

In Ilan Stavans (2011) José Vasconcelos: The Prophet of Race.
New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Originally
published as the prologue to <La raza cósmica> [1925].

Mestizaje

José Vasconcelos

**Translated from
the Spanish by
John H. R. Polt**

[I]

In the opinion of prominent geologists, America contains some of the most ancient regions of the world. The Andes are certainly made of material as old as any on our planet; and not only is the land ancient: the traces of life and of human culture are also of an age that exceeds all our calculations. The architectural ruins left by our fabled Mayas, Quechuas, and Toltecs are evidence of civilized life that precedes the oldest establishments of the peoples of Europe and the Orient. A growing body of research has come to support the view that Atlantis was the cradle of a civilization that flourished thousands of years ago in that lost continent and part of what is now America; and the notion of Atlantis evokes the memory of mysterious origins: the Hyperborean continent, lost but for the traces of life and culture that are occasionally found

beneath the snows of Greenland; the Lemurians, or black race of the south; the Atlantic civilization of the red man; the subsequent appearance of the yellow race; and, finally, the civilization of the whites. This legendary hypothesis, so profound, explains the course of human history better than do the learned speculations of geologists like Ameghino, who situate the origin of man in Patagonia, a land we know for sure to be of recent geological formation.¹ Wegener's theory of continental drift, on the other hand, according to which all the land masses of Earth were at one time united in a single continent that has been gradually breaking up, powerfully supports the notion of great prehistoric ethnic empires.² Without having to resort to the hypothesis of intercontinental migrations over lost land bridges, it allows one easily to imagine that in some specific part of a continuous land mass a race should have undergone the process of development and decline until it was replaced by another. It is also interesting to take note of an additional point at which ancient tradition coincides with the most recent geological findings: according to Wegener, the connection among Australia, India, and Madagascar was severed before the separation of South America from Africa, which confirms that the site of Lemurian civilization disappeared before the flourishing of Atlantis and that Atlantis was the last continent to be lost, since scientific research has shown that the Atlantic is the most recently formed ocean.

While the origin of this theory is more or less buried

1. Florentino Ameghino (1854–1911), Argentine naturalist, paleontologist, anthropologist, and zoologist.

2. Alfred Lothar Wegener (1880–1930), German geophysicist and meteorologist, proposed the theory of continental drift, suggesting that the continents shifted around on the earth's surface. Because of a lack of factual evidence, the theory was not accepted until the 1950s.

in a tradition as obscure as it is redolent, there survives the legend of a civilization born of our forests or spread to them after a period of mighty growth, whose traces are still to be seen at Chichén Itzá and Palenque and every other place shrouded in the lasting mystery of Atlantis—the mystery of the red men who, after dominating the world, caused the precepts of their wisdom to be engraved on the Emerald Tablet, some splendid Colombian emerald that, at the time of geological upheavals, was borne to Egypt, where Hermes Trismegistus and his followers learned and transmitted its secrets.³

If, then, we are ancient in terms of geology and also in terms of tradition, how can we continue to accept the newness that our European ancestors invented for a continent whose existence predates the formation of the land from which they set out in discovery and reconquest?

The question is enormously important for anyone intent on finding a plan in History. Those who see events only as an aimless chain of invariable repetitions might see little point in discovering the great age of our continent; and the works of contemporary civilization would scarcely arouse our interest if the palaces of the Toltecs had nothing to tell us but that civilizations follow one another, leaving behind them nothing but a few pieces of masonry, or a vaulted roof, or a ridged one. Why start all over, if four or five thousand years from now speculation about the ruins of our trivial contemporary architecture is to be nothing but a pastime for yet another race of newcomers? Scientific history, perplexed, leaves all these nagging questions unanswered. Empirical history, afflicted with myopia, bogs down in details but fails to identify even one predecessor

3. Hermes Trismegistus, representation of a syncretism between the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian god Thoth.

of historical times. It shuns general conclusions and sweeping hypotheses; but it falls into such puerilities as cranial indices and the description of utensils, along with many another merely external detail, trivial except when integrated in a sweeping, comprehensive theory.

Only a spiritual leap, sustained by facts, will bring us to a vision that transcends the micro-ideology of the specialist. From that position we can probe the mass of events to find in them a direction, a rhythm, and an aim. And precisely where the analyst finds nothing, the synthesis and the creator find light.

Let us therefore attempt to form explanations, and to do so not with the imagination of the novelist, but with intuition based on the facts of history and science.

The race we have agreed to call Atlantic rose and fell in America. After an extraordinary flowering, its cycle and particular mission completed, it sank into silence and progressive decay until it was reduced to the petty empires of the Aztecs and the Incas, wholly unworthy of the superior earlier culture. With the decline of the Atlantic race, the dynamic process of civilization shifted to other places and other breeds: it dazzled in Egypt; it gained breadth in India and in Greece as it took root in new races. The Aryan, mingling with the Dravidian, produced the people of Hindustan, while creating Hellenic culture through other mixtures. The foundations of Western or European civilization were laid in Greece, and this white civilization expanded until it reached the forgotten shores of America to consummate a labor of recivilization and repopulation. And so we have four periods and four human lineages: the black, the red, the yellow, and the white. The last of these, after a formative period in Europe, has invaded the whole world and come to believe in its mission of dominance, just as each earlier dominant race believed in turn. The supremacy

of the whites will of course also be temporary, but their mission differs from that of their predecessors: their mission is to serve as a bridge. Throughout the world the white man has created the conditions for the fusing of all races and cultures. The civilization achieved by him and shaped by our age has established the material and spiritual bases for the union of all men in a fifth race, a universal race that is the fruit of all earlier races and surmounts all that is past.

White culture is expansive, but it was not Europe as a whole that was charged with initiating the reincorporation of the red world into the forms of that not yet universal culture represented during centuries of domination by the white race. This transcendental mission was reserved for the two boldest branches of the European family, the two strongest and most dissimilar human types: the Spaniard and the Englishman.

Ever since the beginning, from the time of the discovery and conquest, it was Spaniards and Englishmen—or Latins and Saxons if we wish to include the Portuguese and the Dutch, respectively—who accomplished the task of beginning a new period of History by conquering and peopling the new hemisphere. They may have thought of themselves merely as colonizers, as transplanter of culture, but they were in fact laying the bases of a period of general and definitive transformation. The so-called Latins, bold and brilliant, seized the best regions, those they thought richest, and the English had to settle for the leftovers of fitter peoples. Neither Spain nor Portugal allowed the Saxon to approach her dominions, certainly not with arms, and not even to participate in trade. Latin superiority was indisputable at the outset. No one could have suspected, in those times of the papal bull that

divided the New World between Portugal and Spain, that a few centuries later the New World would no longer be Portuguese or Spanish, but English. No one could have imagined that the humble settlers along the Hudson and the Delaware, peaceful and hardworking, would step by step gain possession of the biggest and best stretches of land until they had established the republic that is today one of the greatest empires in History.

