FRANCISCO JOSÉ DE CALDAS (1771–1816)
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Whether we look north or south, whether we examine the most populous or the most deserted places in this colony, everywhere we find the stamp of indolence and ignorance. Our rivers and mountains are unknown to us; we do not know the extent of the country in which we were born; and the study of our geography is still in the cradle. This capital and humiliating truth should shake us out of our lethargy; it should make us more attentive to our interests; it should draw us to every corner of New Granada to measure, examine, and describe it. This truth, engraved in the hearts of all good citizens, will bring them together in order to collect information, donate funds, and recruit men of learning, sparing neither labor nor expense to obtain a detailed reconnaissance map of our provinces.

If this project presents difficulties, there remains no other recourse than to improve our educational system. If instead of teaching our youths trifles . . . we gave them some acquaintance with the elements of astronomy and geography, and taught them the use of some easily-mastered instruments; if practical geometry and geodesy were substituted for certain metaphysical and useless subjects; if on finishing their courses they knew how to measure the earth, make a survey, determine latitude, use a compass – then we would have reason to hope that these youths . . . would put into practice the principles they had learned in school, and would make a map of their country . . . I ask the persons responsible for our public education to consider and weigh whether it is more profitable to the State and Church to spend many weeks in sustaining airy systems and all that heap of futile or merely speculative questions than to devote this time to the study of the globe and the land that we inhabit.

The religious orders who have in their charge the missions of the Orinoco, Caqueta, Andaquies, Mocoa, and Maynas should educate the young missionaries in these important subjects. These apostolic men would bring to the barbarians both the light of salvation and that of the useful sciences. Zealous imitators . . . they would leave us precious monuments of their activity and learning. Exact maps, geographical determination, descriptions of plants and animals, and important information about the customs of the savages whom they are going to civilize would be the fruits of these studies. They would serve them as a relief from the tedium and weariness that are inseparable from their lofty ministry.

We have two chairs of mathematics, and that of philosophy offers some instruction in these sciences; thanks to the wise and generous [José Celestino] Mutis, we already have an astronomical observatory, where practical experience can be obtained in the use of certain instruments; we have books, and we lack nothing necessary to working for the good of our country.

Taken from Francisco José de Caldas, "Colonial Journalism in Action," in *Latin American Civilization: History & Society, 1492 to the Present*, ed. Benjamin Keen (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 153–155.