To U.S. businessmen and diplomats, South America had been a land of curiosity since the 1790s. Interest grew after the 1823 proclamation by President Monroe that the Americas should remain a continent free from European colonialism and should be governed by republican institutions. Early U.S. Hispanists (William H. Prescott, Henry W. Longfellow, George Ticknor, Washington Irving, and Mary T. Peabody Mann) expressed interest in the region, its history, languages, and literature. But they failed to develop stable institutions for the study of Hispanic America. After 1873, stimulated by the effects of the economic depression, industrialists, statesmen, and naval strategists started to think of South America as a possible outlet for the overproduction of American industrial goods. Yet, before the first Pan-American Conference in Washington (1889–1890), many U.S. scholars and citizens considered South America a “terra incognita.” Here was a mass of territory containing important potential markets for U.S. commodities, as well as sources of valuable raw materials, a land about which little was known. In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War (1898), new scholarship began to question the cultural similarities between Spain and Spanish America, calling for a separate study of the latter. Starting in the early 1900s, the International Bureau of the American Republics contributed new information—chiefly statistics and maps—to make the region
appealing to U.S. investors and traders. Yet professional study of the region took time to develop.  

Between the Spanish-American War (1898) and President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s declaration of the Good Neighbor Policy (1933), South America became the object of scholarly interest and study in the United States. Historians have characterized this period as preparatory for a professional “Latin Americanism,” itself part of an emergent area studies complex. Rather than clumsy preparatory steps, these U.S. disciplinary interventions were comprehensive and enduring intellectual visions in themselves. From the first decade of the twentieth century, U.S. scholars visited, observed, and measured the subcontinent, raising crucial questions for future research. Geographers, archaeologists, sociologists, historians, and political scientists, among others, turned South America from a land of curiosities into a “field of inquiry,” a virtual territory of science. Distinct individuals working within different disciplines collaborated to create a more intimate, profound, and reliable knowledge of the region’s nature, problems, and possibilities of development. Theirs was not just a search for information about the societies south of Panama, but the beginning of an enduring academic engagement with South America, the branching southward of U.S. research disciplines.

In this chapter I start with a curious diplomatic exchange indicative of the extent to which scientific inquiry and diplomacy were intertwined. The incident reveals a persistent presupposition of U.S. scholars: that South America was a treasure of information waiting to be claimed by U.S. disciplinary knowledge. Next, I discuss the importance of knowledge in the period’s business and diplomatic discourse, in particular in relation to cultural engagement. Then I turn to scholars’ rhetorical interventions in favor of a comprehensive disciplinary study of the subcontinent. I close with a brief analysis of the relationship among scholarship, foreign policy, and the early origins of Latin American studies.

A Diplomat’s Curious Proposal

In December 1940 the State Department received a curious proposal from Boaz W. Long, U.S. ambassador in Ecuador. In a memorandum entitled “Possibilities of Ecuador as a Field for Advanced Academic Studies,” Long explained how U.S. researchers could take Ecuador as their field of study. To the ambassador, Ecuador was a territory virgin to scientific inquiry, a land overflowing with intriguing questions and research possibilities. The language of his memorandum replicated the rhetoric of early promoters of inter-American
economic cooperation with the promise of expanding knowledge rather than commerce and investment.\(^8\)

Specifically, Long argued that Ecuador should interest U.S. scholars in several fields of inquiry: archaeology, ethnology, geography, economics, and sociology. To students of archaeology, the country offered almost unlimited research possibilities. The School of American Research’s latest survey had found many unexplored sites in the country, and since the cost of excavation was low, almost any graduate student could afford to set up camp. Scholars might even investigate the connection between the great pre-Columbian cultures of Mesoamerica and the Andes (Long 1941, 3–6). The student of ethnology could expect to find indigenous groups relatively untouched by Spanish colonization. Though much had been written about the Jívaros, other groups remained unstudied, including the Capayas, the Colorados, the Otavalos, and the Salasacas (ibid., 9). Each of Ecuador’s three major regions—the Pacific coastalland, the Andean highlands, and the Amazonian jungle—afforded researchers many opportunities to study indigenous textiles, folk music, and traditional medicine.\(^9\)

To the geographer, said Long, Ecuador was a “gold mine”: a country with a diversity of climates, vegetation, and landscapes that remained almost unmapped and relatively unexplored. Its jungles, páramos, and highlands presented opportunities to investigate different types of land use, the effect of climate on agriculture, and the altitude at which farmers tilled the land.\(^10\) Those interested in economics would find in Ecuador backwardness in its most “virulent form.” Here was an underdeveloped agrarian economy with a preponderance of indigenous peasants. A racially divided society with three distinct standards of living (white, black, Indian) would be appealing to the student of economics. The sociologist could find in Ecuador examples of inbred cultures and sociabilities developing at the margins of Western law and civilization.\(^11\) On the coast, a peasant mestizo society (the Montuvio) had developed on the fringes of Hispanic civilization, whereas in the Esmeraldas, African traditions seemed to have remained intact. In Ecuador’s marginal and backward agrarian societies, Long argued, U.S. sociologists and economists could begin to untangle the mysteries of underdevelopment.

