

Global Connections

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the North Atlantic nations (western Europe and the United States) exercised their maximum influence over the remainder of the globe. Politicians measured progress in terms of scientific and technological advances as well as increased material wealth. North Atlantic business leaders became fantastically rich by exporting manufactured goods to the entire world. To facilitate this flow of products, European nations recast existing legal institutions such as sole proprietorships or partnerships into modern business corporations and banking systems that allowed fortunate entrepreneurs to accumulate untold wealth. Social position depended less on land ownership and inherited status and more on entrepreneurial acumen.

Technology, especially modernized systems of transportation and communication, made much of this material progress possible. Simultaneously, growing prosperity allowed for the rise of a consumer culture. To be sure, not all people living in the North Atlantic world shared equally in the prosperity. Europe experienced the greatest number of emigrants in its history, mostly to the United States, Canada, and southern Latin America. Despite this trend, the material progress created by Europe and the United States motivated much of the rest of the world to emulate the North Atlantic model of economic development.

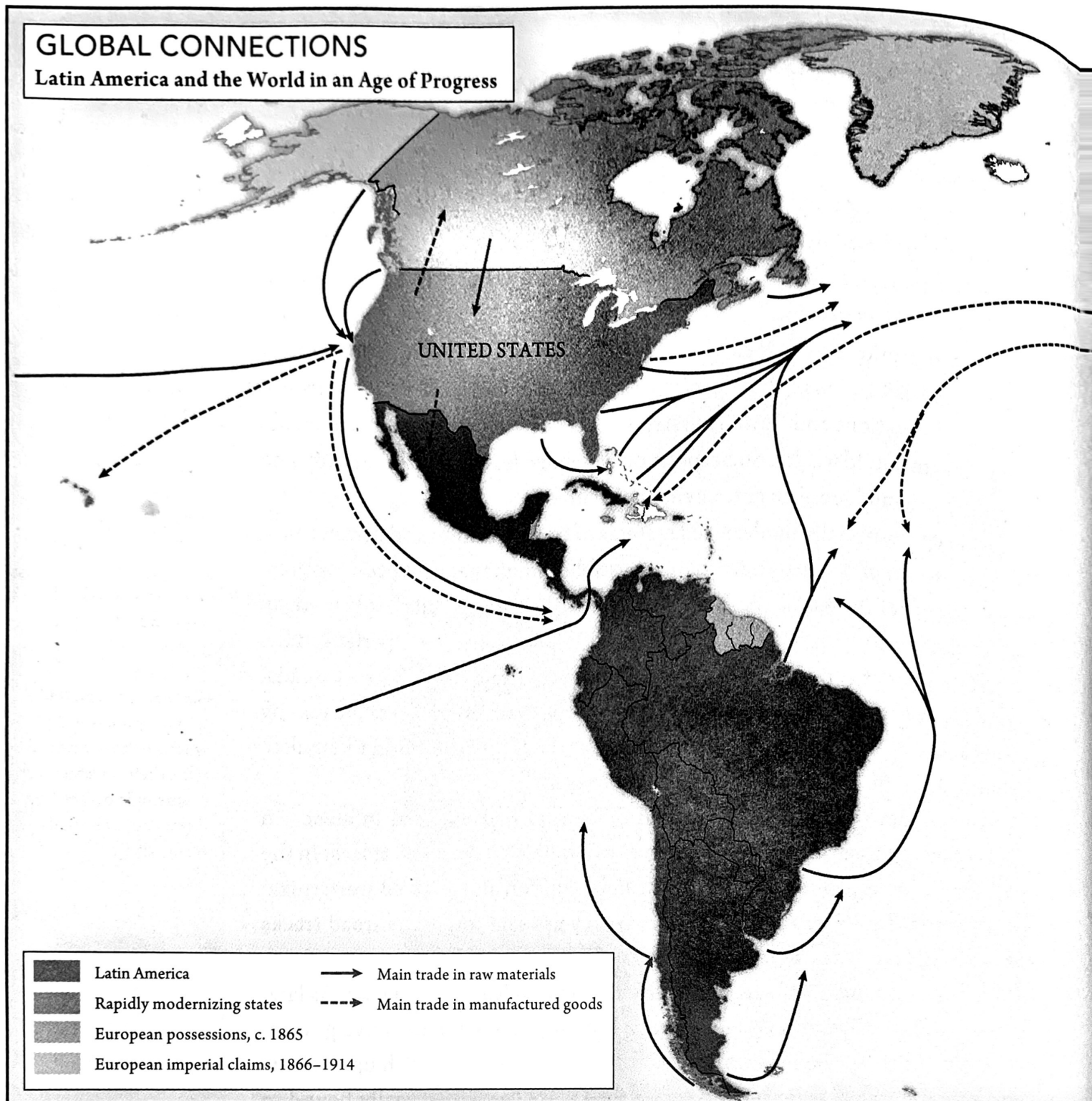
This brave new world of progress and modernity had minimal influence in China, where political leaders felt little need to adopt Western ways, at least in the short term. China's Confucian culture favored tradition and rejected westernization. In the 1870s, for example, the Chinese government tore up railroad tracks that had been laid by an enterprising group of Chinese businessmen.