Our time has become, and continues to be, a struggle of Latin against Saxon, a struggle of institutions, aims, and ideals, a crisis in the centuries-old struggle that begins with the destruction of the Invincible Armada and intensifies with the defeat at Trafalgar. After that, however, the arena of combat begins to shift, to move to the new continent, where further disastrous incidents occurred. The defeats at Santiago de Cuba, Cavite Bay, and Manila are distant but logical echoes of the catastrophes that befell the Armada and the fleet at Trafalgar. And now the conflict is staged wholly in the New World. In history, a century is like a day; it is not surprising that we have not yet shaken off the impression of defeat. We go through periods of discouragement, we continue to lose not only territorial sovereignty but also moral authority. Far from feeling united in the face of disaster, our will is fragmented in pursuit of vain and petty goals. Defeat has brought us confusion of values and of concepts; the diplomacy of the winners deceives us after having defeated us; trade conquers us with its petty benefits. Stripped of our former greatness, we take pride in an exclusively national patriotism and do not even notice the dangers that threaten our race as a whole. We deny and reject each other. Defeat has degraded us to the point where we unwittingly collaborate in the enemy's policy of beating us piecemeal, of offering separate advantages to each of our brothers while sacrificing the vital interests of

another. Not only in battle did they beat us; they continue to defeat us ideologically. The greatest battle was lost the day that each of the Hispanic republics set out to live on its own, detached from its sisters, negotiating treaties and receiving false benefits with no thought for the common interests of our race. Without knowing it, the creators of our nationalism were the best allies of the Saxon, our rival for the possession of the continent. The display of our twenty flags at the Pan-American Union in Washington is something we should see as mockery by astute enemies. Nonetheless, each of us takes pride in his humble rag, which represents an empty illusion, and our disunion in the face of the powerful North American Union does not bring forth even a blush. We do not notice the contrast between Saxon unity and the anarchy and isolation of Ibero-America's escutcheons. We maintain a jealous independence one of the other, but in one way or the other we submit to or ally ourselves with the Saxon Union. Even the unification of the five Central American peoples has remained unattainable, because an outsider has refused to sanction it and because we lack the true patriotism that is prepared to sacrifice the present to the future. A lack of creative thought and an excess of critical zeal, which, to be sure, we have borrowed from other cultures, draw us into fruitless arguments in which we no sooner affirm the oneness of our aspirations than we deny it; but we fail to notice that when the time for action comes, and in spite of all the doubts harbored by learned Englishmen, the Englishman seeks to ally himself with his brothers in America and Australia, and at that point the Yankee feels himself to be as English as is the Englishman in England. We shall never be great as long as the Spaniard in America does not feel himself to be as Spanish as are the sons of Spain. That does not prevent our being different whenever

necessary, though never at the expense of our supreme joint mission. This is how we must proceed if Iberian culture is finally to yield all its fruits, if we are to keep Saxon culture from triumphing in America unopposed. It is useless to dream of any other solution. A civilization can be neither improvised nor cut off, nor can it be based on the paper of a constitution; it always grows in the course of centuries through a slow elaboration and distillation of elements transmitted and blended since the beginnings of History. That is why it is so foolish to date our patriotic sentiments from Father Hidalgo's call for independence, or from the Quito conspiracy, or from the great deeds of Bolívar.⁴ If we do not root them in Cuauhtémoc and in Atahualpa, they will lack a solid foundation, though at the same time we must trace them back to their Hispanic source and shape them in keeping with what we should have learned from the defeats, which are also our defeats, of the Invincible Armada and Trafalgar.⁵ If our patriotism is not linked to the different stages in the ancient struggle between Latins and Saxons, we shall never be able to bring it to the point at which it is more than a mere regionalism devoid of universal aims, and we shall see it inevitably degenerate into narrowness and parochial shortsightedness and the powerless inertia of the mollusk clinging to its rock.

Lest we be forced some day to renounce even our

4. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, aka Miguel Gregorio Antonio Ignacio Hidalgo y Costilla y Gallaga Mondarte Villaseñor (1753–1811), a priest and leader in Mexico's War of Independence from Spain. Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar y Palacios, aka Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), Venezuelan military figure and the most important leader in South America's struggle for independence from Spain.

5. Cuauhtémoc, aka Cuauhtemotzin, Guatimozin, or Guatemoc (ca. 1502–1525), last Aztec ruler of Tenochtitlán, from 1520 to 1521. Atahualpa, aka Atahuallpa, Atabalipa, and Atawallpa (1497–1533), last ruler of the Inca Empire.

country, we must live in keeping with the superior interests of our race, even if these still fall short of the highest interests of humanity. The heart will evidently settle for nothing less than total internationalism; yet under the present circumstances of the world, internationalism would serve but to consummate the triumph of the most powerful nations, serve only the interests of the English. Even the Russians, with their population of two hundred million, have had to defer their theoretical internationalism in order to come to the aid of oppressed nationalisms like those of India and Egypt. At the same time they have reinforced their own nationalism as a defense against a disintegration that could only favor the great imperialist states. It would be childish, then, for weak peoples like ours to set about renouncing their singularity in the name of objectives unattainable in the real world. The present state of civilization still requires our patriotism as the guardian of our material and spiritual interests, but it is essential that this patriotism pursue great and transcendental aims. Its mission was, in a sense, cut short at the time of our independence, and now we must channel it once more toward its world-historical destiny.

The first stage of this basic conflict was fought in Europe, and we lost. Afterward, in the New World, where Spain's dominance gave us every advantage, Napoleonic stupidity caused Louisiana to be handed to the overseas English, the Yankees, thereby deciding the fate of the New World in favor of the Saxons. That "military genius" could not see beyond the miserable border disputes of the petty states of Europe and did not realize that the Latin cause, which he claimed to represent, was lost on the very day he was proclaimed Emperor, simply because that act placed the common destiny in the hands of an incompetent. In addition, European prejudices obscured

the fact that the conflict whose significance Napoleon could not even imagine was already engaged on a universal scale in America. Napoleonic obtuseness was unable to suspect that it was in the New World that the destiny of Europe's races would be decided; and when it unthinkingly destroyed French power in America, it also weakened the Spaniards, betrayed us, and placed us under the sway of our common enemy. Without Napoleon, the United States would not exist as a world empire, and Louisiana, still French, would have to be a part of the Latin American Confederation. The effects of Trafalgar would in that case have been frustrated. No one so much as thought of any of this, because the destiny of the race was in the hands of a fool, because Caesarism is the scourge of the Latin race.

Napoleon's betrayal of the universal destiny of France also dealt a mortal blow to the Spanish empire in America at the moment of its greatest weakness. The speakers of English took Louisiana without a fight, saving their weapons of war for the now easy conquest of Texas and California. Without their base on the Mississippi, the Yankees, which is simply another term for the English, would not have been able to gain possession of the Pacific and would not today be the masters of the continent; they would have amounted to no more than a kind of Holland transplanted to America, and the New World would be Spanish and French. It was Bonaparte who made it Saxon.

Of course it is not only external causes—treaties, war, and politics—that decide the destiny of peoples. A Napoleon is nothing but the visible sign of vanity and corruption. There are times when the decline of mores, the loss of a people's liberties, and generalized ignorance have the effect of paralyzing the energy of a whole race.

The Spaniards went to the New World with the plethora of vigor that their successful reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula had left idle. Those free men called Cortés and

Pizarro and Alvarado and Belalcázar were neither lackeys nor Caesars, but great captains who combined a destructive impulse with creative genius.⁶ On the morrow of victory they laid out new cities and drew up the laws that were to govern them. Later, when bitter disputes arose with the homeland, they knew how to repay tit for tat, as did one of the Pizarros during a famous trial. They all felt themselves to be the equals of the king, as El Cid had done, as did the great writers of the Golden Age, and as do all free men in great epochs of history.

But with the completion of the conquest, control over the entire new structure slipped into the hands of courtiers and royal favorites, men incapable, not only of conquering, but even of defending what others had conquered with their skill and daring. Degenerate sycophants capable of oppressing and humiliating the natives, but obsequious to royal power, they and their masters did nothing but degrade what the Spanish spirit had accomplished in America. The astonishing achievement begun by indomitable conquerors and consummated by wise and selfless missionaries sank toward collapse. A succession of foreign monarchs, so pitilessly portrayed by Velázquez and Goya in the company of dwarfs, buffoons, and courtiers, consummated the downfall of the colonial regime.⁷ The obsession with imitating the Roman Empire—which has brought such harm to Spain as well as to Italy and France—militarism, and absolutism brought about decadence at the very time when our rivals, strengthened by virtue, grew and expanded in liberty.

6. Hernán Cortés (1485–1547), Spanish conquistador, credited with bringing down the Aztec Empire. Francisco Pizarro y González (ca. 1471–1541), Spanish conquistador, instrumental in bringing down the Inca Empire. Pedro de Alvarado (ca. 1485–1541), Spanish conquistador and governor of Guatemala. Sebastián de Belalcázar (ca. 1479–1551), Spanish conquistador of present-day Ecuador.

7. Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599–1660), Spanish painter in the court of King Philip IV. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828), Spanish painter and printmaker, considered one of the first modern artists.

