

## Élisée Reclus' Latin Americanist Geography

Extensive Writings Bookended by Episodic Travels

*La Geografía Latinoamericanista de Élisée Reclus: Escritos extensos soportados en viajes episódicos*

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- 1 Normally, Elisée Reclus is not thought of as a Latin Americanist geographer, given that the majority of his life was lived in Europe, and most of his geographical travels were in Europe and neighboring lands. Similarly, as a geographer, he is primarily known for his research and regional writing projects that are global in scope. In addition, if Reclus is remembered outside of geography's circle of historians, it is for his political writings and commitments. Reclus has always had a place in the pantheon of anarchist and decentralist thinkers and activists, but his geographical work seems to undergo periodic rediscovery by new generations of geographers. As this paper demonstrates, we are in the midst of one of these revivals or rediscoveries. Unlike the generation of the 1930s, when figures such as Lewis Mumford and Carl Sauer were looking back to Reclus and others for their decentralist and regionalist inspirations, or during the 1960s when New Left geographers were excavating past legacies for serviceable guides to radical theory and praxis, today's geographers as well as social theorists might find in Reclus both old and new ways of conceptualizing chorologies, ecologies, and politics. I think it is especially encouraging that Latin American geographers, especially the younger generation, have taken an historical turn, and begun to investigate the grounds of their own national and regional foundations. Of course, the roots and vitality of any local, regional, or national geographic tradition are those that are "home-grown" and locally generated and grounded. Thus, getting to know one's precursors and those that have paved the way to the present is all to the good. But this is not to say that non-local or non-national geographic visitor, observer, and/or commentator has no agency or impact on a tradition, or in this case, the development of geographical thought and practice in a particular place. It is in this context that I would like to provide an overview of Elisée

Reclus' connections and contributions to Latin Americanist geography. To date, Reclus scholars have directed little attention toward Reclus' travels in, and writings on, Latin America. Agreeably, this paper promises to make major advances in furthering our knowledge of Reclus as Latin Americanist geographer.

- 2 Elisée Reclus traveled only twice to Latin America during the course of his long, intensely politically engaged, and highly productive scholarly lifespan. His exposure to Latin America immediately preceded the start of his scholarly career. In self-exile from Louis Napoleon's 1851 coup d'état, after year in England and Ireland he traveled to Louisiana where he resided for two years (1853-1855). Tiring of Louisiana and its slave-based society, Reclus left in late 1855 for New Granada (Colombia) with stops in Cuba and Panama. Initially he intended to settle in Colombia, but his plans for colonization failed and he returned to France in 1857 after less than two years in the Santa Marta region. While his travels were more in the youthful *Wanderjahre* mode than systematic geographical investigations, these early Latin American experiences helped set his career compass on a life devoted in part to geographic description and synthesis. His only other Latin American exposure was to Brazil, where he traveled with his wife in 1893 to meet with geographers and scholars. In his biography of Elisée Reclus, Paul Reclus (1964: 124), clearly states that Reclus not only visited Brazil, but also Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. Further evidence that he actually made these Southern Cone side trips is lacking, though it could be confirmed in correspondence that I have not consulted. The trip to Brazil and perhaps beyond was forty years after he first viewed the New World tropics in route to New Orleans. In the interim he had achieved global renown for both his geographical scholarship and his political advocacies and activities. If one includes mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Louisiana as more a peripheral part of Latin America than a fully incorporated precinct of Anglo-America, and a good case can be made for this, then Reclus' Latin American travels and residence spanned not quite four years out of his seventy-five. Compared to most geographers specializing in the region, or those geographers native to it, Reclus' credentials to comment on its geography might be questioned. However, Alexander von Humboldt, perhaps single most noted and notable figure in Latin Americanist geography's genealogy, spent five years traveling and investigating Cuba, northern South America, and Mexico. Certainly Humboldt's thousands of printed pages on his Latin American travels and research stand as a monument to his industry and authority. Reclus' published output on Latin America falls short of Humboldt's, but still weighs in at more than two thousand pages. Whereas much of Humboldt's reportage was derived from his own experience and fieldwork, little of Reclus' Latin American writings can be so credited. Nevertheless, Reclus rendered and synthesized a vast literature, primarily from secondary sources, into his own distinctive and authoritative voice and vision. It is this portion of Reclus' voluminous geographical writings that needs to be analyzed and commented on if we are to begin to evaluate Reclus and his production in the context of Latin Americanist geography. This paper then, is perhaps a beginning to this much larger-scale assessment.

