LATIN AMERICA’S 19TH CENTURY: A WORK IN PROGRESS

This exhibit is a culmination of UT students’ collaborative effort to select, curate, and digitize original documents held in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection that reveal the region’s tumultuous and transformative 19th-century journeys towards modernity.

Introduction
Spanish poet Antonio Machado Ruiz captures an essential aspect of the modern human condition with his words from 1912: “Caminante, no hay camino; se hace el camino al andar / Wanderer, there is no path to follow; the path can only be made by walking.” In many ways, this exhibit evokes the difficult, unprecedented paths humans forged when faced with the unpredictable changes of modern life. However, it does so by focusing on people who made their lives in a geographic region usually considered anything but modern: Latin America.

The exhibit begins with the dissolution of Spain’s Atlantic Monarchy in 1808 and continues into the early 20th century, tracing out how revolutions in technology, medicine, and political systems transformed lives, communities, and places. This somewhat eclectic collection reflects the research interests of undergraduate students at the University of Texas at Austin who, in the fall of 2017, worked closely with Professor Lina del Castillo and the resourceful staff at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection to create this exhibit. Their selections range from high-level political documents to novels, personal photo collections, and more. Taken as a whole, the exhibit is also an exercise in the preservation of documents. Their transformation into digital form will allow researchers from all over the world access to primary sources held at the Benson.

Many of the documents included in this exhibit reveal how people dealt with uncertainty when, in the wake of Napoleon’s invasion of Spain in 1808, monarchical sovereignty was called into question. Independence and republicanism offered possible yet problematic alternatives. Would indigenous and enslaved people be included in these new republics, and if so, how?

Other documents convey the daily lives of people who traveled, loved, worked, got sick, fought, and died. Some of the people highlighted in these documents include buyers and sellers of properties, photographer-engineers, government officials, and those who suffered a violent backlash for professing their beliefs. Throughout it all, the people in the region we call Latin America lived in a time of increasing global interconnectedness. The path towards modernity was by no means single or clear-cut; these sources suggest how historical actors made their way through unpredictable global and local changes to forge paths of their own making. Over the course of the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth, many of the historical actors considered here saw themselves as working to bring progress to themselves, their families, their countries, and the region itself.
A Crisis of Sovereignty
By Anastasia Demes, Ryan Hobbs, and Liliana Talamantes

The French emperor Napoleon’s invasion of the Iberian Peninsula caused a massive global disruption that was felt in the far reaches of the New World. People living under Spanish rule in Central and South America, especially the elite, had to confront a crisis in monarchical sovereignty and decide where their allegiance would lie. The documents in this section illustrate how a crisis that began in the Iberian Peninsula affected the daily lives of people throughout Spanish America. Initially, most maintained their loyalty to Ferdinand VII, the Spanish King forced to abdicate to Napoleon. Although produced by elites, the documents also suggest how the crisis unleashed uprisings by indigenous people and popular sectors in Mexico and South America.

Figure 1. Naciones: la guerrera España, y la tranquila y abundante America, unidas por el amor y la fidelidad sostienen el Frono de Fernando Septimo.

This striking document draws one’s eyes to the framed image of King Ferdinand XII of Spain surrounded by Greek muses symbolizing loyalty, abundance, just warfare, and knowledge. Under the image, the caption reveals that Mexico City lawyers were behind the commissioning of the image in October of 1809. The general director of the royal academy of San Carlos in Mexico designed and drew this image, which was printed in Mexico immediately after news of Napoleon’s invasion of Iberia crossed the Atlantic. Through it, the elite class in Mexico displayed their loyalty to their King and their displeasure at the forced abdication at the hands of French usurpers. Little did elites in Mexico City know that they stood on the cusp of the dissolution of Spain’s Atlantic Monarchy. Independence came for Mexico in 1821, but only through its adoption of a monarchy, which only four years later was replaced by republicanism. The refined aesthetics of this image are jarring when juxtaposed with the instability, violence, and transformations unleashed by war and independence.
Figure 2. Letter written from Manuel Duran de Castro to the Marqués del Valle del Tojo, in Potosi, Bolivia.

