

*El Panamericanismo de persecución:*  
Examining the Struggles of Oppressed Populations and Minorities in Latin America  
and the Caribbean Through the Lens of Literature Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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## **Abstract**

This thesis will attempt to explore the struggles of oppressed populations and minorities throughout Latin America and the islands of the Caribbean via the modality of Pan-American literature. Ibero-American works such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*, known for both its depictions of slavery and the restrictions forced upon women in Cuban society, and Clorinda Matto de Turner's *Aves sin nido*—a Peruvian novel demonstrating the plight of the indigenous Andean people—will be critically compared. Literature of a relatively more recent vintage, including *Avengers of the New World*—Laurent Dubois' historical account of the Haitian Revolution—and Virginia Garrard-Burnett's work concerning the Mayan genocide in Guatemala of the early 1980s, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, will also be scrutinized as well in a comparative fashion. Due to the holistic nature of the Latin American Languages and Civilization program of study, this project intends to utilize the related disciplines of history, political science, literature, language, and cultural studies in order to discern connections and form relevant analogies to the respective present situations of these populations and their countries today. Lastly, this endeavor will also hope to provide perspective on how the effects of these intercontinental American developments have both in turn impacted and have been impacted by the influence of the United States.

## Introduction

A common theme that has been present throughout the entire history of human civilization has been the persecution and oppression of groups of individuals on the basis of political, religious, class, gender, sexual, racial, and/or ethnic affiliation. Whether state-sponsored, carried out by radical extremists, or firmly entrenched in the moral fabric of a particular society, the scars of oppression throughout the centuries—and even within the respective lifespans of the generations still living today—are an appalling testimony to the inhumanity present within parts of the human race.

To briefly reference some of the most well-known instances of persecution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that are still *mostly* recognized within today's collective consciousness, it would be impossible to ignore the event that almost single-handedly sparked the creation of the term for the ultimate form of oppression, *genocide*. The Holocaust of European individuals of Jewish, Polish, or Romani heritage—and along with those who were imprisoned and killed due to either their physical or mental disabilities or their sexual orientation—is arguably the particular atrocity that frequently comes to mind whenever that infamous word is uttered. The genocides of more recent memory, such as those that occurred within Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Sudan, can also be considered relatively well-recognized examples of the extreme persecution of particular populations.

It is somewhat surprising that all of these horrific events—most of which have at least been nominally mentioned within the majority of history curriculums in the school systems of the United States—actually took place not within the Americas, but on the respective African, Asian, and European continents. The omission of the aptly-named “Silent Holocaust” from that list – otherwise known as the “Guatemalan” or “Mayan” genocide—is also surprising to note.

Occurring most notoriously during the early 1980s—and well before the fall of the Soviet Union—these years of targeted violence and persecution have often gone unmentioned in many “American” (read: United States’) textbooks. That selective omission certainly raises a number of questions, and also serves as a jumping-off point for this project. Although constrained by time, resources, and overall feasibility, the principle goal of this thesis is to examine examples of oppression that have been documented in Pan-American literature since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Since an undergraduate thesis is not the appropriate medium for a large-scale project of far-reaching scope, this particular endeavor will solely focus on four specific literary references that have been previously utilized—albeit separately—within classes pertaining to the study of Latin America that were recently offered through several departments at Oakland University. One of the challenges of this project will be to effectively relate material stemming from several different genres, languages, and periods of time into a cohesive disquisition. The works in question—Laurent Dubois’ *Avengers of the New World*, Clorinda Matto de Turner’s *Aves sin nido*, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab*, and Virginia Garrard-Burnett’s *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*—each pertain to a respective Latin American or Caribbean nation, and as such, each work alone could arguably merit an in-depth investigation that would individually concern the topics of marginalized populations and persecution. With that said, the objective of this project is understandably not to provide discrete summaries of each respective opus, but instead to analyze the disparate ways in which their authors were able to successfully—or even *not* so successfully—portray the struggles of the oppressed. That task in turn will lead to a number of valid comparisons amongst the compositions in question, and then on to an overarching examination of how the respective histories of each country have each been influenced by—and also in turn have effectively *influenced*—that of the United States. That last goal, although

seemingly tangential in this context considering the primary focus of the topic, will also be pursued in order to hopefully allow for a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of the nations of the Western Hemisphere, or that entity which from henceforward will be described herein in the truncated form as “Pan-America.”

In addition, several of the terms that will be frequently mentioned throughout the course of this monograph must firstly be defined. The Oxford American College Dictionary definition of *oppression* that will be utilized is “the state of being subject to unjust treatment or control,” while the similar *persecution* can be defined as “hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of race or political or religious beliefs” according to that same source. The Encyclopædia Britannica explains *minority* as “a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group. As the term is used in the social sciences, this subordinancy is the chief defining characteristic of a minority group. As such, minority status does not necessarily correlate to population.” Additionally, within this project “Latin American countries” will be defined as those in which a Romance language (i.e., Spanish, French, Portuguese, and associated creole languages) is predominantly spoken, while the term “Caribbean” will apply specifically to the islands within the Caribbean Sea regardless of the language—or languages—that are commonly spoken.

