

<Lecture>**Latin America and the Caribbean
in the History of the World :
Going Global Is Nothing New*****Franklin W. KNIGHT******Introduction :**

Today we live in a world preoccupied by thoughts of impending globalization, a subject on which opinion is clearly sharply divided. But it is an unavoidably important subject. Many economists and thinkers view the process of globalization as unavoidable and universally in our best interest. The various protesters – organized and otherwise – who have haunted international meetings from Seattle to Quebec think that globalization is a vast, malicious, capitalist plot designed to divert our interest away from the pressing problems of world poverty.

Last September (2000) *The Economist* of London weighed in on the subject, in an article titled, “The Case for Globalisation” :

International economic integration is not an ineluctable process, as many of its most enthusiastic advocates appear to believe. It is only, one, the best, of many possible futures for the world economy ; others may be chosen, and are even coming to seem more likely. Governments, and through them their electorates, will have a far bigger say in deciding this future than most people appear to think. The protesters are right that

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governments and companies – if only they can be moved by force or argument, or just by force – have it within their power to slow and even reverse the economic trends of the past twenty years.

The Economist, September 23, 2000, p. 19

But is this preoccupation really so new? I would say not.

Sometime we need to look back to figure out what is ahead. Globalization is a good case for review and now is as good a time as any to explore this fascinating and unavoidable theme.

Just as technology is driving today's world, so in the eighteenth century logic, or reason, provided the principal impetus. Like today it was a period of rapid, confusing and often misunderstood changes. Two of the great thinkers of the eighteenth century, the Abbé Raynal, and Adam Smith thought much about the foreboding implications of change for their time – and their part of the world.

The Abbé Raynal wrote in 1774 :

No event has been so interesting to mankind in general, and to the inhabitants of Europe in particular, as the discovery of the New World, and the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope. It gave rise to a revolution in the commerce, and in the power of nations ; as well as in the manners, industry, and the government of the whole world. At this period, new connections were formed by the inhabitants of the most distant regions, for the supply of wants they had never before experienced. The productions of climates situated under the equator, were consumed in countries bordering on the pole ; the industry of the north was transplanted to the south ; and the inhabitants of the west were clothed with the manufactures of the east ; a general intercourse of opinions, laws, customs, diseases and remedies, virtues and vices, was established among men.

Every thing has changed, and must change again. But it is a question, whether the revolutions that are past, or those which must hereaf-

ter take place, have been, or can be, of any utility to the human race. Will they ever add to the tranquility, the happiness or the pleasures of mankind? Can they improve our present state, or do they only change it?¹⁾

[Raynal's observations were accepted almost in toto by Adam Smith two years later and appears in the *Wealth of Nations*, Bk 1 Ch 11 "The rent of land"; as well as in Bk 4.]

Their observations are relevant to our discussion today, because I wish to return to their observations and reexamine the importance of the Caribbean and Latin America in the history of the modern world.

For me, the modern world began about 1492, with the discovery of America and its integration into an Atlantic system of commerce and colonization that would eventually go global.

I will examine our topic under six principal sub-themes :

1. The Americas in the imaginary of Europe post 1492
2. The Americas in the global environmental transformation
3. The Americas and population growth
4. The Americas in the world economy
5. The Americas in modern political thought
6. The Americas and the contemporary world

Each of these sub-themes is worth a full lecture in its own right. Certainly the literature on each is vast. You would not want me today to engage each fully, so I will only briefly address each as it relates to the principal goal of establishing the centuries-old importance of the Caribbean and Latin America to the integration of a global system of communication and commerce.

My conclusion is that globalization is nothing new. It is a process that has been going on for centuries – sometimes dramatically, but more often surreptitiously. Sometime we consciously engineer the process, but more often the consequences present themselves to us in surprising ways. But more important, we need not fear the consequences of this unforeseen proc-

ess. We have been handling it for the past five hundred years and I think we can manage for the next five hundred – if given the chance.

Let me begin with my first sub-theme.