It was Long’s intention to alert U.S. universities and scholars to the possibilities open in Ecuador. Pressing for further research in South America’s least-noticed country, Long replicated an assumption typical of U.S. diplomacy in the Good Neighbor years: that a better understanding between the United States and South America depended on the production of cross-disciplinary knowledge. He viewed the small Andean country as a vast deposit of evidence useful
for validating theories in the social and human sciences. Scientific inquiry in Ecuador itself was an underdeveloped field, and it was up to the United States to deploy U.S. intellectual capital to exploit all existing research possibilities. In short, Ecuador was a field ripe for the model of cross-disciplinary research pioneered by the leaders of the “university movement” in the United States (James B. Conant, Daniel Coit Gilman, William R. Harper, among others).12 Long wrote, “Here is a rich interplay of the material introduced in departments of History, Anthropology, Sociology, Economics, Linguistics, and Political Economy. Moreover these studies have the two advantages, first, of being human, living studies, and second, of being of immense value to the development of the Western Hemisphere” (1941, 19). U.S. specialized academic communities could help to complete the work of explorers who had pioneered the study of the Andes, the Amazon, and the Pampas.13 Long’s proposal was clearly informed by the area-studies perspective, in which a group of disciplines, acting in conjunction, could better understand a region’s peoples and problems. Though the area-studies complex is supposed to have emerged as a knowledge auxiliary to Cold War politics, it is clear that several departments of U.S. universities had established the bases for Oriental and Latin American studies much before 1947. In fact, by 1940, the State Department was aware of the need to promote economic development in the hemisphere. And several of the key promoters of this idea—among them, none other than Nelson Rockefeller, the coordinator of Inter-American Affairs—believed that such assistance could not be extended without further knowledge of the region’s history, economies, societies, and politics.14

Why Promote Regional Knowledge?

A diplomat with a long expertise in Central America and the Caribbean, Long ended up advocating knowledge as the key mode of U.S. engagement with Ecuador. Early on in his career, Long had favored direct intervention and Dollar Diplomacy. In 1913, after ten years of traveling as a diplomat in Mexico, Central America, and Cuba, he was appointed head of the Latin American division of the State Department. In this role, he supported new loans to Nicaragua to expedite the U.S. acquisition of canal rights.15 Indeed, in Mexico and Central America, Long sustained a position close to Dollar Diplomacy: where direct intervention proved neither possible nor desirable, the United States could exert influence and oversight through bank loans. Long’s 1914 report on Honduras was typical of U.S. imperial views and policies in Central America: he argued
that high illiteracy, substandard diets, and alcoholism provided the structural conditions for “chronic revolution.” To overcome Hondurans’ impulse to anarchy, the United States should assist the country’s economic recovery with loans and technology. To this end, Long supported the railroad-and-loans scheme designed by agents of Minor Keith and the United Fruit Company (Baker 1964, 5). In 1918, at the time of a crisis in U.S.-Mexican relations, Long argued that the United States should loan money to Mexico in order to secure control over Mexican oil fields.16

While serving in Central America and the Caribbean, Long maintained his imperialist view of the region. In 1919, he was appointed U.S. minister in Cuba. In response to his reports on civil disorder and labor strikes in Havana that year, the United States sent the marines to the island. Long was the one who requested that a small corps of marines remain in Camagüey until 1922 (Schoultz 1998, 233).17 After Cuba, he served in Nicaragua, during 1936 and 1937. Next, he was appointed U.S. minister in Ecuador, where he became interested in archaeology and ethnology, gathering a rich collection of native rugs and artifacts.18 In 1943, after his memorandum on Ecuador, he was named ambassador to Guatemala.19 Retiring in 1946, he went to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he assumed the directorship of the Museum of New Mexico.

In Ecuador, Long learned to appreciate the importance of indigenous cultures to the country’s social and cultural make-up and, in time, he became a collector and an amateur archaeologist. At the time, as the United States weighed whether to join the European war, education and scholarly exchange became the new frontier in the cultural war between American “democracy” and German “dictatorship.” To counter German propaganda in Ecuador, Long cooperated with Galo Plaza to establish the American College of Quito.20

Beyond a response to the new international conjuncture, Long’s 1940 memorandum was an assertion of the quest for hemispheric knowledge that accompanied the expansion of U.S. economic interests in South America. His gesture could be seen as a continuation of the scientific conquest pioneered by U.S. scholars between 1900 and 1930, in which the United States sought to affirm its supremacy over South America in science and education, and to learn to interact with its southern neighbors on the terrain of culture. In the heyday of the Good Neighbor Policy, scholars and politicians alike considered knowledge of the societies and cultures of South America to be crucial to American diplomacy.21
Knowing South America Better

During the period 1900–1918, calls for enhancing knowledge of the region abounded; business prospectors, economic analysts, and diplomatic reformers all hungered to know more. For U.S. businessmen concerned with winning an increased share of the South American trade, opening trade and investment opportunities in South America required a better knowledge of the region. Such demands were instrumental. To capture these markets from traditional European traders, their sales representatives, diplomatic agents, and other commercial travelers had to be acquainted with the languages, traditions, and habits of South Americans.

