EDUARDO GALEANO’S LEGACY

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“To publish Eduardo Galeano is to publish the enemy: the enemy of lies, indifference, above all of forgetfulness. Thanks to him our crimes will be remembered. His tenderness is devastating, his truthfulness, furious.”

—John Berger

“I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Galeano’s vision is unswerving, surgical and yet immensely generous and humane…. Eduardo Galeano ought to be a household name…”

—Arundhati Roy

On April 18, 2009, the late President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela met with President Barack Obama at the Summit of Americas in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. As the two posed for their now famous photo together, Chavez handed Obama the book Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent, by Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano. Leftists have long considered the work to be a seminal critique of U.S. and European colonial exploitation of Latin America, and Chavez took advantage of this public meeting to reintroduce what he considered, “a moment in our Latin American History.”

The work, first published in 1971 and banned by the right-wing dictatorships of Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay in the years after its initial publication, became Amazon’s second largest seller in the days after Chavez gifted it to Obama. A new generation discovered the book that had been so influential in its promotion of leftist ideals. The Right has long discredited the work, and in 2014 Galeano himself proclaimed, “Open Veins tried to be a book of political economy, but I didn’t yet have the necessary training or preparation.” Yet no amount of criticism has diminished its influence, and Open Veins has remained one of the most widely read books on the region’s colonial legacy of underdevelopment.

Scholars have vigorously studied, debated, and written about Latin America’s underdevelopment for over half a century. Modernization theory, dependency theory, and world-systems analysis were all developed as means to help us better understand the plight of underdeveloped regions throughout the world, and Latin America has commonly been the central area of focus for these explanations. Economist Raúl Prebisch, economic historian Andre Gunder Frank, and sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein are just some of the many respected academics who have been producing work in the field since Open Veins was published. Yet, as important as some of these books have been in the development of the field, few if any share the overall success that Open Veins has had. Why is this? What is it about Galeano’s work that has not only withstood the test of time, but also captured the attention of millions, and garnered the respect of activists, writers, academics, and the general public? Why was it Open Veins that Chavez chose to hand Obama on that early spring day in 2009? The goal of this essay is to answer these questions and show that Galeano’s book is more than just another critique of U.S. and European colonial influence. Born out of the region’s rich literary history, strong leftist ideology, and turbulent political history, Open Veins is not only a product of Galeano, it is a product of Latin America.

Open Veins of Latin America

In order to best understand how Open Veins is so representative of the Latin America that Galeano lived in, we must start by exploring the work itself. For Galeano and many of his contemporaries, the connection between the core imperialist countries of Europe and the U.S., and Latin America was not one of give and take, but more one of take and take, with Latin America being the loser. The plundering of resources was an omnipresent reality that undergirded the region’s history from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego. In the simplest manner, Galeano lays out his argument, writing:

This book, which seeks to chronicle our despoliation and at the same time explain how the current mechanisms of plunder operate, will present in close proximity the caravelled conquistadors and the jet-propelled technocrats; Hernán Cortés and the Marianos; the agents of the Spanish Crown and the

2 Ibid.
International Monetary fund Missions; the dividends from the slave trade and the profits of General Motors.\(^3\)

At its core, Galeano’s work is an attempt to chronicle what he saw as five hundred years of exploitation, resulting in continued instability across the region, apparent even while he was writing. He worked to depict exploitation as more than simply economics, profits and losses, or numbers. He attempted to give exploitation a human face to represent the millions who suffered as a result of imperialist plundering, and who were still suffering around him. Influenced by the styles of Latin America’s most important novelists, *Open Veins of Latin America* was an elegant plea to the world to open up its eyes and pay attention to the horrors that Latin Americans were continuing to live through.

