

Charles Howard Richardson
Central Michigan University

**The Political Geography of Latin America:
A Decade of American Research**

During the decade of the 1970s, Latin Americanist political geographers directed their skills toward a wide range of research topics, a trend pursued for the past several decades. This review updates the research of Latin Americanist political geographers for the decade of the 1960s (Richardson, 1971), and includes a brief description of more than 35 research contributions by American geographers including publications, dissertations, and papers delivered at professional meetings. Excluded from consideration here and from this bibliography are numerous contributions concerning political affairs by Latin Americanist political scientists, historians, and others. Political geographers considered at least eight research themes in the 1970s. These themes, with the number of studies included, are seen in Table 1.

Category	Number of Studies
Regional development	12
Nation-state	8
Border	7
Frontier and extra-territorial claim	5
International relations	4
Supra-national	2
Capital	1
Spatial perception	0

Regional development dominated all categories of investigation during the 1970s. Among these studies, planning for regional development was the most popular. In the area of planning, studies on Chile and Ecuador were national in scale. Rinehart focused on the institutionalization of the administrative system of Chile (Rinehart, 1972), while Giral-Bosca studied how planning methods were used in resource allocation within Ecuador (Giral-Bosca, 1973). Other planning studies were regional in scale. Jones developed a planning model for crop allocation within the western side of the Venezuelan Llanos (Jones, 1973). For

northwestern Dominican Republic, Green designed a planning model to encourage more efficient resource allocation on peasant farms (Green, 1974). Yet another study was spatially integrative in character. It focused on transportation planning within the Bío-Bío Region of Chile (Kannann, 1972).

Latin Americanist geographers pursued additional aspects of regional development during the 1970s. Researchers explored urban development in Argentina and a hydroelectric power network of a river basin that transects Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Ackerman formulated a strategy for development of Cuyo, Argentina (Ackerman, 1970). Sternberg investigated hydroelectric projects along the Paraná River (Sternberg, 1978). McIntosh investigated the non-functional characteristics of local government in Guatemala in terms of lag in regional development (McIntosh, 1974).

Yet another regional development topic was agrarian reform. Minkel and Thomas investigated the ways by which land reform affected development in Guatemala (Minkel and Thomas, 1979). Another investigator sought to find the extent of the influence of agrarian reform on small holder communities in Chile's Central Valley (Bloom, 1973).

Geographers also investigated various political aspects of the nation-state. The field of inquiry included decolonization, nation-building, electoral patterns, economic consequences of revolution, and the problems of mini-states. The decolonization of British Honduras and the creation of Belize captured the investigative efforts of two American geographers (DePena, 1976; Collins, 1973). Other researchers on nation-building centered their attention on Trinidad and the Bahamas. Vogt studied how a sense of political community evolved in rural Trinidad (Vogt, 1975). Spadoni studied how the state-idea of the Bahamas formed and spread throughout the islands (Spadoni, 1977). In Mexico, the question of post-revolutionary, social, political and economic inequality was worthy of investigation. Inequality pervades many areas of Mexico City. Eckstein studied part of the central city, a low cost housing project, and a peripheral squatter settlement (Eckstein, 1972). Another Latin Americanist geographer assessed the mini-states of the Caribbean, studying the level of living among Caribbean islanders (Tata, 1978). Lastly with respect to the nation-state, Patton examined the spatial distribution of the electoral system of Colombia (Patton, 1973) and Caviedes published a book entitled *The Politics of Chile: A Sociogeographical Assessment* (Caviedes, 1979).

During the 1970s, border studies by Latin Americanist geographers were considerably more popular than during the 1960s. The United States-Mexican was the most studied border, but other research included the Dominican-Haitian borderlands, the Chilean-Bolivian border, and the Brazilian-Colombian border, Jeffrey studied the historical geography of the United States' presence along the Arizona borderlands with Mexico in terms of air bases and other military establishments (Jeffrey, 1979). Carter chose to investigate law and order along the United States-Mexican border (Carter, 1979). Christopherson compared the border states of Mexico with their United States counterparts, indicating that a binational region has developed, a region that is cross-cultural and functionally linked across the border (Christopherson, 1979). Others studied land use and landscape changes along the Haitian-Dominican borderlands (Augelli, 1980; Palmer, 1976), with Augelli noting that border tension decreased as a result of Dominican development. Also there was an investigation of the long history of political negotiations over the proposed exchange of territory between Chile and Bolivia (Glassner, 1979). Lastly, among the border studies was an investigation of a small border town, Mitu, Colombia, located on the east central border of Colombia with Brazil (Hawkins, 1972).

