“Regenerating the Race and Nation: Charity, Health, and Moral Order in Colombia, 1850-1936”
IUSB Faculty Research Grant Proposal
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Abstract

This project involves the completion of a book manuscript so that it will be ready to send to publishers for revision by the end of the grant period. My manuscript, entitled, “Regeneration the Race and Nation: Charity, Health, and Moral Order in Colombia, 1850-1936,” examines the nation-building project in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Colombia by analyzing the essential, but overlooked, social and cultural dimensions of the nation-building project. Influenced by Social Darwinist principles and European theories of racial degeneration, various elites were preoccupied about the “degeneration” of the race, exemplified by the mixed-race poor whom they viewed as immoral and sickly. I focus, in particular, on elites in the capital city of Bogotá who became increasingly alarmed at the numbers of prostitutes, ill, vagrants, and orphans roaming the city streets. As Colombia modernized, various elites were prompted to rethink the nature of poverty and reassess their relationship with the poor. In the process, priests, politicians, and especially a new generation of medical doctors in the late nineteenth century reshaped the meanings of progress, poverty, citizenship, and nation as they used a gendered, moralized, and medicalized discourse. I argue that in order to “save” the nation from “doom” and “barbarity,” elite individuals, the church, and the state called for a regeneración de la raza through public health measures, charity, and moral reform. Through these means, they sought to correct the vices of the poor and transform “degenerate” beggars, prostitutes, and the ill into honorable, healthy, and productive citizens, thereby incorporating them as useful members who would contribute to national progress and the common good. This does not mean they were to be incorporated as equals. It is further argued that public health, charity, and moral reform served to reproduce the hierarchical structures of the social order at the same time as more individualistic and secular values tugged at both the elites and the poor. I contend, then, that until at least the second decade of the twentieth century, progress was defined more so in moral than in material terms. Morality and charity were deemed as fundamental, and perhaps more critical, to progress and nation than material concerns, though this has not previously been recognized in the historical scholarship on Colombia.

To complete the book manuscript, I am proposing a brief research trip to Bogotá, Colombia to visit two archives (one of which opened relatively recently) and asking for the time and funding to permit me to travel, incorporate the new research, and complete the revisions of the manuscript throughout the summer.

Description, Objectives and Methods

I am currently on sabbatical and am working on revising my book manuscript, entitled, “Regenerating’ the Race and Nation: Charity, Health, and Moral Order in Bogotá, Colombia, 1850-1936,” which is based on my original Ph.D. dissertation from the University of Virginia. In particular, I am reading several recently published secondary sources so that I may discuss how my book project relates with those studies and analyze the Colombian case in a more international context. I will also be writing a book proposal and focus on the revision of a sample chapter to include with the proposal that I will then send to the appropriate editors at five
university presses hopefully by May 2012. I am applying for a Summer Faculty Research Grant so that I may continue with the momentum from my sabbatical leave and complete the revisions and editing of the remaining six chapters, so the entire manuscript will be ready to send to publishers should they be interested in my book after having evaluated my proposal and sample chapter. In order to do so, I am requesting funding for a brief research trip to Bogotá, Colombia during Summer I to examine documents housed at two archives, one of which, the Archivo de Bogotá, has opened since my original research was completed. Since my study focuses on the city of Bogotá, it is essential that I visit this archive as it contains some municipal documents that may be central to my study. I am also requesting some salary replacement as I plan to use the summer months to travel and incorporate the new research into the manuscript.

In general, my work contributes to the historical literature on nation formation in Colombia, and Latin America as a whole by analyzing the essential, but overlooked, social and cultural dimensions of the nation-building process. My project is unique in its approach to the questions concerning nation formation. Rather than conducting a more traditional analysis of the political and economic characteristics of nation and state-building, my work focuses on elite concern for the “degenerate” poor and how they related this perceived “degeneracy” to national progress (or lack thereof). Influenced by Social Darwinism and European theories of racial degeneration, many elites, including statesmen, ecclesiastical officials, and a growing class of medical doctors, viewed the poor, mixed-race peoples of Colombia as obstacles to progress because it was perceived that many engaged in vices and/or were ill and therefore failed to contribute to society and national progress.

