

AMERICAN, UNITED STATION, USAMERICAN, OR GRINGO?

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A little cultural war passed almost unnoticed in cyberspace at the end of March 2002. The first salvo of that war was fired by Thomas Holloway in an e-mail posted at the H-LatAm¹ discussion list on March 26th. He asked for an alternative to the word “American” when referring to people from, or citizens of, the United States of America.² The fact that the citizens of the United States call themselves “Americans” causes discomfort for many Latin Americans, who see the appropriation by the United States citizens of the collective identity of all peoples and countries of the continent as a clear act of cultural imperialism. In fact, the thirty-four other countries of the hemisphere can claim to be as “American” as the United States.

Taking advantage of the issues raised on the debate that followed Holloway’s posting at H-LatAm discussion list, I will discuss why the development of the national idea in the United States led to the consolidation of the word “American” as the official name/adjective for the citizens of one particular country in the whole American continent. In contrast, in Spanish America and Brazil, the process of national affirmation led to the weakening of the collective “American” identity and the strengthening of particular characteristics of each local community in order to build the new nations. Terms used to identify peoples, cultures, and regions have lately come under intense scrutiny. It has been recognized that those words can harm people not only because they are sometimes received as an overt insult but also because they can propagate a debasing representation of those people which affects their social status, political leverage, and access to public goods. The appropriation of the collective identity of the continent by one country is clearly an expression of power and a mode of manipulation that reinforces the idea of alterity used to describe the countries and peoples of the American continent excluded from this definition of America.

As Director of the Hemispheric Institute on the Americas at University of California at Davis, Thomas Holloway is well aware of the problematic use of “American” as a definition of the citizens of one specific country in the Western Hemisphere. It is noteworthy that the term *Americano/a* has widespread use in Latin America; it has the same meaning attributed to “American” in English. In Portuguese and Spanish, however, “*Americano/a*” also reflects an affiliation with the Western Hemisphere more broadly. The use of “*Hemisferio Occidental*” for Western Hemisphere is rare, while the use of “*América*”, or “*Américas*” (also possible in English) to define the entire continent is more typical. But in both Portuguese and Spanish, the ambiguity of the word *Americano/a* can be easily avoided by substituting “*estad(o)unidense*.” In line with this solution, Holloway proposed the term “United Station” to avoid the multiple meanings of the word “American.” His proposal opened a debate that produced a host of new words for defining the people of the United States: United Station, USAmerican, Unitedstatesian, Usonian, Usanian, Usan, and — alas — Gringo.

This last term caused a sanguine discussion. One participant found “gringo” offensive, non-specific (actually, it may refer to Italians or people from other national origins in many parts

¹ . H-LatAm is an INTERNET based forum for the scholarly discussion of Latin American History. See <http://www.h-net.org/~latam/>

² The discussion log for March and April 2002 can be found at the H-LatAm website: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lx&list=h-latam&user=&pw=&month=0203> and <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lx&list=h-latam&user=&pw=&month=0204> .

of Latin America); and not applicable to many “United Statesians, or US Americans, or whatever we are.”³ This comment was attacked in a spirited way by other participants:

It's offensive. I find this SO funny — for hundreds of years, Anglos (or gringos) used so many offensive terms towards people of color. NOW that the tables have turned, where do all these hurt feelings come from? It seems to me a bit silly to focus on really nonessential nonsense, while Latin America is drowning in debt and poverty. If this is what goes on in academia, then I will want nothing to do with it. Poverty is offensive; let's focus on that. The fact that the group in control of the world gets “offended” by a name... is indicative of focusing on the speck in my eye.... Well, you know the rest. The descendants of those people who invented truly offensive terms seem to me to have no moral legitimacy to point fingers at anyone else. That being said, I promise not to use the term again! :) ⁴

Debating the origins of the term Gringo, participants proposed three main hypotheses: that the word was derived from 1) a song US troops chanted during the Mexican War (1846-48), (“Green Grow the Rushes, Oh”)⁵; 2) from the green color of US marines’ uniforms during the many US military interventions in the region, meaning “Greens Go!;” or 3) from the word “griego” (Greek), meaning those who speak in an incomprehensible language, as in the expression “that’s Greek to me.” The origin of the word remained unsolved. Nor was there any consensus on the use of the term Gringo or any of the other possibilities as an alternative designation for U.S. nationals. The discussion, however, raised an important question that merits further analysis: how and why did “American” end up as the official name/adjective for the citizens of the United States?

