



The Lettered City (Post-Contemporary Interventions)

Angel Rama

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Posthumously published to wide acclaim, *The Lettered City* is a vitally important work by one of Latin America's most highly respected theorists. Angel Rama's groundbreaking study—presented here in its first English translation—provides an overview of the power of written discourse in the historical formation of Latin American societies, and highlights the central role of cities in deploying and reproducing that power. To impose order on a vast New World empire, the Iberian monarchs created carefully planned cities where institutional and legal powers were administered through a specialized cadre of elite men called *letrados*; it is the urban nexus of lettered culture and state power that Rama calls “the lettered city.”

Starting with the colonial period, Rama undertakes a historical analysis of the hegemonic influences of the written word. He explores the place of writing and urbanization in the imperial designs of the Iberian colonialists and views the city both as a rational order of signs representative of Enlightenment progress and as the site where the Old World is transformed—according to detailed written instructions—in the New. His analysis continues by recounting the social and political challenges faced by the *letrados* as their roles in society widened to include those of journalist, fiction writer, essayist, and political leader, and how those roles changed through the independence movements of the nineteenth century. The coming of the twentieth century, and especially the gradual emergence of a mass reading public, brought further challenges. Through a discussion of the currents and countercurrents in turn-of-the-century literary life, Rama shows how the city of letters was finally “revolutionized.”

Already crucial in setting the terms for debate concerning the complex relationships among intellectuals, national formations, and the state, this elegantly written and translated work will be read by Latin American scholars in a wide range of disciplines, and by students and scholars in the fields of anthropology, cultural geography, and postcolonial studies.

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