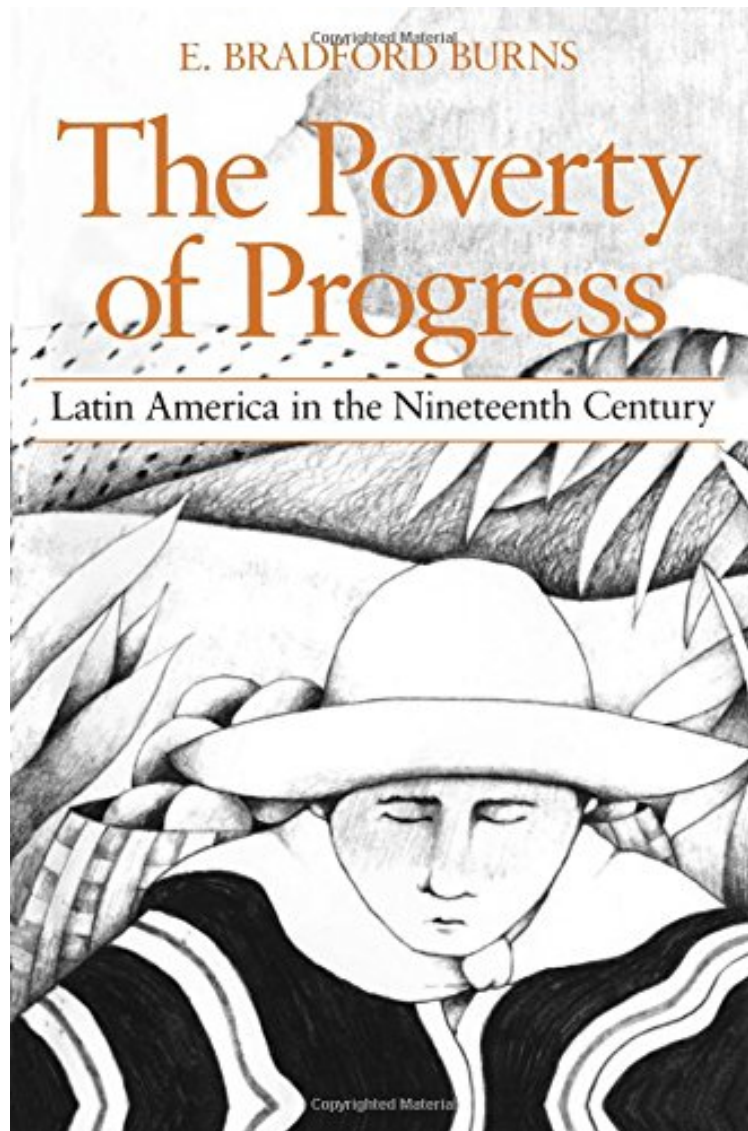


(Library ebook) The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century

# The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century

*E. Bradford Burns*

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**E. Bradford Burns : The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century:

15 of 17 people found the following review helpful. The Pitfalls of Modernization According to E. Bradford Burns By A Customer E. Bradford Burns' The Poverty of Progress is a complex analysis of the degree of beneficence that modernization had upon nineteenth-century Latin America. Burns attempts to provide a novel perspective that will