Westernization met with a more positive response in Russia and Japan. As late-comers to industrialization and modernity, both nations required active government intervention in the process of modernization in order to catch up with the North Atlantic states. After emancipating the *kulaks* (peasants legally bound to work on great estates, much like the peones who worked on Latin America haciendas) and liberalizing legal codes, the Russian czar ordered the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad in the 1880s. He encouraged foreign investors to build steel foundries and textile plants and decreed high tariffs to protect these fledgling industries. Once opened to westernization in the 1850s, Japan embraced modernization even more readily. The Meiji government played a major role: building railroads, creating banks, and providing capital to industry. More than any other Asian country, the Japanese adopted Western fashions and purchased products



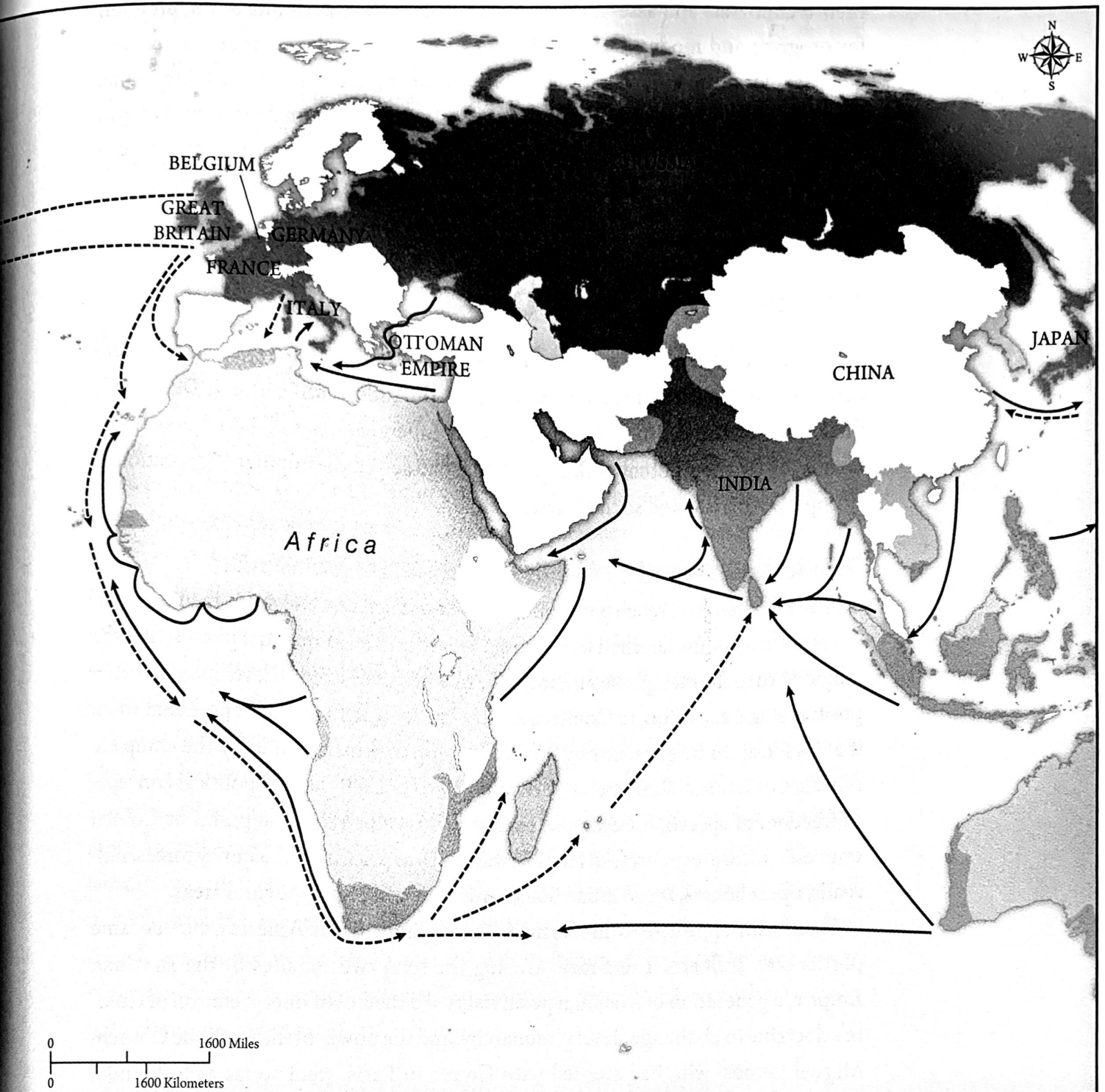
≡ The Rambla at Mar del Plata, Argentina.