## Reclus' Latin Americanist Publications

- 3 Reclus' Latin American publications fall into several categories. They include his first book, *Voyage à la Sierra-Nevada de Sainte-Marthe. Passages de la nature tropicale* (1861). This was his only monographic treatment of a Latin America topic. It was an account of his

travels in coastal Colombia combined with some geographical observations. Portions of larger works, primarily *La Terre*, vols. 1 and 2 (1868), and *L'Homme et la terre*, vol. 4 and 5 (1905) contain Latin American material. In addition three volumes, 17, 18, and 19, of his *Nouvelle géographie universelle* (1891, 1893) are devoted to Latin America and the Caribbean. Material from volumes 18 and 19 of the *Nouvelle géographie universelle* were later edited, annotated and translated into Spanish and Portuguese by local scholars and published as separate books under the titles *Colombia* (1893), *Estados Unidos do Brasil: Geographia, Ethnographia, Estatica* (1900) and *Jeografia de Chile* (1903). He also published various articles on Latin American topics in both scholarly geography journals and popular geography outlets, along with review articles in which he discussed recent books in expanded contexts and some reviews of single books. In addition, he contributed to an edited collection of essays on Mexico that was drawn from the Mexican section of the *Nouvelle géographie universelle* (Reclus 1904).

- 4 If we consider mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Louisiana, especially before the abolition of slavery, as an outlier of Latin America, then Reclus' earliest publications are part of his Latin Americanist writings. In 1857 he published a series of articles in the *L'Union*, one of New Orleans' ephemeral francophone newspapers. These newspaper articles are his first known publications. The first five were published in February (1857a, 1857b, 1857c, 1857d, 1857e) on his trans-Atlantic voyage and Louisiana experiences. They were followed in July and August by another eleven articles on New Granada (1857f, 1857g, 1857h, 1857i, 1857j, 1857k, 1857l, 1857m, 1857n, 1857o, 1857p).
- 5 Reviewing Reclus' Latin Americanist writings as a whole, the formative influence of modern geography's twin founding figures, Carl Ritter and Alexander von Humboldt, is not hard to discern. Of course much has been made of Reclus' university training and contacts with Ritter in Berlin. While I have yet to find specific mention of this in Reclus' writings, one might easily imagine that Reclus' great global regional synthesis, his *Nouvelle géographie universelle* was in part designed to complete Ritter's own massive global regional synthesis projected that never made it past Asia and Africa. One must also ask to what extent did Reclus carry forward the attitudes and perspectives of his erstwhile mentor? This is a thorny question, because in stark contrast to Reclus' generally progressive and enlightened views on race, ethnicity, and class relations, at times he voices surprisingly retrograde assessments of human-environment relations, ones that sound more like echoes of Ritter or anticipations of Ratzel than Reclus constructing a new left-libertarian geography. To cite one example, in his discussion of the influence of climate in the tropics in vol. II of *La Terre* (1873: 440) he remarks:

In many regions of the tropical zone, all that man has to do when in search of food is to shake the branches of the trees, or pull up roots from the ground. His needs are so very few, and life is so easy to him, that he cares little about it; he is not compelled to sustain it by dint of work, but it meets him, as it were, half way, and he almost despises it, because its favors are so generously offered. He therefore meets death without a regret, and not one tear is shed when he closes his eyes forever.... Thus mildness of the climate, the fertility of the soil, the exuberance of life, and the suddenness of death, take an equal part in maintaining man in his native carelessness and idleness.

- 6 Similarly one can find passages in Humboldt on tropical Latin America that advance similar ideas and attitudes, but Humboldt writing a half-century earlier tempered his environmental determinist sentiments with an analytical eye put to specific examples. Perhaps his best remembered observation was that bananas in tropical America were so

extraordinarily productive – 44 times more productive than potatoes, and 138 times more than wheat per unit area, that they were in effect, counter-productive. As Humboldt (1814: ) concluded, “the facility with which the banana can be cultivated has doubtless contributed to arrest the progress of improvement in tropical regions.” On the other hand, there is much in Reclus that echoes the both Humboldt’s progressive Enlightenment outlook as well as his Romantic-subversive side.