Their demands for enhanced cultural competency were part of a more general discourse about how to gain South American markets, a discourse deployed in books of advice to merchants and manufacturers, in expert articles about U.S. trade and shipping, and in promotional literature published by the International Bureau of the American Republics. This discourse emphasized the need to establish U.S. banks in the region, the convenience of direct shipping lines to South American ports, and the urgency of improving how exporters conducted their business. Attention to better packaging, greater information about customs practices, and a more nuanced knowledge of consumers’ preferences completed the list of concerns of South American trade as construed by business rhetoric.

At first, business prospectors did not require academic knowledge to achieve their ends. They took on themselves the task of discovering the “real South America,” advising traders on the practical obstacles they would face in the region. On occasion, business writers protested the “superficial knowledge” dispensed by travel writers and the unrealistic optimism of local consuls and Washington officials. Often their main concern was that commercial travelers and agents lacked adequate training in languages and local culture. So they demanded that commerce schools and colleges do better at teaching Spanish. As for learning “people’s wants and tastes,” they considered this to be their own mandate and were not ready to relinquish this to anthropologists, historians, or geographers.

Occasionally, business experts entered into the discussion of U.S. commercial policy in relation to cultural awareness. In 1907 James Van Cleave took on the argument that German and British traders were well ahead of Americans in their linguistic training and cultural sensitivity. If this was so, he said, a bit of cultural immersion in Hispanic America and better language training would help U.S. businesses win those coveted South American markets. But the competition for informal empire, Van Cleave argued, was chiefly a contest
of productive forces among industrial nations. In the short-term, sales persua-
sion might require agents to possess some cultural background knowledge and
good language skills, but in the long run, U.S. manufacturers would have to
outcompete European firms in product cost, quality, design, and convenience.

The business community increasingly sought cultural knowledge as the
1920s began. In 1920, the National Convention in Foreign Trade (gathered in
San Francisco) recommended equipping US business agents with “accurate
knowledge of foreign markets, with practical knowledge of foreign languages
and with a wide knowledge of the economic, social and political conditions
prevailing in overseas markets” (Lord 1921, 167). Universities and colleges had
taken on the challenge of training men in foreign trade, they argued, but the
curriculum was too practical and lacked content in the humanities. 27 Greater
training in the history and literatures of the world was required. 28

A similar demand emerged from diplomatic quarters, calling for improve-
ments in the U.S. Foreign Service. Almost ritualistically, reformers demanded
entrance examinations as part of ending political favoritism. These examina-
tions would test language competence as well as a general knowledge of the
history of the areas where the United States was involved. This discourse was
also instrumental and specific: the knowledge demanded was considered a
requisite for better job performance. In 1896, trying to overcome British and
German dominance of foreign trade, the world traveler and writer Charles
Dudley Warner demanded that consular officers have both business training
and a command of the local language. 29 Their appointment should be by exam-
ination only. In addition, he urged U.S. manufacturers and exporters to imitate
British and German training: Germans sent quite educated agents abroad to
study foreign markets, while British business agents carried with them cata-
logs of manufactures and were prepared to accommodate the demands of local
merchants. 30

The government agreed with the reformers. Executive orders of 1905 and
1909 required applicants to pass examinations to enter the; U.S. Foreign Ser-
vice. Regulations demanded that they know international law; diplomatic usage;
modern languages; U.S. history and institutions; histories of Europe, South
America, and the Far East; as well as composition, grammar, and punctuation.
Though the salaries of consular officers remained quite low and the numbers
of positions small, examination requirements improved the quality of the U.S.
Foreign Service. 31 By 1915, sixteen well-known universities and colleges were
offering courses tailored for these exams. 32

Apparently, the demand for more comprehensive academic knowledge did
not come from policy makers. Though Secretary of State Elihu Root advocated
greater understanding between the intellectuals of North and South, his rhetoric echoed that of other promoters of hemispheric friendship and cooperation. Root came back from his 1906 South American tour filled with enthusiasm about economic opportunities. Speaking at commercial clubs in Kansas City, Saint Louis, and Cincinnati, he talked about the economic and cultural complementarities between South America and the United States. Mainly he spoke about the products that U.S. businesses could sell, the need for agents who spoke Spanish and Portuguese, the importance of opening branches of U.S. banks in the region and improving maritime transportation, and the imperative to treat South Americans with respect. But like the speeches of other business promoters, his “South American Address” (reprinted by the American Exporter and later distributed among manufacturers and merchants) contained nothing to suggest the beginning of a scientific conquest of the subcontinent (Jessup 1938, 490–91).

Building Fields of Regional Knowledge

To conquer a new field of study, one must first envision the field in terms of a problematic core and draw, however tentatively, its disciplinary boundaries. Next, one must disseminate interest among potential practitioners of the field, highlighting the importance of certain paradoxes, unanswered questions, or puzzles about the region’s geography, antiquity, history, political regimes, and societies. To sustain interest over time, efforts must be made to translate the initial intellectual curiosity of a few scholars into teaching subjects, for it is through courses and class interaction that this interest is passed on to students. As practitioners grow in number, they seek to form professional associations that, in turn, sponsor disciplinary journals, conferences, and specialized collections. At a certain point, with the assistance of government and philanthropic foundations, a further step will be taken: the setting up of research centers, institutes, and graduate programs.