Michael Rich recalled that this discussion is centuries old and quoted Bill Bryson’s book Made in America to illustrate his point:

[C]onsiderable thought was given in early Congresses to the possibility of renaming the country. From the start, many people recognized that United States of America was unsatisfactory. For one thing, it allowed [for] no conventional adjectival form. A citizen would have to be either a United Statesian or some other clumsy locution, or an American, thereby arrogating to US citizens a title that belonged equally to the inhabitants of some three dozen other nations on two continents. Several alternative possibilities were considered — the United States of Columbia, Appalachia, Alleghania, and Freedonia or Fredonia (whose citizens would be called Fredes) — but none found sufficient support to displace the prevailing title.⁶

³ FOX, Geoffrey: H-LatAm, March, 29th.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=TdSSk/s5849wJjTvFY6vcg&user=&pw=>

⁴ PADILLA, Victor, D.: H-LatAm, March, 29th.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=0Z8MDCKuao%2bAOfl5udkpuA&user=&pw=>

⁵ Green Grow the Rushes, Oh: The leader sings: “I’ll give you one, oh.”/And the group responds... “Green grow the rushes, oh!”/Leader: “What is your one, oh?”/Group: “One is one, and all alone, and ever more will be so.”/Leader: “I’ll give you two, oh”/Group: “Green grow the rushes, oh!”/Leader: “What is your two, oh?”/Group: “Two, two, the lily-white boys, clothed all in green, oh.”/“One is one and all alone, and ever more will be so.”/Leader: “I’ll give you three, oh”/Group: “Green grow the rushes, oh!”/Leader: “What is your three, oh?”/Group: “Three, three, the rivals, two, two, the lily-white boys...” etc.

⁶ RICH, Michael: H-LatAm, March, 26th.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=5Sqs7ddOg79Gt9dOIHTk4g&user=&pw=>

Conversely, some participants of the debate proposed the use of alternative names for the continent. Marc Becker (H-LatAm, March, 27th), for instance, stated that some Indigenous rights activists have advocated the use of the term

Another discussant argued that the US citizens have historical precedence and, thus, “the right to use this term”.⁷ This assertion, however, was rapidly proved wrong, since “americanos” was widely used by Spanish American *criollo* insurgents, and centuries before that by the Spanish colonists who used the term “español americano” to differentiate themselves from the Spanish Crown subjects born in Europe.⁸ At this point, William Paterson made an important point:

Let me start by saying the people in the British colonies did not call themselves “Americans,” but “British.” Later in the colonial period they started calling themselves “Virginians,” “Marylanders,” etc. Still British identity was stronger. By the time of independence patriotism took hold but mostly on regional identities. The effort to create a homogeneous, supra-identity during the early national period was challenged by the still stronger regional identities. Just prior to the Civil War people in the United States did not call themselves “Americans” so much, but still “Virginians,” “Georgians,” etc. The term “American” was there and it was used whenever a supra-identity was intended, but it was not as strong as the regional identity. It was not until the Civil War that homogeneity became the norm. The end of the Civil War was a victory for a stronger federal government and a homogenous identity. What actually cemented the term “Americans” to identify the people living in the United States was Europe’s response. Europeans (except Iberians) answered to this newfound identity by calling all “estadunidenses,” “Americans.” This reflected the fact that for Europe at this time (after the US Civil War) the only thing that matter[ed] in the Western Hemisphere was the United States.⁹

Of course, the United States was not for Europe the “only thing that matter in the Western Hemisphere” (sic) at the 19th century since Latin American countries were an important market for European goods and investments, as well as the main source for many important raw materials.