## The “Still Small Voice”: Minority Populations

*“Hay que alejar a estos foráneos, francamente, señor cura, porque los indios en teniendo apoyo se hacen insufribles, francamente.”* (Matto de Turner 68)

To briefly provide an overview of the groups of individuals that will be discussed herein, each of the four-forementioned works will be quickly summarized within the context of this project. Laurent Dubois’ *Avengers of the New World* documents the history of the French colony of Saint-Domingue and the origins of the Haitian nation on the island of Hispaniola, and in turn the author also discusses to great lengths the oppressed African slave populations that eventually became the liberated citizens of the first independent black republic of the Western Hemisphere. Clorinda Matto de Turner’s *Aves sin nido* is a Peruvian novel written in 1889 that primarily espoused and predated the Andean concept of *indigenismo*—the movement that both brought awareness to indigenous rights and denounced the exploitation of native populations throughout Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and most predominantly Peru—while simultaneously highlighting the abuses of power carried out by officials of the Catholic Church and the Iberian-headed government alike against both women and minorities. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab*, another 19<sup>th</sup> century Spanish-language novel written by a female author, both criticized the institutions of slavery and those of the misogynistic Hispano-Caribbean society. This particular *novela* also has been viewed as a predecessor to the type of antislavery literature epitomized by later works such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and *Sab* surprisingly even contains elements that strongly critique the abuses inflicted on the indigenous population of Cuba by European colonists. Finally, Virginia Garrard-Burnett’s *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit* details the most contemporary account of minority oppression out of the four-discussed

works. That particular opus, while delving into the years of violent civil war that have plagued Guatemala since the United States-sponsored 1954 coup d'état, specifically examines the minority populations that were targeted by former President Efraín Ríos Montt's dictatorial regime during the early 1980s. *Terror* successfully relates the respective roles of religion, racism, and Cold War politics in demonstrating the mechanisms behind the oppression of the persecuted groups. While sometimes simplified as the "Mayan genocide," Garrard-Burnett's work additionally highlights the many Catholics and "communist-sympathizers" that were in turn massacred under Montt's orders. Since even in this preliminary stage comparisons amongst the compositions in question can be easily drawn, the remainder of this project will intend to examine specific examples present within the previous works that are especially effective representations of each author's respective portrayal of minority oppression.

### **Roots of Pan-American Oppression: The Atlantic Slave System**

*“¡Ah!, sí; es un cruel espectáculo la vista de la humanidad degradada, de hombres convertidos en brutos, que llevan en su frente la marca de la esclavitud y en su alma la desesperación del infierno.”* (Gómez de Avellaneda 106)

Taking into consideration the inherent goals of the four works, Dubois' *Avengers of the New World* is the most objectively historical of the group when dealing with the subject of human slavery. Before delving into literary analysis of both that and the other resources, an examination of the sociopolitical and historical origins of slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean is necessary. Formally established in 1501, the infamous transatlantic slave trade officially began due to the actions of *los reyes católicos* of Spain—Ferdinand and Isabel—that

legally allowed slaves to be imported, bought, and sold on the island of Hispaniola, or that which is now composed of the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Since that time, over two million slaves were imported into the Spanish colonies alone throughout the next 350 years (Meade 67). The prospects of slaves that were brought into the Iberian-dominated New World were undeniably bleak, as estimates have been made that “Slaves, amply replenished through a brisk trade from West Africa, were worked to death in less than five years on Caribbean sugar islands and in 8-10 years on the plantations of northeast Brazil” (Meade 68). In comparison to the total number of human slaves imported into the United States since colonial times—which by some sources can roughly be considered 523,000 men, women, and children—between only 1816 and 1867, Cuba alone introduced at least some 595,000 slaves into its brutal plantation workforce (Meade 68). Curiously, in most parts of Latin America and the Caribbean even after the “Haitian Revolution” of the early 1800s, “census data listed 18.2 percent of the population as white, compared with 81.9 percent people of color, divided among Indians, blacks, mestizos, and mixed-race black and white, or mulattos” in 1827 (Meade 72). In the French colony of Saint-Domingue, the racial composition was even more extreme. An estimated 500,000 slaves—or a ratio of 15 African slaves to each white French colonist—lived and worked on Saint-Domingue at any given time prior to the successful slave revolt (Meade 72). Even more telling is the evidence “that the entire African-born population turned over every 20 years” due to the outright inhumane quality of life experienced by most plantation slaves. Dubois devotes page-upon-page in *Avengers* to detailing the horrors inflicted upon the slaves of Saint-Domingue. Much as in many other “slave societies”—those in which the institution of human trafficking and forced labor was an integral part of an economy’s survival—in the French colony most newly-arrived slaves were forced to receive brandings to mark their state as human property. In many cases,

slaves would end up receiving multiple brandings alongside substantial scarring, as slaves were frequently bought and sold to various masters over the course of their lives. It has been estimated that in just the 18<sup>th</sup> century alone more than 685,000 men, women, and children of African origin were delivered in captivity to the colony, while estimates of the total number of slaves shipped to Saint-Domingue from the 1600s up until the end of the Haitian Revolution are assumed to have been between 850,000 to even one million human lives (Dubois 39). Many plantations reported child mortality rates to have reached nearly fifty percent amongst the slave populations, while their birthrates as well were typically stagnant at around three percent (Dubois 40). Unfortunately, Dubois almost argues that it would be better for slaves to avoid at all costs bringing children into the living Hell known as the enslavement of human property. In a particularly poignant criticism, the author notes that,

Focused on short-term gain and for the most part unburdened by humanitarian concerns, many masters and managers in Saint-Domingue coldly calculated that working slaves as hard as possible while cutting expenses on food, clothing, and medical care was more profitable than managing them in such a way that their population would grow. They worked their slaves to death, and replaced them by purchasing new ones. (Dubois 40)

The life of a typical slave in Saint-Domingue was grueling to say the very least. Most enslaved Africans began their daily labor at five in the morning and worked until sundown—and with little respite—for six days out of each week. Many slaves received debilitating injuries due to exhaustion and their work with machetes and mills, as often all it took was a single mistake for a slave to lose an arm or a hand to a sugar grinder or sharp blade (Dubois 45). On Saint-

Domingue, the vast majority of slaves were employed on either coffee or sugar plantations, as by the time of the infamous slave revolt the relatively small French colony had become the leading provider of both commodities in the entire world, producing and exporting “as much sugar as Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil combined and half of the world’s coffee” (Dubois 21). Indeed, Dubois notes that Saint-Domingue had quickly become “the centerpiece of the Atlantic slave system” (21).