Galeano initially divided the book into two parts in the 1971 edition, with a third part added later. Each of the two original parts is divided up into chapters, and each chapter is further broken down into subsections. The subsections have clever names such as, “They Crave Gold like Hungry Swine,” and “Burn the Crops? Get Married? The Price of Coffee Dictates All,” each representative of the book’s lyrical prose. The chapters are organized thematically but also run along a rough chronological timeline dating from the sixteenth century into the twentieth. In Part I, Galeano examines the natural resources that have made Latin America so attractive to its colonizers, and the oppressive methods used to exploit them. He begins in the first chapter telling the story of man’s most precious metals, gold and silver, and their place in the earliest history of plundering. He moves on to agriculture in the second chapter, focusing on sugar in Brazil and the Caribbean, beef from the pampas of Argentina and Uruguay, coffee and fruit from Colombia and Central America, rubber in the Amazon, and Cocoa in South America. Here he takes the time to explore the transformation of the colonial plantation into the present day *latifundio*, and shows how Latin American agriculture has always been dictated by the needs of the core imperialist nations. The final chapter of the first part examines the exploitation of other mineral resources such as copper in Chile, iron in Brazil, oil in Venezuela, and tin in Bolivia. In each subsection of these chapters, he meticulously explores what agricultural and mineral resources meant for the people unfortunate enough to live in the lands where they were produced, and how the extraction of them only benefited the colonizers, neo-colonizers, and a small number of Latin American elite.

The second part consists of only two chapters, and deals with the structure and methods that dependency theorists believe have been used by the core imperialist nations to exploit the colonial periphery. He shows how free trade, anti-nationalization, banking practices, forced retardation of industrialization, and brute force all became tools to keep Latin America profitable for business interests. He points out that keeping Latin America in poverty benefits the core imperialist countries because “hunger wages in Latin America help finance high salaries in the United States and Europe.”\(^4\) In this part of the book, Galeano focuses on contemporary methods of exploitation as a way to argue that his work is not merely historical, but current, about the situation Latin America was facing as he wrote. The world Galeano witnessed around him played a driving force in the book’s creation; and it is imperative to explore this world to see how *Open Veins* fits in.

Galeano’s Latin America

Like the entire developing world, Latin America is no stranger to the perils of being on the periphery. The exploitation of resources, brutal dictatorships empowered through the overthrow of democratically elected leaders, excessive poverty, genocide, and misery have all been common themes in the history of this region over the last two centuries, and more so in the three centuries that preceded the independence movements of the New World. Yet, that vast area south of the Rio Grande, all the way down to Galeano’s birthplace in Uruguay, is a particularly special case when discussing post-colonial “Third World” regions. With minor exceptions, it is the oldest of the lands colonized by Europe. Even after revolution ended Iberian control in the early nineteenth century, other countries, mainly England and the United States, maintained immense influence across Latin America. The U.S. has been exceptionally in-


\(^4\) Galeano, *Open Veins*, 207.
fluent in the region due to its self-proclaimed role as protector of the Western Hemisphere, backed by its economic and military might. It was this perilous world—a world of coups, disappearances, and threats to stability across the region into which he was born—that drove Galeano to write *Open Veins*.

Eduardo Hughes Galeano came into the world in 1940, and was raised by middle-class parents of European descent in the Uruguayan capital of Montevideo. Like many Latin Americans who were not of the upper class, he knew both high and low times as his family occasionally struggled to make ends meet. His innate intelligence blossomed early, and by the age of fifteen he had already sold his first political cartoon to a socialist party periodical called *El Sol*. By the age of twenty he began his career in journalism with a job as editor-in-chief for the influential weekly publication *Marcha*. There he was exposed to important contributing authors such as Mario Vargas Llosa, Mario Benedetti, Manuel Maldonado Denis, and Roberto Fernández Retamar. During these years he also edited for *Epoca* and the *University Press*. In the eight years prior to his writing *Open Veins*, Galeano became acquainted with some of Latin America’s most influential fiction and nonfiction authors. These early influences appear in the leftist ideals espoused in *Open Veins*, and as we will see, in the unique style of prose and the intellectual theories undergirding the book.

In Uruguay, June of 1973, an aggressive rightwing civil/military dictatorship took power following a coup d’état. The country’s new leaders fiercely persecuted leftists and Galeano was imprisoned before eventually fleeing the country. He did not go far, just a ferry-ride across the Rio Plata to Argentina. By the time he left Uruguay, Galeano had already published several books including *Open Veins of Latin America*, which he wrote in just three months. His book became so successful that it was banned in Uruguay after 1973, and later in Argentina and Chile as right-wing dictators grabbed power in these countries as well. Galeano only lived in Argentina three years before a right-wing regime under Jorge Raphael Videla took control and started to “disappear” leftist intellectuals. He was on a list of those to “disappear.” In 1976 Galeano fled to Spain, and did not return to Uruguay until 1985 when democracy was restored. His story is one that was very common for intellectuals across Latin America in these decades, yet thousands were not as lucky as Galeano, and *el desaparecido* (“the disappeared”) became a common reference for those never seen again.