1. The Americas in the European and World Imaginary :

- Before 1492 Europe was not noticeably ahead of the world in many areas of comparable technology. European cities – especially Spanish cities were relatively small. Pre-Hispanic American cities were quite impressive and densely occupied. Tenochtitlan had about 250,000 in 1519 ; Monte Alban in Oaxaca had about 45,000 in 700 A. D. Tikal in Guatemala had about 45,000 in 550 A. D. Chan Chan on the northern coast of Peru had about 100,000 between 900 and 1463.
- Between 1502 and 1630 the Spanish built 331 cities in the enclaves they occupied across the Americas – many on the sites of pre-existing concentrations of people.
- The discovery of the Americas changed the European concept of space and time.
- The Americas changed language – not just in adding new words – but also by transforming old words : *empire, plantation, slave, Creole, Cimarrón, race*.
- The American experience changed European self-perception of themselves and their previously parochial world. Contrast the modest reports of Christopher Columbus and Bernal Diaz del Castillo with that of the unknown Spanish factor at Macao writing to Philip II in 1580 : The reality of the American conquests changed the European notion of geography, but it also radically changed their self-image and how they viewed the other.

This can be seen in a number of European reactions to their new situation : From the logs of Christopher Columbus :

This is a green, level, and fertile island, and I have no doubt that the

people sow and reap grain, and also many other things, year around. I saw many trees quite different from ours. Many of them have branches of different kinds, all on one trunk, one twig is of one kind and another of another, and so different from each other that it is the greatest wonder of the world. How great is the diversity of one kind from another. For example, one branch is like cane, another like mastic ; this on one tree five or six kinds, and all different. Nor are these grafted so that one can say that the graft does it, for these trees are right there in the woods, and the people do not take care of them.

From the soldier, Bernal Díaz del Castillo :

We went forth to the Indies to serve God and His Majesty, to give light to them that dwell in darkness, and to grow rich as all men desire to do.

From a Spanish Factor in Manila, 1580 :

Send me 50 good Castilians that I might conquer for Your Majesty the kingdom of China.

The reaction of the factor at Manila is in strong contrast to the earlier reports of Columbus and Díaz del Castillo who still retained some respect for the novelty of their situation. The initial experience in the Caribbean and Latin America would have a profound impression on Spain and the rest of Europe. The Spanish would begin a new experiment in empire, transforming the Portuguese tradition of the trading post empire and creating a structure of government and control that would forever change every aspect of the indigenous American experience – and basically alter Europe's view of itself and of the non-European world.

Christopher Columbus and his successors definitely changed history. And they accelerated a process that eventually led to the first stages of con-

tacts and exchanges on a global scale.

2. The Americas and environmental transformation.

The exchange of plants and animals across the Atlantic created a basically new environment. Here are some of the things we can consider :

- Plants from the Old World such as sugar cane, wheat, chickpeas, melons, onions, radishes, grapes, bananas, rice, olives, various grasses like daises, dandelions and the Kentucky Bluegrass took hold in the Americas and in our world seem to be native to the hemisphere.
- Animals from the old world such as horses, asses, mules, cattle, pigs, chickens, sheep, goats proliferated rapidly and adapted to the American hemisphere as rapidly as did the human immigrants..
- By the end of the sixteenth century hides exported from the New World became a major commerce. Herds of cattle that numbered in the hundreds in Spain numbered in the hundreds of thousands in the Americas. Animals transformed the landscape as surely as man.
- New plants like the sugarcane were laying the foundation for a new commercial commodity that would make viable an Atlantic economy based on the reciprocal linking of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Commerce became global since the sixteenth century..

American crops in the wider world fell into two types, non-food crops and food crops :

- Non-food crops of major economic importance included tobacco, rubber, and certain types of cotton.
- Food crops of equal importance included maize, beans, peanuts, white potato, sweet potato, manioc, squash, pumpkins, papaya, guava, avocado, pineapple, tomato, chili pepper, and cocoa. Most produce well in wide climatic differences and low soil fertility. And most have become so common worldwide that their origin has been largely ignored.
- Maize, beans, potato, and manioc yield extremely high calories per

hectare and so have virtually revolutionized food production in parts of Africa, Ireland, Germany, Yugoslavia and Rumania, India, China, and Indonesia.

- African populations would not possibly have survived the depredations of the transatlantic slave trade if the importation of American food crops had not boosted food supply especially among the forest peoples.