This succession of events is not far from the process by which scholars constituted Latin American studies in the United States. Every step of the process required enunciatory acts: invitations to visit the region; calls to conduct research in certain areas or problems; discussions as to the propriety of gathering evidence in foreign lands; propositions about the need to teach the subject in colleges and universities; and demands for concerted actions to recruit professors, finance research, launch journals, and organize conferences. Thus, the invention of a new study area composed of various subdisciplines entailed a collective process of construction mediated by discursive interventions.
After Root’s visit to South America (1906), South America came to be considered a region in need of further exploration, knowledge, and understanding. Not only was it a provider of raw materials and a market full of potential consumers of U.S. manufactures, it was now a field of interest for the U.S. social sciences and humanities, that is, a repository of evidence that could corroborate generalizations stemming from the emerging disciplines. Scholarly curiosity about South America grew contemporaneously with economic and financial interest. During the period 1907–1930, academic visits to South America increased significantly, and as a result, a rich harvest of new data and interpretation reached universities and learned societies in the United States. New contributions to the fields of sociology, geography, archaeology, anthropology, politics and government, constitutional law, economics, finance, and international relations began to appear in various academic journals in the United States.

Gradually, the region started to acquire greater visibility and significance within research universities. The First Pan-American Scientific Congress gathered at Santiago, Chile (from December 1908 through January 1909), was perhaps the event that triggered closer intellectual connections between the two Americas. Here began the process of constituting Latin American studies in the United States. Well before Ambassador Long, that is, other U.S. scholars and statesmen had envisioned Latin America as a “field of research,” an empty territory of inquiry open to the gaze of U.S. explorers and researchers. The impetus for this change came from scholars’ minds, rather than from the workshops on foreign policy. The Pan-American Congress set in motion a series of reconnaissance expeditions that delimited U.S. research interests in South America. An influential group of experts attended this congress as U.S. government delegates, among them Archibald Coolidge from Harvard, Bernard Moses from California, William Shepherd from Columbia, Paul Reinsch from Wisconsin, Leo Rowe from Pennsylvania, and Hiram Bingham from Yale (Karnes 1979). Before the congress started, Bingham went on an expedition from Buenos Aires to Potosí, trying to map the old royal road. This trip put him in contact with people and information that later led to the discovery of the ruins of Machu Picchu. Other scholar-delegates also engaged in exploration travel, trying to personally inspect certain aspects of South America for future research.

Root believed that the scientific congress at Santiago would “bring together the best scientific thought of this hemisphere” and make possible “the scrutiny of many distinctly American problems.” In his view, intellectual cooperation between men of North and South America was necessary for scientific and practical reasons. The “common understanding and free exchange of opinion upon scientific subjects is of great practical importance,” he wrote, because many
specific relations could arise that were “incident to our expanding trade, our extending investment, and the construction of the Panama Canal” (quoted in Holmes 1909, 442). In other words, scholars would act as ambassadors of U.S. economic interests, trying to tone down the criticism of the United States by Latin American intellectuals. Yet scholars encountered in South America much more than Yankee-phobia; they found a wealth of information for the development of regional or comparative studies in their own disciplines.

Envisioning a new field is itself a labeling operation, one that assigns a name to a series of problems, questions, and information about a particular area. Just before he was appointed assistant professor at Yale University, Hiram Bingham (1908b) published an influential paper that promoted research in South American history and politics. Bingham assumed that U.S. scholars shared a distinctive “interest” in understanding the southern republics, and that study should concentrate first on history and politics. In his initial argument, two reasons justified Bingham’s initiative: economic interest and the availability of sources. He noted the ample economic opportunities open to U.S. firms in the subcontinent and the interest of Yale students in those opportunities. He was confident that graduate students would find enough library resources in the northeast to conduct research on the South American topics.

In 1910, invited by President Porfirio Díaz, Leo S. Rowe visited Mexico City for the inauguration of the new National University. Besides observing the progress of Mexican universities, Rowe envisioned intellectual cooperation between U.S. and Mexican scholars and universities. He returned to the United States convinced that anthropologists from Mexico and the United States could work together to solve the problems presented by Toltec, Zapotec, and Maya antiquity, leading perhaps to the establishment of a binational school of archaeology. After this, cooperation could extend to studies in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities (Leo S. Rowe 1910a).

During his work with the Yale Peruvian Expedition (YPE), the geographer Isaiah Bowman defined the “Southern Peruvian Andes” as the area in which to concentrate multidisciplinary research efforts. Later on, in 1914, his observations about geographical accidents, climate, patterns of settlement, and natural regions extended to a wider area: “South America.” The new subdiscipline—South American geography—would concern itself with the relations between humans and the environment in the territory extending south of Panama. Bowman’s volume on South America was part of Rand McNally’s series Lands and Peoples, which included other “geography readers” on Asia, Europe, and Africa.
The work of the YPE opened up for research questions about Inca history and culture. But the YPE was hardly the definitive blueprint for the archaeology of Andean South America. Other U.S. archaeologists did a better job in drawing the contours of this regional science, calling attention to important pre-Inca cultures such as the Chimu, Nazca, Chavin, Tiahuanaco, and Diaguitas, among others. Philip A. Means’s *Ancient Civilizations of the Andes* (1931) was perhaps the compendium work that helped to establish “Andean archaeology” as a disciplinary subfield. Nevertheless, the publicity that the discovery of Machu Picchu and the launching of the YPE attracted set the precedent for further academic adventures in the Andean region.