Latin American elites quickly adopted the late nineteenth-century European practice of taking holidays, either at the shore or in the mountains, to escape the heat of the city during the summer months. By 1910 Mar del Plata in Argentina became fashionable for elites and the new middle class in part because of its accessibility from Buenos Aires. City planners constructed a lengthy boardwalk where visitors, dressed in all their finery, could promenade before dinner and take in the fresh salt air.



promoting new technologies of hygiene, like the modern toothbrush. Nevertheless, many Japanese debated the long-term consequences of modernization on traditional religion and culture.

Like the Japanese imperial circle, elites in Latin America enthusiastically embraced progress as a panacea for all that had gone wrong in the postindependence era. For these Latin Americans, progress equated with material wealth, readily observed in such technological advances as the bright lights of western European and



US metropolitan areas, where electrification illuminated and extended the day for city dwellers. A significant number of Latin Americans had seen the transformative nature of progress firsthand, often as a result of the “Grand Tour” of Europe that put the final touches on the educations of the sons of the elite.

Latin Americans seized on the French intellectual Auguste Comte’s socioeconomic philosophy of positivism, interpreting it as a set of guidelines leading infallibly to progress. This chapter explores these guidelines followed by the elite and

their technocrats and assesses the political and economic results of the program for progress and modernization. The model created by these economic technocrats (explored in this chapter) notably transformed the nations of Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, and Cuba. Although policy makers in other Latin American countries believed in the same general principles of positivism, local circumstances limited the degree of material progress that they could attain.

Philosophy and Principles of Modernization: Positivism and Social Darwinism, 1870s–1900s

After a midcentury Conservative interregnum, the Liberals returned to power across Latin America in the final decades of the nineteenth century. During the final third of the century, Latin American Liberalism was updated and transformed by two new potent philosophies that had seized the popular imagination in Europe, positivism and social Darwinism.

The Ideas behind Positivism and Social Darwinism

Auguste Comte, the French philosopher who developed **positivism**, argued that society reaches its pinnacle when it arrives at the last of three sequential phases: first the religious, then the metaphysical, and finally the “positive” stage of development. In the positive stage, according to Comte, a society has evolved to its fullest potential when it allows itself to be governed by infallible scientific principles and by the complete rejection of artificial limitations (such as religion) or such abstract political concepts as freedom of speech, for example, that had constrained it in the past. For Comte, one could measure progress in tangible ways such as professional security forces, railroads, opera houses, broad urban boulevards, and well-regulated rural areas.

Positivism appealed to modernizers throughout Latin America, but became particularly influential in Brazil. During the final two decades of the Brazilian Empire, a generation of Brazilian positivists used their own interpretation of Comte’s doctrine to challenge slavery, monarchy, and the power of the Catholic Church. Miguel Lemos, who had studied with Comte in Paris, went so far as to found a positivist church in Rio de Janeiro, dedicated to the cult of order and progress as a religion. Lemos’s church was influential among military officers and journalists—two sectors of society with growing influence in national politics. Meanwhile, the Brazilian engineer Benjamin Constant split with Lemos and founded a more pragmatic Positivist Society, similarly influential among military officers. In 1889, these officers played a decisive role in terminating the weakened Brazilian Empire and inaugurating the first Republic of Brazil. Its motto, *Ordem e Progresso* (Order and Progress), was emblazoned on the new Brazilian flag, where it remains today.

