Disciplinary Conquest
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Published by Duke University Press

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

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If Pan-Americanism has any real meaning it must lead us to co-operate with our neigh-
bors, not only in repelling aggression, but in assisting them wherever our experience
can be of value. The service will be reciprocal; for there is much of Latin-American
civilization by which we can profit. We have entered upon the era of good feeling with
South America. —LEO S. ROWE, “The Awakening of Bolivia” (1907)

The political scientist Leo S. Rowe was undoubtedly a primary architect of the
system of inter-American cooperation.¹ In addition to being among the first
Latin American experts hired by the State Department (1919–1920), Rowe was in
1920 appointed director of the Pan-American Union (PAU), a Washington-based
agency that gathered information and formulated policies for Latin America,
where he remained for twenty-six years. During this period, he participated in
the transformation of U.S. foreign relations from Dollar Diplomacy to the Good
Neighbor Policy. In this chapter I investigate the interconnectedness between
academic knowledge and foreign-policy principles in his writings. In particular,
I am interested in the construction and transformation of Rowe’s foreign-policy
principles in relation to changes in his perception and thought on Latin America
generated by the displacement from formal to informal empire.
Before coming to the State Department and the **PAU**, Rowe had pursued graduate studies in Europe, then built a reputation as expert in international law and theory of municipal government. He was appointed professor at the University of Pennsylvania in 1894. In 1900 President William McKinley appointed him as member of the commission entrusted with the revision of the laws of Puerto Rico, and in 1913 he served on the Land Claims Commission in Panama. From 1902 to 1930, he presided over the American Academy of Political and Social Science. He was thus in a privileged position to observe the unfolding of the U.S. empire.

Rowe’s intellectual trajectory can be summarized as follows. In his graduate studies in Germany, France, and Britain (1890–1894), he developed an interest in municipal government and finance. His book *Problems of City Government* (1908) addressed the great gap separating inherited political ideas from the conditions of life in modern U.S. and European cities. By 1900–1903, his experience in colonial administration led him to question U.S. governance in the Spanish Caribbean. He condensed these reflections in his book *The United States and Porto Rico* (1904). Then, circa 1906–1909, Rowe interacted with intellectuals of the Southern Cone, an experience that changed his view of inter-American relations. In a series of articles about “South American progress,” he communicated the news of the southern republics’ economic bonanza and political stability. After the First World War, he promoted “intellectual cooperation” as the most effective way to build U.S. hegemony in Latin America. From its inception, the idea of intellectual cooperation was related to the spectacle of progress in the Southern Cone. It was rapid economic growth and institutional stability that made the region comparable to the United States and sustained the hope of a hemispheric brotherhood of scholars.

By 1914, he was challenging President Wilson’s doctrine of nonrecognition, taking a multilateral view of the Monroe Doctrine, and promoting the cause of “neutral rights” in South America. In his 1914 lectures at the University of La Plata, Rowe attempted to communicate the problems of modern society and government in the United States to the Argentine intelligentsia. His observations on Argentina’s government institutions were later condensed in *The Federal System of the Argentine Republic* (1921), where he criticized “presidentialism,” the domination of the executive over the other branches of government, and Porteño centralism, the domination of the capital city over the interior provinces. After this, he used foreign-policy papers and addresses to convey the ideas and policies central to what he called “constructive Pan-Americanism,” an approach to hemispheric integration that privileged mutual

**Intellectual Cooperation**
understanding through intellectual and cultural cooperation over economic and defense objectives.  

Along Rowe’s intellectual trajectory we find the construction of two guiding principles: the principle of “education in self-rule” to be applied to the Circum-Caribbean protectorates; and the principle of “intellectual cooperation” to be used in relation to South America. While the former principle emerged from Rowe’s experience as a colonial administrator in Puerto Rico, the latter was a by-product of his immersion in the academic circles of South America during 1906–1914. Rowe’s reflections on the Caribbean dependencies influenced his views about the ABC countries (Argentina, Brazil, and Chile), leaving him with a comprehensive and differentiated view of Latin America. Thus, foreign-policy principles appear as the sedimentation of a long intellectual and policy trajectories. I call this composite result or synthesis “situated regional knowledge,” a term that encapsulates the combination of certainties and passions that orient the scholar-administrator’s views and policies to a given area of influence. Situated regional knowledge emerges out of the interaction of personal experience, geopolitical conjunctures, and academic concerns. This synthesis partakes of the attributes of “imperial knowledge,” including comprehensive visibility and extranational sovereignty.

Rowe’s discussions of “insular” government and sovereignty in Puerto Rico and the Philippines spoke to a more general issue in U.S. government: the “elasticity” and adaptability of democratic ideas and institutions in colonial situations. When Rowe dealt with the question of Puerto Rico, he derived consequences for the whole set of U.S. interventions in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Similarly, his study of Argentine federalism contributed to a more general debate about the institutional parallels between the United States and the southern republics. This study took as given the national sovereignty, economic progress, and political stability attained by Argentina by 1914; the country did not seem to require education in self-rule. In the Southern Cone, Rowe discovered an illustrious elite willing to entertain a debate about European vs. U.S. models of progress and modernity.

Rowe’s program of intellectual cooperation was his major contribution to the field of inter-American relations. His insights in this matter show a process of selection that corresponds with knowledge production in imperial contexts: out of a set of intellectual concerns, a scholar-statesman selects a subset of hardcore beliefs and principles that define the interests and ideals of his nation-state. Rowe’s belief in the politics of scholarly brotherhood had a long-lasting influence in inter-American relations—more so than his contributions
to understanding Argentine federalism, the problems of city government, or the transfer of colonial government.

*Lessons in Imperial Governance*

Rowe first engaged with Latin American institutions and culture in the context of formal empire, while participating in U.S. colonial administration in Puerto Rico and Panama. He considered the annexations and protectorates an opportunity to study the transfer of U.S. government overseas. He was particularly interested in the constitutional implications of the transition from military to civil rule in the new possessions. Most of his writings between 1900 and 1904 aimed to show that the U.S. empire was sustained by a legal-constitutional structure and that, in the end, the U.S. occupations could bring the dependencies closer to U.S. ideals of government. His book *The United States and Porto Rico* (1904), together with a group of articles published during the years 1900–1903, could be read as a treatise on colonial governance. In these writings Rowe asserted that U.S. military occupations always gave way to provisional civil governments, which in turn could lead to self-government. To this extent, the U.S. empire was different from other imperial ventures, for U.S. protectorates enjoyed U.S. constitutional guarantees.

