

HOW TO BECOME A HISTORIAN OF LATIN AMERICA: *The Extraordinary Career of Frank Tannenbaum*

In January 2001, before the Conference on Latin American History decided to link its annual luncheon address to the recipient of its Distinguished Service Award, I had the honor of speaking at the CLAH luncheon, and in that previous talk I briefly discussed the circumstances that led to my becoming a Latin Americanist.¹ Here I return to the theme of becoming a historian of Latin America, but this time I will be drawing not on my own rather unremarkable experience, but instead on my current research for an intellectual biography of the renowned Latin Americanist Frank Tannenbaum (1893–1969), whose path to specialization in Latin American history was considerably more remarkable.

I should note that the following story actually goes somewhat against the grain of the biographical project in progress, since a central purpose of the study is to explore and underscore the extraordinary diversity of Frank Tannenbaum's intellectual output and scholarly activity. But since this text began its life as a talk to a room full of historians of Latin America, it seems fitting to narrow my focus temporarily to foreground Tannenbaum's career and identity as a historian of Latin America.

Barbara Weinstein is Silver Professor of History at New York University and past president of the American Historical Association. She has also taught at Vanderbilt University, Stony Brook University and the University of Maryland. Her publications include *The Amazon Rubber Boom, 1850–1920* (1983), *For Social Peace in Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920–1964* (1996), and *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil* (2015). She has served as co-editor of the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, the journal *International Labor and Working-Class History*, and the Radical Perspectives book series published by Duke University Press. Her research been funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Fulbright-Hays Program, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. She was a 2017–18 Fellow at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, where she began work on an intellectual biography of the pioneering Latin Americanist Frank Tannenbaum; she continued this research in 2022 with the support of an NEH Fellowship.

1. As was already the custom, my earlier luncheon address appeared in this journal. “Buddy, Can You Spare a Paradigm?: Reflections on Generational Shifts and Latin American History,” *The Americas* 57:4 (April 2001): 453–466.

Indeed, in the later decades of his life, this was clearly Tannenbaum's preferred academic identity. By the time he retired from Columbia University in 1961, he was routinely identifying himself as Professor Emeritus of Latin American History—I have even heard a recording of a radio program from the 1960s that introduced Tannenbaum as “Mr. Latin America.”² So it seems safe to say that he was, by then, known first and foremost, as an expert on Latin America, and that he was entirely comfortable with that designation. But this career choice was not even remotely foreshadowed by his early experiences and influences.

Like many of us, Tannenbaum had no “heritage” connection to Latin America. He was an Austrian Jewish immigrant and his first language was Yiddish. Born in 1893, he arrived in the United States in 1905, just before his twelfth birthday. Obligated to work to support himself after running away from home at the age of 15, he had no formal education beyond primary school until he was in his twenties.³ In multiple ways, he hardly seems a likely candidate for the role of historian of Latin America, especially given that Latin American studies was something of a “niche” field, to put it euphemistically. When Tannenbaum was entering academic adulthood, it was an area of marginal significance within a discipline dominated by historians of the United States and Europe.

Then how in the world did Tannenbaum become a historian of Latin America? One way to answer that question would be to point to the enormous interest in the Mexican Revolution in New York's left-wing circles during the 1910s, when Tannenbaum, living and working on Manhattan's Lower East Side, first became engaged in various radical political and intellectual activities. Sometime around 1913, he began attending lectures at the anarchist-run Ferrer School in the Bronx, and became involved in efforts by the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW, popularly known as the Wobblies) to organize restaurant workers (including himself) and mobilize protests by the unemployed. Both the anarchists and the Wobblies closely followed developments in Mexico, and at any major rally in New York in those days, the orators would devote a portion of their speeches to the dramatic and inspiring developments across the southern border.⁴ Thus, Tannenbaum certainly had some awareness of Latin

2. The program was an interview with Brazilian politician Carlos Lacerda on November 15, 1967. NYPR Archive Collections, WNYC Archives ID: 72269. <https://www.wnyc.org/story/72269-carlos-lacerda/>, accessed April 24, 2023.

3. There are several publications that recount the details of Tannenbaum's early life, but the best source by far is an unpublished “Memoir of Early Life” by Tannenbaum himself, written when he was 23 (probably 1916). Columbia Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Frank Tannenbaum Papers [RBML/FTP], Box 56, black binder.

