Disciplinary Conquest

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Disciplinary Conquest: U.S. Scholars in South America, 1900–1945.

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From 1900 to 1945, well before the consolidation of area studies, U.S. scholars in the humanities and the social sciences delineated the contours of a recently “rediscovered” land: South America. Their publications provided comprehensive and empirically informed visions of the subcontinent that contributed to the United States’ diplomatic rapprochement with the region. Parallel to business prospectors, Pan-American enthusiasts, religious missionaries, and travelers, a group of U.S. scholars came to the region in search of new data and fresh, direct observations to confirm or reject prior generalizations and stereotypes. Little by little, their authoritative representations began to fill the previous vacuum of knowledge, said to represent a major obstacle for more intense economic relations between the two Americas. Enhanced knowledge, the argument ran, would generate greater mutual trust in inter-American relations. These acts of knowing laid the foundations for a substantial apparatus of knowledge in the service of hemispherism.

I call these scholarly engagements “disciplinary interventions”: disciplinary because they were rooted in scientific disciplines; interventions because they fostered U.S. economic, technological, and cultural hegemony in the region. In a way, these adventures in disciplinary knowledge constituted a continuation of U.S. hemispheric diplomacy through other means. In a region free from direct U.S. military and political intervention, information gathering
and knowledge production constituted cumulative acts of possession, through which the United States apprehended, systematized, and rendered legible the realities of South America. Textual, scientific representations of the region, which later congealed into regional disciplinary knowledge, constituted the appropriate mode of engagement for a benevolent informal empire.

In the interwar period, scholars were increasingly engaged in Pan-Americanism, a movement that envisioned a hemispheric system of cooperation. Its promoters expected university professors and researchers to produce new knowledge that could reveal the “true nature” of the southern republics, ascertaining the similarities and differences in the region’s cultures. By the time of the Second World War, U.S. scholars had established the infrastructure of Latin American studies: the institutes, the research centers, the experts, the university programs, and the library collections for sustained interdisciplinary research on the region. Most of them were proud that the knowledge attained by their disciplines served to inform U.S. policies toward the region. Implicit in the design of Latin American studies was a constitutive connection with U.S. foreign policy. This connection gave meaning and substance to many of the research efforts deployed to “know” South America. In addition, scholars expected that, once disseminated to the U.S. population at large, this new knowledge would bring about feelings of sympathy and understanding for South Americans.

In this book I explore the engagement of U.S. scholars with distinct aspects of South America—its natural environments, human settlements, pre-Columbian cultures, colonial history, and contemporary social relations and forms of government—during the period 1900–1945. I examine the growth of academic knowledge about the region in relation to the building of informal empire. More precisely, I investigate the connection between the region’s integration as an object of U.S. scientific inquiry and the “economic conquest” of South America. In Disciplinary Conquest I argue that knowledge enterprises could be considered ancillary activities in the making of imperial hemispheric hegemony. Scholarly visions of South America made the countries of the region more easily apprehensible, their “realities” more readable both to U.S. foreign-policy experts and to the U.S. general public.

My inquiry focuses on the works of five scholars: a historian (Clarence H. Haring), a geographer (Isaiah Bowman), a political scientist (Leo S. Rowe), a sociologist (Edward A. Ross), and an archaeologist (Hiram Bingham). While restricted, this selection of scholars and disciplines provides a panoramic overview of knowledge production about South America in the United States. In other words, the work of these five scholars could be considered as representative of the modalities of U.S. scholarly engagement with the realities of the
southern republics. *Disciplinary Conquest* deals with the parallel and complementary expansion of the U.S. informal empire and the formation of regional knowledge about South America. Increased commercial and investment opportunities in South America motivated these scholars to extend disciplinary research into this new and unexplored territory. Interest in Inca citadels developed into a full-blown inquiry of Andean archaeology. A geographical survey along the 73rd meridian provided the initial step for the project of South American geography. Interest in the administration of the Spanish colonial system and in U.S.-Latin American diplomatic history served to configure the field of Hispanic American history. In areas as different as geography, government, social relations, economics and finance, education, and history, scholars made a concerted effort to survey, report, and interpret the complex realities of the region, comparing them with Europe, the United States, and former Iberian empires.

