

Introduction

César N. Caviedes

Department of Geography

University of Florida

Gainesville, FL 32611-7315

This is the last issue of the *Yearbook* published at the end of the twentieth century and, alas, the closing of the Second Millennium. Reflecting the state of the discipline at this point in time, it is a showcase of debated contemporary themes, methodological approaches, and interpretative tendencies dealt with by a wide variety of specialists on Latin Americanist geography.

The front article reconciles the advantages of empiric analysis with the flights and flaws of discursive-deductive methods when treating the question of the origin of the black earths found in the Amazon basin. Of very disputed interpretation, these *terra pretas* have become a central argument in the discussion about the density of native populations and the carrying capacity of the humid tropical lowlands of South America. The senior author of this paper applies his experience in uncovering traces of human occupancy in tropical soils to the interpretation of soil samples collected in riverine locations. He maintains that some of are of natural origin, which -- if that is so -- could have sustained larger populations than commonly assumed.

The article by David Keeling presents aspects of current politics and the impact of new orientations in city management and urban renewal on Buenos Aires. The paper offers insights into the frequently asked question whether Argentina is on its way to institutional and economic recovery after the 1982 debacle and the adoption of neo-liberal schemes of growth by the country's entrenched political powers.

A pertinent view of one of the last frontier towns in southernmost South America is offered by Veronika Baumann and Christoph Stadel in their article on Ushuaia. The work opens with a discussion of the meaning of frontier settlement and its applicability to the analysis of peripheral urban centers. The functions and purposes of Ushuaia in the plans of Argentine regional developers, politicians, and city administrators are detailed throughout the paper.

An intriguing article on the traits imprinted on the urban landscape by Latin American immigrants is the one by Robert Kent and Augusto Gandia in the specific case of Puerto Ricans living in Lorain, Ohio. It is a welcome addition to a body of literature that deals with city imagery and urban symbolism in the rapidly changing cultural ecology of North American cities.

The interest in themes concerning the natural environment is represented by the article on atmospheric pollution and heat islands in Greater Mendoza, Argentina, authored by Wilfried Endlicher, Barbara Zahnen, and Eckart Schultz. Urban air properties obtained by on-site measurements and tethered balloon observations are examined in the context of the major weather situations that affect that city, and it is pointed out how air quality affects differentially the various socio-economic groups within Greater Mendoza. The paper closes with a comparison between the findings in Mendoza and those obtained through similar investigations in other Latin American cities at comparable sites and faced with identical air contamination problems. [end p. v]

A subject of current actuality is addressed by James Wiley in his paper on the imperatives imposed by the production of export-oriented non-traditional agricultural commodities with the purpose of ameliorating the national economies of small countries in the West Indies. Using as example the ongoing efforts to achieve agricultural diversification in Dominica and Grenada, the author concludes that these measures have not

resulted in sizeable progress and that the prosperity originally hoped for has not materialized.

The final contribution by Eric Keys studies the modalities of garden production in the Kaqchikel region of Guatemala, with a special emphasis on the labor input by women and children. The relevance of the latter in the food production of traditional societies of Latin America has been placed in its proper perspective by several contemporary studies. Activity in these gardens plays an important role in integrating the younger members of Mayan communities into the emacular culture, instilling certain attitudes towards the environment, and training them information in ancestral agricultural techniques and proper plant utilization.

As is customary in CLAG *Yearbook* issues, this volume includes the honors bestowed to the most meritorious scholars in the specialty as they were recognized at the CLAG Meeting of Santa Fe, New Mexico, in October of 1998.

That year's Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Award was granted to Carl Johannessen in recognition of his multiple contributions to the field of diffusion. All those who know Carl value him for his stimulating, often controversial, and always challenging ideas, and for the forceful way and contagious enthusiasm with which he presents his discoveries. Doubtless, his presence in the Latin Americanist arena has imbued the field of cultural geography with a very inspiring and lively spirit.

The Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholar Award went to Karl Zimmerer for his steady and insightful flow of work on cultural ecology and environmental change in the Andes of Peru and Bolivia, and his most recent contributions, *Changing Fortunes: Biodiversity and Peasant Livelihood in the Peruvian Andes* and the edited volume of *Nature's Geography: New Lessons for Conservation in Developing Countries*. These works demonstrate a happy marriage between serious scholarship and militant engagement in favor of agricultural communities in an area whose problems are much too often misperceived and wrongly interpreted.

As editor of this issue I greatly appreciate the interest demonstrated by many colleagues and friends of CLAG to submit manuscripts. The papers submitted underwent a rigorous review process by peers and specialists of cognate disciplines. The input of the latter ensured that the production of Latin Americanist geographers was consistent with the state of the art and represented a real contribution also to neighboring specialties.

Finally, two recommendations to future editors of the *Yearbook*. The keen response on the part of colleagues who submitted papers and other specialists who enquired about sending manuscripts, reveals that this publication is becoming a respectable outlet for current research on Latin America. The stringent referee policy has enhanced the quality and originality of the articles and contributed to the good name of this publication. Yet, it seems that the *Yearbook* has not made its way into libraries of institutions that have a distinct interest in Latin America. Several prospective contributors remarked that the *Yearbook* was not in the holdings of their libraries although they are affiliated with universities and colleges that have a tradition in Latin Americanist research. An effort must be made to have institutions subscribe to the *Yearbook*, since the articles published are valuable resources for the writing of research papers and graduate work.

Also to be explored should be the possibility of having the abstracts of articles appearing in the review included in *GeoAbstracts*, *Current Geographical Publications*, and the on-line data bases of the Library of Congress. In this way, the work of Latin Americanist geographers can reach wider audiences. [end p. vi]