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The importance of Latin America in global affairs is not always clearly understood. Contemporary concerns about such issues as international terrorism, widespread economic recession, and nuclear weaponry have tended to divert the attention of policymakers and the media to other areas of the world. Nevertheless, astute observers have not lost sight of Latin American issues as well as the widespread influence of Latin American culture and society, especially within the Western Hemisphere.

The region’s nearly 600 million people account for approximately 10 percent of the world’s population and Latin Americans outnumber North Americans by two to one. Moreover, as the Latino population continues to grow in the United States, its impact on politics, the economy, and popular culture is becoming increasingly significant. Even US television has seen fit to include a series depicting the Latino experience. Also, in a CNN documentary aired on October 21 and 22, 2009, Soledad O’Brien explores how Latinos are reshaping US communities. And historical figures from Latin America have been portrayed on film with great critical success. For example, *Frida* (2002) presents the life story of surrealist artist Frida Kahlo and in so doing successfully depicts many of the artists and political figures of postrevolutionary Mexico. In Che Guevara’s *Motorcycle Diaries* (1952), adapted to film in 2001, a youthful pre–Cuban Revolution Che discovers his socialist vocation while traveling with his friend on a motorcycle through beautiful Latin American landscapes.

Latin Americans live in a geographic region that encompasses 15 percent of the world’s land surface with vast differences in terrain and climate ranging from tropical rain forests, swampy lowlands, grassland plains, and deserts to mountainous highlands, island chains, and cays. Increasingly, demographic
concentration in urban areas, especially in large cities, has reaffirmed some cultural traditions and torn down others. European-style central cities have become surrounded by shantytowns occupied mostly by migrants displaced from rural agrarian societies. These and other demographic trends have presented a variety of difficult socioeconomic challenges.

Issues relating to the environment, economic growth and distribution, immigration, and political and developmental concerns are most appropriately understood in historical perspective. The area has an extremely interesting past in which three major ethnic groups have simultaneously clashed with each other while forming unique fusions. Much of the Latin American story is one of confrontation and accommodation among indigenous peoples* (the Aztecs, Maya, Inca, Taino or Arawak, Carib, Aymara, and Quechua), Europeans (the Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, and Dutch), and Africans (the Yoruba, Mandingo, Fulani, Hausa, and other groups). The interaction among the European conquerors, indigenous civilizations, and imported African slaves during the colonization period left a legacy that has profoundly influenced subsequent development. Later, immigrants from many nations contributed to the multiplicity of groups interacting in the region.

The conquerors, who sought adventure and wealth in the New World, transferred a peculiar system of agrarian feudalism that was derived primarily from the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula after eight centuries of Moorish domination. The land and the native peoples were divided among the colonizers, who created a hierarchical social order in which the landed aristocracy was supported by the church and protected by the military. Significantly, criollos (creoles)—Europeans born in the Americas—eventually supplanted the European-born colonizers at the top of the social order. Although they were thoroughly Spanish, English, or French, for example, the creoles often had never even been to Europe. Similarly caught between two cultures were the mestizos, offspring of Europeans and native peoples. Later, the offspring of Africans and Europeans identified themselves more with the haciendas, large socially self-contained ranches, than with the homelands of their forebears.

The plantation economy and hacienda life produced interactions and traditions that have continued to influence Latin American society. Moreover, the region is rich in many natural resources that have contributed to the global economy. Latin America has produced large percentages of the world’s supply of crops such as coffee, bananas, linseed, cocoa, sugar, and cotton. Significant percentages of the world’s oil, nitrates, bauxite, tin, copper, gold, and silver, among other sources of wealth, have also been found in the region. Nevertheless,

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*The term Indian has often been used to refer to the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean because Christopher Columbus thought he had encountered “Indians” based on his misconception of where he had landed. We break with this convention in this volume and use native peoples or indigenous peoples whenever possible.
even after the colonial period ended with independence for the countries within Latin America, foreign capital predominantly exploited and foreign interests largely profited from these resources until foreign companies were partially displaced by attempts to promote national development and social equity through state planning and governmental enterprises.