To generate interest in a new field, scholars usually presented the area as an unexplored territory, empty of knowledge. In 1932, in a proposal for the study of the Caribbean region, Clarence H. Haring described Latin America as a “terra incognita” of scientific knowledge: “Latin America is from the scientific standpoint, and especially in the Social Sciences, still a virtually unexplored territory. South of the Rio Grande these disciplines, and above all the science of political economy, are still in an embryonic stage. There is little adequate instruction and virtually no research.” The backwardness extended not only to the new social sciences, economics and sociology, but also to the more traditional disciplines of law and history. The challenge was, then, to extend U.S. research efforts into these uncharted lands. This entailed a further specialization within university departments. In history departments, for instance, Latin American experts had to persuade their colleagues of the importance of the new field in relation to the existing concentration in European and U.S. history.

Demands for greater emphasis in under-researched areas often led scholars and universities to extend existing fields. This was the case of Brazilian history in relation to Hispanic American history. When in 1933 William Shepherd asked his colleagues at Columbia University to expand the study of Brazilian history, he deployed a battery of arguments. Among these were the lack of comprehensive treatises on the subject, the availability of documentary sources in U.S. libraries, and the growing economic importance of Brazil, a country then in the midst of industrialization.

Adding Latin American courses to the curricula of colleges and universities was a crucial part of constructing subdisciplinary fields of regional knowledge. In December 1926 the Hispanic American History Group gathered at Rochester to discuss ways to encourage the interest of students in their particular branch of history. Much of the discussion pivoted on the question of where to locate the new subject within the existing history curricula. Some
suggested teaching Hispanic American history in the “foreign affairs” section of regular U.S. history courses. Others thought it more convenient to discuss the Spanish and Portuguese empires within courses on the expansion of Europe. A third proposal was to open up new courses on the comparative history of the Americas.  

These scholarly interventions illustrate the complex process of construing a regional discipline and its relationship to existing fields. Some of these interventions built the infrastructure of new disciplines devoted to regional study, among them Andean archaeology, South American geography, and Hispanic American history. Others transformed the discussion within established disciplines, as in political science and sociology. To most U.S. observers, the political and social condition of the peoples of the southern republics did not constitute an autonomous field of inquiry. In spite of this, scholars built an area of interest around crucial questions of politics and government. In sociology departments, experts kept talking of “social problems” in the region, often relating them to economic and political problems, instead of hatching a new subdiscipline called “South American sociology.”  

Scholarship and Foreign Policy

U.S. scholars usually presented their knowledge-seeking adventures in South America as beneficial to the “mutual understanding” of the two Americas. This lofty ideal was in tune with the rhetoric of foreign-policy makers, particularly those who promoted the cause of U.S. Pan-Americanism. During the 1920s and 1930s, many authors published works about South America as contributions to the better understanding with the “southern neighbors.” For example, in the introduction to William Spence Robertson’s *Hispanic-American Relations with the United States* (1923), the economist David Kinley wrote,

> Among the things desired by all patriotic Americans, north or south, are a better acquaintance with one another and more intimate relations. Our people need to be better acquainted with our neighbors in Central and South America and they with us. This is desirable not only for reasons of mutual economic benefit, but in the interest of international peace, in the interest of the influence of the American continent on world affairs, and in the interest of securing that advantage which comes from the reaction of the culture of one people on another. (Robertson 1923, iii)  

Kinley and others expected that better knowledge would help the United States influence Latin Americans and their markets. Crucial to this rhetoric was the
idea that the average U.S. American would somehow familiarize herself with South American ways of life and problems. But in time scholarly publications distanced themselves from such business rhetoric, claiming to be in pursuit of truths that were more permanent, objective, and reliable.

After the Second World War, Leo S. Rowe, the director of the Pan-American Union (PAU), came to be persuaded that extensive intellectual cooperation was the only path to an enduring mutuality of sentiments and interests between the United States and Latin America. An important policy in his plan was the exchange of students and professors. By bringing Latin American students to U.S. universities, the policy would expose them to the “American-way-of-life.” Rowe also emphasized the importance of creating interest among U.S. scholars about Latin America.

It is also important that students and investigators in the U.S. should more fully realize the opportunities for study and research in Latin America. The countries to the south of us afford great opportunities for scientific inquiry to students from the U.S. and the prosecution of such inquiries tend to strengthen the intellectual currents between the northern and southern sections of the hemisphere. (Rowe 1927b)

To the director of the PAU, academic research had a political potential. Taking over Latin America as a field of study facilitated the policy of inter-American cooperation.