4. On the radical/bohemian culture of New York City during these years, see Thai Jones, *More Powerful than Dynamite: Radicals, Plutocrats, Progressives, and New York's Year of Anarchy* (New York: Walker & Co., 2012), and Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

American history and politics during his formative intellectual years. But so did many people who never once gave a thought to becoming a historian of Latin America.

After leading a series of church occupations or “raids” by the unemployed during the bitter winter of 1913-14, Tannenbaum was convicted in March 1914 of “unlawful assembly” and sentenced to a year in Blackwell’s Island Penitentiary and a \$500 fine (a sum equivalent to approximately \$15,000 today). The trial was extensively covered by the New York press and made Tannenbaum something of a celebrity in the city’s radical and bohemian circles. His articulate defense of his actions prior to sentencing, and the unusually harsh penalty imposed by the judge, also made him an object of sympathy, even among some New Yorkers who would otherwise look askance at his radical activism.⁵

Throughout his time in prison, Tannenbaum bombarded his friends in the radical community with requests for books of various sorts, and after his release he compiled a list of everything he had read during the 12 long months of confinement, some of it spent in solitary. The list included the complete works of Shakespeare, biographies of Byron and Shelley, Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Carlyle’s history of the French Revolution, all of Balzac’s novels, and several books by the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin.⁶ It was a remarkably diverse collection of readings, but not one of the many volumes he requested had even a remote connection to Mexico, or to Latin America more generally. There was as yet nothing to indicate that Frank’s interests would run in that particular direction.

As should be evident, Tannenbaum, a classic autodidact, certainly sought to educate himself. Not only did he read so much in the dim light of his prison cell that his friends feared he might go blind, but several recollections (including his own) regarding the young Tannenbaum remark on his fondness for his job as an elevator operator because it allowed him to read while at work.⁷ He had also declared in his courtroom statement that workingmen like himself should have the opportunity to attend college so that working-class movements could form a leadership from within their own ranks. It was this remark that moved an independently wealthy Progressive-era social worker

5. For example, one witness for the defense, a *New York Tribune* reporter named George Kaufman, declared that he had no political sympathy for the IWW or Tannenbaum, but testified that there was no disorder and Tannenbaum had offered to clean up the church afterwards. *New York Call*, March 27, 1914, 1. This witness later became, as George S. Kaufman, a famous and successful Broadway playwright.

6. “Books I Read in Jail,” RBML/FTP, Box 3, Folder G.

7. “Memoir of Early Life,” 2.

named Grace Childs to contact the dean of students at Columbia and propose that Frank, once out of prison, be enrolled as a provisional student; she and her husband, progressive reformer Richard Childs, would cover his tuition. It was a strange request; even stranger is the fact that the dean, Frederick Keppel, agreed.⁸

So within a matter of months of completing his prison sentence, Tannenbaum, who had no formal high school education whatsoever, began undergraduate studies at Columbia. There he majored in history and economics, but again showed no special interest in Latin America, though he did study Spanish. His most significant mentors at Columbia were Carlton J. H. Hayes, a historian of European nationalism, Edwin Seligman, an institutional economist, and above all, John Dewey, then widely regarded as the leading philosopher in the United States. As for William Shepherd, Columbia's first and only Latin American historian at the time, the relationship between the two seems to have been cordial but chilly. Tannenbaum may have taken a course from him, but Shepherd was hardly a major source of scholarly inspiration. And while Shepherd had his admirers, his field—our field, Latin American history—occupied a rather precarious position in academia at the time. It was not a field of inquiry likely to attract an ambitious young intellectual like Frank Tannenbaum.⁹

Tannenbaum's early writings and publications also indicate no special attraction to Latin America. His first political publications, as far as I know, were articles in the Socialist monthly magazine *The Masses*, in a series called "What I Saw in Prison." His first scholarly piece, published in the *Texas Review* during his junior year at Columbia, was a theoretical essay critiquing teleological approaches to history. And the one unpublished undergraduate paper that survives in the archive is an analysis of the concept of national development in the thought of German economist Friedrich List.¹⁰

There is also very little evidence of interest in Latin America in Tannenbaum's early book-length publications. Soon after completing his military service during the final months of World War I, he received a research fellowship from

8. The best account of the Childs's successful effort to convince Dean Keppel to admit Tannenbaum can be found in Matthew G. Yeager, *Frank Tannenbaum: The Making of a Convict Criminologist* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 30–31. Tannenbaum dedicated his second and most personal book, *Wall Shadows*, to Grace Childs.