The costs and benefits of this sort of exchange have not been fully dealt with by historians, but certainly they constitute an important dimension of the steady global integration of societies worldwide.

3. The Americas and World population changes :

- It is extremely difficult to know what world populations were around 1492 but the population of the Americas might have been around 25 millions, most concentrated in the Central Valley of Mexico and the Andean highlands of South America.
- By 1650 Europe (including parts of Russia) had an estimated population about 100 million, and the African population amounted to roughly the same. Asia had about three times as much – and the Americas had probably had a population of approximately 12 millions – considerably less than in 1492. But by 1650 the composition of the American population was vastly different from what it had been in 1492.
- The American population of 1650 was largely derived from immigrants from Europe and Africa and a large newly generated *mestizo* population that resulted from the procreation of newcomers with indigenous people. *Mestizaje* begun as early as the first Europeans to the Americans.
- Already by 1580 about 65 percent of the population of Spanish Cuban towns were *mestizo*, a pattern that was no doubt reproduced on the mainland.

- The Americas would also be peopled in the following centuries by waves of immigrants from divers parts of the globe : Europeans, Africans, Asians, as well as relocating mixed populations created across the Americas.
- Iberian immigrants arrived at a rate that might have reached 1–2,000 per year before 1650.
- Between 1650 and 1782 Africans arrived at rates that rose from about 9,000 to 39,000 per year – immigration rates not exceeded until after the revolution in transportation and migration during the nineteenth century. Africans, therefore, were the single largest group of immigrants to the Americas before the nineteenth century.
- The re–population of the Americas resulted from the massive demographic disaster of the century immediately following the arrival of the first Europeans in 1492, and represented uniquely plural communities in world history. Nowhere else did such a mixed group of people derive from the integration of immigrant groups as throughout the Americas.

4. The Americas in the World Economy

- It is extremely difficult to exaggerate the importance of the Americas in the development of the world economy after the sixteenth century. That is a theme that runs through authors as different and varied as Martín Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Walter Prescott Webb, Earl Hamilton and Pierre Chaunnu.
- John Elliott notes in *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* that “Between 1500 and 1650 something like 181 tons of gold and 16,000 tons of silver reached Europe officially from America, and further large quantities must have arrived by contraband... One consequence of the new availability of silver was to push up the price of gold relative to that of silver – by the early seventeenth century the ratio of gold to silver exceeded one to twelve. A further consequence was to enable Europeans to acquire large quantities of those Far Eastern

luxuries for which Asia insisted on silver in exchange.” By 1650, therefore, the silver trade was being conducted worldwide, with commercial links between the producers in the Americas and the consumers in Europe and Asia.

- By Raynal’s account, bullion valued at more than six million pounds sterling still entered Spain and Portugal from the Americas in the 1750s. The precious metal contribution of the Americas to supplies in Europe and Asia after 1550 was enough to modify significantly the value of gold and silver. American silver and gold production inflated the quantities available in Europe and Asia and depressed their prices over the following centuries.
- More important than bullion to the European economy, however, were the commodity and slave trades between 1650 and 1850.
- The slave trade made a monumental contribution to the development of European capitalism, despite doubts to the contrary by Roger Anstey and David Eltis and others.
- The Commodities trade – in tobacco, sugar, cotton, cochineal, cacao, and other plantation exports also manifestly increased the wealth of Europe and areas participating in those trades.
- Finally there was the economic input that the importation of the food crops described earlier made to the local economies. The economic impact of food crop production was especially evident during and after the eighteenth centuries when the populations began to explode in Europe.
- Note the situation in Ireland as recounted by Alfred Crosby :

One and a half acres, planted with potatoes, would provide enough food, with the addition of a bit of milk, to keep a family hearty for a year. It was not exceptional for an Irishman to consume ten pounds of potatoes a day and very little else. On this diet the Irish, without benefit of medical science, hygiene, industrialization, or decent government, increased from 3.2 million in

1754 to nearly eight million in 1845, not counting the 1.75 million who emigrated before 1846. Then came the potato blight, the failure of the Irish staple, and one of the worst famines of modern times. The Irishmen who had lived by the potato died by the potato.²⁾

Latin America, and the Caribbean were extremely important to the development of imperial power worldwide. The imperial might of Spain, of Portugal, of France and of England derived from their colonial and economic interests in Latin America and the Caribbean. The history of those states simply could not be written without recounting the importance of their American connection.

