

DREAMING OF FREEDOM  
IN THE AMERICAS:  
FOUR MINDS AND A NAME

James Dunkerley

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAS  
INAUGURAL LECTURE

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I MUST CONFESS THAT THIS IS THE THIRD INAUGURAL LECTURE that I will have delivered in the University of London in the past dozen years – the first at Queen Mary and Westfield College (now Queen Mary, University of London) and of which I remain a proud member, but now and on the previous occasion in this fine federal hall.

Although I shall today discuss plurality and pluralism, it has to be said that multiple inaugurals are not always a sign of professional – let alone professorial – good judgement. Happily, though, we are today inaugurating a new institute, of which I happen – as much by good fortune as by deliberate design – to serve as the first director.

Established by the University Council on 10 December 2003, the Institute for the Study of the Americas is formed through the merger of the Institute of Latin American Studies and the Institute of United States Studies, both in their turn set up 39 years ago. As a result, ISA benefits from considerable experience as well as the energies derived from innovation. I am privileged to possess a total of eight predecessors as director, one of them with us this afternoon.<sup>1</sup>

1. At ILAS: R.A. ('Robin') Humphreys (1907–1996), 1965–74; John Lynch, 1974–87; Leslie Bethell, 1987–92; Victor Bulmer-Thomas, 1992–98. At IUSS: Harry Allen (1917–98), 1965–71; Esmond Wright (1915–2003), 1971–83; Peter Parish (1929–2002), 1983–92; Gary McDowell, 1992–2003.

Yet I am at one with Robin Humphreys, the first director of ILAS, when he stated at his own inaugural that, 'It is with more than ordinary degree of trepidation – proper no doubt to feel, and decent to avow on occasions such as this – that I address you today.'<sup>2</sup>

The main reason for a touch of nervousness is because our new Institute aims to forge beyond customary academic barriers, and it must do so at a time of appreciable academic and political controversy.

First and foremost, we are committed to an authentic and enduring inclusion of Canada and the Caribbean, which were rarely considered in the mainstream ILAS and IUSS programmes. That means that the Institute will, from next year, offer not only master's courses on the United States and Latin America but also on Comparative American Studies – a prospect made realistic by the fact that we have this month been able to announce new lectureships in Canadian and Caribbean Studies.

Such a combination of multidisciplinary expertise in each of the specific areas of the Americas in their own right with a capacity for their comparative study at postgraduate level is, I believe, institutionally unique – certainly within Britain and Europe, probably in the world. It is not a challenge we could confront without the support of our colleagues in the sister Institutes of the School of Advanced Study, itself unique within the continent and presently, in my view, enjoying the boldest and most creative phase of its ten-year existence.

Nor, of course, would such a scholarly enterprise be possible without the assistance of the leadership of the University itself, and we today formally assume the responsibility of conducting it according the University's Charter of 1836, namely:

to hold forth to all classes and denominations, both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, without any distinction . . . pursuing a regular and liberal course of education.

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Ten years ago this month Sir John Elliott published in the *New York Review of Books* a respectful but gently sceptical review of a volume by the Chilean

2. 'The Study of Latin American History', delivered at University College, London, on 4 Nov. 1948, and published in R.A. Humphreys, *Tradition and Revolt in Latin America* (London 1969), pp. 229–44.

historian Claudio Véliz, whose work has long stressed the differences between – and the distinctiveness of – Anglo and Hispanic America. In Elliott's view, the image of an uncomplicated dichotomy was not borne out by all the historical evidence.<sup>3</sup>

Easily told, readily understood, and popular on both sides of the notional divide of the continent – or in both continents – this story reposes comfortably within the political cultures both of 'American exceptionalism' and Latin American dependency theory which, in a conspiracy of unequals, were bonded by mutual repudiation. America, all agreed with relish, did not have 'a common history' and could not survive as one in the future.<sup>4</sup>

Those politico-intellectual currents are now closely associated with the decades after World War Two, but they retain greater buoyancy than some people prefer to recognise. Exceptionalism has a worried but best-selling advocate in Samuel Huntington, who feels constrained to defend Thomas Jefferson's 'American creed' against multiculturalism driven by existence within the USA of 38 million native speakers of Spanish – more than in Spain itself.

Anglo-Protestant culture has been central to American identity for three centuries. It is what Americans have had in common and, as countless foreigners have observed, has distinguished them from other peoples. In the later Twentieth Century, however, the salience and substance of this culture was challenged by a new wave of immigrants from Latin America and Asia, the popularity in intellectual and political circles of the doctrines of multi-culturalism and diversity, the spread of Spanish as the second American language, and the Hispanization trends in American society, the assertion of group identities based on race, ethnicity, and gender, the impact of diasporas and their homeland governments, and

3. 'Going Baroque', a review of *The New World of the Gothic Fox* (Berkeley 1994), *New York Review of Books*, 20 Oct. 1994, pp. 29–32. This critical reception was not unpredictable:

'Ever since I got to know him, many years ago, the Chilean historian Claudio Véliz has been organising seminars. In the 60s he had his office in Chatham House, alongside Arnold Toynbee's, and he brought to London ideological Latin American economists and anthropologists to verify their inability to deal with the pragmatic English. He invited me to one of these reproductions of the Tower of Babel and I had a very good time.'

Mario Vargas Llosa, 'Nations. Fictions', in *Making Waves* (London 1996), p. 299.

4. Lewis Hanke (ed.), *Do the Americas Have a Common History?* (New York, 1964).

the growing commitment of elites to cosmopolitan and transnational identities.<sup>5</sup>

The latest declension of dependency theory is no less ably expressed by Régis Debray, who fought the Cold War against Huntington largely on paper, from a Cubanist redoubt, and who still finds ‘nothing but contrast’ between two Americas dreaming separately in the same bed:

Nothing reveals the contrast between two virtually contiguous states of God, that of scribes and that of printers, better than the mental abyss separating, from the beginning, Hispano- and Anglo-America. The regions of the *marvellous real* and those of the *amended real*. New England, where everything is done according to the Law, derives its judicial basis from a formalist Lawgiver, carefully cut off and freed from the censures of Rome. New Spain, in which the sermon rules and discourse mesmerizes, stems from an oral and clerical God, subject to the Index, to a control of ports and borders, whose metropolis proscribed the printing of works of miscreants. Four centuries later, it still makes for two dreams in a single bed.<sup>6</sup>

At one level, the case for difference is so overwhelming that we need not tarry long over detailed evidence. The primacy of the USA in the world today may be celebrated or denounced, feared or thought to be self-destructing, but it is not sensibly denied. At the turn of the millennium the US possessed less than 5 per cent of the planet’s population but it accounted for 31 per cent of global GDP, 36 per cent of the world’s expenditure on defence and 40 per cent of its investment in research and development.<sup>7</sup>

The United States has military bases in 130 different countries, and its predominance in the world is such that, whatever our views on the real extent of globalisation, nobody can afford to ignore it, and all need to understand it. *Hegemon* is a Greek word but its sense of leadership and the master-principle is arguably more applicable to today’s English-speaking superpower than that of ancient Athens.

5. *Who Are We? America’s Great Debate* (New York, 2004), p. xvi.

6. *God: An Itinerary* (London, 2004), pp. 200–1.

7. ‘Present at the Creation: A Survey of America’s World Role’, *The Economist*, 29 May 2002, p.4.

'It is no more than rudimentary common sense', said Harry Allen at his 1955 inaugural as Commonwealth Fund Professor of American History, 'to do our utmost to understand – if only to help us to influence – this powerful nation . . . We must study the history of the United States: we dare do no other.'<sup>8</sup>

Within the context of the western hemisphere the asymmetry resulting from US prowess is even more marked. Its GDP per capita of \$35,000 compares with \$5,000 in Mexico, \$2,600 in the rest of Latin America and \$5,200 in the Caribbean.<sup>9</sup> These are national figures, concealing greater disparities within states as small as St Kitts, with a population of just 46,000 supporting 1,500 hotel rooms, or as large as Brazil, with 175 million people, three-quarters the size of the USA.

Brazil is the world's tenth-largest economy and its leading producer of sugar and tobacco as well as coffee. It is also its greatest debtor and responsible for less than 1 per cent of global exports.<sup>10</sup> But beyond its cultural richness and sporting prowess, Brazil is a formidable outgrowth of the Portuguese empire and a significant player in the modern world. It may not be able to impose its will in wider hemispheric matters, but neither can it be ignored in their design. We can properly talk of Brazilian exceptionalism.

So may we of Canada, although that may not alter the perception of an essential asymmetry since 75 per cent of 30 million Canadians speak only English.<sup>11</sup> Canada's overall quality of life is assessed to be slightly beneath those of Norway and Sweden, and on just about all other healthy indices she stands seventh or eighth in the world. Canada exports four times more than Brazil, casting some doubts on the claim by a finance minister of the 1980s that, 'No matter how we define the term, Canada has an acute shortage of rich people.'<sup>12</sup>

Canada, though, like Mexico sells over 80 per cent of her exports to the USA,

8. Quoted in Peter Parish's obituary, *BAAS Newsletter*, 80, 1998. The great disparity as well as discrete commonalities between the UK and the USA were exhaustively depicted by Allen in his major text, *Great Britain and the United States. A History of Anglo-American Relations (1783–1952)* (London, 1954).

9. Derived from Nicola Phillips, 'The Americas', in Anthony Payne (ed.), *The New Regional Politics of Development*, forthcoming.

10. *The Economist*, *Pocket World in Figures. 2004 Edition* (London, 2003), pp. 24, 38, 46–7; R. Hillman and T. D'Agostino (eds.), *Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean* (London, 2003), pp. 15, 135.

11. 'Population and growth components, 1851–2001 Census', <http://www.statcan.ca>.

12. Michael Wilson, 30 May 1985, *Chambers Dictionary of Quotations*.

from which she buys more than 70 per cent of her imports. The government in Ottawa possesses modest military resources and a firm multilateralist tradition. This is unsurprising when the country's population is only a quarter of those of her founding European nations whilst inhabiting a territory thirteen times their combined size. Canadian exceptionalism, like that of Brazil, does not seriously threaten the doctrine of difference within the continent. One is, nonetheless, tempted to wonder what might result from more collaboration between them.

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This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of two symbolic books – *The Wretched of the Earth*, an excoriating critique of the consequences of world poverty by Frantz Fanon of Martinique, and David M. Potter's *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character*, scholarly but sprightly to the point of celebration. Surely, at such a distance, we should simply register the differences and, following Sheridan, treat the distinct interpretations of those conditions as 'a very pretty quarrel as it stands – we should only spoil it by trying to explain it'?

Well, in one sense we won't – inasmuch as the new Institute will maintain quite separate programmes on the USA and Latin America as well as upholding the vocation of its parent bodies for 'area studies', understood as the multidisciplinary commitment to understand places and peoples in intrinsic, contextual and specialised forms. It is, unfortunately, because area studies are about specificity that they have been in receipt of such rough treatment in a globalist era so prone to pallid generalisation.

Yet knowledge of the local is, as HSBC profitably continue to inform us, as useful as it is profitable. A few years ago the existence of a modicum of precise and practical knowledge of Afghanistan – let alone fluency in, say, Dari – within the major chancelleries of the world might have saved countless lives, not least in the Americas. Today, we observe with awe the steepness of the learning-curve with respect to Iraq.<sup>13</sup>

13. I press these points of disciplinary partisanship from a utilitarian viewpoint, which could equally well animate the reminding of Messrs Blair and Bush of the speech to the House of Lords made by William Pitt the Elder, the Earl of Chatham, on 18 November 1777, at the height of the revolutionary war: 'If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I would never lay down my arms; never – never – never!'



We have recently been told that this year's fall in applications to American Studies courses in British universities is due to the war in Iraq, and some have welcomed that attribution, but apparently only as an excuse to criticise the Bush administration, and heedless of the fierce debates within the United States.<sup>14</sup> Predictable though it is, such a response is depressing, with regard both to understanding the USA and to area studies in general. It wilfully confuses curiosity with celebration, and it treats the acquisition of knowledge as a simple function of empathy and approbation.

American Studies understood as United States studies grew in the UK at the time of the Vietnam War, and they grew strong through their engagement with a plethora of currents of thought, culture and power within that extraordinary country. Not dissimilarly, Latin American studies reached its peak – certainly in terms of overall activity, arguably in terms of scholarly quality – in the 1970s and 1980s, when military dictatorships and butcherous behaviour abounded, supported no less by indolent *realpolitik* than by permafrosted ideologies. Many useful lessons were learnt about adversity and in often adverse circumstances, but the greater point here is that one needs to understand the world even when the practical applicability of that understanding is not manifest.

In one of the several frank exchanges of opinion last year over the merger of the two institutes it was put to me that students of the United States would be obliged to study Ecuador in a kind of pious off-shore variant of North American multiculturalism. There is, though, no 'Ecuador Question', and nobody will be encouraged – let alone obliged – to study Quito, or to compare it with Kalamazoo unless, under the normal rules pertaining to informed consent, they sign up so to do. It is our mission to ensure that both towns are the object of serious inquiry and analysis. One possible way for that – a

14. Polly Toynbee, columnist on *The Guardian*, predicated a pithy but thoughtful piece on the 2004 US election result, explaining poor European poll findings about American society largely in terms of the Bush legacy and suggesting that a 'Kerry win might still do much to heal the rift, just by showing America publicly renouncing Bush and all his works'. Given Kerry's senatorial record, particularly on Iraq, this strikes me as an exotic notion but it is supportive of her later comment that, 'the underlying picture of attitudes towards America suggests a miasma of confusion and deep emotion'. Toynbee's piece properly called for greater interest in Europe amongst British students but did not deign to dip its toe into the tiresome waters of student finance, years abroad, or the fact, plainly signalled by her reported quotes, that European youth promiscuously cherry-pick their favoured Americanisms, heedless of possible linkages between Shane, Sergeant Bilko and *Sex and the City*. 'A degree in bullying and self-interest? No thanks.' *The Guardian*, 25 Aug. 2004.

means hitherto institutionally unavailable and still out of fashion – is through comparison. Plurality of method sensibly accompanies plurality of object.