spark a reassessment of the common view that Latin America flourished with the implementation of the European ideals of progress, urbanization, and industrialization. With his claim that not all parts of Latin American society were in favor of the changes induced by modernization, Burns asserts his view that because progress benefited the elite minority while crippling the folk majority, modernization was ultimately a pitfall for Latin America. Due to the intricacy of Burns' argument and the informative information he provides, his *Poverty of Progress* successfully justifies a mandate for a reinterpretation and questioning of the traditional association of modernization with better living standards. Burns presents his argument in an organized fashion that builds the scenario of the cultural conflict. One should note that early in the first chapter, Burns shows his belief that the problems associated with modernization were due to a cultural conflict rather than a class struggle. With this in mind, Burns begins by discussing the rift between the modernizing elites, who associated progress with capitalism, and the folk, who felt threatened by the capitalist system as it opposed their old, entrenched traditions of harmony and cooperation. The capitalist ideals of individuality and competition clashed with the folk ideals causing the cultural conflict that Burns so articulately explains. He covers the goals of the elite minority which were routed in Spencerian and Darwinian evolution, Positivism, and the Enlightenment, and with these ideologies, the elites pushed for aspects of modernization such as industrialization which came at the expense of the folk majority. With his explanation of the cultural conflict and the aims of the elites, Burns then explores the majority's opposition to modernization with a discussion of the intellectuals, patriarchs, and folk. Here, one begins to understand why modernization was not entirely a beneficial development for Latin America. Burns mentions that intellectual elites began to notice the problems of modernization such as the growing dependence upon foreign investors who took control of Latin America's infrastructure. Intellectuals also pointed to the burdens of agrarian mismanagement that plagued economic conditions for the masses. Large land plots were increasingly controlled by a limited number of landlords who used the land inefficiently to produce export commodities, and economic conditions worsened for the masses as Indian, peasant, and church lands were confiscated. The masses also suffered since food was produced for export rather than for the nourishment of the country. Patriarchs hesitated to modernize as well because the new capitalist incentives for expanded agrarian production threatened their traditional norms of stability and simplicity. Burns suggests that the folks and patriarchs, having common ties in rural society, worked together in defiance against elitist modernization. Finally, he presents an important part of his argument in the last chapter when he explains that the terms "economic growth" and "development" are often misconstrued in their application to nineteenth-century Latin American history, and he offers his own definitions for these terms as well as alternatives to modernization that could have saved Latin America from its downfall. Ultimately, Burns' argument is effective in sparking debate over the degree of beneficence of modernization. One can find several strengths in Burns' *The Poverty of Progress* that make his belief in the detrimental consequences of modernization convincing. To begin with, the format and style he uses to present his position are effective as he first presents the elite desire for modernization, then the misgivings of the intellectuals toward the implementation of progress, and finally the opposition of the patriarchs and folk to modernization. This overview helps to illuminate the fact that Latin American society was not entirely united behind the trend for progress, and while one might criticize Burns for making broad generalities about Latin America, he dispels this judgment by explaining that his broad analysis is justified by aspects that all eighteen nations had in common: the presence of folk societies which resisted Europeanization, unbalanced power in the hands of the elite minority, and the role of the latifundio as it eventually expanded under the control of few landlords at the majority's expense. Burns also shows a great deal of wisdom in admitting the fact that his broad approach "across vast geographical and temporal spaces" is "at best suggestive," and such a statement allows his work to achieve its polemical purpose since it diffuses critics who might attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the book for its novel approach toward nineteenth-century Latin America (p. 2). This is perhaps the strongest point of the book since it works toward Burns' goal of inciting controversy and a reassessment of the true impact of modernization. Thus, in his *The Poverty of Progress*, Burns successfully argues that modernization in nineteenth-century Latin America was not completely beneficial as it only advanced the welfare of a select few while decimating the majority.<sup>7</sup> of 14 people found the following review helpful. Good but flawed. By J. Huntington Worth. Mr. Burns advances an excellent critique regarding the attempt of South American elites to ape western style capitalism. He suggests that attempts to cram western economic/political ideas into the dynamics of Latin America did considerably more harm than good. What Mr. Burns does not address is that the remedy advocated by many of the critics of those regimes was in very much the same vein. Marxist philosophy, theorized in the tradition of western thought- with western nations in mind, proved to be as ill a fit for Latin America as was western style capitalism. Mr. Burns' failure to realize this is the book's ultimate downfall. The end product is a study of Latin American hierarchical elites who sought to remake Latin America in 19th century Western Europe's image and a implication the results would have been different if they had modelled it after 20th century Eastern Europe. A good book soured by moldy Marxism.

From the Preface by Bradford Burns:

From the Inside Flap"Put this at the top of your reading list. It addresses 'the major enigma of Latin America: prevalent poverty in a potentially wealthy region.'"