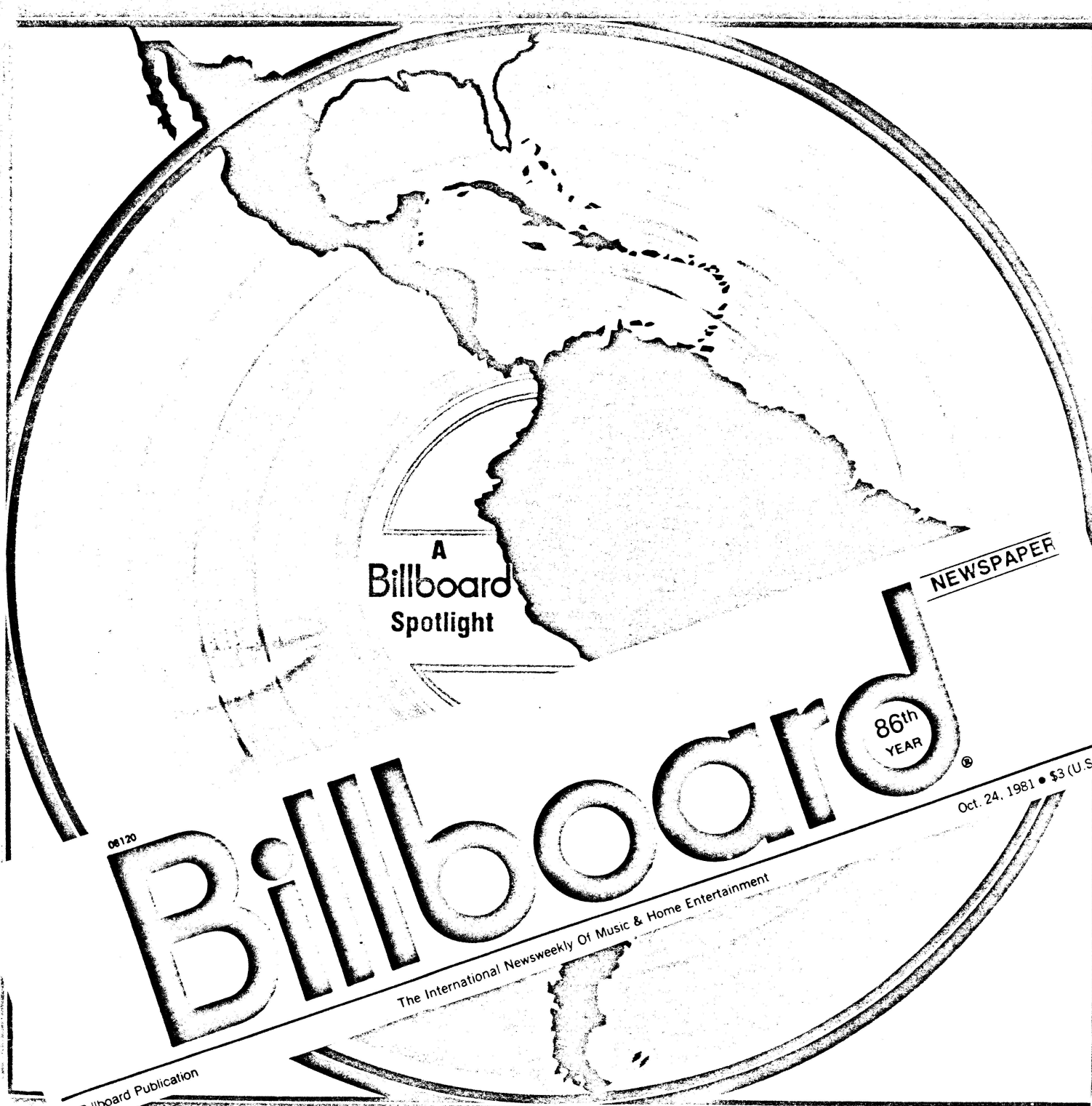


LATIN AMERICA

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IN
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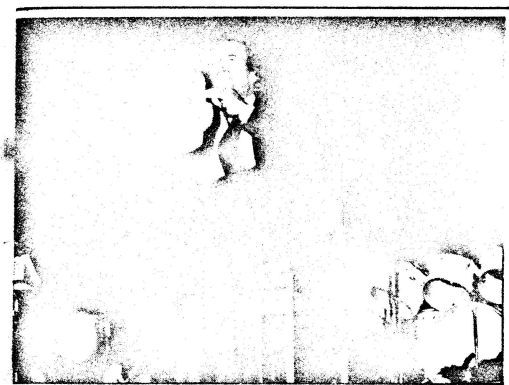
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¹Statistical Abstract of Latin America, published by UCLA, editor, James W. Wilkie, "National Population Census Series"

²Statistical Abstract, "Population Projections"

³Cuba, Dominican Republic and Haiti only (Statistical Abstract)



Julio Iglesias, a major star in nearly every Latin country.



Lively television shows centering on music characterize the present day excitement for Latin labels.



Roberto Carlos, relaxing and composing music, is a major star in many Latin nations but especially in Brazil.

Latin American Ideals Make Resurgence

By JAMES W. WILKIE

Discotecas and revolutions, public health and literacy, consumption and plastic—these seemingly diverse elements tell us much about the Latin America of today and tomorrow. Whereas daily news reports tend to focus on highly visible political coups, it is the invisible social and cultural revolution exemplified by these other elements that merit interpretation in this spotlight on Latin America.

To focus on economic problems and political instability leading to military seizure of power in the region generally suggests that it is "one minute to midnight" and that "there is a man at the door with a gun" ready to overthrow "corrupt oligarchs" who are supported by the "imperialist United States." Such conclusions give a very pessimistic view of Latin America's future, which is seen to pose poor rural peoples against unredeemable governments in the name of "land reform or death!"

To examine the rapid social and cultural change that has taken place in Latin America in the last few decades, however, is to take a more optimistic view. Optimism does not mean that Latin America has "solved" its social and economic problems; rather, it means that the region is improving its situation and not worsening its standards of living as has been generally thought. This factor in turn may exacerbate political problems that will further pre-empt the news.

