

# June C. Nash (1927–2019)

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It is with great sadness that we note the passing of June Nash, Distinguished Professor Emerita of Anthropology at the City University of New York, on December 9, 2019, at the age of 92. The recipient of LASA's 2004 Kalman Silvert Award, June was one of the pioneers in the anthropology of gender, the anthropology of work, and in the study of social movements in Latin America.

A 1948 graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University, June earned her MA and then PhD in 1960 in Anthropology at the University of Chicago. She taught at Northeastern Illinois University, Yale University, and New York University before joining the City University and Graduate Center at CUNY as professor in 1972, where she remained until her retirement in 1998. She was a visiting professor at American University in Cairo; the University of Colorado, Boulder; the State University of New York, Albany; FLACSO-Quito; and Smith College.

June served as president of the Society for the Anthropology of Work, of the Society of Feminist Anthropology, and of the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology. She also served on the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association, the American Ethnological Society, the Joint Committee on Latin American Research of the Social Science Research Council and American Council of Learned Societies, and the Guggenheim Foundation Committee for Latin American Research. She received the Conrad C. Arensberg Award from the Society for the Anthropology of Work, and the American Anthropologist Association's Distinguished Service Award.

June's early field research was in Cantel, Guatemala, and Chiapas, Mexico, followed by a stint in Burma. She began her work in the Andes in 1969, carrying

out research in Bolivia and Peru over the next decade and a half. In the mid-1980s, she turned her attention to New England, and over the past couple of decades alternated her research focus between Chiapas and Pittsfield, Massachusetts. A common thread to this research was garnering local-level understandings of and responses to national and global processes of change. Another was the interplay between class, race, and gender.

June's contribution as an advocate, mentor, and scholar to building the interdisciplinary field of gender in Latin American studies was enormous. Her advocacy on behalf of the field began during her tenure (1971–1974) on the SSRC-ACLS Joint Committee on Latin American Studies. Expected to promote a new area of research, June rightly identified the study of women in Latin America as an undeveloped field. She successfully obtained funding for what developed as a two-pronged initiative under the rubric "Feminine Perspectives on Social Science Research in Latin America."

Co-led with Helen Safa and Elsa Chaney, the first phase began with networking, traveling throughout Latin America to identify those who were already carrying out research on women. Those identified were then invited to the first academic conference on the topic, held in Buenos Aires in 1974. An outcome of this conference was *Sex and Class in Latin America* (1976), edited by June and Helen, and the companion volume, *La mujer en América Latina* (1975), foundational texts in the field.

The second phase involved training a new generation of scholars to carry out research on women. Some 30 graduate students, mainly from US universities, but including a balance of Anglo Americans, Latinas, and Latin Americans, were

invited to a six-week, SSRC-funded Research Training Workshop held in Cuernavaca, Mexico, the summer of 1974. The professors, besides June, Helen, and Elsa, included a number of the women present at the Buenos Aires conference. Among the participants were Mary Goldsmith, Marianne Schmink, and Carmen Diana Deere, all of whom went on to write dissertations in this field, partly as a result of this workshop. Carmen Diana credits June for her penchant for “mixed methods,” the combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques in fieldwork, which was novel at the time in her field of agricultural economics. Following June’s model, she used family life histories to illustrate the dominant political economy in her subsequent book on the northern Peruvian peasantry.

June’s first publications on women included her contribution to *Sex and Class*, “A Critique of Social Science Roles in Latin America.” She also authored a background report on the integration of women in the development process for the first United Nations World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975. She was deeply involved in her research on the Bolivian mines in this period, and her first article on women that drew on her ethnographic work was “Resistance as Protest: Women in the Struggle of Bolivian Tin-Mining Communities” (in *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge*, edited by Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, 1975).