## Initial Impressions

- 7 In assessing Reclus’ place in Latin Americanist geography, one needs to take into account his biographical background as well as the contours of 19<sup>th</sup> century geography. Geographer Gary Dunbar’s (1978) *Elisée Reclus: Historian of Nature* remains the authoritative biography, though as with Humboldt we are yet to see a comprehensive biographical study that either puts these figures in full intellectual and contextual relief, or that records and relates their lives in fine detail. Here, a brief outline of Reclus’ life, especially his intersections with Latin America through direct observation or through published description, would be useful. As generally known, Reclus was born in 1830 into a large family of religious dissidents and free-thinkers in southwest France. He attended a Moravian school in Germany and a Protestant university in his native French region. He capped his formal education with a term spent at the University of Berlin, where he attended the lectures of Carl Ritter. From Ritter he gained an appreciation for large-scale works of geographical synthesis, and a perspective on the “the earth as the home of man.” Reclus’ nineteen volume *Nouvelle géographie universelle* (1876-1894) in effect completed Ritter’s never-finished multi-volume world regional geography, but replacing its religious teleology with an anarchist vision of organically constituted regions linked in decentralized harmony. Reclus’ other major works include: *La Terre. Description des phénomènes de la vie du globe* (1868-1869) [two volumes], *L’Homme et la terre* (1905-1908) [six volumes]. His lesser works (single volume books, articles, reviews) total more than two hundred publications. Except for *Les Volcans de la Terre*, a posthumously published three volume study of volcanoes in Asia and Europe (1906, 1908, 1910) his multi-volume works all contain Latin American material, though the *Nouvelle géographie universelle* and *L’Homme et la terre* are the richest sources, along with *Voyage à la Sierra-Nevada de Sainte-Marthe: Paysages de la nature tropicale* (1861). His Colombian interlude was a prelude to a full life devoted to both geography and radical politics. Reclus’ political activism was sparked by the continent-wide upheavals of 1848, and active opposition the Louis-Napoleon’s coup d’état of 1851 led to the self-exile of Elisée and Elie in Ireland. Working as a rural laborer, Reclus saw colonial oppression first-hand. There he also began to dream of researching and writing grand works of geography. Joining the rural exodus in the wake of the potato famines, Reclus traveled with Irish immigrants to New Orleans rather than New York, choosing a city more like Marseille than Paris.
- 8 The trans-Atlantic voyage took Reclus first within sight of Montserrat, past the southern coasts of Haiti, Jamaica, and Gran Cayman, through the Canal de Yucatán, into the Gulf of Mexico to the mouth of the Mississippi. In his brief account of the voyage, he mentioned a few evocative land sights, including denuded Haitian hill slopes – though without mentioning human agency (Reclus 2004: 25). Coasting off Jamaica he noted the Negroes’ pirogues “gliding like waterbugs” against a backdrop of sugar cane fields extending to water’s edge, crowned with plumes of smoke from the sugar factories (Reclus 2004: 25,

28). As he entered the Mississippi he commented on stray cattle roaming the marshy landscape and knocking over recently installed telegraph lines. These free ranging cattle belonged to the Isleños, or descendants of Canary Islanders, who Reclus thought “semi-barbaric” (Reclus 2004: 41).

- 9 Reclus arrived in New Orleans in early 1853. He initially found work as a dockworker, but soon turned to tutoring the children of local elites. Traveling upriver from New Orleans, he became tutor for the Fortier family at Felicity Plantation. His earliest published writings are on his Louisiana experiences (Dunbar 1984). Among his most critical and vivid descriptions were of race relations and the institution of slavery (Reclus 1859, 1860). He was repulsed by slavery and the culture it produced, including endemic drunkenness and general disorder (Reclus 2004: 52, 56-57). His later geographical writings are notable for their critiques of racist thinking and doctrines in orthodox Eurocentric thought and scholarship. His rural experiences combined with readings of the utopian socialists, especially Charles Fourier, and quite likely Humboldt's panegyrics extolling the colonizing potential of Latin America's “vacant lands,” led to his decision to become a colonist. He ruled out México in favor of Nueva Granada. He had hoped that his brother Elie would join him in this next segment of his travels, but this didn't materialize. Elie later did travel to México, so served as something of a proxy for Elisée in that regard. In correspondence, his caustic side is on full display (Reclus 2004: 76-77):

I'm not of the opinion that we should go immediately to Mexico. There are the passports, the police, the gendarmes, and Santa Ana, another Napoleon III, elected by the people. Popocatepetl and Orizaba and Perote and the Plateau of Anáhuac and the mines of Xihuatitlán and the magueys and the thieves, all of that would without doubt be quite interesting to see, but in New Granada we'll find a world of nature that is every bit as beautiful as that in México and much further beyond our expectations. It's the country that holds the future of South America...There are no passports or gendarmes, but there are, if I'm not mistaken, nice people who aren't at all Yankee.