The use of violent force as an oppressive measure was unfortunately all-too routine in Saint-Domingue. Dubois provides the following horrific details about some of the most common forms of torturous abuse. Please advise, for the light and innocent of heart this may be far too much inhumanity to handle. These quotes are lifted directly from *Avengers*, and are only included in full to demonstrate the actual extent to which many African slaves and their families were persecuted at the hands of their oppressors.

Physical punishment was both a constant threat and a frequent reality in the lives of the slaves. The most common punishment was whipping, which according to the Code Noir [the set of laws originally passed under France's King Louis XIV in 1685 that defined the conditions of slavery throughout the French empire] was the only punishment allowed on plantations. Masters or drivers tied the hands and legs of the enslaved to posts stuck in the ground, or else tied them to a ladder or hung them by their hands from a post. Whippings were used as torture and as spectacle. “Slow punishments make a greater impression than quick or violent ones,” wrote one wealthy plantation owner to his managers. Rather than fifty lashes “administered in five minutes,” he recommended “twenty-five lashes of the whip administered in a quarter of an hour, interrupted at

intervals to hear the cause which the unfortunates always plead in their defense, and resumed again, continuing in this fashion for two or three times,” as being “far more likely to make an impression.” The message was aimed as much at the other slaves, who were forced to watch, as at the victim.

Hot peppers, salt, lemon, or ashes were sometimes rubbed into open wounds, which might also be burnt with an open flame to increase the pain. Cases of even more extreme torture appear in the documents. One man wrote in the 1730s about the practice of placing gunpowder in the anus of slaves and lighting it. Another wrote of the castration of male slaves. A master brought to court in the 1750s had tied a slave, suspended, above a fire. Moreau [a wealthy white lawyer who recorded anecdotes about life in pre-revolution Saint-Domingue] documented cases in which slaves were splashed with burning wax and women’s “shameful parts” were burnt with hot coals, and one in which a master attacked some of his slaves and bit off pieces of their flesh. Another late eighteenth-century writer described slaves being doused with boiling cane juice and others being buried alive after having been forced to dig their own graves. (Dubois 50)

Apologies for recounting the entire list provided by Dubois—which in many instances seems to border on the outright pornographic—but the intention behind the inclusion of said atrocities is to accurately demonstrate the author’s most unflinching depiction of the brutal oppression experienced by the Saint-Domingue slave population.

The oppression of the paradoxically black minority-majority also went beyond just the corporal sense. According to the author, African religious customs—alongside their syncretic derivatives such as Voudon—were outlawed, social gatherings of slaves belonging to different

masters were banned, and wronged slaves were often given little to no legal recourse against abuse of any kind. Dubois provides one particularly chilling anecdote in which the planter Nicholas Le Jeune—a Frenchman who tortured, imprisoned, and directly led to the deaths of two female slaves—was accused of these crimes by fourteen other slaves, stood trial, but in the end never received a just punishment of any kind (56). Despite the presence in Europe of staunch “Enlightened” critics of slavery in the form of French philosopher-writers such as Guillaume Thomas François Raynal and Louis Sebastien Mercier—with both men arguing that “like all other oppressed peoples, the slaves had the right to resist their oppressors violently”—the plight of the African population in Haiti only began to effectively change for the better due to the “perfect storm” of the combined Haitian and French Revolutions and the ensuing conflicts with Great Britain and Spain (Dubois 57-59). Since the intent of this thesis is not to provide a complete historical account of the events of each country, the discussion concerning the Haitian Revolution and its “liberatory” outcomes will be left for a different project at a different time. However, for those who wish to know more about the legacy of oppression in post-revolution Haiti, née Saint-Domingue, Dubois and other historians take care to address in great length the violent retaliations performed by the newly-freed citizens of that black republic upon their former white oppressors (Dubois 299-301).

Moving on to the second work specifically addressing the topic of slavery, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* provided a pointed criticism of Caribbean slavery at a time in which the despicable institution was still both legal and thriving in Cuba. While the *novela* was originally published in Madrid in 1841, it took more than seventy years—and well after both the author’s death and the end of Cuban slavery—for the work to reach Havana in 1914. While lacking in both the levels of historic information and accurate realism present in both Dubois’

*Avengers* and Garrard-Burnett's *Terror*, the raw, unfettered emotion of Gómez de Avellaneda's stirring novel provides a decidedly more intimate view of an oppressed population. The heroic and tragic protagonist of the Cuban author's work, the mulatto slave Bernabé "Sab" belonging to Don Carlos de B..., is juxtaposed against a nearly all-white cast of symbolic individuals in order to provoke sympathy in the reader for the dilemma of the unfortunate slave. Even from the deceptively picturesque beginnings of the novel, the author chose to highlight the disdain held by Enrique Otway—the stand-in representative for the English and European-educated business class—once the rich young man discovers Sab's ethnic heritage. Despite Otway's initial high regard for Sab, upon learning that the latter's mother was an enslaved former princess of the Congo, Otway's entire demeanor witnesses an abrupt change to the derogatory (Gómez de Avellaneda 109). The use of outwardly stereotypical characters to reflect the long-held prejudices of both Spanish and Hispano-Caribbean society is one of the primary tools the author utilized in order to successfully demonstrate the oppression of both Afro-Cuban mulattos and pure African slaves alike. In another notable instance, Carlota, the white female protagonist that the mulatto is hopelessly infatuated with, received the news that Sab's heart had literally burst the previous night. Despite the adoration Sab had heaped upon this woman to an arguably unnecessary extent throughout the course of the entire novel, Carlota's reaction to his passing, to quote the English translation, "hardly seemed to affect her," as "the loss of the mulatto was very minor" (Gómez de Avellaneda 127). Sab was her constant companion and arguably her "guardian angel" throughout much of her early life, so indeed Carlota's almost nonchalant response to the death of the mulatto is a blatant representation of the miniscule value placed on the lives of slaves and "inferior beings" in 19<sup>th</sup> century Hispano-Caribbean society. As a sharp contrast to that dismissive reaction, Carlota is instead brought to tears and dramatic sighs by the

news that her servant Teresa had decided to enter the convent. To further cement the naïve woman's candid opinion of her deceased friend, Carlota, upon wrongly surmising that Teresa's startling decision was the result of the servant having been in love with the mulatto, exclaimed to Enrique that "to love him [Sab]!... Oh, it's not possible! Him, a slave!" (Gómez de Avellaneda 129). In clearly presenting the prejudices of the privileged white characters of the novel, Gómez de Avellaneda effectively demonstrated the underlying currents of racism that were present—quite ironically to say the least—in even the seemingly benevolent and sympathetic whites. Much earlier in the story, Carlota was observed as both a kind protector of her father's slaves and as a proponent of abolition (Gómez de Avellaneda 57). After encountering a group of slaves while innocently frolicking in a private garden gifted to her and tended by Sab, Carlota, the "progressive idealist and friend of slaves," enthusiastically declared the following soliloquy:

