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THE ORIGIN OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE IDEA¹

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THE core of the Western Hemisphere idea is the proposition that the peoples of the Western Hemisphere are united in a special relationship to one another that sets them apart from the rest of the world; above all, apart from Europe. Around this core there gathered at an early date a large cluster of related ideas, social and cultural as well as politico-geographical, and mystical as well as rational. Thus, already in 1813 Thomas Jefferson was saying, in a famous letter to Alexander von Humboldt which gave the idea its first complete expression, that America *has* (not *is* but *has*) a hemisphere of its own, and that the unity of its peoples extended to all their "modes of existence."²

The Western Hemisphere idea soon spread from the United States to Latin America. It has subsequently found political expression in a variety of important forms, each different from the others and all imperfect in one way or another, such as the unilateral Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the multilateral corollary to the Monroe Doctrine proposed by Argentine Foreign Minister Drago in 1902, and the evolving Pan American movement since 1889. The vitality of the idea was maintained and even increased well on into the present century. In 1916 young John Foster Dulles (now Secretary of State) based an important public address³ on the assumption that the nations of the Western Hemisphere have, as he put it, "a common personality, distinguishing them from the other nations of the world" and "an orbit absolutely detached" from the orbit of Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Through the 1930's this idea thrived in the

United States and Latin America, and even spread to Canada. About 1940, however, there was a widespread revolt against what the rebels called the "Western Hemisphere complex."⁴ How successful the revolt has been, at least in this country, is illustrated by the fact that today the United States is tied to Western Europe in an organization, NATO, which is irreconcilable with the classical Western Hemisphere idea, since an essential component of that idea was the separation of America from Europe.

Paradoxically, the roots of this anti-European idea lie deep in America's European past, for it grew out of the conception of America as a New World. Wholly European in its origin, this conception remained largely European in its development down to the eighteenth century. The European origin of the whole "New World" idea is obvious the moment one breaks the idea down into its two component parts, which are the newness of America and the congruity of its several parts. The idea that America was new bore the "made in Europe" label on its face, for the "wild surmise" with which Cortés and his contemporaries viewed America and its adjacent waters was surely not shared by the native Americans, the Indians. To them, the New World was Europe. Dr. Samuel Johnson put the case in a nutshell when he said that Columbus "gave a new world to *European curiosity*."⁵ Likewise, the idea of the congruity of the several parts of America was one which, until the Europeans invented it and propagated it with their maps, had never occurred to anyone in all the agglomeration of indigenous societies sprinkled over America from Alaska to the Tierra del Fuego. To this

¹ This paper is a condensation of parts of the series of Commonwealth Lectures given by the author at University College, London, in 1953. These lectures are to be published in the autumn of 1954 by the Cornell University Press under the title *The Western Hemisphere idea: its rise and decline*.

² Quoted in Laura Bornholt, *The Abbé de Pradt and the Monroe Doctrine*, *Hispanic Amer. Hist. Rev.* 24: 220, 1944.

³ Second Pan American Scientific Congress, *Proceedings* 7: 687-692, Washington, Govt. Print. Off., 1917.

⁴ A notable product of the revolt was the article by Eugene Staley, *The myth of the continents*, *Foreign Affairs* 19: 481-494, 1941, which used the term "Western Hemisphere complex." This article was reprinted in Hamilton Fish Armstrong, ed., *The foreign affairs reader*, 318-333, New York, Harper, 1947.

⁵ Quoted in Pedro Henríquez-Ureña, *Literary currents in Hispanic America*, 4, Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1945. The italics are mine.

day the surviving remnants of those societies have never accepted the idea; to them, Pan Americanism is gibberish.