This period was not unstable only for the nations in the most southern reaches of Latin America. The Cold War was in full swing and many countries in the region were affected by U.S.-backed anti-communist aggression. By the time Galeano was writing his book, Fidel Castro had taken control in Cuba, and the U.S. was using every tactic short of full invasion in attempts to eliminate him. A brutal coup d’etat in Guatemala ripped power from democratically elected Jacobo Árbenz on behalf of U.S. business interests. Brutal dictators, like Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, oversaw the rape, murder, and destruction of his people, while the United States turned a blind eye and continued to offer support. Galeano was watching the United States’ aggressive march south when writing this book, and in only a few years Operation Condor would bring this U.S.-backed terror directly to his home. All the anger and fear that resulted from being a part of this madness comes through in *Open Veins*. Throughout the work, death, torture, and suffering are common themes, just as they were in Galeano’s Latin America. Yet, it was not just exploitation and death that played an important role in the creation of *Open Veins*. Literary style also performed its role. As we will see, his early years as a publisher exposed Galeano to some of the region’s most imbued

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5 In June of 1973, Uruguayan President Juan Maria Bordaberr, in coordination with the armed forces, dissolved Uruguayan parliament, officially finishing the process of a coup d’état which began a civil-military dictatorship lasting until 1985. See Michael Freeman, *Freedom or Security: The Consequences for Democracies Using Emergency Powers to Fight Terror* (Westport, CT: Preager, 2003), 99-102.


important novelists and impacted his prose. Understanding the literary world of which *Open Veins* is a product is also crucial to uncovering its success.

**Latin American Literature and Open Veins**

The instability which most Latin American countries have endured since gaining independence in the early nineteenth century has heavily influenced popular literature coming from the region, and *Open Veins* is no exception. Even as Galeano was writing his book, uncertainty continued to shape Latin American literature. Each new generation of writers, influenced by those preceding them, and influencing those who followed, expressed this uncertainty with their unique styles. During the middle of the nineteenth century, the most popular authors of the newly formed republics imbued their works with romanticism and nationalism. One piece of literature that exemplifies this amalgamation comes from Argentine author Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. He titled it *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarianism*.

Sarmiento's work from 1845 is a creative nonfiction account of Juan Manuel de Rosas, an Argentine *caudillo* who rose to power through populism and ruled as dictator from 1829 to 1852. By tracing the rise and fall of Facundo Quiroga, a gaucho headman who became one of Rosas rival and victims, Sarmiento defined the line between the barbarianism that retarded the rugged untamed gaucho, and the civilized manners that allowed the gentleman of the metropolis to progress. Sarmiento romanticized the necessity of European influence to modernize Argentina, and pleaded that what was best for the nation would come from across the Atlantic, developing in the port city of Buenos Aires.9

For Galeano, Sarmiento represents the dependence on Europe that continued to cripple the development of Latin America. In *Open Veins* he critiques *Facundo*, writing:

The illustrious Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and other liberal writers saw in the rural *montonera* only a symbol of barbarism, backwardness, and ignorance, the anachronism of the countryside confronting the urban civilization, the poncho and chaps against the frock coat, the spear and knife against the troops of the line... such scorn and hatred were an expression of anti-patriotism clearly tinged with political economy.10

Although it is clear that Galeano did not accept Sarmiento's political views, he was influenced by his approach. Like *Open Veins*, Sarmiento's work is the combination of a fictional literary style and nonfiction erudition. Positively or negatively, literature from the early years of the new republics influenced Galeano's work. We should not overlook it in the process of explaining the present popularity of *Open Veins of Latin America*.

At the turn of the twentieth century, just eighty years after the wars of independence, Latin America was rapidly developing, and the literature being produced there was changing as well. In the early decades of the century, a backlash to the romanticism borrowed from Europe in the nineteenth century was exhibited in the literary style that has come to be known as *Modernismo*. Two aspects of this style are especially important for their influences on Galeano's work, *Indigenismo* and *Regionalismo*. *Indigenismo* can be best described as a style of writing born out of concern for the suffering of the indigenous peoples. As the century progressed, so too would this form of writing. However, even in its nascent stages, authors using this style focused on the cruel treatment and removal of natives from their lands, often as a result of foreign interests.11 Latin American literary expert Philip Swan describes *Regionalismo* as a direct backlash to European influences on Latin American literature, specifically to European romanticism and to “official realism” associated with authors like Charles Dickens.12 Through *Regionalismo*, authors focused on themes that made Latin America unique, and subsequently made the literature their own. Both of these literary styles play a role in Galeano's

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12 Ibid., 23.
creation of *Open Veins*, if not directly then through their influence on the New Narrative, a movement that gained popularity in the 1940s and 1950s, and climax
ed with a period which the literary world named “the Boom” in the 1960s.