*-¡Pobres infelices! -exclamó-. Se juzgan afortunados, porque no se les prodigan palos e injurias, y comen tranquilamente el pan de la esclavitud. Se juzgan afortunados y son esclavos sus hijos antes de salir del vientre de sus madres, y los ven vender luego como a bestias irracionales... ¡a sus hijos, carne y sangre suya! Cuando yo sea la esposa de Enrique -añadió después de un momento de silencio-, ningún infeliz respirará a mi lado el aire emponzoñado de la esclavitud. Daremos libertad a todos nuestros negros. ¿Qué importa ser menos ricos? ¿Seremos por eso menos dichosos? Una choza con Enrique es bastante para mí, y para él no habrá riqueza preferible a mi gratitud y mi amor.*

(Gómez de Avellaneda 146-147)

“Poor unfortunate souls!” she exclaimed. “They judge themselves fortunate because they are not receiving blows and abuse, and they calmly eat the bread of slavery. They judge themselves fortunate, yet their children are slaves before they leave their mother’s womb, and they see them sold off like unthinking beasts... Their children, their flesh and blood! When I am Enrique’s wife,” she added after a moment of silence, “no unhappy soul around me will breathe the poisonous air of slavery. We will give all our blacks their freedom. What does it matter to be less wealthy? Will we be any less happy because of it? A hut with Enrique is enough for me, and for him there will be no greater riches than my gratitude and my love.” (Gómez de Avellaneda 57)

Gómez de Avellaneda utilized such a passionate passage denouncing slavery to juxtapose with the later revelations that Carlota could not conceive of the possibility of ever “loving” even a mulatto she called her friend. Such apparent dichotomy can lead to the interpretation that the author sought to highlight the hypocrisy present in much of the rhetoric embraced by fervent white abolitionists. Even though those intellectuals were able to see and critique the evils of slavery, simultaneously many of them would never think to relate to Africans in any manner more genuine than just patronizing pity. In essence, Gómez de Avellaneda playfully lambasted whites who outwardly sought to end slavery while inwardly holding on to their ingrained prejudices against blacks. Carlota, for all her talk of being grateful to Sab throughout the novel, merely viewed his death as yet another inconvenience in the “perfect” life she had always dreamed of. The naïve woman did not see blacks as human brethren worthy of her affections but rather merely her pity, and in this way the author was able to demonstrate the ostracization of Africans and mulattos from white society.

The argument can easily be made that the two-discussed works utilized decidedly different strategies in constructing their representations of Caribbean slavery, but with that being said, they each sought to successfully highlight both the overt and the subtle methods of oppression common to the society of that period of time. Dubois' intent was more to structure a comprehensive depiction of the underlying reasons behind the Haitian Revolution, while Gómez de Avellaneda instead sought to humanize the mulatto slave and hopefully allow her primarily-Spanish audience to connect with his sorrows and struggles. An especially poignant and hopeless assessment delivered by Sab to Teresa in the second half of the novel serves to highlight the bleak outlook that would seem to accompany the institutionalized oppression weighing down upon the minds, hearts, and bodies of many slaves.

*“¿No notáis este color opaco y siniestro? ..., es la marca de mi raza maldecida... Es el sello del oprobio y del infortunio. Y, sin embargo -añadió apretando convulsivamente contra su pecho las manos de Teresa-, sin embargo, había en este corazón un germen fecundo de grandes sentimientos. Si mi destino no los hubiera sofocado, si la abyección del hombre físico no se hubiera opuesto constantemente al desarrollo del hombre moral, acaso hubiera yo sido grande y virtuoso. Esclavo he debido pensar como esclavo, porque el hombre sin dignidad ni derechos, no puede conservar sentimientos nobles. ¡Teresa!, debéis despreciarme..., ¿por qué estáis aquí todavía? ..., huid, señora, y dejadme morir.”*

(Gómez de Avellaneda 218-219)

“Do you see this face, Señora? What does it tell you? Don’t you see this sinister, opaque color? It is the mark of my accursed race. It is the seal of shame and misfortune. But nevertheless,” he added, pressing Teresa’s hands convulsively against his breast, “nevertheless, the fertile seed of noble sentiments lives in this heart. If my destiny had not stifled them, if a man’s physical degradation had not been in constant opposition to his moral development, perhaps I could have been noble and virtuous. Enslaved, I have had to think like a slave, because a man deprived of rights and dignity cannot keep hold of noble feelings. Teresa! You should despise me. Why are you still here? Flee, lady, and—” (Gómez de Avellaneda 106)

While Gómez de Avellaneda’s prose easily allows the uninitiated bibliophile to have an intimate glimpse into the emotional struggles of a slave, Dubois provides a much more academically objective—albeit still inherently biased—account of the many forms of persecution experienced by Haitian slaves. The argument can be made that each has its own merits and accompanying weaknesses, and that by targeting decidedly different audiences—19<sup>th</sup> century Spaniards and Cubans specifically for Gómez de Avellaneda, while 21<sup>st</sup> century English-speaking academics and the insatiably curious for Dubois—the authors successfully utilized the strengths of each medium to highlight similar yet undeniably distinct stories of oppressed populations in ways that still are able to resonate with their readers today.

## Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2): *La lucha de los indígenas*

*“Nacimos indios, esclavos del cura, esclavos del gobernador, esclavos del cacique, esclavos de todos los que agarran la vara del mandón.”* (Matto de Turner 208)

The struggle of indigenous populations against oppression throughout Latin America and the Caribbean is almost too broad—albeit paradoxically situational—of a topic to discuss within any medium whatsoever, and yet there are marked similarities that can be found when examining the often racist and culturally-derisive examples of persecution in countries as dissimilar as Guatemala and Peru. Upon first glance, the argument can be made that both of these nations share more in common with each other than this green author would seem to believe, but most in Latin America would beg to differ. Guatemala and Peru, while both falling prey to colonial interests during *la Conquista* of the New World by the Spanish Empire, each belong to decidedly different ethnic heritages despite the all-too-popular false presumption in the United States that “all Hispanic countries serve tacos.” Although admittedly the intentionally ignorant statement made may be inaccurate in describing the beliefs of many of those considered “more culturally-sensitive Americans,” it still serves to highlight the gross stereotyping and oversimplification of ethnicities that many here do still embrace.

For a brief explanation concerning the inherent differences between the two countries, each of them is home to one of two respectively contrastive indigenous populations. In Guatemala—the Central American country sharing a border with its North American neighbor Mexico—the most predominant indigenous communities collectively are known as descendants of the Mayan peoples. *Los mayas quiché* constructed the ancient city of Tikal, made substantial advances in mathematics and astronomy, and were subjugated by ruthless Spanish conquistadors

such as Pedro de Alvarado (Loprete 19-25). Peru, on the other hand, is a nation situated mostly within the Andean mountain range that traverses much of the western portion of South America. The indigenous populations that still call Peru their native home today are mostly descendants of the Incan people whose empire composed much of Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru along with portions of southern Colombia and northwestern Argentina (Loprete 31-34). *Los incas* commonly spoke dialects of the Quechua language, and the same holds true for many of the indigenous populations dwelling within Peru today (Loprete 31). The Incan people were masters of unorthodox methods of construction and masonry such as those evident in the cities of Machu Picchu and Cuzco, and they even were able to devise ingenious footpaths for traversing their mountainous empire. However, the joint efforts of Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro were enough to bring that massive empire to its knees, and in turn the once-proud rulers of much of South America have become the subjugated and oppressed peoples described within the pages of Clorinda Matto de Turner's *Aves sin nido* (Loprete 31-34, 60-62). In a similar manner, the harsh treatment of the Mayan peoples living in 20<sup>th</sup> century Guatemala is demonstrated through Virginia Garrard-Burnett's *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*. As each resource effectively considers the topic(s) of racial and ethnic oppression as confined to a particular population, comparisons can be made between the two works while also allowing individual examinations of the merits and drawbacks of each approach.

To begin with a discussion of *la novela peruana de Aves sin nido*, the work in question serves to highlight the persecution and immoral and unjust subjugation of the indigenous Andean populations residing in Peru through a story based in the fictional city of Killac. Allegedly modeled after *el Distrito de Tinta* where Matto de Turner was raised, the author weaved a literary tapestry depicting the dramatic situation of *las aves sin nido*, or in English the

metaphorical “birds without a nest.” While arguably Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* often dwelled more on the complex “love quadrilateral” amongst its principal characters to more subtly drive home its point concerning the oppression of black slaves, Matto de Turner from the beginning made her point clear that she intended to address the injustices that oftentimes pervade the offices of people in power. Throughout the novel, the author delivered pointed vitriol and barb-after-barb towards both the local government officials and the representatives of the Catholic Church. Arguably it was the criticism of that latter institution that was enough to both excommunicate Matto de Turner and place her novel on the Vatican’s infamous “index of prohibited books” due to its overt anti-clergy message. Although the author utilized a number of relatively stock characters in her depiction of Andean society, each individual served to highlight a specific aspect of said culture in her tale of indigenous oppression. The Quechua Yupanqui family—representative of the oppressed Andean indigenous populations and composed of Juan Yupanqui, his wife Marcela, and their “children” Margarita and Rosalía—endures the wrath of the corrupt Spanish aristocracy when they choose to seek the assistance of the recently arrived *criollo* couple Fernando and Lucía Marín. The aforementioned aristocracy—represented primarily by the governor Sebastián Pancorbo and the priest Pascual Vargas—serve as the antagonists of this tale as well as a critique of Spanish oppression and corruption. The priest in particular suffers the brunt of Matto de Turner’s scathing criticism. Drawing from a revealing excerpt of the text, the conversations between Governor Pancorbo and Father Vargas arguably do not leave much at all to the imagination of the reader.

*-No faltaba más, francamente, mi señor cura, que unos foráneos viniesen aquí a ponernos reglas, modificando costumbres que desde nuestros antepasados subsisten, francamente -contestó el gobernador deteniendo un poco el paso para embozarse en su gran capa.*

*-Y deles usted cuerda a estos indios, y mañana ya no tendremos quien levante un poco de agua para lavar los pocillos.*

*-Hay que alejar a estos foráneos, francamente.*

*-¡Jesús! -se apresuró a decirle el cura, y tomando de nuevo el hilo de sus confidencias, continuó-: Cabalmente, es lo que iba a insinuar a usted, mi gobernador. Aquí, entre nos, en familia, nos la pasamos regaladamente, y estos forasteros sólo vienen a observarnos hasta la manera de comer, y si tenemos mantel limpio y si comemos con cuchara o con topos -terminó el cura Pascual, arrojando una bocanada de humo.*

*-No tenga usted cuidado, francamente, mi señor cura, que estaremos unidos, y la ocasión de botarlos de nuestro pueblo no se dejará esperar -repuso Pancorbo con aplomo.*

*-Pero mucho sigilo en estas cosas, mi don Sebastián. Hay que andarse con tientes; éstos son algo bien relacionados y pudiéramos dar el golpe en falso.*

