EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Intellectual enterprises must have real-world resources to survive. The interaction between ideas and their social context is fraught with significance, a point not lost on the founders of modern social science such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim, all of whom analyzed the subject. Marx's observations about the impact of the real-world base (the forces and relations of production) on the content of the institutional and ideological superstructure stimulated responses from Weber and Durkheim. While both of them tacitly accepted much of Marx's argument about the impact of the real world on ideas, they offered a depoliticized sociology of knowledge placing more emphasis on the reciprocal influence of ideas on reality, or at least on perceptions of reality.

These issues come to mind with respect to the state of the intellectual enterprise that forms the subject matter of this journal—Latin American studies—in terms of its relationship to the real world as the twentieth century ends. The great historical events that have marked the last part of this century (the collapse of communist regimes, the end of the cold war, the resurgence of democracy, the decline of U.S. economic dominance, perhaps even peace in the Middle East) are running their courses, although a few surprises may yet appear. These events have dramatically altered some other foreign area fields such as Asian studies, Soviet studies, and Eastern European studies. Studies of Latin America, in contrast, seem to have remained surprisingly unaffected. Judging from recent issues of *LARR*, Latin Americanists continue to be preoccupied with issues such as democratization, human rights, debt and development, the environment, popular culture, and cultural survival, all of them regional concerns manifested in one form or another for decades.

If the great events of contemporary world history are not reshaping research on Latin America, then what influences do play a formative role? Developments in Latin America certainly have some influence. The community of U.S. Latin Americanists reacted strongly to events like the

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Chilean coup of 1973 and the debt crisis of 1982. The role of events in Latin America may also be more indirect, via their impact on the intellectual discourse of our colleagues throughout the region. Although variations among the national experiences of the Latin American republics create significant differences in the timing and content of discourse, commonalities of concern and of interpretation continue to surface among Latin American thinkers. The export of these intellectual products to the United States and Canada, as in the cases of dependency theory and the concept of bureaucratic authoritarianism, is a phenomenon worth studying in its own right. The tension arising between what Latin American intellectuals think is important about Latin America and what Anglo-American intellectuals judge to be important is an ongoing source of creativity as well as wonderment. While the influence is mutual, within the field of Latin American studies it is probably safe to say that the concerns of Latin Americans themselves (if not always the interpretations) usually carry the day.

The institutional base of support for Latin American studies in the United States also helps to shape the field. Over the long term, this base is structured less by events in Latin America than by U.S. domestic factors such as the size of student enrollments, the health of university budgets, the condition of state and federal budgets, federal investments in higher education and in other institutions that employ Latin Americanists (such as think tanks), and the broad intellectual and political currents that determine national priorities. Although the Cuban Revolution of 1959 was important in adding Latin America to the roster of foreign areas to be studied with federal support, U.S. federal subsidies for foreign area studies began as a response to the Soviet Union's successful 1957 launch of Sputnik, the first man-made object to orbit the planet. This achievement shocked policymakers in Washington into realizing that the Russians might win the cold war after all. The Eisenhower administration responded in various ways, one of which was the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. Its primary purpose was to emulate the Soviet overproduction of rocket scientists and engineers. Some farsighted persons managed to slip into the NDEA legislation Title VI, which provided for subsidies to foreign area studies, presumably on the grounds that because the United States was competing with the Soviets in space, it might also wish to have the skills to compete with them on earth. Title VI continues to subsidize foreign area studies today as part of the Higher Education Act.

Within a few short years after these federal funds were injected into U.S. higher education, foreign area centers could be found on every major university campus. Latin American studies came into full bloom. The *Latin American Research Review* was established in 1965 and the Latin American Studies Association the following year. By the 1970s, more than 150 organized Latin American studies programs were offering courses

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and enrolling students at U.S. colleges and universities. In 1985 the Library of Congress's *National Directory of Latin Americanists* identified some five thousand professionals working as specialists on the region. The field almost certainly has grown since then, as indicated by student enrollments reported by Title VI centers, subscriptions to *LARR*, and attendance at LASA congresses.

These impressive institutional resources suggest a rosy future for Latin American studies. But lest we fall victim to self-congratulation and complacency, the possibility of a reversal of fortune should be considered. If the cold war provided the impetus for the growth of foreign area studies in the United States, will they survive the end of the cold war? Will the geographic proximity of Latin America to the United States or the so-called special relationship between the United States and Latin America replace the cold war as the motive for continuing U.S. investments in academic programs on Latin America? In this regard, it is instructive to reflect on the fate of Latin American studies at the end of World War II, as described by Howard Cline in 1966:

> Latin America lost nearly all the priorities and special attention it had recently achieved. The learned councils withdrew their support. Private funds from foundations tapered to an almost negligible point. Harvard did not fill an endowed professorship for Latin American history and economics when the incumbent retired. This was all reminiscent of the similar decline which ensued after World War I, when the *Hispanic American Historical Review* had to suspend publication for some years, and universities dropped their war-spawned courses and interest in the area.
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> The cataclysmic, catastrophic tumble from the 1942–1945 heights set the context for the following decade. As late as 1958 hardly a major university had undertaken a significant general Latin American area program. During the cold war the disinterest in Latin America continued. Despite generally unfavorable conditions, several individual Latin Americanists persisted in their seemingly futile efforts to keep their chosen specialization from degenerating into a shabby genteel academic slum. (*LARR* 2, no. 1:60–61)

Cline's observations remind us of the fate of another interdisciplinary studies program—that of classics, which combined foreign languages like Greek and Latin with area studies of Mediterranean antiquity. Once the pride of U.S. higher education, classics today has all but disappeared from most campuses. The recent demise of Latin American studies in Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union represents a more recent instance of academic euthanasia. Is a similar tumble from Latin American studies' present height possible, given the depression in funding for higher education in the United States and the reorientation of federal priorities after the end of the cold war?

While one hopes that these academic doomsday scenarios are unlikely to be repeated under the current circumstances, they may serve as

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useful reminders that the resource base of Latin American studies should not be taken for granted. If it is, the health of this particular academic enterprise will be at risk, however much there is to learn from Latin America.

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