There were five investigations within the category of frontier and extra-territorial claims during the 1970s. Historical geography was a common approach to political research and presentation. Owens analyzed the political influence of the Guarani Mission on the frontier life of the Río de la Plata area (Owens, 1978). Another researcher explored the Anglo-Hispanic conflict over the Bay Islands of Honduras (Davidson, 1972). The Guatemalan frontier was another setting for investigation. For example, McIntosh studied the development of the domestic frontier and also Guatemala's trade situation (McIntosh, 1978). A political regionalization designed for both the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico was another undertaking (Capone, 1973). Finally in this category was the investigation of the controversy between the United States and Peru over territorial waters (Martinez, 1974). Martinez considered juridical, political, economic, and strategic facets of the controversy.

International relations became an important category of study for Latin Americanist geographers during the 1970s. Geopolitical considerations, energy politics, and illegal immigration were of continuing relevance. Child analyzed geopolitical thinking in Latin America (Child, 1979). Also there was a study of

the geopolitics of the Caribbean Sea and vicinity (Fagor, 1973). New Mexican oil and gas discoveries influenced changing United States-Mexican relations (Richardson, 1979). Also there was a discussion of illegal immigration that saw it as the paramount foreign policy issue between the United States and Mexico (Beaton, 1979).

Besides the major political geographic categories of research by Latin Americanist geographers, there were two lesser ones: capital and supra-national studies. Supra-national research included a study of CACOM, the Central American Common Market (Glassner, 1978) in which it was noted that CACOM was a community in trouble. Another study focused on the West Indies during the period following sovereignty of the Islands (Lowenthal, 1973). Finally, Bolivia was the setting for a study of the removal of the capital from Sucre to La Paz (Gade, 1970).

The results of this review of Latin Americanist political research for the 1970s reveal that regional development and the nation-state were the most popular. Relatively unattractive to Latin Americanist researchers were issues within the capital and supra-national categories.

When compared with the decade of the 1960s, the research of the 1970s continued to focus on regional development, especially planning aspects. There were secondary interests in agrarian reform and river basin projects. The 1970s brought more studies in the nation-state category. Nation-wide research topics involved such issues as barriers to political decentralization, patterns of electoral development, and nation-wide strategies for development. The combined categories of border, frontier, and extra-territorial claims grew four-fold in research interest in the 1970s compared to the decade of the 1960s. International relations attracted only a few who were interested in Latin American geopolitics and United States-Mexican relations. Other categories such as capitals and supra-national research attracted little interest during the 1970s. This wide spectrum of research brightens the prospects for the field of political geography as it contributes to the growth of new knowledge and understanding of Latin America.

References Cited

Ackerman, W. V. "A Spatial Strategy of Development for Cuyo, Argentina." (Doctoral Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1970).

Augelli, J.P. "Nationalization of Dominican Borderlands," *The Geographical Review*, Vol. 70 (1980), 19-35.

Bloom, R.J. "The Influence of Agrarian Reform on Small Holder Communities in Chile's Central Valley, 1965-70." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1973).

Capone, D.L., and A.F. Ryan. "The Regional Sea: A Theoretical Division of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea" *Transactions of the Miami Geographical Society*, Vol. 3 (1973), 1-9.

Carter, M. "Law, Order and the Border: Transnational Co-operation and Conflict on the U.S.-Mexico Border." (Paper presented at the Mexico City National Council for Geographic Education meeting, 1979).

Caviedes, C. *The Politics of Chile: A Sociogeographical Assessment*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979).

Child, J. "Geopolitical Thinking in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 14 (1979), 89-111.

Collins, C.O. "The Political Geography of Nation Building: The Case of Belize." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Kansas, 1973).

DaPena, R. "Belize: Prospects for Independence and Sovereignty." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1976).

