The various texts on courtesy, manners, etiquette, and taste—savoire vivre in French and urbanidad in the Hispanic tradition—constitute an essential source for the study of the evolution of social conduct. These publications reflect the systematization of social practices prevalent in a given place at a given time and, above all, they are the testimonies of its idealization transmitted by those who can be considered speakers of dominant society. In recent years scholars from a range of fields in the social sciences and humanities are using these sources to study historical connections between the evolution of manners and social change.

As far as modern history is concerned, this scholarship argues that starting in the 18th century courtesy and etiquette manuals reveal a substantial change in conduct codes that resulted in the substitution of traditional models. Up to that moment the predominant conduct patterns in the West were modified national versions of those established during the Renaissance by Baldassare Castiglione in The Book of the Courtier (1528). Castiglione’s ideal man and woman were members of the nobility who had to learn the manners, values, styles and social skills needed to be successful in the court of the prince. Over the course of the 18th century the model of the courtier would be substituted by a new conduct code that was diverted toward the promotion of the new middle classes. The main proponents of the new culture of manners were English, French and, to some extent, Italian authors who provoked a sharp rise of interest in this kind of literature in their respective countries. In the Anglo-American world this new model of conduct is known by scholars as “the culture of gentility.” Recent studies by Richard Bushman, Dallett Hemphill and Linda Young, among others, demonstrate that in the different parts of the Anglo-American and Australian spaces, gentility codes of conduct have functioned as a cultural system with similar norms and practices founded in common intellectual, religious, and social roots.
In the light of findings regarding the Anglo-American and Australian history of courtesy, manners and etiquette, I am going to suggest in this paper three working hypothesis and one argument for future research in Spain and its former American colonies—what I will call the Hispanic world. My first working hypothesis is that there is enough evidence to suggest that since the 18th century Spain and its colonies, like other parts of the West, started to abandon early modern courtesy patterns and embrace a new form of urbanidad that in the future would be known as civismo. The second hypothesis is that this new culture of urbanidad and civismo formed a cultural system similar to the Anglo-American values of gentility and respectability. The third hypothesis is that this new culture of urbanidad and civismo resulted from a process in which emulation played an essential role, at least in the early stages. Most of the new texts on courtesy, manners, and etiquette published in the first half of the 19th century were translations of manuals written in France, Britain, and Italy. These translations were adapted to the characteristics of the Spanish speaking reader and were gradually transformed into national literature. Finally, I argue that the study of discourses of urbanidad and civismo in Spain and Latin America is essential for a better understanding of modernizing attempts by Hispanic political, social, and cultural elites after the early 19th century revolutions. More specifically, in the literature on urbanidad, etiqueta, and civismo, the historian of Latin America or Spain will find crucial information concerning national struggles for the building of bourgeois public spheres, the different processes of imagining the community, and the introduction and promotion of consumer cultures.

I base my working hypothesis in the findings extracted from two historical indicators and from my own research for the case of Spain. First, evidence collected from library catalogues and bibliographical sources indicate a growth in Spain and Latin America of the number of urbanidad, etiqueta, and civismo publications from the 1830s to the first half of the 20th century. Second, urbanidad and civismo became required subjects in the curriculum of most school systems within the Hispanic world. As I said, I will use my findings on the study of the history of urbanidad in Spain as a case study sample.

During the 18th century only forty-four books on courtesy and etiquette were published in Spain, in comparison to 287 in England, and 216 in France. In addition most of these Spanish
books were translations of French, English, and Italian manuals, despite the fact that during the 16th and 17th centuries Spanish authors such as Antonio de Guevara and Baltasar Gracián contributed to European courtesy literature with a great deal of originality and success. There is not enough space in this paper to discuss the reasons for the drop in publications of conduct literature in 18th century Spain. However, the fact is that during the 19th century Spaniards caught up with European trends. Between 1820 and 1900 there appeared in Spain 300 books on manners-related subjects, while England registered 335 publications, and France 403. What these numbers tell us is that over the course of the 19th century Spanish society experienced an explosion of interest in courtesy literature. We could speculate extensively on the reasons for this marked change, but at the end of the day the conclusion is that Spanish dominant groups were anxious to catch up with the new courtesy and etiquette forms established during the 18th century in the most advanced Western societies.