9. It is worth noting that Columbia University—with one of the largest history departments in the United States—continued to have only one tenured Latin Americanist well into the twenty-first century.

10. Tannenbaum, "What I Saw in Prison," *The Masses* 6:8 (May 1915): 8–9; "The Blackwell's Island Hell," *The Masses* 6:9 (June 1915): 16–17; "A Strike in Prison," *The Masses* 6:10 (July 1915): 16–18; "Does History Teach?," *Texas Review* 3:3 (April 1918): 259–265. The paper "Friedrich List: Apostle of Economic Nationalism" can be found at RBML/FTP, Box 56.

the newly founded New School for Social Research, despite the fact that he still had not completed all of the requirements for his undergraduate degree. He used the time it afforded him to research and write his first book, *The Labor Movement: Its Conservative Functions and Social Consequences* (1921), a volume that did not contain a single reference to Latin America. Ditto with his second book, *Wall Shadows: A Study in American Prisons* (1922), which brought together his writings about the prison experience and its impact on both guards and inmates. Two years later, he published *Darker Phases of the South*, a book entirely focused on manifestations of extreme racism, social stratification, and labor exploitation in the US South.¹¹

In other words, as an author he continued to make a name for himself in areas of inquiry unrelated to Latin America. However, there is in this last book one very brief but tantalizing reference to Latin America that comes in the chapter on possible remedies for the race problem. After registering his sense that the extreme racism among whites in the South made it hard to imagine any resolution to the problem that would not provoke a massively violent white backlash, he suggests that perhaps increased immigration to the South might help; it might bring in a white population less inclined toward strict racial segregation: [This immigrant] “might in fact relent somewhat in the insistence upon racial integrity. One can point to France and to the Latin American countries for evidence that such an occurrence is at least not wholly beyond range. It really is more than a mere conjecture.”¹²

If there was barely a trace of interest in Latin America in the pages of Tannenbaum’s first three books, the same cannot be said of his writings for several magazines during the early 1920s. To be sure, for a time he was more likely to focus even in his journalism on subjects such as labor unions, worker training, and penal reform. With regard to the latter, in 1921 Tannenbaum and his first wife, Esther Abramson, spent most of the year touring correctional facilities in the South and Midwest of the United States, gathering information for a report on prisons and convict labor solicited by a Congressional commission on the state of prisons and punishment. It was an extremely important mission, crucial to the eventual report to Congress that became the basis for significant penal reforms. But it was also a very grim assignment, one that involved witnessing some of the most horrifying spectacles that US society

11. Tannenbaum wrote *The Labor Movement* as a book but both *Wall Shadows* and *Darker Phases of the South* included several chapters that had been previously published in magazines such as *Century* and the *Atlantic Monthly*.

12. *Darker Phases of the South* (New York; London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1924), 178. Even here, Tannenbaum seems to have been more focused on France than Latin America, arguing (18) that military service in France during World War I had a major role in producing “what is recognized as the ‘new negro.’”

had to offer, including methods of discipline and confinement that Tannenbaum depicted as torture.¹³

It is easy to imagine that, by the end of that year, the young couple was eager for a change of scenery and subject. I do not know exactly how their path veered in the direction of Mexico, and to what extent Frank himself initiated this new course, but sometime in 1922 he agreed to be a sort of envoy in Mexico for the American Federation of Labor in its efforts to foster collaboration between the AF of L and the leading Mexican labor federation, the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM).¹⁴ This, together with assignments for articles from *Century Magazine* and *Survey Graphic*, made it financially feasible to spend a year in Mexico. Frank and Esther jumped at the chance. It would be difficult to overstate the contrast between the months Frank and Esther spent touring correctional facilities and the time spent living and traveling in Mexico. Despite the many material hardships and political tensions of the postrevolutionary years, Mexico City had already begun to attract a dynamic cohort of artists, writers, labor leaders, and assorted political activists. The Tannenbaums quickly found themselves at the center of this vibrant multinational community.

