

Introduction

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Most of the papers published in this volume were presented orally at the tenth anniversary meeting of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers (CLAG), which was held April 10-13, 1980 in Muncie, Indiana. This meeting, in addition to celebrating the first decade of activity by CLAG, also provided a setting in which to examine the past ten years' research by geographers in Latin America and to delimit research goals for the 1980s. This, the published result of the tenth anniversary meeting, therefore offers a sense of the past as well as a whisper of the future.

There are relatively few geographers with research interests in Latin America, so the influence of geography in this region traditionally has been small. The few outstanding geographers who labored early against poverty, apathy, and inertia were able to accomplish little more than to sketch the outlines of the environmental and cultural patterns that shaped the present era of growth and change.

Today the problems and challenges of Latin America continue to dwarf the efforts of geographers even though our numbers are larger and our influence greater. The great unanswered questions surrounding the process of development with its concurrent environmental and social upheavals dominate the research of geographers within this diversified region. Some geographers look to the past to find answers; others look to the future. Both views are well represented in this volume.

Geography is an eclectic discipline and the range of geographic interests in Latin America is represented in the nearly fifty papers in this volume. The topics range from investigations of pre-Columbian agricultural technology to presentation of models for future location of biomass energy systems, and from evaluation of the geographic content of the work of a nineteenth-century German artist who travelled in Mexico and Chile to an inventory of contemporary research in Chilean geomorphology. Thus, perhaps more than any other volume, this collection of essays represents the broad range of interests and abilities displayed by the community of scholars that comprises the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers.

Two broad themes were accentuated at the tenth anniversary meeting of CLAG. The first, carried over from the first meeting in 1970, is the call for geographers to apply their skills to the solution of Latin America's multifarious problems. Ten years ago, the call for applied research was seen by some of our colleagues as a turning away from geography's traditional academic orientation and an attack on "pure research." These concerns have eased considerably during the decade of the 1970s, partly through an increasing awareness that research interests may not be separated into such categories as "applied" or "pure." There are papers in this volume that demonstrate the application of geographical knowledge to solving problems that may not have been envisioned by those who first developed the concepts utilized in their resolution.

The second theme is a sense of the cloudy future for geography in Latin America. In 1970, funds for research were still reasonably plentiful, graduate students still enrolled in large numbers, and students had reason to expect that upon graduation they would be able to apply their skills to Latin American problems. In 1980, none of these conditions prevail. Some problems are outside our control but bear directly on the profession. The present world economic decline, for example, will mean that geographers from the United States will find it more difficult to conduct research in Latin America and that fewer students will be drawn into geography through exposure in traditional university settings. Within Latin America, pressures will militate against all but the most clearly pragmatic research, presenting barriers to those who wish to conduct geographical investigations and apply spatial knowledge. Population growth threatens to destroy the social and economic gains made by the present generation of Latin Americans, and wholesale destruction of complex ecosystems may cause unforeseen and disastrous consequences for much of the region.

The survival of Latin American geography will depend on our ability to meet these challenges and others yet unknown. A new generation of native Latin American geographers is already hard at work in many countries of the region, often bringing fresh insights to the solution of old problems. Elsewhere, geographers from outside and within Latin America are joining with colleagues in other disciplines in unprecedented numbers to formulate broadbased attacks on both theoretical and applied problems. The positive results of these joint projects

are evident in some of the papers in this volume.

The Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers enters its second decade facing the necessity to alter established approaches while presented with evidence that many of our colleagues are already embarked on new paths that may prove even more productive than those of the past. In this sense, some of the papers in this volume summarize the progress made during an era of Latin American geography just reaching its end while others point the way to major future developments in a period just beginning.

The organizers of the tenth anniversary meeting of CLAG endeavored to have represented all significant research interests of Latin Americanist geographers. Participants in the first meeting were invited to present papers summarizing the progress in their areas of interest during the decade, and other colleagues, working in areas that were under-represented in the earlier meeting, were added to the list. Nevertheless, there are some gaps in the coverage of this volume that should be noted. Nowhere is there recognition of the excellent work conducted during the past ten years on periodic market and trade area analysis. Another area that has long been a focus of interest for geographers but which does not receive the attention it deserves is the spatial analysis of the various settlement and colonization movements, both planned and spontaneous, in Latin America (as distinct from the ecologic impact, which is discussed in several of the papers in this volume). One could also argue convincingly that several sub-fields of economic geography, especially industrial and transportation geography, were slighted. Recent work by David Robinson and his students at Syracuse University and by German and Mexican geographers with the Puebla project analyzing post-conquest historical geography is worthy of note, and the lack of a paper discussing the types of remote sensing data now available for much of Latin America and their utility for geographers is an unfortunate omission. Of perhaps greatest concern, however, is the relative lack of representation of geographers from Latin America in this volume. As the references following the papers will attest, our colleagues from Latin America have been active during the decade of 1970s, producing an impressive array of research on an increasingly sophisticated level. The decidedly norteamericano flavor of this volume is, we hope, much more a reflection of the difficulties of obtaining travel funding than it is of a lack of desire for increased communication and participation among Anglo- and Latin-American geographers.

Despite the lacunae noted above, the papers in this volume provide for geographers a summary of the fruits of their labors during what has been the most productive decade of research by Latin Americanist geographers in history, and for our colleagues in other disciplines they will reveal the extent and significance of research by geographers on Latin America. We now look forward to another decade of productive geographical research on Latin America that we expect to see reported in a volume celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers in 1990.

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