The Marqués del Valle del Tojo held economic and political power in the region between Bolivia and Argentina, and this letter reflects the ways the Constitution of Cadiz of 1812 began to affect the indigenous labor drafts in one of the most productive silver mines in the world. This letter was written by Manuel Duran de Castro in Potosi to his wealthy boss, the Marqués del Valle del Tojo. Manuel Duran de Castro, who was in charge of the Marqués’ real estate in Potosi, wrote to the Marqués to inform him of the impending sale of his properties. By November 1812, when the letter was written, the Cádiz Constitution had abolished the mita, a system of forced labor drafts critical for production in the Marqués’s Potosí mines. Although constitutional changes may have prompted the Marqués’ interest in selling his properties, the sale was delayed by an embargo. A dozen mysterious killings in the area had also made sales difficult. Given existing threats to his wealth and property caused by constitutional and local instability, it should not be surprising that the Marqués del Valle left the royalist ranks and joined the patriot cause against the Spanish Cortes.

Figure 3. Letter from Spanish Americans in Mexico to the Spanish King Fernando VII.

The strikingly elegant handwriting on this thin parchment begs the King of Spain for help with security and protection from the "ferocious" indigenous people of Zacatecas, Mexico in 1813. The problem was that by 1813, King Ferdinand VII was imprisoned in France after having abdicated the Spanish throne to Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808. The crisis in sovereignty that ensued sparked destabilizing violence, especially in the region of the Mexican Bajío, which included Zacatecas.

Pedagogical Exercise
Online “gallery walk”: The students will take time to view a group of images from the exhibit. As they examine them, tell them to reflect on what they see. Have them either write on a post-it note or in a notebook a thought or two, or a question, about each of the images. This can be assigned as homework or done in class. Then, bring the students together to discuss everyone’s thoughts and questions about the documents.
Confronting the Instability of Early Republican State Formation
By Max Morales and other students.

A law, a decree, and a manifesto -- two from Colombia and one from Mexico -- all share a similar story. The highest rungs of republican rule that emerged from Spanish American independence produced these three documents, and each seeks to assert top-down stability and control in their respective countries. While the Colombian law from 1826 suggests how the state intended to relate to independent indigenous nations occupying territories the Colombian regime claimed in the name of the nation, the 1828 decree by Simon Bolivar suspends Colombian constitutional rule altogether. Despite laws, territorial claims, and constitutions, the Gran Colombian government was on the verge of falling apart. The manifesto issued by the self-proclaimed governing body that had toppled Emperor Iturbide in Mexico also tries to convey legal authority, stability, and the right to rule, despite clear challenges to its legitimacy. All three documents illustrate how early republican leaders faced political uncertainty by issuing laws, decrees, and official statements intended to produce stability.

Strikingly, this law, passed by the Colombian Republic in 1826, incorporates the Independent Indian nations of the Goajira, the Darien, and the Mosquitos as subject to Colombian jurisdiction and control. These tribes populated territories up to what is now modern-day Nicaragua and Honduras. If Colombia succeeded in its attempts to claim sovereignty, then it would also have had legitimate claims on the territories occupied by these independent Indian tribes. The year Colombia issued this law, the United Provinces were still working out their newly formed territory. The claim by Colombia that it would "civilize" Independent Indians is nevertheless problematic. The Colombian Republic's decree may have declared that the government would pursue "any means necessary" to "civilize" the indigenous groups deemed a threat by local populations, but the instability of the 1820s would render such declarations moot. Even if the Colombian government did deploy troops to the region, the real threat of retaliation by these independent Indian groups discouraged such actions.
Figure 5. Decree dissolving the Constitutional Convention and Bolívar's promises to the people.

This document, disseminated in 1828, amplified Simón Bolívar's efforts to justify his newly claimed dictatorial powers through an appeal to legitimacy and nationalism: "Colombianos! I force myself to obey your strict and legitimate desires." Bolívar was one of the most important military and political leaders of independence in Colombia and Venezuela during the early 19th century, but by 1828, Bolívar's vision for Gran Colombia was endangered by combative political factions. In an effort to regain control, Bolívar took increasingly bold measures to ensure the future of this republic. In this document, Bolívar explains how his plans to suspend Colombia's Constitutional Assembly and enact a dictatorship will protect the freedom and unity of all Colombians in the long run. Bolívar’s willingness to suspend democracy illustrates the political instability rife throughout Gran Colombia in the late 1820s and raises intriguing questions about the fractious history of independence and unity in Latin America.

Figure 6. Supreme Executive Power Manifesto.

