

From the President

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In a recent conference I attended, Sergio Bitar reflected on the Pinochet regime in Chile, its antecedents, and its consequences for democracy in the country. “There is not one history, there are many memories, many histories,” he said, reminding us of the diversity of ways in which democracy and memory interconnect, not just in Chile, but throughout the world. His comment caught my attention. What do we remember? What do we choose to forget? Do we remember the same events in similar or different ways? Are memories sometimes so overwhelming that they make it difficult to move forward? How do diverse histories and cultures contribute to reconciliation or conflict? How do we learn to understand the foundations of so many memories and so many histories?

These are just a few of the questions that are being asked in numerous panels selected for LASA’s 32nd Congress to be held in Chicago this coming May.

As I have watched the Congress take shape under the skillful guidance of program co-chairs Florencia Garramuño and Raúl Madrid, and as I have come to appreciate the serious and difficult work that 52 track chairs did in assessing proposals, I have also been struck by the extent to which the theme of “Democracy and Memory” will be reflected in panels, papers, and workshops. Even more striking is the diversity of ways in which scholars across numerous disciplines have interpreted this theme, using it to reflect on literature, theater, film, politics, history, sociology, and a plethora of other disciplines. Equally impressive is the extent to which LASA members have taken this theme and applied it to situations as diverse as political party formation in the aftermath of authoritarian regimes of the recent past and the impact of colonial policies on indigenous groups in

more distant times. Indeed, LASA2014 will reflect many memories and many histories.

This issue will certainly be reflected in the three presidential panels that are scheduled for the Congress. One panel will focus on collective memory and democratic institutions. Panelists will address questions such as “How can we understand relationships between collective memories of violence and repression, on the one hand, and the creation, consolidation, and functioning of democratic institutions, on the other?” and “What enduring political conflicts are linked to collective memories of repression?” A second panel will consider how relationships between democracy and memory are reflected in literature. Here, panelists have been asked to discuss the extent to which patterns have emerged in literary works that deal with the theme, strategies that writers have used to explore it, and linkages between literature and particular political projects under democratic regimes. To what extent does addressing the theme of democracy and memory make the writer a political actor? A third panel will explore public space for memory, drawing together leaders of some of Latin America’s most interesting “memory museums.” The panelists will reflect on how memory is represented in space, the relationship between such representations and democratic values and praxis, and the political dilemmas that museum leaders must address in their work. These panels consider the basic theme of democracy and memory from numerous and important perspectives.

I hope you share my excitement in anticipating these major panel discussions and plan on attending them. Nevertheless, I am aware of the difficulties facing everyone who attends a LASA Congress. There are always too many choices to make! Which panels should I attend?



Which ones simply cannot be fit into my schedule? Which workshops or meetings will I miss because it’s important to have a cup of coffee and catch up with a colleague I have not seen for a year? Will I wake up in time to make it to an 8:00 session? How can it be that my panel is scheduled for the morning after the Gran Baile? How can I keep track of where I’m supposed to be at every hour of the day?

There are few fully satisfactory ways to answer these questions. LASA2014 will feature 902 panels and workshops scheduled over the three days of the meeting. There will inevitably be sessions whose timing conflicts with others we’d like to attend, however hard Raúl, Florencia, and Executive Director Milagros Pereyra-Rojas have tried to minimize such difficulties. The primary reason for the unwelcome choices that each of us will face is actually very good news. The LASA Congress will represent a significant achievement—the time slots and rooms will stretch to incorporate 93 percent of all panel proposals submitted. All of those who have been involved in the planning and scheduling process—Raúl and Florencia, Mili, the track chairs, the Secretariat staff—have my deepest gratitude for the extraordinary work of planning for Chicago. I now have a first-hand view of how difficult a job they have had. The end result, however, is a Congress you can anticipate with excitement and interest. I am certainly looking forward to it. ■