

## THE SOUTHWESTERN COUNCIL OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

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"It is we in the borderlands who have the strongest bonds with our Latin neighbors. We of all North Americans best know and appreciate their brilliant minds, their generous hearts, and their delicate culture."

Herbert Eugene Bolton

Hoping to stimulate undergraduate as well as graduate students of the University of Houston and residents of the city to consider critically and constructively our country's relations with Latin America—their knowledge seemed to be limited to a tiny bag of clichés relative to Fidel Castro, military dictatorships, ownership of the Panama Canal, Mexican *braceros*, etc.—Harvey L. Johnson, professor of Spanish and Portuguese and acting director of Latin American Studies at the University of Houston, arranged a one-day conference on 19 March 1966 that featured two lectures and discussions led by members of the faculty plus a luncheon address, "The Epic Poem of Latin America" by Rafael Squirru, Argentine poet and critic and director of the Cultural Division of the Pan American Union. At a general meeting, the coordinator of the program raised the question about founding a council of Latin American studies for the southwest. Wholehearted support was manifest. In November of the same year, a three-day conference, sponsored by Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas, and coordinated by Richard A. Johnson, its director of Interdisciplinary Area Programs, focused on the subject "The Confluence of the Cultures of the Americas." Among the speakers were the Honorable Fulton Freeman, United States ambassador to Mexico; Luther H. Evans, director of International Collections at Columbia University; several distinguished professors from various Mexican universities; and Howard F. Cline, director of the Hispanic Foundation. At the close of the conference an informal meeting was convened, with Richard A. Johnson serving as chairman, for the purpose of considering the desirability of establishing in Texas a regional association of Latin American studies. A motion to create it carried, but in the general discussion regarding the implementation of the proposal it was decided to await the outcome of the final decision to be reached at the conference scheduled for April 1967, at the University of Houston. Although the organization was postponed, the group recognized, nevertheless, the need to have a committee appointed to draft a constitution and bylaws prior to the meeting in Houston.

The second annual conference held at the University of Houston, 27–29 April 1967, focused on the theme “Latin America in This Decade.” Jorge T. Velásquez, director general of the National Bank of Panama and governor of the International Monetary Fund, opened the conference with an address entitled “Current Panama-United States Relations: Their Impact on the Economic Development of Panama.” Samuel Marti, Mexican violinist, and Rudolph P. Acton, expert on Latin American universities, enriched the program that ran the gamut from a session of Brazilian music played by an accomplished pianist to the military and politics, manpower and agricultural research, educational reform, the Central American common market, advance of the air industry, literature, economics, transportation, library resources, the Latin American in the southwest, etc. Harvey L. Johnson presided over the closing session, 29 April 1967, which voted to found the Southwestern Council of Latin American Studies (SCOLAS) and adopted with minor changes the constitution and bylaws drawn up by a committee chaired by August O. Spain. The following were elected officers and members of the Executive Board: President: August O. Spain, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth; Vice-president: Richard A. Johnson, Trinity University, San Antonio; Treasurer: (for three years) William F. Cooper, Baylor University, Waco; additional members of the Executive Board: Harvey L. Johnson, University of Houston, Houston; F. M. Kercheville, Texas College of Arts and Industries, Kingsville; Donald D. Brand, The University of Texas, Austin.

The area of special interest to be embraced by the Council would include the southwestern states and Mexico and its purposes were “. . . to provide a professional association to foster the interest and enterprise of scholars in Latin American studies, to encourage more effective teaching and research therein, to adduce a continuing dialogue among scholars and knowledgeable individuals both within and without the organization and to communicate by forums, publications and other means with any individuals concerned with Latin American life and culture” (SCOLAS constitution).

Thus membership was open to nonspecialists as well as specialists; teachers of secondary schools along with instructors of community and junior colleges and universities, librarians, and graduate students; and any individuals or institutions interested in Latin America. The Council from its inception hoped to attract members from the academic community, business, labor, professions, governmental service, and any other occupation with individuals concerned with Latin America and its confluence with the United States. Provision was made for four categories of membership: regular, student, institutional, and honorary.

The first SCOLAS conference, at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, 22–24 February 1968, had for its theme “Life, Labor, and Culture in the Americas: Symbiosis and Dialogue.” Otto R. Nielsen, vice-president of the University of the Americas, Mexico City, and former chief of the Human Resources Division, AID Mission to Guatemala, gave the opening address, “The Dialogue of the Disciplines.” R. Richard Rubottom, Jr., vice-president of Southern Methodist University and former assistant secretary of state for interamerican affairs, discussed the subject “United States and Latin America: Theory and Practice.”

