

# DIRECTIONS IN LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S HISTORY, 1977-1985\*

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Although the history of Latin American women has emerged only recently as a dynamic field of research, it is already shedding light on a range of social and cultural issues. Thirteen years ago, Ann Pescatello edited the first anthology of Latin American articles on gender issues, *Female and Male in Latin America*. One of her greatest contributions was a hefty interdisciplinary bibliography listing not only secondary sources but primary documents as well. In 1975 and 1976, Meri Knaster's excellent bibliographies appeared. "Women in Latin America: The State of Research, 1975" surveyed the research centers in Latin America with active publishing programs and assessed the state of the art.<sup>1</sup> *Women in Spanish America: An Annotated Bibliography from Pre-Conquest to Contemporary Times* (1977) is an interdisciplinary bibliography that has become a standard reference on women in Spanish-speaking America. Asunción Lavrin's historiographic essay in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives* charted the course taken by subsequent historical researchers and indicated new directions and resources (Lavrin 1978a). Marysa Navarro's "Research on Latin American Women" discussed the effects of economic development on gender roles in less-developed countries, pointing out that Marxist and radical feminist perspectives do not adequately analyze female society.<sup>2</sup> June Hahner's article, "Researching the History of Latin American Women: Past and Future Directions," briefly reviewed scholarly trends (Hahner 1983). Her most recent report in this journal identified research centers and important interdisciplinary studies on women in Brazil (Hahner 1985).

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Because research on Latin American women has emerged as an important field and has attracted numerous scholars, further cataloging and assessment of their work is in order. This article will update Knaster's bibliographies in the area of history but will also include citations on Chicanas and Brazilian women. It will assess the directions taken by research since Lavrin's 1978 article and suggest new approaches to outstanding questions.<sup>3</sup> While Navarro's and Hahner's works inform some of the opinions in the essay, my arguments will range beyond their points in attempting to analyze the major avenues of research since 1977.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS OF LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S HISTORY

As heirs to Spanish and Portuguese traditions, diverse Indian cultures, and African ways of life, Latin American women took part in the evolution of Iberoamerican culture a century before the British reached North America. Latin American and Anglo cultures share a hemispheric history of colonization, slavery, independence, nationhood, and modernization that affected women's lives. But the history of Latin American women offers interesting contrasts to the North American version by providing another cultural context for the history of women in the Western Hemisphere.

Women's history also provides a window for viewing the sweep of historical events in Latin America. By studying the varied experiences of women during the conquest and colonization periods, for example, scholars can analyze how cultures merged and yet remained distinct. Light has been cast on how male and female behavior in a given Indian culture determined patterns of conquest and colonization, how public and private conduct differed, and how conventions of interracial mixing resulted in mestizo and mulatto races. These events and conventions were as basic to the formation of the historical past as were military exploits, legal authority, and economic structures. Studying Latin American women's history thus adds important dimensions to perceptions of the Latin American past (Leacock 1979, 1980, 1981; Clendinnen 1982; Blanco 1980).

*Female culture* is defined here as that aspect of custom influenced by women or identified as female. Because women lived in public and private domains, female culture includes formal and informal activities such as political or community work and contributions to family life. Women derived a sense of right and wrong from their religion and culture, which they passed on to their children. Women formed friendships with other women for strength and identity. Female culture is, then, the conditions of female existence within a specific setting. The historical study of female culture reviews the forces of change within

the female sphere and the way women affected and were affected by the dominant culture over time.

Writing women into history thus contributes entirely new explanations of causation, complex notions of time, the incorporation of reproductive labor into concepts of production, and a view of private as well as public ways of life. This undertaking also requires innovative methodological approaches to sources and expands the function of traditional writing. Biographical, legal, and political investigations, for example, inform new subfields of Latin American women's history, such as family history, female criminality, sexual deviance, female political action, and social relationships between the sexes. Conversely, these new subfields offer explanations of the ways in which actual circumstances influenced the conditions of war, political policies, legislation, and social ideals.

#### HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ASSESSMENT

Over the past decade, historians studying Latin American women have developed strategies for investigation, appropriate methodologies that probe new questions, rigorous standards, and a body of literature informing ongoing investigations. The contributions researchers have made suggest an agenda for future work. The following discussion of recent historical literature about Latin American women begins with the more orthodox approaches to women's history—biography and legal and political analyses—and will then move into new areas of social history such as family history, criminality, and the triple constraints of class, race, and gender.

Perhaps the most traditional form of historical writing, the biography continues to manifest vitality and occasionally real innovation (Ciria 1983; Crespo 1980; Galvan 1982; Paz 1979; Petrillo de Lagomarsino 1977; Soeiro 1981; Valencia Vega 1978). Significant gaps in information on famous women remain, however, leaving obvious holes in what is known about viragos, or women who succeeded in a male world. Recent biographies have placed famous women amid important crises by interweaving individual acts into the historical moment, even though references to their perspectives have often been omitted. For example, many biographies of Eva Perón recount her life and provide new information about the Peronist period, but only a few discuss how Eva's feminine qualities enhanced her role as mythmaker for the Peronist party (Barnes 1978; Crespo 1980; Demitropulos 1981; Navarro 1977, 1981; Taylor 1979; for additional bibliography, see Ciria 1983). Marysa Navarro's exceptional article, "Evita's Charismatic Leadership" brings feminist analysis to bear on questions of charisma, political power, and women by broadening the concepts of charisma and leadership to in-

clude Eva Duarte de Perón's female behavior (Navarro 1982). Instead of becoming the political leader of Argentina, Eva served as a bridge between Juan Perón and the people. She used her nurturing qualities to convince the poor of Perón's intentions to protect and employ them. Her dynamic speaking ability and feminine charisma attracted worker support for Juan Perón, not for herself. In this way, Eva perfectly complemented Juan Perón, for she assumed the role of the adoring and virtuous wife and used her considerable appeal to further her husband's political career.

