

# Latin Americanist Research in the New Millennium

David J. Keeling

*Department of Geography and Geology*

*Western Kentucky University*

*Bowling Green, KY 42101-3576*

As we transition into the Third Millennium (at least in terms of the Gregorian calendar), this is the final issue of the *CLAG Yearbook* in its present form. Beginning in 2002, a retitled and revamped journal -- *The Journal of Latin American Geography* -- will build on the tradition of showcasing research on, debate about, and interpretations of Latin American geography represented in this volume. In 2001, a special issue on Latin Americanist geography will focus on the many ways in which geographers contribute to identifying and solving human-environment problems in the region.

Demonstrated by the research presented in this volume, Latin Americanist geographers continue to tackle issues and questions that speak to the complexity of development, growth, and change in the region. In the first article, Wayne Burke and George Lovell take us back to the early post-Conquest period on Dominica to evaluate demographic conditions on the island. Their research addresses the issue of population numbers on the eve of European intrusion and attempts to estimate likely rates of indigenous demise as a consequence of contact. Craig Revels continues an historical geography approach to human-environment relationships in Latin America with his exploration of the role of coffee in the development of nineteenth-century Nicaragua. Revels argues that transport and government promotion policies were the most critical elements in the expansion of coffee cultivation in Nicaragua. He suggests that Nicaragua's experience was similar to that of other countries in the region and calls for a more thorough geohistorical analysis of the role of transportation and government policy in the commodity production process.

John Harner brings our focus back to the contemporary period with an analysis of the Mexican community in Scottsdale, Arizona. Widely known as an upscale tourist and retiree community, Scottsdale long has relied upon Mexican labor for its economic and quality of life success. Yet despite the importance of the Mexican community, Harner shows how Scottsdale's official imagery ignores the many contributions made by Mexican migrants to the city's success and illustrates the continued segregation that Mexicans endure. Dan Klooster continues the Mexican theme with an analysis of forest change in two indigenous communities in highland Mexico. He argues for a deeper examination of a "deforestation orthodoxy" that suggests a unilinear process of agricultural expansion and forest reduction. Klooster's research in the Lake Patzcuaro region challenges the orthodoxy and suggests that researchers need to examine more closely the social factors governing biomass loss and agricultural change. The widespread presumption that an homogenous process of deforestation is sweeping the Mexican countryside is refuted in this study.

Paul Hudson examines the geomorphology of the Rio Panuco in Mexico's Tampico region and focuses on spatial and temporal variations in the watershed characteristics. He argues that a lack of research on rivers along the Mexican Gulf Coastal Plain has left gaps in our knowledge of the region's geomorphology. Field work on sediment discharge and transport rates in the Basin provided data that enabled a comprehensive assessment of the Rio Panuco's behavior patterns. Hudson argues that subtle changes in the floodplain topography may significantly influence fluvial system characteristics. Elizabeth Babcock and Dennis Conway shift the focus back to Central America with their analysis of international migration and Belize. They suggest a research approach that explores the nexus between transnational social relationships, micro-level socioeconomic impacts, and the local-global complexity of international migration. With Belize [end p. vii] as a case study, Babcock and Conway examine the implications of migratory flows to and from the United States and offer Belizean policymakers and migrants four steps that could enhance the impact of migration

on local communities.

William Crowley delves into the local and international impacts of globalization with an examination of changes in Chile's wine industry. He demonstrates through an historical analysis of the industry how the "wine revolution" has reshaped the character of viticulture in Chile. Yet despite new technologies and marketing strategies, the geography of wine in Chile still demonstrates a level of centralization fairly typical of much economic activity in Latin America. Michael Camille continues the theme of changes in the production of an important commodity with an historical geography of mahogany extraction in Belize. He traces the development of timber haulage improvements from the late 1700s through to the mid-twentieth century and links these improvements to variations in mahogany exports. The successive introduction of oxen, tractors, and logging trucks dramatically impacted both the spatial range of mahogany cutting and the level of mahogany production.

Roberta Delson concludes the research article section of this *Yearbook* edition with an intriguing analysis of the late-colonial Amazonian cultural landscape using visual sources. She demonstrates how the Portuguese frequently adapted and adopted indigenous knowledge into the construction of material culture despite an official policy of Europeanizing the local population. Analyses of cultural landscape images from the region support Delson's assertion that the fusion of local knowledge with European material culture was not an aberrancy.

A new section added to this year's edition of the *CLAG Yearbook* showcases field research. Eric Perramond reports on preliminary research that looks at the relationship between buffelgrass and soil erosion in Sonora, Mexico. Initial results suggest that although buffelgrass can be a highly effective soil cover, erosion rates seem to be high in newly seeded pastures. In the second article, Martha Works and Keith Hadley use the technique of repeat photography to analyze landscape changes over a 50-year period. Drawing on Robert West's late-1940s work in the Sierra Purepécha of Michoacán, Mexico, they compare photographs taken in 1999 in order to question assumptions about change in the biophysical landscape. The use of repeat photography methodology highlights the importance of what the term "research" really means: to [re]search or to go back and look again! Their comparison of landscape images over a fifty-year period rejects the a priori assumption that deforestation has been a leading cause of landscape change in Mexico.

The 1999 CLAG Honorees are presented in the penultimate section, and this edition of the *CLAG Yearbook* closes with a section titled "CLAG Retrospectives." Here, Stephen Jett offers an analysis of his personal journey as a cultural diffusionist into and through geography, and George Lovell offers a poignant remembrance of Jim Parsons.

I am grateful, as usual, to all of the authors who agreed with the reviewers' and editor's suggestions and modifications of their texts, figures, and tables. I also thank the many colleagues who reviewed the eighteen manuscripts submitted for the 2000 volume, including those published here and those that could not be included in this issue. They include: Tom Boswell, Bill Denevan, Bill Doolittle, Tim Brothers, Steve Driever, Dan Dugas, Brian Godfrey, Maureen Hays-Mitchell, Peter Herlihy, Rob Kent, Dan Klooster, Karen Lewotsky, Taylor Mack, Ines Miyares, Karl Offen, Richard Pace, Bonham Richardson, David Robinson, Rick Sambrook, Joe Scarpaci, Andy Sluyter, Betty Smith, Cynthia Sorrenson, Michael Steinberg, Michael Trapasso, Rolf Wesche, Tom Whitmore, and Karl Zimmerer. Your individual service to CLAG is very much appreciated; my sincere apologies if I have failed to recognize any reviewer.

Finally, I am indebted to the Department of Geography and Geology at Western Kentucky University for logistical and other office support.

**[end p. viii]**