Critics consider the blossoming of the New Narrative, in which authors were gaining exposure outside of the region like never before, the most internationally successful period of Latin American literature. *Open Veins* was not only influenced by the rise of the New Narrative, but is really a product of the Boom period. Understanding this helps to elucidate the success of the book. The New Novel, as the New Narrative was also termed, can best be described as a refinement of *Modernismo*. Like Regionalist writers a generation before, Latin American authors of this genre separated themselves from European realism. Yet they went further, rejecting the very notion of conventional realism and concomitantly the Regionalists who inspired them. They saw the works being produced by *Modernismo* writers as overly simplistic, tending to lead the reader to a simplified and narrow view of reality. Swanson writes, “the New Novel was seen to question the key underlying assumptions of traditional realism: that reality was straightforward or even comprehensible; and that reality could ever be captured easily or accurately in writing.”

The styles that New Narrative writers produced hinged on this underlying critique, but varied in their results.

Two of the most popular approaches to the New Novel were Magical Realism and Neo-Indigenismo. These styles are worth briefly exploring because of their influence on Galeano. Magical Realist writers saw Latin America as distinct, even wondrous, because of its extremities in population, history, geography, development, and religion. For authors like Gabriel García Márquez, reality throughout the region was fantastical, so the narratives they produced treated bizarre magical events naturally, and laced them into everyday realities.

Neo-Indigenismo, like its precursor *Indigenismo*, was a genre that focused on the indigenous peoples of Latin America. Neo-Indigenist writers differed in that they sought to rely on the perspective from the inside of the indigenous community, not the external view that the earlier Indigenists employed.

The New Narrative built momentum and peaked with the Boom during the years Galeano was editing for *Marcha, Epoca*, and the *University Press*. The “big four” authors most influential during the Boom were Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Gabriel García Márquez. The exposure Galeano had to these authors in the decade before writing *Open Veins* is clearly visible in his content and style of prose. Llosa, as mentioned earlier, was a direct contributor to *Marcha*; Galeano references his second novel *La Casa Verde* in a footnote for a section on the exploitation of rubber in the Amazon. *Cien Años de Soledad*, by Márquez, is one of his most famous works, and Galeano refers to it in a footnote regarding the 1928 massacre of banana workers striking against United Fruit on the Colombian coast near Santa Marta. In chapter two, Galeano uses Fuentes’ popular work *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz*, in a section on the Mexican Revolution he titled “Artemio Cruz and the Second Death of Emiliano Zapata.” Although these are only a few examples from the biggest Boom writers, they show us how Galeano was directly influenced by these talented authors.

What marks *Open Veins* as a product of the Boom is the way it encapsulates both the ideology and stylistic prose of the New Novel. Anyone familiar with books by Márquez has been exposed to a poetic style that is unique to Latin American literature during this period. In spite of the fact that Galeano’s book is nonfiction, this New Novel style of writing is present throughout it, and gives it more readability. Here is one example from a section on Bolivian tin miners that demonstrates this prose:

> The cemetery creaks. Beneath the graves countless tunnels have been dug, with openings barely wide enough for the men who disappear into them, like rabbits, in search of tin. New deposits of tin have accumulated through the years in the tons upon tons of slag piled up in huge gray mounds across the landscape. When the violent rains pour from low clouds over Llallagua—where men drink themselves into a desperate stupor in the *chicha* taverns—one sees the unemployed crouching beside the dirt roads

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13 Swanson, *Latin American Fiction*, 37.
14 Ibid., 49.
15 Ibid., 51.
16 Galeano, *Open Veins*, 90
17 Ibid., 109.
18 Ibid., 124.
to collect tin as it is washed down. Here, tin is an omnipresent canned god reigning over men and things. There is not only tin in the bowels of Patiño’s old mountain; the black sparkle of cassiterite betrays its presence even in the adobe walls of the camps. There is tin, too, in the yellowish mud that slides off the slag, and in the poisoned water that flows from the mountains; it is in earth and rock, surface and subsoil, in the sands and pebbles of the Seco riverbed. In these dry and stony regions almost 13,000 feet above sea level, where no grass grows and everything—even the people—is the dark color of tin, men stoically endure their enforced separation from the joys of the world.  