The political process of intervention, annexation, and ordering of the new territories followed a predictable path. At first, military rulers seemed to operate with absolute power. Then the president, with the support of Congress, appointed civil governors and gave them instructions to manage the affairs of the colony. In a third moment, a local government, commonly composed of a bicameral congress, a judicial system, and municipal authorities, was established. After this, the protectorate could administer its own affairs, under the limitations contained in the annexation treaty. In Rowe’s view, at each step of this transition there were constitutional provisions and jurisprudence that limited the authority of colonial administrators.

Rowe was a progressive imperialist who believed in the superiority of U.S. institutions of government. For him, it was self-evident that the U.S. constitutional government was a perfected political system, one that should be transferred to the newly acquired territories. Rowe presented the U.S. empire as a progressive force in the Caribbean. Given the proper instruction and enough time, the inhabitants of the new protectorates would learn to enjoy the advantages of U.S. constitutional government. Though he expressed concerns about the “preparedness” of Caribbean peoples to embrace U.S. institutions, he expected that
the transfer of U.S. law and government would be beneficial to Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Filipinos.

To him the U.S. constitutional government was a flexible, adaptable system that could incorporate within itself other modalities of rule and political traditions. In a way, the legal empire he imagined was a malleable system of rules of governance designed to bring order and civility to Caribbean and Pacific peripheries. The bastion of imperial governance was the U.S. Constitution, a system of ideas embodied in institutions believed to be “perfect” for the attainment of “universal goods.” Like other constitutional experts, Rowe seemed unaware of the provincialism of this position or of the historical and cultural embeddedness of “American government.”

His experience in Puerto Rico in 1900–1901 influenced his views on empire. President McKinley gave him the unique opportunity of revising the laws of a recently acquired colony. While the other members of the commission charged with revising the laws of Puerto Rico dealt with criminal and civil laws, Rowe was entrusted with ordering existing legislation concerning urban affairs. Later he was given the task of writing the island’s political code, designing the basic instruments of government: the limitations of the executive, the composition of the chambers, and the attributions of different judicial authorities. In addition, he helped to organize the electoral regime and the municipal system.

The legal transition from military to civil rule was a clear, unambiguous process. First, the occupation government acted under a state of war, its actions justified under the principle of “exigency.” As soon as war ceased, military authorities had to protect the basic rights of local inhabitants, including personal, property, and religious rights. But during the transfer of government to local authorities, it was not clear what laws regulated the transition or whether the new authorities were bounded by U.S. constitutional principles. When Puerto Rico became a legal possession of the United States, the issue of constitutional supremacy came into question.

During Rowe’s service in Puerto Rico, the Supreme Court issued new decisions affecting the status of the island (known as the “insular cases”). Rowe examined these decisions to reflect on the constitutional and legal status of the new U.S. empire. The decisions contained a great deal of confusion and ambiguity. The Downes v. Bidwells decision, in particular, brought about a problematic “in-betweenness” eroding all constitutional certainties. According to the Downes ruling, Puerto Rico was “domestic in an international sense” and “foreign in a domestic sense.” On only one point were all judges in agreement: they rejected the automatic incorporation of new possessions into the
union. Congress retained the prerogative to accept or reject a new state. If this was so, the president had a free hand in dealing with the colonies during the transition. No constitutional restrictions prevented U.S. colonial authorities from establishing governments that temporarily departed from the “American system of government.” Rowe justified the “free hand” to experiment with hybrid forms of governments by pointing to the cultural differences between Hispanic America and the United States (in race, customs, religion, and modes of thought).

In a subsequent article, Rowe argued that the transfer of Puerto Rico’s sovereignty from Spain to the United States had imposed limitations on government and extended the protection of civil and individual rights. After the transfer of sovereignty was ratified by Congress, the “provisional civil authority” had to establish order, provide public health, and administer the internal affairs of the territory. Though freed from congressional oversight, the provisional government had to respect existing laws regulating property rights and could not innovate in matters of freedom of the press (Leo S. Rowe 1902c). Hence, Rowe argued, imperial expansionism was compatible with the reestablishment of the rule of law.

To Rowe, the Philippines case added a new dimension to the problem of insular government: an insurrectionary movement that prolonged military rule (Leo S. Rowe 1902a). But this altered neither the process of transition, nor the idea of a government bounded by constitutional provisions. The Philippines also underwent the three-stage process described by Rowe. To prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a military governor, President McKinley appointed a commission entrusted with legislative powers and with the mandate to reorganize the judiciary. The commission enacted new laws that reorganized provincial and municipal governments and placed “natives” in charge of those positions (Leo S. Rowe 1902a). Soon after, the principle of separation of powers was restored.

From his experience in Puerto Rico, Rowe derived a few basic lessons about governance and culture (Leo S. Rowe 1904). First, the Spanish legal system was adaptable to the new conditions of U.S. rule. Second, the localism inherited from Spanish rule (under which city councils enjoyed considerable autonomy) provided a good basis for the establishment of a modern municipal government. Granting elections at the local level entailed little political risk, as long as U.S. authorities controlled the central government. But Hispanic political culture—and this was the third lesson—presented an important hurdle in the transition to self-government. Local politicians took politics too seriously, turning party disputes into family feuds and occasionally generating outbursts.
of political violence. From this, Rowe concluded that “Spanish-American values” were not particularly suited to democratic, republican government. The adaptability of “American government” was also successfully tested in the Philippine experiment. Rowe associated the success of municipal and provincial reform in the islands to the commission’s decision to retain some features of the Spanish colonial administration. The U.S. intervention government preserved control of the municipality of Manila as well as the power of police and sanitation in the islands. After the census was taken, Filipinos were allowed to hold elections for the national assembly, while the commission itself nominated the Philippine senate. The experience of Puerto Rico helped Rowe understand the Philippine transition. In both cases the Spanish colonial legacy presented an important “cultural” obstacle in the transfer of U.S. models of government. In the Philippines “paternal ideas about government” prevailed among local politicians. Rather than being devoted to the common good and the progress of the community, governments were captive to private passions and interests (Leo S. Rowe 1902d, 322). The establishment of civil government had to bring the new territories closer to “American standards of liberty” (Leo S. Rowe 1902c, 472). The U.S. interventions in the Caribbean had highlighted the difficulties of governing overseas territories and, at the same time, delineated more clearly the mission of the benevolent empire. The U.S. empire had to teach “natives” the basic notions of constitutional government so that they could achieve self-rule (Leo S. Rowe 1902b, 261). This peculiar notion of empire burdened the United States with a pedagogic responsibility.

