

In Remembrance of Kevin J. Middlebrook

by **Cynthia McClintock** | George Washington University | mcclin@gwu.edu

Our dear colleague Kevin J. Middlebrook passed away on November 20, 2022. Although Kevin was born and raised in Iowa farm country and his family had no ties to academia or to Latin America, he became profoundly committed to the advancement of understanding of the hemisphere. His outstanding contributions came from his own thoughtful, rigorous research and from his extraordinary service to the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). At the time of Kevin's death, he was only seventy-two years old, and he had much more still to give to the study of Latin American politics, and to LASA, but he was struck down by complications from Addison's disease.

It was my honor to know Kevin for almost fifty years. We first got to know each other in 1974, when he was a PhD candidate at Harvard University and I was a PhD candidate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. We had both just returned from research in Peru, and we enjoyed many conversations about the concept of corporatism and its application to Peru's military government. It was clear to me that he was passionate about Latin American politics as well as extraordinarily insightful and diligent. And he had a wonderful sense of humor. Subsequently, Kevin went on to research in Mexico and then professorships at Indiana University, the University of California at San Diego, and, since 2012, University College London, but we always enjoyed getting together at LASA Congresses and, between them, conversing on the phone about Peruvian politics, Mexican politics, and of course our families and friends.

At times, Kevin's wife, Helga Baitenmann, of Mexican origin and herself a scholar, also attended LASA, and it was a joy for me to get

to know her and, through the years, follow the magnificent growth of their daughter, Mariel, and her many achievements. In one of my last conversations with Kevin, in early 2022, he highlighted his pride in Mariel and his joy that she was marrying Isaac Klimasmith.

Kevin's scholarship stood out not only for its thoroughness and rigor but also for its concern for social justice. As he delved into the politics of labor in Mexico, his hopes for workers' political voice and economic betterment shone through. These multiple commitments are very evident in his *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), in his coedited volume on the maquiladora industry in Mexico (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana of Mexico City, 2006), in his coauthored *Organized Labour and Politics in Mexico: Changes, Continuities, and Contradictions* (Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2012), and in his forthcoming book.

Kevin's forthcoming book, tentatively titled *The International Defense of Labor Rights: The North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation in Comparative Context*, is to be published by Columbia University Press and is likely to be his crowning achievement. I believe that Kevin's assessment of the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) is the most significant contribution to date to the intense controversies about labor rights provisions in free trade agreements. To assess the successes and failures of the NAALC, Kevin evaluates the timing, framing, and results of 39 grievance cases filed between 1994 and 2016. He considers in particular the tension between state sovereignty and internationally recognized labor rights and the implications of the NAALC institutional design

for the success or failure of grievance cases. And Kevin contributes a comparative perspective—consideration not only of the NAALC but also of alternative arenas for the protection of labor rights, such as cross-border labor solidarity campaigns, international norms agencies, generalized system of preferences agreements, regional economic institutions, and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Kevin has made major scholarly contributions beyond the politics of labor in Mexico. His edited volume *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico* (Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of London and the Center for US-Mexican Studies at the University of California at San Diego, 2004) and his coauthored *Mexico since 1980* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) are seminal texts. His coedited book *The United States and Latin America in the 1980s: Contending Perspectives on a Decade of Crisis* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986) and his edited volume *Conservative Parties, the Right, and Democracy in Latin America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) were pathbreaking empirically and conceptually; both were widely cited and used in the classroom.

Kevin's service to the profession was boundless and invaluable. He cared tremendously about his colleagues, about his students, and about LASA as an institution. At the University College London's website for tributes to Kevin, among the colleagues contributing condolences are former LASA president Eric Hershberg, LASA members Steve Levitsky and David Mares, and such prominent analysts of Mexican politics as Víctor Manuel Durand and John Womack. An immense number of former students wrote both of Kevin's knowledge and of his kindness and generosity with his time.

Kevin cared deeply about LASA and worked hard and well to advance the association. Kevin's contribution to LASA's financial health was especially significant. Among his many areas of expertise, he was knowledgeable about finance, and as treasurer from 2006 to 2010, he did a great deal to build LASA's investment portfolio (always with concern for social responsibility). In addition,

both Kevin and I served for many years on LASA's Development Committee, and we won a Special Recognition Award for our fundraising efforts (in particular for life memberships) in 2014.

Further, Kevin was intensely dedicated to the principles of democracy and human rights, and he strove ceaselessly to build respect for those principles. Kevin was at the forefront of the establishment of LASA's Guillermo O'Donnell Democracy Award and Lectureship, which stands out for many of us as a highlight of each year's Congress. Previously, from 1994 to 1997, he cochaired LASA's Human Rights and Academic Freedom Section. Also, in 2009, he cofounded LASA's Mexico Section and then cochaired it until 2012.

It will be with great sadness that in Vancouver at the Congress, I will not be able to have my traditional dinner with Kevin; it was always a highlight for me. But I also look forward to sharing memories of Kevin with my many friends and colleagues who will also be sorely missing him. We will be thinking of Helga and Mariel and wishing we could express our condolences in person. And we will be highlighting Kevin's enduring legacies—his immeasurable contributions to the understanding of Latin American politics, to his students, and to LASA. //