True comparison, of course, does not depend exclusively upon difference – something we need reminding of in these days when ‘otherness’ has often been driven by academic fashion beyond its hermeneutic capacity into the land of drivelling orthodoxy whence it requires rescue.<sup>15</sup>

Comparisons so based may illuminate but they rarely explain, even if that is their universalist claim. Perhaps the best one can say for the doctrine of difference in the Americas is that it has been successfully transformed into an ideology, or, as Richard Hofstadter put it, ‘It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one.’<sup>16</sup>

Correspondingly, the programme of unity, integration or even similarity has never been successfully insinuated into the popular mind. It also receives only intermittent support amongst intellectuals suspicious of melting-pots, although the fearless deconstructionism of our day promotes manifold hybridity and thus accelerated homogeneity by methodological default. The post-moderns unleash mongrels with almost as much zest as the eugenicists of a century ago pampered pedigree.

However, there are, so to speak, real exceptions. In the south a varied but popular culture of *mestizaje* endures, most thoroughly evident in Hispano-Guaraní Paraguay. The summoning call of Ibero-America has echoed with more tonality than that endowed by narrow anti-Anglo-Saxonism. Even the cross-cultural, continentalist Pan-American vision survived the isolation and invasions of the nineteenth century – often in solitary poetic mode – to be kitted out in twentieth century bureaucratic garb of suits, congresses and

15. ‘Difference, tautologically enough, operates as identity formation; it confers identity on the differentiated. Diversity labours to foster divergence; it deconstructs identity and the identical and thereby foregrounds plurality and alterity, internal and external. Post-melting-pot United States culture and cultural discourse live by difference, even as they proclaim a rhetoric of diversity . . .’ Djelal Kadir, ‘Introduction: America and Its Studies’, ‘America: The Idea, the Literature’, *PMLA*, 118:1, Jan. 2003, p. 14. Among the dozen ‘key developments’ identified by Prof. Kadir at the First World Congress of the International American Studies Association was: ‘From its unquestionable ideological imaginary, encoded variously as “the American dream” or “the American way”, America’s foundational myth is becoming subject to sustainable inquiry and demystification.’ ‘Defending America against its devotees’, *Comparative American Studies*, 2:2, 2004, p. 136.

16. *New York Times*, 2 July 1989. Time had earlier editorialised in the same vein: ‘The true religion of America has always been America’. 27 Sept. 1984.

acronyms. Occasionally it has exercised some influence. The Central American airline TACA is currently using the slogan ‘Uniendo los Cielos de las Tres Américas’, and nobody portrays the diasporic reality of the Americas more assiduously than Western Union, now handling migrant remittances from this country too.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, in 1994 John Elliott opened his review of Véliz’s encyclopaedia of distinctiveness by surveying the claims of the opposite, unionist camp. That was associated with the now largely ignored historian Herbert Bolton, whose presidential address to the 1932 congress of the American Historical Association sought to lure the profession away from the confines of the actually-existing nation-states and towards an appreciation of the existence of a ‘Greater America’, to which Bolton attributed epic qualities.<sup>18</sup>

It was this claim that attracted such robust rebuttal in subsequent years. Bolton seemed to treat complicating evidence with recidivist disregard, merely declaiming ‘E Pluribus Unum’ over a patchwork of under-theorised monographic studies. Yet he properly drew attention to many similarities derived from European colonisation, and he may fairly be identified as an intellectual author of Franklin Roosevelt’s ‘Good Neighbor’ policy. Beyond that, his perspective skirted around the grounding of success and failure that has so long underpinned the teleological distortion of hemispheric history.<sup>19</sup>

The Bolton thesis was, nevertheless, itself a decided failure, and I should make it plain here that the new Institute has no more mission to resuscitate it than we do to embalm exceptionalism. On the contrary, following the advice

17. I first came across Western Union in the mid-1990s at the Archway Tavern, north London, a pub of strong Irish republican connections that housed a booth for the firm as well as possessing a then-rare widescreen television to show sporting events. I was served only after I had removed my cap sporting the Bolivian tricolour and had explained that that country had been constituted as a republic 98 years before Eire, against which Azkargota’s team narrowly lost on a cold Dublin night. Like many Latin American pilots, TACA flight-crew tend to announce that they ‘have received authorisation to land’, which might strike the Anglo mind as a nice triumph of formal virtue over absolute necessity.

18. The address is reprinted in Hanke, *Do the Americas Have a Common History?*, pp. 69–100.

19. Sir John Elliott, ‘The Past and Future of Hemispheric and Atlantic History’, address to the Hemispheric Studies Colloquium, Rothermere American Institute, Oxford, 17 Sept. 2004. It is remarkable how much is shared between those who predict the ‘breakdown of the American order’ and those who believe that it will be agreeably sustained once election-driven ‘attention deficit disorder’ is overcome: Emmanuel Todd, *After the Empire* (London, 2004); Niall Ferguson, *Colossus. The Paradox of America’s Empire* (London, 2004).

of my colleague Warwick Gould, we shall seek actively to reflect and promote no doctrine whilst reflecting upon all those that matter.

That is why we, following Felipe Fernández-Armesto, have opted for Americas plural in our title.<sup>20</sup> It is a plain descriptor for the region's 35 states inhabited by 850 million people, however you choose to cut and judge them. This, I ardently hope, will enable us to explore with tenacity and gentleness the balances of sameness, similarity and difference that underlie the realities and dreams of the Americas.

Now, I have not quite managed to clear the impedimenta of controversy from our path this afternoon. I have referred to a continent and to a hemisphere. Some of my North American colleagues can identify more than one continent in the Americas and they are sometimes echoed from the south, albeit in less punctilious language. Equally, critical geographers depict the very concept of 'continent' as mere myth and ideological construction.<sup>21</sup> And, since geography is the paradigm-packing discipline of the moment, we will be in some trouble if we scurry back to the term 'hemisphere'. This is because a hemisphere is precisely what it says, half the globe, and apportion the degrees and minutes to your pleasure, that will always amount to more than the Americas and salt water.

Whilst the Caribbean has mostly been seen and acted as a continental actor, that is not so for much of the Atlantic and Pacific archipelagos, which are thereby annexed to the identity of an alien continental landmass. I regret that, beset by the imputation of false consciousness and the desiderata of radical positivism, I can offer little mental refreshment on this theme. We should, though, reserve it for serious introspection, and I will try not to employ the demotic to gratuitous effect as we pass on to the name in the title of today's talk.

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The continental landmass of the western hemisphere was first settled by human beings around 22,000 years ago, but it has only been called America

20. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Americas. The History of a Hemisphere* (London, 2003) argues a more muscular case than I, and it will serve as a revisionist stimulant for years to come.

21. M. Lewis and K. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents. A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, 1997).

since 1507. The birthplace of the name can be located with some exactitude – a kilometre south of the main runway of Florence’s international airport. For it was there, in Peretola, that Amerigo Vespucci was born in 1451, and it was Vespucci, no less publicly expressive and self-advertising than other voyagers of the day, who claimed to have knowingly discovered the new continent – as distinct from its associated islands – in 1497, that is a year earlier than Christopher Columbus.

Vespucci undoubtedly made two of the four voyages he described in letters published under the title *Mundus Novus* in 1507, which was the year after Columbus died. Some say that Vespucci was really in Seville in 1497, but none seriously doubts the voyage of 1499. So, we can with some confidence say that he landed in what is now Brazil on 27 June 1499, and that by the end of his final voyage in 1503 he had travelled along the continental coastline from the St Helena Sound in South Carolina to beneath the River Plate.<sup>22</sup>

Yet Vespucci’s self-promotion was in itself insufficient to secure the world’s biggest and latest appellation. It was the adoption of his name by Martin Waldseemuller, a talented cartographer from Freiburg teaching at the college of St Dié, which made the difference. Waldseemuller, having read Vespucci’s account, published in the same year a map to accompany his edition of Ptolemy, sticking the word ‘America’ on the southern part of the landmass.

According to the generous Germanic geographer,

Now that the regions are truly and amply explored and another fourth part [of the world] has been discovered by Amerigo Vespucci, I do not see why anyone can prohibit its being given the name of its discoverer, Amerigo, a wise man of genius.

22. B. Quaritch (ed.), *Amerigo Vespucci. Letters of the Four Voyages to the New World* (Hamburg, 1992). A less likely claim for the origins of the name is made on behalf of Richard Ameryke (or Ap Meryk), chief customs office at Bristol and sponsor of John Cabot, whose vessel *Matthew* reached mainland America (probably northern Maine) on 24 June 1497. Cabot made two more voyages and disappeared off the Orinoco in 1499, possibly killed by forces from the Ojeda fleet, in which Vespucci travelled. There is little doubt that Cabot was helped by the Bristolian knowledge of the Newfoundland waters, and his map certainly passed, via the Spanish ambassador, to both Columbus and Vespucci. We do not, however, have any documentary evidence for Cabot repaying with such title the £20 Ameryk paid to him, and nobody subsequently drew a map to fete the rich man from Ross-on-Wye. Of course, evidence of a Norse presence 500 years earlier is compelling.

Well, as is the way with academics, disputation arose, and when in 1513 a chastened Waldseemuller published a second map of the region, he labelled it 'Terra Incognita'. But it was too late.<sup>23</sup>

The name has stuck, even if for more than two centuries it interacted, often as a junior partner, with 'the New World' – still used by supermarkets to denote a certain class of wine – and, mostly in Spain, with 'the Indies'. 'America' now prevails, in singular fashion, and despite the fact that it is based upon a mistake derived from a fib of oceanic proportion. This, I should warn you, is not the last time we will encounter the disorganised relationship between verifiable evidence and contested truths.

Yet it was the decision in early July 1776 by rebel colonists in Philadelphia formally to name their new polity as the United States of America that really guaranteed a debate over nomenclature.

I hope that I am not in denial if I cite John Elliott a third time because he so admirably summarises the issue:

By default, the inhabitants of the new republic arrogated to themselves the name of 'Americans' for what else could they be called? In the process they deprived all the other peoples of the hemisphere of their collective name, and compelled the pluralisation of 'America' into 'the Americas'.<sup>24</sup>

I myself think it clear that no deprivation was intended. The American Revolution was made as much by writers and speakers as by soldiers, and even when that formidable impulse to express and communicate was formally constrained – as at the Constitutional Convention – they still could not stop Madison from writing it up on the side. In sum, we do not lack evidence of what many leading people said they thought and wanted to do. The challenge is to break from the teleological trap that stops us looking uncertainly forward in their company, even as we must perforce look back at them.

23. Samuel E. Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Southern Voyages* (New York, 1974); E.L. Stevenson, 'Martin Waldseemuller and the early Lusitano-Germanic Cartography of the New World', *Bulletin of the American Geography Society*, XXXVI, no.4, 1904, pp. 193–215. An agile review of the whole experience and its cultural backdrop and projection is provided in Edmundo O'Gorman, *La invención de América* ([1958] repr. México, 1992), pp. 116 ff.

24. J.H. Elliott, *Do the Americas Have a Common History?* (Providence, 1998), pp. 9–10.

Here nobody helps better than Gordon Wood:

Whatever feelings of American nationalism existed in 1776, they paled before people's loyalties to their separate states . . . When people in 1776 talked about their 'country' or even their 'nation', they usually meant Virginia or Massachusetts or Pennsylvania . . . Few Americans . . . could conceive of creating a singly full-fledged continental republic . . . for John Adams, the Massachusetts delegation in Congress was 'our embassy'.<sup>25</sup>

This impression is strengthened by the rather makeshift manner in which the national name was reached. As late as October 1774 the Resolution of Grievance was sent to George III in the name of the 'inhabitants of the English colonies of North America'. By May 1776 the Continental Congress was repudiating the monarch in the name of the 'inhabitants of these United Colonies'. In the draft manuscript version of the Declaration of Independence 'United' starts in upper case, and 'states' in lower; in the printed version that is reversed, but in both cases those states are declared as being 'in Congress Assembled'.<sup>26</sup>

Talk of union at this stage was as much animated by the practical need to hold together the forces of rebellion as by any higher constitutional design.<sup>27</sup> And as late as February 1778 the treaty with Louis XVI of France was between 'The Most Christian King and the thirteen United States of America, to wit New Hampshire, Massachusetts etc.'

Once the war was won, the Articles of Confederation passed by the Continental Congress in 1777 declared that, 'each state retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence', and so proved too loose to guarantee even the payment of basic customs revenues.

Yet when, within a decade, the Constitutional Convention was called, Luther

25. *The American Revolution. A History* (London, 2003), p. 55; *The Creation of the American Republic 1776–1787* (London, 1969), p. 356.

26. J.R. Pole (ed.), *The Revolution in America, 1754–1788. Documents and Commentaries* (London, 1970), pp. 20, 29, 41.

27. 'His Majesty is advised that the union in America cannot last. Ministers have more eyes than I, and should have more ears, but with all the information I have been able to procure, I can pronounce it a union, solid, permanent and effectual.' William Pitt the Elder, Earl of Chatham, to the House of Lords, 20 Jan. 1775.