A similar pattern can be detected in Latin America, although in this part of the world trends manifested themselves a little later than in Spain. Evidence from catalogues of national libraries and other major libraries of some Latin American countries (Mexico, Venezuela, Peru and Argentina), show a limited number of courtesy books before 1850, and in most cases these were imported from Europe. However during the second half of the century and onwards, and especially between the 1880s and the 1950s, there was a sustained growth in the number of books on urbanidad recorded, and some were written by citizens of the new Latin American nations, such as the Lecciones de urbanidad by the Peruvian Bartolomé Trujillo, and the Código completo de urbanidad y buenas maneras by the Mexican Manuel Diez Bonilla. The best example however of this trend is the book popularly known as El manual de Carreño, written by the Venezuelan Manuel Antonio Carreño and first published in 1853. Manuel Carreño is a good example of the new dominant groups that arose in Latin America during the national period. Son of a middle rank creole family of Venezuela, he was educated in the traditions of the Enlightenment and became a reputable musician and successful educator. Carreño was above all a modernizer who wanted to Europeanize Venezuelan society. He founded a long-lasting educational institution and eventually entered politics—in 1861 he was minister of the Treasury and of Foreign Affairs in Venezuela. The Manual de urbanidad y buenas costumbres para uso de la juventud de ambos sexos, the complete title of Carreño’s work, is no doubt the most
emblematic text on manners, etiquette, and civility of the Hispanic world in modern times. It was adopted as an official text by the Venezuelan National Congress in 1855, immediately after its publication. “El Carreño” is to Latin America and Spain what Lord Chesterfield’s Letters and Emily Post’s Etiquette has been for Anglophone countries. It is a typical 19th century bourgeois text on conduct that still is published and read in many parts of Latin America.

In many of the new Latin American nations, as well as in Spain, urbanidad, became a required subject in the education curriculum of the new liberal states. In Mexico, for instance, the requirement was introduced in 1853 during Manuel María Lombardini’s provisional government by national decree. Originally the subject fell under the category of moral and religious education. Emperor Maximilian’s modernizing policies removed urbanidad from the exclusive sphere of religion and morality, including it in the area of civic studies (1867 Public Instruction Bill for the Mexico City and its Territories). Under the Porfiriato, by means of the law of June 1890, urbanidad became part of the area known as civic duties, along with new subjects such as hygiene and physical education, and traditional subjects such as history. In Spain the subject was introduced in the schools as a consequence of the constitutional period of 1812. Like in Mexico it was first taught as a religious matter with an emphasis in the supremacy of Catholic morality. By the beginning of the 20th century urbanidad was only partially inspired by religion; at that point its main goal was the modeling of responsible citizens, self-restrained individuals, and educated consumers.

In sum, from all of these developments we can deduce that during the 19th century dominant groups in the Hispanic world were promoting a new culture of manners and etiquette that resembled the Anglo-American culture of gentility. The proponents of this culture were members of the elite in the new national and liberal states established after the early 19th century revolutions. The postulates and recommended practices of this cultural system can be found in an extensive number of courtesy, manners, etiquette and civility manuals that were published in Spain and in Latin America throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. What were the main features of this new cultural conduct that I will call new urbanidad? What does the study of new urbanidad and civismo tell us about social and cultural developments in modern Spain and Latin America?
As I stated before, in the Hispanic World the predominant model of behavior up to the end of the 18th century was inscribed in the tradition of Castiglione’s Renaissance courtier. There was a Hispanic archetype of the courtier modeled after the adaptations and modifications introduced during the 16th and 17th centuries by Spanish authors. That model’s main feature was that the nobility represented its exclusive subject. Conduct books were written to teach nobles to perform in the court of the king and its surrounding spaces of power. These texts reflected the divisions of estate society and provided manners and values to maintain that framework of social relations. By looking at courtesy manuals published in early modern Spain we can discern at least three basic recurrent themes. First, there is a persistent obsession with hierarchy—the main rule of this old *urbanidad* was to be aware of social rank in order to show deference toward superiors. Second, the rules of individual and collective conduct were determined by the principles of religion or, in other words, Catholic morality. Third, norms of behavior were given for the correct performance in the complex variety of spaces of the absolutist Court, for instance for interacting with the King, with a member of the aristocracy, in the salons of the Royal Administration etc.

By the mid 18th century some texts of Enlightened writers introduced an alternative discourse that questioned the predominant Renaissance models of conduct. This discourse, inspired by ideas and principles from France and England, ended up imposing its postulates by mid 19th century. In the new discourse the term *urbanidad* remained in use, however it would change its meaning and would be modified by the introduction of a set of new words to define new social practices. First, there would be a discussion regarding what it meant to be *urbano*. The upshot of this discussion was that traditional *urbanidad* came to be considered artificial and false, and was substituted by a new authentic *urbanidad*. Once that new, genuine *urbanidad* was defined via its opposition to the old practices, the discourse on manners introduced a new vocabulary with terms borrowed from gentility and *savoir vivre*, such as polite society, civility, etiquette etc.