My claims refer specifically to the period 1900–1945, which corresponds to the construction of Pan-American institutions and ideals. Before 1900, the very rarity of specialized regional knowledge made the interaction between knowledge and state power less frequent and effective. First proposed by Secretary of State James G. Blaine in 1881, the Pan-American ideal was envisioned as a loose cooperative union of the American republics. Later, under President Woodrow Wilson, as the U.S. launched a rapprochement with South America, the notion developed into a full ideology, hemispherism, which centered on ideas of economic cooperation, cultural engagement, and collective security. By the mid-1930s, support for Pan-Americanism reached a peak of enthusiasm. Throughout the country, “Pan-American societies”—associations devoted to promoting inter-American friendship and understanding—received the broad support of U.S. functionaries, corporations, universities, and municipalities. Indeed, Pan-Americanism became a government-sponsored social movement. The Good Neighbor Policy of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, for example, served to deepen U.S. rapprochement with the subcontinent.

The era of Pan-Americanism was a particular conjuncture in which economic opportunities made knowledge of South America a special concern shared by U.S. businessmen, foreign policy makers, and scholars. Diplomatic efforts to gain the cooperation of the South American republics presented U.S. officials with many questions about the opinions of South American intellectuals.

This study focuses on South America, the region geographically located south of Panama. After 1900, diplomats, scholars, businessmen, missionaries, and other travelers delineated an enduring geopolitical division of the
hemi sphere. In the academic discourse of the period, “South America” stood
for a region quite different from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean,
where the U.S. exerted more direct forms of intervention. North of the Panama
Canal were nations with frequent revolutions, with illiterate populations living
under conditions of extreme poverty, and subjected, because of their proximity
to the United States, to close and frequent supervision by Uncle Sam. South of
this divide, in South America, were more politically stable republics, some of
which had attained a significant degree of economic progress, particularly the
so-called ABC powers, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, as well as, by extension,
Uruguay. In the U.S. foreign-policy community and in business circles there
developed during this period a temporary fascination with—at moments bor-
dering on perplexity at—the rapid progress attained by the ABC powers. As a
consequence, authors called for a differential treatment of the region relative to
the rest of Latin America. For diverse reasons, the Washington establishment
never considered these republics as possible targets of military intervention.
Promoters of Pan-Americanism, such as John Barrett, presented the southern
republics as “lands of opportunity” to U.S. investors and merchants.

Once they had constructed the divide, U.S. scholars filled this construed
géopolitical entity, “South America,” with meaning. In this book, I examine sev-
eral instances in which U.S. scholars presented this crucial geopolitical differ-
ence (the Great Divide) as a constitutive element of Latin American studies.
In the works of geography, government, archaeology, sociology, and history
I review, the specificity of “South America” resonated clearly and vividly. My
inquiry traces the steps taken by U.S. scholars in making regional disciplin-
ary knowledge, my central preoccupation being the ways in which this newly
acquired knowledge helped diplomats and policy makers envision new U.S.
foreign policies toward the region. I demonstrate that new knowledge about
South America brought greater order and enhanced visibility both to U.S. schol-
ars and to U.S. foreign-policy makers. Scholars endeavored to order the great
diversity of observed phenomena with concepts, methods of direct observation,
and generalizations proper to their academic disciplines. By aggregation, these
observations developed into general panoramic vistas of history, society, poli-
tics, culture, and the environment. These synthetic views condensed under-
standings about race, gender, nation, and power in South America. Certain
aspects of these knowledge-producing activities were constitutive of Latin
American studies: comprehensive visibility, the attempt to describe and un-
derstand regional and subnational diversity, and the prestige associated with
scientific methods of observation.
In addition, these acts of knowing presented a purportedly scientific vision of the subcontinent that businessmen and foreign-policy experts deemed necessary for the United States as an emerging international power. The possibility of viewing the whole field from a distance and the authority to pronounce general statements about the region’s past, present, and potential future constituted a pervasive and enduring form of power. In relation to this, we can claim that there was an intellectual conquest of South America, in the sense of appropriating and incorporating the region within the field of vision and range of influence of U.S. academic knowledge. The institutional and developmental issues of the region would not have developed into “problems” without thorough regional disciplinary work in the social sciences and in the humanities. Regional knowledge was a precondition for the construction of hemispheric influence and power.

