

From the LASA2019 Congress Program Co-chairs

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We are ready for LASA2019 in Boston. All the work by LASA members, track chairs, section leaders, prize committees, and the LASA staff will bear fruit: this Congress will showcase the intellectual energy and creativity of Latin Americanists from around the world, along with our commitment to making it a more just, inclusive, equitable, and livable environment.

Boston is a splendid city with an extraordinary display of world talent in all fields of knowledge in its universities and academic centers, a vibrant civil society, and strong, progressive political activism. With its concentrations of immigrant communities from Latin America and its historical tradition of struggle and resistance, it offers a unique venue to make extraordinarily visible our presence and our demands for inclusion and justice in Nuestra América, from Alaska to Patagonia.

We continue to defend fundamental rights in Nuestra América from bigotry, racism, polarization, and exclusion. Those rights are threatened in many countries by individuals, interest groups, political leaders, and even heads of state, whose words and deeds promote agendas that divide our societies even further between winners and losers, haves and have-nots, citizens and immigrants, “legal” and undocumented residents, men and women, “patriots” and “enemies,” and the list goes on.

For many in Latin America and across the world, the rise of globalization and the free movement of capital—which historians have demonstrated were built on slavery, imperial designs, and various forms of colonial domination—have failed to keep their shining promises of social and economic progress. For some regions and groups, the benefits

were considerable. In China, for example, vast contingents of people managed to leave extreme poverty behind, though a poor human rights record has accompanied the increase in living standards. Others, however, saw their living conditions decline in absolute or relative terms with the increase in socioeconomic inequality. In this regard, the burden of the international financial crisis of 2008–2009 was far from evenly distributed, Latin America being most adversely hit by the end of the boom in commodities. Moreover, the benefits of the subsequent economic recovery have been concentrated in the now famous 1 percent.

In this unfavorable context, migration has exploded worldwide, as millions are forced to leave their countries for economic or political reasons, including ethnic or other types of violent persecutions and harassment. This phenomenon, which coincides with a slowdown of economic growth and job creation in the industrial world, has been met with increasing hostility, as populist cum racist and xenophobic discourses and policies became more and more visible, outspoken, and normalized. Such discourses construct immigrants as a threat to the social, cultural, and economic status quo and, in some cases, as in the current administration in the United States, as an important, if not the main, source of violence, crime, and social decay. In this context, democracy, human rights, universal education and social security, and even the protection of the environment have come to be perceived by increasingly powerful populist leaders as obstacles to their economic and political agendas.

Within this scenario, violent, sometimes lethal, attacks against journalists, social and environmental activists, grassroots organizers, and progressive leaders are becoming more and more frequent in our America. In Guatemala, for example, the UN commission against corruption has been targeted as an enemy of the government. In Brazil, the current president is using hate speech against gay, *quilombola*, and other communities. In Mexico, the murder of journalists reached unprecedented levels in 2018. Another stark example of the growing hostility against specific individuals and groups seeking social justice and opportunities is the experience of the caravan of thousands of Central Americans fleeing the region due to social and economic problems. They cross Mexico only to meet, on the US border, a wall of xenophobic anger and rejection.

Our meeting in Boston, with its emphasis on “justice and inclusion,” will signal our commitment to persevere in defense of the most fundamental human rights of the peoples of Nuestra América.

It has been a very rewarding experience for us to serve as Program Committee co-chairs for the LASA2019 Congress. We want to express our appreciation to everyone who collaborated with us and helped us build a great program of activities, but especially to Lynn Stephen, LASA president, for her leadership and her commitment to LASA and what it represents. And we welcome Mara Viveros, who will lead LASA through equally challenging but also exciting times. //