The domestication of the New World idea in America and its development into the Western Hemisphere idea was a slow process, which required more than two centuries for its completion. It took place in two stages: first the provincial and then the continental stage, or, in terms that apply to a later date, first the national and then the inter-American stage. For a long time during its provincial stage the development seemed to be in the opposite direction from the one leading to the Western Hemisphere idea, for its first result was a proliferation of parochialism. Sooner or later, the American descendants of Europeans began to think of themselves as Americans and no longer as Europeans-in-America; but their sense of Americanism was localized in Brazil or New Granada or Peru or Virginia—there was nothing continental about it. Even in British North America as late as 1765, a new note was struck when one of the delegates to the Stamp Act Congress, Christopher Gadsden, exhorted his colleagues: "There ought to be no New England man, no New Yorker, known on the Continent, but all of us Americans."⁶ Yet even Gadsden meant, not the whole American continent, the whole Western Hemisphere, but only that fragment of it, British America, which was to become the United States. Consequently, the provincial stage resulted first in a fragmentation of America through the development of local loyalties which signified a weakening of ties with Europe but did not bind the fragments together in a new synthesis.

This synthesis was achieved in a second and quite different stage and under a stimulus provided mainly by Europe. The stimulus came from three eighteenth-century revolutions: the intellectual, the commercial, and the political. Since my time is limited, I shall confine the rest of my remarks mainly to the intellectual revolution, for without it the other two would never have led

⁶ Quoted in S. E. Morison and H. S. Commager, *The growth of the American republic*, 29, New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1937. Among the many evidences of an earlier development of the same sort of Americanism in Latin America one may note, for Brazil, Pedro Calmon, *Historia de la civilización brasileña*, 77-78, Buenos Aires, Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, 1938, and, for what is now Colombia, Juan Friede, *El arraigo histórico del espíritu de independencia en el Nuevo Reino de Granada*, *Revista de Historia de América* 33: 95-104, 1952.

to the formulation of the Western Hemisphere idea.

The intellectual revolution was accomplished by the spread of the Enlightenment from Europe to all the countries across the Atlantic, first to the United States, and somewhat later to Latin America. In both it fell on fertile soil. Americans, both North and South, were attracted somewhat by the "completely original form of philosophic thought" which it produced, but still more by its gospel of reform and progress through the promotion of useful knowledge.⁷

Among the most important agencies in spreading the Enlightenment, in America as in Europe, were the academies or learned societies which sprang up in both areas in the course of the eighteenth century. The first such body in the New World, and one of the most important, was founded at Philadelphia in 1743. Its name, "The American Philosophical Society . . . for Promoting Useful Knowledge,"⁸ left no room for doubt about its being an offspring of the Enlightenment. Similar societies began to be organized in Spanish America about 1790.⁹ They were numerous, for they enjoyed the royal government's good will and at times its active support. The oldest of them, the "Sociedad de Amigos del País," of Havana, is, like its Philadelphia counterpart, still very much alive today. The names given them were similar to those of their prototypes that had appeared in many parts of Spain since about 1760, such as "Patriotic Society," or "Society of Friends of Their Country," with perhaps the prefix "Economic"; but these old names soon acquired a new significance in America.

Through these societies and other channels, the Enlightenment contributed to the growth of the Western Hemisphere idea in three ways. First, it stimulated Americanism: throughout the Americas its leading exponents took the patriot side in the struggles for independence from Eu-

⁷ These two aspects are stressed respectively in Ernst Cassirer, *The philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1951, and Carl Becker, *The heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers*, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1932.

⁸ This name was adopted when the Society was definitively organized in 1768: Edwin G. Conklin, *A brief history of the American Philosophical Society*, *Year Book Amer. Philos. Soc.* for 1953: 11, Phila., 1954.

