

The Laboring and Middle-Class Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean: Historical Trajectories and New Research Directions*

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Only in the last thirty years did the study of labor emerge as an academic specialization within and about Latin America and the Caribbean, a region where the political importance of wage-earning laborers was widely recognized if little studied. By now, however, the study of the working peoples of Latin America has established itself throughout the region with the cohering of a generation of labor studies specialists within and across disciplines and countries.¹ Although history was not among the pioneering disciplines, labor history has rapidly gained ground in the last two decades in this vast region of 533 million people that is marked by compelling similarities *and* starkly differentiated national peculiarities. Although we still lack a convincing synthesis, the region's labor historiography stands at an exciting moment of maturation and transition, with an increasing breadth of studies of the diversity of its laboring and middle class peoples in their distinct national contexts.²

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1. This chapter complements rather than repeats my recent interdisciplinary surveys of Latin American and Brazilian labor studies as well as the 1997 essays, co-authored with Daniel James, that reviewed the theoretical, conceptual, and historiographical issues involved with the study of women workers in Latin America, with particular attention to questions of oral history methodology: French, "Latin American Labor Studies Boom", French and Fortes, *Urban Labor History*, French and James, *Gendered Worlds*. Also see the reflections on the "new labor history" of Latin America offered in James, "Latin American Labor History".
2. Latin American labor history has recently seen the publication of both an introductory English-language textbook and an edited collection for classroom use (McCre-

As befits the first stage of the quest for a global labor history, this chapter explores the political and intellectual dynamics that give originality to labor's trajectory in Latin America and the Caribbean, when compared with the paradigmatic North Atlantic cases. In particular, it delineates the transnational intellectual milieu within which the study of labor emerged, especially the link between populism, workers' movements, and the political salience of the popular classes. It also traces an initial disjuncture between external (i.e. Latin Americanist) and intra-regional (Latin American) inquiry, largely in the social sciences, that would be followed by significant advances in their progressive integration into a common intellectual enterprise since the 1980s. Although far from seamless, an increasingly interwoven community of Latin American labor historians has by now created a dynamic arena of research that is, if still unevenly, simultaneously global and transnational as well as intra-regional and national. While appreciating our accomplishments, this chapter ends by criticizing the restrictiveness of our current foci and identifies lacunae for future research. The pursuit of new directions, it argues, does not mean that we should abandon, replace, or forsake traditional labor topics or approaches; rather, it offers us the opportunity to further enrich and broaden the scope of our research as we pursue a more ambitious and all-encompassing historical narrative of the region's working and middle classes. In making a regional trajectory politically legible to an international audience, this chapter places Latin America and the Caribbean into a larger comparative context, as a contribution to the creation of a global labor history capable of meeting the challenges of a new millennium.

ery, *The Sweat of Their Brow*; Peloso, *Work, Protest, and Identity*). Given the problem of accessibility for non-Latin Americanists, especially those outside of the Americas, I will discuss mostly English language books. The distortion entailed by this decision does not, however, mean that the most significant or path-breaking work is being produced by foreign scholars (despite the many advantages they enjoy in terms of research support and academic infrastructure). Indeed, works by non-Brazilians, for example, made up only one sixth of the 350 most significant articles and books chosen for annotation in a recent bibliographical publication on Brazilian urban labor (French and Fortes, *Urban Labor History*, p. 18).

Origins and the Study of “Modern” Labor in Latin America and the Caribbean

The region known today as “Latin America and the Caribbean” has been integral to the five centuries that saw the rise of Europe and the North Atlantic world to a position of unparalleled world power through military conquest and economic predominance. Yet there are deep ironies involved with the very use of a term like “Caribbean”, derived from the Caribs, indigenous peoples who were exterminated during the Spanish settlement of the islands that they had erroneously labeled the “West Indies”. The term “Latin America” is a byproduct of nineteenth century French imperialism whose conquest and occupation of Mexico (1861–1867) was justified as an expression of the common brotherhood of Latin-derived language speakers vis-a-vis “Anglo-Saxon” nations like England and the United States. Although rejected by Latin Americans in the 1860s, this discursive construct began to take hold after the Spanish–American War of 1898, when political and intellectual elites grappled with the increasingly aggressive U.S. economic and military interventionism in the region.

If the region’s national languages attest to its colonial inheritance (Spanish, Portuguese, English, French/Creole, and Dutch), the region’s Indo-Afro-Latin demographic composition speaks to the powerful contributions of the subaltern, including the Native American population that numbered between 15 and 25 million at contact. Even today, indigenous peoples make up a majority of the population in Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Bolivia while tens of millions continue to speak native languages (Nahuatl in Mexico, Mayan languages in Mexico and Guatemala, and Quechua and Aymara in the Andean region).³ As for the eleven million Africans brought to the New World as slaves (90 per cent to non-North American areas), the presence of their descendants has marked the history of both the hemisphere’s richest capitalist society, the United States, and its only successful

3. For insights into the lives and political struggles of contemporary indigenous speakers, see the oral history by Condori Mamani, Gelles, and Escobar, *Andean Lives* on Perú and Gould, *To Die in This Way* on Nicaragua; the fine collection of documents on the background and fight of the contemporary Zapatista movement in Mexico by Womack, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, and the political *testimonio* of Burgos-Debray, *I, Roberta Menchú*, and the surrounding controversy (Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú*) and responses (Arias, *Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*). Mallon has recently produced both an oral history of a female Mapuche activist (Reuque Paillalef and Mallon, *When a Flower Is Reborn*) and a scholarly monograph on the struggle of Chile’s indigenous peoples (*Courage Tastes of Blood*).

socialist revolution, Cuba. These two countries, along with Brazil, would be the last in the hemisphere to abolish slavery during the years between 1863 and 1888. Indeed, un-free labor in the New World would prove central to the ideological battles that defined an emerging world of capitalist "free labor", going back to the French and Haitian Revolutions through the abolitionist struggles of the nineteenth century.⁴ In much of the English, Creole/French, and Spanish-speaking Caribbean, the population is composed predominantly of peoples of African descent (overwhelmingly so in countries such as Jamaica) as are countries like Brazil (which is at least 45 per cent black or mixed).⁵

The European-descended component of the population not only includes settler/immigrants from the Iberian peninsula, but also a massive immigration from Italy starting in the late nineteenth century that made Buenos Aires, Argentina and São Paulo, Brazil the second and third largest New World destination of Italian emigrants. The region has also has a significant population of Eastern European origin (the world's third largest concentrations of Jews is found in Buenos Aires, Argentina),⁶ a small but significant immigration from the Middle East, and close to a million Japanese and their descendants are to be found in São Paulo, Brazil, having arrived with Japanese government support during the 1920s and 1930s. In the English-speaking Caribbean, the continued demands of plantation agriculture led the British after abolition to bring indentured laborers from the Indian subcontinent – comprising a significant part of the population in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago – while Chinese were imported for the same purpose, in lesser numbers, to Mexico, Peru, and even Cuba. To complete the mix, there is even a widespread and ethnically distinct Eng-

4. The theme stretches from James, *Black Jacobins*, in the 1930s to Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, the collection by Cooper, Holt, and Scott, *Beyond Slavery*, and Dubois, *Colony of Citizens*.
5. A rich historical literature has now begun to emerge on the labor and political history of African-descended workers in Latin America, in particular the pioneering monograph by Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*, as well as his comprehensive one volume survey *Afro-Latin America*. In addition, there are a number of interesting oral histories, including several from Cuba: Montejo, Barnet and Hill, *Biography of a Runaway*, Castillo and Castillo, *Reyita*, Sarduy and Stubbs, *Afro-Cuban Voices*.
6. For a brief introduction to the region's immigration, see Mörner and Sims, *Adventurers and Proletarians* as well as specialized studies of European immigrants to Argentina, among them Bilsky, *Semana Trágica*, Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise*, and Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*. There are also two collections of correspondence between Europe and the New World: Baily and Ramella, *One Family, Two Worlds*, and Kula, *Writing Home*.

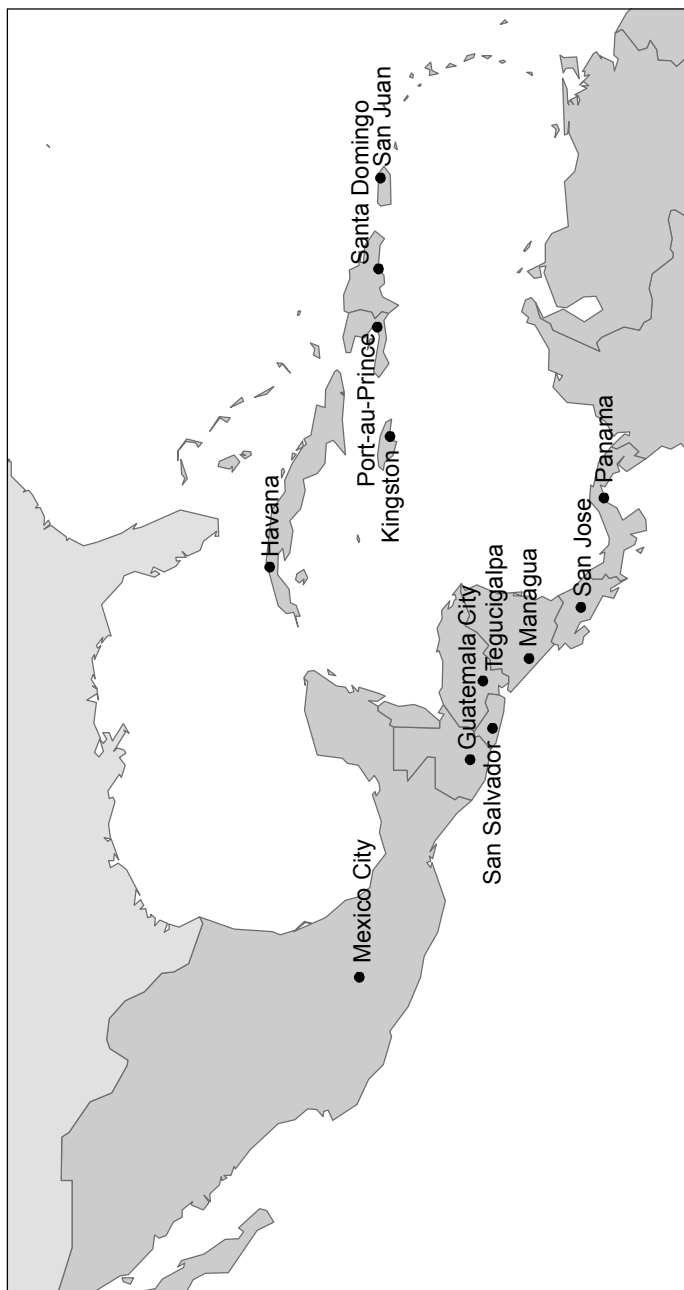
lish-speaking West Indian diaspora throughout the Spanish-speaking circum-Caribbean region.⁷ Meanwhile, tens of millions of Latin Americans, especially Mexicans and Central Americans, have migrated to the United States where they constitute a minority population almost equal to that of African-Americans. These new “Hispanic”, “Latino”, or Spanish-speaking immigrant groups are the subject of an extensive and dynamic scholarship as well as a key to a new era of political and trade union activism in the United States.

