

President's Report

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We are proud to inaugurate with this issue the *LASA Forum's* new cover and design, the “graphic” culmination of our efforts to transform this newsletter into a more vibrant publication that would help keep scholarly debates alive among our members *in between* our Congresses. As this issue goes to press, the Secretariat is abuzz with final preparations for LASA2006—similarly the culmination of many, many months of hard work and creative energies contributed by our indefatigable LASA staff, an exceptional Program Committee and a first-rate Local Arrangements Committee, headed by Dra. Margarita Ostolaza in San Juan.

Over 4000 had pre-registered to attend the Congress as of the December 15, 2005 deadline, so we can easily expect this to be the biggest meeting in LASA's forty-year history (the largest thus far was held in Washington D.C. in 2001, with 4,171 in attendance). More importantly, the requirement of pre-registration for those wishing their names to appear in the Congress Program should reduce the number of last-minute no-shows and thereby improve the coherence and, hence, quality of many Congress sessions. Thanks to generous support from the Open Society Institute and the Inter-American Foundation, to member contributions to our various travel funds, and to Executive Director Milagros Pereyra-Rojas' efficient management of LASA's reserves and endowment, we are happy to report that we were able to maintain our travel funding for Latin American participants at or above our historic levels, despite a dramatic increase in the absolute number of requests received for this Congress (800+

applications, over 25 percent of which were funded).

We are delighted to have such expanded participation as the bountiful and diverse LASA2006 program, which will unfold across a spectacularly beautiful, beachfront Congress site, should provide an unusual opportunity for our members to engage in collective discussion and debate about cutting-edge scholarly topics and pressing socio-economic and political issues in a peaceful and relaxing setting. The historically rich and culturally effervescent city of San Juan will also offer all participants a chance to engage in plentiful *distracciones* as well as debates during the meeting; the essay by Local Arrangements Committee member, Lcdo. Rafael Torres Torres, provides a preview of some of the *diversiones* available for mind, body, and spirit.

The March Congress will be an opportune moment for debate, nonetheless, as 2006 is a year that portends many changes in the region: major elections will take place in Chile, Haiti, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Peru, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Brazil—and the nature and possible direction of those changes will no doubt inform many formal sessions and informal conversations during the San Juan meeting. Rather than focus on electoral processes per se (as we did in the Winter 2005 issue of the *Forum*), the *Debates* Section in the present issue, entitled *Theorizing Contemporary Latin American Social Struggles/Teorizando as Lutas Sociais Contemporâneas na América Latina/Teorizando las Luchas Sociales Contemporâneas en América*



Latina, explores societal (civil society or social movement-led) processes that also have provoked significant changes in the region in recent years—again, in the hope of anticipating some of the debates that will unfold during LASA2006.

At least since the 1999 protests that brought down the De la Rúa government, the panorama of social-cultural-political struggles in the region has changed dramatically. Involving an impressively broad array of non-State actors, that transformed landscape spans from massive mobilizations in Bolivia and Ecuador and novel forms of organizing among indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples to the innovative modalities of resistance developed by Brazil's MST and Argentina's *piqueteros* and multi-scalar networks emerging out of the World Social Forum and other recent national, regional, and global organizing processes. These and many other developments “on the ground” have prompted fresh theorizing by scholars and activist-intellectuals alike. The present *Debates* Section features a sampling of theoretical reflections by prominent scholars and activist-intellectuals in the field about the changing dynamics of social struggles over the course of the past decade.

We asked contributors to contemplate a wide range of questions, including: Do recent expressions of social mobilization portend a deepening and extension of democracy in the region? Or do they

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instead (or also) undermine democratic “governability”? If the 1990s arguably saw the “NGOization” of a number of important social movements (such as feminism), is the present decade witnessing the return of mass-based mobilization and protest actions as the “preferred” mode of social activism in the Américas? Are seemingly “unorganized” or even “disorganized” mass protests simply “mob actions”? Might they signal a surge of anarchy, political chaos and Praetorianism, as many critics contend and some supporters worry? Can we conceptualize apparently un/dis-organized social protest actions as “social movements”? Do such actions signal a lack of political leadership or of a coherent political project on the Left? What expressions/forms/modalities of contemporary activism seem particularly promising to you and why? What “old” and “new” theoretical perspectives and conceptual tools might help us to better apprehend the dynamics of recent expressions of social struggle? Individual essays included in the present *Debates* Section address some of the above questions or pose additional ones regarding the key theoretical and political issues the authors believe to have been raised by the social movements/struggles of the past decade.

The topic of the *On the Profession* section in this issue also prefigures many of the debates we hope will animate conversations during the San Juan meeting and like the previous three in our LASA 40th anniversary commemorative series, this special section, entitled “Transnational Dialogues on Globalization and the Intersections of

Latina/o-Chicana/o-Latin American(s) Studies, also previews one of the Congress’ nine planned Thematic Plenary Sessions. Guest edited by Professor Juan Poblete of the University of California at Santa Cruz, this collection of brief essays represent a range of compelling reflections about how we might move beyond the binary opposition between Latina/o and Latin American Studies and analyze the manifold transborder flows and points of intersections, as well as points of tension, between these knowledge formations. Like the question of the place of Latin American scholars in “*latinoamericanismo*,” explored in the Fall 2005 issue of the *Forum*, the “bridging” of Latina/o and Latin American Studies is also arguably a privileged *problemática* from which to contemplate and better theorize the “decentering” of Latin American Studies, the core theme of LASA2006 and one of the principal concerns of this presidency. Thanks to the pioneering efforts of many members of our Latino Studies Section and to the kinds of conceptual and methodological innovations undertaken by many of our members, aptly captured by this issue’s *On the Profession* essays, LASA has become one of the key sites for rethinking what Lynn Stephen in her essay enjoins us to conceptualize as “the Américas.”

Because of Puerto Rico’s “in-betweeness,” it is particularly well suited to serve as an ideal site for productive conversations between U.S. Latina/o Studies, Caribbean Studies, and Latin American Studies. However, because of what Jorge Duany referred to as the island’s particular status as a “postcolonial colony” (*LASA Forum*,

Spring 2005), and despite the fact that we all regard San Juan as very much a Caribbean/Latin American venue for this Congress *at heart*, Puerto Rico nonetheless presents the same problems as the U.S. mainland with respect to *access* for non-U.S. citizens. Most members are no doubt familiar with the fact that visas were denied to all 61 Cuba-based would-be participants who were scheduled to participate in our Las Vegas Congress. As of this writing, we can report that the Cuban visa application process for LASA2006 is nevertheless again well underway, that we were able to secure third-country funds to subsidize the visa application fees for some Cuban participants, and that members of the Cuba Section and of the special Cuba Task Force continue to monitor the visa process closely. The visa application process also is becoming ever-more difficult and (monetarily and politically) costly for other Latin America-based members in and LASA is attentive to that broader situation. In 2009, we will at least momentarily be rid of the visa problem for non-U.S.-based members, as the Congress will be held in one of three Latin American venues: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, or Buenos Aires. Final details are being worked out by the Secretariat regarding contracts and other local arrangements and the chosen site for LASA2009 will be announced during the San Juan meeting. ■