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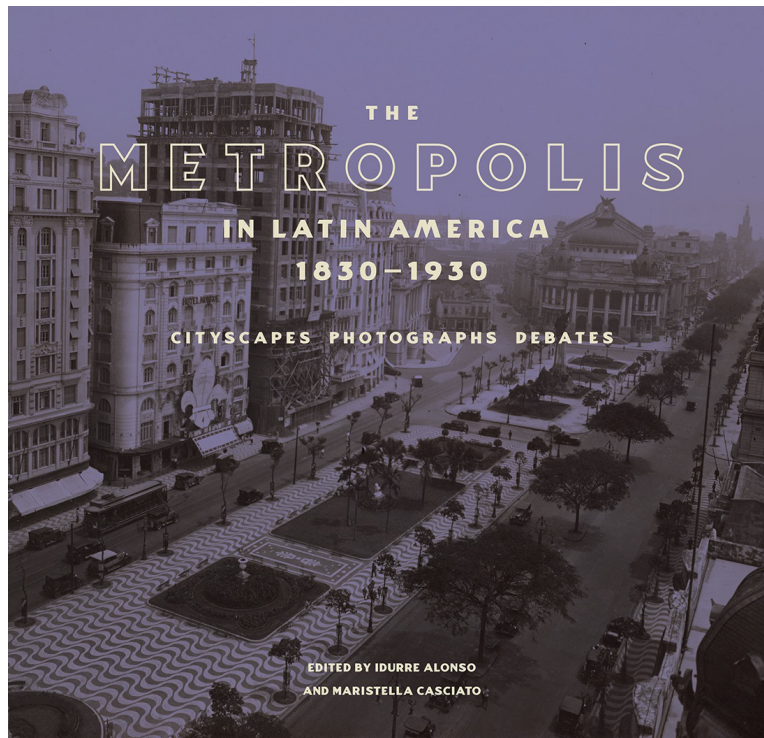
Images and Ideas About the Latin American Metropolis

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Review of Idurre Alonso and Maristella Casciato, *The Metropolis in Latin America, 1830–1930*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2021, 324 pages (ISBN 978-1-60606-694-2). This large-format book traces the history of the metropolitan transformations of the great Latin American cities and is accompanied by an impressive corpus of historical images.

Keywords: metropolis; Latin America; images





From September 2017 to January 2018, the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles held an exhibition titled *The Metropolis in Latin America, 1830-1930*, curated by Idurre Alonso and Maristella Casciato. The exhibition, which later travelled to the Americas Society in New York, served as the basis for a large-format book in 2021. This book represents a voluminous work of urban history that illustrates the transformations of certain Latin American capitals, including Mexico City, Havana, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Lima and Santiago, from around 1830, when republican governments were consolidating in Hispanic America, to the era of renewal projects and the metropolitization process and then culminating in the arrival of modern urbanism and professional urban planning of the 1930s. The book features a large quantity of visual documentation such as maps, blueprints, photographs, technical drawings, architecture and urban design projects, oil paintings, watercolors, beautiful gatefold panoramas and graphic records that formed part of the original exhibition.

The volume is divided into six albums and ten essays that explore different aspects of Latin American urban life during this period. The visual documentation that the albums contain, some of it unknown even to specialists, is very useful for understanding the transformations six capital cities underwent. These albums include general urban landscapes, images of the cities that date to the colonial period, views of public spaces, images of railways and other infrastructures, buildings and a collection of

sketches, plans, and publications representing the gaze of the European and American architectural avant-garde on Latin American cities. The majority of the images are taken from the collection held by the Getty Research Institute. The last two albums feature photographs and urban projects from the city that hosted the exhibition, Los Angeles; the decision by the editors to include the great metropolis of southern California alongside the urban symphony of Latin America was an inspired one.

Beyond offering an invaluable visual tour, this volume also reflects on the urban history of Latin America through ten essays commissioned from renowned researchers. The essays are organized chronologically, yet the book also reveals another order. Some of the articles provide panoramic readings of Latin American cities that follow theses advanced by urban historians several decades ago, while others are more specific and advance on current historiographical issues.

The founders of Latin American urban historiography in the 1970s and 1980s such as Richard Morse, Jeffrey D. Needell, José Luis Romero, Jorge Enrique Hardoy, and Armando de Ramón addressed the configuration of 19th-century bourgeois cities, European influences on the material configuration of Latin American capitals, and the impact of migration on the region's great metropolises. These scholars developed what we now consider the canon of Latin American urban history that focused on the study of the transition from Spanish and Portuguese colonial urban societies to bourgeois republican societies as well as analyzed urban planning in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Arturo Almandoz's essay in the volume under review expands on the contributions made by these historians in analyzing how urban expansion and demographic growth ended up establishing new urban societies in the 19th century and in the transition to the 20th. So too does Argentinian landscape historian Sonia Berjman's analysis of the construction of South American public spaces that pays special attention to beaux-arts plazas and parks; Maria Cristina da Silva Leme's study of the plans for the transformation of Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires at the turn of the century, written in a conventional register similar to the one adopted by the urban historiography of the 1970s and 1980s; and Maristella Casciato's investigation into the transfer of knowledge and contacts between modern architects and urbanists in Europe and Latin America. These texts take up ideas that have become traditionally accepted; their general accounts of the cities they analyze could be of great interest to those who are not very familiar with the urban history of Latin America.

Among the contributions that address the history of these cities through an examination of specific problems are those by Jorge Rivas Pérez, Idurre Alonso, and David MJ Wood. Rivas Pérez discusses the introduction of plant species and the development of green areas at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century

that beautified Latin American cities, a subject that has not been treated much by Latin American urban historiography, demonstrating how cities were transformed through the incorporation of nature via parks, *alamedas*, and gardens. Idurre Alonso's chapter falls under the category of the history of urban representations. In her chapter, she studies how photography was used to represent urban renewal projects as well as prevailing poverty in the region's capitals. Wood employs film as a record of urban transformations during a time in which social tensions, political crises, and the frenzy of modern life were all intertwined. These articles are of great interest because they address issues that until now have not been taken up.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize the three contributions that explore how cities and architecture shape Latin American identity. The Latin American continent is defined by its constitution as a culture comprising mixed ethnic groups, languages, and traditions that arose from the permanent relationship between Indigenous civilizations, a Blackness that is the consequence of the arrival of massive numbers of enslaved peoples from Africa during the colonial centuries, a Spanish and Portuguese culture that survived even after the independence movements, and a European culture brought in during the mass immigration of Europeans during the 19th and 20th centuries. Germán Mejía Pavony studies the city as a political fact and argues that the citizens of the 19th century functioned as a civilization project. In his essay, Cristóbal Jácome-Moreno examines the Indigenous past through the process of technological modernization in Mexico City between the end of the Porfiriato and the years immediately following the Mexican Revolution. Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales analyzes the tensions between the Indigenous and the colonial past in historians' search for a 'genuine' style for modern Latin American architecture in the early decades of the 20th century.

The inclusion of high-quality images, primarily from the Getty Research Institute archive but also from other Latin American and US archives, also makes this publication valuable. While the book showcases traditional panoramic views of the history of these cities, it also includes more innovative and specific takes. Moreover, nearly all the contributors to this volume come from the cultural area under study and wrote their contributions in Spanish or Portuguese, languages that predominate in historiographic reflections on this continent, which were then translated into English. The book will surely contribute to disseminating knowledge on these cities among a broader public that does not speak these languages fluently.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