Their sense of the practical, their instinctively successful strategies, developed along with their material strength. The colonists in New England and Virginia broke with England, but only so as better to grow and become stronger. Their political separation has never kept them from being of one mind and acting in unison in what concerns their common ethnic mission. Emancipation, instead of weakening this great race, split it into two branches, increased it, and, starting from the impressive nucleus of one of the greatest empires of all time, extended its power over the whole world. And ever since then, whatever is not conquered by the Englishman of the Old World is seized and held by the Englishman of the New.

On the other hand, we Spaniards, whether Spanish by blood or by culture, began to reject our traditions as soon as we achieved emancipation; we broke with our past, and there were those who disowned their blood, saying it would have been better had the conquest of our part of the world been carried out by the English—treasonable words, which some would excuse as a reaction against tyranny and as blindness born of defeat. Yet for a race to allow its fate to strip it of its historical sense is absurd, is equivalent to our denying strong and wise parents when it is we, not they, who are to blame for our decadence.

At any rate, the campaign to de-Hispanize us and the corresponding Anglification shrewdly promoted by the English themselves have clouded our judgment from the outset, making us forget that the humiliation of Trafalgar affected us, too. The presence of English officers on the staffs of the leaders of our wars for independence would have been the ultimate dishonor, had not the insult energized our proud old blood, which punished the pirates of Albion whenever they approached with rapacious intent. At such moments, the rebellious spirit of our ancestors

responded with the voice of our cannons, at Buenos Aires as at Veracruz, at Havana, or at Campeche and Panama, each time that the English corsair would attack, disguised as a pirate to avoid responsibility in case of failure and sure of an honored place in the ranks of British nobility in case he triumphed.

In spite of this solidarity in the face of an invading enemy, our struggle for independence was diminished by provincialism and by the lack of vast and visionary plans. The race that had dreamed of ruling the world, the supposed descendants of Roman glory, yielded to the puerile satisfaction of creating mini-nations and petty principalities inhabited by souls that in every mountain range saw not a peak but a wall. With the illustrious exception of Bolívar and Sucre and the Haitian Pétion, and at most half a dozen more, the founders of our independence dreamt of Balkan glories.⁸ Obsessed with the local and enmeshed in confused, pseudorevolutionary phraseology, they concerned themselves only with diminishing a conflict that could have been the start of a continent's awakening. To divide, to break up the dream of a great Latin power, seemed to be the aim of certain well-meaning but ignorant collaborators in the great work of independence, who deserve a place of honor within that movement but who could not and would not listen to Bolívar's inspired advice.

Of course in the case of every social process we must take into account the underlying causes that inevitably condition each particular stage. Our geography, for example, was and still is an obstacle to unity; but if we are to overcome that obstacle we shall first have to bring order

8. Antonio José de Sucre y Alcalá (1795–1830), Venezuelan independence leader, one of Simón Bolívar's closest friends and collaborators. Alexandre Sabès Pétion (1770–1818), founding father of Haiti and its president from 1806 until his death.

to our spirit by determining our goals and clarifying our ideas. Until we rectify our concepts we shall be unable to make our physical surroundings serve our purpose.

In Mexico, for example, almost no one except Mina thought of the interests of the whole continent; what is worse, for a whole century the prevailing patriotism taught that we triumphed over Spain thanks to the indomitable valor of our soldiers, with hardly a mention of the Cortes de Cádiz or the uprising against Napoleon, which electrified the whole race, or of the triumphs and sufferings of our Spanish American brothers.⁹ This sin, which we share with all the other countries in America, is the product of a time when History is written to flatter despots, when jingoism, not content to depict its heroes as parts of a continentwide movement, presents them in isolation, without realizing that by so doing it diminishes them instead of aggrandizing them.

Another reason for these aberrations is that the native element had not, and still has not, wholly amalgamated with the Spanish blood; but this conflict is more apparent than real. Speak to the most exalted partisan of the Indians of the need to adapt ourselves to Latin culture, and he will not demur in the least; tell him that our culture is Spanish, and he will immediately raise objections. The stain of blood once shed remains, a cursed stain that centuries have not wiped away but that our common danger must remove. And there is no other way. Even the pure-blooded Indians are Hispanized, Latinized, just as our cultural environment is Latinized. Say what you will, the red men, the illustrious men of Atlantis from whom the Indian descends, went to sleep thousands of years ago,

9. Francisco Javier Mina (1789–1817), Spanish lawyer and army officer who fought in Mexico's War of Independence. The Cortes de Cádiz were a series of legislative sessions during the French occupation of Spain that served as an important step toward the nation's embrace of liberalism and democracy.

never again to awake. In History nothing returns, because History is transformation and renewal. No race returns; each one defines its mission, fulfills it, and departs. This truth is as valid for biblical times as for our own; it has been formulated by all the historians of antiquity. The days of the pure white race, today's conquerors, are as numbered as were those of its predecessors. By fulfilling its destiny through the technological development of the world, it has unwittingly laid the foundations of a new age, the age of the fusion and amalgam of all peoples. The Indian has no door toward the future but the door of modern culture, no path but the already cleared path of Latin civilization. The white man, too, will have to surrender his pride, and he will seek progress and ultimate redemption in the souls of his brothers of other races, and he will be absorbed and perfected in each of the higher varieties of our species, in each of the manifestations through which revelation becomes manifold and spirit more powerful.

In the pursuit of our ethnic mission, the war for independence from Spain was a dangerous crisis. By this I do not mean to say that it should not have been fought or won. There are times when ultimate aims must be put off; the race waits while the fatherland impels, and the fatherland is the immediate and imperative present. It was not possible to continue in dependence on a scepter that from blunder to blunder and calamity to disgrace had been steadily sinking until it fell into the ignominious hands of a Ferdinand VII.¹⁰ Negotiations seeking to establish a free Hispanic federation would have been possible in the Cortes de Cádiz, but the only suitable response to the monarchy was to defeat its emissaries. On this point Mina

10. Ferdinand VII (1784–1833), king of Spain in 1808 and from 1813 to 1833.

saw clearly: first establish freedom in the New World, then overthrow the monarchy in Spain. Because the stupidity of the time kept this brilliant plan from being carried out, let us at least try to bear it in mind. Let us recognize that it was our misfortune not to proceed as cohesively as did the northerners, the remarkable race on which we like to heap insults simply because it has beaten us at each step of our centuries-old struggle. It triumphs because to its practical gifts it joins an intuitive knowledge of a clear historical mission, while we lose our way in a labyrinth of verbal will-o'-the-wisps. God himself seems to be guiding the steps of the Saxons, while we kill each other over questions of dogma or proclaim our atheism. How those potent builders of empire must be laughing at our Latin strutting and vanity! Their minds are not burdened with the Ciceroian weight of phraseology, nor is their blood riven by the contradictory instincts of a mixture of different races; but they committed the sin of destroying those races, while we assimilated them, and that gives us new rights and the hope of a historically unprecedented mission.

This is why our unfortunate stumbling steps do not induce us to give up; we vaguely sense that they will help us find our course. And we are right: it is in differences that we find the way. If we only imitate, we lose; if we discover, if we create, we shall triumph. Our tradition has the advantage of being more open to the outsider. This implies that our civilization, with all its faults, can be the one chosen to assimilate and refashion all men, and that within it the basis for a new humanity, its rich and varied plasma, is thus taking form.

This imperative of History first became manifest in the abundance of love that allowed the Spaniards to create a new race in combination with the Indian and the African, disseminating white stock by means of the soldier who

engendered a native family, and Western culture by means of the teaching and example of the missionaries that made the Indian capable of entering the new stage, the stage of One World. Spanish colonization created a mixed race; this distinguishes its character, determines its responsibility, and defines its future. The Englishman continued to breed only with whites and exterminated the native, and he goes on exterminating him in the silent economic struggle that is more efficient than armed conquest. This proves how limited he is and indicates his decadence. On a large scale, it is the equivalent of the incestuous marriages of the Pharaohs, which undermined the vigor of that race; and it contradicts the ultimate aim of History, which is to achieve a fusion of all peoples and all cultures. Making the whole world English, wiping out the red man so that all of America may replicate a northern Europe made up of pure-blooded whites, is merely to repeat the victorious process followed by every conquering race. The red men did the same, and every strong and homogeneous race has done or tried to do the same; but this is no solution to the problem of humanity, and it was not for so petty a purpose that America was held in reserve for five thousand years. Our new-and-old continent is meant for something far more important: it is predestined to become the cradle of a fifth race that will combine all peoples to replace the other four that have independently been shaping History. It is on the soil of America that dispersion will come to an end; it is there that unity will be consummated by the triumph of fruitful love and that every separate lineage will be transcended. And in this fashion a synthesis will be engendered, a human type that shall combine all the treasures of History to give expression to the sum of the world's aspirations.