⁹ Arthur P. Whitaker, ed., *Latin America and the Enlightenment*, 13-15, New York, Appleton-Century, 1942. Dr. Robert Shafer of Syracuse University is preparing a comprehensive study of these societies in Spain and Spanish America.

rope in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Second, it created for the first time a basic kinship of ideas between the two Americas, bridging the gap opened between Protestants and Catholics just when America was colonized. The rapprochement was aided by the fusion of the Enlightenment in Spanish America with the older liberal Spanish-Catholic tradition, which was revived at this time.¹⁰ Third, the Enlightenment gave the Americas for the first time a reciprocal interest in, and some knowledge about, each other's culture.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the attitude of both Americas is typified by Cotton Mather, whose only interest in Spanish America was a missionary one—to convert the papists to Protestantism. The new attitude which both sides were beginning to take as the century came to a close is illustrated by the fact that, even in the wilds of Venezuela, Alexander von Humboldt encountered a Spanish American scientist who was familiar with the works of Benjamin Franklin. By 1800 the American Philosophical Society had established relations with scientists in Mexico and Cuba, and in 1801 and 1802 the *Gazeta de Guatemala* took extensive notice of medical studies recently published by Drs. Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Smith Barton of Philadelphia. In 1808 the Peruvian José Hipólito Unánue published a book on the climate of Lima (*El clima de Lima*) which contains several references to the New York periodical *Medical Repository*.¹¹

To be sure, the Enlightenment's spread at first produced the opposite effect, for it stunted the growth of the isolationist Western Hemisphere idea by fostering a feeling of fellowship among enlightened people in all the countries on both sides of the Atlantic.¹² This was the kind of thing

¹⁰ On the revival of this tradition, see especially Camilo Barcia Trelles, *Doctrina de Monroe y cooperación internacional*, in *Académie de Droit International, Recueil des cours*, 1930 2: 391–605, Paris, 1931; Manuel Giménez Fernández, *Las doctrinas populistas en la independencia de Hispano-América*, Sevilla, Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1947; and Silvio Zavala, *La filosofía política en la conquista de América*, Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1947.

¹¹ Harry Bernstein, *Some Inter-American aspects of the Enlightenment*, in Whitaker, ed., *Latin America and the Enlightenment* (cited above, n. 9), 53–69. See also the same author's *Origins of Inter-American interest*, Phila., Univ. of Penna. Press, 1945.

¹² The growth of this feeling is discussed in broad terms in Michael Kraus, *The Atlantic civilization: eighteenth-century*, Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1949 and Arthur P. Whitaker, *The Americas in the Atlantic*

the hopeful philosophers of that age looked forward to when they spoke of the international "Republic of Letters" and called themselves "citizens of the world." Not until the Atlantic community was split in twain in the early nineteenth century were international-minded Americans fully converted to the view that they were citizens of only half a world.

In the meanwhile, however, one other development arising out of the Enlightenment had completed the preparation of American minds for the new hemispheric orientation. This was the elaboration by European writers of what we may call an anti-American thesis, and the defensive reaction which this thesis not unnaturally provoked among the victims of their denigration.¹³

The anti-American thesis may be summed up in the proposition that the New World was inferior to the old in every respect, as to both man and nature. This proposition betokened a new attitude towards America on the part of Europe which was clearly a by-product of the Enlightenment. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries European writers had made no such generalized comparison, either favorable or unfavorable, between America and Europe. To them, the newness of the New World did not give it either uniqueness or unity; rather, as Henríquez-Ureña has pointed out,¹⁴ they considered it in terms of a problem which was universal and which the European mind of the Renaissance was already debating when America was discovered, namely, "the age-old contrast between nature and culture." The results of the inquiry were mixed, for if it produced the cult of the noble savage, it also produced the cult of the ignoble savage; and in both cases the American savage was judged not as an American but as a savage.

Nor was any such generalized comparison implicit in the tendency of Europeans of that earlier period to think of America in utopian terms. Sir

triangle, in *Ensayos sobre la historia del Nuevo Mundo*, 69–96, Mexico City, Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1951. On the European intellectual background, see Paul Hazard, *La pensée européenne au XVIIIème siècle*, Paris, Boivin, 1946, and, on the aspect indicated, Gilbert Chinard, *Eighteenth century theories on America as a human habitat*, *Proc. Amer. Philos. Soc.* 91 (1): 27–57, 1947.