“Abya Yala” for the American continent. The term means “Continent of Life” in the language of the Kuna peoples of Panama and Colombia.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=Ctzqp6zGeCsu4IKTOht4Jw&user=&pw=>

Another proposal (DORMADY, Jason: H-LatAm, March 27th) was to rename the Americas as Leifia or Erika, after the Vikings.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=Lc6OqwTLt3NhwJT2buf/oQ&user=&pw=>

⁷ LEONARD, Virginia: H-LatAm, March 28th.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=ZOYG/you%2bLhYB%2bxSzip/5A&user=&pw=>

⁸ REBELLO, Eduardo: H-LatAm, March 28th,

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=%2bEj9XcS/XxT0rm3wumawIw&user=&pw=>

MORIN, Thomas: H-LatAm, March 28th,

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=VWno%2bEsPyeC5YhHoOGY%2bqA&user=&pw=>

DUCEY, Michael: H-LatAm, March 28th,

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=4uKwkFhQBwS8xWzFy4R7og&user=&pw=>

and CLOKE Jon: H-LatAm, March 30th.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=e&msg=r6nGBYXMeiBVt/oMKyGZ5g&user=&pw=>

⁹ PATERSON, William: H-LatAm, March 28th.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=g68s5QestdcYy41nCRco5Q&user=&pw=>

On the political side, Latin America was important enough to justify many European interventions.¹⁰

Thus, it would be very problematic to claim that it was Europe's response to the new situation created by the end of the colonial ties to its American colonies which consolidated the term "American," but it is important to note that the concept of America (meaning the whole continent) was indeed invented by the Europeans. In the process of defining itself, Europeans constructed convenient "others" in the form of a mythical America¹¹ and a newfound notion of the Orient.¹² As Edmundo O'Gorman puts it, America was not discovered, but invented by the Europeans.¹³ On the other hand, America's inhabitants before 1492 were not aware of the existence of other continents. So the concepts that they bestowed this immense continental mass (the Cemanáhuac for the Aztecs, the Abia Yala for the Cunas of Panama, Tahuamtisuyo for the Incas) equated with the whole world.

For the Europeans, the discovery of the Americas represented a revolution in a world-vision dominant since the Ancient Greeks. The discovery of the new continent, the world's "fourth part," represented a revolution to the then current geographical and theological world views. The notion that the *orbis terrarum*, the Island of the Earth, consisted of three different entities — Europe, Africa, and Asia — was prevalent since the ancient Greeks and was much more than a geographic interpretation. It was the basis on which rested a complex theological world view. As O'Gorman stressed, these three territorial entities are sorted in hierarchical manners that transcend a mere geographical concept:

It is all-important to understand that we are not dealing with a partition of a purely territorial or political nature, like the division into states of a modern American republic, but with a division of the world that concerns its spiritual constitution. In this archaic conception Europe, Asia, and Africa appear as entities endowed with a special meaning that transcends the purely geographical sphere and individualizes them from the historical point of view. Upon the closed stage on which human life unfolds, a hierarchy is ultimately established, based not on physical or natural endowments, but on preeminence in the moral sphere. In this hierarchy, according to Strabo's express declaration, Europe occupies the highest place, not because it is the largest or the richest part of the *Orbis Terrarum*, but because it is the place of origin and development of the forms of human life that embody human values with the greatest purity.¹⁴

The idea of the American continent as a "New World," on an equal footing with the other three parts of the world, implied the possibility for the American continent to become a new Europe. Names such as New England, New York, Nueva España, Nueva Granada, and Nova Lusitânia were far more common in the American continent than any other place colonized by the Europeans.

¹⁰ For a brief account of European political and economic interests in Latin America during the 19th Century, see FREEMAN SMITH, Robert. "Latin America, the United States and the European powers, 1830–1930." In BETHELL, Leslie (ed). *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume 4, c. 1870 to 1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

¹¹ TODOROV, Tzvetan; *The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.

¹² SAID, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

¹³ O'GORMAN, Edmundo. *The Invention of America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 136.

A positive meaning was associated with the notion of America. The continent's natural exuberance was stressed and the indigenous peoples were idealized in the lines of Rousseau's noble savage. As the colonization proceeded, this benevolent interpretation was reversed: the American continent became synonymous with inferiority and decadence. The anti-American interpretation, which reached its peak during the 18th century, understood the continent's nature as intrinsically inadequate to the development of civilization and prone to destroy European's virtues and institutions. The amazement with the continent's nature was replaced by a critic view from European naturalists like Buffon and Pauw, who sustained that the very American nature contaminated and degraded even the European colonizers.¹⁵ A political translation of this approach was the basis for the marginalization of the *criollo* elites from the power positions in these societies. As Anderson expresses it:

Even if he was born within one week of his father's migration, the accident of birth in the Americas consigned him to subordination — even though in terms of language, religion, ancestry, or manners he was largely indistinguishable from the Spain-born Spaniard. There was nothing to be done about it: he was *irremediably* a creole. Yet how irrational his exclusion must have seemed! Nonetheless, hidden inside the irrationality was this logic: born in the Americas, he could not be a true Spaniard; *ergo*, born in Spain, the *peninsular* could not be a true American.¹⁶

By the end of the 18th century, the European identity of the *criollo* elites, as subjects of the kings of Spain, Portugal, or England, was eroded enough to allow nativist sentiments that were built around a notion of dual allegiance to a local *patria* and to an idea of America that differentiated the New from the Old World. These local *patrias* were not clearly defined. Some of the likely candidates for becoming “national” units, from the point of view of these local allegiances, would never achieve such a status. On one hand, the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata, for instance, gave way to more than one nationality. On the other hand, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Sul and other Brazilian *patrias*, as well as many regions of the former Spanish and British empires in the American continent, could not develop separate nations.

The emergence of the American republics in contrast to the old European monarchies created a political dimension to the cleavage between America and Europe. The differences between the political institutions prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic gave new meaning to the “New World” concept. In his 1808, 1809, and 1811 letters, Jefferson created the concept of Western Hemisphere.¹⁷ In this correspondence, he sustained that the American peoples' unity was due to the similarity of their “modes of existence,” which differentiated them from the rest of the world (meaning Europe). That key idea was translated into a political dichotomy between America and Europe. The contrast with the European monarchies created a sense of unity or at least solidarity among the new republics:

One of the things that shaped US observer's enthusiasm for the Spanish American patriots was the conviction that their southern neighbors were fellow “Americans.” US Geography texts of the period most commonly referred to

¹⁵ See, for instance, CEASER, James. "A Genealogy of Anti-Americanism." In *The Public Interest*. Summer 2003. <http://www.thepublicinterest.com/archives/2003summer/article1.html>

¹⁶ ANDERSON, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991 - Rev. and extended ed. 2nd ed., pp. 57-8.

¹⁷ For the concept of Western Hemisphere, see WHITAKER, A. P. *The Western Hemisphere Idea: Its Rise and Decline*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1954.

“America” as an unitary continent, though US speakers and writers could often move back and forth between national and continental meanings of the word within the same speech or document.¹⁸

In his Jamaica Letter (1815)¹⁹, Bolívar proposed “consolidating the New World into a single nation,” an ideal that soon proved impossible to reach. Instead, more than a dozen countries emerged from the former Spanish American colonies, in contrast with the creation, after the Civil War, of a single nation out the Thirteen Colonies, and a unified Brazilian Empire.

But both the United States and Brazil also faced the risk of disintegration. In the latter, the many regional revolts that threatened Rio de Janeiro’s control over the country were only suppressed in effective way after 1850, and the regional tensions were strong enough to fuel an internal military conflict as late as 1932. As for the former, the viability of the United States as a single nation was only achieved after the greatest bloodshed in the continent’s history. Anderson pointed out:

Yet even in the case of the USA there are elements of comparative “failure” or shrinkage — non-absorption of English-speaking Canada, Texas’ decade of independent sovereignty (1835-46). Had a sizable English-speaking community existed in California in the eighteenth century, it is not likely that an independent state would have arisen there to play Argentina to the Thirteen Colonies’ Peru? Even in the USA, the affective bonds of nationalism were elastic enough, combined with the rapid expansion of the western frontier and the contradictions generated between the economies of the North and South, to precipitate a war of secession *almost a century after the Declaration of Independence*; and this war today sharply reminds us of those that tore Venezuela and Ecuador off from Gran Colombia, and Uruguay and Paraguay from the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata.²⁰

Whatever were the historical conditions that produced the unity of the United States and Brazil, and the fragmentation of Spanish America, the key issue behind the adoption of the adjective “American” to identify US citizens is the way US nationalism was built or, better yet, *invented*. This process differed in important ways from the similar inventions of Peruvian, Argentine, Colombian, or Brazilian nationalisms.