It is within this context that music plays a key role in Latin American life. Rapid growth of the popular music industry has been made possible as much by the expansion of consumerism as by the extension of communications, especially the transistor radio that has opened up the backlands and forever shattered the quiet of hitherto isolated areas: Popular music as much as news has carried to rural peoples ideas of "modernity" and "progress" within their own country as well as of the world as a whole. This transistorized revolution in hinterland attitudes helped to make the Beatles the world-wide phenomenon that they became in the 1960s. Indeed, the decade of Beatlemania meant that after the mid-1970s lower-class Latin Americans would join the middle class to reject traditional Latin American music as well as popular and folk music in each country. Such trends and countertrends have social meaning, reflect economic standings of countries, and have portent for politics.

Bleakness of the political situation in Latin America is perhaps best represented by the case of Bolivia where it is claimed that coups come with such frequency that since gaining independence from Spain in 1825, the country has had over 190 changes in government or slightly less than an average of one per year. This information, repeatedly disseminated in the U.S. news, is erroneous—it confuses the number of attempted coups with successful ones which number less than half of the 190 changes claimed. If political perceptions of stability are wrong by up to 100%, no wonder it is difficult for foreign observers to fathom the social and economic situation in Latin America.

The economic situation of the region is especially misunderstood for two reasons. Even serious analysts have seen GNP as a measure that gives a sure indication of social conditions in poor countries. And analysts have failed to point out that the idea of "poor" (as opposed to "rich") nations of the world lumps together countries that represent very different cultural patterns and economic achievements. On an economic scale from rich to poor, Latin America is well-to-do compared to poor Asia and poorer Africa.