June and Carmen Diana’s friendship was forged around discussions of questions of class, the interaction of class and gender, and how these were framed by the broader political economy. It was facilitated by the fact that June had acquired a summer home in Plainfield, Massachusetts, not too far from Northampton/Amherst, where Carmen Diana was based. In the 1980s and 1990s, Plainfield became the site of many *tertulias* on June’s latest projects, which drew friends from throughout New England and beyond. She remembers lively discussions around the draft chapters of two of June’s other well-known anthologies, *Women, Men and the International Division of Labor* (1983), coedited with Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, and *Women and Change in Latin America* (1986), coedited with Helen. June’s introduction to this

latter collection summarizes the advances in the gender field over the previous decade; both Carmen Diana and Florence Babb contributed articles to this collection.

Florence remembers her great fortune in meeting June, Helen, and Elsa (and Carmen Diana) while transitioning from doctoral student to new faculty member in the early 1980s. From her first LASA meeting in Mexico City, when Helen stepped up as president, Florence counted on the mentorship of these pioneers in the field of gender studies in Latin America. While June’s earliest work in Mexico, *In the Eyes of the Ancestors* (1970, 1986), was also influential, her monograph, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (1979), garnered the accolades of anthropologists and Latin Americanists for its masterful analysis of men and women in the Bolivian mining centers, which elevated culture along with political economy, gender along with class.

When Florence turned to research in Nicaragua in the 1990s, and a decade later to comparative research that included the Chiapas region, she engaged with June’s work in new ways. Like June, she was increasingly drawn to the project of developing close ethnographic studies of locales understood in global contexts and of examining ethno-racial injustices along with inequalities based on gender, class, and sexuality. June’s work exemplified the sort of intersectional approach that feminists, and especially women of color, have called for since the 1980s. Moreover, she was a political activist who linked her research interests to her deep social commitments. Not surprisingly, she brought her critique closer to home as well, with her study of the community impact of the changing industrial order in Pittsfield, Massachusetts (*From Tank Town to High Tech*, 1989). She was well known as a scholar of social movements who stood in solidarity with those in struggle (*Social Movements: A Reader*, 2004).

June’s culminating work based on her research spanning a half century in Chiapas, *Mayan Visions* (2001), reflected on decades living and working with Mayas, from the vantage point of the period following the Zapatista uprising. Florence remembers the times she stayed at June’s place in

San Cristobal de las Casas, accepting June's great hospitality with visiting scholars, and the care June was taking as she prepared a 50-year retrospective of photographic images she would show in the community of Amatenango del Valle. She recalls sitting in June's library surrounded by bookshelves of her collected classics of the Chiapas area, and thinking there was surely nowhere more inspiring from which to be typing up notes on her own field research. This, as much as anything else, summons the openhearted way in which June so generously welcomed a host of researchers and fellow travelers to her home in Mexico.

In 2002, Lynn Stephen and Florence co-organized a session in honor of June and her work for the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, with papers published in 2005 as a special issue of *Critique of Anthropology* entitled "Autonomy in an Age of Globalization: The Vision of June Nash." The high point of both the session and the journal issue were the commentaries that June herself offered. She showed herself to be, as always, ready to debate critical issues around social injustices, wherever they are found. As we wrote in the issue, "the breadth of June's scholarship enables us to see how ethnography, and especially innovative ethnography that makes partners of research 'subjects,' can illuminate the essence of personhood that drives struggles for autonomy, self-actualization and social transformation."

As noted, a hallmark of June Nash's career has been her mentorship of women graduate students and young faculty. Lynn was first introduced to June Nash by her PhD advisor, Robert Hunt, in the mid-1980s, while writing her dissertation. June generously met with Lynn at an AAA meeting and shared her ideas for writing her dissertation. Her classic, coedited texts were important to Lynn as she wrote her first book focused on the dynamic intersection of class, ethnicity, and gender in an indigenous community in Oaxaca. June generously invited Lynn to contribute a chapter to the book *Crafts in the World Market* (1993), which solidified their intellectual and personal friendship.