The large, bold, solid typeface announces that the Supreme Executive Power of the Federated States of Mexico issued this 9-page Manifesto in 1824, adorned by an image of agricultural equipment and abundance, rather than the bellicose Mexican eagle perched on a cactus. Through the circulation of the document, the acting head of state, Vicente Guerrero, clearly sought to assure Mexicans that stability and prosperity would come. Mexico was in a state of crisis following the collapse of the Mexican Empire under Agustín de Iturbide and a triumvirate formed, known as the Supreme Executive Power. The triumvirate was responsible for convincing states that were wavering to unify under a new Republic. The manifesto is a plea to the people of Mexico to set aside past differences and quarrels in favor of unity.

Pedagogical Exercise

Plot each document and year that it was produced on a map of Latin American. Look at geographic links and compare the temporal space surrounding each marker.
As the Mexican Empire Dissolves, Central American Caudillos Rise
By Fernando Salazar Matinez and other students.

It was one thing for the Mexican Empire to gain recognition from Spain as a legitimate, independent monarchy in 1821, but it was quite another for Mexico to maintain unity and sovereignty over most of North and Central America as a monarchy. Shortly after pro-republican forces overthrew Emperor Iturbide, provinces from Guatemala down to current-day Costa Rica declared their independence from Mexico. These three documents reflect the difficult processes of early state formation in Central America, as opposing factions competed to gain political prominence. Consequently, this region struggled to retain durable central governments in the wake of the ensuing social unrest. The perpetual political infighting resulted in fragile governments that were susceptible to rebellions led by men known as caudillos. Caudillos were military leaders who rose through the ranks and utilized political propaganda to decrease their rivals’ influence. With caudillos at the helm, these authoritarian regimes frequently infringed upon the rights of the citizens to secure public tranquility and their hold on power. The following documents offer a glimpse into this period of upheaval and uncertainty through the words of those who either accused others of caudillismo or, arguably, were caudillos themselves.

Figure 7. Letter Titled Grito Patriotico
Written in El Salvador 1843 by a Group of Liberals

This “cry of patriotism” was first penned in San Vicente, it then was printed in Comayagua, and circulated throughout El Salvador in 1843. The patriotic cry came from El Salvador’s Liberal party that sought to chastise the Conservatives. The Conservative Party controlled the central region of the newly formed republic, and the Liberals claimed the Conservatives had offered only “irresponsible and malevolent” leadership. The Liberals focused their anger on Francisco Morazán, who served as President of the Federal Republic of Central America from 1830 to 1839. These self-proclaimed patriots refer to the Salvadoran Government as a toy for self-interested and corrupt politicians. This print broadside conveys how authority and legitimacy in El Salvador rested on a fragile balance of regional, ethnic, factional, and community alliances. Political stability was an elusive goal in Central America during this period.
Figure 8. A Legal Decree Concerning Individual Rights in Central America. Molina, Pedro, 1777-1854.

The Federal Republic of Central America (1823-1839) issued this governmental decree in 1831 from the National Palace of Guatemala, and it perfectly captures the tense and turbulent political situation in Central America during the era of Caudillos. In Central America, ideological differences between Liberal and Conservative factions had created a constant state of political instability and social unrest. As a consequence of this political volatility, the Federal Republic was continually on the brink of collapse. This document provides a glimpse of this tense period under Francisco Morazán, and describes how the government legitimated its efforts to infringe upon the rights of its citizens by arguing that it was trying to “secure the tranquility of the public”. In this early period of nation-building in Latin America, Caudillos like Morazán were very influential in the early development of these young countries, for better or worse.

Figure 9. A published letter from President Guadalupe Victoria to the Mexican People.

This document is a 3-page letter from then president of Mexico Guadalupe Victoria in 1828 to the Mexican people. It comes at a time of upheaval and uncertainty in Mexican history. Mexico had just received independence and was in the early stages of trying to forge a formidable and reliable republic. It announces the rebellious conduct of Santa Anna and warns of his escape and attempts to start an uprising. It was made to warn Mexicans of Santa Anna’s corrupt ways and urges his citizens to stand by him and the Mexican constitution.

**Pedagogical Exercise**
1. Discuss the significance of these documents, along with any similarities & differences.
2. After the discussion, split the class in two groups: Pro and Con.
3. Each group is to come up with Pros and Cons of what each document is seeking to achieve.
4. Regroup and discuss how life would be like in this era of Latin American history, drawing comparisons to modern day governments.
Global Connections and Transformations
By Dinda Aryaputri, Madison Tumey, Kathryn Wilk, and other students.