Davidson, W.V. "Historical Geography of the Bay Islands, Honduras: Anglo-Hispanic Conflict in the Western Caribbean." (Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1972).

Eckstein, S.E. "The Poverty of Revolution: A Study of Social, Economic, and Political Inequality in a Center City Area, A Squatter Settlement and Low Cost Housing Project in Mexico City." (Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 1972).

Fagor, D.O. "The Geopolitics of the Caribbean Sea and Its Adjacent Land." (Doctoral Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1973).

Gade, D.W. "Spatial Displacement of Latin American Seats of Government: From Sucre to La Paz as the National Capital of Bolivia," *Revista Geográfica (Mexico)*, No. 73 (1970), 42-57.

Giral-Bosca, J.A. "Allocation of Resources through Planning: The Ecuadorian Experience." (Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 1973).

Glassner, M.I. "CACOM: A Community in Trouble," *Focus*, Vol. 29 (1978), 12-16.

Glassner, M.I. "The Proposed Exchange of Territory Between Chile and Bolivia." (Paper presented at the Mexico City National Council for Geographic Education meeting, 1979).

Green, M.W. "Planning Models for Efficient Resource Allocation on Peasant Farms: Some Applications in Northwestern Dominican Republic." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Florida, 1974).

Hawkins, H.G. "Mitu, Colombia: A Geographical Analysis on an Isolated Border Town." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Florida, 1972).

Jeffrey, C.F. "The U.S. Military Presence on the Arizona-Mexico Border." Paper presented at the Mexico City National Council for Geographic Education meeting, 1979).

Jones, R.C. "A Target Planning Model for Regional Crop Allocation: The Western Llanos of Venezuela." (Doctoral Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1973).

Kanaan, N.J. "A Geographic Study in Transport Planning: The Case of the Bío-Bío Region in Chile." (Doctoral Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1972).

Lowenthal, D. *The Aftermath of Sovereignty; West Indian Perspectives*. (Garden City: Anchor, 1973).

Martinez, J.D. "The U.S.-Peruvian Territorial Waters Controversy: Juridical, Political, Economic, and Strategic Considerations." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1974).

Mcintosh. T.L. "Local Government Development and Development Lag in

Guatemala: Spatial and Process Considerations." (Doctoral Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1974).

Mcintosh, T.L. "International Economics and Domestic Frontier Development: The Example of Guatemala." (Paper presented at the New Orleans Association of American Geographers meeting, 1978).

Mcintosh, T.L. "Barriers to the Utilization of Local Government Decentralization in Guatemala." (Paper presented at the East Lansing meeting of the Midwest Association for Latin American Studies, 1979).

Owens, D.J. "Rio de la Plata Political Geography: The Guaraní Mission Influence." (Paper presented at the New Orleans Association of American Geographers meeting, 1978).

Palmer, E.C. "Land Use and Landscape Change Along the Dominican-Haitian Borderlands." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Florida, 1976).

Patton, O.C. "Spatial Dimensions in Electoral Development: The Case of Colombia." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1973).

Richardson, C.H. "American Research on the Political Geography of Latin America," in B. Lentnek, R.L. Carmin, and T.L. Martinson (eds.) *Geographic Research on Latin America: Benchmark 1970; Proceedings, Conference of Latin American Geographers, Vol. 1.* (Muncie: Ball State University, 1971), 288-298.

Richardson, C.H. "Energy Politics in the Americas: Changing United States-Mexican Relations." (Paper presented at the Mexico City National Council for Geographic Education meeting, 1979).

Rinehart, J.C. "Regional Planning in Chile: A Study of the Institutionalization of an Administrative System." (Doctoral Dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 1972).

Spadoni, R.B. "National Identity Formation and Diffusion in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 1977).

Sternberg, R. "The Paraná: Golden Waters-Leaden Politics." (Paper presented at the New Orleans Association of American Geographers meeting, 1978).

Tata, R.J. "Poor and Small Too: Caribbean Mini-States," *Focus (American Geographical Society)*, Vol. 29 (1978), 1-11.

Vogt, R.C. "The Development of a Sense of Political Community in a Rural Setting: Nation-Building in Trinidad." (Doctoral Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1975).