Father Benito Jerónimo de Feijoo became the first proponent of the new genuine *urbanidad* in an essay written around 1740. In that text Feijoo established the main precept of
new *urbanidad*: that the condition of being *urbano* was not exclusive to the nobility; it was attainable by every individual willing to learn and practice the appropriate rules of conduct. Feijoo defined courtesy as something natural that could not be the property of a single social group. He denounced the mistaken assumption prevalent among educated Spaniards of the time, according to which *urbanidad* only existed in the restricted realm of the court, the administration, the army, and in high politics and aristocratic circles. As a matter of fact, Feijoo stated that what one most frequently encountered in these upper spheres of society was a false form of *urbanidad*, insincere, extravagant, and inefficient. True *urbanidad* according to Feijoo was identified with the practice of virtuous sincerity, simplicity, and respect. Like other thinkers of his time, Feijoo considered *urbanidad* not as an instrument for the reproduction of the nobility, but rather as a mean to achieve civilization, a form of knowledge that all members of society should acquire in order to facilitate social coexistence.

We find similar satirical or critical comments on the established practices of conduct by various representatives of Spanish Enlightenment, always in the form of essays or press articles, never as a structured manual. A good example was Clavijo y Fajardo the founder of *El Pensador*, a characteristic 18th century satirical journal inspired by the ideas of Rousseau, in which he wrote dissenting comments on a variety of social and political themes. In two issues of *El Pensador* Fajardo addressed the inadequacy of many of the established courtesy practices in the Hispanic world. He was especially opposed to the ceremonial treatments that he considered ridiculously deferential and out of touch with reality. Clavijo, like Feijoo, called for a new *urbanidad* free of artificiality and subjugation to the rule of irrational hierarchy. His ideal was a code of behavior based on the recognition of natural human potentials, the goal of which should be to recognize individual merit and civility.

The suggestions of Feijoo and Clavijo y Fajardo would mature during the first half of the 19th century into a new structured code of *urbanidad* that would replace traditional concepts. As I have mentioned, the main subjects of this new urbanidad were no longer the nobility, but rather the middle classes—the social group known in Hispanic tradition as the bourgeoisie. Its proponents aimed to establish the behavior norms required to become a person of distinction, and a member of the new dominant polite society. The discourse of bourgeois *urbanidad* did not call
for the total suppression of the conduct norms established under the estate society, but rather for its adaptation to the conditions of a society based on merit rather than inheritance. In its early formulations new urbanidad was as exclusivist as the older version; it established the sociedad de buen tono (polite society), a space composed of select members of the community. The main difference with the past was that under the new rules good manners became a form of capital available to all members of society willing to acquire it (cultural capital in Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualization). By opening opportunities to wide segments of society, modern codes of conduct were designed to become an essential vehicle for the promotion of civic virtue in the newly established republics of citizens. In the new discourse the persistent obsession with hierarchy characteristic of Old Regime courtesy disappeared. Hierarchy was substituted by the notion of “distinction.” Potentially everyone could and should be urbane; however only those who achieve what was required in the literature of urbanidad could attain distinction. Religion would no longer provide the exclusive moral guidance for conduct. Hispanic bourgeois urbanidad manuals generally recommended that one be a good Catholic, however religious practice was not expressed as a mandatory requisite to be urbane, as it was in the past. The Court and its adjacent spaces of power were no longer the main scenarios for the practice of urbanidad, the bourgeois codes of conduct were demanded in a diversity of new arenas for sociability such as the home, the theater, the café, the street, the race track, the vacation resort, the political meeting etc.

Postulates of new urbanidad were compiled in a variety of texts published in the form of conduct manuals starting in the first third of the 19th century. Unlike the sundry writings of the 18th century, the new discourse on manners was transmitted to the public in a clear, focused, and structured form. The writing and printing of manuals of urbanidad responded to a conscious effort orchestrated by the different elements of dominant society to convey normative messages regarding rules of social behavior. In Spain the first of these publications was the manual entitled El hombre fino al gusto del día. Manual completo de urbanidad cortesía y buen tono written by Mariano Rementería y Fica and published in 1829. Rementería’s book is important not only because it was the first of the new age, but also because it became a model that was reproduced throughout the 19th century. It went through several editions, and was printed in revised versions up to the 1880s. The popular Manual de Carreño followed in essence the configuration and
contents established in *El hombre fino*, with the necessary modifications for Latin American audiences. Both texts introduced the ideals of conduct that men and women should follow to succeed socially, thus providing the idealized portrait of the perfect 19th century bourgeois.