Martin told it that the American people had preferred the establishment of thirteen separate sovereignties:

At the separation from the British empire, the American people preferred to establish themselves into thirteen separate sovereignties instead of incorporating themselves into one. To these they look up for the security of their lives, liberties and properties. The federal government they formed to defend the whole against the foreign nations in case of war, and to defend the lesser states against the ambitions of the large.<sup>28</sup>

Even James Madison, who did so much to draft the Constitution, described under his *nom de plume* of Publius as neither national nor federal in nature:

The proposed Constitution . . . is in strictness neither a national nor a federal Constitution; but a composition of both. In its foundation it is federal, not national; in the sources from which the ordinary powers are drawn, it is partly federal and partly national; in the operation of these powers, it is national, not federal; in the extent of them, again, it is federal, not national; and finally, in the authoritative mode of introducing amendment, it is neither wholly federal nor wholly national.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, the Constitution refers to the ‘People of the United States’ before it does to the ‘United States of America’, and the president of the USA still takes the oath under that Constitution as the president of ‘the United States’.

Perhaps, with Jefferson and Franklin abroad, the Convention really lacked the vision as well as the resolution to go for an entirely new name – something snappy, original and yielding good adjectives, but if that route had been followed, the Republic of Colombia, which went through several

28. Quoted in I. Kramnick (ed.), James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (1788) (Harmondsworth, 1987), p. 18.

29. *The Federalist*, no. 39, in Kramnick, *The Federalist Papers*, p. 259; Pole (ed.), *The Revolution in America*, p. 216. It is partly for this reason that Ernest May, in this instance chiming with the exceptionalist mainstream, denies that the United States is a nation-state like any other, causing Niall Ferguson to misunderstand its contemporary behaviour. *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 July 2004, p. 11.



changes of name before it became so titled in 1886, might today be called something else.<sup>30</sup>

Samuel Huntington congregates the primary documents of the independence era under the mantle of 'American Creed', which comprises the core features of US traditionalism, currently under domestic social pressure as well as attack abroad. Pauline Maier, from a far cooler vantage point, similarly treats the Declaration of Independence as 'American Scripture' and, expressly uneasy about assigning religious imagery to a document of such Enlightenment principle, she still allows it because the Declaration inscribes ideals that 'bind an entire people'.

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For Maier there have been two events reanimating the Declaration at critical junctures in US history – Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and the 12-minute speech given by the Reverend Martin Luther King at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington a century later, on 28 August 1963.<sup>31</sup>

However, King, then a Baptist minister for the better part of a decade, is associated less with any creed than with the word 'dream', within which he includes Huntington's 'creed'. Dream is by no means an irreligious or unchristian word – dreams abound in the bible – but by 1963 the term 'American Dream' was already in common currency as reflecting the US self-image as a land of freedom and opportunity for all.

Every idea has its log-book, and here it is not difficult to trace a lineage down from Winthrop's city on a hill, through Horatio Alger's hortatory tales to Archibald MacLeish's explicit use of the term in a 1960 TV debate. MacLeish's reputation rested on the rolling crusted power of his epic poem 'Conquistador', condensing the tragic warrior's vision of Bernal Díaz, serving under Cortés:

30. 'Columbia was a happy coinage. Virginia and Georgia had already made such names familiar. It was almost everything that the USA was not – short, precise, original, poetic, and flexibly yielding good adjectives and nouns.' George Stewart, *Names on the Land. A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States* (New York, 1945), p. 172. Bolívar first used the term Colombia in 1812, seeing its cradle in Caracas, which rather unusually for such a secular mind, he likened to Jerusalem. For the next few years he was inclined to use the term to refer to all Spanish America. V. Lecuña and H. Bierck (eds.), *Selected Writings of Bolívar, I*, (New York, 1951), p. 17.

31. *American Scripture. How American Declared its Independence from Britain* (London, 1997), pp. xix; 214.

Those with the glaze in their eyes and the  
 Fine bearing:  
 The born leaders of men: the resonant voice.  
 They give them the lands for their tombs:  
 They call it  
 America!  
 (And who has heard of Vespucci in this soil  
 Or down by the lee of the coast or toward  
 The Havana?)<sup>32</sup>

Yet he also provided the premier Enlightenment expression of commitment to international peace in drafting the 179-word preamble to the UN Charter.<sup>33</sup>

A writer who served as Assistant Secretary of State, MacLeish was also, like Jorge Luis Borges, national librarian. But unlike the right-wing Argentine, who evaded too public expression of his beliefs, the progressive from Illinois was energetic in that regard, and he gave readings in commemoration of the centenary of emancipation, which provided the immediate context for Martin Luther King's speech.<sup>34</sup>

That speech opens its climactic phase by explicitly evoking the Declaration before citing King's dream in several states of the Union, starting with that of his own birth:

32. 'Conquistador', in *New and Collected Poems, 1917–1976* (Boston, 1976).

33. 'WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, AND FOR THESE ENDS, to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples . . .

34. 'Revolution, which was once a word spoke with pride by every American who had the right to claim it, has become a word spoken with timidity and doubt and even loathing'. *Atlantic Monthly*, Aug. 1949. And maybe it got worse. A couple of years after King was killed, Hunter S. Thompson asked, 'But what was the story? Nobody had bothered to say. So we would have to drum it up on our own. Free Enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas . . .' *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (London, 1972), p.19.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'

I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down at the table of brotherhood.'

The power of King's performance on that day is preserved on film – it is said to be the first and last protest march broadcast live on national television – but he frequently made recourse to personal experience in what was by 1963 a punishing annual schedule of some 200 speeches and sermons. What more poignant image than that of his daughter's face as she hears for the first time of the consequences of the colour of her skin:

Why not 'wait'? When you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you speak to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on the television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky.<sup>35</sup>

To the ears of posterity King possesses an unparalleled voice, and yet for some time now it has been claimed that it is not 'self-evidently true', in the sense that he elided and even stole words from others. Some scholars have identified his Boston University doctorate as being substantially plagiarised, which is a serious matter for that university but has fomented a wider claim that his public voice expresses the thought not of one mind but several.

We are not simply talking of influence here. We can readily identify currents drawn from Hegel, Gandhi, Thoreau, New Deal radicalism and the theology of Niebhur in addition to a rich array of biblical allusions. The essential charge is, rather, one of intellectual and political dishonesty. It is not dissimilar to that levelled against another Nobel peace laureate, Rigoberta Menchú of Guatemala, similarly traduced for wilfully 'voice-merging' or combining

35. 'Letter from Birmingham City Jail', April 1963, in C. Carson (ed.), *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, London 2000, p. 192. Mike Marqusee, 'Day of Dreams', *BBC History*, Aug. 2003, p. 14.

different personal experiences as if one and, most provocatively, as if they were her own.<sup>36</sup>

There is no need to dwell on the political or personal motivations of those making the accusation. Suffice it to say that they seem as incurious about the myriad properties of rhetoric – particularly for subaltern people – as they are insistent upon the self-evidence of truth deriving from irreducible facts.

At the end of *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More tells dedicatee Peter Giles that he was compelled to compose a fiction whereby ‘the truth, as if smeared by honey, might a little more pleasantly slip into men’s minds’.<sup>37</sup> And Mario Vargas Llosa, drawn to utopians but no friend of utopias, reminds us that,

in effect novels lie – they can do nothing else – but that is only part of the truth . . . Men do not live by truth alone; they also need lies: those that they invent freely, not those that are imposed upon them; those that appear as they are, not smuggled in beneath the clothes of history.<sup>38</sup>

This perilous territory becomes doubly dangerous when we talk of facts within dreams. Yet I believe that it is ultimately a side issue, and I think King’s use of the dream motif was such a potent transformation of constitutional argument into moral discourse that it confounds any surrounding doubts as to authenticity.

Two years after the Washington speech Martin Luther King preached a sermon at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta under the title ‘The American Dream’, which he describes as the Declaration of Independence ‘lifted to cosmic proportions’. He repeated the opening of the Declaration, as

36. ‘Some argued that King was following an African American practice of “voice-merging” that did not adhere to the Eurocentric concept of intellectual property rights while others argued that the persistence of plagiarism in his doctoral thesis suggested that King had been poorly supervised by Boston University’s benignly racist, white academic staff’. Peter Ling, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (London, 2002), p. 322. An engaged and sensitive discussion of the influences on King’s thought is provided in Richard King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (Athens, GA, 1996), and a scrupulous review of the pertinent literature may be found in John A. Kirk, ‘State of the Art: Martin Luther King, Jr.’, *Journal of American Studies*, 38:2, 2004, pp. 329–47. A. Arias (ed.), *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (Minneapolis, 2001).

37. *Utopia*, in E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter (eds.), *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of Sir Thomas More*, IV (New Haven, 1965), p. 251. All further references to the work will be to this edition.

38. ‘The Truth of Lies’, in *Making Waves*, pp. 320, 330. It is this last statement that touches most keenly on the present case – the sense of misrepresentation, rather than pure invention.

at the Lincoln Memorial, but no longer tours the states to paint emancipatory portraits. Instead, he dwells a moment longer on the nature of the American creed:

It is a great dream . . . an amazing universalism. It doesn't say 'some men' [are created equal], it says 'all men'.

It says that each of us has certain basic rights that are neither derived from nor conferred by the state . . . Never before in the history of the world has a socio-political document expressed in such profound, eloquent and unequivocal language the dignity and worth of human personality.

And, then, almost in passing, because it required no laboured exposition, he identifies a foundational fiction, and then calmly identifies the cost of a lie embedded in a dream:

But now more than ever, America is challenged to realise its dream . . . And the price America must pay for the continued oppression of the Negro and other minority groups is the price of its own destruction.<sup>39</sup>

This is a voice in high register, but the theme was not new. From early on King had alighted on the practical challenges of the United States promoting in a wider world ideals that it was not practising at home:

The United States cannot hope to attain the respect of the vital and growing colored nations of the world unless its remedies its racial problems at home. If America is to remain a first-class nation, it cannot have a second-class citizenship.<sup>40</sup>

The 1965 sermon also compounds the impact of domestic racism through a highly prescient depiction of Americanisation-as-globalisation:

Never before in the history of the world have so many racial groups and so many national backgrounds assembled together in one nation. And somehow, if we can't solve the problem in America, the world can't solve

39. *A Knock at Midnight. The Great Sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (London, 2000), pp. 86–7.

40. *Stride Towards Freedom. The Montgomery Story* (New York, 1958), p. 197.

the problem, because America is the world in miniature and the world is America writ large . . .

That was nearly 40 years ago, but it is not today difficult to anticipate the closure as Reverend King reflected upon his earlier reverie:

I tried to tell the nation about a dream I had. I must confess to you this morning that since that sweltering August afternoon . . . my dream has often turned into a nightmare.

Now the tableaux presented constitute a familiar litany of continued mass indigence and individual murders. But there is also a refusal of despair which can no longer repose upon any fact, only on faith: 'So, yes, the dream has been shattered, and I have had my nightmarish experience but I tell you this morning once more that I haven't lost the faith.'<sup>41</sup>

Whilst we can never forget that Martin Luther King would be slain by an assassin's bullet, we might need reminding of the context in which that faith was, from the very start, placed under test.

After all, this year is the fiftieth anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision on *Brown versus Board of Education*, which overthrew the doctrine of equality in separateness, and next year will mark the same anniversary of the 382-day bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama – an instance of non-violent direct action that was needed to move a formal judgement by the highest court in the land towards a practical improvement in the everyday lives of black people in the South.

The corrosive, quotidian nature of the issue derived from the racist apportionment of space within the cramped confines of a Montgomery bus, within which each black passenger had, sometimes more than a dozen times a week, to negotiate an acute challenge, if not a veritable nightmare.

This involved buying a ticket from the driver at the front door, and re-entering the bus by the back door to the ten rows of seats allocated to blacks. The front ten rows were for whites only, and could not be walked through or occupied by blacks, even if entirely empty. A middle section of 16 seats was assigned according to need, but no black could sit there in the same row as a white, even if three parallel seats were unoccupied.

41. *Knock at Midnight*, p. 98.

I am sure that I don't have to expatiate upon the personal and collective consequences, other perhaps than to note that the weather in Alabama is not as temperate as in London, and to invite you to imagine the scene when an entirely full bus, with black passengers standing and occupying the middle seats, stops to pick up four white people.<sup>42</sup>

What could be more understandable in such a context than the two reactions that Martin Luther King rejected – resigning in exhaustion or fighting back in hatred? Devoted to the cause of collective deliverance, King was no less opposed to 'running away' – now to the North rather than Liberia – on the grounds that this effectively surrendered the right to demand rights.

He saw the practical synthesis of these forces in non-violent resistance:

A few years ago in the slum areas of Atlanta, a Negro guitarist used to sing almost daily: 'Ben down so long that down don't bother me.' This is the type of negative freedom and resignation that often engulfs the life of the oppressed . . . Violence often brings about momentary results. Nations frequently won their freedom in battle. But violence . . . never brings about peace . . . It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind . . . The non-violent resister agrees with the person who acquiesces that one should not be physically aggressive towards his opponent, but he balances the equation by agreeing with the person of violence that evil must be resisted.<sup>43</sup>

This was a policy with stronger social foundations in the South of the USA

42 Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, GA, 1995), pp. 17–18. It took well over a year to secure the notably modest demands of the campaign: courteous treatment by drivers, the seating of black people from the back of the bus and whites from the front on a first-come-first-served basis without prior racial allocation of seats, and the employment of Negro drivers in routes through predominantly Negro residential districts. Ling, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 43.