Positivism remained a powerful influence among urban technocrats in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Positivists established a modern conception of indigenous autonomy. Positivist tracts argued that Brazil's indigenous population deserved respect and "fraternal treatment" not because they were innocent souls awaiting Catholic evangelization but because they were "the rightful owners of the lands they occupy." Positivist military officers and civil engineers in the early twentieth century advocated peaceful outreach to previously uncontacted indigenous groups in the Brazilian Amazon, and for the establishment of tracts of land reserved for semisedentary indigenous habitation. Although these policies were all too frequently ignored in the rush to exploit new resources, they did begin to establish a framework for indigenous rights.

The other social philosophy that deeply influenced Liberalism in the late nineteenth century was **social Darwinism**. In 1859, the English naturalist Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, in which he argued that species on earth developed through the process of "natural selection," or evolution over time through random mutations. Although Darwin's work offered both a clear, accessible explanation as well as significant evidence based on observations he had made in Ecuador's Galápagos Islands, he was not the first scientist to put forth the idea. The English scientist and political theorist Herbert Spencer had previously reached similar conclusions.

It was Spencer who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" to describe the effects of biology on human behavior, and concocted a theory of the evolution of societies, which he called social Darwinism. Positing that some humans are born more fit for survival than others, Spencer argued that the "procreation of the unworthy" was detrimental to society. Although Spencer was not directly a part of it, such thinking augmented the rise of eugenics and "scientific racism," a set of theories developed in the late Victorian era that attempted to prove the superiority of certain races and ethnicities (especially white, Anglo-Saxon) over others (black, indigenous, or mixed-race).