Latin America and the Caribbean is also marked by socio-economic diversity, including desperately poor mono-crop exporting nations, diversified agrarian-industrial economies like Brazil (among the tenth largest in the world), and one country (Argentina) that was as wealthy as parts of the “First World” in the early twentieth century, at the height of its booming meat and wheat exports. The largest nations – especially Brazil (with a population of 177 million in 2003), Mexico (102 million), and Argentina (37 million) – have experienced a significant degree of industrial development and economic modernization. Despite immense internal disparities, the larger countries of the region like Brazil stand in the top third of many international classifications of nations. This should not, however, lead one to overlook the intra-regional gaps. Argentina, for example, stands at the high end of the region in terms of Gross National Income (GNI) per-capita; despite the precipitous economic decline caused by the implosion of the neo-liberal model since 2001, Argentina’s GNI in 2003 still stood at US\$3,810 (compared to US\$7,470 in 2000), which was well above Brazil at US\$2,720 but below Mexico with US\$6,230; Peru’s stands at US\$2,140 and Haiti is, by far the poorest, at US\$400. Overall, the entire region is seventy-five percent urban while possessing two of the world’s five largest urban conglomerations: Mexico City and São Paulo (approximately 17 million inhabitants each).⁸

In general, the quality of the region’s statistics vary enormously and data on trade union memberships is especially problematic, but a glance at some estimates allows us to gauge the relative importance of organized labor in

7. For further reading on these circum-Caribbean migratory streams, see Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company*; Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*; Harpelle, *West Indians of Costa Rica*, Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*; Petras, *Jamaican Labor Migration*; Putnam, *Company They Kept*, and Richardson, *Panama Money*.

8. The World Bank estimates are for 2003 and can be consulted at: <http://www.worldbank.org/data/countrydata/countrydata.html>; *The Economist Pocket World*, p. 17.



Map 12. The Caribbean, twentieth century

contemporary Latin America, especially in comparison to the countries of the global North. According to the ILO's *World Labour Report 1997-1998*, there were an estimated 33 million union members in Latin America and the Caribbean, roughly 17 per cent of the regional labor force. Such global figures mask, however, the wide divergences between countries.

Table 1. Population, Union Membership, and Union Density in the Twelve Largest Countries of North, South, and Central America in the mid-1990s

Countries	Estimated Population 1996	Union Member- ship (UM)	Column 1 UM as % of non- agricultural labor force	Column 2 UM as % of wage and salary earners	Column 3 UM as % of formal sector wage earners
United States	269 million	16,360,000	13%	14%	
Brazil	161 million	15,205,000	32%	44%	66%
Mexico	93 million	7,000,000	31%	43%	73%
Colombia	36 million	840,000	7%		17%
Argentina	35 million	3,200,000	25%	39%	66%
Canada	30 million	4,128,000	31%	37%	
Peru	24 million	442,000	8%		18%
Venezuela	22 million	1,153,000	15%	17%	33%
Chile	14 million	684,000	16%		33%
Ecuador	12 million	300,000	10%		22%
Cuba	11 million	2,772,000		70%	
Guatemala	11 million	89,000	4%		8%

Source: ILO [International Labour Organization]. *World Labour Report 1997-98. Industrial Relations, Democracy, and Social Stability* (Geneva: ILO, 1997), pp. 259, 235, 237.

The ILO estimated that union membership in the 1990s stood at over 25 per cent of the non-agricultural labor force in four of the ten largest countries (25 per cent in Argentina, 32 per cent in Brazil, 31 per cent in Mexico, and 70 per cent in socialist Cuba), 10 to 20 per cent in an additional three (Chile, Ecuador, and Venezuela), and at less than 10 per cent in another three (Colombia, Guatemala, Peru). These are by no means unrespectable figures given trade union density at the time in Japan (19 per cent), the Netherlands (22 per cent), the United Kingdom (26 per cent), Germany (30 per cent), and Canada (31 per cent), not to mention union membership in the United States and France that stood at only 13 per cent and 6 per cent

respectively. Given the stark structural differences between the economies of North and South, it is important to observe how union density increases as you shift from the standard measurement in column 1, based on the percentage of union members in the non-agricultural workforce, to those that measure its share of all wage and salary earners (column 2). When calculated as a percentage of “formal” sector wage earners (column 3), the figure for Latin American and Caribbean countries doubles in comparison to the first measurement because an enormous proportion of the economically active population, even in the cities, works outside of the “formal” sectors that are, in theory, regulated by the government and whose members are eligible for certain social rights and benefits.⁹

Having largely gained its national independence in the 1820s, the new countries of Latin America were profoundly shaped by their location on the near periphery of the North Atlantic world. Dependent for trade and markets upon England (free trade imperialism), the region’s dominant classes and intellectual elites were shaped by the ideologies and constitutional forms of European liberalism (especially in its more conservative versions). Serious engagement with what was known as the “social question”, dating back to the post-World War I era, took the shape of an immense literature that attempted to establish a legal framework to contain the labor “threat”, anticipatory initiatives that were deeply influenced by North Atlantic legal trends and ideologies. For a Chilean reformer like Moisés Poblete Troncoso, a pioneering inter-war proponent of social legislation, Latin America was arriving at a stage already experienced by earlier industrialized countries (with the unique advantage of being able to learn from their errors). At the same time, he felt constrained in 1942 to rebut those “superficial observers” who criticized the “spirit of imitation” or “exoticism” they saw in Latin America’s new social legislation. Although extensive, the institutional/juridical focus of this generation of thinkers lacked, for the most part, the empirical and sociological dimension of the social scientific studies that began to proliferate after World War II.¹⁰

9. ILO, *World Labour Report 1997-98*, pp. 235, 237. See McGuire, *Peronism without Perón*, p. 269 for earlier data on union memberships, drawn from country-specific specialist sources, for eight Latin American countries with approximately 25 million members.

10. Poblete Troncoso, *Evolución del Derecho Social*, p. 12. On the outlook and background of the early twentieth century labor law reformers in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, see Suriano, *Cuestión Social en Argentina*; French, *Drowning in Laws*; Morris, *Elites, Intellectuals, and Consensus*, and Grez Toso (ed.), “*Cuestión Social*”. On the phases to be

The earliest study of workers, especially urban workers, in Latin America goes back to the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution of 1911-1917, the first of the great twentieth-century social revolutions, which opened the way for the emergence of the popular classes, both urban and rural, as subjects and objects of state action and political dispute.¹¹ Throughout the region, the impact of proletarianization, urbanization, and industrialization was greatly enhanced by the generalized crisis of legitimacy after 1929 that undermined existing forms of oligarchic parliamentarianism in what were, at that time, still predominantly agrarian societies. The question of workers – or the “social question” as it was known – also exercised a great symbolic power of attraction in these dependent societies because of its links to modernity, in both its North Atlantic/imperial and its Russian/communist revolutionary forms. The entry of the masses, whether organized or unorganized, and their interests into political participation and the calculations of policy-makers was vital in shaping the political system of the region as a whole – a process that occurred in waves but was consolidated, in much of Latin America, under the aegis of populists and populism in the decades after 1945.¹²

seen in the earlier historiography, see Morris and Córdova, *Bibliography of Industrial Relations in Latin America*, p. xi.

11. Mexico stands to one side in this essay precisely because of its long history of studies of workers since the Revolution, the unique scope and depth of that literature, and the peculiarities of that country's *sui generis* political trajectory and intellectual culture. For pioneering studies from 1934 and 1938, by a US and Mexican scholar respectively, see Clark, *Organized Labor in Mexico* and Díaz Ramírez, *Apuntes sobre el movimiento obrero*, as well as the fine historical monograph by Anderson, *Outcasts*. See Middlebrook's *Paradox of Revolution* for an excellent overall narrative of labor in post-revolutionary Mexico. Suffice it to say that no other country has such a wide, extensive, and rich tradition of studies of unions and the workers movement, be it in a small railroad town, a provincial capital, or Mexico City (for a recent monographic contribution, see Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens*). For an example, see the pioneering 1956-57 articles on early textile strikes prior to 1910 by social historian González Navarro, *Las Huelgas Textiles en el Porfiriato*. Only in Mexico, for example, does one find a developed use of photographic sources in the writing of labor history, including examinations of the methodological issues involved: Mraz, “Fotografía Histórica” and “Video-historia y la Clase Obrera”.
12. For pioneering surveys by non historians, see Alexander, *Labor Relations*, and Poblete Troncoso and Burnett, *Rise of the Latin American Labor*, as well as the first synthetic historical works by Spalding, *Organized Labor*, and Bergquist, *Labor in Latin America*. Political scientists Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*, offer a sweeping comparative approach to the region; on Brazil and Argentina, see French, *The Brazilian Workers' ABC* and James, *Resistance and Integration*.

Our founding understanding of the place of labor in this populist Latin America was decisively shaped by the fact that the formative academic literature was produced by social scientists, especially sociologists, whether foreign or domestic. Driven by presentist concerns, these early scholars tended to perceive the labor question as a series of puzzles that were regarded, for the most part, as deviations from what was taken to be “modern” North Atlantic developmental sequences and norms.¹³ Given the newness of industrial wage labor in the largest Latin American countries, it is by no means surprising that the initial search for understanding was based largely on the “foreign” example offered by the already industrialized world. At the same time, it is worth recalling where scholarly understanding stood in the “industrialized countries” like the United States as late as the 1930s. Early in that decade, U.S. scholar Dudley Maynard Phelps was dispatched to the ABC countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile plus Uruguay) to study the implantation of industrial branch enterprises by U.S. companies, one of the first studies of international capital mobility by what will come to be known as transnational or multinational corporations. In his richly empirical study, Phelps still felt constrained to address the question of whether or not modern industrial production was feasible in countries that were culturally and often racially and ethnically distinct, in addition to standing at far lower levels of socio-economic development (including literacy).¹⁴ To the question of whether such peoples could adapt to modern machinery and the demands of industrial wage labor, Phelps answered affirmatively in an implicit rejection of still-influential racial and geographical theories that interpreted industrialization as a phenomenon restricted solely to certain superior peoples and climates.

It is striking that the discipline of history was not in the forefront of the pioneering phase of the labor studies boom in most of Latin America, unlike sociologists who began to tackle this politically-fraught dimension of contemporary Latin American societies after World War II. Despite some individual exceptions, the late arrival of historians may have been prompted in part by skepticism about the writing of contemporary history as well as a certain accommodationist posture compared to a more daring and, in Latin America, increasingly Marxist-inflected sociology.¹⁵ This is

13. See the later criticisms by sociologists in Katzman and Reyna, *Fuerza del Trabajo*, p. 236, 264.

14. Phelps, *Migration of Industry to South America*, pp. 90–91, 101, 239.

15. In sociology, see Germani, *Política y sociedad*; Lopes, “O Ajustamento do Trabalho”; in U.S. Latin Americanist history in the 1960s, see Bailly, *Labor, Nationalism, and*

certainly the case of Brazil where, as José Albertino Rodrigues observed in 1968, historians had long preferred the study of the distant colonial past and neglected the republican period and contemporary events. Their “individualistic and political-military preoccupations”, he went on, also contributed to a neglect of economic and social factors (only in the 1930s would such topics come into focus but even the innovative Marxist historiography of Caio Prado Junior slighted labor, free and unfree, as such). Yet these lacunae were not enough in themselves, Rodrigues went on, to explain the non-existence of a concern for urban workers. Equally important was a strong dose of class prejudice, “generated by our patriarchal and slavocratic traditions”, that combined with a fear that workers might “threaten the bases of that same traditional society” (of which the middle classes were an important if dependent component).¹⁶ “Today Latin Americans are in better conditions”, observed the Uruguayan sociologist Carlos Rama in 1967, “to understand the need for social history”, given the advances of the social sciences and the discrediting of “the classic ‘history of the Heroes’, if not ‘of the Presidents’, to which the majority of Latin American historical studies were unfortunately reduced”.¹⁷

Such constraints did not burden the dynamic North American school of international industrial sociology that thrived after World War II. Shaped by the enhanced political and social weight accorded workers coming out of the U.S. New Deal era, a diverse group of social scientists carried out extensive research in Latin America in the two decades after 1945.¹⁸ The largest part of the earliest sociological literature on workers in Latin America, recalled Faletto, “came from U.S. investigators [...] and their studies and essays began to spread in Latin America, leading to the first reflections” on these issues by local scholars.¹⁹ Affirming the adaptability of all peoples to modern industrial development, this North American school of industrial

Politics and Ashby, *Organized Labor and the Mexican Revolution*, and in U.S. political science Payne, *Labor and Politics*.