The most important publications to emerge from Tannenbaum's time as a journalist in Mexico appeared in the monthly illustrated magazine *Survey Graphic*. His first piece, in the January 1924 issue, was titled "The Stakes in Mexico," and depicted the postrevolutionary order in glowing terms, citing the Yucatán in particular as the best place on earth for "anyone who wants to understand the meaning of the social democratic movement now abroad in the world." He followed that with an entire issue of *Survey Graphic* (May 1, 1924), which he edited and introduced. Titled "Mexico: A Promise," it included essays by soon-to-be-president Plutarco Elías Calles, articles by Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos, a posthumous piece by the recently martyred Felipe Carrillo Puerto, artwork by Diego Rivera, and articles by Carleton Beals and Katherine Anne Porter. The lineup of distinguished contributors, and the fact that the publication of the special issue coincided with the much-awaited recognition of

13. For an especially disturbing discussion of prison punishments, see *Wall Shadows: A Study in American Prisons* (New York; London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 108–111.

14. This connection seems to have been in the works even before Tannenbaum arrived in Mexico, as indicated by a letter from José E. Gutiérrez, Secretary-General of the CROM to Tannenbaum dated August 1, 1922, informing all "agrupaciones obreras confederadas del país" that they were to give full cooperation to "camarada Frank Tannenbaum." Tannenbaum's willingness to work with the AF of L was a significant shift from the position he took in a paper written while at the New School for Social Research on "The American Federation of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World," in which he lambasted the AF of L for not being more militant and for being too cozy with employers. RBML/FTP, Box 56.

the Mexican government by the Coolidge Administration, made “Mexico: A Promise” something of a triumph.¹⁵

But apparently it did not make Tannenbaum decide once and for all to become a Latin America specialist, or even a historian. The following year he applied and was accepted to the doctoral program in the School of Economics at the Brookings Institution. His initial dissertation proposal was a study of the professional criminal, but he discarded that topic because it did not spark enthusiasm among his advisers. He then proposed a study of labor relations on the B & O Railroad—a project his advisors endorsed but which became unworkable when the company denied Tannenbaum access to its employment records. Only then did he propose a study of the still embryonic Mexican agrarian reform, which met both with the approval of his examining committee and the enthusiasm of the relevant authorities in Mexico.¹⁶ The result was his 1927 doctoral thesis, published three years later as *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution*.

This volume has the distinction of being the only book in Tannenbaum’s extensive oeuvre based primarily on archival research; it may also be the most turgid and tedious of his book-length studies. Apparently aware of his dissertation’s limited reader appeal, Tannenbaum quickly sought to reshape it into a more popular and readable text, replete with illustrations by the young Miguel Covarrubias. *Peace by Revolution: An Interpretation of Mexico* (1933), with its analysis of the Mexican Revolution as a great peasant rebellion, became a key reference for the historiography of the Mexican Revolution; indeed, the so-called “Tannenbaum thesis” continued to inform scholarship on the Revolution well into the 1960s.¹⁷

By the early 1930s, Tannenbaum had published two influential books on Mexico that incorporated historical material, as well as a study of changing agrarian structures in Puerto Rico commissioned by the Brookings Institution. Although it might seem reasonable to conclude that he had at last shed his other interests and become a historian of Latin America, that was by no means

15. Letter (n.d.) from *Survey Graphic* to Frank Tannenbaum regarding the “enormous success” of its Mexico issue. RBML/FTP, Box 42.

16. Particularly helpful to Tannenbaum in this research was Ángel Batiz, an official in the Departamento de Estadística Nacional. RBML/FTP, Box 2, Folder B.

17. Historians who cite the significant and enduring impact of Tannenbaum’s “populist” approach to the Mexican Revolution include Gil Joseph, “Mexico’s ‘Popular Revolution’: Mobilization and Myth in Yucatán, 1910–1940,” *Latin American Perspectives* 6:3 (Summer 1979): 46–65; Alan Knight, “Frank Tannenbaum and the Mexican Revolution,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 77 (Spring 2010): 134–153; David Brading, “Introduction,” *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution*, D. A. Brading, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), esp. 9–12. Brading describes Tannenbaum (9) as “by far the most influential figure in this populist tradition . . .” I have used the original subtitle of *Peace by Revolution* here; in the second edition (1966) the subtitle was changed to *Mexico after 1910*.

the case. In the same year that *Peace by Revolution* appeared, Tannenbaum published *Osborne of Sing Sing*, a semi-biographical study of the legendary prison reformer Thomas Mott Osborne. While never a bestseller, the volume had the distinction of being prefaced by the newly elected president of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.¹⁸

