

Associate Editor's Report

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Social inequalities have been a landmark of the Americas. European conquest and the subordination of Indigenous people to the new social order, as well as the traffic and enslavement of African peoples to plantation economies, have institutionalized inequality and violence as constitutive of the American nations from the eighteenth century onwards.

However, the northern, Anglo-Saxon societies of the continent accepted the color line as constitutive of their nationhood, and while their white, European portion pursued with vigor the equality ideal of republican citizenship, their black, African side was subjected to systematic oppression. Inequalities in the United States took on a clear-cut racial dynamic, while in Latin America miscegenation and racial tolerance were the moral glue of the new social formations imagined by egalitarian minds but ordered by oligarchic elites taking social inequalities as a matter-of-fact justified by class privileges and the curtailment of citizenship rights. In the North, racial injustice became the American Dilemma; in the South, class oppression the motor of Revolution. The pretense, the non-racialism or racial democracy of Latin America, is now completely discredited. But be it in the North or in the South, do all these inequalities spring from race? What about gender, class, and other forms of exploitation, unequal distribution, and appropriation?

The 2009 LASA Congress in Rio de Janeiro will be dedicated to the task of rethinking inequalities, and in the five issues prior to that Congress the LASA *Forum* will dedicate its *Debates* section to interrogating various aspects of that theme. In this issue we begin by discussing how race can be used as an effective tool in public policies designed to counteract racial inequalities. Is it a universal remedy, a universal poison imposed

by US cultural imperialism, or a more limited remedy that can only be applied appropriately to the northern zones of the Americas? While this issue of the *Forum* focuses on questions of race, subsequent issues will address inequalities in such domains as healthcare, education, and employment.

The *On the Profession* section of this issue presents a very careful, but unambiguous, report on threats to academic freedom during the recent political conflicts in Oaxaca, Mexico. We also announce the establishment of a LASA Commission on Academic Freedom. Throughout much of the Americas intellectual life remains subject to political constraints, and the Association must be diligent in its advocacy of unfettered debate and autonomy of scholars. Establishment of this Commission, chaired by the Vice President and reporting to the President, should better prepare us to do so.

Coming issues of this section of the *Forum* will address a variety of topics of interest to social scientific and humanistic work related to Latin America. Among other themes, we will consider innovative approaches to graduate student training in Latin American Studies. We are planning to maintain an extended discussion on teaching, mentoring, and supervising scholarly research by new generations of Latin Americanists. Consistent with our determination to ensure that LASA fosters conditions through which junior researchers can take part fruitfully in our activities and advance their careers as intellectuals, a focus on the methods, theories, political significance, and social and sociological problems associated with student mentoring seems more timely than ever. ■