Misunderstanding of economic standings between nations and regions has led to the now popular misconception which sees a "widening gap" between rich and poor countries. Problems of understanding have been compounded by failure of analysts to distinguish between absolute and relative measurements. When we compare data for the United States and the twenty traditional republics of Latin America (including the lands from Mexico to the north to Tierra del Fuego at the bottom tip of South America and including the Caribbean countries of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti), the result is a surprise. Although the economic gap in per capita GNP more than doubled between the 1940s and 1970s, the relative economic gap between Latin America and the United States remained the same because Latin America's lower

base kept pace with that of the higher U.S. base. And within the Latin America region absolute wealth per capita more than doubled—this, because of the region's growing "economic pie."

The psychological importance of increasing absolute wealth cannot be ignored. Yet, the increasing per capita wealth of most Latin American countries does not mean that the wealth is fairly distributed between individuals or regions within countries. Rather, it may mean that countries are accumulating resources needed to build national systems at least capable of better supporting populations.

If there is no widening economic gap in this hemisphere, then, does that mean that we can assume there is no widening gap in social conditions? Rather than make such an assumption, which already we have suggested to be erroneous, let us summarize data in the Health, Education, and Welfare Index (HEC Index) which includes twelve primary social indicators. Six of these indicators exemplify the dramatic social change that Latin America has undergone: life expectancy, persons per physician, literacy, enrollment of school-age population at the primary and secondary levels, and persons per motor vehicle.

Life expectancy has increased from 38 to 65 years of age since 1940. Longer life by an average of 27 years means that the 19-year-old youth no longer feels that he is half way through his span on earth.

Because longer life by a 17% increase over 1940 means that early death is no longer the dominant factor for the masses, the immediate import of religion is no longer the same. Indeed, longer life made possible by the spread of modern medicine means that the physician has come to rival the importance of the priests and witch doctors who formerly supervised the life of the ill who had no hope for survival and could only settle their affairs with God. Increase in life span has contributed to the population growth of traditional Latin America, which has grown from 124 to 347 million persons since 1940.

As the number of persons needing service each available physician decreased from 2,800 to 1,900, the number of persons per Catholic priest increased from 7,400 to 9,600. Thus, as the possibility of quality gained in health care it lost in terms of religious care. The Catholic Church, challenged by the weight of sheer population growth, is no longer able to

(Continued on page LA-49)

James W. Wilkie, Editor of the "Statistical Abstract of Latin America" and professor of history at UCLA, is the author of more than 75 publications. His most recent work analyzes "Evita As Theater," a study that contrasts the view of the musical about Eva Peron with her own view of self and the legend which has grown concerning her role in Argentine politics.

Resurgence

• Continued from page LA-3

regularly reach large number of people except indirectly through the televised religious mass, the quality of such a religious relationship competing with soccer matches and telenovelas—in Mexico Sunday television viewers have increasingly become addicted to professional football telecasts from the United States. Even if the Church did not face the handicap of having to work nearly twice as long for each increased individual life span let alone for a rapidly expanding population, it would have to compete with changes in educational patterns, especially involving literacy.

Literacy in Latin America has increased from 50 to nearly 80% during the last four decades. This revolution in human capacity has been accompanied by an enrollment gain in primary-school age population from 45 to over 80%. At the same time, secondary-school age population rose from 5 to 28%. These data affect directly or indirectly the role of the Catholic Church. The Church now faces a situation where it must begin to follow social movements rather than attempt to lead, a factor that explains its internal shifts (however halting) from right to center on the political spectrum—some within the Church even feel that if religion is to compete with Marxism it must appeal to students and workers by adopting Marxist precepts.