Geopolitical forces influenced the development of regional knowledge. At the time of the First World War, scholars had mobilized in response to anti-American propaganda, seeking to interpret the “Latin American mind” (Perry 1920). In the 1930s several universities cooperated with promoters of Pan-Americanism, establishing institutes, centers, and programs devoted to Latin American studies. Harvard University founded a center for the study of Latin American economies and also a council for translating the best literature from Latin America (Doyle 1936). The University of California, Berkeley, made important efforts to institutionalize Latin American studies (LAS), as did universities such as Texas, Duke, Columbia, and Wisconsin. It is difficult to disentangle the establishment and funding of these LAS programs from the imperatives of U.S. foreign policy. For example, when Julian Steward (1943), the chief of the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology, tried to define the direction that “ac-culturation studies” were taking, he recognized that U.S. government “action programs” had initiated and sponsored much of the new work of U.S. anthropologists in Latin America since the Second World War. Similarly, when the British geographer J. A. Steers tried to entice his colleagues to enter the study of Latin American affairs, he was most impressed by the potential for the study of Latin American matters as a field of study.
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of Brazil’s geography, he could only point out the success of the American Geographic Society and the U.S. government in spreading U.S. influence among South American geographers (Steers 1957, 330). Some scholars, threatened by government-supported research, sought to establish a balance between scientific and political objectives.52

The creation of specialized fields of regional knowledge, though stimulated by the government and assisted by the generosity of private foundations, was by and large carried out by scholars. This complex work included inviting scholars to join in the study of the region, promoting interest among students, discussing the state of the field and discerning its most important questions, identifying funds for research, organizing conferences, launching specialized journals, and interlinking the activities of the government, businesses, and scholars in the region. Moreover, though, scholars working on the field did more than merely forge “intellectual bonds” with the South American intelligentsia; they delimited the internal divisions of what constituted the hinterlands of the United States in the former Spanish colonies. By the early 1960s, three areas were clearly established: Mexico and Central America; the Andean or Bolivarian nations; and southern South America.53

**Placing South American Knowledge in Context**

There was a complementarity between the new knowledge formations and the export of financial and physical capital to South America, and to understand these new scholarly interventions and knowledge projects, one needs to place these individual and institutional initiatives within the context of certain expansionist forces. What forces generated such complementarity? Four of these expansive forces are noteworthy: the rise of professionalism in the U.S. academy; the spread of progressive ideas; the consolidation of the research university; and the expansion of U.S. financial and commercial capital into the territory of South America.

First, the expansion of U.S. disciplinary knowledge to the South American borderlands appears as an overflow of energies emanating from growing research universities as they attempted to outdo their European models. Clearly, this period coincides with revolutionary transformations in U.S. universities, a process that produced the departmental division of knowledge, the expansion of research-dedicated faculty, the creation of graduate programs, and the intensified use of labs, museums, and libraries in the provision of university instruction. Though envisioned by a few pioneers, the “university movement” produced tangible
results only because sufficient funds, provided by businessmen and foundations, were available to acquire the needed human and physical capital.  

Second, this was the period of the progressive movement, an intellectual and policy-oriented conjuncture that expressed a new confidence in the powers of expert knowledge for the resolution of social, institutional, and economic problems. In particular, scholars and professionals began to openly support organized labor, black education, the women's movement, and other social reforms. They fostered active government policies to control Big Business. To an extent, the progressive movement reshaped the nature of U.S. democracy and government or, at least, promoted a kind of professional-civic involvement hitherto unknown. Thus, U.S. scholars carried to South America many of the concerns of the progressive agenda and measured the achievements of the southern republics on the basis of this standard.

Third, this period coincided with the emergence of professional associations that affirmed the prestige of specialized knowledge as a new force claiming for greater participation and influence in the formulation of government policy. In the terrain of the social sciences and the humanities, the Progressive Era generated a proliferation of new associations that defended the autonomy of expert knowledge, among them the American Historical Association (1884), the National Geographic Society (1888), the American Academy of Political and Social Science (1889), the American Sociological Association (1905), and the Society for American Archaeology (1934), among others. These scholarly associations promoted the extension of research into the United States's new areas of influence. Their publications brought to readers the new knowledge about Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.

A successful institutional development (the research university), an ideological mind-set (progressive ideas), and the consolidation of an ideal social status (the middle-class professional) combined to generate the autonomy of thought, the prestige associated with academic positions, as well as the responsibility for public service that facilitated the expansion of departments, fields of study, and academic subdisciplines. But the extension of disciplinary knowledge to other areas of the world cannot be explained by these expansive forces alone. Underneath the efforts to better understand “South Americans” were the expansionist drive of U.S. technology and capitalist enterprise. This constituted the fourth most important force of expansion southward.