The hauntingly beautiful yet melancholy picture painted by Galeano exemplifies the style he uses throughout the book, inspired by the New Novel genre and complementary to the literary period. *Open Veins of Latin America* is a creation that fits seamlessly into the history of Latin American literature, and this fit has secured the book’s enduring success. As we have seen, it is antithetical to the works created by earlier authors like Sarmiento, but it is nevertheless influenced by them. *Open Veins* incorporates aspects of the Modernismo and Indigenismo movements that gained popularity in the early twentieth century, and was both directly influenced by and a product of the most successful movement in Latin American literature. By placing Galeano’s work into this setting, it is easier to understand how it could have become so successful, yet this is only part of the story. *Open Veins* was not just a product of Latin American literature, but also a product of one of the leading theories on underdevelopment at the time: dependency theory.

**Dependency Theory and Galeano’s Work**

The underlying theme that Galeano followed in *Open Veins* fell in line with, and was influenced by, the dependency theorists who were gaining popularity in the middle of the twentieth century. Dependency theory is a reaction to the earlier modernization theory championed by scholars like Walt Rostow and Samuel Huntington. These theorists argued that the underdevelopment of areas like Latin America was a product of its inhabitants’ culture. All countries started out in the underdeveloped stage and would have to modernize to escape backwardness. The Third World’s stagnation was not a product of imperialism or colonization, but stemmed from its inability to change the traditional structures of society. Complacency, the blurring of religion and authority, or the prioritizing of personal relationships and kinship over the nation, were just some of the traits that kept Third World peoples from modernization. Modernizationists like Rostow and Huntington—who incidentally both worked closely with the U.S. government during the early years of the Cold War—argued that it was Latin Americans’ fault that they were not growing, and the blame could not be put on external forces. Dependency theorists viewed this underdevelopment quite differently.

The roots of dependency theory are found in Marxist ideology, most importantly in Vladimir Lenin’s interpretation of imperialism. In his work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), Lenin argued that with the development of capitalism, the major capitalistic centers moved away from the production of real commodities into banking and finance. Further, he claimed the production of commodities was outsourced to the colonies, the periphery, and consistent maintenance was necessary to keep these commodity producing colonies in check. They maintained them through economic manipulation, invasion, and wars to establish new markets, expand old ones, and keep wages low for the exploitation of labor. Starting in the early 1950s, dependency theorists reacted to the modernization theorists by expanding on Lenin’s definition of imperialism. Since then, scholars from around the world have interpreted and developed dependency theory with Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis acting as one of the most popular example of this evolution. Yet it was the Latin American scholars who embraced the theory first.

21 Ibid., 126.
One of the most important contributors to dependency theory is German-born Andre Gunder Frank, who developed his ideas while teaching and living in Chile during the short presidency of Salvador Allende. In the preface of his book *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (1967), Frank asserts, “I believe, with Paul Baran that it is capitalism, both world and national, which produced underdevelopment in the past and which still generates underdevelopment in the present.”23 To expand on this idea, he writes, “The metropolis expropriates economic surplus from its satellites and appropriates it for its own economic development. The satellites remain underdeveloped for lack of access to their own surplus and as a consequence of the same polarization and exploitative contradictions which the metropolis introduces.”24 Frank’s argument is a straightforward and direct reaction to modernization theory. The underdevelopment of Latin America could not be blamed on Latin Americans without taking into account the exploitation and manipulation of outside forces.

It is important to take into consideration that dependency theorists were not trying to posit that the stagnation of Latin America was caused solely by external forces. Like modernization theorists, dependency theorists understood the inherent problems within the structure of Latin American society resulting from three centuries of Iberian colonization. However, dependency theorists saw that the core imperialist countries exploited these weaknesses for their gain. In his essay *Development and Stagnation in Latin America: A Structuralist Approach* (1965), Brazilian economist Celso Furtado argued that there are two legacies of Iberian colonization that need to be taken into account when discussing Latin American underdevelopment: the presence of a strong urban center which in colonial times had allegiance to Europe, and “the existence of a special class of men connected to this central power by bond of loyalty, to whom the factor of production—land and native labor where it existed—were adjudicated by that central power.”25 Like Frank, Furtado recognized the influences of the core imperialist countries in the region’s stagnation, but also realized there were internal structural problems as well.