In Rowe’s view nothing short of full Americanization in the art and theory of government should satisfy U.S. colonial governors, experts, and statesmen. U.S. interventions had to “make Americans of the Porto Ricans.” This meant two things: the transfer of laws governing the states of the union; and the introduction of “American standards of political liberty and self-government” (Leo S. Rowe 1902b, 261). The flexibility of the U.S. constitutional system could facilitate the legal transfer. The Constitution allowed transition governments to function on the basis of legal hybrids. But the empire’s pedagogical imperative required more: it demanded a transformation of local political culture. Puerto Ricans, for instance, adhered to quite different notions of family relations, state authority, and religious liberty. Their “cultural foreignness” represented a monumental obstacle to overcome.

U.S. interventions in the Caribbean had tested the adaptability of U.S. government and had created new knowledge about how to administer foreign possessions. Rowe’s experience in Puerto Rico had given him some important lessons, including “the necessity of a greater elasticity of ideas, a broader sym-
pathy, and a readiness, or at least the willingness to understand the point of view of a people whose training, traditions and system of law are essentially different from our own” (ibid., 262). Rowe’s empathy toward local cultures prefigured his future position on inter-American relations. The resolution of the problem of self-government required a better understanding of Hispanic American history and culture—a form of Latin American studies.

Imperial governance, in short, demanded new attitudes from U.S. statesmen, experts, and officials, specifically “the ability to appreciate the value of alien institutions which fulfill the same ends of justice as our own” and the determination to educate the peoples of the new dependencies into “the free and willing acceptance of our system of law and government” (ibid.). The full “Americanization” of the political culture of colonial peoples presented new challenges to knowledge-producers. Scholars had to better understand the history, culture, and institutions of insular possessions. To manage a modern empire, the adaptability of policy to local conditions and legal cultures was crucial. Consequently, it was desirable that insular governments retain the discretionary power to transfer U.S. ideas and institutions (Leo S. Rowe 1902a, 323).

*South American Progress*

Rowe was one of the pioneers in reporting South America’s progress. The impression produced by the region’s modern cities, ambitious educational projects, and progressive governments led him to reconsider the place of “South America” in the hemisphere and subsequently to imagine a different mode of imperial engagement. The novelties he “discovered” (political stability, economic progress, and urban renovation) were the bases on which he later grounded his argument about intellectual cooperation.

Rowe first traveled to Argentina in 1906, after the Rio Pan-American conference came to an end. Before reaching the cities of Buenos Aires and La Plata, he visited Entre Ríos and Santa Fe, areas of farmers’ colonies, small-scale property, and active community engagement in municipal government. He spoke with provincial authorities, saw the city councils at work, visited local newspapers, and attended a producer’s exhibit at Concordia. Avidly, he sought information on municipal government and finance, roads and railroads, agrarian production, public health, and other subjects relating to the region’s recent progress. He was pleasantly surprised by what he heard. The littoral colonies showed both wealth and good administration.15

In La Plata Rowe entered into contact with the outstanding talents of the conservative-liberal elite, among them Joaquin V. González, the recently
appointed rector of the university, and Rodolfo Rivarola, the dean of the law school. He took residence in the university college (“internado”), where he mingled with students of veterinary medicine and law. Accepting an honorary doctorate, Rowe spoke of the great similarity between the United States and Argentina and of the irony of the rediscovery: “How is it possible,” he asked the audience, “that our countries had remained unknown to each other for so many years and that we have now to make a second travel of discovery of America?” Next he praised the new scientific spirit he found at the University of La Plata, an institution that cultivated research for practical ends. Encouraged by the similarity in progress between the United States and Argentina, he made a remarkable proposition. University men in the Americas could unite in the solution of common problems. In our universities, he said, is the basis for the construction of the “true unity of American culture.”

From June 1907 to February 1909, Rowe traveled through the main capitals of South America (Lima, Santiago, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires), carrying good news about U.S. willingness to intensify commercial and cultural relations with its southern neighbors. In an article published in the North American Review, Rowe (1907c) acknowledged that the southern republics had made great progress in terms of political stability. The impressive growth of its cities was the proof of its economic potential and progressive spirit. The region offered great market opportunities not yet fully exploited by U.S. manufacturers and merchants.

His speeches at the universities of Santiago and Lima in 1907 dealt with a novel and controversial issue: university reform. At the University of San Marcos (Lima), Rowe spoke of traditional universities as mere producers of academic degrees for the benefit of self-interested elites. It was time to prepare men willing to work for national progress and social welfare. At the National University of Chile (Santiago), Rowe spoke of the common ideals of “American” universities and of the need of university men to study democratic governance. The Americas were a great experimental field for democratic governance. Hence, its universities should pay special attention to democracy. Modern universities had to be practical and useful, adapting to the changing circumstances of economic and social life. Rowe advocated closer relations between students and professors, emphasis on practical and business education, and a campus atmosphere propitious to community solidarity.

This trip gave him the opportunity to observe closely the progress in urban renewal, municipal government, and education in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, and Chile. In 1908 he pondered the sanitary and educational improvement of São Paulo and other cities in southern Brazil (Leo S. Rowe 1908a). The coffee
capital had recently improved its water supply and drainage systems, built new hospitals, and established sanitary controls. These reforms made São Paulo “one of the healthiest cities on the American continent” (ibid., 509). Supported by export taxes on coffee, the state had developed and impressive educational system, with model normal and technical schools. Rio de Janeiro also had undergone extensive renovation. A progressive mayor had built a broad avenue along the coast and great public buildings were being erected (ibid.).

In the rapidly growing cities of southern Brazil, Rowe found confirmation of his views about democracy and urbanization. Strong urban improvement movements showed that democracy and civility had taken root at the local level. U.S. investors were collaborating with city governments in the creation of basic infrastructure and transportation services. By all appearances, “American ideals” had been planted in fertile ground. Even in Bolivia, there was a “new spirit of progress.” A U.S. syndicate was building a rail connection with Argentina, U.S. investments in mining were pouring in, and education was progressing at rapid pace. The Bolivian government’s interest in education provided an opening for inter-American cooperation (Leo S. Rowe 1907a).