43. *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 212–13. The practical paradox is how, without first inflicting violence, to adhere to Hegel's stricture that freedom from slave consciousness only comes from risking life. Frederick Douglass only managed it after a long fight with his overseer. *Narrative* ([1845] Harmondsworth, 1986), pp. 102 ff. At the Colored National Convention of 1848 Henry Highland Garnet declared, 'to be dependent is to be degraded . . . we must become equally dependent with other members of the community'. And, thirdly, there is a most serious feature of the 'running away' motif, which in the nineteenth century was explicitly drawn from classical history – that, just as in Rome aliens could not become citizens, so Africans could never find a home or rights in America. Richard King, *Civil Rights*, pp. 32–3.

than the North, and it drew heavily on Christian doctrines that sanctioned resistance to unjust laws whilst also requiring sinners to be loved. The churches were, therefore, vital spiritual as well as logistical sources of support. There is much in this respect that might be exchanged with liberal doctrines of justice and toleration, but those secular currents offer less to palliate fear and awe. And, of course, even under the formal rule of federal law, they were very weakly institutionalised in the southern states.<sup>44</sup>

As well as a figurehead and leader, Martin Luther King was throughout a member of a movement, belonging to organisations that predated his birth and that would continue after his death in Memphis in 1968. We must see him from that perspective too, of course, because he operated in a political arena where, despite the Supreme Court rulings of the 1950s and the Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s, the slowness of change encouraged the radical alternative of Black Power.

Moreover, by the spring of 1967, the logic of King's position on non-violence was itself irresistible, and he came out firmly against the war in Vietnam, thereby losing support from much of mainstream opinion.

Martin Luther King, the pastor who in his youth was nicknamed 'Tweed' for his snappy sartorial style, denounced rock and roll as degrading. Nothing we now know of his private life and personal anguish alters the fact that for many he occupied a position of alternative respectability, associated more with liberal freedom than the burgeoning cultural practices of participatory liberty.<sup>45</sup>

There are critical distinctions between his Thoreau and that of the following

44. According to Christopher Lasch, 'Social theories from the Enlightenment, which assume that scientific mastery over nature ought to "exorcise" fear and awe and thus to make people feel more secure, cannot explain why so many of them feel more insecure than ever . . . Nor can such theories explain why the most effective resistance to the prevailing sense of hopelessness, in recent years, has come from the very people having the best reason of all to identify themselves as victims, namely the black people of the South, oppressed first by slavery and then by peonage, political disenfranchisement, and a vicious system of racial segregation.' *The True and Only Heaven. Progress and Its Critics* (New York, 1991), p. 386. Richard King, *Civil Rights*, p. 41, notes that churches were 'events/sites where participants could express fear as well as resolution', and, with respect to Montgomery, Peter Ling states that, 'Churches were meeting places, and in a city with neither a widely read black newspaper nor a black radio station, they offered an important means of communication.' *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 39.

45 Richard King, *Civil Rights*, pp. 26–7, 34–5.



generation, pacifist but also abolitionist of sexual shackles. He could not have endorsed all of Bob Marley's lyrics even though standing up for rights was his life's work. And in this he was also at odds with Claude MacKay, an earlier eloquent combative son of Jamaica, a country that King greatly admired and which he compared favourably to the USA in his sermon to the Ebenezer congregation in 1965.<sup>46</sup>

In 1959, shortly after King published *A Stride Toward Freedom* to promote the cause of non-violent direct action, there was a violent, revolutionary capture of state power in the Caribbean no less consequential for the world than the bloody victory of the rebels in Haiti 200 years ago. The cancellation of that anniversary this year took place well before the destruction wrought by tropical storm Jeanne last month. The political ruin which caused it is a tragedy in its own terms, for Haiti was the second republic in the western hemisphere – effectively a republic of former slaves – and it was a selfless supporter of liberty on the mainland, as freely admitted by Simón Bolívar, himself a former slaveowner exiled in slaveholding Jamaica.<sup>47</sup>

Yet Bolívar invited neither Haiti nor Brazil to the first pan-American conference in Panama in 1826, and it is not entirely coincidental that this year Brazil, where slavery was only abolished in 1889, has been so prominent in the international peacekeeping effort in Haiti, with its world cup-winning soccer side playing a friendly match in Port-au-Prince.

In 2004 we might feel that if there is a unifying element in the Caribbean, it is the hurricane, which afflicts all, if not all alike: residents of Florida have lodged nearly \$20 billion of insurance claims, those of Cuba not a penny's worth but they are supported by a Spartan rigour; those of little wooded Grenada were largely protected from the aftermath, those of deforested

46 'Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,  
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!'

*Harlem Shadows* (1922). For a fine study of MacKay's work before going to the United States, see Winston James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice. Claude MacKay's Jamaica and His Poetry of Rebellion* (London, 2000).

47. 'The President [Alexandre Pétion] impressed me, as he does everyone, very favourably . . . I hope for much from his love of liberty and justice.' Port-au-Prince, 2 Jan. 1816, to Louis Brión, in *Selected Writings*, I, p. 129. Later, of course, Bolívar was to see Haitians as 'foreigners' no less than North Americans, and he used their experience of instability as a lesson for the constitutional design of the country named after himself. 'Address to the Constituent Congress (25 May 1826)', in *El Libertador. Selected Writings of Simón Bolívar* (New York, 2003), p. 57.

Haiti were drowned in their thousands by mudslide and flood.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, it was surely slavery that constituted the more powerful force over history, and we should note that between 1500 and 1870 probably ten times more slaves were shipped to the Caribbean than to the colonies of North America and the USA. If estimates of a total trans-Atlantic trade of people in bondage range widely, we can say with some confidence that between 1830 and 1860 one-third of a million Africans were sold into Cuba.<sup>49</sup>

Martin Luther King might, then, have been expected to have included that country in his repertory of freedom after 1959, but there is almost total silence. It was, in fact, Stokeley Carmichael who went to revolutionary Cuba to declare 'Our people are a colony inside the US', and it was Malcolm X who, in December 1964, read out to a Harlem meeting a personal message of greeting from Che Guevara, then in New York to attend the UN General Assembly.<sup>50</sup>

Ernesto Guevara de la Serna was six months older than Martin Luther King Jr.; he would have been 76 this year had he not been executed by a Bolivian army sergeant, Mario Terán, on 9 October 1967. Neither Guevara nor King lived to see their 40th birthday.

If both are icons of the mid-20th century, Guevara's image is the more distinctive by virtue of being depicted in two famous photographs. The first, of course, is that omnipresent image captured by Alberto Korda in March 1960 of the bearded young man in his beret staring with serene resolution towards destiny.

The second, taken by Freddy Alborta, is of Guevara's corpse laid out the day after his execution in a village laundry-house, his wounds washed, eyelids opened and hair cut by the Bolivian authorities so as to leave no doubt as to the identity of the dead man. This image – seen by Derek Walcott as Caravaggio-like, and likened by John Berger to Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson*

48. It is a tragic irony that it was at Gonaïves in 1802 that the captured Toussaint L'Ouverture declared, 'In overthrowing me, you have cut down in Saint-Domingue only the trunk of the tree of liberty of the blacks; it will grow back from the roots, because they are deep and numerous.' Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World. The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (London, 2004), p. 278.

49. D. Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Madison, 1969), pp. 249, 263.

50. John Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara. A Revolutionary Life* (London, 1997), p. 618.



of Dr Tulp as well as to Mantegna's Christ – made Guevara so lifelike that it struck a truly Promethean nerve.<sup>51</sup>

The great guerrilla leader, already suffering from gunshot wounds and

51. In this dark grained news photograph, whose glare  
Is rigidly composed as Caravaggio's,

The corpse glows candle-white on its cold altar . . .

'Che', in Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems 1948–1984* (London, 1992), p.123. John Berger, *Selected Essays and Articles. The Look of Things* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 42. Richard Gott, one of only two men to have met Che before he went to Bolivia and to have seen his corpse, discusses quite distinct photographs taken by Brian Moser immediately after the execution in *The Guardian*, 18 Aug. 2004, and he reviews Che's life as a whole in 'The Ribs of Rosinante', *London Review of Books*, 21 Aug. 1997.

asthma, apparently faced Sergeant Terán bravely. Yet his death in the Alborta photograph is less one of bravery than of beauty – exactly the kind of death that Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Mikoyan told the Cuban leaders he recognised to be part of their calling but that Moscow thought never to be worthwhile.<sup>52</sup>

Che Guevara was himself a keen photographer. He opens the *Motorcycle Diaries*, which have just been made into a strong and popular film, with a cautionary comment about the authorial power to present the daylight image of a negative:

Any book on photographic technique can show you the image of a nocturnal landscape with the full moon shining and the accompanying text revealing the secret of this sunlit darkness . . . If I present a nocturnal picture, you have to take it or leave it . . . I was restless too, mainly because I was a dreamer and a free spirit . . . Our fantasizing took us to faraway places . . . a round of mate sealed our pact not to give up until our dream was a reality.

And there too, directly and in a number of affecting passages, he reveals himself to be a dreamer.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, what might be considered the dramatic high-point of both diary and film – the moment when the questing ‘Fuser’ mutates into the committed Che – comes when, at a birthday party arranged for him in a Peruvian leper colony, Guevara elevates an awkward speech of thanks into a celebration of continental unity:

Although we’re too insignificant to be spokesmen for such a noble cause, we believe, and this journey has only served to confirm that belief, that the division of America into unstable and illusory nations is a complete fiction. We are one single mestizo race with remarkable ethnographic similarities, from Mexico down to the Magellan Straits.

52. Gott, ‘Ribs of Rosinante’, p.8.

53. Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries* ([1951–2] London, 1995), pp. 12–13. In March 1965 Che wrote a farewell note to Alberto Granado, his youthful travelling companion now settled in Cuba: ‘My itinerant home will be off on two legs again and my dreams shall know no bounds, at least until bullets decide otherwise . . .’ Alberto Granado, *Travelling with Che Guevara* ([1978] London, 2003), p. 204.

And so, in an attempt to break free from all narrow-minded provincialism, I propose a toast to Peru and to a United America.<sup>54</sup>

From now on Che, born in provincial Argentina, would be a consistent continentalist.

The Bolivian diary runs until two days before his death, and is almost poignant in its pedestrian qualities – in the end he discarded even the mule that had replaced the motorbike. Yet the strategic vision is perceptible throughout, not least in another toast, after the leader of the Bolivian Communist Party had failed miserably to impose national leadership of the guerrilla being established in his country:

At noon we drank a toast . . . and calling this moment the new ‘battle cry’ . . . of the continental revolution, [I] went to say that our lives count for nothing before the fact of the revolution.<sup>55</sup>

Guevara, of course, projected that radical fearlessness on a truly international plane. It was in Uruguay, at the last conference of the Organization of American States before Cuba was suspended from it, that he declared,

we also fight in Africa and Asia, in any part of the world where the strong oppress the weak, so that the weak may achieve independence, self-determination, and the right to self-rule as a sovereign state.<sup>56</sup>

He himself fought in the Congo as well as Cuba, and amongst those slogans most closely associated with his example is the injunction to ‘create two, three, many Vietnams’.<sup>57</sup>

If Martin Luther King, drawing on the theology of Martin Buber, insisted on the individual human being as being the end and subject of world-life,

54. *Motorcycle Diaries*, p. 135. ‘Fuser’, Guevara’s youthful nickname, derived from ‘El furibundo de la Serna’, a telling compression of the pertinent adjective with the matronym.

55. D. James (ed.), *The Complete Bolivian Diaries of Che Guevara and Other Captured Documents* (London, 1968), p. 96 (entry for 31 Dec. 1966). ‘My country is much larger . . . America is my country’. Quoted in H. Barrio and G. Jenkins (eds.), *The Che Handbook* (London, 2003), p. 356. Mario Monje, the general secretary of the Bolivian CP, continues to live on the outskirts of Moscow.

56. Speech at Punta del Este, 8 Aug. 1961, in *Che Guevara Reader. Writings on Politics and Revolution* (Melbourne, 2003), p. 252.

57. Message to the Tricontinental, *ibid.*, pp. 350–62.

the sacrificial logic of Ernesto Guevara's militant militarism cannot stay the same course.

And yet its very voluntarism – its insistence that the popular forces can beat an army, and that they did not need to wait for all the requisite revolutionary conditions since they can create those themselves – is more than a mere variant of Marxism-Leninism. The role of agency and activism in Guevara's programme presses right past the deterministic barriers of Marxist orthodoxy.

Although I agree with Christopher Hitchens that it is ultimately this quality which enfolds Che within the romantic tradition, it is certainly not the case that he eschewed analysis, ignored objective limitations or under-estimated the risk of making mistakes.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, in his handbook on guerrilla warfare he noted that, 'the only thing history does not allow is that analysts and executors of proletarian politics be mistaken'.<sup>59</sup>

However, for some like Mario Vargas Llosa, Guevara's prediction that the war which could not be avoided was continental in character, 'and it will cost much blood and countless lives for a long period of time', was a self-fulfilling prophesy.<sup>60</sup> Nor was it just a passing function of flawed elitism but a failure for which Latin America paid the price of prolonged repression and tyranny:

His *foco* theory, that flexible and heroic spearhead group whose activities would create the conditions for revolution, did not work anywhere and resulted, in Latin America, in thousands of young people who adopted it and attempted to put it into practice, sacrificing themselves tragically and opening the doors of their countries to cruel military tyrannies. His example and his ideas contributed more than anything to undermine democratic culture and to plant in universities, trade unions and political

58. 'He belongs more to the romantic tradition than to the revolutionary one. To endure as a romantic icon, one must not just die young, but die hopelessly. Che fulfils both criteria. When one thinks of Che as a hero, it is more in terms of Byron than Marx.' Quoted by Sean O'Hagan in a generally disparaging piece, 'Just a Pretty Face', *The Observer*, London, 11 July 2004.