Positivism and Social Darwinism in Latin America

Latin American liberals enthusiastically embraced these new philosophies, as they reinforced the hopes for modernity and progress that had long been the liberal hallmark. In some respects, it may seem surprising that Latin American liberals endorsed social Darwinism, since its racist, geographically deterministic thinking placed even the liberal elites themselves (descendants of southern, not northern, Europeans), well down the pecking order of racial hierarchies. The mixed-race, indigenous, and black majorities of their nation's populations fared even worse in this schema.

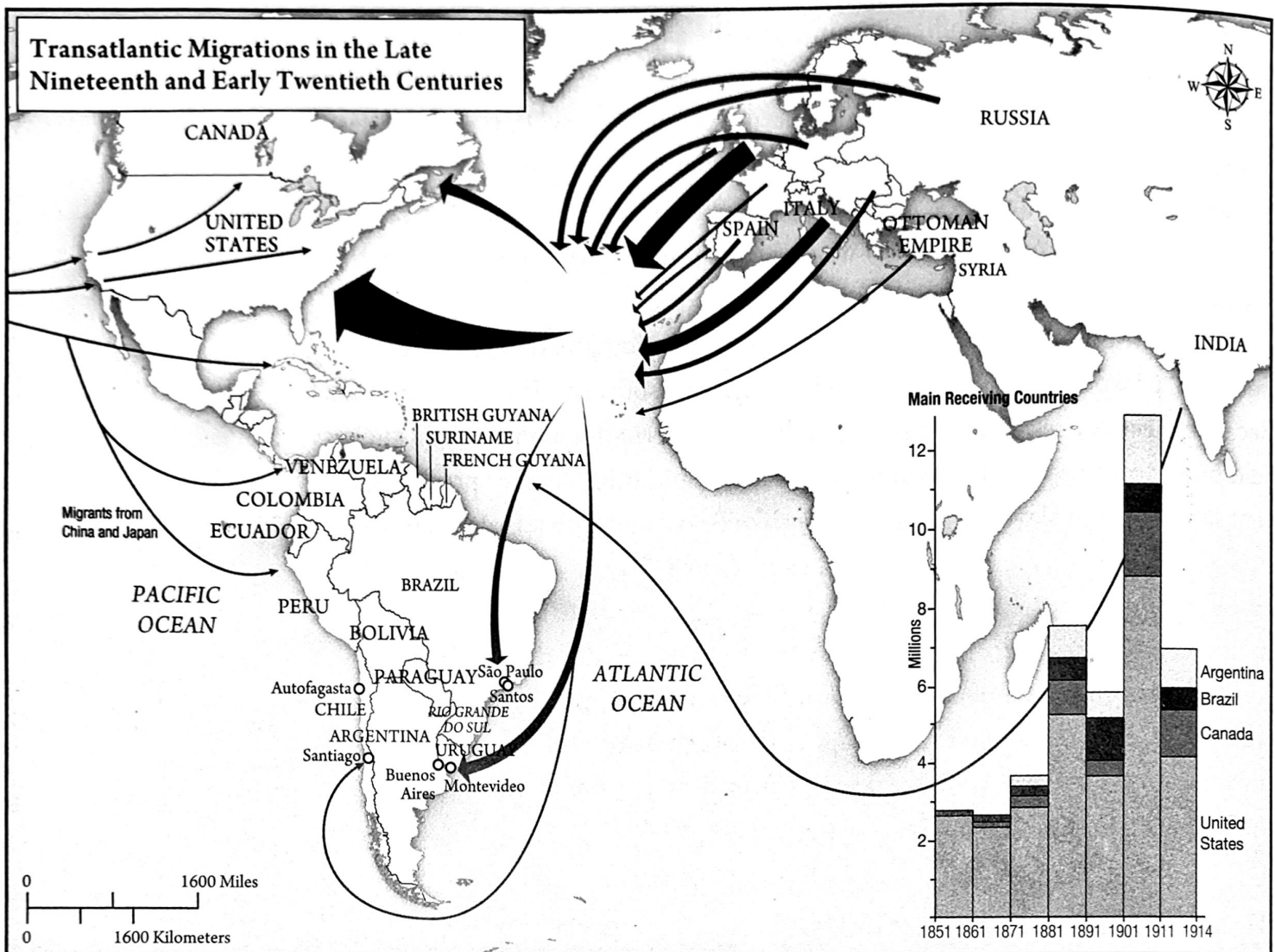
For Latin American liberals who feared that their nations were already woefully far behind in the march toward progress, social Darwinism and positivism seemed to provide both diagnosis and prescription. The Latin American implementation of positivist remedies tended to the pragmatic, with an almost formulaic response to modernization. The prescription began with the creation of political order by centralizing governments and professionalizing the military and the police. Order, in turn, would encourage private investors from the United States and Europe to provide funding for new infrastructure and the development of the export economy. Railroads and other new technologies would enable the Latin American nations to deliver export products to markets abroad and link remote rural villages to national capitals and ports, and the resulting prosperity would encourage a wave of immigrants to make the arduous journey to new homes in Latin America. Latin America could then recapitulate the process of modernization that had occurred in the United States, Japan, and Western Europe.