The Latin peoples, as we call them, having been most faithful to their divine mission in America, are

those destined to consummate this synthesis. And that faithfulness to the hidden design is the guarantee of our triumph.

Even in the chaotic period of the struggle for independence, which deserves so much rebuke, one can glimpse that passion for universality that heralds the desire to blend all humanity in a universal synthesis. In part because he realized the danger into which we were falling as we split into isolated nations, and thanks also to his gift of prophecy, Bolívar already had formulated a plan for an Ibero-American federation that some fools oppose even now. And if the other leaders in that struggle generally had no clear concept of the future, if it is true that under the sway of provincialism, which we now call patriotism, or of limitation, which is now termed national sovereignty, each of them concerned himself only with the immediate fate of his own people, it is also surprising to note that almost all of them felt stirred by a universal human sentiment that corresponds to the destiny that we assign to the Ibero-American continent today. Hidalgo, Morelos, Bolívar, the Haitian Pétion, the Argentineans at Tucumán, Sucre—all of them were concerned with freeing the slaves, declaring the equality of all men in natural law, the social and civic equality of whites, blacks, and Indians.¹¹ At a critical moment in History, they formulated the transcendental mission that is assigned to our portion of the globe, the mission of ethnically and spiritually fusing all peoples.

Something was thus done among the Latins that never entered anyone's mind on the Saxon continent. There the opposite thesis continued to prevail, the open or tacit aim of cleansing the earth of red, yellow, and black men for

11. José María Morelos y Pavón (1765–1815), priest and revolutionary leader during Mexico's War of Independence.

the greater glory and happiness of the white. In fact, the two systems that to this day place the two civilizations in opposite sociological camps became clearly defined at that time. One seeks the exclusive supremacy of the white man; the other is creating a new race, a race of synthesis, which aims to embrace and express all humanity through a process of constant elevation. If proof were needed, it would suffice to observe the accelerating spontaneous intermixture among all peoples on the Latin continent and, on the other hand, the rigid line that separates black from white in the United States and the ever-more rigorous laws that exclude the Japanese and Chinese from California.

The so-called Latins—perhaps because, to begin with, they are not, properly speaking, Latins but a conglomerate of types and races—persist in not paying much attention to the ethnic factor in their sexual relations. Whatever opinions may be voiced in this respect, and no matter what repugnance prejudice may evoke in us, the fact is that there has been and continues to be a mingling of blood lines; and it is in this fusion of blood lines that we must seek the most basic distinguishing trait of the Ibero-American character. Economic competition may sometimes oblige us, and in effect has already obliged us, to close our doors to an inordinate deluge of Orientals, as do the Saxons. But in so doing, we proceed from reasons of a purely economic order; we recognize it to be unjust that peoples like the Chinese, which under the pious guidance of Confucian morality multiply like rabbits, should come to depress standards of living just as we are beginning to understand that intelligence can rein in and regulate our base animal instincts, which contradict a truly religious concept of life. If we reject such peoples, it is because as man progresses, his rate of reproduction decreases and he feels a horror of quantity, precisely because he has come

to esteem quality. In the United States they reject Asiatics out of the same fear of being physically overwhelmed, characteristic of superior species, but also because they dislike the Asiatic, because they look down on him and would be incapable of interbreeding with him. The young ladies of San Francisco have refused to dance with officers of the Japanese navy, who are as well groomed, intelligent, and, in their way, as handsome as those of any other navy in the world. Nevertheless, these ladies will never understand that a Japanese can be handsome. Nor is it easy to convince the Saxon that if the yellow race and the black have their characteristic odor, so does the white man for others, even if we are unaware of it. In Latin America the revulsion felt by one blood on encountering another also exists, but in infinitely more attenuated form. There we find countless bridges toward the sincere and cordial fusion of all races. The contrast between the northerners' ethnic immurement and the southerners' far more relaxed openness is for us the most important as well as most favorable fact if one thinks, no matter how superficially, of the future, because it will then be immediately plain that we belong to tomorrow, while they are on the way to belonging to yesterday. The Yankees will create the last great empire of a single race, the final empire of white power, while we continue to suffer amid the vast chaos of an as yet inchoate breed. The germ of every human type will ferment within us, but we shall know that a better race is coming. Nature will not repeat one of its partial attempts in Spanish America: the race that will now issue from forgotten Atlantis will no longer be of a single color and particular features, will not be a fifth race or a sixth, destined to triumph over its predecessors; what will arise there is the definitive race, the integral race, the synthesis, made of the character and blood of all peoples and for that

very reason better capable of true brotherhood and a truly universal vision.

To work toward fulfillment of this aim we must gradually create the cell tissue, as it were, which is to serve as the frame and flesh of the new biological entity; and in order to create this protean, malleable, profound, ethereal, and essential tissue, the Ibero-American race will have to comprehend its mission and embrace it as a form of mysticism.

Perhaps nothing is useless in the processes of History; even our physical isolation and our mistake in creating separate nations have kept us, as did the original fusion of blood, from incurring the Saxons' limiting defect of forming castes based on racial purity. History shows that such a process of rigorous selection, when carried on for a prolonged time, yields a physically refined breed, interesting but lacking vigor, beautiful in a strange way, like the ancient Brahmin caste, but, when it comes down to it, decadent. Never has such a breed exceeded other men in intelligence, virtue, or vigor. The road on which we have set out is far more daring; it breaks with ancient prejudices and would almost be inexplicable were it not founded on a kind of outcry reaching us from a remote distance—not the distance of the past but the mysterious distance whence come the presages of the future.

If Latin America were nothing but another Spain, to the same degree that the United States is another England, the old struggle between the two breeds would only be repeating its various phases on a larger stage, and one of the two rivals would eventually prove the stronger and would prevail. But this is not the natural law of opposites, neither in mechanics nor in life. Clash and struggle, especially when transported to the realm of the spirit, serve better to define the opponents, to impel each of them to

the zenith of his destiny, and, in the end, to combine them in a common and victorious transcendence.

The Saxon's mission has been fulfilled earlier than has ours, because it was a more immediate mission and one already familiar to History; fulfilling it required nothing but following the example of other victorious peoples. The white man's values reached their peak, their bearers acting as a mere prolongation of Europe in that part of the American continent occupied by them. This is why the history of North America is like the uninterrupted and vigorous *allegro* of a triumphal march.

How different are the sounds that accompany the molding of Ibero-America! They resemble the profound *scherzo* of a deep and infinite symphony, voices that bear echoes of Atlantis, abysses dwelling within the eyes of the red man, who thousands of years ago knew so much and seems now to have forgotten everything. His soul is like a Mayan cistern in the middle of the forest, filled with deep, green, motionless water, so ancient that even the legend of its existence has been lost. And this stillness of the infinite is stirred up by the drop contributed to our blood by the black man, craving sensual delight, drunk with dancing and unbridled lusts. The yellow man appears, too, with the mystery of his slanted eye, which sees everything from a strange angle, which discovers who knows what new folds and dimensions. The mind of the white man, clear like his skin and his dreams, also plays its part. Hidden in the blood of Spain since the days of the cruel expulsion, strands of Jewish blood are revealed, and so are the melancholy moods of the Arab, the aftertaste of the morbid sensuality of the Muslim. Who does not hold some part of all this within himself, or does not want to hold it all? And then there is the Hindu, who will also come, who has already come in spirit; and though he is the last to come, he seems our

closest kin. So many who have come, and others yet to come; and thus shall our heart grow sensitive and broad, reaching out to everything, holding everything, vibrating in sympathy with everything, but also bursting with vigor, laying down new laws for the world. And we sense that our head, too, will be different, making use of every perspective to achieve the marvel of transcending our globe.