59. 'Guerrilla Warfare: A Method' (1963) in *Che Guevara Reader*, p.73. Three years earlier Che wrote, 'When a government has come to power through some form of popular vote, fraudulent or not, and maintains at least an appearance of constitutional legality, it is impossible to produce the guerrilla outbreak since the possibilities of civic struggle have not yet been exhausted'. 'The Essence of Guerrilla Struggle' (from Chapter One of *La Guerra de Guerrillas*) in *ibid*, p.65. That scenario corresponds almost exactly to Bolivia under the rule of General René Barrientos in 1966.

60. 'Guerrilla Warfare: A Method', in *ibid.*, p. 82.

parties in the Third World a contempt for elections, pluralism, formal liberties, tolerance and human rights as being incompatible with authentic social justice. This delayed by at least two decades the political modernisation of Latin America.<sup>61</sup>

For others, such as Julio Cortázar, Che was less the author of that veritable nightmare than a true fraternal guardian, whose presence out there in the hills had enabled them to sleep, perhaps to dream, despite the fact – indeed, because of the fact – that he was unseen, in the shadows:

I had a brother.

We never saw each other.  
But it didn't matter.

I had a brother  
who passed through the hills  
while I slept.  
I loved him in my fashion  
I took his voice  
free like water,  
I sometimes walked  
close to his shadow.

We never saw each other  
but it didn't matter,  
my brother awake,  
whilst I slept,  
my brother showing me  
from beyond the night  
his chosen star.<sup>62</sup>

61. Mario Vargas Llosa, 'The Death of Che' (1992) in *Making Waves*, p. 295.

62. 'Che', in A. Bernádez (ed.), *Julio Cortázar. Cartas 1964–1968* (Buenos Aires, 2000), p. 1201. 'I am not at all sure that Cortázar is not here evoking Hamlet's soliloquy in Act 3 whilst withholding an open imputation of death-wish. In all events, he is not readily accused of being prey to Guevara's charm: 'The truth, as ever, takes multiple form. In the plane, returning from Havana, I read Che's text, and I was annoyed by its combination of literary poverty and pretension . . . ' *Ibid.*, p. 1195. Eric

[cont. on p.32]



If Che Guevara was himself a dreamer and died a rebel, he also stands before posterity as a senior official of a state. His invariable use of olive-green military fatigues was not for camouflage but as the uniform of a regime. It was in that capacity that he presided over the judgement of servants of the Batista dictatorship, being personally responsible for ordering at least 55 executions by firing squad in the weeks after the revolutionary victory. At the time the US response to this was one of marked equanimity, even it was soon incorporated into the official charge-sheet against the man and against the system.<sup>63</sup>

As did King, though, Guevara possessed critics aplenty to both left and right, and perhaps on no subject more volubly so than over his fleeting endeavour to sustain from a position of state power a concrete fantasy – a utopia that was materially sited and practically pursued – in the foundation of a new society based upon moral, not material incentives.

Just as Che saw the guerrilla vanguard as awakening ‘the still sleeping mass that had to be mobilised’, so was he scornful of ‘the pipe-dream that socialism can be achieved with the help of the dull investments left to us by capitalism’:

For a long time man has been trying to free himself from alienation through culture and art. While he dies every day during the eight or more hours in which he functions as a commodity, he comes to life afterwards in his spiritual creations. But this remedy bears the germs of the same sickness: it is a solitary individual seeking harmony with the world . . .<sup>64</sup>

Not, I am sure you will agree, an unreasonable cultural diagnosis, but scarcely a practical blueprint for public policy. Although, as president of the

62. [cont. from p. 31] Hobsbawm likewise notes Che’s (unremarkable) capacity to be unremarkable: ‘as fine a figure of a man as he looks on the famous photo, though he said nothing of interest’. *Interesting Times. A Twentieth-Century Life* (London 2002), p. 256. Che was no Fidel Castro – he palpably listened to others, spoke succinctly and used minimal gesticulation.

63. According to Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

‘When you have a revolution, you kill your enemies. There were many instances of cruelty and oppression by the Cuban army, and they have the goods on some of those people. Now there will probably be a lot of justice. It will probably go much too far, but they have to go through this’.

Quoted in R. Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York, 1993ff). For the process of ‘revolutionary justice’, see Anderson, *Che Guevara*, pp. 325–3, 386–8; Jorge Castañeda, *Compañero. The Life and Death of Che Guevara* (London, 1997), pp. 139, 143–4.

64. ‘Socialism and Man in Cuba’ (1965), reprinted in Che Guevara, *A New Society* (Melbourne, 1991), pp. 212, 221.



National Bank, Che signed the new 10- and 20-peso bank-notes with his nickname, he had no trouble in transferring his hatred of greed to a dislike for money, and when, remarkably, he was appointed minister of industry in February 1961, there began a brief phase of what Dudley Seers has termed 'euphoric planning'.<sup>65</sup>

That phase is generally dismissed as a fleeting aberration even by Cuban standards, the revolution whistling in the wind of reality before, within a year, the Kennedy administration imposed a total trade embargo, which has endured for over 40 years. It is, nevertheless, worth recording that Che, ever resourceful in pursuit of polemic, bolstered his general repudiation of market economics with a narrower critique of commercial monopoly. At Punta del Este in August 1961, he adopted the defence of free trade made at the 1891 Washington Monetary Commission of the American Republics by José Martí, who restored the old sense of the term as freedom to trade:

A nation that wants to be free must be free in matters of trade. It must distribute its trade among nations that are equally strong. If one is to be preferred, give preference to the one that needs it the least. Let there be no unions of the Americas against Europe, nor with Europe against a nation of the Americas. Only the mind of some university student can deduce an obligation to political union from the geographical coincidence of our living together in the Americas. Commerce follows the land and sea routes of the earth, going to whatever country has anything to exchange, be it a monarchy or a republic. Let us be in union with the whole world and not just a part of it, not with one part against another. If the republics of the Americas have any function at all, it is certainly not to be herded by of them in the future.<sup>66</sup>

65. Quoted in Richard Gott, *Cuba: A History* (London, 2004), p. 187. Guevara lasted a matter of a few months as president of the National Bank, early on rejecting all the elevators and half the lavatories planned for the bank's new 32-storey building by the architect Nicolás Quintana. When Quintana complained to Guevara about the execution of a friend belonging to *Juventud Católica* who had been caught distributing anti-government leaflets,

'Che told me: "look, revolutions are ugly but necessary and part of the process is in justice at the service of future justice." I replied that that was Thomas More's *Utopia*. I said that we [mankind] had been fucked by that tale for a long time, for believing that we would achieve something not now, but in the future.'

Quoted in Anderson, *Che Guevara*, p. 458.

66. A slightly different translation may be found in E. Allen (ed.), *José Martí. Selected Writings* (New York 2002), pp. 304–9.

If I may be permitted that iconoclasm – Che Guevara in favour of free trade – perhaps it could also be suggested that he broke virtually all of his own rules in going to Bolivia, and that he did so in order that he might next return home, to Argentina. His last visit was clandestine – during the Punta del Este meeting, at his express request and with the permission of President Frondizi to visit his dying Aunt María Luisa in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Isidro.

Some four years later, before leaving Cuba, he donned a fully quixotic persona in writing to his parents,

Once again, I feel beneath my heels the ribs of Rosinante. Once more I'm on the road with my shield on my arm . . . It's possible that this may be the end. I don't seek it, but it's within the logical realm of possibilities.<sup>67</sup>

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In 1891 Martí had been arguing against US proposals for continent-wide usage of a single silver-based currency, widely seen as a plan to dollarise the Americas. Although the dollar was in the 1990s legal tender and almost the unit of account in revolutionary Cuba, in the 1960s it was the very symbol of that materialism which Che Guevara sought to extirpate. By then, of course, it was the dollar bill that was changing hands, and since the comprehensive redesign of 1957 each contained the motto 'In God We Trust', which, composed during the Civil War, corresponded well to the needs of the Cold War.

Perhaps it doesn't matter since, as Aphra Behn wrote in the 1680s, 'money speaks sense in a language all nations understand', but the dollar bill does so largely in Latin.<sup>68</sup> That is because since 1935 it has depicted both George Washington and the Great Seal of the United States, on which there are three Latin phrases: *Annuat Coeptis* – 'Our endeavour is favoured'; *Novus Ordo Seclorum* – 'new order of ages'; and the original motto of the United States – *E Pluribus Unum* – 'one out of many' or perhaps, in keeping with the sentiments of the 1770s, 'out of many, one'.

67. 'To my Parents' (1965), *Che Guevara Reader*, p. 384.

68. *The Rover*, (1681), pt.2, act.3, sc.2.



The first two phrases are agreed to derive from, respectively, the *Georgics* and the *Eclogues* of Virgil, but there has always been some dispute over the exact origins of the national motto.<sup>69</sup> The more learned and high-minded incline to Cicero's description of friendship in *De Officiis*.<sup>70</sup> However, the exact words carried by the American bald eagle correspond more closely to those used by the London-based monthly *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which each year from 1731 had published an annual compendium of the twelve previous issues under the motto 'E Pluribus Unum'. Indeed, Franklin, who was on the first committee to design the seal, wrote in the journal and modelled his own *General Magazine* upon it. Yet Franklin's proposal for the national motto in 1776 was 'Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God'.<sup>71</sup>

The issue remained unresolved throughout the revolutionary war and another two committees until the imminent signing of a peace treaty with Britain made the design of a seal imperative. The matter effectively fell into the hands of Charles Thomson, the longstanding secretary of the Continental Congress. An upstanding, Derry-born man, Thomson had been adopted by the Delaware people under the name 'Man who speaks the Truth', and, having

69. *Annuit Coeptis*: 'da facilem cursum atque audacibus adnue coeptis' (grant me a calm voyage, give assent to my bold enterprise). *Georgics*, I:40. *Novus Ordo Seclorum*: 'magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo' (the great lines of centuries begins anew). *Eclogues*, IV:5.

70. 'Quod Pythagoras vult in amicitia, ut unus fiat ex pluribus' (as Pythagoras requires of true friendship, that several are united in one). *De Officiis*, I, XVII, 56.

71. 'Report on a Seal for the United States, with Related papers', 20 Aug. 1776, in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, I (Princeton, 1950), pp. 494–7; E.C. Burnett (ed.), *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, V (Washington, DC, 1936), p. 149.

taught Latin in Philadelphia, he went about his new duty most seriously.<sup>72</sup>

'E Pluribus Unum' was the only contribution from the first committee six years earlier that Thomson decided to keep, and while I have no difficulty in believing that it did derive directly from the vulgate issuing from London, it seems clear that he chose it because he could locate in the works of Virgil, his favourite poet, a phrase that differed by just one letter: 'e pluribus unus'.

It is to be found in an early poem entitled 'Moretum', or salad, where Virgil describes at enthusiastic length a lusty peasant mixing parsley, leeks, cheese, garlic and salt:

On these he sprinkles grains of salt, and cheese  
Is added, hard from taking up the salt.  
The aforesaid herbs he does now introduce  
And with his left hand under his hairy groin  
Supports his garment; with his right he first  
The reeking garlic with the pestle breaks,  
Then everything he equally rubs  
In the mingled juice. His hand in circle moves;  
Till by degree they one by one lose  
Their proper powers, and out of many comes  
A single colour . . .<sup>73</sup>

So strong was the vapour, Virgil tells us, that his husbandman had to pour some oil on it, and I suppose some might similarly need an antidote to the notion of a national motto originating in a recipe for Caesar salad. It is, after

72. Thomson left Ireland for America at the age of 11, in 1740. He served as the 'perpetual secretary' of the Continental congress from 1774 until it was effectively replaced in 1789, but he resigned when not invited to play a role in the inauguration of George Washington, to whom he had conveyed the intelligence that he had been elected first President of the United States. Having written as a young man *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Alienation of the Delaware and Shawaneese Indians*, Thomson retired to undertake a fresh translation of the bible from Greek, published in four volumes in 1808. B. Schlenther, *Charles Thomson: A Patriot's Pursuit*, (London, 1990).

73. His salis inspargit micas, sale durus adeso  
caseus adiicitur, dictas super ingerit herbas,  
et laeva vestem setosa sub inguina fulcit;  
dextera pistillo primum fragrantia mollit  
allia, tum pariter mixto terit omnia suco.  
It manus in gyrum: paulatim singula vires  
deperdunt proprias, color est e pluribus unus  
'Moretum', in J. Wilstack (trs.), *The Works of Virgil*, I (London, 1884), p. 123.

all, that part of the national scripture which is most widely disseminated, many millions of times a day in the format of global scrip.

Yet one might also find here an epicurean consolation, especially as interest in Latin within the USA is only now recovering from a long decline, begun almost immediately when it was attacked, with the aid of a great many classical quotes, by that redoubtable founding father Benjamin Rush, who considered it, 'with Negro slavery and spirituous liquor . . . though in a less degree, unfriendly to the progress of morals, knowledge and religion in the United States'.<sup>74</sup>

Today, of course, we freely refer to the USA becoming more 'Latin American', but it would probably be better, on grounds of precision, to say Hispano-American, as did Martí, even if that scarcely matters to, say, the 2 million New Yorkers of Hispanic descent. No doubt the terms employed will be ever subject to the whims of fashion as well as the strictures of propriety.