*-Cuenta que sí, mi señor cura, francamente; que ellos están buscándole tres pies al gato. ¿Se acuerda usted lo que dijo un día don Fernando?*

*-¡Cómo no! Querer que se supriman los repartos, diciendo que es injusticia; ¡ja! ¡ja! ¡ja! -contestó el cura riendo con sorna y arrojando el pucho del cigarro, que había consumido en unos cuantos chupones de aliento.*

*-Pretender que se entierre de balde, alegando ser pobres y dolientes, y todavía que se perdonen deudas... ¡bonitos están los tiempos para entierros gratuitos! Francamente, señor cura -dijo don Sebastián, cuyo eterno estribillo de francamente lo denunciaba como un hipócrita o como un tonto. (Matto de Turner 68-69)*

“That was the only thing wanting, Father, that some foreigners [Fernando and Lucía Marín] should come here to make rules for us, modifying the customs which have existed from the time of our great grandfathers,” answered the Governor, stopping a moment to wrap himself up in his great cape, while the priest added, “Give a little more rope to these Indians and soon we shall not have anyone even to draw up water to wash out the cups.”

“We must get rid of these foreigners, really. [sic] Father, for these Indians, if they have anyone to uphold them, will soon become insufferable.”

“That is just what I was going to suggest to you, Governor. Here, among family, we get along beautifully, but these foreigners come here to observe us, to watch us, even to our manner of eating, — if we have a clean table cloth, if we eat with spoons or with sticks,” grumbled the priest, sending out a cloud of smoke from his mouth.

“Do not trouble yourself. [sic] Father; let us be united, and the occasion for throwing them out of the town will soon present itself.”

“But with great caution, Don Sebastian; we must be very careful in these matters, these people are well connected and we might make a false move.”

“We know what they are working for. Do you remember what Don Fernando said one day?”

“Certainly, Governor; he wishes that the ‘distributions’ [*la mita o los repartos*: in essence, the forced labor of indigenous peoples—typically the males—in the mines or other public projects for a predetermined period of time] should be suppressed; says that they are an injustice! Ha! ha! ha!” [sic] laughed the priest maliciously, throwing away the stump of his cigar.

“He also wishes that the poor should have free burial, and that even debts should be pardoned. Fine times for free burials! Really, Father,” added Don Sebastian, whose eternal “really” caused one to suspect him to be either a hypocrite or an idiot.

(Matto de Turner 361)

Indeed, the words of the scheming individuals would seem almost equally at home in either plotting the death of Christ or within any number of clichéd “smoke-filled room” political dramas. Skipping ahead to the conclusion of their secret meeting, Father Pascual Vargas definitively states that “The fact that the Señora Lucía called us there to speak to us about some poor scheming Indians who do not wish to pay what they owe; she has used words that, as Don Sebastian says, if understood by the Indians, would destroy for us our customs of *repartos*, *mitas*, *pongos* [unpaid indigenous “manor servants”], and everything else” (Matto de Turner 404). After a brief echo chamber of the rallying cry “We will never consent. What an idea!” and “Away with the pretensions of these foreigners!” the governor Don Sebastian decreed the following nationalistic—albeit equally xenophobic—sentiment:

*-De una vez por todas debemos poner remedio a esas malas enseñanzas; es preciso botar de aquí a todo forastero que venga sin deseos de apoyar nuestras*

*costumbres; porque nosotros, francamente, somos hijos del pueblo -dijo don Sebastián, alzando la voz con altanería y llegándose a la mesa para servir una copa al párroco.*

*-Sí, señor, nosotros estamos en nuestro pueblo.*

*-Cabales.*

*-Como nacidos en el terruño.*

*-Dueños del suelo.*

*-Peruanos legítimos.*

*Fueron diciendo los demás, pero a nadie se le ocurrió preguntar si los esposos Marín no eran peruanos por haber nacido en la capital.*

*-Cuidadito no más, cuidadito, no hacerse sentir y... trabajar -agregó el cura marcando la doctrina hipócrita que engaña al hermano y desorienta al padre.*

*Y aquella tarde se pactó en la sala de la autoridad civil, en presencia de la autoridad eclesiástica, el odio que iba a envolver al honrado don Fernando en la ola de sangre que produjo una demanda amistosa y caritativa de su mujer.*

(Matto de Turner 71)

“Once for all, let us put an end to all these evil teachings; it is necessary to expel from the place every foreigner who does not come with desires to support our customs, because we, really, are the children of the country,” said Don Sebastian, raising his voice and going to the table to serve a glass to the priest.

“Yes, we are in our own country.”

“Born in the land!”

“Genuine Peruvians!”

Such were the exclamations from all sides; but no one stopped to inquire if the Maríns were not Peruvians because born in the capital. [sic]

“Carefully, carefully; say nothing, but work!” added the priest.

And that afternoon, in the house of the civil authority and in the presence of the ecclesiastical ruler, was stirred up and set to work the odium which was to envelop the honest Don Fernando in a wave of blood, because of the kindly and charitable act of his wife [in seeking to aid the Yupanqui family]. (Matto de Turner 404-419)

Due to the nature of the work in question, there are unfortunately significantly more examples of oppression *and* xenophobia that could potentially be discussed in a project of this type than there is sufficient space to successfully elaborate on each of them. From the very beginning of the novel to its tragic end, a plethora of injustices against both the Yupanqui family and Fernando and Lucía Marín are mentioned and expounded upon. Implied sexual servitude and abuse, human trafficking, attempted murder via the medium of drunken mob violence, *actual* murder via the medium of drunken mob violence, kidnapping, ransom, forced labor, corrupt debt-collecting, and the scapegoating, imprisonment, and unlawful seizure of the livestock of an innocent indigenous man are all topics explicitly referenced throughout the course of Matto de Turner’s novel (53-220). In summary, the author arguably accomplished her twofold goal of both raising societal awareness concerning aristocratic abuses of power against both indigenous populations and foreigners, while simultaneously providing a sympathetic depiction of those she supported—the aforementioned native Andean peoples and foreign-born *criollos*—while denouncing those she vehemently criticized; namely, the corrupt Church, judicial, and government officials.