During its first year of existence, the Council had a paid-up membership of 138, of which eight were institutions and ten were graduate students. It conferred its first honorary membership on J. Lloyd Mecham, long-time professor of government of the University of Texas at Austin. Harvey L. Johnson was elected vice-president and Karl Schmitt, University of Texas at Austin, and Arnulfo S. Martinez, Pan American College, were elected members of the Executive Board. The president appointed a committee to launch publication of an organ of communication that would keep the membership informed of regional activities. The president was authorized to appoint a committee charged with exploring the possibility of forming a southwestern consortium to microfilm Mexican archival documents.

The second conference of the Southwestern Council was held in San Antonio in conjunction with the centennial celebration of Trinity University. The meeting, 6–8 March 1969, had for its theme “The Role of the Rio Grande Frontier and Other Barriers to Confluence.” Among the numerous speakers were Raymond L. Telles, chairman of the United States section, United States–Mexico Commission for Border Development and Friendship and Antonio Castro Leal, distinguished Mexican scholar. Nettie Lee Benson was recipient of the SCOLAS honorary membership award for 1968–69. The secretary of the Latin American Studies Association and representatives of five regional councils convened in their annual meeting during the conference. A consortium of Texas colleges and universities to cooperate in microfilming Mexican archival materials and maintaining a union list of holdings available to participating institutions was organized. SCOLAS now had 160 members, a 23 percent increase in membership over the previous year. Harvey L. Johnson was elected president for 1969–70.

The third annual conference convened at the University of Houston in the evening of 23 April 1970, and concluded at noon the 25th. The luncheon lecture, “United States–Latin American Relations” was given by the Honorable Joseph John Jova, United States ambassador to the Organization of American States. At the business session, T. Lawrence White, director of the Inter-American Institute, Pan American College, Edinburg, was elected president for 1970–71. Harvey L. Johnson ceased to edit the *SCOLAS Newsletter* with volume 3, no. 3 (25 May 1970); he had served as editor since the founding of the Southwestern Council of Latin American Studies in 1967.

President White called a special meeting of the Executive Board of SCOLAS in San Antonio, 17 October 1970, to consider plans for increasing the membership. The Board recommended at this meeting that a special panel of graduate students be assigned a session on the program of the next conference. The fourth annual conference held in Edinburg, 15–17 April 1971, had for its theme “Cultural and Diplomatic Exchanges between Mexico and the United States in the Twentieth Century.” At the business session, the treasurer explained that for SCOLAS to comply with Internal Revenue Service requirements as a tax-exempt organization, the constitution would need to be amended so that if dissolved, the Council’s funds would be left to another tax-exempt body. The amendment naming the Library of Congress SCOLAS’ beneficiary

was approved unanimously. Donald D. Brand ascended to the presidency for 1971–72.

The fifth annual conference, at the University of Texas at Austin, 13–15 April 1972, had for its theme “The Cultural Unity of Latin America.” In the plenary session, William P. Glade spoke on “The Future of Latin American Studies.” Two student panels added to the variety of the program. Magnus Mörner, director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Stockholm, Sweden, spoke at the banquet on “Some Reflections about the Significance of Latin American History Today.” David M. Vigness, professor of history, Texas Tech University, moved up to the presidency.

The sixth annual conference held under the auspices of Texas Tech University, Lubbock, 23–24 February 1973, chose for its theme “Continuity and Change in Latin America.” In the graduate student panel, four different universities were represented. Lyle C. Brown, professor of political science, Baylor University, became president for 1973–74. William F. Cooper, professor of philosophy, Baylor University, terminated six years of commendable service as treasurer of SCOLAS.

The seventh annual conference was hosted by Baylor University, 21–23 February 1974. Thirty-two papers dealt with “Religion in Latin America,” the theme of the meeting. The Baylor meeting had on the program quite a number of graduate students and speakers from other regions. Charles Frazier, professor of history, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, served as president of SCOLAS and coordinator of the eighth meeting, 14–15 March 1975, which had for its theme “Latin America during the Twentieth Century.” The first SCOLAS meeting held outside of the United States took place 19–22 February 1976, at the Universidad de las Américas, Cholula, Puebla, Mexico; its theme was “Dependency and Underdevelopment in Latin America.” Stephen R. Niblo coordinated the program. A large number of participants were from various regions of the United States or Mexico. Philosophy, religion and music received more than usual attention.

The tenth conference, hosted by Texas Tech University, 3–5 March 1977, was organized by Robert J. Morris, president for 1976–77. Two sessions focused principally on Brazilian folk traditions and practices and religious cults, a third on black literature, and a fourth on ethnic groups. At the business meeting, Harvey L. Johnson was again elected editor of the *SCOLAS Newsletter*, which had not been distributed since 1971. It was hoped that through the reestablishment of this organ of communication membership would increase and interest in SCOLAS flourish again.