- 10 Here we see a preview of a counter-Anglo or Yankee sensibility that surfaces in his Latin Americanist writing for the next fifty years. He envisions Colombia as a tropical paradise without much state presence and also perhaps, proximity to the Colossus of the North. To what extent that his reading of Humboldt on Colombia as opposed to México may have influenced him would be interesting to know. Certainly Humboldt was a formative influence, but Reclus only occasionally refers to him or his writing in his own Latin American work, and not in his letters leading up to his decision to go directly to Colombia.
- 11 In late 1855 he booked passage on the Philadelphia, a steamer with a regular route to Panama via Havana. The boat broke down in Cuba, and during the two-week delay, he saw some of the island. His next landfall was Aspinwall (Colon) Panama. He was immediately struck by the ethnic diversity of the population. Adventurers from all parts of the world mixed with the local whites, blacks, Chinese, and indigenous folk. Racial admixes of all these groups offered an ethnic tableau of great complexity – one that he obviously enjoyed. As with his anti-racist stance, in his later geographical works Reclus wrote approvingly of the biological and cultural blending of races and ethnic groups. In this regard, he countered the dominant discourse of his times – especially voices such as Arthur de Gobineau's, the founder of “scientific racism” and the myth of the master Aryan race. In most aspects of Reclus' life and work, theory and practice were well

integrated. His family life was no exception. Clarisse, his first wife, was Afro-French – her mother Fulani and her father French.

- 12 Reclus' brief stay in Panama also helped sharpen his critique of Anglo-capitalist expansion in Latin America. For Reclus, the English and North American enclave of Aspinwall offered a prefiguration of the future, when British and North Americans would establish outposts beyond local control throughout the region. It is worth quoting from his description of this implantation (1861: 8-9):

The flag of Colombia flies on a house of Colon-Aspinwall; but Colombian authorities, far from being able to govern, are lucky to be simply tolerated. The railroad company, declared owner of the island by the Colombian congress, is in reality the sovereign power of the Atlantic Coast of the isthmus, and its decisions, whether or not agreed upon by the officials in Colon or Bogotá, are virtually law. It was fearless Americans who dared set foot on this unhealthy island of Manzanilla, who built the foundations of warehouses and buildings in these viscous and putrid waters where death germinates with the plants, and who cried out to the four corners of the earth: 'Be like us, risk your life for wealth!' They even brought the majority of pre-fabricated housing from the United States, and they still send for flour, bread, meat, even fuel, from the United States. The city is their creation, and they feel in their own right to govern it and to name it after one of the most powerful men in the company, the merchant Aspinwall. This name is shared with that of Colon that the Grenadian Republic chose as a tribute to the glorious navigator who discovered the island of Manzanilla.

## Reclus in Colombia

- 13 Leaving Aspinwall, Reclus took a series of coastal craft east to Santa Marta. After a few weeks in Santa Marta he moved up the Guajira Peninsula to Riohacha, which he judged to be a better terminus for his project of establishing a rural retreat and possible community of likeminded colonists. He spent the next year in Riohacha interacting with the small circle of ex-patriot French there, and trying various schemes to support himself, including giving French, German, and English lessons. None met with success. Having exhausted the options of urban life, Reclus resolved to move to the mountains and launch a new life as a self-sufficient farmer. He convinced Jaime Chastaing, informal leader of the French community, to join him as equal partner in the venture. After an extensive reconnaissance of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta uplands, Reclus chose a fifty-hectare valley plot a half-league outside San Antonio, a pueblo some fifty kilometers south of the coastal village of Dibulla. At about 850 meters altitude, a wide range of crops could be grown there.
- 14 The site selection was the high point of his venture. From there on out, it was literally and figuratively downhill. The return trip to Riohacha was arduous. It took Reclus a month to recuperate. The return trip with supplies to start the colony was even worse. The trip to Dibulla by bongo ended with a capsizing, but the cargo was saved. Waiting in Dibulla to arrange oxen for the inland trek, Reclus contracted malaria, something that plagued him for the rest of his time in Colombia. Resuming the journey, Reclus' mule died the second day out. He proceeded on foot, but fever once again overcame him, and he thought he would die beside the road. He was found by Chastaing, his son Luisito, and two hired-helpers coming along behind with oxen and supplies. Once installed in San Antonio, Reclus took another two months to recuperate. Still ever the optimist, Reclus' febrile visions were of a resplendent future. As he remarked (1861: 293):

already I could see the mountain slopes covered with coffee trees and orange groves, the Aruacos, happy and free, founding flourishing communities with school for their children, European colonists clearing the virgin forests; roads radiating in all directions... regular passenger service serving the port of Dibulla.