[II]

After examining the long- and short-term potential of the mixed race that inhabits the Ibero-American continent and the destiny that is impelling it to be the first example of racial synthesis on our globe, we must consider whether the physical environment in which this breed is developing is suited to the aims set out for it by its biological attributes. The expanse already at its disposal is enormous; there is certainly no problem of space. The fact that its coasts offer few first-class harbors has almost no importance in view of the ever-greater progress in engineering. On the other hand, the basic necessities are undoubtedly more plentiful here than anywhere else on earth: natural resources, fertile arable land, water, and a favorable climate. Of course some will raise an objection with regard to this last factor: the climate, they will say, is hostile to the new race, because most of the available land lies in the hottest region of the globe. That, however, is precisely the advantage and the secret of the race's future. The great civilizations of the past arose in the tropics, and the final civilization will return to the tropics. The new race will begin to fulfill its destiny as new methods are invented to combat the adverse effects of heat on man while leaving intact all its beneficent capacity for the generation of life.

The triumph of the white man began with the conquest of snow and cold. The basis of white civilization is fuel. First it served as a defense during the long winters; subsequently men noticed that it contained a force that could be utilized not only for protection but also for work. At that point the motor was born, and thus all the technology that is transforming the world proceeds from the hearth and the stove. An invention of this sort would have been impossible in torrid Egypt and, as a matter of fact, did not occur there, even though that race was infinitely superior to the English race in intellectual capacity. For proof of this affirmation one needs only to compare the sublime metaphysics of the Egyptian priests' *Book of the Dead* with the banalities of Spencerian Darwinism.¹² Another thousand years of training and evolution would not suffice for those dolichocephalic blonds to bridge the abyss that separates Spencer from Hermes Trismegistus.

On the other hand, the Egyptians never dreamt of anything like the English ship, that marvelous machine derived from the Vikings of the North. The harsh struggle against his environment obliged the white man to devote his talents to the conquest of physical nature, and precisely this is his contribution to the civilization of the future. The white man taught dominion over matter. Some day white science will reverse the methods it employed to achieve mastery over fire and will make use of condensed snow, or electrochemical currents, or subtly magical gases, to destroy flies and other pests, to eliminate torpor and fever. Then all humanity will pour into the tropics, and in the solemn immensity of its landscapes the souls of men will achieve their plenitude. At first, the whites will try to

12. After Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), British philosopher, sociologist, psychologist, and political scientist, author of *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* and *The Man versus the State*, among other books.

use their inventions for their own benefit, but as science is no longer esoteric, they are unlikely to succeed in this. They will be overwhelmed by the avalanche of all the other peoples, and finally, swallowing their pride, they will join with the others to compose the new racial synthesis, the future fifth race.

The conquest of the tropics will transform every aspect of life. Architecture will abandon the pointed arch, the vault, and in general, roofs, which meet the need for shelter. The pyramid will once more be developed; men will build colonnades as gratuitous displays of beauty, and perhaps spiral constructions, because the new aesthetic will try to adapt itself to the endless curve of the spiral, which represents untrammelled aspiration, the triumph of being in the conquest of the infinite. The landscape full of colors and rhythms will convey its richness through emotions; reality will resemble fantasy. The aesthetic of cloudy skies and grays will be seen as a sickly art of the past. A polished and intense civilization will respond to the splendors of a Nature bursting with potency, arrayed in abundance, gleaming with light. The panorama of today's Rio de Janeiro or of Santos, with the city and its bay, can give us an inkling of what to expect as the future seat of the coming consummate race.

Once science has conquered the tropics, there will be a time when all mankind will settle in the planet's torrid zone. The Promised Land will then be the region that today includes all of Brazil, in addition to Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, part of Peru, part of Bolivia, and the northern part of Argentina.

There is the danger that science might outpace the ethnic process, so that the invasion of the tropics would occur before the fifth race is fully formed. If this should occur, there will be battles for the possession of

the Amazon that will decide the destiny of the world and the fate of the definitive race. If the Amazon falls under the control of the English, who, whether European or American, are champions of a pure white race, then the appearance of the fifth race will be blocked. Such an outcome, however, would be absurd: History does not deviate from its path, and the English themselves, in the new climate, would become malleable, would become *mestizos*, though with them the process of integration and transcendence would be slower. The Amazon must therefore be Brazilian, Iberian, along with the Orinoco and the Magdalena. The resources of this zone, the world's richest in terms of treasures of all kinds, will allow the new racial synthesis to consolidate its culture. The world of the future will belong to whoever conquers Amazonia. Near the great river, Universopolis will rise, from which the evangelizers, the fleets and airplanes spreading the good news, will set out. If the Amazon became English, the capital of the world would not be called Universopolis but Anglown, and fleets of warships would set out from there to impose on other continents the stern law of the supremacy of the blond-haired white man and the extermination of his dark rivals. On the other hand, if the fifth race gains control of the axis of the world of the future, airplanes and armies will spread out over the entire planet educating all peoples to achieve wisdom. Life based on love will come to express itself in forms of beauty.

Naturally, the fifth race will not attempt to exclude whites, any more than it intends to exclude any other people; it is constituted precisely on the principle of utilizing every potential to produce a more integrated power. Our aim is not war against the white man, but war against every sort of violent supremacy, whether of

the white man or, conceivably, of the yellow man, if Japan should become an intercontinental threat. As for the white and his culture, the fifth race counts on them and still expects to benefit from their genius. Latin America owes what it is to the white European and will not disavow him; it owes a great part of its railways and bridges and business enterprises to the North American, and it similarly has need of every other race. Nevertheless, we accept the white man's higher ideals, not his arrogance; we wish to offer him, as to all peoples, a free fatherland in which he will find home and refuge, but not a prolongation of his conquests. The whites themselves, disturbed by the materialism and social injustice into which their race, the fourth race, has fallen, will come to us to aid in the conquest of liberty.

Perhaps the characteristics of the white man will predominate among those of the fifth race, but this supremacy must result from the free play of inclinations and not from violence or economic pressure. Superior cultural and natural traits will have to triumph, but this triumph will be solid only if based on its voluntary acceptance by the rational mind and on the unfettered choice of the imagination. Until now, life has been shaped by man's inferior faculties; the fifth race will be the fruit of his highest faculties. The fifth race is not exclusive: it garners life; hence the exclusion of the Yankee, like the exclusion of any other human type, would constitute an *a priori* mutilation, even more disastrous than a subsequent amputation. If we do not wish to exclude even those races that might be deemed inferior, it would be an even greater folly to banish from our enterprise a race possessed of energy and solid social virtues.

After explaining the theory of the formation of the future Ibero-American race and the way in which it will be

able to utilize the environment in which it lives, we need consider only the third factor of the transformation that is taking place in the new continent, the spiritual factor that is to guide and consummate this extraordinary enterprise. Some may think that the fusion of today's different races into a new race completing and transcending all others will be a repulsive process of anarchic mongrelization, in comparison with which the English practice of marrying only within the same breed will appear as an ideal of refinement and purity. The first Aryans of India essayed precisely this English system to defend themselves against mixture with the colored races; but because the wisdom possessed by these dark races was the necessary complement to that of the blond invaders, the genuine culture of India only appeared after the centuries had consummated the mixture in spite of all written prohibitions. This predestined mixture, moreover, was useful not only for cultural reasons, but because man needs to draw physical renewal from the genetic pool of mankind. The North Americans hold very firmly to their resolution to maintain the purity of their breed; but this is because what faces them is the black man, the other extreme, as it were, the very opposite of a fungible element. In Ibero-America the problem does not arise in such stark terms; we have very few blacks, and most of them have already been turning into a population of mulattoes. The Indian is a good bridge toward fusion. Besides, the hot climate favors relations among all peoples and their unification. Furthermore—and this is essential—interbreeding among the races will not be owing to simple propinquity, as occurred at the beginning, when the white settler would take a native or black woman because no other was available. Eventually, as social conditions improve, crossbreeding will become ever more spontaneous, until it is no longer subject to necessity

but to taste or even to curiosity.¹³ Spiritual considerations will thus come to outweigh physical needs; and spiritual considerations should not be understood to mean thought, but rather the taste that is our guide in the mysterious choice of one person among so many.