The U.S. experience in teaching colonial peoples could be extended to Bolivia, a new frontier for U.S. capital, knowledge, and influence. Rowe drew on bodily metaphors to present the idea of benevolent empire from a different angle: the double impulse of U.S. capital and local leadership was awakening the energies of progress, dormant for centuries, in the South American periphery. If this progress had local roots—if Paulistas, Porteños, or Limeños demanded U.S. expertise and capital for engineering projects—then U.S. interventions appeared as responses to South American requests. From the “Bolivian awakening” Rowe derived a notion of Pan-Americanism based on the exportation of U.S. advice. U.S. Americans could teach Bolivians all they had learned about modern education. 19

Rowe’s tour was highly successful. Everywhere he went, he was feted as a celebrity and showered with honors. Various universities of the region granted him honorary degrees. He was received with banquets, his addresses were printed in the local newspapers, and local learned societies treated him as a guest of honor. Rowe was quite excited about the results of his trip. After a banquet offered by President José Pardo in Lima (September 1908), he told the press that he “felt as if under a delightful spell” and that the whole trip had been “like an entertainment of the Arabian Nights.” 20 Because he spoke in a familiar idiom of economic growth, social and moral improvement, and educational progress, South American elites treated Rowe as a friend.
Back in the United States, Rowe reported to President Theodore Roosevelt and disseminated the “good news” in addresses to universities, business associations, and scientific societies. The press interviewed him and printed his arguments under flashy headlines. He told the Public Ledger that South America was eager to imitate the U.S. educational system; to the Enquirer he reported that sentiments in South America were turning favorable to the United States; to the New York Sun he emphasized that U.S. Americans should “awaken” to the reality of the “marvelous social progress and economic development” attained by the southern republics. His unbounded optimism paralleled that of John Barrett, who at the time was advertising South America as “the land of opportunity.”

His second South American tour reinforced the impression he had reached earlier at Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires: Latin American statesmen and scholars would willingly form an inter-American “brotherhood of intellectuals.” As Roosevelt now wrote to Rowe, personal ties among elite, university men could generate the goodwill needed for inter-American cooperation. A continental community of scholars, united in the resolution of common problems, could achieve more than an army of diplomats. Implicit in this definition was a conception of scholarly research as instrumental to foreign policy. Rowe’s idea of a brotherhood of scholars appealed to South American scholars and politicians, for it seemed that, as Americanos, they were invited to the banquet of inter-American science. At stake was the possibility of lessening their intellectual dependence on Europe.


In April 1909, immediately after his return from his South American tour, Rowe published an essay in the North American Review that can be considered his first manifesto of inter-American cultural and intellectual cooperation. A response to European fear of the growing influence of U.S.-sponsored Pan-Americanism, the essay set the foundation of an enduring foreign-policy approach. The article called for a different approach to U.S.-South American relations, one centered on closer “moral and intellectual ties.” The basis of his notion of “constructive Pan-Americanism,” Rowe’s manifesto articulated three arguments: one about the dissonance between U.S. power and U.S. consciousness; another about the need to acknowledge “South American progress,” and a third about the ways to build an enduring inter-American system.

Its economic and military strength had elevated the United States to the condition of world power, yet its citizens continued to think in isolationist
terms, ignorant of the world around and unaware of their nation's interna-
tional responsibilities. U.S. provincialism was especially problematic with
regard to South America, a region whose recent progress was remarkable—
not only in material wealth but also in matters of education, sanitation, and
municipal government. The region seemed animated by a progressive spirit.
The “striking similarity” of political institutions and historical trajectories made
cooperation between the United States and South America a natural outcome
(Leo S. Rowe 1919).

At a time when John Barrett was promoting “practical Pan-Americanism,”
Rowe argued for “intellectual cooperation” as the main modality of hemi-
spheric hegemony. Efforts on the commercial front should be complemented
with a sustained policy of intellectual and cultural exchange. To illustrate his
point, Rowe contrasted the imperial policies of Great Britain and Germany.
While Britain dealt with Latin America mainly as a territory for commercial
and financial transactions, Germany saw the region as a field of study and influ-
ence by expertise. Germany presented a positive model to imitate, a deeper
mode of engagement that invested in regional knowledge. By contrast, the U.S.
failure to gain a prominent position in South American markets appeared as
a failure of knowledge. The inability to understand recent “South American
progress” placed the U.S. business community at a disadvantage in relation
to German merchants, for Germany had paved the road to business with
knowledge.

The United States, Rowe suggested, should follow the German path. It should
become an empire of knowledge and influence. Intellectual cooperation should
be at the center of its inter-American policy. If the United States wanted to
replace Britain as the main supplier of capital and goods of South America,
it had to become also the region’s mecca of knowledge. It should bring Latin
American students to her universities and send U.S. experts to the region. The
responsibility for hemispheric unity rested on the shoulders of researchers,
teachers, and university administrators. They had to teach students “a clearer
appreciation of the significance and content of the Spanish American civiliza-
tion” (Leo S. Rowe 1909, 593).

Rowe presented intellectual cooperation as crucial to the growth of Pan-
Americanism. A more intense flow of culture and ideas could elevate the unity
of the Americas to a higher plane. The United States should give priority to the
study of economic conditions, political organization, and literary achievements
of the people of Latin America. A clear appreciation of Spanish-American cul-
tural differences was essential to the formulation of an informed and effective
foreign policy.
Overcoming Latin American “distrust”—which Rowe considered a historically specific manifestation of anti-Americanism—was the key to hemispheric integration. What had caused this particular form of anti-Americanism? First, the United States had acted under the erroneous idea that South America was like Central America and the Caribbean: a land of revolutions and “turbulent conditions.” This misunderstanding short-circuited all efforts to establish enduring commercial relations with South America. Second was the questionable morality of U.S. merchants and manufacturers in South America; they did not respond to consumers’ complaints, disregarded contract conditions, and were dishonest in their catalog descriptions (Leo S. Rowe 1907c).

Latin American “distrust” was a problem both of business culture and of foreign policy. Dismantling it required greater efforts in communication and education. The U.S. public and the business community needed to be aware of the new realities of South America, where political stability, modern industry, and urban lifestyles were increasingly the norm. Latin Americans in turn had to be persuaded of the good intentions of the United States. Conceived as a problem of communication, the solution consisted in the United States understanding the “Latin American mind” and then choosing the proper speech. Rowe believed that scholarly cooperation and a more sensitive foreign policy could mitigate South Americans’ distrust. Deep-rooted prejudices and self-perceptions hindered understanding between North and South America: U.S. Americans’ sense of superiority regarding their political, social, and educational institutions, and their belief in the innate incapacity of “Latins” to build republican government (Leo S. Rowe 1907c). “South American progress” confronted U.S. Americans with the need to revise their sense of superiority and mission.