I present various instances of the production of regional knowledge: the exploration of Machu Picchu by the amateur archaeologist Hiram Bingham; the mapping of South America by the American Geographic Society under Isaiah Bowman’s leadership; the social landscapes of Andean nations drawn by the sociologist Edward Ross; the comprehensive revision of Spanish colonialism made by the historian Clarence Haring; and the studies of government in colonial and neocolonial situations pioneered by Leo Rowe. These studies entailed a recurrent adjustment or calibration between preconceptions and realities, between national generalizations and subregional description. I examine the processes that created such new knowledge and the circumstances and relationships that made it possible. These scholarly interventions—together with others not discussed in this volume—generated new understandings of South America. The increased academic interest generated by these interventions caused U.S. diplomats and businessmen to reappraise the region’s limitations and possibilities.

By studying these scholars’ intellectual trajectories, research designs, and foreign-policy opinions, Disciplinary Conquest revisits the question of the origins of Latin American studies from a different perspective: an understanding rooted in the mutual constitution of disciplinary regional knowledge and the U.S. exertion of economic and cultural influence over South America. First, until now, the consolidation of Latin American studies has been erroneously dated to the early 1960s and understood as a by-product of the Cuban Revolution. My position is that the fundamental intellectual apparatus of the Latin American field was already established prior to this—in fact, before the Second World War. Second, I emphasize the connection between U.S. scholarly engagements
and U.S. foreign policy, arguing that the motivations for knowing South America “scientifically” were diplomatic, economic, and political. The disciplines’ move toward regional knowledge cannot be separated from the discussions about the U.S. role in the hemisphere, the ideal of Pan-Americanism, and the cultural turn in inter-American relations implicit in the Good Neighbor Policy. Endowed with the authority of disciplinary knowledge, U.S. scholars intervened in foreign-policy debates, gauged the possibilities of further economic penetration, and argued for or against the convergence of Anglo-American and Spanish-American cultures. Whether they were staunch supporters of Pan-Americanism or not, scholars tended to envision the nature of the U.S. hegemony in South America as something to be wrought in the terrain of culture. In this regard, their views sustained and accompanied the transition from Big Stick diplomacy to the Good Neighbor Policy.

**Disciplinary Conquest** is intellectual history with a twist. For although I am concerned with scholars’ intellectual trajectories, influences, and interests, I do not separate the ideas and visions of these scholars from the social context and the material dimensions of their labors: their teaching, their travels, their editorial tasks, their networking activities, and their political and social interactions. In conjunction, all these activities contributed to shape U.S. academic visions of South America, which, in turn, were crucial for building the foundations of disciplinary regional knowledge in U.S. universities and learned societies. In this sense, my perspective follows the agenda, advanced in **Close Encounters of Empire**, of examining the postcolonial encounter in its multiple, ground-level manifestations and representations to ascertain the relationships construed and the positions claimed by U.S. representatives in Latin America. This time, though, the object under study is a collection of disciplinary interventions, themselves a diverse assembly of knowledge-producing experiences and representations.

An empirical impulse guided these scholars, and their “findings” tended to emphasize differences internal to the object of study (South America). In the book, the reader will see the perplexity of scholars as they tried to account for an array of nations and negotiate the obstacles in collecting evidence, the satisfaction when they successfully carried the evidence to their home universities, the temptation to make great generalizations about the whole region, the pausing to consider the challenges that a certain piece of evidence presented to existing understandings. In this terrain, I greatly benefited from Bruno Latour’s insights about the nature of scientific work: research is socially and institutionally grounded; there is a constant circulation of materials and concepts; and interpersonal networks of scholars matter.
My argument is not reductionist, nor does it lend itself to a facile instrumentalist interpretation. The U.S. economic expansion and the diplomatic rapprochement that followed Secretary Root’s visit to the region in 1906 opened up many questions about the nature and condition of South America. U.S. scholars posed these questions within their disciplines and realized that, to answer these questions, they needed field observations. This data gathering foregrounded the emergence of regionally based knowledge. Within three to four decades, initial regional subdisciplines came together as Latin American studies. *Disciplinary Conquest* shows that the content of the new regional disciplines was informed by several forces, among them the problems posed by foreign policy, the availability of library and archival collections, contemporary currents of thought, expert definitions and concepts, academic politics within universities and learned societies, technologies of observation and recording, and the interest awakened in the U.S. public about “South America.”