[III]

This law of taste as the criterion for human relations is one that we have expounded more than once, calling it the law of the three stages of society, stages defined not in the manner of Comte but in a far more ample sense.¹⁴ The three stages identified by this law are the material or military, the intellectual or political, and the spiritual or aesthetic. They constitute a process that is gradually liberating us from the rule of necessity and subjecting all of life to the higher criteria of feeling and imagination.

Material factors are the sole arbiters of the first stage; when peoples come into contact, they fight or combine in obedience only to violence and their relative strength. Sometimes one will exterminate the other, or they will form pacts in keeping with their needs and interests. The hordes or tribes of every race live like this. Under these conditions, physical force, the only cohesive element of the group, is also what causes one stock to mix with another. There can be no choice when the strong takes or rejects the conquered female as his whim may dictate.

13. *Translator's note:* Here and in subsequent passages, I render the Spanish word *gusto* as "taste." This, I believe, is its primary meaning in this context; but the reader should bear in mind that *gusto* can also mean "pleasure," a meaning that resonates to some degree in Vasconcelos's prose.

14. Referring to Auguste Comte (1798–1857), French philosopher and the founder of the doctrine of Positivism.

Of course the instinctive affinities that attract or repel in keeping with the mystery we call taste, the secret foundation of all aesthetics, underlie human relations even in this period; but the promptings of taste do not dominate in the first period, nor do they in the second, which is subject to the rigid norms of reason. Reason is also present in the first period as the motive of human conduct and action, but it is a weak reason, comparable to the suppressed taste. It is not reason that decides, but force, usually a brutal force to which judgment, enslaved to primitive will, submits. When judgment is thus perverted to become astuteness, it degenerates in the service of injustice. In the first period it is impossible to work for the harmonious fusion of the races, both because the rule of violence to which it is subject makes spontaneous cohesion impossible, and because geographical conditions do not even permit constant communication among all the peoples of the planet.

Reason tends to prevail in the second period, artfully utilizing the conquests of force and rectifying its errors. Borders are defined by treaty, and mores are organized according to the laws of mutual benefit and logic. Roman society is the most perfect model of this rational social system, although it actually began before Rome and still lingers in our age of nationalities. Under such a regime, the mixture of races arises in part from the whims of free instinct operating beneath the constraints of social norms, but especially from concern for immediate ethical or political benefits. In the name of morality, for example, almost indissoluble matrimonial bonds are imposed on persons who do not love each other; in the name of politics, inner and outer liberty is curtailed; in the name of religion, which ought to function as sublime inspiration, dogma and tyranny are imposed; but each case is justified

with the appeal to reason, recognized as supreme arbiter of human affairs. A superficial logic and a questionable science are also the guides of those who condemn miscegenation in the name of a eugenics based on incomplete and false scientific data and therefore unable to produce valid results. This second period is characterized by faith in the formula; therefore in every respect it merely establishes norms for intelligence, limits for action, borders for the fatherland, and curbs to feeling. The rule, the norm, and tyranny are the law of the second period, in which we are today trapped and from which we must escape.

In the third period, whose coming can already be discerned in countless ways, our behavior will be guided not by poor reason, which explains but does not discover, but by creative feelings and irresistible beauty. Norms will be derived from the supreme faculty, the imagination; that is, men will live without norms, in a state in which all that is born of feeling is right. Instead of rules, constant inspiration. The worth of an action will not be sought in its immediate tangible results, as occurs in the first period, or in its obedience to certain rules of pure reason; even the ethical imperative will be transcended, and beyond good and evil, in the world of aesthetic emotion, the only concern will be that an action produce happiness through its beauty. To follow our impulse, not our duty; to walk the path of taste, not that of appetite or syllogism; to experience joy founded on love—that is the third stage.

We are unfortunately so imperfect that in order to achieve so godlike a form of life we shall first have to travel every road: the road of duty, where the lower appetites are purified and overcome; the road of dreams, which stimulates the highest aspirations. Then passion will come, redeeming us from low sensuality. To live passionately, to feel so intense an emotion toward all things that their

movement falls into the rhythms of happiness—this is one aspect of the third period. It is achieved by releasing our divine impulse, so that with a single agile bound, without bridges of morality or logic, it may reach the zone of revelation. Unmediated intuition, which leaps over the chains of syllogistic reasoning and, being a passion, transcends duty from the outset and replaces it with exalted love, is an artistic gift. We know that both duty and logic are the scaffolding and mechanics of the building, but the soul of architecture is a rhythm that goes beyond the mechanical and obeys no law but the mystery of divine beauty.

What role is assigned in this process to that sinew of human destinies, the will, which the fourth race came to deify in the intoxicating moment of its triumph? The will is force, blind force that pursues confused ends. In the first period it is guided by the appetite, which uses it to satisfy all its whims; next the light of reason dawns, and the will is restrained by duty and shaped by logical thought. In the third period the will becomes free, transcends the finite, bursts and plunges into a kind of infinite reality, is filled with distant echoes and aims. No longer satisfied with logic, it puts on the wings of imagination, descends into the deepest depths and glimpses the highest heights, swells with harmony and ascends in the creative mystery of melody, finds satisfaction and release in emotion and is one with the joy of the universe: it becomes a passion for beauty.

If we recognize that humanity is gradually nearing the third period of its destiny, we shall understand that the task of racial fusion will be accomplished on the Ibero-American continent in keeping with a law derived from the exercise of our highest faculties. The laws of emotion, beauty, and joy will govern the choice of partners, with results infinitely superior to those of a eugenics based on

scientific reason and attentive only to the least important aspect of the act of love. The mysterious eugenics of aesthetic taste will prevail over the eugenics of science. Where radiant passion rules, restraints are unnecessary. The very ugly will not procreate, will not want to procreate; what will it matter, then, that all races will blend into one, if ugliness will find no cradle? Poverty, deficient education, the scarcity of beautiful individuals, the wretchedness that makes people ugly—all these calamities will vanish in the future stage of society. Then it will seem repulsive and criminal for a mediocre couple to boast, as is now common, of having multiplied misery. Marriage will cease to be a consolation for misfortunes that there is no reason to perpetuate and will become a work of art.

With the spread of education and prosperity, the danger of mixing radically opposite types will vanish. Unions will take place in keeping with the unique law of the third period, the law of mutual attraction, refined by the sense of beauty—a genuine attraction and not the false one imposed on us now by necessity and ignorance. These unions, sincerely passionate and easily dissolved in case of error, will produce bright and beautiful offspring. The whole species will change its physical appearance and its temperament; the higher instincts will prevail, and the elements of beauty that are now scattered among the various peoples will be fixed in a happy synthesis.

At present, in part out of hypocrisy and in part because such unions are formed between wretched persons in unfortunate circumstances, we are profoundly horrified by the marriage of a black woman to a white man. We should feel no repugnance whatsoever at the union of a black Apollo with a blond Venus, which proves that beauty sanctifies everything. On the other hand, it is repulsive to see those couples that every day issue from the courthouse

or the church, about 90 percent of them ugly. Thanks to our vices, our prejudices, and our misery, the world is thus filled with ugliness. Procreation motivated by love is a good harbinger of choice offspring; but love must itself be a work of art, and not the refuge of despair. If what is to be passed on is stupidity, then what links the parents is not love, but a low and disreputable instinct.