This was the time in which American corporations ventured into South America, after gaining experience in Mexico and Canada. In the late nineteenth century, U.S. entrepreneurs had conquered the tropics, building in Central
America an emporium of trade based on the production and commercialization of bananas. Also during this time, U.S. firms competed with their British and Chilean counterparts for the control of nitrate fields, later entering into the mining of copper for export. Yet interest in and exploration of petroleum deposits in Mexico, Venezuela, and Peru was a phenomenon of the twentieth century, as was the investment of Chicago meat-packing plants in Argentina and Uruguay. If Secretary Root’s visit to South America in 1906 stimulated the search for closer cultural relations and a better understanding of the southern republics, it was the First World War and its disastrous effects on European–South American trade that provided the impetus and the opportunity for an expanded economic and financial engagement in the region. Complaints about the lack of U.S. shipping lines to South America or about the lack of U.S. bank branches in the region subsided in the 1920s, as American businessmen invested in these and other sectors of activity. In the first two decades of the twentieth century U.S. companies renewed their efforts to increase the productivity of sugar ingenios in Cuba, built electric tramways in Rio de Janeiro, and developed new oil fields in Colombia and Peru.59

The impulses to seek sources of raw materials and new markets in South America, and to invest in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing varied according to time. In the 1870s and 1890s Southern manufacturers in particular expected the opening of South American markets to provide a solution to their problems of overproduction. During the Mexican Revolution, many American investors suffered wartime destruction of property, while others complained that the different factions of the revolutionary government imposed on them excessive taxation. These investors and entrepreneurs were willing to move their capital elsewhere in the continent, particular after the enactment of the 1917 constitution in Mexico, which declared the subsoil to be the inalienable property of the nation. However, much before this happened, the Guggenheims were investing in Chilean copper mining, Swift and Armour moved their meat-packing activities to Argentina and Uruguay, and the National City Bank of New York started to establish branches in the most important capitals of South America. The availability of natural resources, the potential for high profits in relatively undeveloped markets, and technological superiority must have stimulated the expansion of U.S. business activities in South America. Though these investments were carried out on the bases of minimal information about the destination countries, the difficulties encountered soon made U.S. investors aware of the need to better understand the culture and sociability of the southern republics.
As it is often the case, it was a combination of circumstances that made for the emergence of specialized fields of knowledge about Latin America in the United States. Among them the expansionist forces of U.S. American capital and technology, the emergence of the research university, the rise of professionals, and the spread of the progressive movement. Still, the enthusiasm and dedication with which U.S. scholars undertook the building of the new fields of regional knowledge indicates certain personal involvement that cannot be reduced to contextual circumstances or underlying factors. Moreover, the extension of scholarly interest from a specific and local research question into problems of international relations demands a study of particular intellectual trajectories and academic interests. The debates over the U.S. role in the international arena, its “responsibility” to the Caribbean and Central American nations, and the pertinence of the Monroe Doctrine to South America were issues that naturally could have been taken on by international relations experts. But, in actuality, these issues were taken on by scholars working in a variety of fields, from archaeology to literary studies, from economics to political science.

During this period, the scope of certain disciplines extended to include South America. This expansion was related to previous available knowledge, the ways scholars envisioned the new study fields, the methods of observation employed, and the generalizations derived from them. Knowledge-generating activities can only be studied in their located materiality. New knowledge about geography in the Central Andes, federalist government in Argentina, Inca culture, racial oppression in Peru, and the effectiveness of the Spanish commercial monopoly emerged from the interaction between U.S. scholars and local informants, on the occasion of field trips or participation in academic conferences. Local circumstances were quite important for the development of knowledge projects of transnational scope. That is, particular circumstances shaped by the local context influenced the way the evidence was constructed, as well as the set of problems that were considered crucial for each research program.

Latin American Studies

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, an important accumulation and processing of information and knowledge took place within research universities and learning societies in the United States. This accumulation delineated the contours and content of U.S. scientific interest in the subcontinent. Scholarly discussions in U.S. journals about the human, economic,
and cultural potential of the Southern Andes, of Chile and Argentina, and of the Amazon and Patagonia were developed into “problems” and “interests” well before Fidel Castro and Che Guevara appeared in scene. Though the Cold War in general, and the Cuban Revolution in particular, gave a great impulse to the extension of Latin American studies in the United States, the basic structure of this multidisciplinary knowledge arrangement was already in place by the early 1940s.

In fact, the interwar period witnessed an enormous advance in setting the foundations for the study of Latin America. The central themes and programs of the discipline had already coalesced by the 1930s. In 1937 Clarence H. Haring spoke before Latin American historians about the need for a comparative history of the Americas. At the time, he said, there were 160 colleges and universities in the United States teaching the history of Hispanic America. Haring’s estimate was conservative: ten years earlier, a survey by the PAU had established that there were 175 colleges and institutions teaching courses on Latin American history in the United States.61 The accumulation of this teaching and research capital accelerated during the Second World War, and the U.S. government stepped up the exchange of professors and students with South America as well as U.S. programs in Latin American studies. By the end of the war, the United States had built a substantial and integrated knowledge about South America. Libraries at universities such as Harvard, Yale, Texas, Michigan, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Duke, and Chicago and the Library of Congress and other public institutions had amassed impressive collections on Latinoamericana.62 Large foundations offered subsidies for travel and study in the region. Great bibliographic enterprises were underway, the most important of which was the Handbook of Latin American Studies.