U.S. scholars brought back to their home universities and learned societies new claims about South America’s natural environment, population, history, politics, social relations, and antiquities that in time consolidated into formidable structures of regional knowledge. Their research constituted new subdisciplines, such as Andean archaeology, South American geography, and Hispanic American history. Inquiries into politics and government in the region did not generate a discipline called “South American politics,” just as the interest of sociologists in social relations in South America did not produce a “South American sociology.” These intellectual contributions acquired meaning in discussions internal to U.S. academe, and also in dialogue with questions posed by U.S. foreign-policy makers. The common theme that connected scholars and diplomats was the role the United States had to play in the hemisphere.

In this book I consider scholarly interventions in South America in relation to the growth of research universities and disciplinary knowledge in the United States. These were the expansive forces that accompanied the deployment of U.S. cultural authority and disciplinary knowledge in South America, at a time of unprecedented expansion of U.S. investment and trade in the region. During this period, there was a complementary relation between the expansion of knowledge capital and that of financial and physical capital. For this reason, it is quite difficult to separate neatly the economic and knowledge imperatives of informal empire. Many forces were connected in this period, including capital and knowledge, research universities and progressive ideals, a cosmopolitan, post-isolationist national outlook and the apparently insatiable quest for knowledge of the outside world.
The “intellectual conquest” that this book examines cannot be reduced or subsumed to grand metanarratives of evolution and progress, Euro-American centrism, or the constitution of a permanent and well-delimited alterity. While the different authors spoke to the preoccupations of their time and culture (race, gender roles, nation, tradition, modernity, economic progress), we cannot speak of a common discourse connecting the enunciations of their disciplinary endeavors. The claims I advance concerning the relationship between knowledge and informal empire should be read within the bounds of “situated knowledges.” They do not belong to the slippery terrain of great discursive formations or grand epistemes. To be sure, U.S. scholars betrayed in their writings some general notions of U.S-style Occidentalism, some condescension toward women, and even some overt racism. U.S. scholars also tinkered with the idea of U.S. exceptionalism in relationship to South American development. But, by and large, their characterizations of South America were governed more by the evidence they gathered—and how they interpreted this evidence—than by any metaconceptions about humanity, races, gender roles, or national prejudice. For this reason, Disciplinary Conquest does not deal much with stereotypes and cultural biases, a usual focus of most literature on the history of inter-American relations.

In short, U.S. scholars “conquered” their fields by contributing data, new discoveries, and a bounty of interpretations about the realities of South America. The knowledge they produced was not so much trapped into “Occidentalism” or “Americo-centrism” as propelled by a voracious will to know, informed by the history of the different disciplines and by foreign-policy imperatives.

My argument about the origins of “regional knowledge” is rooted not in a wide-ranging critique of universality and Western epistemology, but in a pragmatic view of knowledge production as located within institutions, power networks, and the accumulation of cultural capital. It would take much imagination—and very little common sense—to reduce the contributions made by Haring, Bowman, Rowe, Bingham, and Ross to a complicity with metadiscourses of white supremacy, male domination, or U.S. superiority. Besides a common ascription to U.S. exceptionalism, the only discourse that united the different academic interventions was that of “useful knowledge,” a rhetoric that connected the arguments of different disciplines about South America to the dilemmas of the U.S. role in the hemisphere.