A mixture of races consummated in keeping with the laws of social benefit, mutual attraction, and beauty will lead to the formation of a human type infinitely superior to all previous ones. By the Mendelian law of heredity, the crossbreeding of opposites will produce widely diverse and extremely complex variants, just as the human elements to be crossed are manifold and diverse; but precisely this assures us of the boundless possibilities that a well-directed instinct opens for the gradual perfection of our species.¹⁵ If heretofore it has not improved much, that is because it has lived in crowded and miserable conditions that have impeded the functioning of the free instinct of beauty; reproduction has occurred after the fashion of beasts, with no quantitative limit and no aspiration toward improvement. The spirit has taken no part in it, only the appetite, which seeks satisfaction as best it can, so that at this point we cannot even imagine the modalities and effects of a series of truly inspired crossings. Unions based on talents and beauty ought to produce many individuals endowed with the dominant qualities. If we then choose, not with our reason but our taste, the qualities that we wish to prevail, the select individuals will become ever-more numerous, while the throwbacks will tend to disappear. Recessive offspring will no longer unite with

15. Mendelism, a series of genetic tenants derived from Austrian scientist and priest Gregor Johann Mendel (1822–1884), related to the transmission of hereditary characteristics from organisms to their offspring.

each other but will go in search of rapid improvement or will voluntarily suppress all desire for physical reproduction. The very conscience of the species will develop a shrewd Mendelism once it is freed from physical pressures, ignorance, and poverty; and thus monstrosities will vanish within very few generations, and what is normal today will come to seem abominable. The lower types of the species will be absorbed by the higher. The blacks, for example, could be redeemed in this fashion; and by means of voluntary extinction the ugliest breeds will gradually give way to the most beautiful. As the inferior races become educated, they will become less prolific, and the best specimens will gradually ascend on a scale of ethnic betterment, whose highest point is not exactly the white man, but that new race to which the white, too, will have to aspire in order to achieve synthesis. The Indian, by being grafted onto the kindred race, will leap across the thousands of years that separate Atlantis from our time; and within a few decades of aesthetic eugenics the black might disappear, along with such types as the free instinct for beauty might mark as fundamentally recessive and therefore unworthy of perpetuation. A process of selection through taste would thus prevail, one far more efficient than the brutal Darwinian selection that might be valid for inferior species, but never for man.

No race of our time can present itself as a perfect model to be imitated by all the others. The *mestizo* and the Indian, and even the black, surpass the white in countless genuinely spiritual abilities. Neither in antiquity nor today have we ever seen a race able to create a civilization on its own. Humanity's most illustrious epochs have been precisely those in which dissimilar people have come into contact and mixed. India, Greece, Alexandria, Rome, are so many examples of the fact that only geographical

and ethnic universality can yield the fruits of civilization. In the contemporary period, when the pride of the current masters of the world, through the mouths of their scientists, affirms the ethnic and mental superiority of the white man of the North, any teacher can observe that the children and young people in North American universities, descendants of Scandinavians, Dutch, and English, are much slower, almost obtuse, in comparison with the *mestizo* children and youth of the South. Perhaps this superiority can be explained as the effect of a salutary blending of opposite elements, a spiritual genetics. The fact is that new blood renews vigor and that even the soul seeks something different with which to enrich the monotony of its contents. Only a long-term experiment will be able to show the results of a mixture carried out not through violence or out of necessity, but through choices arising from bedazzlement with beauty and confirmed by the emotional power of love.

In the first and second periods we are living in, the human species, because of isolation and wars, is in a sense living in conformity with Darwinian laws. The English, who see nothing but the present of the external world, did not hesitate to apply zoological theories to the field of human sociology. If this incorrect application of a physiological law to the realm of the spirit were acceptable, then speaking of the ethnic absorption of the black would amount to a defense of retrogression. Implicitly or openly, the English theory presupposes that the black is a kind of link closer to the ape than to the blond man. There is consequently no option other than making him disappear. The white man, on the other hand, especially the English-speaking white man, is presented as the sublime culmination of human evolution; crossing him with another race would mean befouling his stock.

Such a view of things, however, is nothing but the illusion cherished by every successful people during the time of its hegemony. Each of the great peoples of history has deemed itself the last and the chosen. When we compare these childish instances of pride one with another, we see that the mission that each people assigns to itself is at bottom nothing but lust for booty and the desire to exterminate its rival. Even official science is, in each period, a reflection of the pride of the dominant race. The Hebrews based their belief in their superiority on oracles and divine promises. The English base theirs on observations concerning domestic animals. Out of the observation of crossings and hereditary varieties of these animals grew Darwinism, first as a modest zoological theory, then as a social biology that assigns the Englishman absolute superiority over all other races. Every imperialism has need of a philosophy to justify it. The Roman Empire preached order, that is, hierarchy: first the Roman, then his allies, and slavery for the barbarian. The British preach natural selection, with the implied conclusion that by natural and divine right the world belongs to the dolichocephalic inhabitants of their islands and to their descendants. This science that came to invade us along with the products of conquering commerce can, however, be fought in the same way that every imperialism is fought, by opposing to it a superior science, a broader and more vigorous civilization. The fact is that no race is sufficient unto itself and that Humanity would be—indeed, is—the loser every time that a race disappears by violent means. It is all very well for each race to evolve as it chooses, but always within its own vision of beauty and without interrupting the harmonic development of human elements.

Each thriving race needs to create its own philosophy, the wellspring of its success. We have been educated

under the humiliating influence of a philosophy devised by our enemies, sincerely perhaps, but with the aim of exalting their own purposes and crushing ours. Thus we have ourselves come to believe in the inferiority of the *mestizo*, in the hopelessness of the Indian, in the condemnation of the black, in the irremediable decadence of the Oriental. The rebellion of our arms was not followed by the rebellion of consciousness. We rebelled against the political power of Spain and did not notice that, along with Spain, we fell under the economic and spiritual domination of the race that has been mistress of the world since Spain's greatness came to an end. We shook off one yoke only to fall under another. We became victims of a shift in the locus of power that would have been inevitable even had we understood it in time. There is an inevitability in the destiny of peoples, just as in that of individuals, but now that a new phase of History is beginning it becomes necessary to reconstruct our ideology and organize every aspect of the life of our continent in keeping with a new ethnic doctrine. Let us then begin to live our own lives and make our own science. If we do not first free the spirit, we shall never succeed in redeeming the flesh.

Our obligation is to formulate the bases of a new civilization, and for that very reason we must bear in mind that neither in form nor in substance do civilizations repeat themselves. The theory of ethnic superiority has merely been a weapon employed by every warlike people, but the combat that faces us is so important that it allows of no such specious ruse. We do not maintain that we are or will become the world's leading race, the most enlightened, the strongest and most beautiful. Our aim is

even higher and more difficult to achieve than a transient superiority. Our values exist in potentiality, so much so that we are as yet nothing. Nonetheless, for the proud Egyptians the Hebrew race was nothing but a vile breed of slaves, and from it was born Jesus Christ, founder of the greatest movement in History, proclaiming love for all men. This love will be one of the fundamental dogmas of the fifth race that will arise in America. Christianity liberates and engenders life, because it contains a universal, not national, revelation, which is why the Jews, who could not bring themselves to join with Gentiles, had to reject it. America, however, is the homeland of the Gentiles, the true promised land of Christians. If our race proves unworthy of this sacred soil, if it comes to lack love, it will be replaced by peoples more qualified to carry out the predestined mission of these lands, the mission of serving as the home of a humanity made up of every nation and every breed. The form of life that the progress of the world forces on Hispanic America is not a rival creed that in the face of its adversary says, "I shall overcome you or do without you," but an infinite yearning for integration and wholeness that necessarily invokes the universe. The boundlessness of its desire guarantees it strength to fight the exclusivistic creed of the enemy and confidence in the victory that must always fall to the Gentiles. The danger lies rather in our undergoing the same fate as the majority of the Hebrews, whose refusal to become Gentiles lost them the grace that had arisen among them. This is what will happen to us if we prove incapable of offering home and brotherhood to all men. Then another people will be the axis, some other language will be the vehicle; but no one can any longer hold back the fusion of peoples, the coming of the fifth era of the world, the era of universality and cosmic consciousness.