The forging of new national identities and liberation from oppressive colonial structures did not result in the rapid redefinition of political and social institutions leading to stable self-governance nor did the region’s economies develop self-sufficiency. On the contrary, confusion and disorder were manifested in caudillo rule, control of the people by military strongmen. Initially, authoritarian solutions to this anarchic and unstable situation prevailed, despite the democratic tradition of cabildo abierto (town meeting) and Bolivarian ideals of independence and order. To this day, the appeal of authoritarian populism in the face of destabilizing political, economic, and social problems can be traced to the way the Catholic kings consolidated Spain under unified control. These traditions are reflected in ongoing Latin American culture—in literary themes; in gender roles; in relations among ethnic groups, belief systems, and educational systems; and in political institutions and practices.

Latin American culture has been in transition. The combinations of strong legacies of the past, many of which are worthy of preservation, and modern challenges to the traditional order have been explosive at times. Although the multiple forces operating in Latin American societies are complicated and the overarching political cultural context is far from constant, ignoring these legacies and influences is just as naïve and misleading as accepting the myriad myths surrounding the area. Evolving fusions of religious beliefs, political and social forms, and even ethnic groups have yielded a whole that is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

After the end of the Cold War, the new world order that began to emerge in the last decade of the twentieth century set into motion a process of realignment among the developed and developing nations. Latin America had not been immune to the emergence of competitive regional economics and the apparent collapse of authoritarian regimes that came to characterize the new international dynamics. Termination of General Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile, the end of military rule in Brazil and Argentina, the negotiated truces that ended the wars in Central America, the restoration of an elected leader who had been ousted by a coup in Haiti, and fairly free elections in the Caribbean, Venezuela, and elsewhere seemed to indicate a trend toward democratization and the eventual amelioration of debilitating problems such as political corruption, massive poverty, monetary inflation, foreign debt, illiteracy, crime, and disease.

In the twenty-first century, however, there is evidence of a throwback to patterns that characterized Latin American instability in the past. Issues such as the ongoing Venezuelan-Colombian dispute, the 2009 Honduran coup, the
potential for armed intervention in general, and the rise in civilian violence appeared to reflect previous patterns in which a praetorian military would intervene to prevent perceived progressive threats to elite interests. At the same time, the emergence of leftist governments in such countries as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Brazil, and Bolivia has challenged the process of international realignment.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton’s visit to Latin America in March 2010 reveals the declining ability of the United States to determine political outcomes in the region. For example, during the visit Clinton was unable to convince Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) to impose sanctions on Iran. Similarly, she had little influence on leaders such as Lula, Hugo Chávez, and Felipe Calderón who had been pushing for the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)—a largely symbolic alternative to the Organization of American States (OAS). CELAC, comprised of Latin American nations (including Cuba and excluding Canada and the United States), is gaining popularity as a demonstration of Latin American independence.

The complex dynamics on which we must base our interpretations raise a series of questions: Fundamentally, what constitutes Latin America? Who are the Latin Americans? How are the legacies of colonialism and nationalism being transformed in contemporary Latin America? What are the prognoses for further democratization, economic and social development, stability, and amelioration of serious crises of governance? Is a hemispheric free-trade zone viable? Will regional integration help to resolve or exacerbate the problems facing Latin America? If populist regimes continue to emerge, will they solidify a regional bloc that includes neither the United States nor Canada? In short, where has this vital region been, and where is it going? The story is far from complete. Each chapter of this book focuses on a different, yet interrelated, aspect of these open-ended questions. If we are to understand Latin America, we will continue to seek answers to these questions; develop new insights, empathy, and appreciation; and raise new questions.

To be sure, responses to these questions are far more complicated than they may initially appear. For example, Latin America can be defined as a region in a variety of ways. Some definitions are based on geopolitical and strategic concerns, others on common languages and cultures. Some include only Hispanic countries, excluding the Anglo-Caribbean, the Francophone countries, and Brazil. Others include these areas as well as French Canada, part of Louisiana, southern Florida, and the southwestern United States because of their strong Latino influence and cultural connections.

Similarly, many theories have been advanced regarding the inhabitants of the Americas. The most widely accepted view holds that, originally, groups of Asians crossed the Bering Strait, migrated south, and settled in North and South America. Another suggests that these groups crossed the Pacific Ocean on
rafts. Yet another maintains that human life began in South America. José Vasconcelos, a Mexican intellectual, posited in 1948 that Latin Americans had become a “cosmic race,” combining the strengths of different ethnic groups that have inhabited the region. Each theory is based on a plausible interpretation of certain aspects of the available evidence, and each definition has its own logic. Thus, a comprehensive approach is required to respond adequately to what are actually complex, rather than simple, questions about the nature of the area and the people we seek to understand.