To the best of my knowledge the term 'Latin America' is as old as this university, being first used in 1836 by one Michel Chevalier in the introduction to a volume entitled *Lettres sur l'Amérique du Nord*, a second edition of which we have upstairs in the Goldsmiths Library.

Chevalier argues that the dichotomies which today so vex Samuel Huntington have their origin in two Europes – one Teutonic and the other Latin, each determined by language root. But unlike Huntington, Chevalier celebrates the prospect of miscegenation, presenting an early version of the 'cosmic race' as the highest of civilisations.<sup>75</sup>

The indigenous or first peoples of the continent are virtually absent from Chevalier's prospectus although when Lewis and Clark set out from St Louis 200 years ago to find a land passage to the Pacific, they were heading into territory occupied by over 140 distinct language groups. Today Native

74. Quoted in F. Waquet, *Latin, or the Empire of a Sign* (London, 2001), p. 180. At the start of the twentieth century half of all US high-school pupils studied Latin, by the end of it only 150,000, with there being only 30,000 Latinists in higher education – far behind Spanish – the leading language studied – and even Japanese and Chinese. Yale dropped facility in Latin as an entrance requirement in 1931, four years after it appeared on the dollar bill and four decades before Oxford and Cambridge followed suit. *Ibid* [sic.], pp. 29–30.

75. A Spanish version appeared in *Revista Española de Ambos Mundos* (Madrid, 1853). In 1856 the Colombian José María Torres Caicedo wrote 'Las dos Américas' in Venice, publishing it in Paris in February 1857. Caicedo's unashamed call for union was manifestly stimulated by the filibustering of

[cont. on p.38]

Americans, including those in Alaska, comprise just 4 million of the US population of 280 million.<sup>76</sup>

Last month the National Museum of the American Indian was inaugurated in Washington, marking a resurgent optimism but, one might note, occurring over 170 years after the Cherokee were first removed from Georgia to Oklahoma. Equally, it is not the original inhabitants of the 'West Indies' who today populate the 'Caribbean', a sea and a society named after a people all but exterminated by Europeans within a few years of their arrival.

In Mesoamerica and the Andes, by contrast, great indigenous cultures resisted, co-opted and endured during conquest and colonisation, allowing Martí's contemporary Rubén Darío to declare,

If there is poetry in our America, it is in ancient items; in Palenque and Utatlán, in the legendary Indian and the sensuous and elegant Inca and the great Moctezuma. The rest is yours democratic Walt Whitman.<sup>77</sup>

75. [cont. from p.37] William Walker in Nicaragua, 90 years before Che Guevara's toast in Amazonian Peru:

Mas aislados se encuentran, desunidos,  
Esos pueblos nacidos para aliarse:  
La union es su deber, su ley amarse.  
Igual origen tienen y mission –  
La raza de América Latina,  
Al frente tiene la sajona raza,  
Enemigo mortal que ya amenaza  
Su libertad destruir y su perdón.

However, the strongest claim for actively promoting the idea of Latin America – rather than placidly swallowing Parisian concoctions – lies with Justo Arosemena, born in Panama in 1817, ambassador in London and Paris in the 1870s, and driving force behind the International American Congress of 1864 in Lima. Arosemena noted of Chevalier, 'que no es visionario, pero tampoco tímido'. *Examen sobre la franca comunicación entre los dos oceanos* (Bogotá, 1846), p. 45. For a lucid depiction of this overlooked issue, see Aims McGuinness, 'Searching for "Latin America". Race and Sovereignty in the Americas in the 1850s', in N. Applebaum, A. Macpherson and K. Rosenblatt (eds.), *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill, 2003), pp.97–102.

76. The US Federal Government recognises 562 tribes, the largest groups being Cherokee (730,000), Navajo (300,000), indigenous people from Mexico and Mesoamerica (180,000), Choctaw (160,000) and Sioux (155,000), *The Independent*, London, 20 Sept. 2004. As recently as 1980 the US census registered less than 1.5 million American Indians; in 1900 the figure was 237,000, and the first count, in 1860, was of only 44,000. It is reckoned that in 1492 there were about 2 million people in North America, with perhaps 15 million in Mesoamerica and 7.5 million in South America. H Klein, *A Population History of the United States* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 20–1, 247–8.

77. 'Palabras liminares', *Prosas Profanas*, (1896), in *Páginas Escogidas* (Madrid, 1979), p. 59.

We can today celebrate the fact that, as a result of the disorientation of Vespucci and other early navigators, ‘Indians’ – West, American and adjective-free – are equally at home in Vijayawada, Walsall, Winnipeg and Warisata.

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Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz would surely have agreed with the first of Darío’s affirmations for although she was a favourite of the Spanish viceroy and dedicated to classical learning, she sometimes wrote in Nahuatl, cooked Mexican dishes, and collected indigenous musical instruments.<sup>78</sup>

The *Loa*, or prefatory act, to her stylised comedy *Los Empeños de una Casa* contains two candid quatrains not included in Catherine Boyle’s new translation performed by the RSC this past June under the title *House of Desires*. For Sor Juana, writing in the early 1680s, America is the land of plenty:

From the common curse of man  
its sons appear to be born free  
for here their daily bread  
costs but little sweat of labour.

Europe knows this best of all  
for these many years, insatiable,  
She has bled the abundant veins  
of America’s rich mines.<sup>79</sup>

78. In the *Loa*, scene 3, to *El Divino Narciso* (c.1687), ‘America’ declares,  
If your petition for my life  
and show of Christian charity  
are motivated by the hope that you, at last, will conquer me,  
defeating my integrity  
with verbal steel where bullets failed,  
then you are sadly deceived.  
A weeping captive, I may mourn  
for liberty, yet my will grows  
beyond these bonds; my heart is free,  
and I will worship my own gods!

P. Peters and R. Domeier (eds.), *The Divine Narcissus* (Albuquerque, 1998), p. 19. For recipes from the Convento de San Jerónimo attributed to Sor Juana, see *Libro de Cocina* (Mexico, 1979).

79. *Obras Completas*, IV, pp. 37–8, quoted in J. Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813* (Chicago, 1976), p. 71.



Octavio Paz counsels us against reading back into this depiction of despoliation some sort of proto-nationalism, as if the seventeenth-century nun were, as 'the Phoenix of Mexico', the creole counterpart to the Virgin of Guadalupe in a patriotic cult rolling ever forward from Cuauhtémoc. Paz notes that Sor Juana's New Spain was a young land long ago, greatly complicating any claim we might make on her today:

New Spain was young and possessed of intellectual vigour – as shown by Sor Juana and [Carlos] Sigüenza y Góngora – but she could not, within the terms of that intellectual constitution, invent or think for herself. . . criticism was prohibited . . . This was the predicament encountered by Fray Servando Teresa de la Mier: his sacro-historical arguments over Quetzalcóatl / St Thomas served to justify not only separation from Old Spain but also the destruction of New Spain itself. The society of independent Mexico deliberately broke with New Spain, and so was founded on alien and antithetical principles: the democratic liberalism of the French and the English.<sup>80</sup>

That effort at retrieval nonetheless continues, even though Sor Juana is almost certainly the least known as well as the most brilliant of the four minds that I am addressing. She retains a fascination for secular feminists, who sometimes claim that this 'tenth muse' was, in mortal form, Sapphic – a matter which was controversially and creatively stirred by a kiss in María Luisa Bemberg's 1990 film *Yo, la Peor de Todas*.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, Juana's employment of the linguistic intricacies of the Baroque form to promote the role of critical reason within the institutional

80. 'Orfandad y legitimidad', introduction to the original edition of Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl et Guadalupe* (Paris, 1974), reprinted in *México en la obra de Octavio Paz. I. El peregrino de su patria* (Mexico, 1987), p. 182. Here Paz is effectively rebutting the claim of Robert Ricard: 'By reason of the role that she assigns to the Indians, the mestizos, the blacks, and the Nahuatl language, Sor Juana is Mexico, in the largest sense of the word, and her work represents an essential link in the progressive formation of the Mexican national consciousness'. *Une poétesse mexicaine de XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1954), 112 leçon.

81. For an intelligent treatment, see Denise Miller, 'María Luisa Bemberg's Interpretation of Octavio Paz's Sor Juana', in J. King, S. Whitaker and R. Bosch (eds.), *An Argentine Passion. María Luisa Bemberg and her Films* (London, 2000), pp. 137–73. For what seems to me to be special pleading – 'her lesbianism is taken for granted by Latino/a and Spanish lesbian and gay poets' – see Emilie Bergmann, 'Abjection and Ambiguity: Lesbian Desire in Bemberg's *Yo, la Peor de Todas*', in S. Malloy and R. Irwin (eds.), *Hispanisms and Homosexualities* (Durham, NC, 1998), pp. 229–47.



realm of Counter-Reformation Catholicism was truly extraordinary. It has been the source of enduring delight for students of literature and ideas, whilst Latin American schoolchildren have understandably been pretty frustrated by it.

Paz places Sor Juana at the heart of his labyrinth of solitude, and he opens his magisterial biography bracketing her with Emily Dickinson, Gabriela Mistral, Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop.<sup>82</sup> It seems to me reasonable to claim that she was the greatest writer of the Spanish language in the Americas until Rubén Darío 200 years later:

The vision offered us in “First Dream” is that of a dream of universal night in which the world and mankind dream and are dreamt of, a cosmos that dreams until it dreams that it is awake. Nothing could be further from the physical and spiritual night of the mystics than this intellectual night. Sor Juana’s poem has no antecedents in the poetry of the Spanish language.<sup>83</sup>

And although, once again, the charges of illicit literary borrowing must be addressed, we may in this case draw on the authority of the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, which, in the midst of its painstaking policy statement on plagiarism, cites her example as one in which unacknowledged Latin citations constitute borrowed language as both accepted tradition and as a means of inserting a minority voice into mainstream discourse.<sup>84</sup> One might add, albeit for distinct purposes, that this can be learning at its ludic best.

Sor Juana would not have eaten Virgil’s salad since at an early age she ‘abstained from cheese because I heard it made one slow of wits, for in me the desire for learning was stronger than the desire for eating’. At the same time, however, she was of the view that, ‘he who does not know Latin is not a complete fool, but he who does know it is well qualified so to be’.<sup>85</sup>

82. *The Labyrinth of Solitude. A Dramatic Portrait of the Mexican Mind* ([1950] London, 1967), p. 103; Sor Juana. *Her Life and Her World* ([1983] London, 1988), p.1.

83. *Ibid.*, p.1.

84. <http://www.gtu.edu/ctl/teach/GTUPlagiarism.pdf>. Policy passed by GTU Doctoral Faculty, 15 Oct. 1993.

85. ‘Response to the Most Illustrious Poetess Sor Filotea de la Cruz’, in M. Sayers Peden (trs.), *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Poems, Protest and a Dream* (Harmondsworth, 1997), pp. 15, 49.

Her formal subversions of the scholasticism of the day are necessarily framed within its own language and so proffer only fleeting, contradictory glimpses of a modern, enlightenment vision. But she also takes us beyond her awakened state because,

not even my dreams have been excluded from this ceaseless agitation of my imagination: indeed, in dreams it is wont to move more freely and less encumbered, collating with great clarity and calm the gleanings of the day, arguing and making verses . . .<sup>86</sup>

I think it important that at the end of her public life and whilst under an effectively irresistible injunction to lay down her pen, Juana identifies the only work that she wrote purely for her own pleasure as being 'The Dream', now generally referred to as 'First Dream'.<sup>87</sup>

Published in her lifetime, this 975-line poem in the form of a *silva* describes the voyages of a human soul seeking to comprehend the nature of the cosmos, failing twice before dawn, when compelled to rejoin the body as 'the chains of sleep begin to slip away':

moist and soporific  
vapours were released to issue upwards  
and assail the throne of reason (whence  
sweet torpor was dispensed, making its way  
to every limb)  
and where, consumed by  
warmth's soft ardour,  
the chains of sleep begin to slip away.<sup>88</sup>

It is a text full of classical allusion and pagan referencing, so the heavens and the divinities are decidedly plural for over 670 lines, before the redemptive presence of an omnipotent deity is duly signalled. The poem ends, nonetheless, with illumination being provided by the sun, and Sor Juana has travelled

86. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 65. Sor Juana did not give titles to her poems and refers in her 'Response' to 'El Sueño' whilst in the 1692 edition of her work, published when she was still alive, it is entitled 'Primero Sueño', which Margaret Sayers Peden has rendered as 'First I Dream'.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

entirely on her own, without the fretting companionship of Virgil. The fact that the writing is about a dream may well have protected it from outright charges of heresy, and whilst Juana's expert technique surely helped, as Keith Thomas has shown, such a device was not an uncommon means of expressing new or radical ideas.

Dreams . . . could serve as an external sanction for policies that were otherwise difficult to recommend . . . Dreams provided men with the authority to take decisions, identify thieves and engage in controversial activity . . . The regularity of the natural world, the impossibility of miracles, and the mortality of the soul were asserted by Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), and reiterated by the 'libertine' thinkers of 16th-century Italy and 17th-century France. The inspiration for these writers was not the new science so much as the rationalist authors of classical antiquity: Hippocrates, who denied that epilepsy had supernatural causes; Aristotle, who dismissed most 'prophetic' dreams as mere coincidences; Cicero, who repudiated the cult of divination; Epicurus and Lucretius, who showed that the course of the world could be explained without invoking divine intervention.<sup>89</sup>

The outer story of the body that carried this mind is not so hard to trace. Born in 1648 at San Miguel Nepantla, near the city of Mexico, and baptised in the name of Juana Ramírez de Asbaje, Sor Juana was an illegitimate child – a fact that she either did not know or that she actively denied when seeking entry to the convent of Santa Paula in 1669.