Immigration, 1870s–1900s

Most members of the elite establishment, particularly those influenced by social Darwinism and positivism, believed that the influx of European immigrants was vital to transform and modernize Latin American society. Many members of the elite subscribed to racist ideas that northern European immigrants, especially Germans, made more desirable workers and citizens than did indigenous peoples, mestizos, and those of African descent. Among some policy makers, this was sometimes referred to as “whitening the population.” In the opinion of the elite, only hard-working, thrifty, white immigrants, could push Latin Americans along the path to progress.

Immigration in the Southern Cone

At least four million people emigrated to Argentina between 1870 and 1930, with well over one million arriving between 1901 and 1910. They came in especially large numbers from Italy, Spain, eastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. Most of them arrived impoverished, particularly in the late 1870s, when the Argentine government heavily subsidized immigration. They tolerated the grueling,



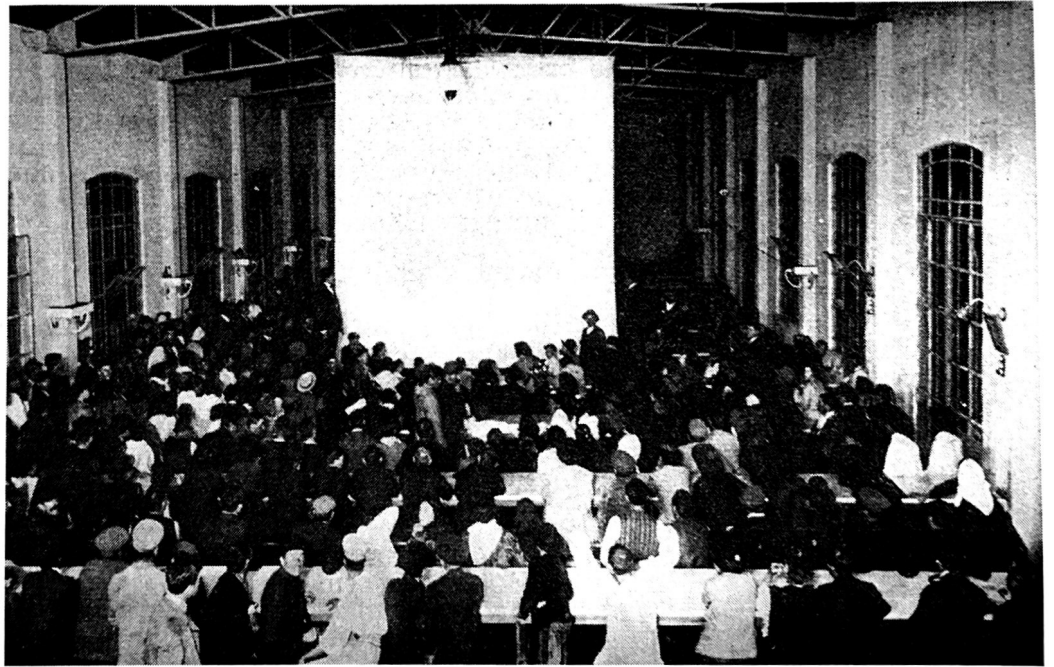
MAP. 5.3

uncertain life of tenant farmers in the interior, and then tended to move to Buenos Aires or cities in the interior as soon as they had saved enough to survive and look for work. As *frigoríficos* (refrigerated meat-packing plants) and flour mills grew in size and number in the riverine corridor stretching from Buenos Aires to Rosario, immigrant labor served their needs and built up the surrounding, densely populated urban neighborhoods.

Nearly half of the immigrants came from Italy. Dockside neighborhoods in Buenos Aires became so heavily Italian that they transformed the language: *lunfardo*, a local dialect blending Spanish and Italian, was the language of everyday life in dockside neighborhoods like La Boca. Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe, in many cases refugees from early twentieth-century Russian pogroms, were admitted in large numbers but faced greater linguistic and cultural barriers to success in Argentina. These barriers only strengthened the resilience of their community networks, however.

Migrants fleeing the collapsing Ottoman Empire on the eve of World War I, particularly from Syria and Lebanon, responded in parallel ways to similar challenges. Across Latin America, these former Ottoman subjects were called *turcos*, or Turks, despite the fact that most spoke Arabic or French rather than Turkish. Although some were Muslim, most were Christian (although Orthodox rather than Roman Catholic). They created a merchant network with its own credit operations in urban outposts throughout Argentina and beyond, including regions far from the Southern Core, such as Honduras, which became home to many “turco” immigrants.

These immigrant streams transformed Argentine demographics in particular, making it a nation of cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. As long as economic growth and the demand for immigrant labor continued, Argentina could accommodate that diversity without extensive internal conflict. When times grew tough, immigrants were often blamed for urban crime and labor agitation.



≡ **A Multilingual Policeman in Buenos Aires and the Hall for Immigrants.** The annual arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants in Argentina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century posed many issues for Argentine society, especially in the port city of Buenos Aires, where most immigrants ultimately resided. First, immigrants were welcomed into the House of Immigrants, where newcomers were taught about Argentine customs in an attempt to incorporate them into society. In this particular photograph, immigrants are watching a movie about life on the pampas, where the elite hoped they would migrate to become laborers. In addition, the city created a special multilingual police force to assist immigrants. These officers wore badges on their arms to tell foreigners which languages they spoke (in this instance Spanish, English, Turkish, French, and Arabic). Officers like the one portrayed here could iron out cultural difficulties, intervene in disputes, and of course arrest troublemakers regardless of their place of origin.

Immigrant populations made up a smaller proportion of the national population in Uruguay than they did in Argentina, but followed similar patterns. Italian, Jewish, and Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to Montevideo played similar roles to those of their cousins across the Rio de la Plata estuary in Buenos Aires. By the late nineteenth century, Montevideo was already assuming the personality it would retain throughout the twentieth century, smaller than Buenos Aires yet similarly cosmopolitan.

The same immigrant groups arrived in large numbers in Brazil, particularly at Santos, the port of São Paulo. Italian immigration to the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul and to the southeastern state of São Paulo, created burgeoning Italo-Brazilian colonies. In the early twentieth century, planters in western São Paulo also recruited laborers from Japan. Both southern European and East Asian immigrants to rural Brazil often faced exploitative labor and miserable living conditions. Not surprisingly, many of them moved to the growing city of São Paulo as soon as they got the chance, creating vibrant Italian neighborhoods and a bustling Japanese neighborhood at the core of that city. Although immigration to Brazil was less momentous on a national level than it was in Argentina, it proved decisive in shaping the burgeoning metropolis of São Paulo.