The fragility of the United States as a nation before the Civil War is a well documented fact.²¹ As Boorstin noted, “Independence had not created one nation, but thirteen.”²² The invention of an American nationality was far from automatic and during the first decades of the Union, the primary allegiance of the citizenry was directed to the local states and not to the federal government. The collective identity for the citizens of all the states rested upon an idea of America, as a way of life that differentiate them from the peoples of Europe. That identity was not necessarily equated to the United States and, since the autonomy of the states was a sensitive issue, there were no serious efforts to enforce that identity. It is noteworthy that the word “nation”

¹⁸ JAEDE, Mark: H-LatAm, March 28th.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=%2b/9gjoP7h0ft7kDw2ZwrhQ&user=&pw=>

¹⁹ Full text available at <http://www.college.emory.edu/culpeper/BAKEWELL/texts/jamaica-letter.html>

²⁰ ANDERSON, Benedict R. O’G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991 - Rev. and extended ed. 2nd ed., p. 64. Emphasis in the original.

²¹ See, for instance, MURRIN, John H. “A Roof Without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity.” In: BEEMAN, Richard; BOTEIN, Stephen; and CARTER II, Edward (eds) *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Origin*. University of North Carolina Press, 1987, and BOORSTIN, Daniel J. *The Americans: The National Experience*. Vintage, 1965, esp. pp. 327-430.

²² BOORSTIN, Daniel J. *The Americans: The National Experience*. Vintage, 1965, p. 405.

was omitted from the Declaration of Independence. In Murrin's metaphor, American nationality was then "a roof without walls."²³

Only after the Civil War was the federal government confident enough to press for and develop specific policies to cement the nation. The "Reconstruction" period after the war is certainly one of the finest moments of nation-building of the 19th century. Winik captured the importance of this moment in his book *April 1865: the month that saved America*. He recalled:

there were the broad philosophical questions. Was the Confederacy to be treated like a conquered, treasonous nation, a hodgepodge of nameless, shapeless territories to be carved up and remade, *lex talionis* ("an eye for one eye"), as the Radicals believed? Or would it return, as an equal part of the United States, Lincoln's view, in which some rebels would be innocent and others, a far smaller number, perhaps guilty of crimes?²⁴

The fact is that, if the Confederacy was vanquished, the Union would also disappear in the years the followed the war. Finally, a new nation was consolidated with the progressive weakening of the sentimental ties and allegiance due to the states and the strengthening of the common "American" identity. The use of the word "America" to define this common identity remained permeated by ambiguity, meaning, at the same time, the whole continent, the idea of particular way of life, and, also, as short for the United States of America. This ambiguity was, in many ways, instrumental to redefine allegiance to the common nation and avoid resentment and resistance. It is much easier to adhere to an ambiguous concept than to one that has a precise meaning. At that point, trying to establish a new name for the nation that was finally being forged would be a difficult and divisive issue. Through this process, local identities were weakened and the common "American" identity was consolidated.

On the other hand, in the former Spanish colonies the ambiguity between the common "American" identity and the individual national identities was solved by reinforcing those local identities. In order to sustain these newfound identities, stress was put on the supposed differences among the various states that were trying to legitimate their rule over a specific territory and population. With the support of the respective rulers and intellectual elites, many distinct national mythologies were developed for these new countries and particularisms and patriotic sentiments were encouraged. The local particularities were stressed or even invented to legitimate new nations that could put some flesh on the states that were created, sometimes arbitrarily, out of the former Spanish colonies. The common "American" identity was relegated to a secondary role. In the "American" conferences held in the 19th century,²⁵ attempts were made to develop common strategies to deal with extra-continental aggression (and sometimes with the expansionism of the United States), but they were unable to consolidate a common identity.

The process of constructing many particular national identities was based on stressing or inventing historical, geographical, racial, and cultural differences between, for instance,

²³ MURRIN, John H. "A Roof Without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity." In: BEEMAN, Richard; BOTEIN, Stephen; and CARTER II, Edward (eds) *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Origin*. University of North Carolina Press, 1987, pp. 33-348.

²⁴ WINIK, Jay *April 1865: The Month that Saved America*. Perennial. 2002, p. 210.

²⁵ Panama (1826), Lima (1847/1848), Santiago (1856), Washington (1856), Lima (1864/1865), Caracas (1883), and Washington (1889/1890). The United States participated only in the 1889/1890 Conference, under the aegis of the pan-Americanism. In this meeting the United States proposed the creation of an customs union among all American states, proposal that was finally rejected.

