureaucrats at city level implementing policy. This access was based on solidarity and was ensured by the authoritarian leadership of the different groups of vendors being able to promise members' compliance with the directions of their political patron who may be taking them from his own patron in a higher-level *camarilla*. The author shows the vendors' groups could be guaranteed to vote, protest or intimidate to order as long as they got their own wishes fulfilled. Low-level contacts can reach right to the top especially if you can offer organized support for politicians and enables pressure to be put on them. So, periods of greatest 'democracy' are good for organized, authoritarian leaders to impose themselves over even elected representatives of the people. Periods of high-level authoritarian rule allow policies to be implemented and prevent intervention from self-interested groups to the detriment of the national whole.

The lessons taught by this book are that, at all levels, democracy brings stasis, vulnerability and weakness while authoritarianism brings action, strength and influence. No wonder authoritarianism is so popular in Latin America and elsewhere and democracy is in crisis worldwide. The author claims early in the book that informality is a choice; by the end he claims it is an economic good because it allows people to 'survive'. I would agree with his first contention rather than the second. In this Latin America has a lot to teach the rest of the world. Individuals want to control their lives, and do not want interference from the state, politicians and, especially, low-level bureaucrats. Patron-client relationships and authoritarian rule force individuals to socialize, demonstrate loyalty, make contacts and participate in society. Paradoxically, democracy fosters division, the climate of 'rights' proposed by organized groups and corruption at even the most modest levels of the bloated bureaucracy. As the state becomes more acquisitive and antagonistic in the era of the Washington Consensus it begins to have nothing to offer the individual.¹⁰ Divide and rule and attempts to divert peoples' minds from the problems are its only tactics. Despite the laboured political correctness of the author, the (unintentional?) conclusions to be drawn from the book are non-politically correct but lead to better understanding.

The final book in this review not only highlights the non-political correctness of government and politics in Latin America but also brings us full circle to answer unequivocally the question posed in the first paragraph as to whose vision of order has been imposed. Jeremy Adelman's *Republic of Capital: Buenos Aires and the Legal Transformation of the Atlantic World* takes us back to Argentina and traces the transition of

¹⁰ For the concept of the Antagonistic State, see Derham, 'Immigration'.

Buenos Aires from colonial port to capital of an 'ordered' republic. Rather than being coterminous with the course of the Independence wars this change is considered to have actually taken until the 1860s to complete. Accurately, Adelman points to the betrayal of the widely-promoted revolutionary ideals of popular 'liberty' in favour of the less uplifting interests of capital and capitalists. Capital supposedly needs stability to prosper and so the order imposed upon the country was that of the capitalist political classes based in the major port of Buenos Aires which controlled the River Plate outlet to the Atlantic trade routes. Mightier than the sword, money, or rather the lack of it, put an end to the age of the *caudillos* and the constant wars between Buenos Aires and the confederated states. However, anger, resentment and exclusion among those without capital in the lower classes and the interior regions created a volcano of discontent which would eventually be personified in the twentieth-century figure of Juan Perón.

Adelman does not delve into the areas of Positivism and immigration, nor does he take up the cudgel of the excluded poor despite being attracted to include a study of social class formation. Despite the very different focus of his analysis he still arrives at the same picture as Shumway of a divided country at odds with itself. On the other hand, for a more complete picture of the process he describes some knowledge of those areas is required for a fuller understanding. For that reason the volume will be more useful for postgraduate students than for undergraduates and the more general reader. It deals with commercial and constitutional law rather than civil and criminal. The author recognizes, but defends himself against, accusations that the work is overly descriptive. I must confess that it took me an inordinate amount of time to read it; perhaps my own personal circumstances intruded too much, but it did seem to take an awfully long time to say what we already know. I am sure the author also knew the conclusions before writing the book and so the path from A to B became largely description or illumination to use a less pejorative term. The work is magisterial in style with breathtakingly effective translations (his own?) and refreshingly few typographical errors. However, reflecting Adelman's confessions in the Acknowledgements to losing frequent track of the direction he was taking, I found it at times very dense and even occasionally repetitive. On the other hand, questions of identity, nationhood and anti-*porteño* feeling are still rife in Argentina; to have this documentation, from a completely new angle, of deliberate social exclusion, foreign influences and as a result the formation of veritable partition within the nation makes this a valuable addition to the academic collection.

In conclusion it would appear that production on urban history in Latin America is thriving as much from within the region as from without. However, it is also apparent from this limited selection of available works that issues thought moribund by the late nineteenth

century, such as the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism, still plague the literature. In comparison with North America the republics of the south have a history of alienation, separation and division, not only in national terms due to attempts to construct distinct identities, but also within each country between the urban and the rural.

I feel that many of the still unresolved arguments held in nineteenth-century Latin America, particularly Argentina, have renewed relevance today in the construction of Europe. The works reviewed cover concepts of civilization and barbarism, order and progress which still pepper our modern political discourse. The civilized order of the liberal elite was, and is still being, imposed. The deliberate exclusion of the working classes to the benefit of the political/business elite continues unabated. How green was my valley? Not very, would be the laconic reply for the majority of the population and, comparatively, the grass has become no more verdant since. As Europe slips towards Third World status it may now be time for the developing nations to give us the benefit of their experiences.