Knowledge is, after all, an arrangement of elements, a deployment of arguments, that is always situated and material, in its production as well as in its circulation. As Bruno Latour has taught us, knowledge requires a vast circulation of objects, a constant negotiation with language, and innumerable skir-
mishes over what constitute “facts” and how they should be interpreted. The pursuit of knowledge is not simply an altruistic endeavor; it is part of a process of construing academic authority, a process that tends to concentrate knowledge-power in certain locations, from where it radiates influence to the international scholarly community. Though certainly influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, my work in this volume advances a slightly different conception of power/knowledge. Instead of emphasizing that knowledge cuts across all exercises of power, I underline the instrumental value of knowledge in the construction of imperial hegemony. That is why I speak of “knowledge-power” rather than of power/knowledge. Disciplinary knowledge is a particular form of knowledge, with boundaries and objects of study defined by experts or professionals, generally working within academic institutions.

The formation of regional knowledge may entail the marginalization of locally based knowledges and peripheral intellectuals. Regional disciplines such as Hispanic American history or South American geography have tended to present themselves as superior to national disciplines such as Peruvian history or Colombian geography, the practitioners of the former often discrediting the works of the latter as unscientific, incomplete, noncomparative, or simply sloppy. The alleged superiority of regional disciplines over national ones is in turn related to important asymmetries in the accumulation of cultural capital. The construction of academic fields of regional knowledge presupposes that libraries, archives, and museums hold specialized collections. It requires scholars to mobilize labor and financial resources to sustain wide-ranging research agendas on foreign lands. Underdeveloped nations rarely possess such resources for generating knowledge about their own conditions, much less to study the industrialized centers of the world economy. This basic asymmetry is often dismissed as unimportant by scholars from the North.

Knowledge and cultural capital tends to concentrate in the center at the expense of the peripheries. Institutes for the study of colonialism, development, slavery, and other themes crucial to the peripheries of the world economy are usually located at the center. Sixteenth-century debates about the condition of the American Indian and the proper form of evangelization took place in Spanish centers of high learning (Valladolid, Salamanca). Imperial history was born in England, though its subject matter was the colonies, more specifically “colonial India.” The same could be said of African studies in France or colonial studies in the Netherlands. Latin American studies in the United States do not depart from this centripetal logic: knowledge purported to be specific of peripheral regions and populations tend to concentrate into the hegemon's centers of knowledge.
In addition to location, there is a question of usage. At the center, the findings of regional-based knowledge could be used to design policies that facilitated the exploitation of the resources of the peripheries while avoiding conflicts and resistance. I call this knowledge useful in the sense of knowledge oriented toward the needs of the central nation-state. Yet, to the degree that regional knowledge provided policy makers and businessmen at the center with enhanced visibility of the peripheries’ problems, this knowledge was also imperial.

By and large, U.S. scholars measured the realities of South American nations against the model of “American modernity.” This contributed to the process of “Americanization,” the attempt to deploy the U.S. way of life as a model to be imitated or replicated by South American societies. Edward Ross projected his own view of U.S. social modernity (the agrarian democracy of the Midwest) onto his portrayal of the Andean societies. In similar ways, Leo Rowe evaluated the condition of Southern Cone universities against that of U.S. college culture and measured Argentine federalism against U.S. constitutional theory and practice. Isaiah Bowman presented the exploitation of natural resources in the southern Andes in relation to U.S. corporate methods and rationality. Yet this book is not about U.S. modernity or its deployment in South America. It is about the forms of knowledge that emerged out of U.S. scholars’ encounters with the realities of the southern republics. At the heart of this knowledge formation was an ethnocentric conception of knowledge and of the organization of higher learning that is not particularly “American.”

This book offers an introduction to the intellectual conquest of South America. Notable U.S. scholars drew the fundamental insights and posed the most important questions about the region’s nature, present condition, and future. Their work pioneered the road to a comprehensive knowledge of the region. As later acknowledged by practitioners of Latin American studies in the 1960s, these pioneers sought to understand the totality of “Latin American culture.” By this they meant the interrelations among geographies, populations, governments, economies, and forms of society and culture. At the same time, they established the bases for disciplinary authority in certain locations within the United States: Cambridge, New Haven, Philadelphia, New York, Madison, Austin, Berkeley, and so on. In this regard, these scholars participated in the centripetal logic implicit in the accumulation of regional knowledge and disciplinary authority. New evidence “traveled” from the southern periphery to a selected group of academic centers in the United States to serve as raw materials for the generation of new knowledge about South America. By the late 1920s and 1930s, these centers were actively producing knowledge about South America and, at
the same time, bringing business leaders, diplomats, state functionaries, and regional experts together to discuss “Latin American problems.”