The model of perfect behavior according to Rementería and Carreño was the English dandy –*dandi* in its Spanish form. Rementería’s manual introduced for the first time the term *dandi* in the Spanish vocabulary. It is important to note that by 1950 the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy defined *dandi* as “a man who distinguishes himself by his extreme elegance and politeness.” Whereas in the past “etiquette” referred exclusively to the ceremonial procedures of the royal court, Rementería and Carreño used the term for the first time to refer to the ritual to be followed in social interactions by aspirants to polite society. Three fundamental things were different in the new conception of extra-courtier etiquette. First, its practice was no longer mandatory but recommended. Second, its use was endorsed for the variety of spaces traditionally described in Habermas’s bourgeois sphere (cafes, literary reunions, theaters, salons etc.). Third, its function was to establish a symbolic language of social differentiation for the new dominant groups.

In the early stages of new *urbanidad* the attempt to follow the example of English and French societies was openly stated. Rementería’s manual was actually a modified translation of two French courtesy books published during the 1820s: the *Code civil, manual complet de la politess* by Horace-Napoleon Raisson and *L’art de briller en societé* by P. Cuisin. “Paris,” wrote Rementeria in the introduction of his book, “is the center of civilization and sociability, of indulgence, and liberality (…) it is the supreme court of taste.” Emulation also inspired many of the passages of Carreño’s book—its structure, messages and even stories and metaphors resembled previous courtesy texts from European authors. However, neither Rementería nor Carreño simply transmitted behavioral patterns that they considered appropriate for Spaniards or those that they deemed superior to current practices. Both ended up writing thoroughly revised versions of the translated works to meet the needs of their own audiences. For example, when Rementeria discussed etiquette for theaters, he mentioned Spanish plays and actors of his time, and when he commented on the manners to use in a social gathering with artists his examples and references were classic and modern Spanish painters. In many parts of his text he explains
the differences in manners between the French, English and Spanish societies. When Carreño addresses the topic of appropriate behavior in the church his references are exclusively to Catholic cult.

With modifications that take into account national character and cultural traditions, there is an ideal model of men and women that fits into a pan-European pattern of conduct. Rementería’s *hombre fino* (refined man), and Carreño’s *hombre urbano* are the Hispanic versions; while they possessed some traits specific to Spanish society, overall this refined man was more European than anything else. The first attribute of Rementería’s *hombre fino* was to behave according to the tradition of the honorable Spanish Gentleman, always genteel with women and generous with his family. In his book, Carreño refers to the etiquette expected by a refined man or woman when encountering in the street a priest carrying the holy host for a sick person, or a procession with the image of the Virgin, situations unthinkable in a street of England or the United States. Nevertheless, overall the norms of conduct compiled in *urbanidad* were not that different from those established in Anglo-American gentility. The ideal urbane individual, like the English gentleman, was expected to be an articulate speaker who had to be familiar with a set of strict rules of conversation. Generosity and prudence substituted modesty and deference as the main virtues expected from the refined man. In polite society (*sociedad de buen tono*) there was nothing worse than being stingy or indiscrete.

As mentioned before, distinction substituted hierarchy; it was a condition that urbane men and women needed to acquire. There is no doubt that traditional forms of elevated status, such as the possession of a distinguished last name or aristocratic title, or being wealthy, provided some measure of distinction, but being distinguished in the 19th century meant more than that. “In our time,” Rementería wrote, “classes are not differentiated by their clothes, but by the manner in which they wear these clothes.” The urbane followed fashion with discretion, avoiding exaggeration, and reading fashion magazines, conduct books, and other sources of information. They were the first to adopt the most recent fashion and also the first to know when something went out of fashion. The urbane individual was described as a modern consumer who visits shops, reads European magazines and cares about the cleanliness of his or her clothes and body. Rementería recommended up to twenty-two styles of tie knots, depending on the moment
of the day and the occasion; in France and England there could be found complete manuals dedicated to this skill.