Uruguayans or Paraguayans and Argentineans; Ecuadorians or Venezuelans and Colombians. The effort to strengthen all these newfound “nationalities” was an effort to overcome and reject a common identity.

In Brazil, the continuation of the monarchy, transferred to a prince who became “Brazilian,” created a peculiar situation that was translated into a distinct manner of thinking about – and conferring legitimacy upon – both the state and the social relationships within the country. In a challenge to geography, the Brazilian Empire viewed itself as European, and therefore “civilized,” in contrast to the anarchy and instability it viewed as characteristic of the neighboring republics. For the new republics of the Americas, the “other” was Europe and the *ancien régime*, but for the Empire of Brazil, the “other” was the group of neighboring republics.

The invention of the Brazilian nationality was quite different from the similar processes in its neighboring states. When these states broke their ties with the colonial power, they immediately embarked on the task of defining, already in terms of a nationalist consciousness, what it meant to be a Peruvian, Chilean or Mexican, concepts that until then had not had any political significance. In Brazil, the invention of nationality followed a more complex path. The Brazilian monarchy allowed for a long period during which the Brazilian national identity would mature under the aegis of a dynastic state modeled after the European ones. This situation was in sharp contrast with the circumstances in the neighboring republics, where there had been a sharp break from the colonial status quo in several respects, including geographically, with the sharp distinction between the New and Old Worlds (America *versus* Europe), and ideologically, with the creation of a republic and establishment of the concept of a society organized on the basis of a social contract, rather than the prerogatives of a hereditary monarchy. In Brazil, resorting to a contrast with the undesired “other” led to an attempt to construct a self-image, interestingly, of a European Brazil that was “civilized” and stable, in contrast with its neighbors in turmoil. Although Europe was the “other” for the rest of the countries in the continent, Brazil saw the “other” just beyond its own borders. In these conditions, unlike the rest of the nations of the continent, the invention of a common “Brazilian” identity above the local *patrias* was achieved without resorting to the idea of alterity to Europe. An “American” identity was carefully avoided by the Imperial authorities. It was only after the creation of the Republican Party, in 1870, that the idea of a “European” Brazil was seriously put in question. Its founding document, the “Republican Manifesto,” stated: “We are from America and we demand to be Americans.”²⁶

It is easy to imagine that if Spain’s former colonies had become a single nation, or even if the Brazilian “Americanism” had come earlier, competing claims over the “American” identity would have developed. It was historical contingency that made “American” the name for the people of the United States. But it is important to note that in spite of how deep and consolidated they appear to be, these identities are in a constant process of change. Since the inauguration of NAFTA, for instance, besides the still strong Mexico’s Latin American identity a competing North American identity has emerged. Argentineans, Brazilians, Paraguayans, and Uruguayans are discovering new similarities and common goals under the development of their MERCOSUR identity. The growth and the empowerment of the Latino population is transforming US culture, blurring the line that separates it from the mainstream “America.” In the near future, it is not unthinkable that the process of economic integration of the continent may create the need to

²⁶ For additional comment on this issue, see author’s article in: GALOPPE, Raul and WEINER, Richard (ed.). Explorations on Subjectivity, Borders, and Demarcation: A Fine Line. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005.

strengthen and redefine the continent's common identity. In an "American Union" (certainly it would take more than a Free Trade Area) extending from Alaska to the Tierra del Fuego, who will be the Americans?

For a provisional answer on how to address the problematic usage of the word "American," a simple and effective strategy emerged from the H-LatAm discussion.²⁷ In most cases, the use of US as the adjectival form works fairly well: US citizens, US public opinion, US tourists, "someone from the US," etc. The recent introduction of words such as Ms., African-American (which in this context does not necessarily but usually means a US citizen), etc. indicates that solving the ambiguity inherent in the unqualified use of the word "American" is not an impossible mission. Academia is the likely candidate to be starting the point for this change. Why not begin by renaming the American Studies programs in the Universities of the United States? Naming them "US Studies programs" would be more appropriate.

²⁷ ANNA, Timothy E.: H-LatAm, March, 28th,
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=XivYq5LSmT46jWthbdgkZA&user=&pw=>
and WILLIFORD, Tom: H-LatAm, March, 29th.
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-latam&month=0203&week=d&msg=Jvf%2bmFH6qJUzyxDoBqHZvA&user=&pw=>