Central to my study is an analysis of the relationship between these social classes (the rich, the poor, and the emerging middle class of medical professionals) during a period of rapid urbanization and modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rapid growth during this period forced various elites to reassess the meanings of poverty and progress, as well as what these signified in terms of their relationship to the poor. I employ a variety of sources. Some of these sources, such as essays and books written by elites, accounts by foreign travelers, newspapers, magazines, various laws and ordinances, and numerous government documents have been used by other scholars. However, I have used them differently, as I focus on elements previously overlooked or ignored. For example, many scholars have read the numerous treatises, essays, memoirs, and speeches of political leaders of the late nineteenth century focusing on their concern for administrative, political, and economic reform. Always mentioned is the strong presence of the church. However, no one has explored the excessive concern for morality during this period, which I study in depth. I also use sources that have not previously been used by most historians of Colombia. These include medical journals, medical and legal theses, letters to members of Congress from the administrators of charitable institutions and from poor beneficiaries, as well as statutes, annual reports, reports of visitors, and organs of various charitable organizations.

In particular, I analyze elite discourse on progress, poverty, race, and nation in Bogotá, Colombia from 1850-1936. This discourse reveals considerable anxiety about the degeneración de la raza, the “degeneration” of the Colombian nation and race, a mestizo or mixed race. This degeneration was epitomized by the increasing prevalence of poor prostitutes, orphans, beggars, and ill in the streets of the capital city. As Colombia modernized, various elites were prompted to
rethink the nature of poverty and reassess their relationship with the poor. In the process, priests, politicians, and especially a new generation of medical doctors in the late nineteenth century reshaped the meanings of progress, poverty, citizenship, and nation as they used a gendered, moralized, and medicalized discourse. I argue that in order to “save” the nation from “doom” and “barbarity,” elite individuals, the church, and the state called for a regeneración de la raza through public health measures, charity, and moral reform. Through these means, they sought to correct the vices of the poor and transform “degenerate” beggars, prostitutes, and the ill into honorable, healthy, and productive citizens, thereby incorporating them as useful members who would contribute to national progress and the common good. This does not mean they were to be incorporated as equals. It is further argued that public health, charity, and moral reform served to reproduce the hierarchical structures of the social order at the same time as more individualistic and secular values tugged at both the elites and the poor. I contend, then, that until at least the second decade of the twentieth century, progress was defined more so in moral than in material terms. Morality and charity were deemed as fundamental, and perhaps more critical, to progress and nation than material concerns, though this has not previously been recognized in the historical scholarship on Colombia.

Scholarly Contributions of the Book Manuscript

This study will contribute to historical scholarship in three primary areas. First, it will contribute to the general historiography on Colombia. Even though poverty is an indelible, central feature of daily life in Colombia, the urban poor and elite preoccupation with them have rarely been the subject of historians. A historiography dominated by materialistic concerns has given particular attention to economic and political development, violence, conflict, and the place of coffee (Bergquist, 1986; Braun, 2003; Palacios, 2002; Roldán, 2002). Other essential elements like elite efforts to remedy the social and moral conditions of the people have been virtually ignored by historians of Colombia and Latin America as a whole and this study will rectify the deficiency, as it is more principally about the search for social harmony.

Second, the monograph offers an innovative approach to the much-studied questions of nationalism and nation- and state-formation, as well as questions of race that are perhaps the most in vogue and lively subjects of Latin American studies now (Appelbaum, et al, 2003; Doyle and Pamplona, eds., 2006; Grandin, 2000; Guy, 1991; Stepan, 1991). It adds to this scholarship by reconsidering definitions of citizenship and progress, and focusing on the social, cultural, moral, and medical dimensions as opposed to the political and economic aspects of nation-building. Furthermore, the case of Colombia is a rather curious one in that the project of nation formation fell to the Conservative party as they ruled from 1884-1930. Moral edification and the resolution of the social question, viewed as a moral question, were essential goals of Colombian leaders and the Conservative state, which sought the assistance of Catholic religious orders. Thus, this manuscript joins a very small literature that posits and analyzes a Catholic project of modernity (Maiguashca, 2005).