Bart Lewis, professor of Spanish, Texas A and M University and president of SCOLAS for 1977–78, organized the eleventh conference which assembled in College Station, 27–28 February 1978. Scientific and technological contributions to Latin America from Texas A and M University became obvious at this meeting. The growing attention to oral history collected on tapes was, likewise, manifest. Several universities, colleges, and the Institute of Texan Culture have utilized their expertise in this activity which is concerned with family histories,

biographies, social life, ethnic contributions, border relations, folklore, linguistic patterns, etc.

The twelfth conference, convened in the Menger Hotel, San Antonio, 8–10 March 1979, was organized by Brother Robert D. Wood, S.M., president of SCOLAS for 1978–79 and professor of history, St. Mary's University. The mayor of San Antonio welcomed the members. The opening address, given by Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, specialist in Indian languages and a member of the staff of the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico, spoke on "Aztec Religion, Christianity and Syncretism." Stanley R. Ross, professor of history at the University of Texas at Austin, discussed at the luncheon "Mexico-United States Border Problems: A New Area for Mexicanists and Others."

All the annual conventions, with the exception of the one in Mexico, 1976, have been held in Texas, and all, except the twelfth, have been hosted by universities in the state. All of the presidents, excepting the coordinator of the conference at the Universidad de las Américas, have been professors at Texas institutions of higher learning. The meetings have been scheduled in February (5), March (4), and April (3) and follow pretty much the same pattern: words of welcome from an administrator of the host institution; an inaugural address by a guest speaker; an after-luncheon speech by another guest; a business meeting; and panel sessions. The number of participants has ranged from twenty to seventy-five. History and literature predominate over the other disciplines; the fine arts (music, painting, architecture, etc.), women's roles and contributions, Chicano studies, sociology, philosophy, archaeology, and geography have been neglected on the majority of the programs. Mexico, as is to be expected because of its proximity, has received more attention than the rest of Latin America.

The planners of the majority of the conferences have assigned themes, but have had to spread the nets so wide in order to take in all manner of subjects that frequently there resulted little correspondence between the theme and the papers read in the sessions. Two of the exceptions to this general observation resulted in publications: *Proceedings of the Centennial Conference on Latin American Studies*, Trinity University, 6–9 March 1969, 56 pp., with the theme "The Role of The Rio Grande Frontier and Other Barriers to Confluence"; and *Religion in Latin America*, Baylor University, 21–23 February 1974, with the theme "Religion in Latin America and Other Topics." This volume, about five hundred pages in length, is being published by the Markham Press Fund of Baylor University Press. The assignment of themes to the conference has been discontinued in the last few years. Each annual convention has enjoyed a unique feature: discussion of law and the constitution in Hispanic America, 1968; a concert of Latin American colonial music and a lecture on the history of courtship music in Latin America, 1969; performances of two one-act plays by Carlos Solórzano, who also read a paper on trends in the contemporary Spanish American theatre, 1970; first panel of graduate students, 1971; division of program into separate sessions for the humanities and social sciences, 1972; study of the natural sciences in Latin America, 1973; thirty-two papers on religion in Latin America, 1974; bilingual teacher-training program, 1975; emphasis on philosophy, 1976;

Latin American studies at the precollegiate level and problems of teaching Latin American culture studies at community and junior colleges, 1977; oral history, 1978; Latin American archival resources in San Antonio, 1979.

The principal officers of the council are the president—he/she holds office for one year but serves as vice-president the year prior to ascending to the presidency—who organizes the program and heads the committee on local arrangements, and the secretary-treasurer—now combined but formerly two separate offices. The *SCOLAS Newsletter* (1967–71), now the *SCOLAS Bulletin* (1977– ), issued three times a year, carries information about the annual conference, regional and national meetings, news relevant to Latin Americanists, activities of members and institutions, recently published books, job opportunities, and visiting lecturers. Approximately two hundred persons receive the *Bulletin*. The Council's records, treasurers' reports, minutes of business meetings, official correspondence, copies of programs, and issues of the *Bulletin* are deposited in the Texas Collection of the Baylor University Library, Waco, Texas 76706.

The sources for this sketchy history of the Southwestern Council of Latin American Studies have been copies of the programs of the annual conferences, minutes of the business sessions, and the *SCOLAS Newsletter* and *SCOLAS Bulletin*. Membership in SCOLAS has never been limited to persons or institutions of the southwest, and people from other areas and Mexico invariably appear on the programs. Stated briefly, SCOLAS' function is to preserve, promote, and impart through multidisciplinary approaches a better understanding of Latin American culture. Reviewing the programs of the past twelve years, it is apparent that the organization has succeeded well in fulfilling its obligations. The heterogeneous contents of the papers, the number of sessions and active participants on the program leave one a bit amazed. The graduate students, through their discussions and papers, have shown that they, too, are an integral part of the Council's membership. As a result of the annual meetings, bonds of friendship link colleagues in various institutions and reduce to some degree the feeling of scholarly isolation that, at times, prevails in institutions of higher education.