A biography can go beyond recounting the details of a single life to reveal much about historically significant groups. The biography of a society lady, an educator, or a female laborer who represents her socioeconomic group would reveal the kinds of values that shaped her perceptions. But few biographies of feminists and female educators attain this level of analysis, and more should be done to capture attending female culture—that is, what it meant to be a society lady or a female laborer during a particular historical period (Landaburu, Kohn Loncarica, and Pennini de Vega 1980; Levy 1977; Soeiro 1981; Valencia Vega 1978).

Such autobiographical works as Domitila Barrios de Chungara's *Let Me Speak!* and Rigoberta Menchú's *I . . . Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman in Guatemala* provide models for biographical studies of representative women. This kind of biography describes the process through which a single woman took action and also analyzes the circumstances motivating a group of women to act. The experiences of those women can help readers view the revolutionary process through women's eyes and better understand the conditions that led women to rebel. Because biographies describe the special qualities of the individual in the context of surrounding circumstances, each biography of a woman necessarily casts light on how gender contributed to the larger events in her society.

Another way of studying groups is the collective biography, a technique that is catching hold in women's research. Prosopographic literature breathes life into populations of women who left few personal records and whose membership in a statistically significant group is the only connection historians have with their past. My (1984) paper, derived from a survey of individuals who knew twenty-six leaders of the Cuban feminist movement, demonstrates that Cuban feminists could be wives, mothers, professionals, and feminists without having to solve the problems of child care and housework. All were middle- or upper-class women who had wealthy professional husbands and three to seven servants. Twenty-seven percent of the feminist leadership had college or graduate degrees. Seventy percent were married and had children, although they averaged 2.6 children in comparison with the

typical Cuban family of 4.5. This kind of collective information sheds light on the advantages of educated and well-to-do Cuban feminists and the environment that produced a movement seeking to preserve the Cuban family as well as advance the rights of women. While prosopography lacks the passions of traditional biography, it can provide an accurate picture of a historically significant group.

Multiple approaches may be used to describe the circumstances surrounding women's lives. Elizabeth Kuznesof's (1984) paper relies on legal prescriptions and statistical evidence about wage-earning women in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Latin America to show what they could expect to be, to do, and to have. She argues that marital status, age, education, employment possibilities, laws about female employment, and location framed the life choices of working women in late colonial and early national societies. Kuznesof's study examines the effects of independence on work and earning potential for women and finds that continuity, rather than change, prevailed. In retrieving a group of women who would otherwise be lost to history, Kuznesof employed legal research combined with statistical analysis of census data, household lists, and birth and death records.

Increasingly, historians have been expanding the traditional realm of legal history by assessing the difference between the formal content of law affecting women and the complex realities that fell beyond those legal bounds. Silvia Arrom's work on legal change for women in nineteenth-century Mexico argues that although the law evolved slowly, ongoing social reform reflected the influence of liberalism and positivism (Arrom 1978, 1981, 1984). By looking at marriage and divorce patterns, Arrom has challenged stereotypical ideas about female legal rights. Some women wrote marriage contracts that differed markedly from extant civil codes and thus preserved their authority over their estates. Arrom also describes the circumstances in which women sued for divorce and compares them to suits initiated by men. By contrasting the prescriptive literature in documents and tracts on the education of women with the practical content of census data and the records of actual court cases, Arrom goes far in measuring the divergence between ideal and actual female behavior.

My work on the Cuban women's movement for legal reform, 1898–1958, interprets the rapid passage of legislation favoring women as evidence of more profound social changes (Stoner 1983, 1984). The interplay among feminists, politicians, the international women's movement, and ordinary women produced an intricate story of political upheaval and social idealism. Cuban feminists won radical reforms for conservative reasons. They wished to protect traditional female roles by dignifying motherhood while seeking equal opportunities for women. They commanded authority because they acted as a moderating force

during a period when Cuban socialist and communist parties threatened to dominate the trade unions and influence major political figures.

Police records, medical reports, and Inquisition testimonies provide evidence for studies of female sexuality and crime. Works published by Patricia Aufderheide (1981), Larissa Lomnitz and Marisol Pérez Lizaur (1978), and Susan Socolow (1980b) as well as works in progress by Donna Guy, Asunción Lavrin, and Ann Twinam investigate female sexuality, sexual deviance and criminality, and the legal treatment of women as plaintiffs. Conventions of sexuality reflected the assumptions women and men made about their relationships with one another and about their own behavior. Commonly held ideals of women as pure and passive and men as dominant and aggressive were doubtless the prescribed roles, especially among the upper classes. But Lavrin and Twinam are uncovering evidence of premarital and extramarital sexual relationships of prominent women suggesting that other models existed for gender behavior. Such behavior belies conventional standards. Twinam and Lavrin also examine punishments for the guilty partners and offer explanations for the break with conventional mores.

Ann Twinam's (1984) conference paper on premarital sex and illegitimate children illuminates the dichotomy between public and private moral behavior. In many cases, the family and lover of a pregnant unwed woman maintained the pretense that she was a virgin while privately acknowledging the fact that she would soon give birth and would need help providing for the child. The study of the differences between public and private moralities promises to broaden understanding of the possibilities of human interaction and to temper notions of absolute patriarchal authority that are found in prescriptive literature.

