Eduardo Prado used the metaphor of Brazil as an island in his book *A ilusão americana* (*The American Illusion*), published in 1893, which soundly criticised the United States. He had harsh words for some of the Spanish American republics, but nonetheless found a few positive qualities, ones he viewed as being 'very Brazilian' (p. 44). The Spanish–American War caused Rui Barbosa to see the United States negatively and, like Prado, to identify commonalities between Brazil and the Spanish American republics. Preuss identifies this as beginning 'the final stage in the evolution of Brazilian elite views of Spanish America' (p. 182). While Brazil continued to see itself as exceptional, it also acknowledged a degree of kinship with Spanish America.

Growing formal and informal interactions between Brazil and Spanish America – 'close encounters of the peripheral kind' – multiplied opportunities for reflections by Brazilian writer-statesmen on both the Spanish American 'Other' and their own nation. At the 1906 Pan-American Conference, Oliveira Lima, speaking of the United States and the Spanish American republics, affirmed Brazil's kinship to the latter, 'bound by bonds of blood, economy, and civilization' (p. 172).

While Preuss ably contextualises his thesis in the lives and works of these leading intellectuals, he might have embedded it in a fuller portrait of that era. Thomas E. Skidmore, in *Five Centuries of Change* (Oxford University Press, 2009), identifies the years from 1870 to 1910 as a time of 'Making Brazil Modern', and discusses the attempt to both sell and whiten Brazil, which, although largely directed to Europe and the United States, also included other nations in Latin America. As well, Preuss stresses Brazil's sense of common identity with the Spanish American republics, but most of that discussion centres on Argentina and Chile, prosperous nations that represented themselves as white and civilised.

A broad gloss marks the author's suggestion that 'independence took place against a background of shared historical experience and a high level of cultural, linguistic, and religious uniformity' (p. 21). The divergent resources and colonial philosophies of Portugal and Spain, diversity in the New World's pre-colonial populations in terms of size, material development and exploitable resources, and varying degrees of success in creating stable governments belie that assertion.

Notwithstanding those concerns, *Bridging the Island* is a lively, engaging and challenging discussion of national and regional identifies, and the processes through which difference and similarities are formed at a national level. It provides an innovative perspective on the formation of Brazil's national identity, highlighting a process through which the country redefined itself, its Spanish American neighbours and its place and role in the western hemisphere. Nuanced and at times contradictory, the book reflects the mix of continuity, change and contradictions common to processes of redefinition.

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J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **44** (2012). doi:10.1017/S0022216X12001149

Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), pp. x + 332, $27.95, pb.

Eduardo Elena's book *Dignifying Argentina* constitutes a significant contribution to the field of Argentina's history. In the book, the author grasps the transformative moment that Peronism represented to the country from a fresh perspective that

explores the intersection of populism and mass consumption. In this respect, the book has a remarkable companion – as Elena recognises – in the research of Natalia Milanesio on the rise of popular consumer culture and in that of Rebekah Pite on domesticity, as well as that of Elisa Pastoriza and Juan Carlos Torre on the field of leisure and tourism.

The book's subtitle, *Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption*, is quite revealing of the author's perspective. The theoretical context takes into account both culture and economics, an approach which provides a useful analytical tool that is combined with a political overview of the concept of citizenship. Rather than analysing the relationship between social and political agents in the fields of elections, rallies and other similar accounts, Elena prefers not to 'collapse state–citizen negotiations into a familiar tale of representation versus resistance', choosing instead a narrative in which he explores 'the multiple (and often unexpected) outcomes of struggles over consumption. As a result, it might be possible to study the reshaping of political subjectivity' (p. 3).

In the first chapter, Elena digs into the scenario in which Peronism would find itself when it reached power: a world of unequal distribution of wealth and a group of reformers eager to change such a situation. Reading this chapter, one question that arises relates to the late arrival of social reformism in Argentina, especially considering what occurred in other Latin American countries. By the 1930s, while Brazil entered Getúlio Vargas' reforms, Mexico saw the changes fostered by Lázaro Cárdenas and Colombia experienced the 'revolución en marcha' (revolution in progress), and Argentina faced failed experiments and little change in social issues, with the exception of the fascist governor of the province of Buenos Aires, Manuel Fresco. Chapter 2 works on the idea of a New Argentina that attempted to impose through the use of an adjective the concept of a dignified life. Citizenship became, then, linked to the argument for a better distribution of income. Although the reform processes took place in general in Latin America, as Elena asserts, Perón himself can be seen more as an interwar personality rather than a post-Second World War one due to the kind of management he applied to economic, social and political matters.