16. Rodrigues, *Sindicato e Desenvolvimento*, pp. 2–4.

17. Rama, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero y Social*, p. 10.

18. See Moore, “Primitives and Peasants in Industry”; Form and Blum, “Selected Annotated Bibliography” in *Industrial Relations and Social Change in Latin*, pp. 149–169 for the region as a whole; Moore, *Industrialization and Labor* on Mexico. See also the studies carried by Tumin and Feldman, *Social Class and Social Change in Puerto Rico*, and Reynolds and Gregory, *Wages, Productivity and Industrialization in Puerto Rico*, who examined the US colonial dependency of Puerto Rico as it underwent rapid industrial development in the 1950s as part of “Operation Bootstrap”.

19. Katzman and Reyna, *Fuerza Del Trabajo*, p. 266.

sociology soon extended its reach to other parts of the “under-developed world”, while giving particular prominence to the next practical question in this logical sequence: the new workers’ “incomplete commitment” to their wage-earning status (a non-Marxist angle of approach to the question of proletarianization explored in the influential works of Wilbert Moore).²⁰ Although, modernization theory “had fewer adherents on the Latin American continent than outside, the theory nevertheless helped shape many of the developments and political policies of the 1950s and 1960s”.²¹

Informed by a globalizing paradigm, this U.S. sociological literature contributed to and anticipated the full-blown modernization theory that would emerge by the 1960s, which was “perhaps the most explicit attempt to establish a particular historical trajectory as a universal standard”.²² Testing the limits of such unidirectional assumptions, a young anthropologist Manning Nash could be said to have turned the problem on its head with his 1953–1954 study of the town of Cantel, Guatemala.²³ *Machine Age Maya* showed how a large-scale textile factory, founded in the 1890s, had proven to be eminently adaptable to the local culture of the Mayan-speaking villagers. Factory production, he demonstrated, was not inherently disruptive (at least in the long run) and could easily be domesticated by local realities. His work also suggested, however, that it was not machinery that produced social change but rather the social and political developments in Guatemala under the left-leaning populist governments that came to power in 1944.²⁴ By the time of his field work, the regime’s mobilizing thrust had begun to undermine traditional civic-religious hierarchies among the local Maya through the promotion of trade union organization, which fed the ambitions of younger village men and set them against their elders. Yet even this innovative finding – which explained the local indigenous establishments’ embrace of the CIA-backed counter-revolution of 1954 – was, in turn, assimilated into a different but again uni-directional notion of devel-

20. Centeno and Lopez-Alves, *Other Mirror*, pp. 5–6.

21. Moore and Feldman, *Labor Commitment and Social Change*.

22. Centeno and Lopez-Alves, *Other Mirror*, pp. 5–6.

23. Nash, *Machine Age Maya*. For Phelps, the “analysis of the changes in culture patterns” resulting from industrial production, “no matter how significant they may be”, fell outside the confines of his 1936 study *Migration of Industry*, p. 288.

24. Recent research has yielded a rich portrait of the domestic politics and social mobilization that characterized the reformist populist governments that ruled Guatemala until the CIA-sponsored coup of 1954: Forster, *The Time of Freedom*; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*; Grandin, *Last Colonial Massacre*; Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside*.

opment: that of an inevitable “modernizing” political sequence that followed the trajectory of Western Europe or the United States.

The utilization of foreign lenses to interpret local realities, it should be emphasized, was not unique to one political outlook nor was it avoidable or necessarily detrimental in its practical impact. Important sectors of the region’s political and intellectual elites at mid-century combined a profound rejection of the traditional and backward, powerful aspirations for modernity and national development (whether in its North Atlantic or Soviet variants), and a heightened degree of nationalist assertiveness (the latter point was strongly emphasized by Phelps in *Migration of Industry*). Jostling for space within the intellectual milieu of the 1930s through 1960s were a number of ideas, of distinct political origins, whose differences were not necessarily clear to contemporary Latin American thinkers. On the left there was a “classical” Western European Marxist narrative of the formation and rise of a class-conscious industrial working class which could be linked to either a revolutionary Jacobin or a more reformist-style modernizing imperative. There was also a “Bolshevik” vision of state-led industrial development that would, in theory, combine the struggles for social and national liberation with the fight against feudalism and imperialism. Yet the Latin American story could also be told as the slow rise to citizenship that inevitably accompanies economic and political development, a process that would eventually produce modern stable democracies – inevitable not in the sense of an inexorable social and political process without struggle but conceived instead as a “natural” side effect of the spread of wage labor relations, democratizing ideologies, education, and “rising expectations”. In all fields of endeavor, foreign models were used, as they had been in the past, to understand and imagine Latin America as well as something to emulate.²⁵

Such local appropriations of “foreign” political and intellectual schemes, however, still operated almost exclusively within domestic contexts with very little *regional* thinking across national boundaries (at best, the dominant ideas worked as analogies). At mid-century, the attempt to *think* Latin American social struggle and politics as a regional unity found its clearest expression in the epic 1950 poem “Canto General” by Pablo Neruda, the Chilean communist Nobel-Prize winner.²⁶ But in a strictly academic vein, the quest for such an ambitious panoramic vision demanded resources that

25. Centeno and Lopez-Alves, *Other Mirror*, p. 5.

26. Neruda, *Canto General*.



Map 13. South America, twentieth century

were available to only a handful of U.S. scholars, part of a new post-war generation of Latin American specialists, most notably Robert Alexander. An economist by training and political scientist-qua-historian by vocation, Alexander would publish several dozen books, starting in the early 1950s, that addressed the hottest contemporary issues – Peronism in Argentina, the Bolivian Revolution of 1952, and the Venezuelan Revolution of 1958. He was also the first to publish important books on labor, as well as sketching out the region's history of leftist politics.²⁷

Translated quickly into Spanish, Alexander's works – which reflected his incessant traveling and interviewing – defined the historical and contemporary terrain for most foreign and many Latin American observers (even when they disagreed with his conclusions). In its empirical richness and practical insight, Alexander's work outstripped the contribution of his fellow anti-communist activists who wrote about Latin America, such as the German former-Lovestonite Boris Goldenberg or the indefatigable Spanish ex-POUM intellectual Victor Alba.²⁸ The relative success of Alexander's attempt to define Latin American labor and politics largely reflected the practical means at his disposal when compared to his Latin American colleagues. For example, it was three years after Alexander's earliest pamphlet *Labour Movements in Latin America*, published in 1947 by the Fabian Society in England, that Carlos Rama published a section on "Latin America (1492–1936)" in a French-edited volume of chronologies and bibliographies on workers and socialists movements (the three other contributions covered England, France Germany, and the United States; Spain; and Russia). In its subsequent iterations (in French in 1959 and in German and Spanish in 1967), this compendium of data and bibliography grew in length although its long-term intellectual impact was slight. Writing about Latin American workers' movements for European social history conferences, Rama observed – in a synthetic book published in 1967 – that his efforts were, "in their entirety, almost unknown in Latin America itself".²⁹

Alexander's intersection with Latin America has yet to be fully integrated into our scholarly understanding of the intellectual field within which the study of labor came to be defined. During his five-decade career, Alexander traveled to Latin America and the Caribbean hundreds of times, visit-

27. Alexander, *Labor Relations*; for a full listing of his output and activities, see French, *Robert J. Alexander: The Complete Bibliography*.

28. Alba, *Mouvement Ouvrier en Amérique Latine, Politics and the Labor Movement*; Goldenberg, *Sindicatos en América Latina*.

29. Rama, *Mouvements Ouvriers et Socialistes, Historia del Movimiento Obrero*, p. 9.

ing every country at least once, while recording contemporaneous notes on an estimated 12,000 interviews he conducted with individuals from all walks and life. Varying from a paragraph to five or six single-spaced pages, Alexander's interview notes offer a unique breadth of information and perspective on all aspects of Latin American society and politics – with a special emphasis on labor and politics. In addition, Alexander's other holdings include a voluminous and diverse collection of news clippings, union newspapers, constitutions, leaflets, political pamphlets, union contracts, masters theses, and books.³⁰

In his published works, Alexander provided a far richer historical and political contextualization than the industrial sociologists of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet he nonetheless assimilated the rich politics of Latin America into a Cold War North American vision in which the essential issues revolved around the struggle for economic modernization and political democracy with a social vocation. A profoundly-engaged anti-communist, Alexander saw the region's politics as a complicated two front struggle in which the center-left (the “democratic left”) was pitted against both an undemocratic and retrograde oligarchy (the right) and the local representatives of totalitarian communism. The fundamental tension in his work, however, originated precisely in the difficulties of transposing a North Atlantic social democratic vision into a Latin American context due to the presence of a *sui generis* political phenomenon that will come to be known as populism. In terms of practical political realities, the center-left terrain that might have been social democracy was occupied instead by what Alexander (and most foreign observers) could only see as a group of unscrupulous demagogues, opportunistic and often semi-democratic, who were given to anti-American posturing and a tendency to conciliate as well as fight with the anti-imperialist communist left. In truth, the field of mass popular politics in most Latin American countries at mid-century was structured by a complicated mix of rivalry and cooperation between populists and communists.³¹

30. The cataloguing of the Alexander collection was recently completed by Perrone, *Robert Jackson Alexander Papers* (<http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rulib/spcol/spcol.htm>). For more information, see French, “Robert Alexander Interview Collection” (they are available on microfilm from the Inter Documentation Company (IDC), <http://www.idc.nl>).

31. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed*. The distinctive Chilean case has always drawn disproportionate attention, because of dramatic early labor struggles and massacres and a leftist political trajectory that takes the form of rival socialist and communist Parties, including the world's only Popular Front government outside of Europe and the rise

The political blindness that accompanied the war footing of international social democracy during the Cold War is well illustrated in the archives of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In January 1954, the ICFTU's Dutch General Secretary Jacobus Oldenbroek prepared an international mission to Brazil due to "certain alarming rumors concerning the escapades of the present Brazilian Minister of Labour (Jango Goulart), who is also the President of the so-called Brazilian Labour Party" of Getúlio Vargas. To achieve its objectives, Oldenbroek named labor representatives from Brazil's three largest trading partners to the ICFTU's planned delegation. As Oldenbroek confidently informed his U.S. trade union correspondent, a recent *New York Times* article "did a wonderful job in pointing out that the present Minister of Labor [Goulart] was preparing the ground for another dictatorship". Above all, Oldenbroek insisted, "we should never admit that we are sending a high-powered delegation to bring pressure to bear upon the Brazilian Government [. . .] Brazil is the cornerstone of Latin America and we do not want another *Peronism* or another kind of dictatorship in that huge country" (emphasis added).³² In truth, the ICFTU's intervention occurred as the country was heading towards an anti-getulista military coup and Vargas's term as a democratically-elected president was cut short, in August 1954, when he killed himself rather than accede to a military ultimatum that he resign. These tragic events foreshadowed the crisis of 1964 when another democratically-elected President, Jango Goulart, would be replaced by an anti-labor military dictatorship that lasted until 1985.

The ICFTU's analysis and action, which paralleled U.S. diplomacy in the region, was based on an ideological vision blind to the realities of dependency and to the nationalist Latin American aspirations that were represented by populist politicians like Vargas or Goulart. For Oldenbroek and Alexander, the giants of the populist era, like Argentina's Juan Perón and Mexico's Lázaro Cárdenas, were problematic figures whose demagogic criticisms of the U.S. and rhetorical toying with "third ways" reflected a

and fall of the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende (Cruzat and Devés, *Recabarren*; Devés, *Los Que Van a Morir*; Drake, *Socialism and Populism*; Winn, *Victims*; Winn, *Weavers of Revolution*). The result is an especially rich array of studies, including an active current group of labor historians of that country (Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate*; Klubock, *Contested Communities*; Pavilack, "Black Gold in the Red Zone"; Roseblatt, *Gendered Compromises*; Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*.

