



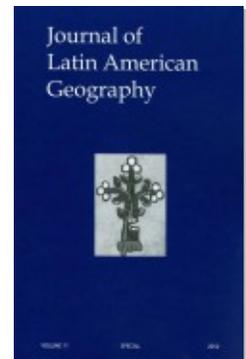
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Buenos Aires: El Poder de la Anticipación (review)

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Buenos Aires: El Poder de la Anticipación. Margarita Gutman. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Infinito, 2011. 764 pp., maps, illus., photos, notes, appendices, and bibliography. \$60.00 paperback (ISBN: 978-987-9393-64-2).

Many cities around the world celebrate their founding either on a designated day and month or on the actual day if it is known. Lima, Perú, for example, celebrates its 1535 founding annually on January 18th, and Santiago de Chile celebrates its 1541 founding on February 12th. In Buenos Aires, Argentina, May 25th 1810 is the most important anniversary for the city because it marks the Day of the Revolution, when a local Creole junta took over governance of the city from the Spanish Viceroy. Yet Buenos Aires did not consolidate its political and economic control over the fledgling nation until 1880, at the dawn of the development period known as the “*belle époque*”. For the next thirty years, until the 1910 centenary, the city underwent a profound and critical restructuring from a post-colonial backwater to a modern, dynamic, and growing metropolis. Spurred by immigration, new technologies, investment capital, and the ideas of the *Generación del '80*, Buenos Aires grew in size, stature, and importance during this so-called “beautiful age.”

The first two decades of the twentieth century provide the temporal context for a wonderful new book on Buenos Aires by Margarita Gutman. cDrawing on a rich archive of illustrations, newspaper articles, commentaries, and planning strategies, Gutman examines a 20-year period between 1900 and 1920, anchored by the 1910 centenary, to analyze how *porteños* (residents of the Buenos Aires federal district) imagined their future city. Although there have been myriad studies over the years exploring how Buenos Aires grew and changed during this *fin de siècle* period, none comes close to the innovative approach exhibited by Gutman as she aims to illustrate the “desires, plans, and expectations for the future of the city produced” by its inhabitants at a critical moment of “grand changes and aspirations” (p. 19). This book has much value for Latin Americanists seeking to understand how urban environments grow and change over time from the perspective of both the general public and professionals.

In a detailed introduction, Gutman lays out the central premise of the book: To examine how the future of Buenos Aires was presented in the various written plans developed by architects, landscape planners, engineers, and government officials. She then compares this more formal vision of the future with the ideas, images, and speculations of writers, illustrators, cartoonists, journalists, and social commentators. Her analysis is richly illustrated with 185 images drawn from over 7,000 sources, including the mass media, specialized journals, both local and foreign, and advertising, all published between 1900 and 1920. Over the following ten chapters, Gutman discusses how these images of future technologies suggested a “vertical city of the future” and helped to shape both imagination and practice in a variety of critical ways.

Chapter one sets out a framework for futurism and asks what we think of when we imagine the future, and then to consider how *porteños* might have imagined the future of their city and society at the beginning of the 20th century. Gutman presents three important social reasons for considering the urban future: (1) to stimulate our thinking about the future in order to develop meaningful plans and policies today; (2) to support the development of a “capacity of aspirations”; and (3) to serve as a historical marker for reflection on a society’s projected or anticipated future. Chapter two analyzes the maps, plans, and policies of professional planners and policymakers, with the goal of teasing out how their vision of the future shaped the physical construction of Buenos Aires. Here might have been a perfect place to present a couple of contemporary maps or schematics to compare with those authored in the 1910s and 1920s.

Chapters three through six most engaged this reviewer, primarily because this is where Gutman's visually supported analysis of how the city's future was imagined during these two decades is the strongest. In chapter six, for example, she explores how illustrations in New York's journals and magazines at the time influenced the type of imaginative ideas about future Buenos Aires, particularly images of skyscrapers as icons of the modern metropolis. With recent and newly envisioned technologies in building techniques, transportation, and urban mobility, planners and architects began to see a different type of city, a more vertical and dynamic built environment that would help to deliver the promise of Argentina on the occasion of its centenary. Bear in mind that in 1910 Argentina had become one of the richest countries in the world (and the richest in the Southern Hemisphere) based on its export of agricultural products, and the capital's movers and shakers were emboldened to envision Buenos Aires as a modern world city. Gutman's methodological approach in this book of comparing and integrating the planning visions and designs of professionals with images of the future metropolis circulating in public journals and newspapers is innovative and refreshingly different from classical treatments of urban change. Some of the images portending how the future might look are ideal (Figure 110 – compare this with modern-day Catalinas Norte in Buenos Aires), while others are a little more fanciful (Figure 165). Overall, the analysis is extremely valuable because it highlights the importance of negotiated space where urban projects can be envisioned that balance the expectations of planners, architects, and the general public alike.

Buenos Aires: El Poder de la Anticipación will be beneficial reading for a wide audience, including Latin Americanist geographers, planners, futurists, journalists, and architects. Its focus on urban development and how a vision of the future inspired multiple actors who plan, (re)create, and (re)build the city every day in myriad ways is innovative and wonderfully illustrated. A key theme index would have been helpful, but there is a detailed index included of journals and newspapers published during the period both in Buenos Aires and New York. A *tour-de force* of urban historical research, Gutman's work has set the standard for further examinations of how the city is envisioned in the present for future generations.

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Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution. Sherry Johnson. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011. xiii + 306 pp., maps, figures, appendices, index. \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 978-0-8078-3493-0).

Sherry Johnson's *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution* is a notable contribution to the emerging literature on environmental history of the Greater Caribbean. Johnson relies on sources from a variety of disciplines – historical climatology, environmental history, and more traditional colonial history – to weave together a compelling argument for taking into consideration environmental criteria in analyzing the history of the Caribbean and the Atlantic world.

The time frame of the study is the second half of the eighteenth century. She focuses on this time span because of the frequency of severe weather events that affected the Americas and Europe during this anomalous warm period, associated with what climatologists today refer to as El Niño/La Niña-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) climate