Rowe presented his formulation of intellectual cooperation at the Second Pan-American Scientific Congress in Washington (1915–1916). His program included the exchange of university students and professors, the dissemination of basic knowledge about Latin America among U.S. teachers, and the training of Latin American technical-school graduates in U.S. factories (Leo S. Rowe 1917b). In an earlier version, Rowe had presented this policy as a derivative of the old belief in “commerce doux,” according to which trade sweetens relations among trading partners, promotes knowledge among peoples, and contributes to international peace. The “unity of sentiments” among the Americas had to be based on “closer commercial and industrial relations” (Leo S. Rowe 1907c, 519). Later, Rowe revised this formulation, arguing that commercial and industrial integration was not enough. A deliberate policy of intellectual and cultural exchange was needed (Leo S. Rowe 1917b). Intellectual cooperation
was the mode of operation of modern empires. Through the training of foreign students and the exporting of expertise, modern empires could accumulate the prestige and knowledge crucial for peaceful interactions with their hinterlands.

“American Problems”: The Novelty of U.S. Democracy

In August 1914, as European countries were declaring war, Rowe delivered a series of lectures at the University of La Plata. Two of them, devoted to the state of democracy in the United States, were outstanding for their practicality and boldness. They presented a new perspective on democratic government and a narrative of U.S. institutional history informed by social struggles and the transformation of the public sphere. These talks addressed the contemporary problems of state regulation and governance in a mass democracy.

Rowe started his first lecture affirming that democracy was not just a form of government, but a whole system of social organization. The U.S. system of government had gradually evolved, adapting itself to new demands from society. The U.S. Founding Fathers had designed a quite restrictive form of government, limiting abusive government and protecting property and liberty. After the Civil War, public opinion became more pressing, shifting political ideas on the role of government. From the 1890s, the people pushed government to control the growing power of monopolies. Central to this revision was the need to redress the unequal distribution of income with active policies (progressive income and inheritance taxes, and labor protection laws) in order to perfect democracy.

As the transition from proprietary to corporate capitalism had put individual liberties in jeopardy, people demanded greater government intervention to level the field. Rowe’s argument sounded persuasive. He was saying that in the last two decades U.S. public opinion had changed the nature of U.S. government and put limits to business enterprise. A new force, “organized public opinion,” had made both capitalism and government move in the direction of greater regulation and social equality. As a result, contemporary U.S. democracy was quite different from that imagined by the Founding Fathers. This was a view of the United States that the Argentine audience did not expect: a different perspective on things, una verdadera novedad Americana.

In the second lecture, Rowe redefined the meaning of democracy. He told the audience that the expansion of the role of government was a direct result of demands that stemmed from modern life: economic regulation, conservation of natural resources, protection of female and child labor, control of big business, and so forth. Government itself was changing, with greater centralization
of decisions and stronger executives, both at the federal and municipal levels. These changes had radically altered the way people thought about “democracy.” U.S. democracy was now a system based on the rule of organized public opinion (Leo S. Rowe 1915, 30–32).

The Argentine audience must have been surprised. Here was a professor of a prestigious U.S. university saying that the U.S. political system was not what its constitution stated, that it was centralized and strongly interventionist. A true democratic government, said Rowe, was one that facilitated social and economic equality, not one that just protected individual rights to life and property. Here was a U.S. scholar unsuspected of socialist leanings telling his audience that modern democracies necessitated economic regulation, labor protection laws, and urban controls. Otherwise, the citizens would fall prey to “industrial tyranny.”

Rowe’s assessment of the state of U.S. democracy came at a decisive moment in Argentine political and social life. At the very beginning of the European War, Latin American “men of letters” were looking for other signposts, reconsidering with anxiety the problems created by “progress.” The Argentine centennial had built enthusiasm for economic progress, but also generated disappointment and frustration about mass immigration, the absence of national sentiment, and the strength of the anarchist movement. The electoral reform of 1912 foretold the end of oligarchic rule. Tensions in Europe had nearly stopped the flow of immigrants and had created economic uncertainty. Labor conflicts were on the rise, as inflation began to erode workers’ incomes.

Rowe’s eloquence added interest to the speech. He spoke a language the audience knew well: of history, of evolution, of ideas that readjusted to the economic and social environment. Rowe gave the “nuevos rumbos” (new paths or transformations) of U.S. democracy the certainty of an evolutionary law. Among his audience were positivists, socialists, and social Darwinists who could empathize with his preoccupations and predictions. The subject matter of the talk contained a supplementary attraction. Unlike other ambassadors of empire, Rowe spoke of the United States: of its problems of government, of its social and economic evolution, of the adaptation of its ideas. Though delivered in an assertive tone, the speech must have sounded like a confession, intimate and revealing.

The Pennsylvania professor presented a new perspective on democratic governance. Free elections were no longer the basis of democracies; now the press and the organizations of civic society were the true checks and balances that guaranteed freedom and equal opportunities. Neither functionaries’ virtue nor good administration emerged automatically from constitutions. Norms of
government conduct had to be imposed by public opinion. Mature democracies had to tolerate the concentration of political power in the hands of the executive. This enabled governments to challenge economic combines and established bureaucracies. As long as public opinion watched over the administration, the democratic principle was preserved (Leo S. Rowe 1915, 34).

The government of public opinion represented the demands of the educated reading public. The new sovereign was a community articulated by the media; the political nation could no longer be defined outside of “print-capitalism.” Common literacy was no longer sufficient. Modern democracies engendered good government only when their societies were organized and active, when collective actions sent messages to governments. This required citizens to gain experiential training in social-democratic interaction in a variety of associations and clubs. This “Tocquevillian turn” must have taken the audience by surprise. The Argentine intelligentsia still referred to Domingo F. Sarmiento’s educational vision (to educate people for citizenship) with respect, but had abandoned all pretense of a democracy built from the bottom up. Many believed that the preservation of republican government was the responsibility of the educated elite.

Rowe presented the problems of U.S. government as a common concern of all Americans. He insisted that these were the problems of “our American democracies.” The pronoun our was an invitation to consider the political evolution of the United States as a valid prediction of the South American republics’ future. But the audience must have read this in terms of the cultural divide between Europe and America, which was to them problematic. His lecture had already raised alarm among conservative listeners, particularly when he spoke in favor of economic regulation. But then he went further, telling the audience that in a true democracy the working classes had to be free from “economic dependence.” To perfect democracy, the state had to intervene to ensure workers’ due share in the distribution of wealth.

To understand these lectures, we must locate Rowe in the Progressive Era. Rowe belonged to a generation that, having experienced tremendous change during their lifetime, had reconsidered the notion of democracy. Judging by his participation in public debates and other public appearances, Rowe was a “progressive liberal.” He supported the cause of the education of African Americans, favored the growing participation of women in public and social life, and was sympathetic to the cause of industrial labor (he participated in public forums with Samuel Gompers). Under his presidency, the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences discussed almost all issues in the progressive agenda. In 1914 the conservative trustees of the University of Pennsylvania threatened
thirteen “progressive professors” with reprisals for their public positions in matters of social and industrial policy. Among them was Leo S. Rowe.

