

# Introduction to the Volume

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In choosing the papers for the 1985 *Yearbook* of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers, I looked for papers that had a clear purpose, that were written in plain prose, and that collectively represented the broad interests of geographers specializing in Latin America. I also tried to achieve a balance among well-established scholars, those who have been in geography a few years, and those who are just entering the profession. The fact that so many of the papers submitted were based on field work was especially pleasing to me, because it is my impression that this tradition is less strong in geography than it once was and needs revitalizing. I was disappointed, on the other hand, because no papers in Portuguese, Spanish, or French were submitted in time to be considered for this year.

The papers fell only very loosely into topic groups and so they are described and printed in a rather eclectic order, which does not represent a ranking of the papers.

Stuart White, whose paper is first, has a talent for conveying to the reader the intimate and creative experience that geographic field work can be. He describes, in an attractive style reminiscent of geographers writing earlier in the century, how he puzzled out the origins of the complex vegetation mosaics of the Southern Peruvian Andes. Two other authors, Peter Herlihy and Clifford Dixon, also write about Latin American landscapes. Herlihy considers how change brought about by economic development and population pressure is affecting the settlement and subsistence patterns of the Darién Chocó. He compares past and present patterns and outlines the factors that instigated the changes, noting that territoriality is now of increasing importance to the Chocó as they confront others eyeing their lands.

Clifford Dixon writes about the coconut, a plant that few Americans from either hemisphere would leave out of their mental image of the Caribbean. Dixon traces the story of the coconut in one part of the Caribbean--the north coast of Honduras. He ends with a discussion of the roles the plant now plays in the lives of the coastal Garifuna and as an export crop. He concludes with an interesting prediction that our images of Caribbean landscapes are in for a subtle but significant revision since, because of disease, a dwarf species of coconut is replacing the more familiar tall stately species.

Four papers deal with migration, but their subjects and timeframes are widely divergent. Vincent Malmstrom is one of several geographers who have been interested in the origins of cultures in Middle America. There have been several collaborative efforts between archaeologists and geographers on this subject, but they do not always agree on the evidence. In the past, Malmstrom has developed a number of hypotheses that have run counter to the theories of other scholars, especially archaeologists. Here he presents some geographic arguments for the idea that the Olmecs originated not along the Gulf Coast of Mexico, where they flourished, but migrated there from the Pacific Coast in Soconusco. He finds his evidence in topographic, climatic, ceramic, and linguistic patterns.

Brian Evans takes us to Alto Peru in the late seventeenth century where the population was in a state of rapid change. His analysis of contemporary census data provides us with demographic profiles that suggest much about the effect of the Spanish colonial policy of forced labor and forced migration. His insights help to explain the processes that dismantled the traditional structures of Peruvian society and brought about the system of peonage.

Luis Aragon addresses a methodological problem in modern migration research. Recent research has shown that migration is far more complex than a simple change of residence by individuals who rationally weigh push and pull factors. Rather migration decisions are often collective, aimed at improving life for those who stay as well as those who go and may involve multiple or repeated moves. Older methods of collecting data only by households have made accounting for this complexity impossible. Aragon suggests, therefore, the use of family networks as survey units. This method would allow the researcher to keep track of migrants that are no longer a **[end p. 1]** part, strictly speaking, of a surveyed household, thus facilitating the quantification of total flows.

Brian Godfrey deals with the Latin American diaspora. He is interested in how migrants, especially those from Central America, came to occupy the Mission District of San Francisco, and how, as they took over the district from earlier migrants, they put their own particular stamp on the community. He concludes that recently heightened Hispanic solidarity is blurring the lines that in the past set the Central American group apart from other Latin Americans.

Development issues have always figured prominently in research by geographers interested in Latin America. One of the common themes has been the need for agricultural reform; but, although the problems generated by export-oriented agriculture are well known, the solutions are difficult to find. Too often efforts that are beginning to show promise are swept away by those impatient for rapid reform or by outside intervention of one sort or another. John Brierley describes the efforts of Maurice Bishop and the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada to raise the standard of living on the island and to increase island self-sufficiency by strengthening both agriculture for export and agriculture for domestic consumption. He concludes that the effort had considerable merit and the gains should not be lost in the wake of Bishop's demise.

Tourism is a development strategy popular in many Latin American nations, yet it often seems to serve the needs of tourists from North America and Europe more effectively than those of the host countries. The question of just what kind of tourism is the best to encourage for the good of the host country has not been settled. Wolfgang Haider's fieldwork in Tobago led to a study of the present role and potential of small guest houses (proven to be more efficient employment creators than luxury high-rise hotels) to attract affluent visitors.

Development also brings with it new awareness of environmental problems and efforts to conserve natural resources; but these efforts may come in conflict with the needs of local people. Susan Place provides a succinct discussion of the issues raised by ecological conservation in Latin America and illustrates her points by documenting how the establishment of a national park on the Costa Rican Caribbean Coast, to preserve both the habitat of the Caribbean green sea turtle and the lowland rainforest, adversely affected the nearby village of Tortuguero. Her conclusion contains suggestions for alleviating the negative human impact of conservation projects.

Changing patterns of human relationships brought about by regional geopolitical developments is the subject of John Augelli's paper. He contrasts Panamanian and local American reactions to the beginning of Panamanian control of the Panama Canal in 1979 with the situation five years later when Americans were still firmly in control of the canal but found their social and cultural influence in Panama waning quickly. He discusses the effect of financial control over the canal on Panama's economy, the challenges to the canal's income by alternative transport strategies, and the future of U. S. behavior vis-a-vis Panama, given recent changes in Central American political alignments.

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