32. Jacobus Oldenbroek to Potofsky, January 16, 1954, International Confederation of Free Trade Union's Collection, International Institute of Social History, folder 5372.

failure to understand both sound economics and the imperatives of the world-wide struggle for freedom. Despite his sincere democratic and labor sympathies, Alexander was unable to recognize the implausibility of his attempt to use this internationally-defined line of division to make sense of Latin American politics (this enigma is no different than that of liberals and some leftists today in relation to the impressive political revolution of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela since 1998).³³ In this regard, Alexander's dilemma was precisely that of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, of which he was a direct participant and agent (many of his trips were financed by the CIA through the U.S. trade union confederation AFL and later AFL-CIO). Thus, Alexander was reduced to dividing the populist camp into "bad" anti-U.S. movements and political personalities and "good" pro-U.S. ones. The spurious logic of these distinctions, it should be emphasized, could be seen when, with each passing crisis, the enemies of one period, such as the Peronists, would become the "good" guys of the next (especially with the radicalization of the Cuban Revolution between 1959-1961).

Populism was a form of non-class-based nationalist and reformist politics that came to prominence in Latin America at mid-century. As the most original Latin American political creation of the twentieth century, populist politics came to shape an entire era of development that came to a sudden end with the military coups of the 1960s and 1970s.³⁴ Populism is generally defined as a nationalist and multi-class movement, typically urban-based, that is characterized by its eclectic ideology and the clientelist adhesion of the masses to a charismatic leader.³⁵ Populism in Latin

33. For an introduction to the Chavista phenomenon in Venezuela, see Gott's journalistic account, *In the Shadow of the Liberator*, as well as the scholarly edited collection by Ellner and Hellinger, *Venezuelan Politics in the Chavez Era*. For a gripping first person documentary on the U.S.-supported coup against Chavez in 2002, see "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" directed by Kim Bartley and Donnacha O Briain.

34. See the introduction to French, *Brazilian Workers ABC*, for a detailed review of the evolution of the wider historiography on workers and populism drawing from the Brazilian example. Populism was the subject of a hemispheric-wide inter-disciplinary debate in the late 1960s and early 1970s whose continuing relevance, after its eclipse in the 1980s, has been reaffirmed in a fine collection on the Latin America debate about populism by Mackinnon and Petrone (*Populismo y Neopopulismo*), a recent volume on populism in Brazil edited by Ferreira (*Populismo e sua História*), and a study of contemporary Ecuador by Torre (*Populist Seduction*). An article Mexicanist historian Alan Knight also weighs in on the ongoing populism debate, although its insight is weakened by a tendency to disregard the temporal unfolding of this crucial debate across several decades and numerous countries (Knight, "Populism and Neo-Populism").

35. On the biographies and mobilizational practices of individual populist leaders, see Alexander, *Rómulo Betancourt*; Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*; Cajías, *Historia de*

America emerged in the generalized world crisis after 1929, which not only shook the foundations of the region's commodity-export model of economic development but sparked a crisis of the oligarchic parliamentarianism that characterized the region's elitist political system: the day of the masses and a "new politics" had finally arrived. With an integrationist orientation, populism has generally been seen as the natural political complement of the era of industrialization through the substitution of imports that prevailed in most of the larger countries after 1930. Yet populism was also, as Miguel Centeno and Fernando Lopez-Alves recently noted, the region's "first 'homegrown' regime model. While clearly influenced by both the Popular Front Left and fascism, Latin American corporatist populism had indigenous ingredients and sought to formulate answers clearly linked to the nature of the [local] economic, political, and social problems they were meant to solve."³⁶

For the students of labor, populism was long thought to have been responsible for the co-optation, if not corruption, of the workers' movement through its subordination of trade unions to politics and the state. In this way, populists promoted forms of representation that have generally been characterized as corporatist in nature. Indeed, one of the most distinctive aspects of Latin American labor history is precisely the powerful role of state action in promoting and structuring working class organization – a far larger and more visible government role than in Europe and the United States. "The essential trait of Latin American trade unionism", observed Chilean sociologist Francisco Zapata in 1979, lay "in its tight relationship with the State and with the political development of each society".³⁷ "No less typical of Latin America", Carlos Rama wrote in 1967, "was the fact that large sectors of the proletariat, even that part organized in trade unions, sought to advance their demands [...] through parties created under the leadership of national politicians who use the art of manipulating the masses, as had been done in the European totalitarian countries" (Argentina under the elected governments of Juan Perón was the most cited case).³⁸

In effect, the consolidation of Latin American labor movements occurred in tandem with a proliferation of government social welfare and labor ini-

Una Leyenda; Dulles, *Vargas*; Green, *Gaitanismo*; Sharpless, *Gaitán*; Townsend, *Lázaro Cárdenas*; Page, *Perón*.

36. Centeno and Lopez-Alves, *Other Mirror*, pp. 5–6.

37. Kaztman and Reyna, *Fuerza del Trabajo*, p. 195.

38. Rama, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero*, p. 83.

tatives after 1930 that included, in Brazil and elsewhere, actual state sponsorship of and financial support for trade union organization. Until the historical work of last twenty years, the highly interventionist and activist state of the Populist era (corporatism) and the resulting peculiarities of working class consciousness (class heteronomy) tended to be seen as deviations, not only by Alexander and liberal scholars but also by many of the region's Marxist thinkers and politicians.³⁹ As suggested earlier, the heated debate over populism – which has direct political implications in most Latin American countries – has revolved around the relationship of Latin America to the paradigmatic European case. In a path breaking 1979, Argentine scholars Silvia Segal and Juan Carlos Torre observed with great acuity that:

In the classic model, the political unity of the working class is seen as the culmination of a laborious process through which the workers, raising themselves above their fragmentation and dependency, came to autonomously constitute themselves as political subjects. On the one hand, the workers overcame objective differences that opposed them to each other in the labor market and came to recognize each other as a solidaristic economic collectivity. On the other, the identity that was achieved in the corporative sphere was expanded to the political sphere through confrontation with a class society in which they had emerged as a social force but of whose political system they did not participate in a legitimate manner. This double movement of solidarity at the base and class opposition was, in synthesis, the axis for the constitution of the working class in nineteenth century Europe.⁴⁰

Until the late 1970s, the scholarly literature on labor in Latin America continued to assume that “working class consciousness” was a known quantity defined by what was believed to be known about that European model. If in the classic tradition, Segal and Torre observed,

39. For an example of such an analysis, by a North American, see Kofas, *Struggle for Legitimacy*.

40. Segal and Torre, “Una Reflexión”, in Kaztman and Reyna, *Fuerza del Trabajo*, p. 144. The edited 1979 collection in which their reflections appeared was the product of an unprecedented international initiative, dating to 1974, that linked a new generation of Latin Americanists in the United States (organized as a committee of the Social Science Research Council) with social scientists from the Colegio de México and the Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLASCO). Despite the absence of historians, the contributors all saw the need to move beyond the economic and sociological in order to arrive at an adequate comprehension of a working class which, as Elizabeth Jelín noted in 1979, refused to conform to internationally-established schemas. As the

the factory served as the axis of social aggregation of the working class, in [much of] Latin America the axis was the public square, the space of mobilization through political integration via the state, that unified the economically fragmented working classes. This early experience of political unification ended with these [political] events being indissoluble from their identity as a class.⁴¹

The struggles of working- and middle-class people in Latin America and the Caribbean have long been bound up with struggles for national self-affirmation on the part these dependent countries on the near-periphery of the North Atlantic world.⁴² The resulting intermingling of national and class struggles in so many countries of the region underlines the significance of Latin America's two landmark social revolutions. In many ways, the Mexican Revolution of 1911–1917, especially its aftermath, marked the birth of the modern era of leftist, populist, and popular politics, while the Cuban Revolution of 1959 represented the highpoint of the populist tide. Indeed, Fidel Castro can be seen as a culmination of many of the potentialities to be found within Latin American populism. While his brother Raúl Castro was more identified with the left, Fidel grew out of the Cuban populist tradition as part of a generation of young intellectuals, after World War II, who thought of politics through the figures of Cárdenas, Perón, and Gaitán.

The radicalization of Fidel Castro between 1959 and 1961 stemmed, in part, from taking seriously the ideological premisses of populism and nationalism. In his fixation on national self-determination, his demands for social justice for the masses, and his preoccupation with the rural populations, Fidel was carrying forward banners inherited from the region's populists, as well as the communist left that he would eventually embrace. At the same time, his rejection of the vanguard party form for his move-

editors observed, all of the essays “depart from a perspective that privileges the populist experience as a crucial factor in the constitution and evolution of these movements [... and its] political vicissitudes” (*ibid.*, pp. 5, 236, 4–5).

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145. The statement captures an enduring truth for many parts of Latin America, although the Argentine example of Perón weighs heavily: Torre, *Vieja Guardia Sindical*. Research on the history of popular electoral participation in Argentina promises to relativize but not displace this essential insight (Karush, *Workers or Citizens*; Sábato, *Many and the Few*).
42. See the thoughtful observations by Lowell Gudmundson and Francisco Scarano in the conclusion to the edited collection by Chomsky and Lauria-Santiago, *Identity and Struggle at the Margins of the Nation-State*, p. 335.

ment, prior to his assumption of power, and his exercise of personal leadership thereafter were far more closely associated with populism than with its rival, communism. Indeed, it was precisely this dimension of Castro's leadership that made the Cuban Revolution such a potent force for change in the 1960s, exercising a powerful force of attraction within the populist universe in Latin America (including Brazil's Jânio Quadros).

Such Latin American specificities point to the dangers that accompany the unexamined resort to the nineteenth century European category of "class", which brings with it a set of assumptions about social boundaries, class institutions, modes of political action, and appropriate consciousness. Indeed, the study of Latin American labor provides ample evidence of the dangers that stem from the utilization of universal categories in such an a-historical fashion. Facing the unexpected results of industrialization and working-class mobilization, the earliest generation of sociologists had been forced to resort to a shifting array of structural and conjunctural factors to explain the anomalous outcome: the impact of rapid urbanization with its enhanced social mobility, the rural origin and culture of most workers, and the persistence of "traditional" cultural values of deference and paternalism. It is precisely on the subject of workers and populism that an emerging field of Latin American labor history would have its greatest impact in reshaping scholarly understanding,⁴³ followed by a turn towards the use of oral history to investigate questions of gender and subjectivity.⁴⁴

From National Labor Politics, through Memory, to Individual Subjectivity in Argentina: Integrating the Subjective and the Objective Dimensions of Working-Class History

Over a quarter century of research on labor and politics in Argentina, Daniel James has stood out precisely for the originality and creativity of his historical imagination. To appreciate James's past and future scholarly work, it must be recognized how difficult it has been to say anything new about the

43. Drake, *Socialism and Populism*; Gould, *To Lead as Equals*; French, *Brazilian Workers' ABC*; James, *Resistance and Integration*; Stein, *Populism in Peru*; Winn, *Weavers of Revolution*.

44. French and James, *Gendered Worlds*; Auyero, *Contentious Lives*; Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor*; Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea*; Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate*; Klubock, *Contested Communities*; Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*. Olcott, *Revolutionary Women* makes a welcome and distinctive contribution with a systematic and tough-minded national political analysis of women's economic, political, and feminist struggles in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s.

key episode of Western Hemispheric history that began in 1946 with the election to the presidency of the populist former military man Juan Perón, who dominated Argentine politics through his death in the mid-1970s and whose movement is still at the center of that country's politics. The figure of Colonel Perón stood at the center of a striking political polarization after 1943 that would pit his sui-generis populist movement, backed by the unions, against a political coalition in 1946 that included conservatives, liberals, socialists and communists (as well as the governments of the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union). Even in the English-speaking world, Perón and his first wife Evita have remained the object of enduring popular fascination – immortalized in journalistic accounts, Broadway musicals, multiple movies (the latest starring Madonna as Evita), and hundreds of books and articles from every possible perspective.