Asunción Lavrin's unpublished work on sexual deviance will document instances of illicit sexual behavior and measure the penalties meted out by Catholic priests for such behavior. Her work outlines the social and religious perception of moral conduct for men and women and demonstrates that women were more obliged than men to meet the highest moral standards, particularly in their sexual behavior.

Donna Guy's forthcoming work on prostitution in turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires will examine a common, but overlooked, institution that classified women's social positions according to their relationships with men. Social and economic class, race, and marital status all determined a woman's social station, to be sure, but sexual relationships with men also divided women from one another, making mutual support or sympathy between certain sets of women impossible. Guy's work probes the ways that sex, class, and economics influenced the life choices of prostitutes. Additional research should be undertaken on the feminist campaigns against prostitution and the public treatment of prostitution throughout Latin America.

Sexuality among persons of color, especially among Indian women, is more difficult to research because few courts had jurisdiction over these groups. To learn about sexuality in Indian communities, historians must use other sources such as the diaries of parish priests, baptismal records, travelers' accounts, and official visitors' reports, which give general evidence of sexual unions between Indian women and Iberian males. Iberian notions of female purity did not apply to Indian women, and little is known about Indian mores concerning women's sexual conduct. During the colonial period, the Crown attempted to protect Indian women from sexual exploitation by Iberian and Negro males, but the realities of colonization brought the three racial groups together in legal and illegal unions, producing the mixed races of Latin America. Thus far, only Magnus Mörner and Verena Martínez Alier have written about the nature of interracial relationships and the fate of racially mixed children over time.<sup>4</sup>

Along with biographical and legal histories, the study of women in politics and public activity has always interested historians and is one of the burgeoning areas in Latin American women's history. The study of women in politics often focuses on women in revolutionary settings, feminist campaigns, and the application of popular political ideologies to women's issues. Perhaps the largest body of literature on women in politics analyzes the role of women in the Mexican Revolution. Long a preoccupation of Latin Americanists, the Mexican Revolution has been studied for its political implications, military strategy, regional origins, solutions to social and economic problems, and relation to Mexico's political past. But such themes have ignored the role of women in the Revolution, implying that they always suffered passively, as did the peasantry in general. The work of Ana Macías and others partially correct the record by documenting women serving in the military as *soldaderas*, as camp followers foraging for food, and as spies working for various revolutionary armies (Macías 1980; Miller 1981; Soto 1979). Sister Barbara Miller has written extensively on women involved in the Cristero Rebellion, demonstrating that women took a predominantly conservative position opposing Calles's restrictions on the Catholic Church in Mexico (Miller 1984).

Feminist campaigns, a turn-of-the-century phenomenon, were often linked to national revolutionary movements and represented an expansion of the female domain into politics. In the case of Mexico, the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz opened the way for popular political representation. As a result, an inspired group of women demanded universal suffrage and Marxist social reforms at the 1916 Congreso Feminista in Yucatán. Not surprisingly, given the state of women's rights in the West, these women did not impress male revolutionary leaders with their demands or their arguments that a democracy should include its

female citizens. Over the next thirty-six years, Mexican feminists formed a tiny nucleus who lodged formal complaints and won some appointments to political office. But their efforts were of little avail. Even Lázaro Cárdenas, the great social reformer, did not fully support women's rights because he feared the issue would threaten his policy on labor reform. Not until 1952 did a conservative administration grant women the right to vote, mainly because Mexicans were embarrassed to be lagging so far behind countries that they considered to be less democratic. Mexico remains a conundrum because of its contradictions between revolutionary rhetoric and the lack of reform. The role of women in the Revolution as well as the implications of the Revolution for women are areas that highlight these discrepancies (Macías 1982; B. Hidalgo 1980; Foppa 1977).

In many Latin American countries, active feminist movements organized in the late nineteenth century and achieved their greatest influence during the 1920s and 1930s (Azize 1979; Carlson 1983; Cano 1980; Enríquez 1978; Feijóo 1978; Fundação Carlos Chagas 1979; García Costa 1982; Hahner 1978, 1979; Lavrin 1985; Little 1978; Macías 1982; Rachum 1977; Stoner 1983). Research on some of these movements has provided a basis for future comparative studies of the movements' successes and failures. Surveying this literature has led to several observations that warrant further investigation.

The success of feminist movements has nearly always hinged on their attachment to nationalist revolutions. In Argentina and Mexico, feminists organized as early as 1880, yet those countries were among the last to grant women the vote. Ecuador, Uruguay, Brazil, and Cuba, with more recent feminist organizations, achieved universal suffrage by 1934. Winning the vote depended upon three conditions: a crisis in democratic rule, the organization of feminist groups, and the involvement of feminists in national struggles for political order. During a national crisis, feminists insisted that political contenders demonstrate their democratic commitment by guaranteeing votes for women. The problem in Mexico and Argentina was that the Mexican Revolution (1910) and Yrigoyen and the Argentine Radical party (1916) predated the peak of feminist activism in the early 1920s. Mexicans and Argentines had defined their programs of social reform before the feminists could include women's rights in political negotiations. Indeed, liberals and radicals in Mexico feared that women would undermine land reform, labor unions, and the efforts to reduce church influence. Those politicians did not judge women as incapable of making political decisions but feared that women would support conservative policies as they had in Spain's Second Republic (Macías 1982; Lavrin 1985).