Unlike the business prospectors, casual travelers, or explorers, these academic observers came to South America to “conquer the field” for a given discipline. It is not that South America (its regions, or constitutive nations, or its populations) was literally conquered by the United States or by the universities that these scholars represented. Rather, the region was claimed as possession by the disciplines themselves—geography, political science, archaeology, sociology, and history—in the sense of being incorporated into the field of visibility and into the core problematic of each academic community. It was through disciplinary knowledge that the region’s “problems” came to be a concern of universities and learned societies in the United States. The inclusion of South American politics, ancient cultures, geography, colonial history, and social relations as crucial elements of the research agenda and curricula of U.S. universities constitutes a form of imperial engagement.

If empires are a transnational form of possession (dominium) and sovereignty (imperium), then academic conquest encompassed and contained both constitutive dimensions of empire. In the specific case of an informal empire committed to a policy of persuasion and cultural transfer, as the United States was after the First World War, imperality acquires the form of technical and knowledge superiority, rather than of direct settlement on the ground. To this extent, the incorporation of the hinterlands takes place “elsewhere,” in the classrooms, libraries, research labs, and professional publications of the hegemon. During this period, U.S. disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities extended their boundaries to include South America’s diversity within their scope of vision. U.S. geographers, for instance, took possession of the knowledge of South American geography, claiming superior authority over this domain. By building the most formidable collection of maps of Hispanic America, the American Geographic Society transformed itself into a mecca for the future peregrination of scholars and businessmen.

The United States entered the Second World War period with an impressive accumulated knowledge about Latin America. Books and articles with the words “South America” in the title published before 1945 are too numerous to examine. Scholars in the United States tend to minimize the value of the knowledge already gathered and to persuade their universities to make new efforts to study Latin America more intensely and completely. Almost ritually, they talk of the ignorance of the U.S. public about the culture, geography, and history of the lands south of Panama. However, from the perspective of South
America, the existence of a vast institutional apparatus of learning dedicated to the region in the United States is notable—and it is puzzling, to say the least. For there is no reciprocity. Latin American universities have not made a proportional investment in the development of United States studies (usually called American studies).

Disciplinary interventions are, by definition, forms of purposeful activity. They are constellations of initiatives and endeavors productive of specialized knowledge and very conscious of its purpose. Academic research is a goal-oriented, rational work process, which presupposes knowledge as the object of desire. In order for these intellectualizations to be communicative—that is, the knowledge produced is intended to be disseminated among scholarly communities, universities, and classrooms—they must produce textualities and, consequently, discourses. Disciplinary Conquest deals with the discourses produced by U.S. scholars in the construction of disciplinary regional knowledge. These discourses are quite specific: they concern racial and economic oppression, education, natural endowments, obstacles to economic progress, ancient civilizations, indigenous peoples, European immigration, and other related topics. In their characterization of South America, different authors singled out distinct sets of problems and causal factors.

Although U.S. scholars shared some progressive views, their enunciations varied from topic to topic. This was particularly so in relation to the question of imperial engagement. Each scholar had a different view about the role the United States should play in the hemisphere. Some suggested that the United States abandon the Monroe Doctrine, while others argued for making it multilateral or Pan-American. Some conceived that the key to hemispheric hegemony was the formation of an inter-American intellectual entente. Others argued for intensified technical assistance and cultural diplomacy. Toward the mid-1920s and 1930s, most scholars agreed that the United States needed to court and co-opt leading men in the most progressive southern republics in order to build a hemispheric commonwealth of peace, welfare, and security.

