

Helen Safa

Recipient of Silvert Award for 2007

Helen Safa is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. She has been active in LASA since the early 1970s, when she was first elected to the Executive Council. She has not missed a single Congress since 1974 and has served on numerous Task Forces (later to become Sections) and advisory committees. In 1982 she was elected LASA Vice President, and served her Presidential cycle through 1986. Her primary initiative was to secure funding through the Ford Foundation for the first exchange agreement with Cuba, which subsequently grew into and remains a major component of LASA Congresses. Dr. Safa also was instrumental in the founding and growth of the Gender and Feminist Studies Section, which helped transform LASA from a largely North American male organization in the 1960s and early 70s into the more sexually, racially, and regionally diverse organization it is today. She is on the editorial board of the *Latin American Research Review* and other scholarly journals.

Dr. Safa has sought to enlarge the scope of Latin American Studies in her own academic institutions, first at Rutgers University and as Director of the University of Florida's Center for Latin American Studies from 1980 to 1985. A major focus at Florida has been on research in the Caribbean, taking advantage of the University's rich library resources there and the state's proximity to the region. Through the Caribbean Migration Program, funded by the Ford and Tinker Foundations, she encouraged students from the Caribbean to do graduate work in Florida; she also invited scholars from the region to serve as visiting professors. Safa also served as chair of the advisory committee for the American Republics of the CIES and on the review panel of the Inter-American Foundation doctoral fellowship program.

Dr. Safa's intense interest in Latin American and Caribbean studies was reflected in her first major monograph, *The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico*, published in 1974, and in *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean*, which appeared in 1995. The latter monograph compares women industrial workers in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, demonstrating how women have become major contributors to the household economy in each of these countries; the impact of that contribution, however, is shown to be weakened by a public patriarchy that continues to view women as supplemental wage earners. *Sex and Class in Latin America* and *Women and Change in Latin America*, both co-edited with June Nash, reveal Safa's continuing interest in the social impact of women's paid labor force participation. With support from the Social Science Research Council, she co-organized with June Nash one of the first inter-American conferences on women and development, and her participation in the international women's movement contributed to another co-edited volume with Eleanor Leacock entitled *Women's Work*, supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

Throughout her work, Dr. Safa has pursued an interest in the causes and consequences of inequality, focusing on class issues in her earlier work on poverty and urbanization, moving to gender in the 1970s and 1980s in the previously cited volumes, and now incorporating race. The intersection of class, gender, and race inequalities is strongly evident in the Caribbean, even in the family, where Dr. Safa argues that the prevalence of *matrifocal* or female-headed households can be explained by the difficulties black men confront in becoming providers. These difficulties have been enhanced since 1980 by structural adjustment and globalization, so that now many lower and middle-income



men in the region, regardless of race, no longer function as adequate providers. Dr. Safa initiated a three-year fellowship program at Florida, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, on Afro-American Identity and Cultural Diversity, culminating in a conference and a special issue of *Latin American Perspectives* entitled Race and National Identity in the Americas. Dr. Safa edited that issue while a resident scholar at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio study center in Italy.

In addition to her books, Dr. Safa has published over 60 articles and book chapters on issues of poverty and urbanization, gender and development, social movements, *mestizaje*, and family structure. She has been a visiting professor at Dartmouth, Columbia, the Kellogg Institute of the University of Notre Dame, the Dominican Studies Institute at City College, Northwestern University, the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, and, with the support of the Fulbright Program, the Universidad Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona and the Universidade Federal da Bahia. She received an award as a founder of Puerto Rican anthropology and a pioneer in Puerto Rican women's studies from the Puerto Rican Association of Anthropology and the American Ethnological Society. For her scholarly achievements, she also received the 2003 Conrad Arensburg award from the Society for the Anthropology of Work of the American Anthropological Association. ■