Consider one of the first encounters between a native person and a European in the early sixteenth century: Montezuma, leader of the Aztec civilization, is reported to have told Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés, “We have known for a long time, from the chronicles of our forefathers, that neither I, nor those who inhabit this country, are descendants from the aborigines of it, but from strangers who came to it from very distant parts” (Keen 1966:47). According to Cortés’s account in his letters to the king of Spain, Montezuma then related an ancient story that legitimized Spanish sovereignty in the Americas. But Montezuma added a comment that would have portentous significance in subsequent history: “‘Look at me,’ he said, ‘and see that I am flesh and bones, the same as you, and everybody, and that I am mortal, and tangible’” (Keen 1966:48). Since the first contact between Europeans and those who had previously settled in the Western Hemisphere, Latin Americans have been trying to define themselves and their region. Who would govern this New World inhabited by the progeny of “strangers”? What kind of world would it become?

The story of Latin America’s indigenous origins, conquest by European powers, struggles for independence, and ongoing search for political and economic stability is an action-filled drama, revealing protagonists whose cultural differences have brought about conflicts as well as coalitions. Contemporary Latin America’s increasingly important yet, at times, neglected role in world politics makes essential a comprehensive understanding of how its history is rooted in a complex and turbulent past. Popular discussions of Latin America and inter-American affairs, however, are generally charged with high levels of passion and scanty knowledge, resulting all too often in mutual misunderstanding due to unfortunate stereotypes on both sides. For example, some North Americans argue vehemently about their need to protect themselves against violent Latin American revolutionaries who threaten political stability in their backyard, illegal immigrants who steal jobs from US workers, and narco-traffickers who poison US youth. And some Latin Americans fear the malevolent intentions of the “Colossus of the North” that has seemed to intervene continuously in their domestic affairs. They exhibit a strong tendency to resent US hegemony in the Western Hemisphere and blame the violence occasioned by drug cartels on the demands of the US market. Yet, many Latin Americans seek upward mobility by emigrating to the United States, thereby causing their “love-hate” relationship to confound many observers.
During the Cold War, many US citizens excitedly propounded the merits of military incursions or covert operations in places like Grenada, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Chile, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. When asked to locate these countries on a map, name their major cities, account for their economic status, or place them in historical context, however, they were clueless. Far too many North Americans are apt to locate Cuba in Central America or Argentina in the Caribbean and to assume Brazilians speak Spanish. Moreover, public opinion on many issues in both the United States and Latin America has become profoundly divided in the post–Cold War era. The plight of Cuba is a case in point. To many observers, the US economic embargo and diplomatic isolation of Cuba have constituted a misuse of power to the extreme detriment of masses of Cubans who, as a result, must endure suffering and hardship. Many others believe Cuba’s development problems should be attributed solely to Fidel Castro’s adoption of the socialist model. In either case, ideological dogmatism has been reinforced by insufficient understanding and vilification of US foreign policy on the one hand or of Castroism on the other. Could it be that this is not a mutually exclusive proposition and that, in fact, both sides have contributed to the dilemma?

Unfortunately, stereotypes and myths that have fostered public impressions, as well as political actions, are deeply embedded in popular culture. Frederick Pike amply documents the pervasiveness of this type of thinking, from the speeches of early statesmen, like Thomas Jefferson and Simón Bolívar, to virtually continuous references in literature, art, cinema, and the media. According to Jefferson, for example, the superior US culture would supplant the inferior Latin American culture. He held that “it is impossible not to look forward to distant times when our rapid multiplication will expand itself . . . and cover the whole northern, if not the whole southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws” (Pike 1992:19). Such thinking has fueled historical US imperialism as well as contemporary reactions to waves of Hispanic immigrants such as the English-only movement and militant resistance to reform of immigration policies. Ironically, Bolívar predicted the United States would “afflict Latin America in the name of liberty” (Pike 1992:18), leading Pike to conclude that “the degree to which American stereotypes of Latin Americans are reinforced by—and perhaps sometimes even originate in—Latin Americans’ stereotypes of themselves [is impressive]” (Pike 1992:116).