In Cuba, Brazil, and Uruguay, by comparison, the movements for social change came in the 1920s and 1930s, after feminist groups had

gained prominence. In these cases, male politicians included women's rights in their manifestos to prove that they were interested in social justice and democracy. Feminists acted as powerbrokers during revolutionary periods and convinced most of the political contenders that women, if given the vote, would support peace, social justice, and democratic rule. Feminists utilized the press to publicize their demands and to convince male politicians that the adoption of women's rights would legitimize their causes. The difference between the sequence of events in Argentina and Mexico on the one hand and in Brazil, Uruguay, and Cuba on the other were two crucial decades when women's organizations managed to infuse women's issues into revolutionary programs that previously and subsequently viewed women's issues as separate from mainstream politics. That North American and British women won the vote during those two decades also made it easier for Latin American countries to follow examples set in other Western democracies (Hahner 1978, 1979, 1980; Lavrin 1985; Stoner 1985).

After 1940, conditions for legislating universal suffrage changed. While the final determination remained in the hands of male politicians, they approved votes for women because the Western world generally approved of universal suffrage and because Latin American politicians wanted to appear progressive rather than provincial. After 1940, pressure from the Pan American Union and the international community was sufficient to compel recalcitrant governments to reform.

North American feminists obviously made an impact on Latin American feminist movements, although not always the one anticipated. Latin American feminists were quick to distinguish themselves from their North American counterparts, whom they viewed as anti-male and antifamily.<sup>5</sup> Latin women were loath even to apply the term *feminist* to themselves because it had originated in the Anglo cultures and did not belong to their own lexicon. To be sure, the North American experience prompted Latin Americans to demand the vote and offered models for organization. Latin American feminists, however, felt that their issues differed, and they created their own brand of feminism emphasizing the importance and dignity of bearing children and caring for the home. They rejected free love and hatred of the patriarchy, views they ascribed to North American feminist dogma. They won rights by manipulating contending political parties, and they rarely resorted to violent tactics such as the British or North Americans used. Always "damas," the feminists urged moderation during periods of political insurgency and peace and social justice as alternatives to violence and repression. Thus Latin American feminism diverges from the understood Anglo definition because it encompasses a complex of individual, social, and moral concerns pertinent to modernizing Hispanic culture.

All these speculations will require further study and independent confirmation before they can be fully accepted as explanations of Latin American feminism. Broader theories on the nature of Latin American feminism should surface soon to help explain views of international feminism. For example, Asunción Lavrin is currently working on a comparison of Latin American feminist movements, and Francesca Miller is researching Pan-American feminism.

The history of feminist movements provides evidence that not all women supported the feminists' positions, and feminists were neither representative of the female population at large nor the only female political activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sandra McGee has written about the objectives and programs of the female auxiliary of the Liga Patriótica, a right-wing political group in early-twentieth-century Argentina (McGee 1983). These women provide an interesting contrast to the feminist groups of the same period in that both groups identified the same social problems and developed similar educational and welfare programs, despite their opposite political intentions. Women in the Liga, through their educational programs, health and welfare activities, and religious propaganda, hoped to demonstrate to working-class and poor women that conservative policies would meet their needs. In so doing, they sought to preserve a class-based society with predictable consequences for poor women. Their intent was neither to redefine class or gender roles nor to encourage government welfare for the needy. On the contrary, they wanted to keep power in the hands of the elite and to undermine radical ideals.

Cynthia Little's (1978) study and Marifran Carlson's (1983) work on philanthropic clubs, the educational movement, and feminism offer partial explanations of common strategies for social reform shared by feminist and conservative women's organizations during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Middle- and upper-class women usually belonged to philanthropic organizations, which were traditionally a female preserve, and this role gave them a sense of responsibility for the poor as well as an opportunity to run their own organizations. What distinguished feminists from philanthropists was the extent to which each side demanded government support for social welfare programs and the degree to which each objected to women's lack of political authority. Feminists assumed that women had the right to work, to have authority over their property, citizenship, and children, and to expect protection as well as equal treatment in the workplace. The philanthropists believed that women should be protected by men, and if not by men, then by charities. Thus conservative women and feminist activists shared a common class background and charity experience, and they agreed that something had to be done to remedy social and economic imbalances. They disagreed, however, over women's demo-

cratic participation, the state's responsibility for social welfare programs, and what women's positions in society should be.

Family history has been a recent venture for historians of Latin American women. Yet over the past six years, a number of outstanding studies have appeared, most of them focusing on Brazil and Mexico.<sup>6</sup> What fascinates many family historians is the extent to which families in Latin America were matriarchal or patriarchal, on the one hand, and nuclear or extended, on the other. Because the structure of Latin American families could have been inherited from three ancient traditions—the Amerindian, the European, or the African—and was influenced by socioeconomic conditions ranging from slavery to aristocratic wealth, family history for this region is marvelously complex (Farriss 1978). It at once explains ancient family traditions and describes how the family unit, which is often presumed to be static and religiously ordered, evolved over time to suit socioeconomic conditions. Family history can also reveal the forces acting on this fundamental unit of social organization and thereby describe the stresses on society.

A number of historians discuss family clustering, that is, nuclear or extended family structure, with most scholarship concentrating on the nineteenth century. The Latin American family has been viewed as an extended patriarchal family, regardless of the geographical region or the social or racial background. This image reflects what is known about certain elite families whose members secured wealth, status, and power through arranged marriages and kinship privilege. Diana Balmori and Robert Oppenheimer (1979) trace the formation of family clusters in the elite class in Argentina and Chile over three generations from the independence period to the end of the nineteenth century. These families shared similar strategies of accumulating capital and acquiring property and political authority. Marriage was the mechanism by which the families fused into clusters, and the number of children allowed for expanding family alliances and then consolidating wealth within the unit. Linda Lewin's (1979) article on kinship organization and family-based politics in the Brazilian Northeast also identified the patriarchal family as the fundamental unit of political leadership. Her purpose was to explain how families preserved their authority. The complex system of incorporating individuals into the family gave kinship groups alternatives for either expanding or consolidating their power and wealth, depending upon external economic conditions. Both articles argue that marriage forged the bonds among the powerful families who became the oligarchs and political leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lewin's work, which follows Iraci del Nero da Costa's study of the Brazilian family structure in Vila Rica at the beginning of the nineteenth century, confirms the dominance of the patriarchal extended family in that region.