Third, this book will contribute to a burgeoning body of literature on public health and disease in Latin America (Abel, 1996; Agostini, 2003; Armus, 2003and 2011; Bliss, 2001; De Barros, 2009; Guy, 1989; Peard, 1999; Reber, 2000; Rodríguez, 2006; Zulawski, 1999 and 2000). These studies on the history of public health that have burst on the scene only in the last two decades are characterized by a new approach, the “new history of medicine,” that engage in
a sociocultural analysis of disease. In other words, there is a recognition in the new scholarship that ideas about disease, medicine, and public health policies are not purely objective but are shaped by local, cultural, social, political, and historical contexts. Furthermore, they also have implications and ramifications that are social and political in nature. This study will contribute to that burgeoning field by offering conclusions and arguments for the case of Colombia, a country for which few studies on public health exist, especially in English (Márquez et al, 2004; Quevedo, 1993; Sowell, 2001). The study of public health during this period has allowed me to unravel important questions about politics, power, and the state during this period, especially the growing influence of medical doctors and higienistas (public health experts) as they carved a space for themselves in this hierarchical society that was increasingly becoming more liberal and capitalistic. This was an emerging group composed of some from the traditional elite but also of a new middle class, a class that has been very little studied in Colombia. This work will also contribute to scholarship on public health and disease by making comparisons and considering the Colombian case in an international context.

**Qualifications and Previous Grants**

I am grateful to have enjoyed the support of numerous research grants, both internal and external, as I have pursued my scholarly endeavors. Grants that I received early in my career to support dissertation research and writing include a Fulbright grant, a Beveridge grant from the American Historical Association, summer library research grants from the University of Virginia and the University of Florida, and a dissertation grant from the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy. As an Assistant Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, I received a summer research grant and a grant from Vanderbilt University to attend a workshop on Nationalism in the New World. Since arriving at IU South Bend in 2005, I have received two IU South Bend Faculty Research Grants (Summer 2006 and Summer 2008) as well as a research grant from the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, IUPUI (2008). In addition, I have received a New Frontiers Exploration Travel Fellowship and an Overseas Conference Fund Grant that allowed me to present some of the results of my research.

The grants I have received after the completion of the Ph.D. have allowed me to conduct additional research and write and/or revise some of my original work for presentation at numerous national and international conferences (please see attached CV). In particular, the IU South Bend FRG and Center on Philanthropy grants I received in 2008 allowed me to collect important primary sources and write new material that resulted in the presentation of “The Quest to Progress: Public Health and the Eugenics Debate in Colombia, 1910-1940” at the Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies Conference, (New Orleans, April 16-18, 2009). With this new research, I also began to revise a chapter of the book manuscript and incorporated new material.

The grants and feedback I received from experts in the field at various professional conferences have also contributed to two of my peer-reviewed publications. The first is a chapter in a book, entitled, “La regeneración de la raza in Colombia,” that was published in *Nationalism in the New World*, edited by Don Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2006). The second is an article entitled, “Trabajo, Ahorro, Familia, y Caridad: Poverty and the Catholic Moral Imperative in the Era of ‘Order and Progress’ in Regeneration Colombia, 1878-1900” that was published in the journal, *The Latin Americanist*
Additional Funding

For my project in 2008, I also applied for a University of Chicago Library Travel grant in case the travel to Florida was not funded. Since then, I also applied for a Beveridge grant from the American Historical Association, which I did not receive (though I had received one once before). I recently submitted another application for a Beveridge grant for this project. This grant will provide a maximum of $1,000.00 for travel and there are few additional sources of support for projects in the Humanities, especially those requesting a stipend for the time needed to complete a project.