- 15 Once the fevers abated, reality returned. Chastaing, his son, and the two mulatto boys had furiously launched multiple projects: clearing, burning, terracing, fencing, planting, and felling timber for buildings. Soon, however, the tempest turned to depression. Chastaing alienated the Indians, ran off one of the workers, and declared the whole enterprise hopeless. He dissolved the partnership and returned to his life of relative leisure in Riohacha. Reclus, still febrile, remained alone there for another month, before dissolving his own dreams of establishing a Colombian beachhead for Euro-egalitarian-colonization.
- 16 In Reclus' time, San Antonio was a small Arhuaco settlement with a few mestizos and former maroons. Though he doesn't say so, Reclus' preference for ethnic diversity may have been a factor in his choice of the site. San Antonio was later abandoned in the wake of the civil wars and upslope migration of coastal blacks, and reconstituted with the misnomer Pueblo Viejo. When various geographers visited the region in the 1920s, Pueblo Viejo was described as a "Negro" village and any vestige of either its indigenous past, or Reclus' venture had been erased.
- 17 One could easily conclude that Reclus' Colombian interlude was largely a misadventure, and the colonization scheme a fiasco. This is what his travelogue conveys – although its quixotic qualities, and Reclus' gentle self-mockery, serve to redeem it as a literary production. But Reclus' (1861: 296) concluding words were: "Some months after I was back in Europe, returning to my true homeland, it still seemed that I was touching the ground of exile." For the rest of his life, Reclus held an idealized view of Colombia in particular and Latin America in general as potential destinations for European migration and colonization. He also distinguished between two very different forms of colonization: "colonies of exploitation" based on the domination of conquered people, and "colonies of peopling" wherein free individuals or groups establish settlements in harmony with local populations. His Colombian *fracaso* did not dissuade him from advocacy of positive colonialization. The epilogue to his *Voyage* volume is a paean to the boundless possibilities that await such colonists to Nueva Granada, and especially the Santa Marta region. He voices similar advice in his later writings on Latin American regions, but more selectively, depending on actual-conditions.
- 18 Reclus' views on race and ethnicity in the *Voyage* volume are quite pointed in places, counterpointed by his anti-racist and non-national chauvinist ideals in other places. He found the semi-nomadic Guajiro people, with their fierce independent ways, very admirable. On the other hand, the Arhuacos, were largely a degraded people, economically exploited and alcohol dependent. Coastal blacks often lived in abject conditions. Some of the most useful and evocative material in Reclus' subsequent Latin American writings is ethnographic. He does not dodge the negative portrayal, but also points to the objective conditions that produce immiseration and depravity. By the same token, his positive depictions of different social or cultural groups are linked to their degree of self-directed industry and social well-being. Like Peter Kropotkin, his anarchist-geographer collaborator, Reclus was a forceful and effective counter-voice to the Social Darwinist and racist doctrines of his times.
- 19 For geographers, perhaps the most salient aspects of the *Voyage* volume and Reclus' later reflections on Latin America, is his emphasis on the natural region. It is not only one of

geography's core concepts, but also a key to building a politically decentralized world mobilized against domination and oppression of all kinds – whether based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, or well ahead of his times – ecological degradation. He may have taken up Ritter's chorology, but he put it in a new and critical key – one that spoke to his 19<sup>th</sup> century audiences, and should still have resonance today.

## ***Nouvelle géographie universelle***

- 20 The Latin American volumes (17-19 published between 1891-1894) of the *Nouvelle géographie universelle* offer perhaps the most engaging material with which to assess Reclus' contributions to Latin Americanist geography. That Reclus chose to make the Latin American material the final volumes meant that he had accumulated more knowledge about these regions than some of his earlier volumes, and possibly that he “left the best for last.” One might read into this that Reclus had a special affinity for Latin America and Latin Americans, or at least those segments of the culture and population that evinced his communitarian and left-libertarian ideals. In the original French edition, volume XVII is titled “*Indes occidentales*” though in the English translation it appears as volume II “Mexico, Central America and the West Indies” and paired with North America (volume I). Clearly Reclus' original order was reversed to appeal to its North American readership.
- 21 Reclus' internal order of presentation is fairly uniform throughout the nineteen volumes. Each nation, colony, or regional association of nations and/or colonies is afforded a separate chapter. Thus, after an opening chapter sketching the Middle American region in broad strokes, the reader marches with Reclus through Mexico, British Honduras, Central America (with subchapters for the five nations), and Panama. It is interesting that Panama was granted a separate chapter, despite, as Reclus points out, that politically it was “an integral” part of Colombia, but geographically part of Central America. This dual quality together with the fact that Reclus had visited Panama en route to Colombia proper no doubt accounts for the extra attention. The Caribbean chapters are prefaced with a general overview chapter entitled “The American Mediterranean.” It is uncertain if Reclus was the first to use this apt characterization, but after the Spanish-American War the concept was evident in the emerging North American geopolitical discourse. Cuba, Jamaica, San Domingo (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and Santa Cruz, The Bahamas, The Bermudas all have separate chapters, and then like the five Central American nations, the Lesser Antilles are grouped in a single chapter.
- 22 Within chapters, the order of presentation is also fairly uniform. The opening section is given to general considerations or a “general survey.” This is followed by: physical features, rivers and lakes, climate-flora-fauna, inhabitants, topography, economic conditions, administration. Mexico, however, is accorded an additional set of sections. Along with the standard physical-to-administrative arrangement, the individual Mexican states are covered. This standardization of presentation of facts and figures along with regional description offers the basis for comparative study of Latin American nations and regions. In this regard Reclus can be considered one of the pioneers of what might be called the “systematic-regional” approach to geography, especially for the production of regional geography textbooks. The information that Reclus provided his readers for the various categories was up-to-date and in many cases has admirably passed the test of time. Of course, much of the reportage has become historical geography with the passing