Among the regional disciplines here discussed, imperialism is embedded in the very definition of the object of study and its disciplinary boundaries. Moreover, U.S. scholars who built regional knowledge tended to articulate expert knowledge as useful for imperial hegemony. For example, Rowe thought that the empires of the past, because of their limited commitment to understanding the hinterlands, had failed to spread their own cultural identities into those regions. The British had built a commercial empire detached from culture and hence were not concerned with learning much about their colonial subjects. Germany, on the other hand, acted as modern empires should, providing edu-
cation to those who lived in their hinterlands and building knowledge about the peoples with whom it interacted.\textsuperscript{30} To Rowe, modern imperial sovereignty meant the capacity to relate more intimately to the peripheral nations’ life and culture. This could only be achieved through knowledge. Forms of imperial hegemony more pervasive and enduring than those attained by commercial empires required a greater commitment to knowledge production. Thus, to truly sustain a “unity of thought and action” between North and South America, U.S. universities had to acquire and disseminate an understanding of “the significance and content of Spanish-American civilization” (Rowe 1909, 593).

Since readers in the United States have regularly taken exception to terms such as \textit{imperial} or \textit{imperialist}, I need to clarify my use of the term. I use the term \textit{imperial} in the sense of hegemony, exemplarity, and purported cultural and technological superiority. Viewed from a long-term perspective, U.S. policies toward Latin America veered toward hegemonic influence through expertise, accommodating the modalities of rule of both formal and informal empire. (In chapter 9 I discuss more extensively the relationship between informal and formal empire.) It is true that the United States did not establish territorial colonies in South America. In strategic, legal, and political terms, the subcontinent was quite different from Central America and the Caribbean, territories subjected to close supervision, repeated interventions, and tutelage by the United States. Throughout the age of Pan-Americanism (1890–1945), the South American republics were able to preserve their territorial integrity and governmental autonomy. Though concerned about the economic power of the “Northern Colossus,” South American governments did not consider U.S. invasion of their territories likely. Yet the experience of colonial government in the “American Mediterranean” influenced U.S. conceptions of hegemony in relation to South America.

Though free from military interventions, South America was considered a “land of opportunity” by U.S. manufacturers, merchants, and financiers. The region was the object of their recurrent textual and inquisitive interventions, through which they sought to discover and reveal its inner nature. During the period under consideration, for economic, political, and cultural reasons, the United States pursued a policy of enticement with regard to the South American republics. This policy included intellectual cooperation, scholarly exchanges, technical advice, translation of literature and history, and the promotion of Spanish education in U.S. schools. This cultural politics of Pan-Americanism was sustained by the belief that mutual knowledge and understanding between the two Americas would generate a better climate for business, diplomacy, and other activities.\textsuperscript{31} These multiple engagements were not “imperial” in the same
sense as India was part of the British empire, that is, as a territorial possession and administrative dependency. They were imperial in the sense that they represented the United States’ desire for hegemony and cultural superiority. So this “imperiality” resembled the relationship of Britain to its former colonies: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were “settler colonies” on which Britain exerted overwhelming cultural influence. In similar ways, the United States imagined the Pan-American Union as a hemispheric commonwealth, a virtual terrain for the deployment of U.S. superiority, advice, and reform agendas. Scholars have shown how the Pan-American conferences and the Pan-American movement served as vehicles for different reform agendas, from childcare to feminismo, from forest preservation to the eradication of malaria and yellow fever. The idea of “Pan America” also served to mobilize the energies of literary figures and even artists.32

To the extent that regional knowledge participated in enterprises of cultural influence, it could be called “imperial.” My argument goes further. I consider disciplinary knowledge itself to be imperial. Disciplinary knowledge can only increase its scope, consolidate its domain, and build comparative inquiries by extending its reach to incorporate the territory of the Other. There would be no anthropology without “the native,” and there would be no “human geography” outside the notion of “settlements” and “frontiers.”33 Some degree of imperiosity—the impulse to attain supranational sovereignty through enhanced and reliable visibility of the new peripheries—is implicit in the definition of disciplines. When practiced in advanced capitalist societies, the social and human sciences—geography, sociology, political science, and history—tend to transcend national boundaries, striving to establish generalizations valid for all societies. “South America” was such an object of knowledge. Once incorporated into the curricula of U.S. institutions of learning, it could radiate in different directions, enhancing the prestige of U.S. scholars. The knowledge thus produced could enhance the prestige associated with U.S. research universities, attracting students and researchers from abroad.