Cosmetics played an essential role in the new urbanidad. For the first time conduct books provided cosmetic advisement for men, telling them how to keep their teeth clean, how their hair should be cut, and recommending that they use milk as a face treatment and cochineal pink powder to improve the color of the lips. The culture of new urbanidad aimed to promote modern consumerism. In addition to the previously mentioned dress fashion there are many other recommendations to consume a variety of commodities in Rementería and Carreño’s texts. For instance, Rementería emphasized the health benefits of tobacco smoking, portrayed as a distinguished habit practiced by men and even women after elegant dinners, theater soirees, and other genteel social gatherings. Carreño provided rules of behavior for tea and chocolate parties, and recommended serving champagne in social balls.

New urbanidad was, of course, gender specific. Along with the books dictating male conduct came an abundant number of texts for the education of women. Again Spanish and Latin American writers extracted their models from Victorian society. Around 1860 female and male writers were introducing in Spain a modified version of the “Angel in the House” model as the ideal for feminine conduct. Actually, in the Hispanic world it was called “El angel del hogar” (the angel of the home), and the slight linguistic modification reflected the adaptation of that model to Spanish ideals concerning the role of women within family and society. Early conduct literature had already introduced the ideals of bourgeois or Victorian domesticity in Spanish society. Rementería portrayed the hombre fino not only performing in the public sphere, but also in the intimacy of his home as a good father and husband. Manuals of urbanidad for girls and women treated and developed all aspects of the ideology of bourgeois domesticity. During the 1880s books on domestic economy and domestic hygiene also became popular, adding additional substance to this culture. By the end of the century and up to the 1930s some of these texts were used in girls’ schools.

After 1850, in Spain, like in other parts of the West, the emphasis of conduct literature shifted toward the promotion of etiquette. The small amount of evidence we have for Latin
America suggests that there this change took place later, during the first third of the 20th century. Etiquette was the instrument of the new dominant bourgeois society to reinforce the barriers of social differentiation. What actually happened is that the liberal notions of Enlightened urbanidad were substituted by more strict codes of behavior that resembled those of the Old Regime society. It is true that fin-de-siècle conduct codes in the West recuperated the value of aristocratic rituals and symbols and gave religion a more significant role. In their analysis of this trend, some scholars who apply Foucaultian categories to the study of the historical evolution of conduct argue in favor of the existence of continuity between the Old Regime and modernity. In my opinion this approach exaggerates the significance of the mid 19th-century etiquette shift, and does not take into account the fact that early 20th century aristocracy was something completely different from Ancient Regime aristocracy.

Probably by the beginning of the 20th century some conduct codes in the Western world were more conservative, but they were also more diverse, whether we refer to Anglo-American gentility, the French savoir vivre, or the Hispanic urbanidad. First, they became more complex from the social point of view. Gradually bourgeois conduct codes were applied to areas beyond polite society, such as the world of business, politics and sports. Secondly, they became more national, or perhaps more nationalistic, by introducing in the conduct books elements of national character, or the etiquette of patriotic celebrations, among other considerations. In Latin America it seems that this path resulted in the swing from urbanidad to civismo. But this takes us to a new story that goes beyond the scope of this paper.

As I said at the beginning, my intention in this presentation is to formulate some working hypothesis instead of presenting conclusive findings. I am sure that my suggestions generate more questions than answers. Perhaps the biggest question for Latin America is to what extent urbanidad had a historical impact beyond the reaches of the literate minority who read conduct manual. We need to know who composed these audiences and then measure, by studying specific national cases, the effect of what was stated in that kind of literature. I can speak for the Spanish case, which is the one I have been researching, in regard to the historical impact. In Spain the imprints left by the culture of new urbanidad were decisive elements in the configuration of modern dominant culture. The lifestyles of the today’s Spaniards are based on
many of the schemes established by bourgeois behavioral patterns over the course of the 19th century. We could cite multiple examples: the importance of fashion, the concern with cosmetics, the role of the values and practices of civility, the importance of etiquette, etc. There is no doubt that similar practices apply to many aspects of contemporary Latin American life. I have also suggested that Hispanic urbanidad was a cultural system similar to the Anglo-American concept of gentility, and here enters the complicated issue of emulation. We need to define the elements that constitute urbanidad and compare them with those of gentility and other similar cultures to determine resemblances and differences. In Latin America we need to start practically from the beginning because, for the most part, this is a virgin field for historians. We need to generate conduct literature bibliographies, establish categories concerning messages, audiences, and goals, and place them in their historical and national contexts. It is a big but exciting challenge that will open new perspectives in the fields of Latin American social and cultural history.

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