Furthermore, it made good sense for Tannenbaum, now edging into his forties, to maintain his status as an expert in several fields. Despite his doctorate and a long list of successful publications, this was an especially challenging time for him as he struggled to find stable employment in the severely depressed job market. The precarious combination of lecture tours, research fellowships, and freelance journalism that had been his means of survival during the previous decade was less and less feasible as a source of steady income, and the frequent relocations had taken a toll on his personal life. By late 1928 it had cost him his marriage and his children; his wife Esther divorced him, immediately remarried, and had Frank relinquish his parental rights so her new husband could legally adopt his son and daughter.¹⁹

Tannenbaum's steadiest sources of income during those years were the reports that he produced first for the Wickersham Commission on Prison Reform, and then for a Brookings Institution study of the impact of US policy on living conditions in rural Puerto Rico. He also wrote another report for the Brookings Institution, published in 1934 as a slim volume titled *Whither Latin America?* He briefly taught criminology at Cornell, but the position proved to be temporary, as was a seminar on labor legislation at the Yale Law School. A classmate from the Brookings Institution recommended him for an opening in labor studies at Wesleyan University but the dean dismissed Tannenbaum as too pro-labor. Western Reserve University in Cleveland, which seemed on the verge of hiring him in sociology, abruptly withdrew its tentative offer as the full financial impact of the Great Depression hit its budget.²⁰

What kept him afloat for the next couple of years (1933-35)—figuratively and sometimes even literally—was a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation, which he used to visit some 18 Latin American countries. The first eight months of the trip, some of it spent in dugout canoes on Upper Amazon tributaries, produced an extremely interesting personal account of his travels

18. To be sure, this was a lucky break for Tannenbaum, since FDR was merely governor of New York when he first agreed to write the preface. Tannenbaum to John Dickinson, May 29, 1930, RBML/FTP, Box 2, Folder D.

19. According to the divorce certificate, Frank and Esther had been separated since December 1927. Esther remarried on July 19, 1929. RBML/FTP Box 5, Folder T2.

20. After teaching criminology at Cornell in the summer and fall of 1932, Tannenbaum wrote to the Economics Department to ask about openings. The chair's reply stated that not only were there no openings but that the faculty might have to take across-the-board salary cuts. December 16, 1932, RBML/FTP, Box 3, Folder J.

written for a group of close friends and confidants, but it was clearly not intended for publication. And it was only tangentially connected to “Agrarian Problems of Peru,” the research topic he had proposed when applying for the fellowship.²¹ In other words, even though he was focusing on Latin America, he does not seem to have had a specific research project in mind.

Moreover, his correspondence during the Latin America trip indicates that Frank was increasingly inclined to envision his future employment in one or more New Deal programs, among them a National Recovery Administration board created to deal with labor issues (including prison labor, a topic on which he was widely regarded as *the* leading expert in the United States) and the problem of farm tenancy and rural poverty in the Southern states.²² As we know from Tore Olsson’s excellent book *Agrarian Crossings*, Tannenbaum, drawing on his familiarity with the Mexican agrarian reform, wrote the first draft of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, which eventually led to the creation of the Farm Security Administration.²³ In a sense, the mid 1930s was a pivotal period, one in which Tannenbaum’s life and career could have gone in a number of different directions.

In June 1934, a fortuitous event (well, fortuitous for Tannenbaum) redefined the direction of his career. William Shepherd, Columbia’s lone Latin American historian, died suddenly of a heart attack during a visit to Berlin.²⁴ Shepherd’s death was crucial not only because it opened up a position in Latin American history at Columbia, but also because it removed from the transition process the figure most likely to object to hiring Tannenbaum as his replacement, that is, Shepherd himself. There are several possible reasons for the lack of affection between Shepherd and Tannenbaum, including Shepherd’s “White Legend” approach to the Spanish Conquest, and his dislike of Tannenbaum’s “excessive” emphasis on Mexico’s indigenous heritage, which he expressed in a dyspeptic review of *Peace by Revolution*. Shepherd’s acolyte, Rudiger Bilden, who had hoped to be tapped for the position and who openly despised Tannenbaum, does not seem to have been exaggerating when he wrote to Gilberto Freyre expressing his outrage that Tannenbaum had been appointed to the Latin

21. This journal of “strange adventures,” which Tannenbaum mailed bit by bit to J. J. Coss (“The Colonel”), a philosophy professor at Columbia, can be found in RBML/FTP; Box 7, Folder C1.

