

Quiz 1

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Introduction

1

After discussing the fact that the history of science and scientific development/pursuit in Latin America is often ignored and has never been focused on to the extent that this book intends to, the author states that science is an integral thread that makes up the true history of Latin America, being “intertwined with other aspects of social and cultural life...” such that it is important to recognize the Latin American scientific context in order to understand causes and effects of “...important regional historical events...” Effectively, the author is claiming that the social history of Latin America is dependent upon the history of science there—along with the reverse.

2

Generally, as the author argues, economic explanations of scientific development fail in that they follow too closely to the model set by European scientific development and activity, and thus fail to account for the specificity of the Latin American context. An example given is the work of Fernando de Azevedo in his attempt to account for historical scientific development in Brazil, which he claimed was “...an integral part of Brazilian culture.” Unfortunately, as the author points out, Azevedo’s work does more to explain why Portugal and Brazil’s resistance to Protestant ideals, and the coupling of religious and civil authority imposed as a means of “...economic exploitation...” hampered Brazil’s ability to follow the scientific mold set by Europe. By using Europe as a sort of scientific measuring stick and ignoring the specific context of Brazil, the work does more to show that European science did not exist, rather than show that science of any sort did.

3

La Sociedad Latinoamericana de Historia de las Ciencias y Tecnología was founded in Puebla, Mexico in 1982, and it publishes a journal on the history of science and technology in Latin America. The function of the journal is

to internalize historical evaluations of science in Latin America and avoid the issues of comparing Latin American science with Europe by adding a necessary element of contextualization. Instead of using Europe as the benchmark, Latin American science was to be seen as unique, but additive to a global scientific context.

4

Traditionally, the concept of peripheral and central science is applied to Latin America in the manner that Latin America is considered the periphery and Europe, being their colonizers, the center of scientific development. Implications of this method of thought are that there is a one directional flow of ideas from the center to the periphery, and that is the cause for legitimate science in the periphery. Examples given by the author of Latin America being central in regards to original scientific progress include botany in New Grenada, herbalism in Mexico, mathematics in Peru, and metallurgy in New Spain.

Chapter 1

1

The author mentions that the way of viewing the history of scientific thought in Latin America that reflects the enlightenment revolves around the idea that proof that science existed in the Americas comes from examples of people in the Americas who could understand the European mode of thought. The author acknowledges that this method of thinking about the presence of science in Latin America is in essence reliant on the societies ability to acquire European knowledge. Columbus landed in the New World on October 17, 1492, and the word Indian as used to describe the peoples of the American continents is a result of the fact that Columbus thought he had landed in India. The author believes that the second or forthcoming version of Indigenous history will be one which does not rely on comparison to European knowledge but instead acknowledges the independent scientific findings/traditions that were present, regardless of their inherent differences.

2

The author's apparent definition of ethnohistory is one that involves the study of the histories of particular indigenous or non-western cultures. Studying ethnohistory would appear to bring out the unique features of these non-western cultures, thus representing a sort of opposition or potentially a reaction against western globalization and its tendency to bring about cultural assimilation and the loss of individuality.

3

The conquest of Latin America was much more extreme than the reconquest of North Africa against the Arabs in the region. The retaking of lands from the Arabic and Muslim control did not, as the author notes, result in their total cultural destruction and did not involve the destruction of their informational sources. This is not the case as to what happened in the Americas, where entire civilizations, their infrastructure, and their cultural knowledge was virtually destroyed by Spanish forces. The extent of the destruction in the New World has greatly limited the amount of knowledge transfer that could happen over generations from these pre-Columbian American societies.

4

The origin of the myth of the Fountain of Youth came from stories of Prester John, the king of Ethiopia in 1165. Prester John was a figure of Medieval legend said to be a Christian king in the African Continent. Tales of the fountain were used to recruit soldiers during the crusades for the chance that the fountain lie wherever they may be sent. Upon reaching and exploring Florida, Ponce de León brought the legend with him and believed he could find the fabled fountain. The stories of the fountain and the belief that Europeans could find it in the foreign lands they visited shows the level of exoticism with which the Europeans viewed the people and lands of the new world. At the same time, it displays the fear and naivety that goes along with experiencing the unknown by the simple fact that they believed there could exist such an unlikely mythical place.

5

Accounts of condors were compared by Europeans to the mythical half-eagle half-lion called a Griffin. This is because of the fact that the condors were described to be, and are, large enough such that they can carry away a human in their talons. The sheer size of these birds and their talons compares to the mythical description of the Griffin, and again we see that the fear of the unknown and the new sights that the Europeans were seeing again allowed them to believe in the mythical beast described by Pliny the Elder that fought humans and stole gold (which again seemed plausible to the Europeans as there was an abundance of gold in the new world).