From women explorers to travelling theater troupe actors, from Protestant missionaries to Spanish chocolatiers, the people who made these original documents offer telling snapshots of the fast-paced changes that came with Latin America’s late 19th century global connections. Taken together, these personal letters, photographs, author portraits, and trading cards reveal how improvements in communications technology, trans-Atlantic political upheavals, and changing gender roles impacted daily life in Latin America. These changes, in turn reflect broader global transformations. We hope that through our various primary sources students can further understand the people, events, and movements of this era.

Figure 10. Portrait of Spanish Baroness Emiliana Serrano de Wilson in her novel Las Perlas del Corazon.

This portrait of the Spanish Baroness Emiliana Serrano de Wilson is an illustration from her novel, Las Perlas del Corazon. Written in Quito, Ecuador in 1880, Las Perlas is one of the many accounts of her journeys throughout Latin America. Fueled by her passion for travel and her love of learning, she travelled to Latin America many times throughout her life, documenting the geography, history, and most importantly, the people she encountered. From these accounts, readers grasp the distinct cultural idiosyncrasies of the different cultures of Latin America through the eyes of a woman. Because de Wilson focuses so in depth on her personal interactions, her novels provide a unique perspective on the lives of women in Latin America.
The trading cards depict the Cuban War of Independence from 1895 to 1898. Chocolates E. Juncosa, a Spanish chocolate company, produced the detailed and colorful cards. The historical actors included Spanish generals, Cuban revolutionary leaders, and “Yankee” soldiers all in conflict. The cards themselves were created and distributed throughout Barcelona to the Spanish citizens. This document illustrates the colonial Spanish view of the war, showing savage Cubans and victorious Spaniards. However, true history revealed victorious Cubans and humiliated, defeated Spanish. This online exhibit puts primary sources, like the cards, in conversation with one another through a “human history” lens. Common themes include independence, movements, state-building, rebels, instability, and violence.
Figure 12. Personal account by Protestant Missionary Almon Greenman.

Almon Greenman wrote this letter in the midst of conflict while working in the town of Celaya, Mexico as a Protestant missionary in 1884. He describes the backlash he faced from local government and townspeople after having survived a stoning perpetrated by the citizens of Celaya. The letter conveys how, during the nineteenth century, Mexicans passionately and violently defended Catholicism against any perceived threat of a change, especially one towards Protestantism. Nineteenth-century Catholicism is largely defined by upheaval and change, yet the influence of the Catholic Church remained pervasive in Mexican society. Rather than succumbing to American Protestantism, Catholicism adapted itself and remained relevant in Latin American during the nineteenth century and beyond.

Figure 13. Portrait of actor Miguel Lavalle taken by the Villalongin Theater Company.

When Miguel Lavalle had this photograph of himself taken in 1890, he decided to sport a decorative uniform that prominently highlighted the symbol of Freemasonry. He was part of the Villalongin Theater Company that traveled freely across the US/Mexico border from northern Mexico to San Antonio and back during the late 19th century. Members from this theater troupe were able to travel freely between the border and possessed strong political and philanthropic views, representing a strong presence of Freemasonry and supporting of charity along the way. This constant movement and interconnection of ideas represents a shared cultural, political, and social network across not just local, but national borders.

**Pedagogical Exercise**

Create an interactive map in which the student has to place the documents in their correct region based on the photos and short descriptions (omitting the place). Once all the documents are in the right place, the map could include information about those cities and greater civilizations at the time, while also physically drawing connections to Spanish/North American regions that interacted with the creation of the document.
Preventing Disease in a Connected World through Public Health
By Colin Barnett and Alyssa Denaro

The nineteenth century marked a significant time of growing global connections among humans, as evidenced by the fast-paced spread of deadly diseases and increasing international efforts to combat them. During this period, health practitioners saw the benefits of public health initiatives. Rather than healing an individual diseased body, doctors diagnosed, treated, and healed through community interventions. As the disease-causing bacteria that produced cholera made their way across the Atlantic for the first time, leading to an outbreak in Mexico in 1833, public health initiatives followed. The dissemination of guidelines to prevent cholera helped bring together opposite sides of the Atlantic into one health community. More than 80 years later, public health initiatives in Panama worked to prevent Malaria and Yellow Fever from killing the community of workers, aiding the completion of the Panama Canal in 1914. The Atlantic and Pacific oceans were connected across Central America, fostering even greater global connections.