Impressions reflected in advertising and the popular media perpetuate myths. In a free association of ideas, what are the first images that come to mind when identifying Latin Americans? If you think of drug traffickers or baseball players, you are not alone. Nor would you be unique in conjuring up the idea of the “Latin lover” or the romantic revolutionary. Regarding politics, a US traveler in Latin America reports that “the value of stability in government is something they [Latin Americans] cannot be made to understand. It is not in their power to see it, and the desire for change and revolution is in the
blood” (Pike 1992:68). Similarly, *machismo* is equated with the oppression of women, the *siesta* with laziness, music and dancing with today, work and planning with *mañana* (Hillman 2003).

Many Latin Americans also hold distorted perceptions of the United States and its citizens. These views vary from the vulgar notion that all *gringos* carry guns and walk on gold-paved streets to the more sophisticated analysis of the United States as a materialistic, mercenary culture of acquisition, devoid of the higher virtues of family loyalty, honor, and personalism. In this regard, José Enrique Rodó of Uruguay wrote *Ariel* in 1900 as a glorification of Latin America’s superior cultural sensitivity. His ideas influenced other Latin American critics of the United States, such as José Martí of Cuba and Rubén Darío of Nicaragua, thus contributing to an anti-*yanqui* sentiment. Hence, mutual misperceptions, stereotypes, and myths abound, making a more penetrating and realistic portrayal of the region particularly important in an era of global change. The basic problem, according to Pike, is that “Americans remain reluctant to accept the fact that their country has become a frontier for Latin Americans. For generations, after all, Americans had assumed that Latin America was their frontier. Old myths, like hoary stereotypes, die hard” (1992:364).

Recognition of the highly misleading and counterproductive nature of portrayals of Latin America as somehow more “natural” and less civilized than the developed North is essential for understanding the region. This book is an attempt to promote such recognition through exploration of basic ideas and information that will contribute to debunking various myths about contemporary Latin America. The fundamental theme of “unity in diversity” provides a comprehensive organizing concept. Using this approach, the authors of the chapters emphasize the significance of the area as a whole, along with ample references to the individual countries within the region and their history, geography, and political culture. Our examination encompasses all territory in the Western Hemisphere south of the United States. (Latinos and Latin American enclaves within North America can be understood in the context of their ties to the region.) Hence, areas within Latin America include Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. Countries within these areas form part of Ibero-, Luso-, Indo-, Afro-, and Hispano-America. Subareas such as the Anglo-, French, and Dutch Caribbean are also included because of underlying similarities that transcend apparent differences.5

Great diversities of peoples, institutions, and geography in Latin America converge in common historical, social, political, and developmental patterns. Various combinations of these patterns, similar socioeconomic problems, and analogous cultural expressions permit a unified vision of Latin America. Therefore, each chapter in this volume draws examples from several countries within the various areas of Latin America, thus allowing the text as a whole to offer a balanced representation of the entire region. The authors use a variety of specific cases to illustrate their general overviews of the geographic setting, historical context, political evolution, and political issues; the role of the military;
the ways in which economic systems function; the impacts of urbanization, demographic trends, and the environment; the influences of ethnicity, class, and nationalism; the role of women; the relationship between education and development; the impact of religion and of cultural and literary expressions; and the ways international relations have contributed to new trends and prospects for the future. In sum, the book is designed as a core text that introduces students to Latin America as a diverse, yet inclusive, region facing crucial issues in the twenty-first century.

Among the major issues discussed in the text, the most prominent are those related to socioeconomic and political development, debt, immigration, narcotics trade, and inter-American affairs. These are understood in the context of a background strongly influenced by European, Amerindian, African American, and the “fused” cultures of the New World as well as by the legacies of colonialism and the predominant impact of the United States. We introduce readers to the area by providing basic definitions, outlining major issues, discussing relevant background, and illustrating these considerations in countries within the region. Thus, the text employs both thematic and case study approaches. Each chapter contains general discussions, key concepts, ongoing questions, and bibliographic resources.