It is tempting to assume that all elite Brazilian families formed patriarchal family clusters, but such a model is challenged by Elizabeth Kuznesof's work on São Paulo families at the turn of the nineteenth century (Kuznesof 1980a, 1980b). Kuznesof agrees that between 1765 and 1836 some wealthy families formed clans, but she finds that other factors reduced the incidence of large family clusters, thus modifying the conditions under which the extended family was possible. She argues that due to the high mortality rate and a rapidly changing economy requiring family relocation, the majority of elite families lived in compounds with only two generations in residence. Thus in São Paulo around 1800, the extended family was the exception, not the rule.

Similar research exists for Mexico. According to John Kicza (1983), colonial entrepreneurs and businessmen in Bourbon Mexico City used family associations and investment strategies to increase their wealth and power even as the Bourbons attempted to streamline taxation systems and reduce the colonists' hold on profitable enterprises. These families maintained their wealth through inheritance and marriage alliances and were thus positioned to become the new dominant class after independence. Tutino (1982) shows that the Mexican elite behaved similarly at the end of the eighteenth century, and Walker (1981) demonstrates that the pattern continued into the early nineteenth century. Wells (1982) examines elite families and the shift in investments and profit making in the Yucatán during the Porfiriato. These studies demonstrate in varying degrees the importance of the extended patriarchal family among elites because acquiring and holding wealth depended upon marriage agreements, patronage within large clans, and judicious alliances with other powerful families.

Women in these elite families were neither the heads of households nor holders of legal authority, yet they wielded power. Edith Couturier's (1978) work on the Regla family in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mexico examines the varied roles women played in one elite family. Strong personality naturally determined the degree of a woman's influence within the family, but other circumstances also determined the extent of her authority. Marital status was the most important legal and social determinant of a woman's authority. As a wife, a woman was under the jurisdiction of her husband, and she could obtain her own legal identity only with his consent. Widowhood consequently gave women their greatest legal independence because they then controlled their own wealth until they remarried. They also had substantial control over the lives of their children. Several of the matriarchs of the Regla family imposed their wishes on the marriages of their children, gave opinions in court, and controlled family wealth, yet others completely abdicated their authority. Couturier's study establishes that as members of a wealthy family, the Regla women helped make the

all-important marriage arrangements for their children as well as investments and inheritance contracts, and some equaled male family members as guardians of family wealth.

The matriarchal family unit was the most likely configuration for slave families. For three centuries (from 1550 to 1850), owners could sell or move members of slave families at will, usually leaving small children and aged parents with the women. Because no comparable research exists like that of Herbert Gutman to demonstrate that slave families kept track of the father's lineage despite hardships and family separations, researchers have assumed that many slave families were matrifocal and matrilineal.<sup>7</sup> This conclusion has prompted the debate over whether female-headed households were the rule in the original African tribes or whether the conditions of slavery disturbed a patriarchal tradition by forcing women to shelter and protect the young, thereby relegating men to secondary familial roles. Craton (1979) and Higman (1978) have concluded from their examinations of slavery in the English-speaking Caribbean that slave families in the initial stages of the plantation economies came from matrilineal and matrifocal family structures in Africa. They found that plantation realities did not force an unfamiliar family structure on African slaves, that the female-headed household, although a necessary arrangement under slavery, had historical precedents in Africa.

Studies like these are needed for the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking societies and for all the African tribal units that came to Latin America in significant numbers because Latin America differs considerably from the British colonies in important respects. In the first place, both Luso-Brazilian and Hispanic colonists imported mostly male slaves because it was cheaper to replenish the slave supply through purchase than to support a slave child until age fifteen, when boys could work to full capacity. In the second place, some of the female slaves who came were manumitted because they were the mothers of the owners' children. Unlike their Anglo counterparts, Iberian men tended to recognize their offspring and emancipate them despite a reluctance to marry black women. These conventions helped determine the household structures of slave families, making matrilineal and matrifocal families a natural outcome of Iberian slave society. African heritage would undoubtedly have made the matrifocal arrangement familiar to the slave mother, but it did not determine family structure in America. Additional studies are needed not only on family structure but on the responsibilities and expectations of slave mothers in order to understand what matrilineal and matrifocal family structure meant to them.

Like white elite and black slave families, indigenous and mestizo family structures gradually altered to accommodate changing economic

conditions. In her article on market agriculture and family structure in nineteenth-century Chile, Anne Johnson demonstrated that households and families were fluid, not static, institutions that responded to economic and demographic change (Johnson 1978). By studying the shift from subsistence to market agriculture among Indian and mestizo families, Johnson showed that the patriarchal conjugal household predominated if sufficient land was available for subsistence farming. When population pressure exceeded the availability of land, complex, extended, and female-headed households resulted. As a market economy emerged and as its attendant commercialization of land and labor reduced the availability of land, the number of female-headed households increased.

These family histories limit the common image of Latin families by showing that the extended patriarchal family was most prevalent among white elite families and was as much an ideal as it was a reality. But many ethnically diverse families had to adopt other arrangements to suit their economic situations. Female-headed households were probably the poorest households in Latin America. Gathering information about the lives of poor women will be difficult, although quantitative techniques can illuminate aspects of their existence as far back as the colonial period. For the twentieth century, sources such as charity records, police reports, labor disputes and court records, and social workers' reports will offer more information on the lives and work of female heads of households.