Research Plan/Planned Activities

May 28-July 3:

During this time I propose to travel to Bogotá, Colombia and visit two archives. From May 28 to June 22 I plan to visit the Archivo de Bogotá. This archive opened in 2003 and is one that I have never visited before. I believe it may contain some documents that were obtained from other archives that I have already examined. However, I have learned from colleagues in my field who have visited this archive and from its website that it contains collections of documents that were previously unavailable at other archives. In particular, I would like to examine the following collections: the Fondo de la Empresa Distrital de Servicios Públicos (Public Services), the Fondo de la Secretaría de Obras Públicas (Public Works), and the Fondo de la Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado (Acueduct and Sewer Systems) of Bogotá. This archive also contains a collection of the Registro Municipal (Municipal Register) and documents from the Concejo de Bogotá (City Council of Bogotá). I have reviewed some issues of the former source and sporadic documents from the Concejo, but I have only encountered them elsewhere in sporadic fashion. It would be wonderful to view the entire collection they have, which spans the years 1887-1954 for the Municipal Register/Record and 1900-1960 for records of the City Council. The documents contained in these collections would permit me to write more completely about the extent to which the municipal government participated in projects pertaining to the provision of public housing, public health reforms, the construction of public works projects, and the control of disease, including a devastating influenza epidemic/pandemic in 1918. I have found previously that a new class of public health physicians took an active role in “regenerating the race” through the study of diseases and the recommendation of various public health reforms. As yet, however, I have been unable to determine the exact extent to which local government officials cooperated with and employed the recommendations of these public health experts. The documents contained in these collections would permit me to better analyze the reforms, the role of the higienistas, and the relationship between the public and private sphere in terms of the implementation of various public health and social services. Analysis of these documents is essential to my book manuscript to ensure that I can offer a comprehensive analysis and more sound conclusions.

From June 23-July 2, I will visit the Hemeroteca of the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library). The Hemeroteca is a collection of numerous magazines, newspapers, and journals. I have visited the Hemeroteca before, but there is one collection that I was unable to view in its
entirety at the time, the *Revista de la Junta General de Beneficencia*. This journal contains reports and other documents from the Departmental General Council on Beneficence. I have an entire chapter devoted to this *Junta*. Further examination of this collection would allow me to provide a more complete analysis of the important activities of the five charitable organizations that were under the direction of this Departmental Council, including the main charitable hospital of Bogotá, the Hospital de San Juan de Dios.

**July 5-August 15**

Upon my return from Bogotá, I will study the new materials and incorporate any new findings obtained from the research conducted at these archives. I am also hoping to complete the final revisions and editing of the book manuscript so it is ready for submission to publishers.

**Prospects for Publication and Impact on Career**

I have received positive feedback from numerous scholars in the field who have heard my work presented at scholarly conferences and/or read various portions or draft chapters of the book manuscript. Furthermore, editors at Stanford University Press, the University of New Mexico Press, Nebraska University Press, and Vanderbilt University Press have expressed interest in my manuscript. I plan to submit the manuscript proposal and sample chapter to each of these, as well as Duke University Press, and am hopeful that one or more will be interested in reviewing a copy of and publishing the revised manuscript that will result from my sabbatical and the additional work I perform over the summer as proposed here. The publication of my book manuscript would be of great benefit to my career. It will help my case for promotion to Full Professor in a few years. It would also open the doors for further scholarly activity, including a second book project. Overall, the publication of this book will enhance my reputation as a scholar of Colombian and Latin American history, and recognition will thus be given to Indiana University.

**Budget**

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**Budget Justification:**

I plan to spend two months of the summer working on this project for which I am requesting the funds necessary for a five-week research trip to Bogotá, Colombia from May 28-July 3 and the rest in salary replacement for a total of $8,500. It should be noted that the $1,200 I requested for lodging is based on the cost of an apartment rental rather than a hotel in order to cut down on expenses. The actual Meals and Incidental rate for Bogotá found through the IU webpage is
$105.00 per day. However, I have only estimated $50.00/day, as I believe I can manage on this amount. The estimate for transportation expenses includes travel to and from the airport in Bogotá and an estimate of daily transportation to and from the archives in Bogotá.

I have submitted an application for a Beveridge grant from the American Historical Association, which would provide a maximum of $1,000 that must be used for travel. I also plan to submit a New Frontiers Exploration Travel Grant. A Faculty Research Grant would be tremendously helpful in providing the support I need for this short research trip and the time over the summer to complete the revisions of my book manuscript.

References