22. There is extensive correspondence on Tannenbaum’s activities with regard to convict labor in RBML/FTP; Box 42, Prison Industries Committee folder.

23. Tore C. Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 44–58.

24. Shepherd was an ardent Germanophile and his (much younger) wife was from an aristocratic German family, which explains why he went to Berlin despite already being ill and despite the political climate. Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia, pleaded with him not to go to Europe “at the troublous times which we are facing and which are likely to grow worse instead of better.” Butler to Shepherd, January 24, 1933 in RBML/William R. Shepherd Papers, Box 1.

American history position, and remarked that “poor Shepherd must be spinning in his grave.”²⁵

Whatever the circumstances, there can be no doubt that Tannenbaum was tremendously relieved and grateful to get the appointment in the History Department at Columbia, and his initial impulse was to embark on the type of project he deemed appropriate for his new position.²⁶ Thus, soon after joining the Columbia faculty, Tannenbaum started work on a three-volume history of Peru. The volumes, in chronological order, would be titled “The Age of Gold,” “The Age of Silver,” and “The Age of Copper.” As the Guggenheim application he completed indicated, he had previously shown some passing interest in Peru’s agrarian economy, but I suspect that he focused on this projected three-volume opus because it was the kind of study he felt a professor of Latin American History at Columbia *should* undertake. After all, the field of “modern Latin American history” barely existed in the 1930s; almost all the major figures in the field were students of European expansion or Iberian colonial rule. It was only fitting, then, for Tannenbaum, now a Columbia professor, to begin a project whose first volume would deal with pre-Columbian and early colonial Peru.²⁷

A decade later, Tannenbaum had completed a typed manuscript, over 300 pages, that was to be the first volume. He even shared it with Luis Valcárcel and Jorge Basadre, the two leading Peruvian historians at the time, and then informed his good friend and potential editor, Alfred Knopf, that they liked what Tannenbaum had written.²⁸ But this first volume never appeared in print, and the other two volumes never left the drawing board. What happened? First of all, it seems that Knopf was less than eager to devote significant resources in the postwar years to a three-volume study of Peru at a time when there was declining interest in Latin America among US readers. But I also think that this project was a failure precisely because it was the kind of book Tannenbaum

25. The quote is from Maria Lúcia Garcia Pallares-Burke, *O Triunfo do fracasso: Rudiger Bilden, o amigo esquecido de Gilberto Freyre* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2012), 184, n. 89.

26. Even before Shepherd’s death, Tannenbaum wrote to Nicholas Murray Butler (who had written to Frank congratulating him on a recent publication) in 1933 to say that Columbia was something of a “shrine” to him. RBML/FTP, Box 2, Folder B2.

27. Tannenbaum submitted the manuscript to his publisher in 1947, but he was already talking about completing it in a letter to Lázaro Cárdenas dated July 19, 1944. RBML/FTP, Box 1, Lázaro Cárdenas folder, 1943–1947.

28. Valcárcel to Tannenbaum, September 17, 1947; Basadre to Tannenbaum, September 18, 1947, in RBML/FTP Box 6, Folder B(2); Tannenbaum to Herbert Weinstock, October 28, 1947, in RBML/FTP Box 10, A. A. Knopf folder. Weinstock was Tannenbaum’s editor at Knopf. Weinstock, after discussing the matter with Blanche Knopf, indicated a lack of enthusiasm for the Peru project. According to him, what the Knopfs wanted was “a big, new book on Mexico.” Weinstock to Tannenbaum, April 17, 1946, RBML/FTP, Box 10, A. A. Knopf folder.

thought he was *supposed* to write, but not one that he felt strongly motivated or inspired to get out into the world.²⁹

Ironically, the first book Tannenbaum published after assuming his professorship in Latin American History at Columbia was *Crime and the Community* (1938), a volume of essays on the social construction of criminality that had absolutely nothing to do with Latin America and very little to do with history. But the concepts Tannenbaum developed in that book—the way criminality is constructed through “tagging” (later called labeling), the way the criminal identity is internalized through the “dramatization of evil”—would become critical foundations for the innovative sociological interpretations of crime and deviance that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in work by Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, David Matza, and Erich Goode, among others.³⁰

Tannenbaum, of course, could not and did not abandon Latin American history. His next book, launched in 1946, was *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas*, certainly his most widely cited publication. It was also a book he had been thinking about for a very long time; the initial impetus stretched back to that brief remark about Latin America in *Darker Phases of the South*. The revelations of mass racial murder by the Nazis provided the final push.³¹ So even Tannenbaum’s best-known book on Latin America was written with the United States and the world, as much as Latin America, in mind.

