

The 1993 Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholar Award



Alan Gilbert

The Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers takes great pleasure in honoring **Alan Gilbert**, Professor of Geography at University College London, with the 1993 Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholar Award. For more than twenty years Alan has produced a steady stream of innovative texts and research monographs. His combination of intellectual advances with attention to questions of social relevance, often of immediate applied consequences, would be difficult to match not only among Latin Americanists, but among geographers in general.

Born in London in 1944, Alan began his academic career at the University of Birmingham (UK) where he completed a bachelors degree reading geography, politics, and economics. Then, after a brief period in advertising, he moved on to the prestigious London School of Economics to undertake doctoral research (1966-1970), Colombia providing the geographical focus of his dissertation. After yet another brief interlude in private consultancy work studying a port expansion in Peru, he accepted an appointment as research fellow at the then recently-established Institute of Latin American [end p. 150] Studies of the University of London. Shortly afterwards he was appointed to the faculty at University College London where he has worked ever since, progressing from Assistant Lecturer to Reader, and from 1990, Professor of Geography.

Though Alan's many papers and book chapters, published in the leading journals and volumes of the profession, would in themselves have ensured his mark in Latin American studies, here I wish to stress the significance of his numerous books. As a virtual novice in the Latin Americanist geographical group, in 1974 he published the first systematic geographical study of contemporary Latin America, entitled *Latin American Development: A Geographical Perspective* (Penguin), providing a whole generation of geographers with their first introduction to the many facets of development theory from a spatial perspective. Eschewing what he soon came to realize as the barren wastes of the then popular quantitative geographical revolution, Alan turned to a more practical issue of major social science concern: urban development. In a series of studies, several published in cooperation with other scholars, his investigations have revealed the complicated contexts of Latin American urban development. In 1982, *Cities, Poverty and Development: Urbanization in the Third World* (Oxford University Press: with J. Gugler), identified many of the topics upon which Alan would later focus his investigations. 1985 saw the publication of *Housing, the State and the Poor: Policy and Practice in Three Latin American Cities* (Cambridge University Press: with Peter Ward), the result of a major international project, as well as a study of *The Political Economy of Land: Urban Development in an Oil Economy* (Gower: with P. Haly). By

1991, yet another landmark analysis of urban conditions was ready for publication. *Landlord and Tenant: Housing the Poor in Urban Mexico* (Routledge), undertaken with his University College colleague Ann Varley, highlighted one of the key elements in Mexican urban development that had been almost totally neglected in the urban literature. Notwithstanding the many difficulties of completing a major project in Mexico, Alan next took his researches to a new international level. In a volume entitled *In Search of a Home: Rental and Shared Housing in Latin America* (UCL Press and University of Arizona Press, 1993), he and his collaborators from Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico provided us with empirical data never before assembled within Latin America. Anyone who has attempted to coordinate a funded research project in one country will appreciate his organizational and diplomatic skills in bringing such a project to fruition.

Yet, while involved in such invaluable advanced research, Alan never forgot the need to provide introductory syntheses for students. If his 1974 *Latin American Development* marked the beginning of this genre, the publication of the brief *Latin America* (Routledge, 1990), and *The Latin American City* (Monthly Review Press, 1994), demonstrated his continued interest in providing those not involved in research at the frontier of the discipline with the general outlines that are so important in stimulating the next generation's interest in Latin American studies. The year 1995 will see the publication of his edited volume *The Megacity in Latin America* (United Nations University Press) that reviews one of Latin America's most significant twentieth-century phenomena.

Besides his many and varied academic projects and publications, Alan Gilbert has also served with distinction in a variety of international consultancies. Since 1991 alone he has served as advisor on employment, housing, urbanization and regional development in developing countries to the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations Center for Human Settlements, UNESCO, and the United Nations University. He has also recently authored a report on the Colombian economy for Business Monitor International.

In 1984, Alan received the Gill Memorial Award from the Royal Geographical Society, and served as President of the Society of Latin American Studies between 1985-1987. It is thus with great pleasure that the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers adds its accolade to a scholar and Latin Americanist geographer of singular distinction.

David J. Robinson [end p. 151]