

From the LASA2016 Congress Program Co-chairs

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This is the last message that we will be sending to LASA members before the historic “LASA at 50” Congress to be held in New York City from May 27 to 30, 2016. When we sat down to write our last memo (published in the Winter 2016 *Forum*), our president, the track chairs, section chairs, program chairs, and LASA staff had already established the contours of the Congress. Members had received their notifications in response to panel and paper proposals, and an immense interdisciplinary effort of many months had begun to bear fruit in the form of a number of specially organized, larger-scale events that were taking shape. Until now, with the planning of these special events—particularly the presidential sessions—still under way, we have only been able to depict them in broad strokes in our messages published here. Now, at last, we can relate some of the details of these events.

We, as program co-chairs, have been humbled and delighted by the individuals who have accepted the invitations that the LASA president, Gil Joseph, extended to participate in “LASA at 50.” “From the President” in the Winter 2016 *Forum* described these panels, the planning of some of which has been in process for over a year. Two sessions feature both current and former presidents of Brazil, Chile, and Costa Rica. Two more concern emerging issues of Cuban policy and diplomacy in the wake of the current reestablishment of relations between Cuba and the United States. Others include high-ranking policy makers and activists discussing Latin American-U.S. immigration; journalism; and a stellar lineup of scholars and thinkers, organized and moderated by the historian Peter Winn, who will look back on 50 years of transformation in Latin America. The roster of these special panels has continued to evolve in the

last couple of months. As part of the Otros Saberes initiative, the Congress will also feature a presidential session on hip-hop and grassroots activism. The distinguished Mexican sociologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen, whose work in academia and in international nongovernmental organizations and promoting human rights throughout the world is surely familiar to many LASA members, has been honored with the Kalman Silvert Award. Dr. Stavenhagen, in turn, will honor LASA by attending the conference and delivering the annual Kalman Silvert Lecture. Over the four days of the Congress, numerous featured sessions will include panels that provide precious insight into academic publishing in Latin American studies, and overviews of the state of the field that will benefit from the accumulated wisdom of some of the field’s most distinguished thinkers, who will be in dialogue with members by way of these open sessions throughout the Congress.

The 50th anniversary impels us to examine not just an institutional or even an intellectual history of Latin American studies but moreover a truly probing and critical examination of how and why area studies took shape as an academic paradigm and political project at different moments in its trajectory, from the middle of the twentieth century to the present day. Among the many ways in which LASA members are answering this call, we are especially impressed with the contributions of the “Area Studies: Critical and Historical Analysis” track. Newly added to the list of thematic tracks under which most of the Congress’s panels are organized, we conceptualized this as part of a larger effort not to take for granted the area studies paradigm but rather to use the critical analysis of it as a means to think creatively about what we do as scholars, teachers, researchers, and politically

engaged thinkers. In the able hands of the two track chairs, Greg Grandin and Christy Thornton, the 16 panels and workshops in this track critically rethink such pressing questions as land reform, the Latin American left, ecological crisis, the U.S. presence in Latin America and the Latin American / Latino presence in the United States, and twenty-first-century geopolitics. This track has also created space to reach out to other area studies fields and will feature a workshop on area and ethnic studies that puts those who study Latin America in dialogue with those whose primary area interest is in Asia and Asian American studies. As part of this track, a special panel will feature Noam Chomsky in conversation with Greg Grandin. Professor Chomsky will reflect on his Managua lectures delivered 30 years ago, now from the vantage of this 50-year anniversary watershed, not only of LASA but also of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA).

We have not exhausted all of the surprises that “LASA at 50” has in store. In addition to the highlighted events organized by the program committee, the panels organized under the sections, and the thematic tracks, there will be a feast of activities and events related to the Congress but not located at the conference site during the officially designated days. There will also be “off-menu” items throughout the city, of course, from the plethora of free, open-to-the-public activities going on at area universities, to the Museo del Barrio in uptown Manhattan, to Flushing Meadows / Corona Park. An audiovisual installation, *Between Neighborhoods*, developed by historian Seth Fein exclusively for LASA2016, will evocatively juxtapose original and archival moving and still images, words, and sounds to travel synchronically between today and the

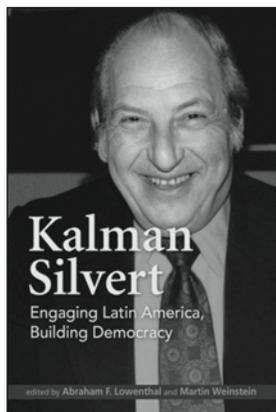
mid-1960s and between Latin America and New York City.

We hope this succinct account piques your curiosity about the extraordinary array of activities that will take place in New York City as LASA celebrates its 50th anniversary. As we close this message, we want to thank Gil Joseph once more for having trusted us with the responsibility

to put together a truly historical Congress. Our goal, from the planning phase to the final touches on the program, has been to craft a Congress advancing a bold intellectual agenda that puts emphasis on critical discussions of the state of our field, amplifies the conversation to other areas of inquiry, and builds on previous LASA initiatives that bring new value to important debates shaping Latin American

studies. We are delighted with the program for LASA2016 and the many surrounding activities. It has been an extraordinary experience to embark on this unique venture. What a ride!

¡Al fin de cuentas, no se cumple medio siglo todos los días! ■



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