Yet another HEC indicator—persons per motor vehicle—suggests that extent not only of rapidly expanding physical mobility but of upward social mobility as well. In 1940 Latin America had 261 persons per vehicle (autos, trucks, buses). By 1980 this figure had fallen below 30. Per capita figures do not mean that all of the regions' population share equally in ownership of the means of transport; rather, they mean that as there are fewer people per vehicle the chance of ownership increases. More importantly, chance of access to transport increases as the number of vehicles increases in relation to the population—to ride a bus or hitch a ride on a truck has become a common form of transport for the masses.

That there is no widening social gap between Latin America and the United States can be seen in the total HEC Index summarizing these and other indicators. The total HEC Index also includes infant mortality rate, persons per hospital bed, population per dentist, enrollment in college as a percent of enrollment in primary schools, newspaper circulation per 1,000 persons, and number of telephones per 100 persons.

With zero on the HEC Index indicating equality with the United States (and 100 indicating maximum inequality), Latin America has an index rank of 74 in 1940 compared to about 60 in 1980. Clearly Latin America is headed in the direction of narrowing the gap in hemispheric social standards; although it has far to go, its position is not worsening as many observers would have us believe. True, HEC data do not include indicators of income, housing, and non-subsistence nutrition, but these three factors are concerned with secondary rather than primary social change. The twelve HEC Indicators deal with the extent to which infrastructure has been created in human capacity: without a strong primary base in inadequate health, education, and communication it is not possible that much headway can be made in the important secondary sphere especially involving income.

★ ★ ★

As Latin America changed socially during the 1950s and 1960s the first wave of consumerism involved the "plastic revolution." Seemingly all goods demanded by the middle class were to be made of plastic: flowers, furniture covers, shoes, toys etc. With the advent of the 1970s and 1980s the middle classes increasingly have gone beyond plastic culture even as the masses move to make it their own. Increasing sophistication about consumption sees plastic as "cheap and common," no longer esteemed for itself. Thus, it is seen more often than not (like the Beatles) as something foreign to Latin Americans as they begin to turn to their own past for culture and design, as in the Mexican case where Spanish colonial furniture has regained prestige in stylized form that adjusts to modern needs.

Change in societal taste also has had important repercussions in popular music. Where during the late 1960s and early 1970s it was difficult to find Latin American dance music in first-class nightclubs, it has begun to return widely since the mid-1970s. This return has been facilitated by some university students who, concerned about Latin America's overly dependent status in relation to the United States and Western Europe for customs and ideas, has begun to conduct research on indigenous music, as in Argentina and Colombia. With glorification of folkloric music and instruments and the recording of some hit records of Indian music (as in Bolivia), Latin American ideals have made a resurgence. In this context it is easier to find dance bands in each country who play cha chas, cuecas, cumbias, sambas, merengues, tangos, mambos, boleros, etc. Too, return to Latin American music in Latin America has been enhanced by the "salsa boom" in the United States.

Yet the Latin American cultural current remains mixed. Although disco music has faded in the United States, it continues to play an important role in Latin America, especially among the masses who often dance it in their own national style, as in Mexico where it takes on a distinctive form and "Saturday Night Fever" becomes Mexican rather than foreign. For elites, worship of plastic itself has shifted to worship of plastics in the form of records, the charts for which continue to show foreign songs in English. (Some of the sons of the elite have chosen a different form of plastic to worship—plastic bombs to employ terror as they seek political change.)

The extent of U.S. musical penetration on and off the

charts has prompted schemes to counter "negative" foreign influence, as in Nicaragua which since the Revolution of 1979 has required that the broadcasting of each U.S. popular song be matched by the broadcasting of a Latin tune. And broadcast control has risen in other ways. In 1977 the Argentine government banned from the television the Three Stooges who are seen as helping to cause violence wherein over 6,000 persons have "disappeared" in police "detention." The Brazilian military government took steps in the 1960s and 1970s to control broadcast of protest songs, as has El Salvador this year.