For the better part of the decade before she became a nun she had been attached to the court of the Spanish viceroy and, celebrated as much for her beauty as for her wit, occupied a highly privileged position. But the price of that privilege was more than the pettiness that abounds in such grand worlds – it was the pressure to get married, a state for which, Sor Juana declared, she felt 'the utmost antipathy'.<sup>90</sup>

Stronger, though, than that aversion – at least by her own account – was a desire for learning and the practice of scholarship, evident from her early

89. *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in popular beliefs in 16th and 17th Century England* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 176, 773.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

years, when she pleaded to be sent to school in the city and when she would cut off her hair in self-punishment of slow progress in her studies. So, as Sor Juana put it in another verse, 'Of myself I am the gaoler'.<sup>91</sup> She takes her vows and enters the cloister – so far as we can tell, never again to emerge until her death, of the plague, in 1695.

The inner story of that mind which perforce seeks mental freedom through physical enclosure defies synthesis. One lumbering psychoanalytical portrait has made truly mad exegesis of the neurotic, narcissistic and melancholic passages that one finds in much fine poetry.<sup>92</sup>

The debate over Juana's sexuality is hampered not only by lack of evidence and abundance of hyperventilated imagination. It is also fuelled by her fine use of erotic ambiguity, which at one point she justifies with reference to the Song of Songs, and which, I believe, was much more necessary for an epoch when power was vested decisively in the person, – rather an institution – making the corporeal, and so the erotic, susceptible to more variegated rendition than today.

Jean Franco notes that,

Sor Juana loved the countess [Paredes, the Vicereine] as a friend but also as an embodiment of a world order in which she stood for the feminine element . . . Each part of the countess' body is compared to nature or state, geography or establishment. Her eyebrows are like the weapons of the army, she is a prison, her cheeks a university . . . This is not simply a celebration of a person, but a tribute to the ideal representation of an empire.<sup>93</sup>

In all this one may encounter what Josefina Ludmer termed 'the tricks of the weak':

Not to say but to know, or saying that one doesn't know but knowing, or saying the opposite of what one knows . . . This trick . . . combines, as in

91. 'While by Grace I am inspired', *ibid.*, p. 145. In 1666 Sor Juana spent three months under the penitential rigour of the Barefoot Carmelites before returning to the temporal world and the court for three more years. She was clear that she wished to have the conditions to study, not to suffer.

92. Ludwig Pfandl, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, la décima musa de México: su vida, su poesía, su psique* ([1946] Mexico, 1963) leads the pack of those hunting down repression, penis-envy and Oedipal complexes.

93. 'Sor Juana Explores Space', in *Plotting Women. Gender and Participation in Mexico* (London, 1989), p. 51.

all tactics of resistance, submission to and acceptance of the place assigned to one by the [more powerful] other, with antagonism and confrontation, retreat from collaboration.

Here, then, submission and silence are deployed by somebody who was simultaneously supportive of the public power and yet at continuous private odds with its denial of freedom to women and of the role of the inquiring mind.<sup>94</sup>

It is to those two motifs that Sor Juana returns in three epistolary disputes with priests – extraordinary exchanges that both reflect and drive on her intellectual voyage until, following her ‘Response to Sor Filotea’ (in fact, the Bishop of Puebla) in 1691, she becomes silent – perhaps out of an altered vocation, maybe through the change of viceroy, very possibly out of eventual resignation over clerical criticism.<sup>95</sup> The fact that we do not know has animated much discussion.<sup>96</sup>

For our present purposes it suffices to note that in the final exchange, Sor Juana insisted that ‘God has granted me the mercy of loving truth above all else’, and that her

94. ‘Las retas del debil’, in P. González and E. Ortega (eds.), *La sartén por el mango* (Rio Piedras, 1984), translated in S. Merrim (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Detroit, 1991). The North American poet Diane Ackerman turns all established pieties on their head in her *Reverse Thunder*, where she imagines Sor Juana being courted by an Italian man inside and out of the convent.

95. The letter of 1681–2 repudiating her confessor Antonio Nuñez, discovered and published by Aureliano Tapia Méndez of the same Jesuit order in Nuevo León 300 years later, and reprinted in Paz, *Sor Juana*, pp. 495–502; the *Carta Atenagórica* of 1690, in which Sor Juana (privately) takes issue, in the name of Augustine orthodoxy, with a sermon given in 1650 by the Portuguese royal chaplain Antonio Vieira over the precise nature of Christ’s *fineza* in washing the feet of his disciples, see *ibid.*, pp. 389–410; and the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea* of 1691, to the Bishop of Puebla, who had, without her permission, published the letter criticising Vieira, *ibid.*, pp. 411–24. Franco, *Plotting Women*, pp. 40–9, provides an admirable summary.

96. The identification of a volunteered silence – ‘an attribute of God, pregnant with glory’ – is not completely rejected by all who might be expected to subscribe to the thesis of repression. G. Tavard (ed.), *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the Theology of Beauty: The First Mexican Theology* (Notre Dame, 1991), p. 207. Asunción Lavrín avers that in 1693 Sor Juana underwent a religious experience that no biographer has been able to explain. Merrim, *Feminist Perspectives*, p. 79. Gabriela Mistral goes further still:

Then, like St Francis, she has a burning desire for the exercise of humility . . . She looks to the sackcloth; she comes to know the freshness of blood across her martyred waist. For me this is the most beautiful hour of her life; without it I would not love her.

‘Silueta de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’ (1922), in S. Tapscott (ed.), *Gabriela Mistral. Selected Prose and Prose-Poems* (Austin, 2002), p. 143. A very useful survey of modern literature on Sor Juana is made in N. Scott, ‘Sor Juana and Her World’, *Latin American Research Review*, 29:1, 1994, pp. 143–54.

inclination towards letters has been so vehement, so overpowering, that not even the admonition of others – and I have suffered many – nor my own meditations – and they have not been few – have been sufficient to cause me to forswear this natural impulse that God placed in me.<sup>97</sup>

She also avows a vocation for intellectual pluralism:

I myself can affirm that what I have not understood in an author in one branch of knowledge I may understand in a second from a branch that seems remote from the first.<sup>98</sup>

And in an exasperation barely veiled by scriptural reference or disingenuous reflection upon natural law – even as she submits to the public prohibition of the education of women – she asks what it is about their private and individual study that offends:

who has forbidden that to women? Like men, do they not have a rational soul? Why then shall they not enjoy the privilege of the enlightenment of letters? Is a woman's soul not as receptive to God's grace and glory as a man's?<sup>99</sup>

Sor Juana certainly wobbled. She neither sought nor deserves sainthood. Her last letter protested at the publication of a matter she wanted to keep private. She then gave away most – but not all – of her books. Her final written words, inked in her blood, 'Yo, la peor del mundo' ('I the worst of the world'), belonged to the customary general confession of the time, but they could be confirmation of an enforced defeat of the spirit. On the other hand, they might form a final, knowing 'trick of the weak', whereby on the verge of that state where there can be no retraction, Sor Juana endorsed the paradox of the human condition which is at the heart of her dream:

Man, in sum, the greatest marvel  
posed to human comprehension,  
a synthesis composed  
of qualities of angel, plant, and beast

97. 'Response', in *Poems, Protest and a Dream*, p. 11.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

99. Letter to Antonio Nuñez, reprinted in Paz, *Sor Juana*, p. 498–9.

whose elevated baseness  
 shows traits of each of these.  
 And why? Perhaps more blessed than other forms  
 it was designed that  
 Man, through loving Union,  
 should join with the Divine.<sup>100</sup>

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In turning from Sor Juana to Thomas More we are, of course, moving back from a self-proclaimed ‘worst in the world’ to a proclaimer of a putative ‘best of all worlds’, to a layman who became a saint of the Catholic Church 400 years after his death.

Furthermore – if I may – it was 475 years ago today that More was appointed Lord Chancellor of England, serving as the country’s senior lawyer for only 29 months before the ‘Supplication of the Ordinaries’ opened the way for the formal submission of the clergy to the temporal power of the monarchy, Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne Boleyn, and the Act of Succession, which would underwrite the coronation of their daughter Elizabeth.

That reign would, in turn, provide the grounding for Samuel Huntington’s creed in an independent state of non-, indeed anti-, Hispanic resolution, Protestant disposition and American calling, from Drake to Raleigh to Shakespeare.

Thomas More refused to take the Oath of Succession. Despite pleadings from the formidable managers of the Tudor monarchy, he wobbled for a year between his debating skills as a lawyer and his faith as a Roman Catholic. The latter prevailed, and he was duly beheaded on 6 July 1535 on Tower Hill, less than a mile from where he was born, on Milk Street, a stone’s throw from the Guildhall.

So, in passing to More, we move to a native of this city, and to one who, as the author of *Utopia*, a book written in Latin, made as much of Vespucci’s voyage as did geographer Waldseemüller.

To the best of my knowledge, More never employed the term ‘America’ in his writings, but the dreamworld that is *Utopia* required a narrator to return

100. ‘First I Dream’, ll. 690 ff., in *Poems, Protest and a Dream*, p. 115.

to land of the awake, and that person – the enlightened bearer of More's honeyed fiction – is one Raphael Hythlodæus, which surname translates from the Greek as 'purveyor of nonsense'.

At the outset of the book Hythlodæus is described as being 'eager to see the world', and so

joined Amerigo Vespucci and was his constant companion on the last three of those four voyages which are now universally known, but on the final voyage, he did not return with Amerigo.<sup>101</sup>

We are, then, also returning to the origin of our name, thereby finding a total fiction felicitously extracted from a partial invention. And rarely, if ever, outside the realm of true scripture, has a deracinated fantasy held so many in its thrall for so long.

More, true to the humanist tradition of playful punning, denoted his ideal world not just no-place (*outopia*) but also a good place (*eutopia*). To the rhetorical query of that other Moore, 'Dude, Where's my Country?', Thomas would have responded, 'It is a good place that is nowhere to be found in fact'. And it has plausibly been declared that,

the very name 'America' . . . became a trope for utopian longings, a connection strengthened by a history of 'invented' nationhood, democratic politics, economic and geographical expansionism, and massive immigration.<sup>102</sup>

It is an idea – the Utopian States of America – but as that most American of thinkers, William James, put it: 'Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events.'<sup>103</sup>

And although Richard Rorty, the leading pragmatist of our own age,

101 *Utopia*, p. 51. In his fourth letter of 4 Sept. 1504, Vespucci states that he left behind 24 men with provisions for six months and 12 'big guns'.

102. 'Utopias', in R. Fox and J. Kloppenberg (eds.), *A Companion of American Thought* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 699–700.

103 'Lecture VI' (1907), *Pragmatism and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth, 2000), p. 88. 'His Harvard colleague Josiah Royce wondered if a pragmatist would ask a witness in a court of law to tell the expedient, the whole expedient, and nothing but the expedient, so help him future experience . . . ' *Companion to American Thought*, p. 347.



repudiates the dualisms at the heart of Platonic thought, he can only embrace the ideal state of Plato's Atlantis, which he calls utopian – since it is so powerfully animated by More – but which might more accurately be denoted Atlantic:

. . . my antagonism towards Platonism . . . refers to a set of philosophical distinctions (appearance–reality, matter–mind, made–found, sensible–intelligent etc.): what Dewey called 'a brood and nest of dualisms' . . . Dewey thought, as I do, that vocabulary which centers around the traditional distinctions has become an obstacle to our social hope . . .

My condition for the most distinctive and praiseworthy human capacity is our ability to trust and to cooperate with other people, and in particular to work together so as to improve the future. Under favourable circumstances, our use of this capacity culminates in utopian political projects, such as Plato's ideal state, Christian attempts to realise the kingdom of God here on earth, and Marx's vision of the victory of the proletariat . . . <sup>104</sup>

*Utopia*, Krishan Kumar argues, is a text that attends the opening of the modern epoch, like Machiavelli's *Prince*, published the previous year. It is at the same time purposefully futuristic and a powerful critique of the existing order, even of the order for which More eventually dies. It 'breaks through the fabric of imperatives' prevailing in the Europe of that time, and it does so, in part at least, by the means of a close, detailed empirical account of a society closely based on that just described by Vespucci as,

having no laws, or faith, and live[d] according to nature. They do not recognise the immortality of the soul, and they have among them no private property because everything is in common.<sup>105</sup>

That is what Amerigo found in Brazil in 1502. But he and his companions

104. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Harmondsworth, 1999), pp. xii–xiii. Meat is added to the bones in *Achieving Our Country. Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

105. Quoted in S. Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Southern Voyages, 1492–1616* (Boston, 1974), p. 286. J.H. Hexter, 'The Predatory and the Utopian Vision: Machiavelli and More. The Loom of Language and the Fabric of Imperatives: The Case of *Il Principe* and *Utopia*' in *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation: More, Machiavelli and Seyssel* (London, 1973), p. 179.

sought the material wealth and salvation of souls that were targeted in *Utopia*, where only slaves wore golden ornaments and where, as Quentin Skinner puts it,

More is telling us that true holiness consists of living a life of virtue, and thus that the heathen inhabitants of *Utopia*, far more than the nominal Christians of Europe, have succeeded in establishing a truly Christian commonwealth . . . More presses the argument to its logical conclusion, implying that it might be possible to become a perfect Christian without any knowledge of the Church or its dogmas at all.<sup>106</sup>

This alternative civic order is not just about active virtue – the kind of ‘new man’ imagined by Che – it has an institutional character too. The first, conversational book of *Utopia* was written in London after the invented ethnography that follows it and which was drafted in Bruges earlier in 1515. Book One takes up a core debate of classical antiquity and the Renaissance concerning the tension – if not the outright conflict – between *negotium*, the life of activity and business, and *otium*, the calling of quietism and contemplation. It is, in truth, a debate we in the universities know very well.