A paradoxical figure, Perón the man was without a doubt fascist in European ideological terms in the early 1940s, although his movement would come to encompass representatives of both the radical left and the nationalist right. A military man imbued with notions of hierarchy and order, Perón founded an unruly labor-based political movement (not party) that oversaw an era of radical social reform whose polarizing impact produced an enduring chasm in Argentine politics and society. Marked by his personalist leadership style, Perón was at best semi-democratic in his conduct of government affairs and was not given to worrying about the theoretical niceties of democratic theory (balance of power, independence of the judiciary and the press, etc). Yet his government, democratically-elected in 1946 and 1952, only came to an end through a self-styled “liberating” military coup in 1955 – which was followed by titanic labor struggles and two decades in which the majority of Argentine voters saw their choice excluded from elections as well as power.

James's first book *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* was highly praised for his effort to understand rather than judge Peronism, and to do so on its own terms and from below. Taking a subject that had been debated and written to death, James's book made it come alive. In the words of the senior labor historian Alan Angel, the book deserved special praise because James was capable of entering into “the mental world of that strange and powerful movement (Peronism) which has been, and continues to be, so central to Argentine politics”. James' capacity to pay close attention to “the variety of meanings Peronism has had for its many adherents”, he went on, stemmed from his ability to “empathize with his subject” in a book that was “the product of years of patient work and a keen imagination”. Richard J. Walter, a specialist in

modern Argentina, wrote that it offered a “compelling picture of not only why the workers acted as they did but also why they thought and ‘felt’ as they did”. The Chilean labor sociologist Francisco Zapata echoed this observation when he noted that the book was not reducible to “a simple narrative but rather transcends that form”, becoming “a profound vision in which events acquire life”. Other reviewers said that James had reached into the “hearts and minds” of those he studied, and thus revealed the “faces behind the masks” that played such a role in the “mysteries” of Peronism.

In many ways, James’s singular contribution to the vast historiography on Peronism stemmed, in large part, from his insistence on the importance of understanding how the “popular culture of the Peronist era” spoke to “a wider, more personal social realm outside improvements in the world of the production line, the wage packet or the union”.⁴⁵ Instead, he suggested that the key to Perón’s popularity and the enduring allegiance he engendered among workers stemmed from the power that comes into being when elements of private experience are transposed and given space, even if primarily discursive, within the public realm of state and nation. Departing from this insight, James went on to suggest something of the “heretical social power of Peronism” and its reconfiguration of words, even negative ones, that were now endowed with positive associations.⁴⁶

Prefiguring his subsequent direction, James offered the following observation on the second-to-last page of the conclusion of *Resistance and Integration*: with the passage of time, a profound recasting of historical memory occurred among Argentine workers but he warned against judging it merely as “irrational nostalgia. Memory and tradition were not ossified but were rather reinvented and reinterpreted selectively in accordance with new needs.”⁴⁷ His ability to build upon this insight was well demonstrated in his 1988 study of the mythicized foundational event that gave birth to the Peronist phenomenon: the mass popular mobilization in greater Buenos Aires on October 17th and 18th, 1945 that freed Perón from prison and launched his presidential candidacy. “The October events and their participants”, James noted, have in the past “been marshaled more as heuristic weapons for contending sides of the debate than as worthy objects of study in their own right”. He continued to take aim against a still prevalent “instrumentalist orthodoxy concerning working-class participation” that

45. James, *Resistance and Integration*, p. 25.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

saw workers' support of Peronism as based on an implicit, if not explicit, calculation of class interest, an idea which leads to a neglect of "the more diffuse social and cultural dimension" of the movement.⁴⁸

Yet James' own initial "resort to oral testimony in order to penetrate deeper into the consciousness of workers who participated" in the October 1945 events, he frankly admitted, "seemed at first to add little to a better understanding" because the workers' accounts were "bathed in the unmistakable aura of an official discourse". Even his informants' "language itself often changed from the richness and vividness of working class dialect to the stilted phrases of formal rhetoric apparently taken from some official guide book to the 'Great Events in the History of Argentine Labor'". In their telling of the story, the workers themselves suppressed "some of the violent and unruly" aspects of the events because it might "tarnish the legitimacy and authenticity of the symbolic meaning the events came to represent". They were especially concerned to deny its carnivalesque dimension, which took the form of a "secular iconoclasm".⁴⁹

In the conclusion to the article, James emphasized that he was not rejecting "a structuralist approach to Peronism in the name of a 'culturalist' alternative" but that he wished that analysts were more alert to the "limits of a reductionist instrumentalism as an explanatory paradigm". In dealing with Peronism, the analyst had for too long attempted "to resolve the fundamental ambivalence which lies at the heart of Peronism, in favor of one or another of its opposing terms". Wouldn't it be more productive, he asked, to simply accept that ambivalence and seek instead "to probe its deeper meaning?"⁵⁰

James was already moving in that direction with his increasing use of oral sources, which had played a small and strictly utilitarian purpose in *Resistance and Integration*. Yet that book's focus on the relationship between Peronism, trade unions, and workers at the national level did not preclude certain new gestures, especially in chapter one, where he argued that what was needed was a more sensitive and comprehensive account of the social and cultural universe of the working and popular classes. Thus, it was not surprising that James would move towards an in-depth study of a single locality in a shift that reduced the scope of the narrative while facilitating an increasing depth of insight into a different dimension of working-class life.

48. James, "October 17th and 18th, 1945", p. 443.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 448-449, 451.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 457-458.

The meatpacking city of Berisso was an obvious choice for a social, cultural, and political archaeology of Peronism from the bottom up. James had noted, in his first book, that the workers' feelings of frustration, humiliation, and bitterness, which spurred the popular explosion that became identified with Perón in 1945–1946, were felt “most fiercely in working class communities dominated by a single large concern, such as the meatpacking plants”. Moreover, the Swift and Armour workers were early and consistent participants in the vigorous strike movements that began in 1956, to protest the overthrow of Perón, and which reached their height during the “Peronist Resistance” of 1959 when the military occupied Berisso.⁵¹ And finally, Berisso also experienced the bitterness of clandestine terror during the tragic years of the post-1976 military regime when hundreds of local residents were “disappeared”. With a remarkable capacity to win the trust of local people of all outlooks, James was well placed to explore the difficult and emotionally-charged issues of innocence, complicity, and guilt in terms of local involvement with the many death squad killings there during the 1970s.

James began his work in Berisso in 1986–87 and made important and fruitful strategic choices early in his research in the city. While familiarizing himself with local archives and the relevant actors (trade union, political, ethnic, and cultural leaders), he came to focus his attention on the life and testimony of a remarkable woman Doña Maria Roldán. A meatpacking worker and union activist, Doña Maria had emerged as a central figure in local politics and union life during the Peronist heyday of the late 1940s. His decision to dedicate years of research to her life story was tied to James's increasing conviction, in the late 1980s, that the study of gender was fundamental to any new understandings of the Peronist era. In dealing with Doña Maria, James refused to treat her 500 page transcript merely as a source of data or colorful supplementary detail. Rather, he came to insist that the text should be analyzed as a narrative if one was to grapple with the complexities of the human consciousness revealed through such storytelling. Entitled *Doña Maria's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity*, the 2000 book includes a significant portion of the original interview transcript along with a series of interpretive essays that explore different themes in her life story.⁵²

The book opens with an introduction entitled “The Town with No Plaza” that examines the public memory markers in the local civic cen-

51. James, *Resistance and Integration*, pp. 26, 64, 115.

52. James, *Doña Maria's Story*.

ter, which are interpreted in light of shared community narratives while probing the tensions that pervade even this sanctioned “memory”. Based on fourteen years of work with oral historical sources, the chapter entitled “Listening in the Cold: The Practice of Oral History in an Argentine Meatpacking Community” examines the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological issues inherent in the oral history enterprise: the relation between interviewer and subject; its moral status, and the nature of the pact between the two sides; and the types of truth claims adequate to a sophisticated understanding of this type of evidence.

The second chapter is entitled “‘The Case of María Roldán and the Señora with Money is Very Clear, It’s a Fable’: Stories, Anecdotes, and Other Performances in Doña María’s Testimony”. In a strikingly original treatment, James demonstrates that much is to be gained from the application of formal literary analysis to oral history texts by “marginal” figures like Doña Maria, a poorly educated female manual laborer. The examination of these literary forms within the oral narrative are used to shed light on the nature of the Peronist project and its meaning for working class men and women. In “Tales Told Out on the Borderlands: Reading Doña María’s Story for Gender”, James addresses the methodological problems of how to read for gender within an exclusively class-oriented female narrative, showing where and how its presence, often latent, is manifested within the text through silences and indirection.

Chapter four, entitled “A Poem for Clarita: Niñas Burguesitas and Working Class Women in Peronist Argentina”, offers a daring and sensitive analysis of a poem that Doña Maria wrote on the occasion of the death of a young female friend from tuberculosis. James showed how the conventions of melodrama permeate and shape this *sui generis* text, while exploring her female version or inflection of these tropes through a comparison to the meatpacking novels and poetry written about Berisso by men. In its most daring gesture, James examines how notions of sexuality can be teased out of the poem through a careful analysis of her language – if the reader is familiar, as is James, with the dialect and context in which she is performing the poem.

James’s book transcends the geographic locus of Doña Maria’s world and speaks to key theoretical issues in the current debates in history, feminism, anthropology, and cultural studies. It is an original work that, in an agile fashion, utilizes approaches, tools, and insights from many sources in order to create a unique synthesis. *Doña Maria’s Story* is especially valuable today when so many have rushed into memory/oral history/reflexivity, under the influence of postmodernism and/or post-structuralism, but

without the creativity or concentrated intellectual power required to produce works that are sophisticated, not simplistic; durable, not brittle; and deeply considered and thought-through rather than sloganeering.⁵³

Doña Maria's Story offers substantive guidance as scholars increasingly use oral sources to deepen their understanding of the subjective dimension of historical reality. As we wrote in 1997: "To incorporate the subjective dimension into historical explanation requires a shift in the nature of the sources used, the tools with which they are approached, and the questions asked of them." We also insisted that it was possible to highlight "the importance of discursive constructions of meaning without reducing reality to an agent-less circular logic of abstract categories". To do so, it must be understood that societal discourses have to be "interpreted and reinterpreted in order to make them fit an individual or a group's understanding of self and society, especially with an eye to the material realities of scarcity or abundance that shape their lives".

The aim of this endeavor should be to establish a more sophisticated understanding of how consciousness operates and how identity is formed within the context of material conditions and structures of power that limit and, to that extent, determine the outcomes. Moreover, claims to identity are always linked to conflict, "difference", and clashing interests and they acquire credibility and stability to the extent to which they fit the material and ideational world in which they are enmeshed.⁵⁴

The accomplishments of *Doña Maria's Story* along these lines, it should be emphasized, are not based on an over-valorization of the individual nor a devaluing of the "real world" subject matter of more traditional studies of the industrial working class. Indeed, the full appreciation of the potential of this approach yields is best found by pairing James's monograph with an equally stunning tour-de-force by his Berisso collaborator, Mirta Lobato of the University of Buenos Aires. In a book that demands translation, Argentina's greatest labor historian does far more than flesh out the life of Doña Maria's community. Her sophisticated 2001 monograph enti-

53. Interest in oral primary sources by historians in and of Latin America began to grow enormously during the 1980s (Winn, "Oral History"; Stein, "Don Pedro Frias"), although the utility of oral history as a source of data had been recognized in some of the earlier social science literature (Mintz, *Worker in the Cane*; Nash, *We Eat the Mines*; Nash, *I Spent My Life in the Mines*). First person oral accounts rendered into print also thrived as part of the revolutionary politics of the 1960s and 1970s; for examples of such political autobiography (*testimonios*), see Dalton, *Miguel Marmol*; Burgos-Debray, *I Rigoberta Menchú*. For a sophisticated recent treatment of the related topic of memory and trauma, see Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*.