Like positivists elsewhere in Latin America, Chilean intellectuals endorsed immigration as a means of modernizing their society. Liberals such as Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna believed that immigrants could replace the Mapuche on the lands in southern Chile, and thereby forestall possible Argentine expansionism into this disputed territory. With Gatling guns and a modern army, Chile forcibly subdued the Mapuche and pushed them further south or onto reservations. Nitrate mine owners in the north also sought immigrants who became skilled workers in technical positions.

In general, intellectuals believed that immigrants would modernize the country and improve national culture and the population through race mixture. Elites often described this as a process of **blanqueamiento** ("whitening;" **embranquecimento** in Brazil), an ideal that seems shockingly racist to modern sensibilities, but one that was frequently espoused in elite publications in Latin America's age of progress and modernization. This ideology of whitening was made manifest in social and economic structures that denied opportunity to Afro-descendant and indigenous citizens while facilitating European immigration.

The Chilean government was so eager to encourage immigration in the 1890s that it subsidized many immigrants' ocean voyages and placed no restrictions

whatsoever on individuals seeking to emigrate from Europe to Chile. European immigration to Chile remained modest (about 85,000 individuals) compared to the masses that arrived in Argentina, in part because of the arduous ocean voyage around Cape Horn in the years before the construction of the Panama Canal. Despite their relatively small numbers, immigrants had a significant impact in Chile.

Unlike Argentina, where most immigrants took up residence in urban areas, immigrants to Chile settled either in the far north or the far south, distant from the national capital, Santiago. British migrants worked as managers or foremen at the northern nitrate mines, or took other middle-class jobs in nearby cities like Antofagasta, while immigrants from Peru and Bolivia performed the difficult physical labor in the nitrate pits. In the dense forests and lakes region of the far south, an area bearing resemblance to Switzerland or the Bavarian Alps, German immigrants tilled the soil, creating prosperous farms and populating quaint towns like Valdivia. There, and in other similar communities, immigrants operated tanneries, breweries, and furniture-making factories. These thriving settlements became the envy of many native-born Chileans.

The immigrants' success eventually worked against them, arousing nationalistic feelings among the next generation of Chilean intellectuals. Instead of being the laborers that Chilean intellectuals wanted, many of these immigrants (especially the second generation) became middle-class businessmen, engineers, teachers, shopkeepers, and even owners of light industry in Santiago. Chileans argued that their own nationals were equally competent to serve in many of these roles, but that immigrants received preferential treatment because of their status as Europeans. Other critics blamed working-class immigrants in urban areas for spreading ideas like anarchism, socialism, and syndicalism, accusing them of fomenting social discontent and urban problems. Some discussions turned ugly: Jews, the Chinese, and "Turks," many of whom owned successful businesses, were called parasites and worse. Even the once-admired Germans in southern Chile were now described as clannish and aloof. As a result of this growing nationalistic sentiment against immigration after World War I, the Chilean government ended its subsidies to immigrants and withdrew its recruiting agents from Europe.

Immigrants and Race

Although elite policy makers preferred European immigrants, they quickly learned that these foreigners, just like indigenous people and those of African descent, refused to perform certain types of particularly unpleasant labor. Only

people fleeing the worst economic conditions would take such jobs. All too often, the laborers who committed to these jobs were duped by stories of wealth or encouraged to sign misleading contracts. The noxious, dusty, hazardous guano pits (where the excrement of seabirds was harvested for fertilizer), the treacherous landslide-prone roadbeds of the railways in the Andes, and hot, exhausting work on disease-infested Central American banana plantations or Brazilian coffee farms were often left to Asians from China and Japan and Afro-descendant workers imported from the British Caribbean.

Chinese laborers were recruited by middlemen in China—often lured by false or misleading promises and contracts—in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to work abroad. Many Chinese laborers initially came to Peru in the 1840s to work in the guano pits of the Chincha Islands, on sugar plantations on the north coast or on the railroad projects high in the Andes. In almost every instance, recruiters from Peru signed the workers, perhaps a grand total of 90,000 of them, to lengthy contracts of indentured servitude, which paid terribly low wages to offset the cost of the expensive trip across the Pacific. Once in Peru, workers found themselves housed in shanties, working long hours, and eating little more than rice. Almost no women accompanied these workers, and no other Peruvians spoke their language, leaving them isolated. A fortunate few found themselves contracted out as household servants or artisans in Lima, where conditions were significantly better. Not surprisingly, once the term of the enforced labor contract ended, many of the Chinese workers in the guano pits or on the plantations joined their countrymen in the capital.

