



Philosophical Polemics, School Reform and Nation-building in Uruguay, 1868-1915: Reforma Vareliana and Batllismo from a Transnational Perspective

Jens R. Hentschke

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This monograph revisits Uruguay's remarkable transformation from a notorious nineteenth-century trouble spot into Latin America's first welfare state democracy, associated with President Jose Batlle y Ordóñez (1903-7, 1911-15) and his Krausist leanings. Central to Uruguay's belated polity formation and nation-building, and the focus of this study, was its school reform, destined to erase frontier backwardness. It had its origin in the foundation of the Society of the Friends of Popular Education in 1868, culminated in Jose Pedro and Jacobo Varela's transformation of primary and normal schooling in the 1870s and 1880s, and was driven by a mixture of North American liberal pedagogy and Spencerian positivism. Batllistas distanced themselves from the Varelas and their ideology since they had lent their services to military dictators. Yet, as Hentschke argues, continuity in change prevailed over the alleged rupture of 1903, with positivism and neo-Idealism co-existing and interacting in the continuation of the education reform. Moreover, by placing Uruguay into the broader context of what, in 1998, a network of scholars has called the Southern Cone's "Corridor of Ideas" from Santiago de Chile through Buenos Aires and Montevideo to Porto Alegre in Brazil, Hentschke shows how the country acted as a crossroads of intellectuals and a laboratory for the contestation, assimilation, and merger of competing global and autochthonous political and pedagogical philosophies.

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