Over the subsequent decade, Tannenbaum seems to have become more and more insistent that his primary academic identity was as a historian of Latin America. When a sociology graduate student from the University of Illinois sent him a questionnaire in 1955 designed to elicit responses from leading criminologists, Tannenbaum politely declined to comply, writing that “[I]n my own case, criminology has been a side issue and a hobby, and my original interest in it derives from the fact that I spent a year in prison.” He then signed the letter “Frank Tannenbaum, Professor in Latin American History.”³²

29. Tannenbaum did try to interest another publisher, McGraw-Hill, and even offered the rights to future books if they agreed to publish the three volumes on Peru. McGraw-Hill also declined, saying the books wouldn’t sell. Lois Dwight Cole to Tannenbaum, February 13, 1948, Box 17, Folder W. After that, he seems to have given up on the project.

30. For examples of books and articles that cite Tannenbaum as the precursor of labeling theorists, see Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders* (Toronto: Free Press of Glencoe, 1966), 9; David Matza, *Becoming Deviant* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 97, 144; and Erich Goode, “On Behalf of Labeling Theory,” *Social Problems* 22:5 (June 1975): 570–583.

31. On the Holocaust and Tannenbaum’s writing about slavery and especially the Middle Passage, see Stephen J. Whitfield, “Out of Anarchism and Into the Academy: The Many Lives of Frank Tannenbaum,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 7:2 (2013): 112.

32. Bruce K. Eckland to Tannenbaum, December 22, 1955; and Tannenbaum to Eckland, January 9, 1956, RBML/FTP Box 8, Folder E.

And lest any doubt should remain that Frank Tannenbaum had become a Latin American historian in good standing, there is the 1960 letter from CLAH president, Irving Leonard, inviting Tannenbaum to be the speaker at the annual CLAH AHA luncheon. And another, also from Leonard, then serving as chair of the 1963 Bolton Prize Committee, informing Tannenbaum that his book *Ten Keys to Latin America* had been awarded that year's prize.³³

But Tannenbaum's other identities never faded completely. When he was the victim of a violent mugging in 1966, at the age of 73, the *New York Post* ran an article, "Chances Good for Stabbed Columbia Prof," describing Frank as an "expert on Latin America, labor history, and penology." The reporter then informed his readers that Tannenbaum had been in the headlines 50 years earlier for leading church occupations, and had spent a year in prison, where he developed his interest in penal reform. The article cited both his 1929 Report on Penal Institutions and the book *Crime and the Community*, and acknowledged the innovative approach Tannenbaum had adopted to the problem of crime.³⁴ The reporter even quoted Frank's own words about criminality: "There is no such thing as a real criminal. The lawbreaker is a social product and if the product is unsatisfactory the social system which produced it is to blame."³⁵ Clearly, Tannenbaum had not succeeded in becoming solely a historian of Latin America.

Finally, just a few weeks ago, as I was wrapping up some research in the Columbia Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, which houses the Tannenbaum Papers (a hundred boxes in all), a sociologist at the next desk asked what I was working on. I answered "an intellectual biography of Frank Tannenbaum," expecting him to respond with "Who?" Instead he said, "Oh, the criminologist." "Yes," I replied, "*that* Frank Tannenbaum."

New York University
New York, New York
bw52@nyu.edu

BARBARA WEINSTEIN

33. Irving A. Leonard to Tannenbaum, April 9, 1960, RBML/FTP Box 11, Folder L(1); November 29, 1963, RBML/FTP Box 50, Ten Keys to Latin America folder.

34. Tannenbaum's 1929 report was issued two years later in United States, Wickersham Commission, *Report on Penal Institutions, Probation, and Parole* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Print. Off., 1931).

35. "Chances Good for Stabbed Columbia Prof," *New York Post*, June 28, 1966, 2. As should be evident from the excellent reporting in this article, it appeared in the *New York Post* during its heyday as a liberal tabloid and prior to it being taken over by Rupert Murdoch.