In 1947, Miron Burgin, editor of the Handbook of Latin American Studies, published a list of universities and colleges teaching subjects on Latin America in the United States. He estimated that 600 colleges and universities and over 2,000 teachers were involved in this type of undergraduate instruction. In 1948–1949 the PAU studied the curricula of 1,500 institutions of higher learning, finding that 875 of them offered 3,346 courses dealing with Latin America (Delpar 2008, 120–31). Clearly, the intellectual capital accumulated in Latin American studies was not small or negligible. The idea that it might be is one of the myths that I attempt to undo: the idea that, before the Cuban Revolution, Latin American studies was a neglected field of inquiry, sustained by a small community of experts, relatively autonomous from the State Department, suffering from a perennial lack of funds. This was not the case.

In the fields of history, geography, and archaeology, scholars and universities took significant steps to develop a regional comprehensive knowledge. Studies
in government and sociology lagged, but interest was growing. Ambitious bibliographical projects had reached maturity, and as a consequence, a researcher working in a leading U.S. university could acquire a comprehensive vision of the main research problems related to Latin America. After the war, funding declined for a while as other areas required priority (Korea, Japan, and Russia). But Latin American studies maintained a strong presence in U.S. universities. In 1956 Haring visited Puerto Rico to address a round table on the question of intellectual cooperation in the Americas. He noted that the average U.S. American was still quite ignorant about Latin America, but that area specialists had done much to gain knowledge about the region.

Most of our colleges and universities offer courses in the history of the Latin American republics. Some universities have professorial chairs devoted solely to that subject. Courses of a more general descriptive sort on Latin America also appear in many of our secondary schools, especially on the Pacific coast which has a Spanish heritage of its own. The literature of the Latin American countries is likewise studied and taught in most departments of Romance languages. . . . The geography, anthropology, and archaeology of the Latin areas of America are also represented on our faculties by distinguished specialists. In some of our universities so-called Institutes have been organized which offer special programs in Latin American civilization and culture, including history, literature, law, anthropology, economics, sociology, and leading to the bachelor’s or higher degrees. Several North American learned journals devote their pages solely to the history and literature of Latin America. Latin American studies was consolidated in U.S. universities and learned societies, and by the time of the Cuban Revolution, it was already prestigious and long-standing. It had established a series of characterizations, problems, and peculiarities to define the region, constituting the armature of a large scholarly enterprise. When John J. Johnson surveyed the state of Latin American studies in 1960, he found the field to be a complex teaching and research apparatus already immersed in the practice and identity of research universities in the United States. It was part of the consensus that courses on Spanish and Hispanic American history and literature were part of the “liberal education” that colleges provided. The field had clearly evolved from an intellectual curiosity of the few to an educational force teaching thousands annually.
Conclusion

From the time Secretary Root visited South America, in 1906, the State Department had been courting the South American intelligentsia through educational exchanges. It is not surprising that Ambassador Long would try to set up an American college in Quito and present Ecuador as a field ripe for U.S. research in the social sciences and the humanities. Like many of his contemporaries, Ambassador Long believed that the expansion of U.S. influence in Latin America hinged on the development of specialized regional knowledge. Only the study of the different countries and subregions of Latin America would provide a comprehensive understanding of the subcontinent’s problems and their causes. This comprehensive view would enable statesmen and scholars to rearticulate the idea and project of the Western Hemisphere. Under Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy, the United States had set up education, technical assistance, and scholarly exchanges in South America. By extension, supremacy in science and education came to be considered central to the exertion of hemispheric influence.

To an extent, the idea of a “soft empire,” energized by exchanges in the areas of culture and higher learning, was predicated on the relative failure of early Pan-Americanism (the economic type promoted by Secretary Blaine). A “loose union” of republics without a unity of purpose, the pau had failed to realize the expectations the United States held for the region at the end of the nineteenth century. The Panama Canal did not, after all, open immense commercial possibilities on the western coast of South America. And it was clear that the cooperation of leading countries in the region—such as Argentina and Chile—was never reliable. Yet the potential harvest of new knowledge continued to inspire scholars to engage with the region.

Local embassy officials learned to deal with U.S. researchers. As Lewis Hanke recalled later, it was unusual in the 1930s for U.S. embassies in the region to be visited by U.S. university professors; ambassadors were unprepared to deal with scholars’ requests. Writing in the mid-1960s Hanke stated, “Such days are definitely over, and the academic presence of the United States in most Latin American countries today is an important and even pervasive force” (1967, 48). It is possible to infer from this anecdotal evidence that the gradual occupation of the field by scores of U.S. scholars—archaeologists, ethnographers, geographers, geologists, economists, historians, and others—had by the 1940s transformed a curious intrusion into a normal activity.

Foreign-policy and disciplinary concerns had converged, so that U.S. scholars felt entrusted with a mission to survey and understand Hispanic Ameri-
can civilization. New trade and investment opportunities had opened in South America starting in the 1890s, which the United States translated in the early 1900s into a policy of rapprochement toward the southern republics. U.S. foreign-policy gestures—such as Secretary Root’s visit to South America in 1906, or the presence of the United States at the Pan-American Scientific Congress in 1908—motivated scholars to immerse themselves in research on the subcontinent to an extent unknown before. While “rediscovering” South America through closer observation and disciplinary methods, they thought to contribute to the understanding of the new position of the United States in the world. Gradually, their scholarly visits rendered visible and legible a region that had remained a “vacuum of knowledge” until 1900.68