The third chapter, entitled 'The War on Speculation', digs into an interesting field of study which is the idea of 'price' that characterised Peronism. A process of inflation accompanied the economic expansion of the first Peronist years. The government then decided to control prices – nothing unique in Latin America or in world history. But more revealing about Peronism is the struggle in society imposed by this control, with a marked division between those who produced and those who lived on artificial rents. The merchants who would not follow the price controls were viewed, in Peronist discourse, as the epitome of the latter, with the threat of store closures if they did not toe the line of the New Argentina. Chapter 4 develops around the idea of living standards and market and state discourses. Notions of comfort, fashion, sexuality, taste and beauty became part of the government's aims. By working with letters sent to Evita, Elena reconstructs the complex relationship between the state and the market in a 'dignified life' and highlights the efforts made by the state to persuade the people that the government and not the free market was the leading force in the process. As the author says, 'officials envisioned nonmarket consumption as creating not a carnival of consumerist pleasure marching to a capitalist beat but an orderly social parade in which labouring majorities were no longer mere spectators but joined other classes in enjoying a share of the economic bounty of modern times' (p. 152). The fifth chapter analyses how the Peronist government aimed to discipline consumption. Opposition

members were depicted as wasteful spendthrifts, while the typical *compañero* (comrade) was portrayed as a simple woman or man. This did not mean at all that the working class following Peronism rejected consumption in order to maintain a 'dignified' standard of life (an idea that superseded that of basic needs), but consumption policies had to be implemented by the state from the Peronist perspective. In this chapter, the reader might ask how the programme of economic constraint applied from 1951 onwards changed these policies in the Peronist administration and how much the idea of constraint could have been imposed.

Finally, *Dignifying Argentina* delves into a counter-discourse and criticism on the area of consumption. With this goal in mind, the author examines the Second Five-Year Plan and the campaign to get the populace to write letters under the slogan of 'Perón Wants to Know What the People Want' (a source that has been used by Omar Acha for his study on civil and political society). We do not know how much impact the campaign had on the government, but the fact that these letters, otherwise unanimously in favour of Perón's administrations, expressed unsatisfied demands is revealing of the people's feelings, as they expected more of Peronism.

The book uses various kinds of sources, some of them fresh, some barely or only recently examined. The historian's craft is also exemplified in the comprehensive bibliography. For these features and the interesting development of the topics I have mentioned here, *Dignifying Argentina* is a must-read for those interested in Argentine and Latin American twentieth-century history.

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J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **44** (2012). doi:10.1017/S0022216X12001150

Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp. xvi + 375, $45.00, hb.

Tanya Harmer's book is an exhaustively researched study of the Chilean revolution in the context of regional international relations. Drawing on archival sources from seven nations and numerous interviews with participants in the events of the early 1970s, she argues that the demise of the *Via Chilena* should be understood in the context of a regional Cold War. While the United States certainly played its part, the struggle in Chile was, she asserts, far less of an East–West conflict than a contest between regional actors, particularly the United States and Brazil on one side and Cuba and Chile on the other. The author also concludes that previous scholarship has seriously overestimated the importance of Washington's role in the demise of the Allende government.

In developing these arguments, Harmer provides a detailed account of the interactions between Chilean, Cuban, US and Brazilian officials, recounting both Castro's growing admiration for Allende and his regime's increasing commitment to Allende's success. The narrative paints a picture of a US response to Allende's election that was less strident than that of Brazil's military rulers, who urged the Nixon administration to take a far more aggressive stance toward the new government in Santiago. The author also offers insight into the intense debates going on within the Allende administration regarding relations with the United States. In particular, there were sharp differences over whether a form of regional détente could be achieved with Washington even as the Unidad Popular (Popular Unity, UP) government sought to reorient the country's diplomatic and economic relations away from the