Figure 14. Método preservativo y curativo del cholera epidémico. Croquer, Tadeo. 1833.

According to this pamphlet, printed in Chiapas, Mexico in 1833, to prevent cholera one must “avoid all feelings of anger, fear, sadness.” The Chiapas governor commissioned Tadeo Croquer, a professor of medicine, to produce the booklet which contains guidelines for preventing and treating cholera during the 1833 outbreak. It references instructions given by the Health Council of Paris, indicating a wide distribution of their recommendations. Included with cleanliness standards are more unusual advice like the above quote, as well as subtle criticisms of the perceived overindulgence and propensity for the poor health of the lower class. Regardless, the booklet reveals that state officials and the medical community viewed the cholera epidemic not simply as a local or country-wide issue, but in the context of a global health crisis.
These two postcards from the J.E. Shaw collection begin to illustrate the chilling death toll that claimed the lives of approximately 25,000 people during the construction of the Panama Canal from French efforts in the late 19th century until it was completed in 1914 by the U.S. The first postcard shows the narrow path to the local hospital in the Panama Canal Zone that many canal builders, unfortunately, found themselves traveling down. The second postcard portrays the cemetery that includes hundreds of headstones marking the final resting places of the dead. The number of dead left in the wake of the building of the Panama Canal suggests the high price humans paid to achieve modernization and progress in the 19th and 20th centuries. The diseases that spread during the building of the Panama Canal also contributed to the development of public health initiatives in Latin America. Because so many people died of diseases while building this canal, significant efforts were made to prevent these diseases from spreading, which led to significant advances in public health practices overall.

**Pedagogical Exercise**

Have students plot each document and year it was produced in a map of Latin America. Then, have the students choose one plot to focus on and create and act out a dialogue based on the contents in the chosen document.
From the steps towards modernity brought forth by President Porfirio Diaz to the Mexican Revolution that ultimately led to his ousting, these selections of photographs and text illustrate the vast changes Mexican citizens endured on their path towards progress, rights, and freedom in the early 1900s. Diaz had a 35-year old stranglehold on power, known as the Porfiriato, in which he attempted to modernize Mexico until those that he had impoverished through corruption and diminished rights rose up in rebellion. In these sources we see Diaz speaking at a Mexican Independence celebration during what turns out to be his final year in power, Francisco “Pancho” Villa meeting with his rebel soldiers during the Mexican Revolution, and a letter from a wealthy landowner making preparations to keep his family’s fortune, not knowing which direction the tides of revolution would turn. The digitization of these original documents show Mexico at a revolutionary and industrial turning point, from Mexico City first building parks to the introduction of the automobile, with Mexican citizen’s celebration of passion and bravery in the forefront.
In 1914 David Russek, son of wealthy Mexican merchant, Marcos Russek, travelled to El Paso to collect money owed to his father from Lázaro de la Garza. De la Garza, who fled over to the United States during the Mexican Revolution, served as “Pancho” Villa’s financial head of the División del Norte. Wealthier people from Mexico’s northern states, like De la Garza, may have fled the violence and instability of the Revolution, yet their financial interests remained tied to the Revolution and its outcome. Many of them either fled or they remained alongside the Revolucionarios to support the movement. Despite having moved over to the United States, De la Garza still managed the financial affairs of Villa and the División del Norte.

**Pedagogical exercise**

Have the students look at each of the individual documents for a very short period of time. After they have gotten a glance at the documents, they will be handed a word key with specific objects, words, or names of people that can all be found in one or all of the documents. The students may then look at the documents and attempt to find each object in the answer/word key. Whoever finds them all first, wins. By playing this game, students will have analyzed the documents far closer than they otherwise might have. This will allow them to pick up on things they had not noticed before and is a great way to familiarize with famous figures in Latin America, as well as the Spanish language.
Credits:
Instructor
Lina del Castillo

Teaching Assistant and Omeka Exhibition Designer
Juan Antonio I. Tiney Chirix

Student Contributors
Dinda Aryaputri
Jacob Avanzato
Colin Barnett
Anastasia Demes
Alyssa Denaro
Ryan Hobbs
Max Morales
Luis Carlos Orozco Medina
Fernando Salazar Matinez
Liliana Talamantes
Madison Tumey
Kathryn Wilk
and other students.

Additional Support by:
Director of LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections
Virginia Garrard

Chair of the History Department
Jacqueline Jones

Digital Scholarship Coordinator
Albert A. Palacios