Rather than attempting to bring these issues and considerations to closure, this text is designed to advance knowledge and stimulate interest and discussion. Therefore, the contents are neither all-inclusive nor deterministic. They are selective and exemplary, based on the premises that (1) common themes tie diverse countries together in a vital region, (2) misunderstanding can be overcome through awareness of other cultures, and (3) a need exists for innovation in domestic and international policymaking as well as in education. As stereotypes are based on partial truths distorted by ignorance and bias, a more adequate comprehension of contemporary Latin America requires that distortions be overcome and that the region be appreciated as a distinctive set of cultures encompassing great diversity, unique amalgamations, and increasing global importance.

While to many observers the region and people are perplexing and unfathomable and their differences profound, we, as scholars, need to keep clearly in mind Montezuma’s observation that, ultimately, we are all “flesh and bones, the same as you, and everybody . . . mortal, and tangible” (Keen 1966:48). This book is designed to clarify that proposition as it applies to Latin America and Latin Americans.

* * *

Much has occurred since publication of the third edition of *Understanding Contemporary Latin America*. The process of democratization has continued to face complicated challenges, especially from leftist-oriented populists such
as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Daniel Ortega (Cameron and Hershberg 2010). However, democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya’s ouster in Honduras at the hands of military-backed Roberto Micheletti in 2009 confuses matters even further. Does this represent retrogression toward the “conflict society” described by Kalman Silvert in the 1960s? Do the new populists and the Honduran case coalesce in their negative impact on legitimate democratic governance and peaceful change?

Also, the threat of global terrorism since the attacks of September 11, 2001, has continued to impact international relations in adverse ways, redirecting attention from developmental issues. And the global financial crisis of 2009–2010 has weakened developing economies disproportionately. Accordingly, economic recession, along with continued globalization, has been accompanied by concomitant disillusionment with both the Washington Consensus in particular and neoliberal solutions in general. Consequently, the fundamental questions formulated in previous editions and reiterated in this Introduction emerge as even more significant than ever.

While there have been challenges and transitions, there has also been durability. The elevated expectations for deeper democratization and hopes for amelioration of socioeconomic and political problems that were identified in the first, second, and third editions have been tempered by the aforementioned new developments in the twenty-first century and constrained by legacies of the past. Therefore, this fourth edition presents a vision of the region that is the product of the new events as well as continuing patterns, building on the themes presented in earlier volumes.

Previous editions of Understanding Contemporary Latin America contained chapter analyses that were consistent in addressing strengths and weaknesses in confronting daunting challenges. Their general tones and conclusions reflected the great potential inherent in a region embarking on difficult transitions toward peaceful conflict resolution, social and economic equity, political democracy, environmental and cultural health, and the protection of human rights. Each chapter of this volume was updated, several contain extensive revisions, and two (Chapters 6 and 12) were completely rewritten by new authors in order to take into account recent developments and challenges.

A common theme emerges in this fourth edition that is consonant with the hopefulness of previous editions, yet much less sanguine about the time frame previously projected. The complex processes of democratization and economic development have faced challenges that will continue to inhibit the full realization of free and open societies in many countries in the near future. Elections in several countries have challenged existing political solutions while raising further questions about historical tendencies and the ability to consolidate democracy in Latin America. Developmental issues, divisive partisan struggles, security concerns, environmental disasters, and ecological challenges have complicated politics in many countries.
Although the Brazilian economy has attracted large amounts of foreign investment, poverty, malnutrition, and health issues have continued to challenge Lula’s populist appeal. In October 2010, Lula’s former chief of staff, Dilma Rousseff, defeated José Serra, the former governor of São Paulo, to become the first female president in Brazil’s history. Although Rousseff’s defeat of Serra provides continuity, her potential impact on the issues facing Brazil remains unclear.

Haiti’s disastrous earthquake in 2009, followed by a hurricane and subsequent outbreak of cholera in 2010, has left the country in dire straights. Similarly, in 2010 Chile experienced an earthquake that also left the country in need of disaster relief. Other environmental issues, such as erosion of coral reefs and hurricane damage in the Caribbean, melting of ice caps off the southern borders of Chile and Argentina, and devastation of the rain forest in Brazil, have exacerbated developmental problems in the region. Interestingly, US president Barack Obama’s new initiatives in clean energy might have challenging implications for oil producers like Venezuela, Mexico, and Ecuador. Yet the largely partisan obstacles that President Obama must face have stultified progressive policies of change.