Both Frank and Furtado were developing these ideas in the decades before Galeano wrote *Open Veins*, and the theory had gained substantial popularity by the time his masterpiece was published. The influence these two theorists had on Galeano is obvious, and their names are mentioned throughout the book. Galeano also references other important Latin American scholars such as Sergio Bagú, Darcy Ribeiro, and Samuel Lichenszttein, all of whom helped to develop dependency theory. For Galeano, *Open Veins* was a way to take the work being done on dependency theory and give it a voice that would resonate with the masses.

Understanding the popularity that dependency theory gained, and the influence it had, helps to make sense of *Open Veins*’ continued success. In the United States, one year after Galeano produced his work, Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein published *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective* (1970), which explored the roots of Latin American dependency. In 1972, historian Walter Rodney applied the theory to examine Africa’s relationship with Europe in his popular book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Samir Amin has used the ideology in Middle East studies, and has written several books since the 1950s. Theotonio dos Santos continued advancing dependency theory in the 1970s with what he called “new dependency,” that focused on both the internal and external factors of underdevelopment. Even today dependency theory has continued to evolve and has remained an important, although scrutinized, means for understanding the global connection of First and Third World countries. Vijay Prashad touches on the theory in his contemporary award-winning book *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*, published in 2007. Maybe one of the greatest legacies of dependency theory is the influence it had on Immanuel Wallerstein and his popular world-systems analysis which, it could be argued, is the evolution of the original theory. Not only is *Open Veins* a book that was influenced by dependency theorists, but it is also an important part of the historiography of works written on it.

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23 Paul Baran is a Marxist economist who was born in Russia but was educated and taught in the U.S. His work was very influential on dependency theorists. See Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review, 1967), vii.

24 Ibid., 9.

If we take into consideration these various influences, we receive a clearer understanding of the success *Open Veins of Latin America*. The work was created during one of the most turbulent periods in Latin American history. It is not a product of an academic who simply researched and wrote, but of one who experienced, witnessed, and lived the subject he wrote about. It was a creation of fear, anger, and passion as much as it was one of extensive research. This book is a product of the most internationally successful period of Latin American literature, published at the end of the Boom Era, and as I have shown, written in the style of the fictional writers who were most popular during that period. Further, Galeano took a blossoming theory that was helping Latin Americans make sense of their uncertain world, and put it into words that the masses could comprehend with pleasure. As he explains, he wrote it “to spread some ideas of other people, and some experiences of my own,” and do it “in the style of a novel about love or pirates.”

In the final part added to *Open Veins* seven years after its initial publication, Galeano reflects on the success it gained over time. He explains that he is especially proud of the fact that it was banned in Chile, Uruguay, and in Argentina, where the authorities went so far as to publically denounce it on television. He also reflects on some of the stories he had heard related to the book’s popularity: a girl in Bogotá who read the book aloud to passengers on the public bus, a woman who fled Chile during the dark days of the Pinochet dictatorship with the book wrapped in her baby’s diapers, and a boy who went from bookstore to bookstore reading bits and pieces of it because he could not afford to buy it. And although these are just some of the stories Galeano shares about *Open Veins* success, we can assume there are many more like them.

So why did Hugo Chavez make it a point to give *Open Veins* to the newly elected President Obama in 2009? When Galeano first published his work in 1971, Chavez was in his late teens; and it is very likely he was exposed to the book while he was still young. Chavez, like most Latin Americans growing up in the turbulent years of South American dictators, watched as U.S.-backed puppets brutally suppressed any chances of Latin American countries trying to control their resources. When he took office in 1999, his goal was to continue the work that was started by men like Salvador Allende in Chile. He took it upon himself to champion what he called twenty-first-century socialism. For Chavez, *Open Veins of Latin America* compacted everything that was wrong in the relationship between Latin America and the United States into two hundred and sixty readable pages. Like the girl on the bus in Bogotá that Galeano describes, Chavez wanted to stand up and let the world know Latin America’s struggle. What better way than to take one of the most popular examinations of this struggle and publically hand it to the leader of the United States?

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26 Galeano, *Open Veins*, 266.
27 Ibid., 265.
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