of more than a century, and as such offers a window on aspects of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin America that merits study.

- 23 Spread throughout the empirical reportage is Reclus' personal commentary on a wide range of topics and questions. For most contemporary readers, these way-stations of insight and outlook should be of particular interest. Here, Reclus' political sympathies are on display. For example, in the volume's general overview chapter Reclus (1891: 6) caustically comments about North American designs on the region: "When the American Republic was controlled in its foreign policy by the southern slave party, the Washington Government made repeated attempts to increase its territory by the acquisition of Cuba..." He goes on to say that an attempt to secure a naval base in the Dominican Republic was frustrated by Northern opposition and to some extent European powers, but that the guano island of Navassa had been commandeered but would be abandoned once its deposits had been exhausted. In his introductory section, Reclus argues that Mexico, in its "almost isolated position, serves as an advanced bulwork for the whole of Spanish America against the Anglo-Saxon world" (1891:11). Here we see not only sympathy for Mexico in particular, and Latin American in general, but also Reclus' less than sanguine view of most, if not all, things Anglo. He also dismisses as nonsense the notion that forces of Anglicization would overwhelm Latin America (1891: 12):

Belt's prophecy, that in a few centuries English would be the mother-tongue of all Americans, from the Frozen Isles of the great north to the Land of Fire, does not seem likely to be fulfilled. Jules Leclereq has even ventured to assert that in a short time all Mexico will be English. But this is a delusion, as shown, for instance, by the extreme slowness with which the process of assimilation is proceeding in New Mexico...

- 24 This disdain for things Anglo is a consistent subtext in Reclus' writings, but it comes out most strongly in defense of Latin American society and culture in the face of Anglicizing forces. Whether this is simply a reflection of stereotypical Anglo-Gallic antagonism, or a principled anti-imperialist stance, is hard to say. Most likely, it is a combination of the two. Among the current debates on Reclus' political thought and positions, is the question of his view of colonialism. Without apology, or seeming contradiction, he differentiated colonialism between a benign, or even beneficent, variety that he termed "colonialism of settlement," and a pernicious variety that he termed "colonialism of exploitation." Reclus felt that in Third World regions that were "underpopulated," "colonies of population" (by European or Euro-American settlers) offered positive benefits. In Third World nations or regions where colonialism was strictly extractive and exploitative, then it was to be condemned. Throughout his writings on Latin America we see this bimodal if not bipolar perspective on colonialism.
- 25 If contemporary readers find his views on colonialism somewhat perplexing, his views on race were more in-line with contemporary scholarly attitudes, but clearly at variance with much of the scholarship in his times. Reclus was categorically anti-racist. He was vehemently opposed to the slavery he witnessed in Louisiana and became like Humboldt, an outspoken opponent of slavery. Throughout his writings he often spoke approvingly of the cultural and biological blending of races and ethnic groups. The frontispiece of the volume is of "Indians of Tecpan, Guatemala" with a Maya headman flanked by two adjutants, and in the three Latin American volumes gives sympathetic portrayals of indigenous people and their cultural landscapes and practices.

26 The volumes on South America (XVIII and XIX) follow the same format as the Middle American volume. Volume XVIII treats "The Andes Region." There is the general survey chapter and then each nation from Venezuela to Chile has a separate chapter. The "Antilles of the Venezuelan Seaboard" (Trinidad, Tobago, Margarita, Aruba, Curaçao) and the Galapagos each have their own chapter. The final volume, XIX is titled "Amazonia and La Plata" but covers all of Brazil, the Guianas, and the Platine Republics. There are general survey chapters for each, in addition to a chapter for the Falklands and South Georgia Island. More than Mexico, which is covered in a single chapter, but with subchapters for groups of its states, Brazil is allotted almost half the volume, and has ten separate chapters. Individual or groups of states are featured in eight chapters. Much of the material on Brazil was subsequently compiled and published as a separate book (1900). As with the Middle American volume, Reclus gives a sympathetic eye to common folk and the indigenous populations. Perhaps because of South America's size, especially Brazil, and the greater distance from the North American hegemon, the theme of Anglo-dominance and its threat to polity and people alike is more muted. All in all, Reclus sees much of Latin America as lands of great promise – once freed from the negative legacies of colonialism and the internal forms of domination. This regard, Reclus can be profitably read today as much as he was a century ago. And for the geographer, Reclus' writings on Latin America offer a valuable window on state-of-the-art geographic knowledge at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as a portal into the mind of perhaps the most prolific geographer in any epoch.

