

From the President

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On to Chicago

As I looked around the busy hotel lobby and corridors of the LASA Congress in Washington, DC, I couldn't help but be reminded of the generations of scholars drawn to the study of the history, culture, economics, politics, and environment of Latin America, and the multiple journeys that bring us together at our (now) annual gathering. At the end of May, students, newly minted professors, rising generations, midcareer professionals, and my dear old friends collected, conferred, and caught up with each other for three busy days. Over a long career, I have seen how LASA meetings provide a space for reunions of friends and colleagues, a summit for debates about recent trends in scholarship, a treasure trove of panels and workshops for advancing important themes of research, and a springboard for students and young scholars to develop rewarding careers. LASA Congresses are, in the deepest sense, a gathering in of a fellowship of those committed to greater understanding of an important region of the world, and a place for expanding our relationships with those who share scholarly interests.

The Latin American Studies Association, founded in 1966, is the largest organization of scholars and professionals who wish to explore the past, present, and future of the region. In 2012, the Association had more than 7,600 individual members, 48 percent of whom resided outside the United States, and 381 institutional members. It is an organization deeply committed to being international and multidisciplinary. In my professional lifetime, I have seen LASA transformed. The language of choice became Spanish rather than English, and politics, history, anthropology, and sociology have been enriched and extended through widening interest in literature, art, film, journalism, environmental sciences, and other disciplines. I have seen the Association become a welcoming home for new generations of teachers, researchers, and explorers in diverse fields and professions.

Our next LASA Congress will meet in Chicago, that great windy city on a very large lake. Our program chairs, Raúl Madrid and Florencia Garramuño, are already thinking of ways to advance our tradition of diverse, intellectually stimulating, and professionally engaging events, and the LASA Secretariat is already busy making certain that the logistics are as flawless as possible. The historic Palmer House is once again anticipating our arrival and no doubt bracing for the clamor of our reunions and debates. We anticipate that the next LASA Congress will be a stimulating and important experience for our membership.

The theme for the Congress is “Democracy and Memory,” chosen to encourage reflection from diverse perspectives on legacies of collective experiences of repression, injustice, and resistance, and the construction of vibrant political, social, and cultural institutions in their wake. This theme has few disciplinary boundaries. Of course political scientists, historians, and sociologists focus on how collective memories of authoritarian experiences influence the present and future of Latin America, but the theme is also one that journalists as well as anthropologists and archeologists excavate; architects, city planners, and curators capture and interpret collective memories in public spaces and museums; humanists produce and study novels, poetry, essays, and theatrical productions about the theme; artists, dancers, and musicians interpret such experiences; religious studies guide us in thinking about trauma and healing; psychologists and brain scientists study how memory is conserved and understood; ecologists and geographers find threads in how our environments are shaped. The theme of memory and its influence on the construction of political, social, and cultural institutions will be particularly important in encouraging us to transcend our disciplinary boundaries and to engage in serious discussion of the influence of the past on our present and future.



There is much to reflect on as we anticipate and plan for the Chicago meeting. LASA provides a wealth of benefits to its members—intellectual encouragement, certainly, but also the important professional networks and collaborations that are critical in our careers and in our scholarship. Its secretariat is invariably responsive and well managed, and the extent of the assistance it offers to its members for attendance at its Congresses is central to its mission. How, then, can we help LASA maintain its important role in our scholarly lives? Let me suggest some opportunities for keeping LASA vibrant, international, and multidisciplinary:

- Renew your LASA membership regularly.
- Become a Life Member of LASA.
- Support LASA's travel funds and student fund.
- Encourage your university or organization to become an Institutional Member
- Contribute to the LASA Endowment.
- Establish a bequest for LASA.
- Serve on one of LASA's many member committees.
- Contribute your ideas and comments for improving our activities.

In addition to these means of keeping LASA dynamic, you can also begin planning panels and papers for our Chicago meeting, May 21–24, 2014. I look forward to seeing you there! ■