

Thomas Elliot Skidmore, 1932–2016

Thomas Elliot Skidmore died on June 11, 2016, in Westerly, Rhode Island, at the age of 83. One of the giants of the generation of Latin Americanists formed in the 1960s, he played a key role in the creation of the Latin American Studies Association, serving as a member of the Executive Board (1968–1973) and as president (1972–1973). His many works on Brazilian politics and culture were quickly translated into Portuguese and have served as basic references in both the United States and Brazil for nearly 50 years. He was the best known *brasilianista* to several generations of Brazilians.

Born in Troy, Ohio, in 1932, he graduated from Denison University and then spent two years at Magdalene College, University of Oxford (1954–1956), where he met his wife, Felicity Hall. Skidmore did his graduate work in German history at Harvard in the late 1950s, producing a dissertation on late nineteenth-century politics (1960). In the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, Harvard awarded him a three-year fellowship to study the Latin American country of his choice. Moving from politics in nineteenth-century Germany to twentieth-century Brazil, he spent his fellowship time learning Portuguese, living in Brazil, and researching his first book, *Politics in Brazil, 1930–1964: An Experiment in Democracy* (Oxford, 1967). Arguably the most influential book on twentieth-century Brazilian politics (in English and Portuguese), it was reissued in 2007. The Portuguese-language version, published in 1969, did not endear him to the military regime in power and remains in print after many editions.

Skidmore moved to the University of Wisconsin in 1966 where he spent the next 20 years playing an integral role in building Brazilian and Latin American studies at his own university and across

the United States. In 1986 he moved to Brown University as the Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Professor of Modern Latin American History and professor of Portuguese and Brazilian studies until 1999. In 2006 he donated his substantial personal library and papers to the Brown University Library. That same year he received the first Lifetime Contribution Award from the Brazilian Studies Association for his outstanding scholarship and many contributions to the promotion of Brazilian studies in the United States.

At Wisconsin Skidmore served as editor of the *Luso-Brazilian Review*. During his long and productive career he authored or edited numerous foundational works. He was one of the principal editors for the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Latin America and the Caribbean* (1993). With his then Wisconsin colleague, Peter H. Smith, he co-wrote the bestselling history of Latin America in the United States. Nearly three decades after its first appearance, *Modern Latin America* (Oxford, 1984) is now in its eighth edition. In 1999 he published *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (Oxford, second edition, 2009), one of the most widely read general histories of Brazil.

Forty years after its publication, Skidmore's second book, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Oxford, 1974; Brazilian edition, 1976), remains a fundamental source for the study of race and social thought in Brazil. With his impressive network of contacts in Brazil, he spent more than 20 years studying the military regime, and soon after the country moved out of the dictatorship he published *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964–85* (Oxford, 1988), with a Brazilian edition published simultaneously. Both these works, along with his first book, remain in print and enormously influential in Brazil.

Skidmore spoke out against repression by the military regime on many occasions. In 1970 he was denied a research visa to enter the country and in 1984, the Federal Police detained him for questioning and threatened to expel him from the country after he criticized the military regime on a prominent television program. With the return of democracy and a free and active press in Brazil he became a frequently sought-after commentator on politics for Brazilian publications and television programs.

A commanding scholarly presence, Tom Skidmore was also a gregarious and personable colleague who delighted in the intellectual exchange of the publicly engaged scholar. He was generous to younger scholars and trained many historians of Brazil and Latin America over more than three decades at Wisconsin and Brown. His legacy lives on in his enormously influential works and in the work of his many former students. It is unlikely we shall ever see another Brazilianist of his stature and influence.

Thomas Skidmore is survived by his wife, Felicity, three sons, and three grandchildren.

Marshall C. Eakin, Vanderbilt University ■