54. French and James, *Gendered Worlds*, pp. 297, 301-302.

tled *Life in the Factories: Labor, Protest, and Politics in a Working Class Community*, Berisso (1904-1970) offers a totalizing materialist history that takes, as its point of departure, the experience of labor in the meatpacking plants (including extensive use of employment records).⁵⁵

A globalizing structuralist abstraction, Lobato notes, has for too long informed the study of the working class but this “traditional” approach – which has lost legibility in political terms today – has all too often erased the specificities that characterize the multiplicity of experiences of those who occupy positions within diverse production processes. Most importantly, Lobato’s monograph seamlessly integrates the material dimension of factory labor with the subjective experience of work by a labor force that was itself heterogeneous in composition, gender, and outlook. Integrating an immense array of sources, the book richly explores the historical trajectory of factory work, the constitution of identities born within but circulating beyond the factory walls, and the links between generations of labor struggle and the contours of national politics and local community.⁵⁶

The spirit of James and Lobato’s books on Berisso, published a year apart, are both shaped by the present realities of deindustrialization and nostalgia in a community that once stood at the center of the national economy and politics. James ends with an elegiac reflection on time, death, the past and present, while Lobato titles her epilogue “From the Society of Labor to the Crisis of Work”. It is to be hoped that these two historians will carry their pact with this community forward to a fuller examination of survival and marginality once the factories have closed, a subject that is of fundamental importance for working people everywhere.⁵⁷ Not surprisingly, labor specialists to date have much preferred to construct upbeat narratives tracing the formation of a working class and its emergence as a social and political actor – as opposed to examining the slow agony of decline and disintegration, not only of an occupation or a class but of the communities which had been given life by these factories or mines.

Such a detailed examination of the deindustrialization of Berisso, beginning with the Armour closing in 1969 followed by Swift in 1979, would offer the first in-depth historical study in Latin America of the increasingly rapid pace with which jobs and industries disappear in today’s global-

55. Lobato, *La vida en las fábricas*.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28, 30.

57. See the richly revealing contemporary ethnography on Buenos Aires by Auyero, *Poor People’s Politics*.

izing world.⁵⁸ At the same time, Berisso's ability to sustain and recreate its community aspirations in the face of adversity suggests that the scenario of plant closings followed by decadence, disintegration, and decline is not inevitable. Indeed, Berisso has lost little population despite the hemorrhaging of jobs and has not been marked, as in parts of the U.S. "Rust Belt", by the out-migration of the young that one might expect; rather, it has managed to sustain, against great odds, a vibrant sense of community and an enduring loyalty to Peronism.

Production and Power Politics versus Community: Urban Violence and Revolutionary Trade Unionism in Córdoba, Argentina

The November 1972 return of Juan Perón, Argentina's legendary populist leader and former president (1946–1955), occurred at a moment of acute political polarization marked by explosive popular protest, heightened labor mobilization, and an increasing resort to violence from all sides. Throughout the years from 1968 to the military coup of 1976, two years after Perón's death in the presidency, the provincial industrial city of Córdoba stood at the center of national political and trade union life.

With a population of 800,000, Córdoba was catapulted to national prominence in 1969 when a tumultuous labor protest was transformed into two days of fighting between residents, the police, and the military. With deaths estimated at between 12 and 60, the *Cordobazo* decisively weakened the military government of Onganía, helped open the way for Perón's return, and served to cement ties between the city's radical students and a remarkably combative local labor movement. In his detailed chapter on the *Cordobazo*, James Brennan's *The Labor Wars of Córdoba, 1955–1976: Ideology, Work, and Labor Politics in an Argentine Industrial City* (1994) highlights new dimensions of this oft-discussed urban uprising while offering a compelling narrative of one of Latin America's most important urban riots.⁵⁹

Yet even prior to the fiery events of 1969, the independent-minded trade unions of Córdoba had emerged as the key national opponents of the accommodationist policies and centralizing "verticalism" of the powerful Peronist union bosses of Buenos Aires. And in the *Cordobazo*'s after-

58. For an innovative labor history of capital mobility in North America, see the prize-winning monograph by Cowie, *Capital Moves*.

59. Brennan, *Labor Wars of Córdoba*; see Braun, *Assassination of Gaitán*, for a study of another major Latin American riot, the 1947 *Cordobazo* in Colombia.

math, Argentina's second largest industrial city was the birthplace of a new form of labor radicalism that came to be known as "*clasismo*" (as in "class struggle"). *Clasismo* began as a shop floor rebellion at the Fiat and Kaiser-Renault auto plants, but rapidly evolved into a dissident political/union movement of national prominence in the early 1970s. For the most part, *clasismo* has been dismissed as an ephemeral episode of Maoist-inspired hyper-radicalism alien to the Peronist traditions and day-to-day lives of Córdoba's workers. This characterization seems self-evident in light of the early slogan adopted by one of the *clasista* unions: "Neither coup nor election, revolution!" which was coined, he tells us, by a local intellectual. Yet Brennan quite rightly criticizes this schematic and highly-politicized approach for failing to understand the workplace discontent that paved the way for this New Left labor insurgency.

Brennan does not, however, deny the undoubted radicalism of this form of "revolutionary trade unionism" that came to speak openly of labor's ultimate socialist goal. Unlike some observers, he deals frankly with the party affiliations and revolutionary projects that came to be embraced by many *clasista* leaders. Yet despite his sympathies for *clasismo*, Brennan never confuses rank-and-file support for *clasista* shop floor activism with an embrace of the increasingly anti-Peronist political agenda of the *clasista* union leadership prior to their defeat and decimation.

Acutely aware of *clasismo*'s youthful miscalculations, Brennan's own perspective is far closer to that of the legendary Agustín Tosco, the independent leftist leader of Córdoba's light and power union. Admirably profiled here, Tosco was the key strategist who both unified Córdoba's pluralistic labor movement and helped to guide it, with no small success, through an extremely complex period marked by intense conflict with employers, the state, and powerful Peronist union leaders in the nation's capital.

In many ways, Brennan's greatest achievement is to make credible the events of this surrealistic period marked by general strikes, factory occupations, and the kidnapping and assassination of union leaders and factory managers (the personnel directors of Fiat and IKA-Renault were both murdered by leftist guerillas acting independently of but "in solidarity" with the *clasista* unions). As befits the era, there is also the case of the U.S. consul Patrick Egan, who offered "some of the best analyses of labor politics in Córdoba in this period" (1973) before being kidnapped and executed by guerillas in 1975.⁶⁰ This so-called "war", however, was decidedly unequal

60. Brennan, *Labor Wars in Córdoba*, p. 406.

in nature and innumerable leftist and independent labor leaders, attorneys, and intellectuals would be “disappeared”, tortured, and murdered in Córdoba during these years.

James Brennan's book offers us a gripping study of the political and trade union events, actors, and movements of this tragic era based on impressive research in a wide array of sources, including union records and the archives of Fiat and Renault. The final result is an intricately detailed account of Córdoba labor from the days of incipient industrialization in the mid-1950s to the military coup of 1976. In particular, Brennan handles the immensely confusing domain of factional labor and leftist politics at the city-wide level with exemplary deftness and clarity. In his treatment of the complex dynamics of Córdoba's labor movement, Brennan eschews abstract labels and timeless categorizations. In discussing the day-to-day politics of labor, he demonstrates a splendid grasp of the calculations, both strategic and tactical, that underlay the maneuvers of each and every segment or faction of the city's labor leadership. In addition, Brennan shows real sensitivity to the individual and group peculiarities that guarantee, in the real world, that even adherence to a similar political position does not necessarily produce identical results. Nor is he one dimensional or unilateral in his judgments of union decision-making vis-a-vis the company, the state, internal union rivals, and external union power brokers. Although he insists on the importance of the larger structural context, Brennan quite rightly recognizes the important role played by the personality of individual union leaders, chance, and even purely regionalist antipathies (which played an important role, he suggests, in shoring up local labor radicalism in Córdoba).

Brennan makes yet another contribution through his rich exploration of the labor process within the automobile industry. He offers a fully contextualized approach to labor/management conflict, which can only be understood, he insists, on a company-specific basis given the enormous variation in production techniques and management cultures between the anti-union Fiat and the more union-tolerant Renault.⁶¹ Dealing with these issues masterfully within a broader comparative context framed by the auto industry elsewhere, Brennan's penetrating account suffers only one weakness: the direct link between production process and union politics remains less well developed than one might expect given the book's declared objec-

61. The impact of company-specific management cultures in shaping labor struggles is well illustrated in a fine recent monograph on the workers of Monterrey, Mexico after the Mexican Revolution (Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance*).

tive of proving the centrality of the factory over the public square in the creation of working class subjects.

The Labor Wars in Cordoba can be placed in a triad with Peter Winn's classic 1986 study of a Chilean textile factory nationalized during the Popular Unity regime of the early 1970s and Deborah Levenson-Estrada's study of Guatemalan union activism from the heady days of revolutionary activism in the late 1970s to the devastating defeats of the early 1980s.⁶² Levenson-Estrada's moving monograph entitled *Trade Unionists Against Terror* explored the emotional life of and inter-personal relations between the activists who constitute a movement's "beloved community". Her monograph is suffused with acute sensitivity to the existential dimension of the lived personal experience of activism and terror. By contrast, Brennan paints a broader canvas than Levenson-Estrada with fuller coverage of the struggle's structural and political dimensions. While Levenson-Estrada painstakingly examines the politics of struggle at the small group level, Brennan offers a sophisticated grasp of the intricacies of union and leftist politics. If Levenson-Estrada's focus leads her away from the world of leftist parties and union fractions, Brennan revels in the tactical intricacies of explaining the peculiar configurations of intra and inter-union politics. He brings a splendid intimacy to his discussion of the *politics* of these labor activists and union officials even if he largely neglects their personal lives, hopes, and nightmares (Levenson-Estrada's forte). Like her, Brennan helps to rescue an entire generation of New Left Córdoba labor activists – the *clasistas* – and their project from the condescension of history. He restores agency and even common sense to a generation that was destined – as in much of Latin America – not only to the frustration of its dreams but to death, torture, and un-mourned defeat.

Within the Latin American labor history field in the early 1990s, Brennan was a critic of the existing labor historiography for what he believed to be its neglect of the centrality of shop floor and production processes. At least for Córdoba, he wrote in a 1996 article, "the importance generally given to the community as an explanation for the militance of the new working class in Latin American has been greatly overstated", a finding that runs against "the prevailing wisdom in labour and working class history which stresses the influence of culture and community over those related to production and power politics". Even when "searching for 'cul-

62. Winn, *Weavers of Revolution*; Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists Against Terror*.

tural' explanations for *clasismo*", he went on, "the workers' own testimonies inevitably lead us back to the factory". Yet the same 1996 article by Brennan also marked a retreat from at least part of these claims. My "previous writings on *clasismo* were not intended to argue for the primacy of structural influences", he clarified, as opposed to a Thompsonian or neo-Thompsonian emphasis on "the subjective experience of workers in interpreting their reality and developing their own modes of organization and political mobilization". Rather, he had been trying to suggest that specific "industrial sectors do exhibit certain structural characteristics which establish the objective conditions for certain kinds of political behavior", while emphasizing the influence of "distinct corporate and workplace cultures and management practices". In summarizing his position, he argued "that studies of the sources of working class politics need to return to the labour process and to reevaluate the importance of the workplace as *another* social arena and important influence in shaping class consciousness and determining political behaviour in distinct historical and cultural contexts" (emphasis added). Restated with such a qualifier, this unexceptional statement would be readily assented to by alleged "culturalists", especially since Brennan's 1996 article also admitted that there were "undoubtedly, other factors to help explain *clasismo*...[including] changes in Argentina's political culture".⁶³

New Points of Departure: When Does Latin American and Caribbean Labor History Start? And What Does it Study? And How?