The doctrine of sociological and biological formation that we expound here is not simply an ideological effort to lift the spirits of a depressed race by offering it a thesis that contradicts the doctrine with which its rivals have tried to hold it down. The truth is that as the falseness of the scientific premise on which the dominance of today's world powers rests becomes more evident, we also come to glimpse, in experimental science itself, indications of a road that leads not to the triumph of one single race but to the redemption of all men. It is as though the palingenesis already proclaimed by Christianity thousands of years ago were now confirmed in the various branches of scientific knowledge. Christianity preached love as the basis of human relations, and we now begin to see that only love is capable of producing a superior Humanity. The policies of states and the science of the positivists, directly influenced by those policies, declared that not love was the law, but antagonism, struggle, and the survival of the fittest, with no criterion for judging fitness other than the curious *petitio principii* contained in the thesis itself, since he who survives is fit, and only the fit survives. Thus all the petty knowledge that tried to ignore sublime revelations and replace them with generalizations based on a mere sum of details is ultimately reduced to flawed verbal formulas of this sort.

The discredit into which such doctrines have fallen is augmented by the discoveries and observations that are revolutionizing the sciences today. It was impossible to assail the view of History as a series of frivolities as long as it was thought that individual life, too, lacked a metaphysical goal and a providential plan. But if mathematics is wavering and reshaping its

conclusions to give us the concept of an unstable world whose mystery changes in keeping with our relative position and the nature of our concepts; if physics and chemistry no longer dare to affirm that in the processes of the atom there is nothing but the action of masses and forces; if biology, too—with Uexküll, for example—declares in its new hypotheses that in the course of life “cells move as though operating within a finished organism whose organs exist in a deliberate harmony and function together, that is, according to a plan,” and that “there is a meshing of animate factors in the physico-chemical drive wheel” (which gainsays Darwinism, at least in the interpretation of those Darwinists who deny that Nature obeys a plan); if genetics also demonstrates, as Uexküll says, that protoplasm is a mixture of substances out of which more or less anything can be made; then, in the face of all these conceptual changes in science, we must recognize that the theoretical edifice supporting the domination of a single race has also collapsed.¹⁶ This, in turn, also augurs the imminent collapse of the material power of those who have created all this false bargain science of conquest.

Mendel’s Law, especially when it confirms the “participation of animate factors in the physico-chemical drive wheel,” must form part of our new patriotism, for its terms lead to the conclusion that the different faculties of the spirit take part in the processes of destiny.

What does it matter that Spencerian materialism held us in subjection if we can now consider ourselves a kind of reserve for humanity, a promise of a future that will outstrip every earlier time? We are, then, in one of those

16. Jakob Johann von Uexküll (1864–1944), German biologist, a pioneer in the fields of muscular physiology, animal behavior studies, and cybernetics.

epochs of palingenesis and in the center of the universal maelstrom, and we must arouse all our faculties so that, active and alert, they may immediately take part in the processes of collective redemption. The dawn of a unique time is breaking. It is as though Christianity were to achieve consummation, but now not only in souls but in the very roots of men. As the instrument of this transcendental transformation, a race has been taking form in Ibero-America, full of vices and defects but endowed with malleability, a quick understanding, and ready emotions, which are fertile elements for the plasma that will create the future species. There is already an abundant supply of biological materials, characters, and the genes of which geneticists speak; only the organizing impulse has been lacking, the formative plan for the new species. What should characterize this creative impulse?

Were we to act in accordance with the first period's law of chaotic pure energy, in accordance with a rudimentary biological Darwinism, then blind force, almost mechanically imposing the most vigorous elements, would bring about simple and brutal decisions and exterminate the weak, or rather, those who do not fit in with the plan of the new race. By the very nature of the new order, however, the permanence of elements will not be based on violence but on taste, and selection will consequently be made spontaneously, in the manner of the painter who from among all colors chooses only those suitable for his work.

If we set about building the fifth race according to the law of the second period, a battle of wits would ensue in which the clever and unscrupulous would win out over the dreamers and the good-hearted. In that case the new humanity would probably be primarily Malay, as it is said that no one outdoes the Malays in wariness and astute-

ness and even, if necessary, in perfidiousness. The path of intelligence might even bring us, should we so desire, to a humanity of Stoics that accepted duty as the supreme norm. The world would become something like a vast Quaker village, where the plans of the spirit would eventually feel choked and deformed by rigid precept. For reason, pure reason, can recognize the benefits of the moral law but cannot endow action with the fighting zeal that makes it productive.

On the other hand, the true power to create joy is contained in the law of the third period, which is the emotion of beauty and a love so pure as to become indistinguishable from divine revelation. Since ancient times, for example in *Phaedrus*, love has been deemed to have the quality of pathos: its dynamism touches and moves our souls, transforms things and destiny itself. The race best able to sense this law and impose it on life and on things will be the matrix of the new era of civilization. Fortunately the *mestizos* of the Ibero-American continent, a people for whom beauty is the supreme justification of all things, possess this gift, necessary for the fifth race, to a high degree. Keen aesthetic sensibility and profoundly beautiful love, heedless of base self-interest and unfettered by formalism, are both necessary for the third period, impregnated with a Christian aestheticism that touches even ugliness itself with a redeeming pity that makes a halo to glow around all creation.

We have, thus, on our continent all the elements for the new humanity, a law that will select the factors for the creation of the predominant types and that will not be guided by national criteria, as a single conquering race would have to be, but by criteria of universality and beauty, and we also have the space and the natural resources. No European people, no matter how well endowed, could

replace the people of Ibero-America in this mission, for each of those peoples has an already constituted culture and a tradition that is a hindrance in tasks of this kind. No conquering race could replace us, because it would necessarily impose its own characteristics, even if only out of the need to exercise violence to maintain its conquest. Neither can the peoples of Asia fulfill this universal mission; they are worn out, or at least lack the boldness for new undertakings.

The people that Hispanic America is now forming, as yet somewhat amorphous but possessed of a free and eager spirit because of our unexplored expanses, can still repeat the great deeds of the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors. The Hispanic race in general is still fated to undertake this mission of discovering new zones of the spirit, now that all lands have been explored. Only the Iberian part of America is endowed with the spiritual factors, the race, and the territory that are necessary for the great task of beginning the universal era of mankind. It contains all the races that will be making their contributions: the Nordic man, who is today the master of action but who had humble beginnings and seemed inferior at a time when several great cultures had already appeared and decayed; the black, as a reserve of possibilities that originate in the remote days of Lemuria; the Indian, who saw the end of Atlantis but whose consciousness contains a silent mystery. We have all the peoples and all the talents, and all that is needed is for genuine love to organize and activate the law of History.

Many obstacles stand in the way of the plan of the spirit, but they are obstacles that progress always faces. An immediate objection might be to ask how the different races will join in harmony when not even the children of a single stock can live in peace and joy within the economic

and social system that now oppresses mankind. But this state of mind will have to change quickly. All the trends of the future are currently interrelated: Mendelism in biology, socialism in government, a growing openness in souls, general progress, and the appearance of the fifth race that will fill the planet with the triumphs of the first truly universal, truly cosmic culture.

If we take a broad view of the process, we shall see the three stages of society, each animated by the contributions of the four basic races that consummate their mission and then disappear in order to create a superior fifth ethnic type, so that we have five races and three stages, making the sum of eight, the number that in Pythagorean lore symbolizes the ideal of the equality of all men. Such coincidences or discoveries surprise us when first we come on them, though they might later seem trivial.

A few years ago, when the ideas that I am now attempting to present in rapid synthesis were as yet ill defined, I tried to express them symbolically through the new Palace of Public Education in Mexico. Lacking the means to do exactly what I wanted, I had to settle for a Spanish Renaissance building with two courtyards, arcades, and passageways that create an impression somewhat like a wing. For the panels at the four corners of the outer courtyard I commissioned allegories of Spain, Mexico, Greece, and India, the four civilizations that have the most to contribute to the formation of Latin America. Below these four allegories were to stand four great stone statues of the four great races of our time—the white, the red, the black, and the yellow—to indicate that America is home to all and needs them all. Finally, a monument was to be built in the center, in some manner symbolizing the law of the three stages: the material, the intellectual, and the aesthetic. In conjunction, all of this was to indicate

that by means of the threefold law, we in America, before any other part of the globe, shall achieve the creation of a race composed of the treasures of all earlier races: the ultimate race, the cosmic race.

First published as preface to *La raza cósmica* (Barcelona: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925); the essay was repositioned as chapter 1 in the revised edition (Mexico City: Espasa-Calpe, 1948), and a prologue was added to the book.