The study of women as family members suggests another avenue of inquiry within family studies. Although it is appropriate to view the family as reacting as a unit to social and economic conditions when studying the emergence of elites, this approach does not consider conflict among family members or the action such conflicts induced. Women, the elderly, children, and fathers had different needs and goals that sometimes conflicted with and inhibited larger family objectives. Such internecine rivalries in some cases charted individual families' histories. They also defined the battles between generations and sexes that challenged traditional values and introduced new ones.

The effects of economic development on women as well as the influence of women on the marketplace have interested sociologists, economists, and anthropologists for some time, but historians are only beginning to explore them.<sup>8</sup> The uneven economic development characterizing twentieth-century Latin America has affected women differently, depending on their social and economic status (Guy 1978, 1981; Hahner 1977; Johnson 1978; Mayer 1981; Wainerman 1979). Aristocratic women have continued to live in splendor within the protection of their homes, secluded from the miseries of the poor. Yet in every Latin American country, a mass insurgency has threatened the security and

legal authority of the privileged class. In some instances, aristocratic women have involved themselves in campaigns for social and economic reform. María Eugenia Rojas Pinilla, the daughter of Colombian President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, played a feminine role as her father's most faithful ally throughout his political career. In 1966 he won his congressional election because his populist party drew support from conservatives and communists alike. María Eugenia, like Eva Perón, served as a figurehead and a mythmaker. Known as "la mamacita de los pobres," she sold rice, yucca, and corn at half price on village streets, promising that such prices would take effect if her father won the election. He ran for the presidency in 1970 and probably won, although electoral fraud gave the election to the opposition. After her father's death in 1972, María Eugenia ran for the presidency in 1974 on the ticket of the Alianza Nacional Popular but lost, despite her loyalty to her father's political ideals. To date, no history has been written of this elite woman's political influence nor any analysis of her commitment to social justice or her self-perception as a female politician.

Wealthy women joined clubs and organized welfare foundations, helping to convince the poor of their concern and to preserve their families' hold on power and wealth. McGee's previously cited article on women in the Liga Patriótica and Little's and Carlson's work on charity organizations provide the only direct discussions of philanthropic activities, although feminist studies sometimes touch on the response of upper-class women to poverty and social unrest. More work on upper-class women's politics is needed, an obvious case being the "marcha de las caserolas" in Chile in 1973. To date, Michelle Mattelart's research offers the best scholarly treatment of women's participation in Allende's Chile, but no historical study of the actions of upper-class women in recent political struggles has been published.<sup>9</sup>

Also lacking are monographs paralleling North American and British literature on the effects of industrialization on the private lives of women. In North America and Britain, industrialization created a large middle class and a class of *nouveaux riches*. Women, particularly wives, became metaphors for their husband's wealth as their duties changed from those of helpmate to those of household ornament. Because they were no longer a source of production, the economic status of middle- and upper-class women vis-à-vis their male counterparts declined throughout the nineteenth century, and their activities centered around the home. But conditions in Latin America were different. To the extent that industrialization occurred, it did not produce a large middle class. The wealthy continued to control national assets and turned their attention to international markets and new forms of social control. To what extent did these social and economic conditions affect women? Elite women began acquiring European and North American upper-class so-

cial customs and value systems. They also redirected their purchase of imported luxury items from Spain to the North Atlantic countries. Elite women attended universities, and some entered prestigious professions such as law, teaching, and the arts. To assess the extent to which wealthy Latin American women's lives changed as a result of industrialization and modernization, historians will have to examine revised educational standards for this group as well as untapped biographical and demographic materials. They will also have to distinguish between the traditional elites and the smaller groups of *nouveaux riches* to learn about changes in the lives of well-to-do women.

The women most directly affected by industrialization and development were the poor. Women were the first laborers in *obrajes* and *fábricas*, and they have remained the lowest-paid and most marginal members of the workforce for well over a century. Women owned local textile operations before independence, when the preferred fabrics came from Europe. After independence and the emergence of native industries, men took over the larger manufacturing interests, displacing women as owners but keeping them on as laborers and pieceworkers. John Kizca (1981) and Donna Guy (1981) show that Mexican and Argentine women did not realize the economic opportunities that were attendant upon nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernization. While men gained exclusive rights to modern technology and the ownership of large enterprises, women remained in the economic realm of primitive agriculture and handicrafts that contributed to family subsistence but could not compete in national and international markets. Marta Tienda (1980) points out that the extent to which women are excluded from the benefits of economic production became more extreme the farther they lived from manufacturing centers.

As labor organizations formed, women took part in the struggle for collective bargaining and protective regulations. They involved themselves in strikes, and some became famous martyrs in violent conflict with business forces. In enterprises such as the tobacco factories in Cuba, women were employed exclusively to devein tobacco leaves. But nothing is known about them, even though they were among the first members of the tobacco unions, the first labor unions in Cuba.

Some of the destructive effects of industrialization were mitigated by maternity laws and hospitals resulting from early social legislation. Several progressive Latin American countries established national health insurance policies that granted working women and the wives of working men the right to free prenatal care and hospital delivery. The coverage of Argentine and Cuban wives of workers and female workers would suggest that employers were not reluctant to hire women because of costs of maternity leave. Moreover, the maternity codes were enforced. In Cuba, insurance offices withdrew contributions

from salary checks, employers had to give to the insurance program, and maternity hospitals began operating in major provincial towns. It would be fascinating to learn why this expensive reform passed with relative ease in Argentina and Cuba in the mid-1930s while other labor laws were either hotly contested or not implemented. Was it because of Hispanic respect for motherhood and the sense that working women needed special care? More important, why did Latin Americans legislate equal rights, maternity care, and protective work legislation at about the same time and not view them as mutually contradictory? The answers to these questions will reveal something about the Hispanic view of women's roles as laborers.