At a moment of crisis for the labor history enterprise in much of the North Atlantic world, the continued political importance of labor in many Latin American countries has given its study an ongoing political as well as intellectual appeal. At the same time, those who live in or study the region's working people remain far more attuned – in terms of the politics of daily life – to the realities of poverty, class oppression, and popular protest.⁶⁴ Yet

63. Brennan, "Clasismo and the Workers", pp. 303–307. As reformulated, Brennan's central causal proposition is almost identical to that advanced by French, *Brazilian Workers' ABC*.

64. The observation about the continued legibility of class in Latin America and the Caribbean was made by Jocelyn Olcott in a private communication with the author. One need only look at the wealth of fascinating recent work on social movements, both urban and rural, in the region: Auyero, *Contentious Lives*; Bacon, *Children of*

this chapter would be dishonest if it did not end with some critical observations about our continued adherence to unnecessarily restrictive definitions of what we study. *Who* and *what* are the objects of study of Latin American and Caribbean labor history? The answer given to this question will clearly have profound implications in terms of the chronological scope of the field (*when*) as well as defining the de facto geographical, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic boundaries under which it operates (*where*). All of this comes before we can even begin to think about *why* and *how*.⁶⁵

Given the preeminence of sociology in establishing this area of knowledge production, it is not entirely surprising that labor history still tends to be a study of the *modern*, the *urban*, and the *industrial* presented as if it *was* the history of labor in the region. We are, in other words, far from being “faberologists” (students of work) since we largely study twentieth century wage earning populations, especially factory workers, and their political and trade union mobilizations. In staking out its future direction, labor history in Latin America should aspire to be something more ambitious and all-encompassing. I would argue that we should define our enterprise as the history of work and of the many types of working peoples who have made up the laboring majority in human societies, both before, during and after capitalist industrialization.⁶⁶

What barriers internal to our field, for example, prevent us from reaching backwards in time to the nineteenth century and even the colonial era?⁶⁷ The fruitful European debates about proto-industrialization, for

NAFTA; Edelman, *Peasants against Globalization*; Gill, *Teetering on the Rim*; Nylen, *Participatory Democracy*; Wright and Welford, *To Inherit the Earth*. The 2002 election of a radical former trade unionist as Brazil's President underlines its continued relevance (on Lula and his Workers' Party, see French and Fortes, “Another World” and Keck, *Workers Party*).

65. In a similar spirit of critique, Marcus Rediker has recently attributed the crisis of North Atlantic labor history in part “to the persistence of certain orthodoxies within labor history, matters of consensus (often unspoken)” that include “an orthodoxy of the subject; an orthodoxy of time, or chronology; and an orthodox of place” (“Revenge of Crispus Attucks”, pp. 39–40).

66. We have no historical studies of the history of labor in Cuba since 1959, for example, and only a single study by a social scientist (Fuller, *Work and Democracy*).

67. A sample of monographs on issues of work in the pre-Colombian and colonial eras include: Bakewell, *Miners of the Red Mountain*; Cole, *Potosí Mita*; Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*; Murra, *Economic Organization of the Inka State*; Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*; Villamarin and Villamarin, *Indian Labor*; Zulawski, *They Eat from their Labor*. On nineteenth century artisans, see Sowell, *Early Colombian Labor Movement*; Salvatore, “The Strength of Markets in Latin America's Sociopolitical Discourse” offers a provocative sweep across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

example, have been completely ignored even though we have a wonderfully sharp book by a colonial Mexicanist on textile *objajes*.⁶⁸ Nor have we, as a group, taken up the challenge offered in *The Making of a Strike: Mexican Silver Workers' Struggles in the Real del Monte, 1766-1775* where Doris Ladd claimed to have found and studied the *first* strike in the Americas.⁶⁹ And too few of us have engaged with the implications, for our own countries of study, of the sustained debate regarding proletarianization and labor dynamics in the nineteenth-century ranching economies of Argentina.⁷⁰

The labor historians of Latin America also continue to work within the reified ideological distinction between "free" and "un-free" laborers. Why shouldn't the study of slavery be an integral part of the labor history that we practice?⁷¹ This reluctance is even more striking in light of the 1994 study of the Demerara slave rebellion of 1823 by Brazilian historian Emília Viotti da Costa (a founder of the Yale Latin American Labor History Conferences currently held annually at Duke).⁷² *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood* splendidly illustrates the fruitfulness of transcending artificial boundaries of legal status with an approach that simultaneously focuses on structural determination, the consciousness of individuals, and their capacity for concerted and collective action.⁷³ Yet too few labor historians have studied her monograph despite the rich insights she derived from a unique documentary source: the diaries and hundreds of letters written by the English mis-

68. Salvucci, *Textiles and Capitalism*.

69. Ladd, *Making of a Strike*. For primary source documents, see Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, *Conflicto de Trabajo*.

70. Salvatore, *Wandering Paysanos*.

71. The unnatural divorce between labor and slavery studies has been forcefully criticized by two Brazilian historians (Reis, "The Revolution of the 'Ganhadores'"; Lara, "Escravidão, Cidadania e História"), as well as by US scholar Rediker, who argues that "we should break down the polarity between slave labor and free labor altogether. We still need to pay attention to the precise historical meaning of these terms . . . [but] should stop using those terms as blinding ideal types" ("Revenge of Crispus Attucks", p. 41). The potential of a labor history approach to slavery was demonstrated in Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, as well as in the edited volume by Turner, *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves*. See also the recent studies on Cuba and Jamaica by Díaz, *The Virgin, the King* and Paton, *No Bond but the Law*.

72. The Twenty-Second Latin American Labor History Conference was held in April 2005 on "Labor and the Environment: Points of Departure", an emerging new area of cutting edge work: See in particular the pioneering articles by Marquardt, "'Green Havoc'" and "Pesticides, Parakeets, and Unions", and the recent dissertation by Rogers, "Deepest Wounds" (the papers can be accessed through <http://www.duke.edu/web/las/laborhistoryconference/laborhistmain.htm>).

73. Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*.

sionaries at work, over a number of years, among the community of slaves in question. Within an anachronistic schema of organizing our historical research, the Viotti da Costa monograph is pigeon-holed as part of the distinct field of comparative New World slavery, a dynamic research area in the 1960s and 1970s that has since lost momentum and centrality to the wider scholarly debate. Wouldn't historians of slavery also gain from formal dialogue with those who study ostensibly free labor, since both focus on systems of labor exploitation? After all, there are structural dynamics that unite both the slave and the free, as well as legal specificities that differentiate them. Who could disagree with the acute observation offered by Luís dos Santos Vilhena, an eighteenth-century intellectual observer in Bahia, Brazil where half the population were slaves:

Political society is divided into proprietors and those who own no property; the former are infinitely fewer than the latter, as is well known. The proprietor tries to buy as cheaply as possible the only possession of the propertyless or wage earner, his labor. The latter in turn tries to sell it as dearly as possible. In this struggle, the weaker contestant although greater in numbers usually succumbs to the stronger.⁷⁴

Moreover, there are enormous continuities between the pre-modern and modern period when one is dealing with how the majority of the population survives. We have a social science vocabulary today that distinguishes the formal (i.e. government regulated) and informal sectors. Yet this definition lacks any historical depth and labor historians are no more likely today, than in the past, to take up the study of the secondary, informal, and tertiary sectors. What if one understood the formal protected sector as a late and fragile addition to a population most of whose subsistence activities have never been encompassed by government regulation from above? Would the phenomenon be different in terms of the material existence of those who survive through these means? Is there, in other words, a *history* to be written of these ubiquitous but under-theorized life ways? Might not the existence of labor laws covering *formal* wage earners produce a self-conscious *informal* sector? And couldn't there be a political point to be made in terms of the contemporary "flexibilization" (i.e. informalization) of employment relations not only on the periphery but in the center of the world system? Finally, our increased attention to women's activities should

74. Cited by Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, p. 435.

also highlight the importance of this topic since the boundaries between formal and informal subsistence strategies are especially blurred for women, even those employed, at one point or another, in the formal sector.

The study of these hard-to-classify subsistence strategies must be placed at the top of our research agenda with the aim of better understanding the consciousness, social psychology, mobilizational dynamics and forms of struggle of this heterogeneous amalgam. The importance of this topic is underlined when we observe that it is these groups, and not the formal sector working class, that are at the heart of electoral revolutions such as Chavismo in contemporary Venezuela. For example, it has long been assumed, though never convincingly demonstrated, that the dynamics of trade union struggle are shaped by the variations in union density within different economic and legal categories of employment. Clearly, this is an area of Latin American uniqueness vis-à-vis the North, as well as of commonality with much of the rest of the global South.

Whatever our answers to these questions, there can be little doubt that a sustained attack on this lacunae would have a salutary impact on our intellectual understanding of the popular classes in Latin America and the Caribbean. We should also encourage research on the impacts of the region's historically high and often sustained levels of inflation on popular consciousness, culture, and politics. Although women have been central to this epic if largely hidden daily struggle for survival, we still lack studies of how urban working class families have responded, over time, to the high cost of living. Beyond its impact on consumption patterns or trade union dynamics, inflation and currency instability must have also had a profound cultural influence on popular views of the nature of money and the economy.

Another yawning gap in our knowledge stems from our neglect of an important group of salaried working people in the region: government employees. This is all the more striking given their numbers and the symbolic role they are made to occupy as exemplars of government incapacity, corruption, and petty tyranny in relation to the poor and humble (not to mention their increasing importance within the organized labor movement in most countries). School teachers, for example, have long played a fundamental role in social movements in Latin America over the last sixty years.⁷⁵ Under what circumstances does this happen and how? The study

75. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*. See also the fine study of the sustained rank and file movement of radical teachers in Mexico by Cook, *Organizing Dissent*.

of various legal categories of government employees should also contribute to a new approach to the study of the state – not so much in its role as an abstract expression of the rule of the dominant classes – but as a living enterprise whose output (wages, services, and contracts), sources of financing, and internal rivalries and bureaucratic inefficiencies are central to the lives of millions. Moreover, the structuring of economic activities in Latin America, even after neo-liberal onslaught, still retains a significant sector of workers in state-owned or para-state enterprises, a subject of supreme political import and constant speculation that has never been the subject of compelling historical scholarship.