In his understanding, a modern democratic society required the elevation of the standard of living of workers, even at the cost of increased government regulation. He strove for equal opportunities in education at a time in which the U.S. South was clearly falling behind. He advocated that city administrators should be appointed on the basis of merits and results. His position on urban improvement was close to that of a Fabian socialist: cities should provide sanitation works, public transportation, and electric and gas facilities. As a member of the National Civic Federation, he promoted the involvement of experts in the redefinition of government policies.38

While in the early 1900s he had supported an imperialist position with regard to the Caribbean region, by 1914 he had significantly changed his views. The institutional stability and economic progress of the southern republics called for a shift toward a policy of cultural and intellectual cooperation. And he took a strong position against Woodrow Wilson’s policy of intervention in Mexico. He thought that the defense of U.S. Americans in Mexico was not sufficient reason to involve the United States in the domestic affairs of Mexico (Leo S. Rowe 1914c). Now he was instructing Argentine audiences about the problems of industrial capitalism and how democratic government should adapt to new social demands. Had he suddenly become progressive? No, Rowe’s conviction about the need of a welfare-regulated capitalism had developed in the 1890s (Leo S. Rowe 1892). What had changed was the geographic location of the problem of governance. In the Circum-Caribbean he had asked whether U.S. constitutional government could be exported to colonial peoples. In South America the relevant question was quite different: how could countries that had long experience with U.S. government institutions be assisted in confronting the problems of modern corporate capitalism?

**Understanding Argentine Government**

What does it mean to understand a country? Basically, it means to grasp the essential or constitutive elements of its character, history, and present condition. This ability to identify the fundamentals gives the knowledge-producer the authority to issue opinions. To a political scientist, these fundamentals are the country’s political and administrative system. Rowe’s book *The Federal System of the Argentine Republic* (1921) constitutes a systematic attempt to comprehend the Argentine system of government: its constitutional bases and its practice. In this book Rowe undertook a comparison of constitutional law and
practice in the United States and Argentina, called attention to the most dan-
gerous aspects of a presidentialist political regime, and presented federalism as
the system most attuned to Argentine political traditions. He connected local
concerns about the excessive powers of the executive and the centralized nature
of Argentine federalism with transnational preoccupations about industrial-
ization, municipal government, and social problems.\textsuperscript{39}

To dissect “Argentine government,” he drew on direct witness, reports from
local informants, and a vocation for comparative history. The book was the
result of observations he made during three periods of residence in Argen-
tina, totaling fifteen months.\textsuperscript{40} His full immersion in the academic life of the
University of La Plata, his contacts with key members of the intelligentsia at
Buenos Aires and La Plata, and his direct observation of relevant political de-
velopments made the book a treasure of knowledge. He recuperated popular
criticism of the judicial system, uncovered the difficulties of the recently im-
plemented secret ballot, and took notice of immigrants’ apathy toward politi-
cal affairs. The book provided also a detailed account of federal interventions
in the provinces during 1906–1908: the central government had the power
to intercede to address interior strife or external threat, but in practice the
president took action to “fix” unfavorable electoral outcomes or to displace
opposition governors.\textsuperscript{41}

During the process of nation-building, Argentina had borrowed constitu-
tional principles and statutes from the United States.\textsuperscript{42} This “legal transfer”
had taken place well before the country’s age of progress (1880–1914). In the
1860s Argentine scholars had translated the \textit{Federalist Papers}, Joseph Story’s
\textit{Commentaries} (1833), and a compendium of important decisions by the U.S.
Supreme Court (Leo S. Rowe 1921b, v–vii). In the 1880s and 1890s, in reaction
against the worship of U.S. legal institutions, local experts proposed that the
laws of the country should adapt to Argentine traditions and environment.
But federalism survived as the organizing principle of Argentine government.

By the time of the Argentine centenary of independence (1910), the increas-
ing complexity of the Argentine economy had added new industrial and social
problems, which enhanced the powers of the central government. Provincial
governments, lacking the necessary resources, had to yield powers to the cen-
tral government if they wanted to expand railroads, build more schools, or
provide sanitation to their cities. But centralization went too far, Rowe said:
the provinces had become financially dependent on the central government.
So a tension emerged between centralized government and popular prefer-
ences for the federalist system. Argentines’ deep-rooted provincial separatism
made it unlikely that this tension would be resolved in the short run.

Intellectual Cooperation
Judgments are one of the most synthetic by-products of knowledge. Rowe examined Argentine history, constitutional law, and political practice to pass judgment on fundamental aspects of the Argentine system of government. His overall verdict was very positive. Argentine constitutional guarantees to person and property were ample and effective. Argentina, having experienced the trauma of despotism and tyranny, had established clearly specified individual guarantees. Equality before the law and protection against unlawful arrest were already part of Argentine judicial traditions. There was the “widest possible” exercise of the freedom of the press (Leo S. Rowe 1921b, 126). Other personal liberties (of commerce, work, correspondence, etc.) were often observed. This favorable opinion extended also to the judiciary, which Rowe thought needed only minimal improvements.

While acknowledging the modernity of Argentine legal and political institutions, Rowe’s book raised concerns about the way Argentines had translated U.S. constitutional theory and law into practice. Argentine government, despite its constitutional analogies with the United States, diverged in practice from true republican, democratic government. Despite clear guarantees of liberty, suspensions of basic liberties actually had been frequent (ibid., 121–23). At the center of Rowe’s criticism was the tension between the ideal of republican federalism and the reality of an over-centralized government. The executive dominated over the legislative and the judiciary (presidentialism), and the capital dominated over the provinces (centralism). The most salient deviation was the ability of the central executive to manipulate provincial politics. Federal interference in the provinces represented the crudest manifestation of this unbalanced regime.

At the root of presidentialism, Rowe said, was the absence of organized public opinion (ibid., 106). Argentina lacked intermediary organizations that could translate people’s demands into political initiatives. His notion of organized public opinion involved common people actively influencing the public-policy agenda. It required a rapid reduction of illiteracy, an improvement in the administration of justice, and an integration of immigrants into the nation’s political life. Once these three changes were implemented, organized public opinion would emerge by itself, balancing the excesses of “presidentialism” and Porteño centralism. While acknowledging that Argentina had made great progress since the electoral reform of 1912, Rowe was nonetheless critical about the incompleteness of Argentine democracy. The electoral reform, he thought, had brought new forces into the political arena, established a legislative chamber more autonomous from the executive, and could in time en-
hance popular confidence in congress (ibid., 98). Argentine government was not yet controlled by “organized public opinion.”