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## APPENDIXES

### Colombian Counterparts

A number of notable foreign geographers have been attracted to Colombia, and in turn Colombia has nurtured a number of its own. From the first years of the Conquest, geographic information was collected, collated, and conveyed to the imperial metropole, as well as circulated within the colony. The culmination of this practice is embodied in the Enlightenment figures of don José Celestino Mutis, Spanish polymath and head of the Royal Botanical Expedition, and Francisco José Caldas, Creole intellectual, revolutionary, and geographer. Both mounted expeditions with multiple natural historical objectives,

but all focused on uncovering, interpreting, and communicating Colombia's base-line geographic realities. Alexander von Humboldt, their Prussian counterpart, spent a number of weeks in their company during the two years (1801-1802) he spent in Colombia and Ecuador on his way south to Peru. Humboldt of course, eventually came to be considered one of the twin founders, along with Carl Ritter, of modern geography. However, as Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, among others have recently argued, Creole colonial scientists both anticipated and assisted aspects of Humboldt's celebrated ascent to world renown for his scholarly achievements, especially in the realm of geography. In turn, Humboldt inspired the subsequent generation of Colombian geographers. The key figure here is Agostino Codazzi, Italian émigré to New Granada, former Napoleonic military officer, merchant, and combatant in various Latin American independence campaigns. Returning to South America in 1826, he directed large-scale national geographic surveys of both Venezuela (1832-1848) and Colombia (1848-1859), producing enduring works of geography and cartography. His efforts won the praise of European academies as well as Humboldt's endorsements. It is difficult to overstate the impact of Humboldt's work on aspects of 19<sup>th</sup> century geography and geographers. Methodology, epistemology, empirical benchmarks, and practical suggestions were all part of the bequest. One of the popular refrains in Humboldt's narrative of his New World travels was the suitability of particular places and sites for European colonization. While in Europe printing and disseminating his multi-volume *Resumen de la Geografía de Venezuela*, Codazzi received encouragement and advice from Humboldt on plans for extensive European colonization schemes. The preference was for German colonists. Only one colony took root, La Colonia Tovar, in the Venezuelan Andes. Today, it is a popular tourist destination, with its Bavarian themed architecture and restaurants. Codazzi died of malaria in 1859, en route to the Sierra Santa Marta region to map and collect data for his massive chorological survey of Colombia. There is no evidence that Reclus and Codazzi were in contact, nor is there indication that Reclus consulted Codazzi's *Jeografía física y política de la provincias de la Nueva Granada* published in 1856. At this point, Reclus was an unknown French adventurer, but in part because of his Colombian interlude, he was to become the foremost French geographer of the nineteenth century. Nor do his later writings on Colombia, primarily in his 19 volume *Nouvelle géographie universelle*, seem to have relied on the base that Codazzi laid, save for some of his maps. Nevertheless, in some ways they followed parallel paths a generation apart. They were both uprooted and set on their travel trajectories by Napoleonic politics. Colombia was an early way-station for Reclus, whereas Colombia was Codazzi's final destination. Both conceived of, and became committed to what would become their life's main mission – researching and writing great compendious chorologic works – at the outset of these travels. Reclus' regional writings on Colombia and Panama were later edited, heavily annotated, and republished in 1893 as a single book by the Colombian geographer Francisco Vergara y Velasco. Entitled simply *Colombia*, Vergara gives ample due to Codazzi's works and contributions, thus by editorial proxy, Reclus both complements and compliments his Colombian-counterpart. Colombia remained the Latin American country that Reclus felt perhaps the most affinity for, and in turn, Colombians more than any other Latin American nationality have honored Reclus and his legacy.

Aside from Colombia, the country that can claim a direct connection with Reclus is Brazil. Reclus and his wife Ermance visited Brazil in 1893. He was the guest of Brazilian geographers in Rio de Janeiro and traveled into the interior, but little to date has been

recorded of his actual itinerary and impact on Brazilian geography. Unfortunately, Reclus seems not to have written an account of his time in Brazil. In 1899 a Portuguese translation (*Estado Unidos do Brasil: Geographia, Ethnographia, Estatistica*) of his major work on Brazil was published. A similarly compendious volume on Colombia (translated into Spanish and annotated by F. J. Vergara y Velasco) had been published in 1893 in Bogota. Combined, both works came to almost 1,000 pages of detailed regional reportage and description.

