

Chicago! Chicago! Looking Ahead to LASA2014

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LASA in 2014 will return to the city that Carl Sandburg described a century earlier in a famous poem as “Stormy, husky, brawling.” “City of the big shoulders,” the name that Sandburg gave to this blue-collar, industrial, and agricultural hub, came to seem appropriate given the reputation the city acquired for tough gangsters (Al Capone) and even tougher sport teams (Da Bears). Chicago’s toughness was exemplified by Sean Connery’s line in the gangster film *The Untouchables*: “If they put one of ours in the hospital, we put ten of theirs in the morgue—that’s how it’s done in Chicago” (or as a Chilean might put it: “*a chanchada: chanchada y media*”). Over time, however, Chicago acquired other reputations and nicknames as city leaders worked to clean up the city’s image. Some dubbed it the Jewel of the Midwest or Paris on the Prairie for its classical architecture, wide boulevards, and beautiful parks. Others called it the Windy City, the Big Onion, or “that toddlin’ town.” Former mayor Richard J. Daley dubbed Chicago “the City that Works” to celebrate its legendary efficiency, which was, not coincidentally, overseen by his political machine.

Latin America has witnessed similar struggles over how to characterize the region and interpret its past. These struggles will be the subject of inquiry at LASA2014, the theme of which is “Democracy and Memory.” More than 30 years after the return to democracy, it is time to examine Latin America as a site of cultural, political, and social debate over memories of dictatorship and democracy.

Since the return to democracy in the region, Latin American countries have struggled to deal with the legacies of authoritarian rule. The authoritarian regimes that ruled the region until the 1980s committed widespread human rights violations and repressed civil and political liberties. They also created a variety of laws and political

institutions designed to prevent future governments from holding them accountable.

Some individuals and countries have pushed to bury this past or have tried to defend it, while others have sought to learn from it and to make amends. Some have sought to preserve the inherited laws and institutions, while others have sought to reform or dismantle them. Central to these disputes are conflicting memories of the past. The different sides have disagreed fundamentally about who did what to whom as well as why they did it. Democracies in Latin America thus have been concerned not just with looking forward, but also with looking back.

LASA2014 will explore these issues in depth. We will ask how memories have been shaped and interpreted and how these memories have molded the institutions and policies that countries have adopted since the return to democracy. We will examine how experiences with violence and contemporary conflicts are dealt with. We will probe how these experiences and memories have shaped public opinion and political commitments, and how these opinions and commitments have been reflected in public policies. We will explore how collective memories have endured and been passed onto younger generations that have no personal experience of authoritarian rule. We will analyze how individuals and institutions, from writers and artists to museums and schools, have sought to represent and commemorate the past. Finally, we will discuss how current and future generations can learn from the past and encourage open and sustained discussion about it.

LASA2014 will hold a variety of panels, events, and workshops dealing with these themes and, as program co-chairs, we welcome all suggestions about this or other aspects of the conference program. Of

course, LASA2014 will also examine a fantastic variety of other topics. Indeed, it is the broad diversity of the panels, events, and workshops offered at LASA that make it the truly great conference that it is.

Track chairs have already been chosen for LASA2014; we thank of all you who agreed to serve in this position. The track chairs will have the difficult task of sorting through and ranking hundreds of papers and panel proposals. We selected our track chairs with an eye toward achieving a diversity of views, approaches, and backgrounds, and together we will work to ensure that this diversity is reflected in the papers and panels.

As in past years, we encourage LASA members to submit panel proposals, rather than individual paper proposals, whenever possible. Panel proposals will have a better chance of being accepted, and the panels that are organized by our members tend to have greater coherence than the panels we assemble from individual paper proposals.

Proposals for LASA2014 are due September 3, 2013. Proposal forms and instructions can be found on the LASA website. See the “Call for Papers” in this issue of the *LASA Forum* for further information and a list of the program tracks and track chairs.

LASA2014 will be held from May 21 to 24, 2014, in the historic Palmer House Hilton in Chicago. The Palmer House, also the site of LASA1998, was built in 1873 and is located blocks from Chicago’s Magnificent Mile shopping district, the theater district, and Millennium Park. Chicago is well known for its terrific museums, parks, restaurants, and nightclubs, many of which are also in walking distance of the conference hotel. Please join us in May 2014 in the City of the Big Shoulders! ■