Rowe’s book borrowed its problematic from local constitutionalist historians, most notably Rodolfo Rivarola and José Nicolás Matienzo. Argentine scholars had already established the contours of a debate about the true nature and implications of Argentine federalism (ibid., 36–37). But Rowe valorized nineteenth-century federalism in a way that neither Matienzo nor Rivarola did. To Rowe federalism was a system of government in tune with the political ideas and traditions of the people. In the post-independence era, efforts to impose a centralist system of government failed utterly, chiefly because of autonomous political traditions. The 1860 constitutional compromise reflected the adaptation of political ideals to the country’s reality. Similarly, Rowe departed from traditional interpretations of the Rosas period (1829–1852). Rosas’s orderly government and his containment of provincial caudillos prepared the way for a future constitutional agreement. Rosas’s undoing of the aristocratic bias of post-independence governments had put Argentine society back on the track of “real democratic government.”

What passes as knowledge—radical simplifications that make a country’s “problems” transparent—are often solutions that rest on untestable generalizations. Rowe tended to attribute the practical failures of Argentine government to Hispanic ideas and traditions. To this extent, his view of “South America” did not depart much from his early observations about Puerto Rico. The Spanish legacy “explained” the absence of court challenges to the constitutionality of presidential decisions. If Argentines did not challenge presidential authority, were too critical of federal judges and deputies, and rejected unitarian constitutions, they were simply enacting political traditions inherited from Spain.

At the root of Rowe’s explanation—the distance between legal statute and reality, the persistence of Hispanic traditions and mentality—was a basic dichotomy between Anglo-American and Spanish legal traditions. In one legal tradition the courts defended liberty and property; in the other the courts continued to defend royal absolutism. The Argentine federal system partook of the Spanish legacy. It was a political arrangement that, in spite of its apparent modernity, was rooted in colonial practices and ideas. Its localism, the people’s disposition to follow caudillos, and the persistence of centralism all worked against the easy seeding of “American democracy” in Argentine soil.

Argentina was not Puerto Rico. Hence, Rowe could not use the innate incapacity for self-rule as the main explanation of the problem. Instead, Rowe argued, it was a socially and historically rooted localism that prevented the
ideal U.S. system from generating, in practice, a fully democratic government. A skillful replication of the U.S. Constitution did not guarantee a similar form of government. The Spanish legacy had transformed federalism into “caudillismo” first and into presidentialism later. The dichotomy between Anglo-American constitutionalism and Spanish absolutism governed the architecture of Rowe’s diagnosis about “Argentine government.” If this is so, one must question the role of local data in the constitution of “situated regional knowledge.” Were not the “facts” Rowe collected mere confirmations of a metanarrative already prefigured?

In addition, Rowe argued that economic progress presented the possibility of an institutional convergence between Argentina and the United States. Argentina’s observable and tangible material progress had created the social problems typical of industrial society and, at the same time, engendered the forces that led to electoral reform and improvements in sanitation and urban facilities. Starting from completely different political traditions and popular ideas, the political development of the two countries could in the future converge. Viewed from an imperial perspective, this prediction appears as an optimistic gesture. In the most progressive of the ABC nations, the discourse on “South American progress” opened up the possibility of fully replicating the U.S. model. To this extent, Rowe was ready to abandon the rhetoric about the impossibility of self-government in order to embrace the future possibility of “full democracy” in Argentina. This possibility was part of the novelty of the ABC countries and made Rowe a welcome interlocutor among South American intellectuals.

**Indirect Government: The Pan-American Union**

The discovery of South American progress and, in particular, of a great developmental gap separating the ABC nations from the rest of Latin America, influenced Rowe’s conception of Pan-Americanism and U.S. foreign policy. While others argued for abandoning the Monroe Doctrine altogether, Rowe defended the need to transform it into a multilateral policy, making the defense of the hemisphere and its political ideas the common endeavor of all American nations (Leo S. Rowe 1914b). In short, he believed in a concerted or multilateral Pan-Americanism, a community of nations cooperating for the resolution of common problems. Consistent with this belief, Rowe called on Washington to define a different set of policies for each region. Revolts and social upheavals in Central America and the Caribbean affected U.S. national security; consequently, the United States should retain the right to intervene.
South America, on the other hand, could be left to manage its own problems (Leo S. Rowe 1914a).

After becoming director of the PAU, Rowe devoted most of his energy to building the architecture of inter-American intellectual and cultural cooperation. He was instrumental in launching “Pan-American Day” (14 April) in U.S. government institutions and schools in 1931, helped commemorate Columbus’s discovery of America with the building of the Columbus Lighthouse in the Dominican Republic, promoted the translation of Spanish-American authors for U.S. readers, and organized music concerts in Washington featuring a selection of Latin American music. With the support of Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, he built the infrastructure of what later became the cultural division of the PAU. Rowe’s “constructive Pan-Americanism” put a premium on social connections: U.S. diplomats, scholars, and businessmen needed to cultivate personal links with statesmen, politicians, and professionals all across Latin America.

From 1920 to his death in 1946, Rowe published extensively about U.S. foreign policy in journals, magazines, and newspapers. These essays and speeches sustained and reactualized the policy principles he had developed prior to the First World War. Rowe was persuaded that hemispheric solidarity should be devoted to solving common problems, especially the resolution of boundary disputes and other conflicts among Latin American states. Rowe had facilitated the mediation of the ABC powers in the 1914 “Mexican imbroglio,” when a tangle of events, including President Wilson’s policy of nonrecognition of Mexico’s President Victoriano Huerta, led to the U.S. invasion and occupation of Veracruz. Later he participated in important boundary arbitrations, the most notable being the Tacna-Arica dispute in 1925–1926. Also important were activities that could improve the material well-being of Latin Americans, including Pan-American conferences that collectively addressed hemispheric problems.

Two years after becoming director of the PAU, Rowe (1922) took an inventory of the achievements of the Pan-American movement. The South American republics, having already achieved political stability, now faced the challenge of bringing “their social organization into closer harmony with their political institutions” (ibid., 3). This required improving the welfare of large segments of the population living in “abject economic dependence,” ending the control of oligarchies over political institutions, and disseminating the benefits of mass education. To prepare societies for democratic government, Rowe suggested progressive policies: comprehensive social legislation, minimum wages, better housing and sanitation, and agrarian reform. To correct wide social inequalities
and foster greater political participation would require even greater government centralism. Further progress toward democracy demanded a long process of experience in building democratic sociability, something that “could not be imposed from without.” To this extent, the United States should concentrate on administering hemispheric peace, again chiefly through the resolution of boundary disputes.