Historians have lagged behind other academicians in studying working-class women. Sociologists and economists such as Helen Safa, Heleith Saffiote, and Carmen Diana Deere have researched the effects of economic development on women, showing that women in the Latin American labor force have been paid less and have endured worse working conditions than men. Yet no information has been unearthed about their goals or whether new work opportunities, however discriminatory, improved their economic status. Also lacking are studies that offer a comprehensive overview of factors that expanded and contracted the female labor force within a given historical period, in contrast with existing studies on slavery.

Latin American historians have paid scant attention to the intense relationships existing between Latin American women. At once adversaries and allies, Latin American women have formed tight friendship groups for purposes of obtaining intimate advice, forming alliances against other women who might pose a threat, drawing financial support (in the instance of *comadres*), and preserving family lore. Female seclusion has certainly created a society of women. *Marianismo*, the feminine counterpart of *machismo*, has ascribed moral superiority to women for maintaining their purity and for suffering quietly when husbands were unfaithful. But a philandering husband could be reined by an alliance between his wife and mother when he went too far with a public affair or if he impoverished the legitimate family. In such instances, the husband's mother could insist that he behave responsibly toward his legitimate family, while the wife could take solace in her purity and moral suffering and be praised by her family for her faithfulness. This convention requires intense and specialized relationships among women, yet only its rudiments have been examined in Evelyn Steven's 1973 article.<sup>10</sup>

The complex network of female relations that encompasses class and ethnicity needs further exploration, and the home is a perfect place to begin. Most middle- and upper-class Latin American women had female servants who lived in the household. Here class and gender,

two classical social divisions, come together in the intimacy of the home. How did women act out these roles? Did class division preclude gender identification?

The first historical accounts of these female relationships came from Gilberto Freyre's stories of how white mistresses treated slave women, which is scant indication of the tenor of relationships existing between Latin American women. Sandra Graham, Elizabeth Kuznesof, and Helen Safa have provided more recent studies. Graham's 1982 dissertation examines the conditions of domestic servants in Rio de Janeiro from 1860 to 1910 and concludes that female domestics were financially tied to their employers. As unskilled laborers, they could hope only to work in homes or factories or on the streets. In many instances, families provided housing and meals, which made servants marginal members of the family. As such, women servants fell under the protection and dominance of male heads of households. They were also required to obey house rules and to suffer the capricious behavior of other family members. More discussion is needed of female interaction within the household and the contacts of female servants outside the home. Perhaps another avenue of research would be to explore the relationship between feminist reformers and the lower-class women on whose behalf they operated.

Medical history is a new subfield for Latin Americanists. Obstetrics, gynecology, abortion, and midwifery as subjects are absent from historical research. It is known that illegal abortion was a common form of birth control for women of all classes. Medical records and anthropological studies of curing practices would shed new light on the subject of birth control.

Sexuality, which has generally been a taboo subject in Latin society, is inextricably linked with the conventions of machismo and marianismo. In the twentieth century, sexual mores and notions of beauty aroused discussion in women's magazines, with the most dramatic changes in taste coming in the 1920s and 1930s, when Hollywood began setting the style in Latin American urban centers. Studying divorce statistics and comparing male and female suits for divorce would also illuminate sex-role expectations.

Until five years ago, Chicanas remained almost invisible to North American and Latin American scholars alike. Considered neither Anglo-American nor Latin American, Chicanas slipped between the cracks of historical research until 1977, when scholars began to study these women (see Del Castillo 1977; Mora and Del Castillo 1980, Enriquez and Mirande 1978, 1979; Melville 1980; Apodaca 1977; and LeCompte 1981). Although the literature is recent and often depicts Chicanas merely as victims, it has nonetheless contributed information where none existed previously. This body of literature opens up a key

field because research on Chicanas offers a unique opportunity to test the extent to which women function as guardians of social custom and morality. If, as many writers assume, all women are perpetuators of social custom, then Chicanas should prove to be retainers of Hispanic traditions. Yet they live in an alien culture with different values and definitions for social roles. The combination of Anglo and Hispanic traditions often places Chicanas in an ambivalent position: Hispanic traditions protecting women in the home are scorned by the dominant society, and yet Chicanas are not prepared to adopt the Anglo version of independence. Studying the Chicana dilemma of cultural change would show how women perceive the need to change social definitions or to perpetuate customs that at times result in their own victimization. Because of the unique place of Chicanas between two cultures, research in this area may have great promise for showing whether and how women create culture.

Puerto Rican and Cuban women share the Chicanas' cultural displacement, but they have their own histories in the United States. Cuban-American women provide the most interesting contrast with Chicana and Puerto Rican women because they were political, rather than economic, exiles. As family members of a professional class that arrived in a mass exodus in the early 1960s, most of the first wave of Cuban-American women lived in enclaves in Miami, New Jersey, or Washington D.C., where they enjoyed a reasonably high standard of living. Although they preserved their language and culture, they did not discourage their children from pursuing elite North American education and prestigious employment. As a result, Cuban-American citizens have enjoyed the highest educational and professional levels of first- and second-generation immigrant groups in American history. Yet Cuban-American women were sheltered and encouraged to find feminine work, with emphasis still placed on marrying and raising a family. The difference between Chicana and Puerto Rican women, on the one hand, and Cuban-American women, on the other, is evident in the social and educational levels of the original immigrants. All three groups share the goal of maintaining Hispanic values, such as a reverence for motherhood and the protection of women. Historical research in these areas is still recent but should produce rich insights into women's roles as maintainers of cultural heritage.