In his satire, More plays out that apparent dichotomy in exchanges with Hythlodæus, the returned mariner. But he does not do so through an idealisation of human nature, or of natural environment, or through divine grace, but precisely through that of social organisation.<sup>107</sup>

And this seminal work of social theory is based in good measure upon a critique of money and greed – perhaps the clinching feature since, as Fredric Jameson notes, those things are so familiar to us that we frequently wonder what life would be like without them.<sup>108</sup> For those who possess gold but set no great store by it, *Utopia* would read as a banal report.

106. *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, I (Cambridge, 1978), p.233. For Anthony Kenny, ‘*Utopia* can indeed be read and enjoyed even by those who know nothing of its author’s life’. Thomas More (Oxford, 1983), p. 1. John Guy, by contrast, believes that *Utopia* ‘can scarcely be approached by anybody lacking a prior knowledge of the writings of Plato and Cicero’. Thomas More (London, 2000), p. 14.

107. J.C. Davis, ‘*Utopia* and the New World, 1500–1700’, in S. Schaer, G. Claeys and L. Sargent (eds.), *Utopia. The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (New York, 2000), p. 101.

108. ‘Politics of *Utopia*’, *New Left Review*, no. 25, Jan./Feb.2004, p. 39; Perry Anderson, ‘The River of Time’, *ibid.*, no. 26, Mar./April 2004.

Taken at face value the book may be understood as a sixteenth-century critique of Europe seen through the mirror of a barely known and energetically imagined America. It is the first substantial effort at European self-discovery through the lens of America, the first of many bound up in that relationship which has remained special even as the discovery has aged.

Of course, the book has also been identified with the collectivist cause that forms part of the repertoire of Utopian life. Marx was happy in *The German Ideology* to claim More as a precursor of socialism, Engels depicted utopian socialism is inferior only to his own scientific variety, and Kautsky declared More a hero of that cause only eight years before he was made a saint by the Papacy.<sup>109</sup>

Yet we know not to confuse the life with the work, and we have become wary of identifying what we would wish for – like youth or a happier past – with what we want, the objects of which may be found outside as well as within dreams. Just like Sor Juana, Thomas More set impossibly high standards and, like Che Guevara, he did so whilst in the service of the state.

He was, accordingly, unable fully to resolve the dialectical exchanges with Hythlodæus. The contradictions at the root of the human condition are sharpened by their American refraction, and the work was quickly placed on the Index, where it remained even after More had become a martyr of the Church. More's mind is a great deal harder to package than is its product *Utopia*, but his image has endured with a remarkable singularity, even as we seek to appreciate him through the pluralities that could not attain pluralism.

Here is a man who, when the English state had executed only 22 heretics in the previous 45 years, in less than three years sent five Protestants to the stake when they refused to recant their faith, having one openly interrogated in the garden of his Chelsea family home.<sup>110</sup> Yet Henry Hyde, chair of the House Judiciary Committee, could begin the impeachment proceedings against President Clinton confidently reminding him that More was, 'the most brilliant lawyer of his generation, the centre of a warm and affectionate

109. K. Kautsky, *Thomas More and his Utopia* ([1927] London, 1979).

110. I am here drawing on several sources, including one of distinct partiality in that it is written by a descendent of a Protestant victim, not of More but of Queen Catherine's daughter, Queen Mary: Jasper Ridley, *Statesman and Saint. Cardinal Wolsey, Sir Thomas More and the Politics of Henry VIII* (New York, 1982), p. 164; Guy, *Thomas More*, pp. 106–25.

family which he cherished [and who] went to his death rather than take an oath in vain'.<sup>111</sup>

In the same vein, this 'Man for All Seasons', who defended the rights of a Spanish queen and whose invective against Luther was as insistently foul-mouthed as any of today's rude rappers, was selected by *The Times* of London as the highest example of English history and civilisation over the last 500 years.<sup>112</sup>

The efforts to make practical application of his work and the material strivings to reach Utopia have fared far less well. Two days before More's execution, a senior judge in the Audiencia of Mexico, one Vasco de Quiroga, issued ordinances for the establishment of hospital-villages in Michoacán based closely on the precepts in More's book.<sup>113</sup> They barely got off the ground. The Jesuit missions in Moxos and Paraguay lasted longer, perhaps supported by indigenous beliefs in a 'land without evil', which was not incompatible with the hierarchical utopian strain deployed by an order under pressure.

More's effective displacement to America from India and West Africa of the longstanding imaginary kingdom of Prester John was probably bound to flourish in an era of continental discovery when the need to locate Genesis geographically was in the ideological mainstream. Even a century after his death Antonio León Pinela could, after studying 780 books, authoritatively place Paradise somewhere between Ecuador, Peru and Brazil.<sup>114</sup>

Nor, of course, did the south have a monopoly on such enterprise. The twinned currents of communalism and millenarianism have persisted in North America deep into the modern age. The programmatically promiscuous Perfectionists fizzled out in the New York of the 1880s, but the Shakers still hold out in a solitary community in Maine. The Utah-based Mormons thrive in their pursuit of Zion, and they do so along lines of sexual conduct rather

111. Quoted in *The Scotsman*, 15 Jan. 1999, and in Guy, *Thomas More*, p. 1.

112. '... filthier than a pig and more foolish than an ass... Father tosspot... he has nothing in his mouth than privies, filth and dung... shitting and beshitted. He is only fit to lick with his anterior the very posterior of a pissing she-mule.' 'Responsio ad Lutherum', in *Complete Works*, V, pp. 181, 225, 311, 341, 429. *The Times*, 6 Feb. 1978, quoted in Guy, *Thomas More*, p. ix.

113. Silvio Zavala, *Sir Thomas More in New Spain. A Utopian Adventure of the Renaissance* (Diamante. IL, Canning House, London 1955).

114. Teresa Gisbert, *El paraíso de los pájaros parlantes. La imagen del otro en la cultura andina* (La Paz 2001), pp. 155–61.

more modulated than at their inception. Yet it is worth recalling that those lines are today more generous than in Utopia, where, having duly inspected your prospective spouse naked, you certainly were not allowed to monkey about as if in Haight Ashbury – a second conviction for adultery carried the death penalty.

These are what might be termed municipal variants. We can still be beguiled by Borges' brilliant but derivative contrivance, replacing American Utopia with Arabic Uqbar and Vespucci's austral exaggerations with an invented Anglo-American Cyclopedia.<sup>115</sup> However, the more powerful and more popular descendents of the genre are those which depict what Susan Buck-Morss calls the dreamworlds of twentieth-century utopia, seeking to universalise control and mostly calling down catastrophe. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is not so far from More's critique of consumption, and although Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* begins with the USA as history, it presents a futuristic nightmare fully imaginable in the wake of the European tyrannies of the last 70 years.<sup>116</sup>

Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* bases its Huxleyite dystopia on the prevailing bromide – the soap opera, hugely popular in both sections on the hemisphere. And if, as has recently been suggested, there is a utopia of perfect health, it is not just absent from the super-size USA but also from Bolivia, where the combination of acute poverty and poor diet is, counter-intuitively, increasing indices of child obesity.<sup>117</sup>

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Macaulay once cuttingly cast his vote for an acre in Middlesex over a principality in Utopia.<sup>118</sup> Today, indeed, the site of Thomas More's birth in Milk Street is an ugly place, uninhabited, its agents touting for tenants on even the shortest of leases. Yet London remains a good town for both dreamers and Americans

Of the scholar, soldier, priest and man of law we have discussed today, we cannot claim Sor Juana, but nor can any other place except the City of

115. *Labyrinths* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p.27.

116. S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe. The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

117. L. Sfez (ed.), *L'Utopie de la Santé Parfaite* (Paris, 1995); 'People die younger in Harlem than in Bangladesh', *The Observer*, 19 Sept. 2004.

118. 'Lord Bacon', *Edinburgh Review*, 1843, I.

Mexico. Che Guevara was one-quarter Irish and so naturally preferred to make his internationalist stop-overs in the brand new airport at Shannon.<sup>119</sup> Martin Luther King spent three days here in December 1964, preaching his sermon 'Three Dimensions of a Complete Life' to a capacity congregation at St Paul's as well as speaking on South Africa before he travelled on to Oslo to receive his Nobel Prize. Only More is ours entirely, and complicated cockney though he was – ever whingeing about the commercial ingenuity of his fellow townsfolk – to deny that he gave to the Americas more than he took from them would be unforgiving judgement.

Archibald MacLeish was here, finding the British Museum's Reading Room – a few yards from this hall – the 'most appropriate place' to write to Pappy Hemingway.<sup>120</sup> It was here that Germán Arciniegas learned to love the extraordinary habit of eating fish for breakfast, and if a century ago Mark Twain produced the conclusive condemnation of London hotel bedrooms, fifty years later it was in a London hotel that John Steinbeck offered J.K. Galbraith his consoling advice as to what precisely to do with unpraising critics.<sup>121</sup>

119. Che, whose maternal grandmother was a Lynch, arrived at Shannon on Saturday 13 March 1965 aboard a mechanically troubled Britannia aircraft of Cuba Airlines. That evening he went to Hanratty's Hotel, Glentworth Street, Limerick City: 'they returned that evening all wearing sprigs of shamrock, for Shannon and Limerick were preparing for the St Patrick's Day celebrations'. Arthur Quinlan, 'Interview with Che Guevara Lynch': [www.irishargentine.org/documents/quinlan.htm](http://www.irishargentine.org/documents/quinlan.htm). Guevara had a few years earlier spent a couple of days in Dublin. In April 1967 the British embassy in Havana reported that, 'this bearded Argentine, with his Irish charm and inevitable military fatigue uniform, has exercised considerable fascination over many men and women.' *The Independent*, London, 20 Aug. 2004.

120. 'Dear Pappy, I can't think of a more appropriate place to write to you than the Reading Room at the British Museum with Englishmen as thick as Englishmen and a draft at the back of my neck which I can feel in my balls (I think it's my balls). I'm writing about the King of England. You remember him'. Quoted in B. Morton, *Americans in London* (London, 1986), p. 122.

121. 'All the modern inconveniences are furnished, and some have been obsolete for a century. The prices are astonishingly high for what you get. The bedrooms are hospitals for incurable furniture . . . Some quite respectable Englishmen still frequent them through inherited habit and arrested development; many Americans also, through ignorance and superstition. The rooms are as interesting as the Tower of London, but older, I think. Older and dearer. The lift was a gift from William the Conqueror, some of the beds are prehistoric. They represent geological periods. Mine is the oldest.' *Ibid.*, pp. 92–4. It was at the Dorchester that Steinbeck tried to buck up the disconsolate Professor Galbraith, who was afflicted by a review in *Time* that characterised his book *The Affluent Society* as 'worried dinner-table conversation': 'That's all right, Ken. I've always said that unless the bastards have the courage to give you unqualified praise, ignore them.' There are several variants on this anecdote, but this I have taken from *ibid.*, p. 192.

London, it is true, is not always first to favour the cause of freedom. Franklin's dozen years and more in this city did not protect him from some very vicious treatment. Miranda, Bello and Bolívar received polite hearings, sometimes at the very top, but little tangible encouragement. On the other hand, they were not significantly hampered, and whilst Canning's claim to have 'called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old' might be a little too much, he did more than a little, and he did it here. It was a Spanish judge who sought the detention of General Pinochet but a London metropolitan magistrate who signed the arrest warrant.

The eloquent precursor of Peruvian independence Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzmán lived for many years off Baker Street, whilst those polymaths Vicente Pazos Kanki, translator of St Luke's Gospel into Aymara, and C.L.R. James, learned Trotskyist commentator on both American civilisation and cricket, ended their days in Euston and Brixton respectively.

The better part of a million people who were born themselves or who have parents born in the Americas live in this town. It is in a very real sense an American city, and it surely ought to have an Institute for the Study of the Americas.

In starting that process I must apologise for embarking on an excursus over a full 500 years. Some of our guests, Vice-Chancellor, will rightly feel that I have gone on for far too long. But I suspect that they will not have forgotten that I opened with the case for pluralism, and that rather narrows my options for a big bang finish.

Strong though that case is, it can always weather some gentle restatement. However, what it cannot entail is a blanket elimination of self-evident truths, and neither can it rest upon the eradication of relativist whimsy. Both are to be encountered in a mental world responsive to sameness, similarity and difference in ever-mutating proportions.

Nor, of course, does a disposition for variety annul that sense of completeness which is so often at the heart of freedom dreams. After all, we are here in a federal University within the United Kingdom, which is part of the European Union, all of which joins all of the Americas in the United Nations. We know keenly that matters of similarity and difference are best negotiated within a whole.

Our new Institute would not exist without the School of Advanced Study,

which this year celebrates ten years of existence, grouping eight scholarly enterprises of quite distinct disciplines, skills and sensibilities. Yet all share an unending appetite for knowledge, a passion for the life of the mind, and a corresponding preparedness to countenance unpopularity.

Perhaps those attributes also constitute a similarity between the four minds we have glimpsed this evening. They certainly are the values required for our renewed study and understanding of the Americas, and I thank you all emphatically for showing your support for that endeavour here today.