Without the bullion of the Indies, Spain would never have been able to be the defender of the Faith and a major player in Europe between 1500 and 1800. It required enormously innovative powers on the part of the Spanish monarchy to establish a system that was, for its time, efficient, streamlined, and controllable. As John Elliott noted in his *Imperial Spain, 1469–1716* :

With the creation of the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, the number of viceroyalties in the Spanish Monarchy rose to nine – Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, Navarre, Sardinia, Sicily, Naples, and the two American Viceroyalties – and the Monarchy's administrative system was now established in the form in which it was to continue for the best part of two centuries. This system was in effect that of the medieval Catalan –Aragonese Mediterranean Empire adapted and extended to meet the needs of a world empire. The vast distances in the empire – eight months or more were necessary to transmit messages from Castile to Peru – constituted a challenge to the Spanish Crown that was without precedent in European history. Inevitably the administrative system developed by Spain during the course of the sixteenth century had numerous defects but its success in meeting the challenge was nevertheless remarkable.³⁾

Brazil was equally important to Portugal, providing vital ports-of-call for its Indian Ocean empire. Brazil was also the source for a series of valuable commodities such as sugar, dyewoods, gold, and coffee that would enhance the commercial importance of that colony for its metropolis and for the rest of Europe.

The perceived wealth of the Caribbean sugar and staple trade instigated a series of wars between Holland, France and England. Much of the commercial success of those countries was based on their Caribbean and American connections. "Saint Domingue in the 1780s" wrote David Geggus :

was an object of international renown, the most fruitful and pleasant of Europe's Caribbean colonies. Accounting for some 40 percent of France's foreign trade, its 7,000 or so plantations were absorbing by 1790 also 10-15 percent of United States exports and had important commercial links with the British and Spanish West Indies as well. On the coastal plains of this colony little larger than Wales was grown about two-fifths of the world's sugar, while from its mountainous interior came over half the world's coffee.⁴⁾

The American connection would also seriously affect both the outcome of the French Revolution as well as the demise of Napoleon who lost 40,000 of his best troops there trying to restore French hegemony after 1802.

The American slave systems – and about 95 percent of the African slaves delivered in the Americas arrived in Latin America and the Caribbean – were of inordinate importance in the development of modern capitalism. As both commodity and factors of production, the transatlantic slave trade created a system of backward and forward linkages that increased economic activity, spread and remodeled capitalist institutions and inculcated and distributed a capitalist mentality.⁵⁾

The story of capitalism has an important American dimension.

5. The Americas in modern Political Thought :

The Americas played an important role in three aspects of international political thought :

i) The Americas were the venue for first working out the nature of empire and of international law, especially between 1492 and 1650. This was an activity that virtually became a Spanish obsession, but was of enormous interest to the other Europeans as well as they competed for hegemony within Europe. This was a major preoccupation of the Iberian monarchs between 1493 when the Treaty of Tordesillas established a division of the Americas for purposes of exploration and evangelical activity and about 1697 when Spain acknowledged after the Treaty of Ryswick, its diminished role in the Americas. No other European state spent as much time as the Spanish in trying to define the nature and legality of empire.

ii) The Americas were the location to reify utopias ; although that seemed more a preoccupation of the eighteenth and nineteenth century emigrants of the British Isles than the mainland.⁶⁾ America as Utopia is a common theme that occupied much of the seventeenth century Europe and beyond.

- The Pilgrims
- The Mennonites
- Diverse Groups of transfrontiers folk like *couriers de bois*, the buccaneers, the maroons, and mountain people of the west.

iii) The Americas were also locations for political and social engineering. In this respect I already mentioned the early Spanish colonial experiment. But after 1502 a number of new political experiments would be conducted in the Americas : buccaneers, slave colonies, maroons, mountain men, and missionary settlements like those of the Jesuits among the Guaraní and elsewhere. Four of the seven major revolutions in world history took place in the Americas :

- The American 1776-83 ;
- The Haitian, 1791-1804 ;

- The Mexican, 1910–17 ; and
- The Cuban, 1959–?