Entering into the last of the four works—Virginia Garrard-Burnett’s *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*—the argument can be made that her account of relatively recent events might not actually dovetail nearly as neatly with the other three resources. Hypothetical support for that particular argument would firstly be that her work is far too focused on a particularly short period of time, that the research conducted is solely based in the relatively small geographic area of Guatemala, and that her continued use of the word “genocide” in reference to the casualties incurred by the Mayan populations is inaccurate at best, or even determinably wrong. Additionally, one could seemingly argue Garrard-Burnett’s opus deals with events that are too far chronologically displaced from those of the other works, as *Terror* references Guatemala primarily from the 1950s onward while the other resources clearly discuss their respective nations and populations prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, despite all of these potential “gripes,” a counterargument can be made that Virginia Garrard-Burnett’s research is the most relevant of the four works to the United States of today. The term “genocide” had not even been yet envisioned at the time of the events of the next-most-recent opus published in 1889, *Aves sin nido*, as *Avengers*—although published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well—primarily discussed historical events that occurred only up until the early 1800s. *Terror* is a resource that expounds upon the complex facets of racial, ethnic, religious, and political oppression in a way that the other works—possibly save Dubois’ *Avengers*—fail to do, as Garrard-Burnett has had the benefits of vast troves of research, statistics, and modern recorded interviews that were not easily available prior to this last century. In addition, the author’s tactful deconstruction of the psychological and sociological causes behind many of the most controversial actions of the Guatemalan Civil War is an insightful bonus as well. Without further ado, here is a discussion of the final work in question.

*La violencia*—or the period of time in which General José Efraín Ríos Montt was in power as the supreme dictator *cum presidente* of Guatemala from 1982 to 1983—was often humbly referred to as *la situación* during his time in office (Garrard-Burnett 3). According to Garrard-Burnett, it has been all-but-unequivocally confirmed that “the most extensive state-sponsored political violence occurred during his [Ríos Montt’s] presidency” (6). The author further notes that during just his 17-month rule, the Guatemalan state’s military succeeded in displacing 1,200,000 individuals from 4,000 different villages (Garrard-Burnett 6). Additionally, approximately 86,000 Guatemalans died at the hands of state-sponsored violence under that General’s reign, but again Garrard-Burnett grimly notes that even that approximation might in fact be an underestimation due to the vast number of unmarked graves and mass burial sites employed throughout both Ríos Montt’s tenure in office and the nearly thirty-six-year war (7). The so-called “Mayan Holocaust” carried out under the General’s orders can be determined to be a fairly accurate nomenclature, as most of the recent truth commissions estimate that “upward of 80 percent” of those killed in the early 1980s were identified as Mayan (Garrard-Burnett 7). The author additionally argues that the “Mayan Holocaust” resulted in the substantial loss of indigenous culture. According to Garrard-Burnett’s interpretation of information provided by Guatemala’s Commission for Historical Clarification (*La Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico*), the organization “has called the violence of the 1982-1983 period genocide: the intentional destruction of a people on the basis of their membership in a religious, racial, or ethnic group” (13). In a study referenced by Garrard-Burnett, the forensic anthropologist Victoria Sanford provided the following commentary on the oppression of *la violencia*:

The Ríos Montt regime used the rhetoric of the Cold War to willfully and intentionally commit genocide against the Mayan people, thus solving the Guatemalan state's historical "Indian problem" once and for all. This argument is persuasive given the basic standard that no government willingly kills off large numbers of its own people unless it identifies a class, racial group, or sector to be a fundamental threat to the existence of the state. Sanford demonstrates that the counterinsurgency campaigns in the early 1980s clearly bear the mark of genocide, citing the CEH report's finding that the vast majority of the victims of *la violencia* were Mayan. The genocide argument contends that the government's program also systematically sought to eradicate Mayan culture through such strategic and symbolic actions as the burning of cornfields (corn being at the heart of the Mayan diet and also at the center of traditional Mayan religion), the forced use of the Spanish language in model villages, and the material destruction of Mayan culture through the incineration of many hundreds of villages during the scorched-earth campaign [*Fusiles y Frijoles*]. (Garrard-Burnett 14)

In a sobering account of a massacre carried out at San Francisco Nentón on July 17, 1982 by Guatemalan forces, the author described an event akin to the despicable acts committed by conquistadors detailed in Bartolomé de las Casas' *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (Garrard-Burnett 93). If the first-hand description provided by a survivor of the massacre provides any indication, the horrific deeds performed that day should be told at truth commissions and human-rights-violation trials, but not discussed in length or detail in a project of this variety. Children were murdered in front of their family and friends, women were raped and killed while their husbands stood by helpless, and the village elders were brutally

slaughtered like animals. However, one should be aware of these *evil* acts of terror before drawing conclusions about undocumented refugees from any Latin American nation, but the explicit details given by one of the sole survivors of the massacre are far too heart-wrenching and sickening to reprint here. According to the author, “The man who escaped through the window lost thirty family members that day: his wife, his eight children (including a one-month-old-baby), his brothers, grandchildren, and the wives of his elder children” (Garrard-Burnett 93-95). Garrard-Burnett continued with the further information that “Of the more than 300 original residents of Finca San Francisco Nentón, three men survived to give testimony of these events from the relative safety of the refugee camp in Mexico” (Garrard-Burnett 95). As one last discussion on the topic of *la violencia* for this thesis, an excerpt of the author’s commentary on the aftermath of that hellish *matanza* should be included here.

It takes a long time to kill more than 300 people one by one. There were so many people to kill that the entire massacre process took many hours, from early afternoon into the early evening. Between 302 and 350 people died at Finca San Francisco Nentón on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1982. In the days and weeks to follow, approximately 9,000 people from nearby villages, fearful that they would suffer the same fate as their neighbors in Finca San Francisco Nentón, fled to the mountains, some making it across the border to the refugee camp in Mexico.