In 1942 Rowe summarized the contributions of the Pan-American system to continental democracy and world peace. To the future world order, the United States could contribute more than the lofty ideals of Wilsonian internationalism. Inter-American cooperation had produced tangible results: forty years of continental peace. The Pax Americana had kept Latin America isolated from European rivalries and wars. Since the Montevideo agreement (1933), the nations of the hemisphere had remained committed to peace, internal security, and mutual defense. In a recent meeting at Rio de Janeiro (January 1942), ten nations had declared war on the Axis powers, while another nine nations had severed diplomatic relations. What better evidence of the success of hemispheric solidarity and collective action? Moreover, in the midst of total war, it was time to think about postwar reconstruction. In this regard, the experience of Pan-Americanism could be especially helpful: “The example of this hemisphere will be a great practical value in the task of postwar reconstruction” (Leo S. Rowe 1942, 77).

An era of imperialism and white supremacy was coming to a close, wrote Rowe, claiming that “the period of white trusteeship for the less advanced peoples is a thing of the past, never to return” and that “imperialism can have no place” in this contemporary world (ibid., 78). Any postwar agreement should adopt the principles of national sovereignty and nonintervention, yet insist on cooperative solutions to maintain international peace (ibid.). In other words, the PAU could serve as a model for the future United Nations.

Conclusion

The process of knowing a region entails a constant displacement of the researcher’s focus of interest. The arguments that connect and make a region a comprehensive totality tend to shift with changes in geopolitical conjunctures, disciplinary concerns, and insights from local informants. Knowledge previously acquired in a given periphery of empire becomes a privileged point of reference and reflection for examining the situation of a newer hinterland. Rowe’s intellectual trajectory shows a clear shift in his perception of empire. After having legitimized U.S. interventions in the Caribbean based on the
higher mission of educating “Hispanic peoples” in self-government, he conceived the idea of a hemispheric intellectual brotherhood that could unite the Americas in pursuit of common goals. A double “discovery”—that of “South American progress” and the possibility of “intellectual cooperation”—made this reconceptualization possible.

Rowe formulated his idea of “intellectual cooperation” in relation to his experience with colonial administration and to the novelties of progress and stability he found in the ABC countries. Perhaps his recommendations for more Spanish courses at high school, more Latin American students in U.S. universities, and more expert missions to the region sound too prosaic and inconsequential to be a new basis for U.S. hemispheric hegemony. But one should not underestimate the power of regional knowledge. Implicit in these proposals was the idea that Latin American studies could end the isolation and ignorance of U.S. culture while invigorating hemispheric commerce and investment. This pragmatic policy principle became part of the governmental machinery of informal empire. During the Good Neighbor era numerous institutions contributed to make the exchange of professors and students between U.S. and Latin American universities a reality. Intellectual cooperation became an integral part of U.S. cultural diplomacy.

Earlier studies in the United States and Europe helped Rowe observe the municipal and educational progress of Brazil and Argentina from a political-science perspective. The progressive achievements of the ABC republics caused Rowe to reconceptualize his problematic as one of institutional reform within an ongoing civilizing-developmental process. This conception in turn triggered a comparison (United States vs. southern republics) that informed a prior debate about the exportation and adaptability of U.S. government. In a way, the problematic came back to the center of empire—the United States—which had uniquely adapted democratic government to the needs of urban, modern, industrialized society.

Out of the comparative framework provided by enhanced visibility emerged two organizing foreign-policy principles. The first, “education in self-rule,” a model rooted in Circum-Caribbean politics, endorsed a policy of recurrent colonial interventions in the region as part of the U.S. civilizing mission. The second, “intellectual cooperation,” a model geared to the more mature politics of the southern republics, sanctioned a mode of indirect intervention via the collaboration of Latin American elites. This policy was thinkable only for countries that had already attained a certain degree of civility, institutional stability, and social order. In the Good Neighbor era this foreign policy principle was extended to the whole field of inter-American relations. Cultural differences
between the Circum-Caribbean and the ABC powers persisted as key underlying reasons for U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America. In *The Federal System of the Argentine Republic*, Rowe simply reaffirmed the difference he had already established: the new peripheries of the U.S. informal empire, having replicated U.S. institutions, had much to learn to perfect this system.

The production of synthetic, regional knowledge involves a necessary simplification. The nuances that informed Rowe’s early works disappeared in time, giving way to simpler arguments aimed at persuading policy makers and public opinion. The synthetic knowledge packaged in the principle of intellectual cooperation did not win Rowe enduring academic prestige. The causality ran in the other direction. It was Rowe’s academic prestige before 1906 that facilitated his journeys to South America, and it was this cultural capital that placed him in contact with the South American intelligentsia.

The difference between the Caribbean and South America fit right into the general model of U.S. foreign policy. In the case of Puerto Rico, the political scientist had noted the tendency to family feuds and passionate politics as the main obstacle of “Hispanic culture” on the road to self-government. In the case of Argentina, the Hispanic legacy had survived in the forms of intrusive centralism and traditional localism. These were the most important lines of an argument about the adaptability of “American government” to Latin America, a project of knowledge in the field of comparative politics that emerged out of Rowe’s colonial experience. Rowe transformed this argument into the principle of intellectual cooperation when he began to interact with the “progressive Southern republics.” At a time of expanding commercial and investment flows, Rowe “discovered” that a network of “native intellectuals” could be productively integrated into the veins circulating ideas and policy of empire.

Rowe’s writings on imperial governance (1900–1905) show the unbounded nature of national theories when enunciated from a location and a country with worldly ambitions. A particularistic set of principles about “American government” appeared endowed with universal validity. Colonial situations (Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Cuba) became experimental grounds where the flexibility and adaptability of this system of ideas and institutions were to be tested. Rowe’s findings served to reassure metropolitan knowledge-producers of their own importance in the making of empire. In the disjuncture between theory and practice, the expert found a natural territory where he could act on his nation’s behalf, seeking more knowledge about the region and suggesting policies that contemplated regional adaptations to the theory of “American government.”
For the Circum-Caribbean, Rowe had shown, greater adaptability to local institutions and a greater understanding of local culture could improve the governance of protectorates. In South America other principles were at stake. These countries had already experienced the transfer of U.S. institutions in the second part of the nineteenth century. Hence, the question to pose was one of “democracy,” rather than one of “self-government.” South America appeared to offer good experimental grounds for examining economic and social progress in relation to “American government” in the Progressive Era.