6. The Americas and the Contemporary World

If we could not contemplate the trajectory of world history before the twentieth century without an American focus, it is even less likely today.

- The USA is a world power – perhaps the only world power at the moment – and a sort of Mecca to the world.
- The Cuban revolution is still struggling along, losing its luster and *venido muy a menos* but still there. What ever we may think of the Cuban Revolution, it was an amazing event and holds its own among word revolutions. Photographs of Che Guevara are displayed at political manifestations everywhere in the world and the memory of the Cuban revolution still continues to fascinate a large umber of people worldwide.
- The Caribbean remains an interesting area to examine diversity, democracy and plural societies. Some of the longest representative democracies – Barbados and the Bahamas – are found in the Caribbean and the political plurality of places like Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad are hard to find elsewhere. In an age when ethnicity continues to create centrifugal forces in many polities worldwide, the success of political plurality in the Caribbean remains fascinating.
- Spain, recently described by *The Economist* as “one of Europe’s big five” has rediscovered Latin America and the Caribbean, ranking behind the USA in investment and political influence. Spain’s BBVA and BSCH rank among the leading banks from Mexico to Argentina. Telefónica operates over the entire region, including Brazil. Endesa owns big power plants in Argentina and Chile. Sol Meliá is active in the hotel industry in Mexico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Chile, and Argentina. Political boundaries are no longer barriers to international trade and business and modern communication technology has penetrated to the most remote regions of the

earth. This is a reality from which no group has the power to withdraw unilaterally.

Conclusion

When Columbus mis-adventured into the Americas in 1492 he set in motion an inevitable process that still continues. The Europeans discovered a new world and by so doing discovered talents in themselves they never knew they had. More important, they discovered the advantages and strengths of global connections.

That discovery began the final closure of what William McNeill in *The Rise of the West* calls the closure of the *ecumene*. After that the entire world would never be the same again. No aspect of world history could ever be the same again. And it all started with an Italian being lost among the Caribbean islands, and the shrewdness of Isabel of Castile to see more than Columbus the true value and portentous implications of his accomplishment.

The consequences that followed, for better and for worse, created first an Atlantic community that inexorably spread to incorporate the entire globe. It is easy to see now that the Abbé Raynal was right : No event was so important to mankind in general, and to the inhabitants of Europe in particular, as the discovery of the New World, and the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope. Technology has made this integrated world more like a community. It has increased mobility, accessibility and communication creating a sort of global village. But this global village is not now, nor is it likely to be ever, a homogenous unit. Of that I am sure.

Globalization is an inevitable process. Nevertheless, it behooves us to keep in mind the sage saying of the sixteenth and seventeenth century English clergyman, John Donne (1572-1631) :

No Man is an island, entire of itself ; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were : any man's death diminishes me, because

I am involved in Mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls ; it tolls for thee.

John Donne, *Meditation XVII*

In this increasingly globalized world it should be necessary to match our concern with our communication. The more we know about others the more we should feel a collective responsibility for them. That spirit of curiosity and concern still prevails strongly throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. It is something that the rest of the world must take seriously if new globalizing concepts such as the World Trade organization or the Free Trade Area of the Americas are to encounter success. Above all, the best approach to globalization is to accept it rather than fight it. The opportunities are everywhere as abundant as the perils.

Thank you all for your patience.

Notes

- 1) The Abbé Raynal [Guillaume Thomas Raynal, 1713–1796], *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*. Trans. by J. O. Justamond. 6 vols. (London, 1798), I : 1–2
- 2) Alfred Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange* (Westport, Ct. : Greenwood Press, 1972), p. 183.
- 3) John Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469–1716* (New York : Mentor Books, 1966), pp. 172–173.
- 4) David Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution : The British Occupation of Saint Domingue 1793–1798* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 6.
- 5) See Barbara L. Solow (ed.), *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 6) See Gerald and Patricia Gutek, *Visiting Utopian Communities. A Guide to the Shakers, Moravians, and Others* (Columbia : University of South Carolina Press, 1998).