Although Latin Americanists may benefit from studying the historiography of European and North American women, they must recognize the distinctiveness of the Latin American experience. Historical events and values fashioned entirely different cultures with distinct roles and provisions for women. Beginning with the conquest and colonization periods, Latin and Anglo American histories diverged. The North American frontier valued both gender roles because of the nature

of the frontier family, the agricultural economy, and the hardships shared by all family members.<sup>11</sup> The Spanish American conquest and colonization—with its emphasis on urban settlement, scarcity of European women, and extractive economy—carefully defined the gender spheres for the white population by keeping white women away from the violence of conquest and settlement (Barbosa 1979; Blanco 1980; Leacock 1980; Russell-Wood 1977, 1978). Black and Indian women fared differently because they were available to men of all races. Sexual relationships between women of color and Iberian men, most of which were illicit, produced the mestizos and mulattos who now populate much of Latin America. The Iberian preoccupation with *limpieza de sangre* discouraged interracial marriages and encouraged the racial supremacy of white women, while viewing Indian and black women as defenseless or promiscuous. Racially mixed children bore the consequence of illegitimacy even though many of their fathers recognized them and provided for them. (The frequency of illicit relations between the races and the Latin propensity for recognizing illegitimate offspring present an entirely different society from the master-slave associations in the Old South of the United States.) The racial and class barriers originating in the conquest have divided women ever since. Consequently, any study of Latin American women must carefully define the class and ethnicity of each group it examines because a standard image of Latin American women does not exist.

Religion, a fundamental force in shaping Latin American society, holds particular significance for women. Although they were seldom theologians, they were the translators of and instructors in the faith. More important, women were the embodiment of religious morality, for their conduct (not that of men) was the bellwether of a community's moral character. Catholicism and Protestantism propounded different prescriptions for female behavior. Catholicism, with its emphasis on the Virgin Mary, held up a saintly religious model for women to emulate. Latin Americans venerate Mary along with Christ and the Holy Spirit and pray to her to intercede on their behalf with God. The Virgin herself can heal and provide comfort. Mary's example of devotion and sacrifice promises women salvation and a moral authority over men.

Religious prescriptions and morality affected the concept of femininity over time. Religion has accounted for the convention of *marianismo* and the reverence for motherhood in Latin culture. Social movements as far afield from formal religion as feminism took on characteristics of moral superiority and sought to preserve the dignity of motherhood threatened with devaluation in the modernizing world. Histories of Latin American feminism therefore cannot assume that Latin feminists sought the same reforms as their Anglo contemporaries, for they did not. Historians of Latin America must develop new interpretations

of women's culture that do not overlook the Hispanic foundations of society. To learn about the complex and varied experiences of women in Latin America, scholars must not only transcend academic disciplines and national perspectives but focus on the unique situations of particular groups of women at specific points in time.

What is remarkable about much of the literature on Latin American women written since 1977 is the extent to which it relates the female experience to major historical themes. To a greater or lesser extent, these works explain linkages between individual lives and social structure, between public and private circumstances and political ideals, and between human survival and economic systems. This improved understanding of female experiences has broadened scholarly views of the forces that shaped a culture. Women's history, then, opens the past to new sets of questions and explanations about cultural and historical evolution, not only illuminating the outlines of female cultures in Latin America but also deepening understanding of the larger themes in Latin American history.

## NOTES

1. See Meri Knaster, "Women in Latin America: The State of Research, 1975," *LARR* 11, no. 1 (1976):3-74.
2. Marysa Navarro, "Research on Latin American Women," *Signs* 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1979):111-20.
3. An effort has been made to include work from both the Americas and Europe in this bibliography. While not exhaustive, it points out the need for improved communications between Latin and North American research centers.
4. Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967); and Verena Martínez Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).
5. Latin American feminists did not refer back to nineteenth-century North American feminism that once used female morality and motherhood as foundations for their demands for social change.
6. This long list would include Balmori (1981), Balmori and Voss (1984), Balmori and Oppenheimer (1979), Calvo (1982), Chandler (1981), Costa (1977), Couturier (1978), Craton (1979), Cuadra Gormaz (1982), Farriss (1978), Ferry (1980), González and Mellafe (1979), Harevan (1978), Higman (1978), Johnson (1978), Kicza (1981, 1982, 1983, 1985), Kuznesof (1979, 1980a, 1984), Kuznesof and Oppenheimer (1985), Lomnitz and Lizaur (1978, 1979), Malvido Miranda (1980, 1982), Mellafe (1980), Ramos (1978), Russell-Wood (1977, 1978), Salinas Meza (1981), Sánchez Ochoa (1979), Smith (1978), Socolow (1980a), Swann (1979), Tutino (1982), and Wells (1982).
7. Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976).
8. For an extended argument on the need for historical attention to issues of economic development and women, see Marysa Navarro, "Research on Latin American Women," *Signs* 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1979):111-20.
9. Michele Mattelart, "The Feminine Version of the Coup d'Etat," in *Sex and Class in Latin America*, edited by June Nash and Helen Safa (New York: Praeger, 1974), 279-301.
10. Evelyn P. Stevens, "Marianismo, the Other Face of Machismo in Latin America," in

*Female and Male in Latin America*, edited by Ann Pescatello (Pittsburg: Pittsburg University Press, 1972), 89–102.

11. For a complete historiographical review of literature on colonial women in the United States and the development of the “golden age” theory of frontier women, see Mary Beth Norton, “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984):593–619.

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