The literature on Latin American labor has also been slow to address the question of popular understandings of the legitimate grounds for authority and obedience. Even in the sphere of the working class narrowly construed, this question speaks directly to the link between rank-and-file workers and their employers, their union officials, and the political leaders to whom they give their allegiance: who has the right to command and who has the duty to obey? In countries like Mexico where trade unions emerged as powerful, indeed dominant, political actors in the post-revolutionary years, the exercise of power within many trade unions is clearly undemocratic if not anti-democratic in nature (the fascinating case of the textile workers' unions of Puebla in the 1930s studied by Gregory Crider has led to a suggested book title: "Trade Unionists With Guns").⁷⁶ The potential gains are well illustrated in Daniel James's approach to the deeply antagonistic debate regarding the relationship between workers and Perón or between workers and the powerful Peronist trade union bosses.⁷⁷

Clearly we will not understand politics and elections in Latin America without a clearer grasp of popular notions of both legitimate and illegitimate authority, their gendered bases, and how they are concretized through personal interactions (whether real or fictive) between workers and authority figures. In other words, we must strive to understand not abstract notions of legitimacy or logics of authority but rather the ways in which the expectations derived from these cultural concepts are manifested and manipulated in the daily practice of interpersonal relations. If we closely examine both practice and discourse, moreover, the study of authority in all of its forms (union, employer, and governmental) will offer insights into the dynamics of self-assertion and deference, resistance and

76. Crider, "Material Struggles".

77. James, *Resistance and Integration*.

accommodation, that define the everyday politics of the weak vis-à-vis the (more) powerful. This will provide ample ground for a wider discussion of the political culture of both the sub- and super-ordinate groups in Latin America, a region whose politics has often been characterized as based on patronage and clientelism. It also connects to the larger question of statecraft and popular “legal consciousness” that have begun to attract increasing attention in recent studies of labor law.⁷⁸

And finally, why are labor historians so reluctant, as intellectuals (a quintessential “middle class” group), to explore the very lines of status that define our own lives: manual versus non-manual; wages versus salaries; workers versus employees; blue collar versus white collar. As the late Michael Jiménez argued forcefully, it is indeed curious that the intelligentsia and middle sectors are not viewed as a “labor history” topic. Although briefly the focus of attention in the late 1950s and early 1960s (especially the seminal 1958 work of John J. Johnson), the Latin American “middle class was [quickly] shrugged off the scholarly agenda” despite the fact that this unstudied “middle class” is central to all synthetic interpretations of the region’s twentieth century politics.⁷⁹ This lacunae should be even harder to sustain with the welcome appearance of recent studies such as Brian Owensby’s *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-class Lives in Brazil* and David Parker’s *The Idea of the Middle Class: White-Collar Workers and Peruvian Society, 1900-1950*.⁸⁰

The investigation of the non-manual salaried, and even non-salaried, middle class is a new frontier in our drive to deepen the “new labor history” of the last thirty years. The transition to salaried status of non-manual working people, some of whom might formerly, or theoretically, have been autonomous (i.e. petty bourgeois, self-employed), could be expected to be traumatic in status terms. Yet in Latin America, the process of adaptation to a proletarianized status could scarcely be identified with personal failure, societal retrogression, or the destruction of a hard fought-for personal “independence”. In this regard, the *dependent* nature of so much of the middle class in Latin America in the early twentieth century, to use David Rock’s term, may actually make the transition to fully salaried status

78. On labor law’s impacts on workers, see French, *Drowning in Laws*; Lopes, *Tecelagem de Conflitos*.

79. Johnson, *Political Change in Latin America*; Jiménez “Elision of the Middle Classes”, pp. 6–7.

80. Owensby, *Intimate Ironies*; Parker, *The Idea of the Middle Class*.

easier than in the case, say, of the United States where the ideal of the “self made man” occupied a larger place in the social imaginary.⁸¹

Moreover, the region’s white-collar middle class has long been characterized by a precocious associationalism, as shown in Parker’s excellent Peruvian study. Educated employees in Latin America appear to have unionized earlier and easier than in much of the North Atlantic world and they did so without overturning status hierarchies in any immediate sense. How is this possible and what are its implications? Once we have made progress on this subject, we could easily extend ourselves to encompass the complicated cultural and status relations between non-working class social strata and workers. The relations between workers and non-workers has been explored for mining communities in Porfirian Mexico by William French, as well as informing Karin Roseblatt’s recent study of the gendered inter and intra-class dialogues that underlay the Chilean Popular Front.⁸² The key to future advances is not to abandon or replace but rather to add to and expand the boundaries of what we define as our object of study. This can be done by incorporating new theoretical problematics and empirical foci as well as through the application of our existing methods of analysis to subjects beyond our current core concerns (as was done in Barbara Weinstein’s pathbreaking study of São Paulo industrialists). After all, we know little about entrepreneurial/industrial cultures or about the labor process as viewed from the employers side of the labor/management divide.⁸³

With few exceptions, labor history has advanced in the past decade through an extension of the geographic reach and depth of our research, which exposes the gross geographical biases of most of what pass for “national labor histories”. Detailed and intensive micro-studies are especially important given the underdeveloped state of our historiography. We still lack, for example, the array of solid institutional and national-level studies (the “old labor history” of the North Atlantic World) that served as the necessary pre-Thompsonian backbone that underlay the “new labor history” of the 1960s and 1970s in countries like England and the United States.⁸⁴ Yet we must avoid falling into the classic illusion of anthropological field work: that we

81. Rock, *Politics in Argentina*.

82. W. French, *Peaceful and Working People*; Roseblatt, *Gendered Compromises*. For more on the complexity of Popular Front politics in Chile in the 1930s and 1940s, see Pavlack, “‘Black Gold in the Red Zone.’”

83. Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil*. Savage, *Sons of the Machine*.

84. It is lamentable that we do not have more first class institutional studies like Steve Ellner’s *Organized Labor in Venezuela*.

will finally understand a given society only after we have studied one more village (and the one after that)! Above all, we must never lose sight of what must remain the central aim of our research: to establish firmer foundations for broad new histories of working people and their place in the modern world. In other words, the pressing nature of our immediate micro-history tasks – and their high intellectual yield – should not lead us to fetishize the particular or the local. Despite its risks, we should intensify the search for meaningful generalizations about and periodizations of social, economic, and political processes as they work themselves out within and across the various nations and sub-regions within Latin America (a key contribution of serious comparative thinking and research).

Within Latin America as a whole, after all, there are enlightening comparisons to be made that might change our understanding of national histories of labor. Looking at the emergence of modern workers' movements, for example, it is possible to identify distinct waves of ferment and agitation that produce the first relatively effective and sustained organizational expressions of a new social class of wage earners. This process occurred during the last decade of the nineteenth century in some countries; in others between 1906 and 1913 or in the aftermath of World War I; and for still other only during the 1930s (on the case of the British West Indies, see Ken Post's spectacular but oft-ignored 1978 study of the Jamaican Labor Rebellion of 1938).⁸⁵ What explains these patterns of mobilization? And how does it reflect changes in the economic and social structure? Or take the question of strike patterns: why are there shared trends through time across widely separated countries within the region while other countries remain immune?

If nations are irreducible facts in one sense, they are equally artificial in other dimensions, as has been brought home once again by globalizing processes in the contemporary world.⁸⁶ Latin America can be said to contain a

85. Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*. There is a striking neglect by Latin American historians of other classics of the labor history of the English speaking Caribbean such as Rodney, *History of the Guyanese Working People*.

86. That the last five centuries have been shaped by sustained and deep-rooted globalizing processes challenges labor historians, as Rediker notes, to learn how to write "trans-national histories of working people that overlap with, intersect with, and sometimes help determine the histories of nation states" ("Revenge of Crispus Attacks", p. 42-43). In *Many-Headed Hydra*, Linebaugh and Rediker strive for a politically-engaged and empowering history of capitalist globalization in the early modern Atlantic world; for a thoughtful exploration of local/global dynamics from a periphery of Latin America, Ecuador, see Striffler, *In the Shadows*.

number of meaningful transnational groupings, as in the case of Argentina, Uruguay and the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. Others would grant a similar status to the countries of Central America and a 1998 edited collection has argued, provocatively, that the Hispanic Caribbean islands could be meaningfully grouped with Central America at mid-century.⁸⁷ And few would doubt that English-speaking colonies of the Caribbean, with their circum-Caribbean diaspora, constitute a meaningful entity. Other types of linkages can also be found ranging from the migration of populations to shared processes of socio-economic transformation. There are clear but unexplored parallels, for example, between the U.S.-led industrialization of Puerto Rico under "Operation Boot Strap" in the 1950s and the "maquiladora" revolution in Northern Mexico. The case of Puerto Rico, incorporated into the U.S. as a direct colonial dependency, is particularly striking because it allows us to examine how a Latin American people and their struggles developed within the context of a U.S. political, legal, and industrial relations framework. And finally, the case of the non-Hispanic island colonies are fruitful because they allow us to explore the impact of an extremely late gaining of national independence on workers struggles.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Let us return to the question of why it is that the labor history we do in Latin America remains predominantly the story of proletarianized wage laborers, especially the factory proletariat. Why has our attention become fixed almost exclusively on capitalist wage labor as it emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, a phenomenon that has spread and broadened its geographical reach within the region with each passing decade of the twentieth century? Why, in other words, do generations of scholars adopt a particular definition of their enterprise? What are the questions they are seeking to answer? And to what end? In truth, Latin American workers' movements are inextricably bound up with the quest for "modernity" by the region's middle classes, an adventure which leads to a search to identify – or perhaps even create – other modern social actors. Although there may be "pristine" workers' movements somewhere, there

87. Chomsky and Lauria-Santiago, *Identity and Struggles at the Margins*.

88. Bolland, *Politics of Labour*; the potential of Latin American examples to shed analytical light on developments in the English-speaking Caribbean is suggested by Rogers, "Bustamante, the Lonely Fighter".

is no belying the inseparability of the struggles of the critical intelligentsia and insurgent workers within most Latin American societies.⁸⁹ In Brazil, for example, the scholarly neglect of urban workers first began to change in the 1950s in the south-central regions of Brazil. The unexpected political and industrial militancy of workers after 1945 attracted the attention of a newly professionalized class of academic intellectuals, especially a group of sociologists associated with the Universidade de São Paulo. Although distant from the workers' movement, the young USP intellectuals clearly identified workers as an integral part of their broad vision of modernity, national development, and democracy; the dream of "heavy industry guaranteed by universal suffrage" in the epigram of Alfredo Bosi.⁹⁰

If we play our cards right, Latin American and Latin Americanist labor historians can play an important role in the intellectual reconfiguration of the wider historical literature on the working class.⁹¹ We will miss this historical opportunity if we adhere too strictly to a self-limiting parochialism that diminishes the role that the study of Latin America and the Caribbean might play in enriching, challenging, and transforming our inherited North Atlantic understandings, categories, and analytical schemes for the study of capitalist development, class formation, and workers' struggle.⁹²

89. The engagement with workers by a generation of radical students and *avant-garde* artists produced sui generis "proletarian" novels in the 1920s (Galvão, *Industrial Park*; Vallejo, *Tungsten*). French, "'They Don't Wear Black-Tie'" deals with the relation between intellectuals, artists, and workers in Brazil between the mid-1950s and 1981.

90. Cited in Mota, *Ideologia da Cultura Brasileira*, p. iv.

91. The new stature of Latin American and Caribbean labor history can be seen in the founding of a new journal by Leon Fink in 2004. The new journal *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* is explicitly designed to be a truly American labor history journal in the broadest hemispheric sense (I am serving as the Associate Editor for Latin American and the Caribbean). As an historian of labor in the US, Fink has led the way by transforming his adding a transnational and multicultural dimension to his own historical practice. *The Maya of Morganton* offers a stimulating border-spanning history of Guatemalan Mayan immigrant workers who came to play a leading role in a strike and unionization drive in North Carolina in the 1990s.

92. While agreeing that we must "avoid imposing a Eurocentric model", Rothstein argued presciently in 1986 that "it is not merely that we must avoid transposing European models onto Asians, Africans, and Americans. We need a model of the totality, that is, of the experiences of all, that does not make the European industrial experience more significant just because it was first" (Rothstein, "New Proletarians", pp. 236-237).

We are only now emerging from the shadow cast by the early industrializing countries of Europe and the United States and there is much to be learned from extra-regional comparisons outside of the North Atlantic world. As we proceed, we must also take care that our scholarship does not become a purely careerist enterprise that has lost its moral and political moorings. Based on all that we have learned in the last thirty years, one must ask today: How can one write a Latin American and Caribbean labor history for this era of transnational and global capitalism? After all, to say “what is” or “what has been” is also to say what can, could, or should be.