By 1890, a distinctive Chinatown had emerged in Lima, centered on Capón Street near the municipal market in the heart of the old city. Chinese immigrants made their living as shoemakers, dressmakers, launderers, and grocery store owners. Popular *chifas* (Chinese restaurants) drew all classes of Lima residents to their tables. Some Chinese-born merchants made fortunes importing goods (such as furniture, rice, and pottery) from their homeland for neighborhood customers, but also sold porcelain objects and other luxury items to Lima's elite. Most people lived in crowded tenements (like the poor in any nineteenth-century city) where disease, crime, and opium dens flourished. Because Chinese workers competed with other Peruvians for jobs, and because they tended to isolate themselves, they were the victims of occasional riots. In 1910, for example, many were driven from their neighborhood. Peru began to regulate the number of Chinese immigrants in 1900 and adopted an official policy of exclusion in 1930 with the passage of a statute that barred further Chinese immigration. This statute remained in effect until the 1960s.

Japanese immigration to Brazil began later (the first Japanese immigrants arrived at the Brazilian port of Santos in 1908) but would quickly become as influential as Chinese immigration to Peru. By 1908, the Italian immigration that had transformed the demography of the state of São Paulo in the last quarter of the nineteenth century had slowed. Coffee planters in western São Paulo sought a new source of inexpensive immigrant labor. Japan was in the midst of its own traumatic transition from a semifeudal state characterized by local, subsistence-oriented agriculture to a modern, Western-oriented industrializing economy, a process that uprooted rural populations.

Japanese and Brazilian political officials initially agreed that this population provided an ideal solution to São Paulo's needs. Well-publicized campaigns and subsidized voyages lured thousands of Japanese to São Paulo's coffee lands, a migrant stream intensified by World War I. By 1930 there were well over 100,000 Japanese immigrants (in Japanese, *issei*, or first generation) and Brazilian-born descendants of Japanese immigrants (in Japanese, *nisei*, or second generation) in São Paulo—a population that would grow to 1.5 million over the next century. (These subsequent generations of Japanese-Brazilians are known in Japanese as *sansei*, or third generation.) Today, there are more people of Japanese ancestry in Brazil than in any other country outside of Japan.

Most of the early arrivals found that life in the coffee zone was precarious and difficult. Some endured, gradually finding ways to farm their own lands, contributing to the diversification of agricultural production in São Paulo in the first half of the twentieth century. Others fled the coffee plantations, settling in the city of São Paulo and in smaller towns throughout the state. They formed mercantile networks, taught children in Japanese schools, and published newspapers in Japanese. The neighborhood of Liberdade in downtown São Paulo became known as a hub of Japanese-Brazilian commerce and culture.

Japanese-Brazilians faced prejudice and discrimination. The Brazilian political theorist Oliveira Viana suggested that the Japanese immigrants were “like sulfur: insoluble,” by which he meant that they could not be stirred into Brazil's melting pot. At the same time, white elites in Brazil often stereotyped Japanese-Brazilians as the more positive alternative to Brazil's Afro-descendant population, exemplifying the qualities of industriousness that descendants of African slaves supposedly lacked. These stereotypes became self-fulfilling prophecies, as Japanese-Brazilians found access to credit, education, and employment often denied to Afro-Brazilians. The Japanese-Brazilian population thus played a key role in the economy and culture of Brazil's most prosperous state, and an important symbolic role in the understanding of Brazilian national identity.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Afro-Caribbean people migrated to coastal Central America in fairly large numbers. Because local people tended to be reluctant to work in the hot, pestilent lowlands, the banana companies induced black laborers from the Caribbean with the promise of relatively high wages to come and work on the plantations. American plantation managers favored banana workers from British Caribbean colonies such as Jamaica, as they already spoke English.

The benefits of working on a banana plantation, which typically included company-provided housing, schools, some sort of healthcare, access to religious services, and often a company store—were significant enough to lure large numbers of Caribbean immigrants. But it was not an easy life; the hard manual labor in a disease-prone climate was challenging, and the banana bosses, many of whom came from the US South, typically did not treat the Afro-Caribbean migrant workers humanely. This furthered the enclave-like quality of the plantations, where English, not Spanish, was most likely to be spoken by both foreman and crews, and where Afro-descendent banana workers would often find themselves isolated not just by language but also by skin color in their newly adopted countries.