## ABSTRACTS

Normally, Elisée Reclus is not thought of as a Latin Americanist geographer, given that the majority of his life was lived in Europe, and most of his geographical travels were in Europe and neighboring lands. Similarly, as a geographer, he is primarily known for his research and regional writing projects that are global in scope. In addition, if Reclus is remembered outside of geography's circle of historians, it is for his political writings and commitments. Reclus has always had a place in the pantheon of anarchist and decentralist thinkers and activists, but his geographical work seems to undergo periodic rediscovery by new generations of geographers. As this paper demonstrates, we are in the midst of one of these revivals or rediscoveries. Unlike the generation of the 1930s, when figures such as Lewis Mumford and Carl Sauer were looking back to Reclus and others for their decentralist and regionalist inspirations, or during the 1960s when New Left geographers were excavating past legacies for serviceable guides to radical theory and praxis, today's geographers as well as social theorists might find in Reclus both old and new ways of conceptualizing chorologies, ecologies, and politics. I think it is especially encouraging that Latin American geographers, especially the younger generation, have taken an historical turn, and begun to investigate the grounds of their own national and regional foundations. Of course, the roots and vitality of any local, regional, or national geographic tradition are those that are "home-grown" and locally generated and grounded. Thus, getting to know one's precursors and those that have paved the way to the present is all to the good. But this is not to say that non-local or non-national geographic visitor, observer, and/or commentator has no agency or impact on a tradition, or in this case, the development of geographical thought and practice in a particular place. It is in this context that I would like to provide an overview of Elisée Reclus' connections and contributions to Latin Americanist geography. To date, Reclus scholars have directed little attention toward Reclus' travels in, and writings on, Latin America. Agreeably, this paper promises to make major advances in furthering our knowledge of Reclus as Latin Americanist geographer.

Cuando se piensa en Elisée Reclus, no se le piensa normalmente como un geógrafo latinoamericanista dado que vivió la mayor parte de su vida en Europa y gran cantidad de sus viajes geográficos también los realizó en Europa y países vecinos. De forma similar, como geógrafo se le conoce por su investigación y proyectos escritos que son de alcance mundial. Además, si a Reclus se le recuerda por fuera del círculo geográfico de los historiadores, es por sus compromisos y escritos políticos. Reclus siempre ha tenido un lugar en el panteón de los activistas anarquistas y pensadores descentralistas pero parece que nuevas generaciones de geógrafos redescubren periódicamente su trabajo geográfico. Como se demuestra en este artículo, estamos en el medio de uno de estos resurgimientos o redescubrimientos. A diferencia de la generación de los años treinta, cuando figuras como Lewis Mumford y Carl Sauer recordaban a Reclus o a otros por sus inspiraciones regionalistas y descentralistas, o durante los sesentas cuando los geógrafos de la Nueva Izquierda estaban excavando legados pasados para encontrar guías utilizables en teorías radicales y en la práctica, los geógrafos de hoy en día así

como los teóricos sociales pueden encontrar en Reclus formas antiguas y nuevas de conceptualizar cronologías, ecologías y política. Yo considero especialmente valioso que geógrafos latinoamericanos, especialmente la generación más joven, haya tomado un giro histórico y haya comenzado a investigar los terrenos de su propia fundación nacional y regional. Desde luego, las raíces y la vitalidad de cualquier tradición local, regional, o nacional son aquellas que son “de cosecha propia” y generadas localmente y conectadas a la tierra. De esta manera, es para bien llegar a conocer a los precursores de uno y a aquellos que allanaron el camino hacia el presente. Pero esto no quiere decir que los visitantes, observadores y/o comentaristas no-locales o no-nacionales no tengan ningún papel o impacto en la tradición, o como en este caso, en el desarrollo del pensamiento y en la práctica geográfica en un lugar determinado. Es en este contexto que me gustaría dar una visión general de las conexiones y contribuciones que Elisée Reclus le ha hecho a la geografía latinoamericanista. Hasta la fecha, los académicos expertos en Reclus, le han prestado poca atención a los viajes y escritos de Reclus en y sobre Latinoamérica. De acuerdo con lo anterior, este artículo se propone realizar avances significativos en la promoción de nuestro conocimiento de Reclus como geógrafo americanista.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Élisée Reclus, Latin America, travels, legacy

**Palabras claves:** Élisée Reclus, América Latina, viajes, legado

**Chronological index:** 1830-1905

**Geographical index:** Latin America, Louisiana, Colombia

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