The savagery and inhumanity of that day is difficult to comprehend, in part due to what Falla calls “the element of inexplicability which makes a massacre something hard to believe.” But one aspect of the tragedy is difficult to overlook, which is that this massacre was explicitly not the playing out of ancient tribal or ethnic hatreds that

underlie so many savage conflicts in other parts of the world. Many, if not most, of the soldiers who took part in the massacre were from the neighboring villages, such as nearby San Miguel, Jacaltenango; the survivors could tell by their manner of speaking. *“They were all from San Miguel [puro sanmigeleños]—they speak their dialect! All Indian [puro natural].”* *“Why did brothers come, the brothers themselves, to kill us? They did not say, ‘This is the crime; here is the proof.’ They didn’t do anything. Who knows why this happened. No one indicated, ‘this was one offense; this was another.’ Nobody said. They just killed. We don’t know. We are ignorant [nosotros somos ignorantes].”* All the victims and most of the *victimarios* (perpetrators) were indigenous; if this case was like many others, they may have known one another or even been relatives.

At the time of the Finca San Francisco Nentón massacre, the Guatemalan military denied that any such event had ever taken place. Three months later, under pressure from international human rights groups, the U.S. Embassy sent out a team to view the site by air to observe the “sites of alleged large-scale massacres purportedly carried out by the Guatemalan Army,” but bad weather prevented their landing or seeing the site. Instead, they visited the army base in Huehuetenango, which was home to the soldiers who had committed the atrocities. Given free run of the base, the U.S. Ambassador concluded, “If these officers have something to hide, they do not seem overly concerned about us finding out,” a statement pregnant with ambiguity. (Garrard-Burnett 96)

The events that took place in Guatemala in the 1980s are very different from those of 19<sup>th</sup> century Peru. The explicit agenda of the Guatemalan regime that specifically targeted Mayans

can only be compared with the other mass killings of minority populations that have unfortunately taken place around the world. State-organized eradication of peoples of a particular culture, race, ethnicity, or any other defining factor stands in a class of its own, and that is basically all there is left to say on that topic in the context of this essay.

**Conclusion: *El Panamericanismo de persecución***

Mandatory classes on the history of Latin America and the Caribbean since the American Revolution are not usually requisite courses in most programs of study. More often the history of the United States, of Europe, or that of the generalized “world” may be required, but specific classes detailing the events that took place within the borders of our nation’s southern neighbors are often entirely neglected. Even within most Spanish language programs, detailed history and political science topics would appear to be the least likely subjects to be brought up in the majority of the required coursework. In my humble opinion, that would appear to be a major disservice—no pun intended—to university students who are graduating in this day and age, and especially to those intending to work alongside Spanish-speaking individuals.

The events that have occurred throughout the Americas have rippled across time and space to affect the very decisions made by politicians today both within the United States and abroad. Issues concerning proposed immigration reforms, the status of refugees seeking asylum from political violence and natural disasters, the illegal Pan-American drug trade, coups within unstable governments, and even the economic situations in countries such as Venezuela can all be traced back through history in ways that can provide significantly greater insight into the world outside of a typical citizen’s “American (read: U.S.A.) bubble.” It is all too easy to forget that despite the horrific events that frequently take place in our country, many other human

beings around the world would trade their entire livelihoods for even a single shot at the so-called “American Dream.” Frequently I believe that we can become rather jaded and feel overtly entitled to that privilege, and especially if one has never had the opportunity to truly relate to someone who has had significantly different—and usually much more difficult—life experiences than those of the typical American college student.

The effects of the Haitian Revolution still influence our country’s relationship with that small island nation today. The immense wartime-debt that had essentially been forced upon the Haitian government since their severing of ties with France has led to a fractured government and an enormous national deficit that has never truly healed. Many citizens there live far below the American poverty line and experience truly deplorable conditions due to the corporate exploitation our nation continues to inflict on the majority of those employed in the Haitian workforce. Since the 1990s, the United States has directly intervened not once, but *twice* in removing a democratically-elected Haitian president. The second time in 2004 could arguably be considered a U.S. sponsored kidnapping and forced-exile operation, and since then the country has experienced a parade of ineffective leaders and U.S. led occupations that have done little to change the outlook of the vast majority of Haitian lives for the better.

Cuba, while arguably a discussion best expounded upon another time, became the country it is today in a large part due to the influence of the United States on its politics and economy. Fidel Castro’s 26th of July Movement was a direct response to the U.S. backed dictator Fulgencio Batista, and even to a greater extent *after* the Cuban Revolution our nation has attempted to meddle in their sovereign affairs time-and-time again.

Peru is one nation that is not usually on the radar of American foreign affairs as much as the others that have been mentioned, but undeniably the stability of many South American countries has had a direct impact on the number of immigrants arriving from those nations.

And finally, Guatemala's thirty-six-year civil war could possibly have been prevented if not for the actions of the CIA and the lobbying power of the United Fruit Company. Entering into and disrupting the governments and economic models of other countries is something we seem to be exceedingly well-practiced at, and yet arguably if the United States had intervened during the tyrannical years of *la violencia*, who knows how many lives could have been saved?

In conclusion, the study of Pan-American affairs is something that should be emphasized far more in the general education curriculums at any level of schooling in the United States. I have personally learned far more about the world in which we live in—through both this project and my chosen program of study—than I would have in nearly any other field, and I can honestly say that within the two years I have specifically focused on Latin America and the Spanish language, I have been provided countless eye-opening experiences that I feel are neglected in most other programs, both career-centric and not. The “America” that we are trying to make great again should not just be solely our nation, but that of the three interconnected continents known truly as “*las Americas*.” The path of isolationist nationalism seems to lead only to oppression, and based upon the many examples examined throughout the course of this project, time will only tell whether we will choose to stand as the United States of the *Americas*, or if we shall stand alone.

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