Shortly after that book was published, the Zapatista Rebellion burst out of Chiapas, Mexico, and Lynn, June, and others who worked with indigenous

peoples in the south of Mexico were called on to comment and interpret what was happening in some US forums. Lynn was invited to the 1994 National Democratic Convention of the EZLN in Guadalupe Tepeyac in August of 1994 and subsequently engaged in a decade of research in Chiapas, following that event. During that period, she regularly saw June in Chiapas and also was hosted for meals and discussions at her house.

June regularly published about the Zapatista movement both in formal journal articles and in brief commentaries about repression on the ground, accomplishments, and particularly on the insights and activities of Zapatista women. She encouraged others to reach far beyond academic research and engage in activism as a part of their professional lives. We followed her example. For example, June published a short article titled "A Gendered View on Indigenous Autonomy Movements," in the *Anthropology News* of November 2003, highlighting the women's statement formulated at the fourth National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA). The short piece emphasized indigenous women's ideas about autonomous governance and decision-making. June published often in *Anthropology News* on social movements as well as on international and Latin American anthropology congresses and activities, and human rights concerns. At the same time, she published a series of academic articles drawing on the Zapatista movement, philosophy, and organizational strategies. In a 1997 article in the *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, June explored how news media covered the EZLN but also how the Zapatistas strategically used the media. She had a sabbatical in 1994-1995 funded by a MacArthur Foundation grant and from her home in San Cristóbal followed the activities of the Zapatistas and the reaction to them. She published several articles on the ways that Mayan cultural beliefs, practices, and strategies offered a new vision for radical democracy in the world, including in *American Anthropologist*. Ahead of her time, she examined the importance of water historically and how the water wars of the 1990s in Mexico and beyond were anticipated by the Zapatistas and other groups as they sought to protect water and subsoil rights in accords that were not honored and

instead received continued marketing from the Coca Cola company as militarization of Chiapas led to new roads and access.

Another of June's legacies from the 1990s to the present is the nurturing of a generation of women graduate students who have written creative and important ethnographies about the experiences of different kinds of women in Chiapas. Invited to provide short comments, these former students echo Lynn's and Florence's experiences and emphasize the building of intellectual and personal community, support, integrating activism with research, building alliances and networks with social movements and communities. Christine Eber wrote: "In Chiapas, Mexico during my initial year of PhD fieldwork I met June. She embraced me as a colleague on a long journey together.... Over the years her gift of accompaniment strengthened me greatly and encouraged me to extend it to others, from students to my Tsotsil-Maya women friends in Chiapas." Patty Kelly shared, "June Nash was a force: she took generations of graduate students from the classrooms of the City University of New York to the highlands of Chiapas and made us into anthropologists (as well as, in my case at least, a better human). Under her tutelage, our scholarship, our activism, and our intersectional feminism grew more complete." Christine Kovic commented, "June Nash was a generous mentor for many undergraduate and graduate students ... sharing her ideas, time, networks, home, stories, and wonderful sense of humor. In addition to her sharp feminist and political economy analyses, she was a model for creating alliances with local and regional organizations and combining activism and anthropology." Kelley Ready added, "I was honored to go to the field school that June held in Chiapas where she had done field work for years. Her willingness to share her contacts enabled us to gain access and insight into communities that were deeply divided by the Zapatista uprising.... Her generous support while I worked in El Salvador was matched by her sincere warmth in opening her apartment in New York and her home in Massachusetts to me and her other students."

June's dedication to her students, indigenous women, and indigenous social movements was reflected in one of her last publications, a 2015

review essay for the *Latin American Research Review*, titled "Indigenous Authors on Their Own History and Culture." The essay discusses three books exploring the meanings of indigenous identity in a context of globalization accompanied by recognition of multiculturalism in many Latin American nations. She emphasizes the continued importance of local organizing. The essay also illuminates the collaborative relationship between authors and their indigenous coauthors and interlocutors and allies—something she practiced in her own life and passed on to multiple generations of scholars and activists. //