

La Perla del Caribe

IV

I

"When I discovered the Indies I said they were the greatest rich domain in the world. I spoke of the gold, pearls, precious stones, spices..."

-Christopher Columbus in a 1503 letter from Jamaica to the Spanish crown

II

"I say money, money, money. I say twenty words in English. I say money, money, money and I say hot dog!"

-Carmen Miranda "The Brazilian Bombshell" in an early interview with the New York World Telegram, 1940

III

"Ideological justifications were never in short supply. The bleeding of the new world became an act of charity, an argument for the faith. With the guilt, a whole system of rationalizations for guilty consciences was devised. The Indians were used as beasts of burden because they could carry a greater weight than the delicate llama, and this proved that they were beasts of burden. The viceroy of Mexico felt that there was no better remedy for their 'natural wickedness' than work in the mines. Juan Ginés Sepúlveda, a renowned Spanish theologian, argued that they deserve the treatment they got because their sins and idolatries were an offense to God. The Count de Buffon, a French naturalist, noted that Indians were cold and weak creatures in whom "no activity of the soul" could be observed. The Abbé De Paw invented a Latin America where degenerate Indians lived side by side with dogs that couldn't bark, cows that couldn't be eaten, and impotent camels. Voltaire's Latin America was inhabited by Indians who were lazy and stupid, pigs with navels on their backs, and bald and cowardly lions. Bacon, De Maistre, Montesquieu, Hume, and Bodin declined to recognize the "degraded man" of the New World as fellow humans. Hegel spoke of Latin America's physical and spiritual impotence and said the Indians died when Europe merely breathed on them."

-Eduardo Galeano, from *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, 1971

¶2. (U) President Chavez opened the "Arepera Socialista" with much fanfare on December 22, advertising its low price and high quality as symbolic of the benefits of his socialist revolution. (Note: "Arepas" are a Venezuelan-style thick cornmeal tortilla usually used for a type of sandwich. End Note.) The restaurant, located in a lower middle class neighborhood of Caracas, serves "arepas" for about a fourth of their regular price. It is currently only open during weekday mornings, although there are plans to extend its hours, add coffee and fresh juice to its menu, and open two new locations in working class neighborhoods.

¶3. (SBU) On a January 8 visit, EmbOffs witnessed a long line of people waiting to get into the restaurant but surprisingly rapid service. Inside, one wall was dominated by a quote in large red lettering from Simon Bolivar: "The best system of government is that which produces the greatest happiness." An employee managing the line said the restaurant served 1,200 customers per day. One man in line said he worked in the neighborhood and came every day since the food was excellent and cheap.

Money is Secondary in Socialist Restaurants

¶4. (U) Besides the price, Saman highlighted another key difference between socialist and capitalist "arepera": customers pay only after eating, while "in fast food chains . . . they only think about money." In the "Arepera Socialista," the cash register is in a corner of the room and customers pay only after eating, self-reporting how many of the "arepas" they ate.

Comment: Let Them Eat Arepas

-excerpt from leaked US diplomatic cable, 2010

“After establishing himself among the leading modernists of Paris, in 1934 Torres-García returned to his native Uruguay. Through written manifestos, public lectures, radio addresses, and studio instruction, he promoted his theory of Constructive Universalism, encouraging South Americans to embrace native traditions and cast off outworn European culture. In advocating for what he called “The New Art of America,” Torres-García did not proceed from nationalistic motivations but from a broader perspective that embraced tribal cultures of both North and South America. He described “a great desire for unification... arising in all the Americas” and referred to “the great Indo-American family.” His doctrine of Constructive Universalism was explicitly humanistic, drawing on the spiritual function of Pre-Columbian art and connecting the great tectonic structures of the past with modern geometric art.”

-Tricia Laughlin Bloom, from the essay *Origin Stories: Native Paradigms in American Abstract Art*, 2010

La United Fruit Co.

When the trumpet sounded
everything was prepared on earth,
and Jehovah gave the world
to Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,
Ford Motors, and other corporations.
The United Fruit Company
reserved for itself the most juicy
piece, the central coast of my world,
the delicate waist of America.

It rebaptized these countries
Banana Republics,
and over the sleeping dead,
over the unquiet heroes
who won greatness,
liberty, and banners,
it established an opera buffa:
it abolished free will,
gave out imperial crowns,
encouraged envy, attracted
the dictatorship of flies:
Trujillo flies, Tachos flies
Carias flies, Martinez flies,
Ubico flies, flies sticky with
submissive blood and marmalade,
drunken flies that buzz over
the tombs of the people,
circus flies, wise flies
expert at tyranny.

With the bloodthirsty flies
came the Fruit Company,
amassed coffee and fruit
in ships which put to sea like
overloaded trays with the treasures
from our sunken lands.

Meanwhile the Indians fall
into the sugared depths of the
harbors and are buried in the
morning mists;
a corpse rolls, a thing without
name, a discarded number,
a bunch of rotten fruit
thrown on the garbage heap.

-Pablo Neruda, 1950