Some observers, however, have viewed the role of popular music in Latin America as helping to prevent revolution rather than to weaken the old systems. Many urban Brazilian poor, for example, spend most of the year and much of their excess energy preparing for carnival week when the samba groups take over the cities as their own. Mexican disco contests on television offer another example as poor and middle upwardly mobile youth compete to gain attention and money.

The impact of television on Latin American popular music during the last decade has been phenomenal. Although Mexican music has been important because of Mexico's strong cinema industry and film exports to the region, recently the televising of musical contests with songs broadcast via satellite hookup (linking many Latin American countries and Spain on the same program) has pulled Latin American together in a new way: Romantic and tropical rhythms are now sweeping Latin America, the charts beginning to show consensus favorites from country to country. With television audiences voting by applause meters in each country as their own songs are pitted against those of other countries, the cultural region of Latin America has been strengthened in a way that was unimagined only a few decades ago.

Sale of records sparked by international song contests typifies the change in consumption pattern of Latin America. To play a record or a cassette requires equipment that itself gives status to the owner. Boom in musical sales, enhanced by the transistor radio that makes songs known in the first instance, suggests that consumption is becoming more sophisticated. With Latin America's population increasingly becoming an urban one (much more than half of the people now live in cities and towns), the majority population tends to be more interested in consumption than in the politics of making coups and revolutions that can only upset consumption patterns. Thus, national support for land reform has tended to fade in the face of urban demands for low-cost food made possible not by land distribution but by concentration of holdings to be worked in large-scale commercial ventures.

Old style revolutions involving land reform as a basic precept have also been called into question throughout Latin America as a result of the failure of the Cuban Revolution to resolve its economic problems—after a brief attempt to distribute land in the early 1960s Cuba set up state farms and is more dependent upon sugar in its relation with the USSR than it ever was in relation with the United States. Even with up to \$9,000,000 of subsidy per day the USSR is having a very difficult time keeping Cuba solvent.

If many workers and intellectuals may still seek violent revolution to solve national development problems as in El Salvador, the middle classes reject the revolutionary solution. Only when the middle classes have thrown their support to insurgent forces has political revolution been possible, as in Cuba and Nicaragua. In both countries the middle classes were soon disillusioned with the sudden expansion of state power at the expense of private business. For "good reason," then, the middle classes have moved to support governments that deregulate economies "to get government off the back of the people," as in Argentina and Chile where free market economies have been instituted and suggest models for President Reagan's plans in the United States.

Latin America's economic problems remain especially serious as its raw-material export prices fall in the OPEC-caused world recession. As industrial demand slackens, so does the need for raw materials. Even the oil exporting Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico have been hurt by the recent "oil glut" resulting from the recession as well as oil conservation programs in all countries. Yet with its industrialization advanced, Mexico's long-term advantage as an oil producing country does not lie in export of petroleum but rather in using that "black gold" to manufacture export goods inexpensively. Recall that the rise of the United States to industrial power was financed in no small part by the mid-nineteenth century gold boom in what had been Mexico's California. The competitive edge for pricing of manufactures may in the future belong to Mexico. In the meantime innovative, upwardly mobile Mexicans may not involve themselves in politics but migrate to the United States in the same tradition that troubled peoples have always done, most recently from Haiti, Cuba, and El Salvador. (Poor Guatemalans migrate to Mexico and Colombians to Venezuela.)

Although from the U.S. view political and economic problems appear to dominate Latin American life, a new conservatism in the region seem to prefer military coups to revolution especially at the middle-class level. With much of the lower-class population in each country identifying with the middle class with whom it wants to join, the idea of a "proletarian identity" has been blunted—who wants to live like the poor workers in the USSR and Polish examples where laborers are doomed to remain at the bottom of society?

In short, it is generally more enticing to go disco or carnival dancing—to rise up in society and try to increase individual consumption levels—than to follow Che Guevara's path to death in guerrilla battles. Popular music may indeed symbolize the way in which consumption patterns short-circuit revolutionary movements which demand austerity for all in the name of "national good" that is not much fun. **Billboard**