¹³ Antonello Gerbi, *Viejas polémicas sobre el nuevo mundo*, Lima, Banco de Crédito del Perú, 3rd ed., 1946, and Leopoldo Zea, *América como conciencia*, 109–120, Chap. VII, "Nacimiento de una conciencia americana," Mexico City, Cuadernos Americanos, 1953.

¹⁴ Henríquez-Ureña, *op. cit.*, 14.

Thomas More and Tomaso Campanella chose America as the locus of their utopias, and about 1540 the Spanish-born Bishop Vasco de Quiroga actually established two utopian communities in Mexico.¹⁵ It would be a great mistake, however, to regard these utopias as inverting the eighteenth-century judgment and exalting America above Europe. The utopians merely believed that America provided a more favorable environment for the application of ideas that were thoroughly European. When they thought about the native peoples of America at all, they were sure that these stood quite as sorely in need of reform as did the peoples of Europe. This conviction was strongly stressed by Vasco de Quiroga, the only one of the three who either saw America with his own eyes or actually tried to put Utopia into practice. In short, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not produce the antithesis "Europe versus America."

Eighteenth-century Europe did produce it, in the form of that denigration of America to which reference has already been made. Begun on a large scale by the French scientist-philosopher Buffon in 1750, this denigration reached its climax in de Pauw's *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* (1768), according to which everything in America was "either degenerate or monstrous," its men cowardly and impotent, its iron unfit even for making nails, and its dogs unable to bark. Indignant rejoinders on behalf of the New World's dogs and its other forms of life poured forth from both North and South America in the next generation—from the pens of Fathers Molina and Clavigero, Thomas Jefferson, Philip Freneau, Joel Barlow, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Smith Barton, and many others.¹⁶ To them, of course, America was superior to Europe. This was something new, for previously Americans had never made a generalized comparison of the two. It was from European writers that Americans learned to think in terms of an antithesis between America and Europe.

The commercial and political revolutions gave the antithesis currency and a focus in the Western Hemisphere idea. The commercial revolution

stimulated its growth by creating a wholly new nexus of trade and communications which provided for the first time the means of political and cultural intercourse between the Americas.¹⁷ The final stimulus came from the political revolutions that swept the Atlantic world in the half century after 1775, and above all from the Spanish American revolutions that began in 1810.

The latter were the catalytic agent which precipitated the formulation of the Western Hemisphere idea. In the vast area stretching from California to Cape Horn, Spanish American patriots started a struggle for independence which quickened the sense of hemispheric solidarity by its apparent analogy to the recent struggle of the United States against another European power, Great Britain. The Spanish American struggle was hardly well begun when there emerged in Europe that Concert of the great powers, commonly called the Holy Alliance, whose leaders soon took a stand hostile to the very principles on which the independence of every American nation was based, and to their whole political way of life—to the right of revolution, popular sovereignty, constitutional and representative governments, and personal liberty. That Britain, one of the members of the European Concert, did not underwrite this program, was not clear to Americans until after the catalytic agent had already done its work. The antithesis was completed when the concert of despotic Europe provoked a concert of the free Western Hemisphere.

That typical child of the Enlightenment, Benjamin Franklin, had prayed that "a thorough knowledge of the Rights of Man may pervade all nations of the earth, so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say 'This is my country.'" Early in the nineteenth century many Americans came to feel that the Western Hemisphere was the only part of the world which could answer Franklin's prayer.¹⁸ When they did so, the formulation of the Western Hemisphere idea was complete.

¹⁷ Arthur P. Whitaker, *The United States and the Independence of Latin America, 1800-1830*, 1-38, Chapter One, "Opening the Door to Latin America," Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1941.

¹⁸ How this situation, by quickening the sense of the newness of the New World, also stimulated the development of Manifest Destiny is pointed out in Albert K. Weinberg, *The Idea of Manifest Destiny*, 134-135, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1935.

¹⁵ Silvio Zavala, *La Utopía de Tomas More en la Nueva España y otros estudios*, Mexico City, Colegio de Mexico, 1937.

¹⁶ The European attack and the American rejoinder are discussed in the two works cited above, n. 13.