Disciplinary knowledge is also imperial to the extent that it appropriates and uses a series of local knowledges: generalizations, observations, and characterizations made by local intellectuals, collectors, and other informants. It is the role of centrally located scholars—scholars working at the center of Western modernity—to collect these diverse utterances, artifacts, and local doxa and transform them into a coherent set of principles and generalizations conducive to disciplinary knowledge. Local intellectuals may at times claim to belong to European science or to international scholarship, but scholars at the center often dismiss or discredit their activities as second-rate replicas of origin-
nal North Atlantic thought. Hence, in studying the formation of “regional knowledge” it is quite important to pay attention to the interaction between international and local intellectuals, between foreign scholars and native informants.

Scholars have examined the relationship between knowledge and empire, chiefly within the context of territorial empires, showing that knowledge provides valuable services in the governability of colonial situations. Less attention has been devoted to the formation of regional knowledge in neocolonial situations, where hegemony takes the form of economic, technological, and cultural supremacy. With regard to Latin America, the existent literature deals with Latin American studies’ complicity with the politics of the Cold War. U.S.-based social-scientific agendas generated some concern among Latin American intellectuals, the accusation being that U.S. social sciences extended abroad the espionage proper to the U.S. security state. On the imperiality of disciplinary knowledge, few studies have reached the depth and scope of Neil Smith’s *American Empire* (2003). The author claims that U.S. geography, through the work of Isaiah Bowman, contributed significantly to envisioning and implementing the U.S. transnational agenda after the Second World War.

With *Disciplinary Conquest*, I contribute to the debate on the relationship between neocolonial expansion and imperial knowledge. Whereas different works have examined the influence of expert knowledge in creating opportunities for U.S. interventions in delimited fields of activity in South America, most notably in the terrains of medical philanthropy and economic advising, much needs to be done in relation to the early foundational texts of U.S. Latin Americanism. Literary critics and philosophers have critically examined the question of U.S. Latin Americanism, and much has been said about the rise and demise of area studies. But the origins of this grid of knowledge, and the important role played by Latin American specialists in it, still requires critical examination. Was Latin American studies the “tail” to the “politicco-commercial kite” of U.S. expansionism, as Richard Morse claimed? Or was it, rather, a semi-autonomous force that participated in the construction of the various problematics and policies of informal empire?

This book can also be read as a contribution to debates about the origins of Latin American studies. In this regard, let me advance a few simple arguments. Before the dynamics of the Cold War came to influence the development of Latin American studies, the area had developed as a strong confluence of interests within the U.S. academy. In leading research universities were professors providing instruction in the areas of Latin American or South American history, geography, archaeology, literature, and other disciplines. Professors of
political science and sociology used South American examples while examining problems of social order or political stability. The political fragmentation of South America, its weak central states, and its frequent revolutions had acquired already the status of research problems in the social- and political-science labs of leading universities. Round tables were organized across the country to discuss problems of democratic government in Cuba, petroleum rights in Mexico, military coups in Chile and Argentina, and indigenous life in the Amazon—well before the Cuban Revolution ignited interest in the region. In other words, before the consolidation of area studies as an interdisciplinary dispositive at the service of Cold War foreign policy, U.S. scholars had already inscribed South America within the domain and the field of vision of U.S. disciplinary knowledge.

By 1947, the pioneers in these fields had already established the basic questions to be addressed and puzzles to be solved. Resolving these questions involved disciplinary expertise and direct observation through travel. South America, upheld by business writers and promoters of Pan-Americanism as a “land of opportunity,” became, almost at the same time, a vast reservoir of evidence for the development of original research in the humanities and social sciences. In Disciplinary Conquest I show that the scholarly push-forward (avanzada) on South America paralleled contemporary exploration of business opportunities, the landing of foreign direct investment, the increase in inter-American trade, and the establishment of more intense diplomatic relations with the region. The book presents the “rediscovery” of the subcontinent in the first four decades of the twentieth century as a harvest of useful knowledge that contributed to a better understanding of South American politics, societies, and culture in the United States.