Instability still prevails in many areas of Latin America. The presidency of Venezuela’s Chávez continues to be fraught with controversy and the country with extreme class-based political polarization (Cardozo and Hillman 2003; Ellner 2010; Hillman 2002, 2004). The conflict in Chiapas, Mexico, continues as does the civil war in Colombia. Peace negotiations between the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and the Mexican government have faltered and violence associated with narcotics trafficking has escalated along the US-Mexican border, especially in Ciudad Juárez. Talks between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)—also known as la guerrilla—and the Colombian government suffer a similar fate and are complicated further by Chávez’s alleged provision of support to the FARC. Despite several major arrests of cartel kingpins, illicit trafficking of narcotics from South America through the Caribbean and Mexico into the United States, as well as the attendant violence, continues practically unabated. Antigovernment demonstrations and hunger strikes designed to free political prisoners in Cuba; Chávez’s blatant repression of dissent, manipulation of judicial institutions, and closing of banks and communications media in Venezuela; and mutinies in the overcrowded jails of the Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Venezuela draw attention to serious human rights problems in the region.

Notwithstanding the potential for renewed respect for US values that has been stimulated by President Obama’s message of change, as well as many Latin Americans’ identification with a US leader of African American descent, the love-hate relationship between Latin America and the Colossus of the North persists. As observers throughout the world perceive the enormity of the issues plaguing the Obama administration, the less sanguine they become that
US policies of “benign neglect” will be overcome in the short term. Although the United States has been a leader in providing disaster relief to Caribbean countries devastated by earthquakes and hurricanes and providing upward mobility for multitudes of immigrants from the region, resentment and defiance continue to affect hemispheric relations.

Other issues have strong symbolic as well as substantive significance. A case in point is President Obama’s campaign promise to close the detention center at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base and restore relations with Cuba. As this book goes to print, the facility has not been shut down and the US embargo against Cuba persists despite failure to achieve its stated goals as well as strong bipartisan and international pressure to restore diplomatic and commercial relations. In fact, free trade in the hemisphere is welcomed by some as a vehicle for development and attacked by others in both the United States and Latin America as an expression of neocolonialism.

All of these considerations require renewed focus on the basic themes of this book and the new questions that they stimulate. Will countries struggling with socioeconomic development find a novel paradigm for political organization? Will the masses be integrated through populist leaders whose regimes devolve into authoritarianism? Or will the new paradigm deepen democracy?

Hence, the story of Latin American trends and developments remains far from being completed. This fourth edition of Understanding Contemporary Latin America continues to seek answers and raise new questions about where the region has been and where it is going. It deals with these and many other questions by focusing on their particular significance in the context of specific subjects organized by separate chapters.

We are hopeful that our efforts will contribute to increased understanding among people of different cultures who may find that they have much in common. Hence, we offer this volume in the spirit of constructive analysis that characterizes the highest aspirations of our respective academic disciplines.

Notes

1. The catchall term Latino refers to immigrants from all parts of Latin America and their progeny.
2. The PBS series American Family: Journey of Dreams (2002–2004), directed by Gregory Nava (El Norte and My Family/Mi Familia), illustrates aspects of Latin American history and culture through several generations of a Mexican American family.
3. An exception to this tendency is Mendoza, Montaner, and Vargas Llosa’s (1996) vehement critique of theories that blame the United States, multinational corporations, and international institutions for development problems in Latin America.
4. Increased recognition of the mutually beneficial aspects of revising US policy toward Cuba, as manifested in growing bipartisan efforts to normalize trade, was stultified by the George W. Bush administration’s stringent adherence to the embargo. As of 2010, the Obama administration had made little progress in either closing the detention center at Guantánamo Bay or normalizing relations with Cuba.
facility at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base (although Obama reversed Bush’s policies on “enhanced interrogation” [torture]) or opening diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba.

5. For a detailed examination of the Caribbean, see Hillman and D’Agostino (2009).

6. Kalman Silvert, in his trail-breaking work on Latin American politics (1967), crafts the idea of the “conflict society” characterized by intervals of violent political change that could be considered a form of “stability” (or predictability). Richard S. Hillman recalls intense discussions with Silvert, his doctoral adviser and mentor at New York University in the late 1960s, about the inevitability and consequences of military golpes in Latin America.

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