Preface

Changing the Americas from Within the United States

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Over the past several decades, Latinos in the United States have emerged as strategic actors in major processes of social transformation. This new reality—the Latinization of the United States—is driven by forces that extend well beyond U.S. borders and asserts itself demographically and politically, in the workplace and in daily life. The perception that Latinos are now positioned to bring about change in the Americas from within the United States has taken hold, prompting hemispheric governments to cultivate new forms of relationships with emigrant communities.

In December 1994 the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR) convened a conference at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in northern Italy. Scholars, policy specialists, community advocates, and cultural workers came together to take stock of pertinent research and policy on the present condition and promise of Latino peoples, with a special focus on the transnational dimension. During the past decade, IUPLR has promoted a substantial body of research on the *significance* of the binational and global processes of the major Latino communities in the United States—Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central Americans. Four themes were highlighted in sessions extending over three days:

- Emergent forms of global and transnational interdependence
- The negative impact and demographic repercussions within the United States, especially in Latino communities, of economic and political restructuring
- Changing concepts of and social bases for community formation, citizenship, political participation, and human rights as individuals *are* obliged to construct identities in more than one sociopolitical setting
- Fresh pathways into international relations and issue-oriented social movements and organizations among these highly mobile populations

A primary objective of the conference was the formulation of a long-term research, policy, and organization-building agenda linking the intellectual and political resources generated by Latinos in the United States with counterparts in their countries of origin. The following sketch is meant to convey what was accomplished on each front and some of the common ground between the conference's four main themes and the work presented in this volume.

Global Interdependence. Complex and interlocking forms of interdependence are emerging between the United States and Latin America, involving the movement of capital, modes of industrialization, trade, migration, and growing inequality. As fluid movement across political boundaries interacts with the continued assertion of national, regional, and community controls over economic processes, Latinos throughout the hemisphere are in strategic positions to define and assert new interests, identities, and voices in economic and foreign policy. Two days before the Bellagio meeting, Latin American presidents at the Miami "Summit of the Americas" embraced a broad array of reformist strategies—a show of unanimity that belied the objective indeterminacy of the outcomes of these measures and the potential roles of social actors not represented at the summit. This tension between the premises and projections of those committed to specific neoliberal policies and those wishing to withhold judgment while pursuing further inquiries surfaced repeatedly in the Bellagio deliberations.

The Reconfigured United States. Parallel processes of restructuring within the United States, some tied directly to transnational dynamics, are shaping the incorporation of Latinos into the work force and other institutional domains. National origin weighs heavily in these adaptations via the formation of networks, enclaves, shared social capital, and distinctive forms of social performance. At the same time, inequality is growing, reinforced by institutionalized exclusion, selective incorporation, and heightened hostility against newcomers, all documented among the principal Latino populations and similarly situated communities. Defensive empowering strategies put into place over the past few decades, however, now position Latinos to claim a place in the policy-making apparatus at every level.

Community, Identity, and Civil Rights. Diaspora communities identify themselves according to national origin, while political demands call for or seek to impose an overarching Latino identity. The tensions between community processes and the structures through which people can participate in politics are particularly complicated. Moreover, homeland and host country interact in the lives of most Latinos, who must address events as diverse as the **1994** Chiapas uprising, Central American peace processes, the effects of NAFTA, Proposition 187, changing patterns of

border crossings and their policing, and shifts in refugee and immigration law, in terms of their human and legal dimensions. There are few analytical or practical approaches, and even fewer legal constructs, through which people can understand and act upon these disparate and often conflicting relationships. Conventional models of assimilation deal with only a narrow segment of these problems. The encounters in this session among community organizers, lawyers, human rights advocates, artists, and academics from the humanities and social sciences were encouraging and productive. The successful integration of these perspectives foreshadowed at the conference is a distinctive feature of this volume.

International Dialogue. Participants offered sharply contrasting views of the conditions and prospects for a more inclusive and productive international dialogue that is responsive to human needs and rights. An optimistic vision (stimulated by the recent Miami Summit) emphasized steps toward full democratization of formally elected governments, accompanied by commitments to government reforms, renewed social initiatives, and a revitalized partnership between the United States and Latin America. However, detailed treatment of the political situation in Cuba, as well as "bottom up" perspectives articulated by labor organizers, feminists, environmentalists, and human rights advocates, documented persistent inequalities and limited progress in advancing popular interests in the transnational setting, despite the increasing activity of nongovernmental organizations. In addition, an overview of competing models for regional integration and development (European, Asian, and Western) found them all deficient, especially in their capacity to deal with persistent and growing inequality and popular discontent. These judgments reaffirmed *the* complexity of the task ahead and its long-term character. Yet participants' experiences on the cutting edge of these issues provided realistic hopes for mapping a Latino path through this maze of contradictions.

Ironically, the perception that Latinos and other minorities in the United States are destined to play an increasingly active role in U.S. foreign and domestic policy crystallized in the 1980s, the very decade that dealt them the most serious material setbacks since the depression of the 1930s.[1] With the national and international policy establishments in disarray, Latinos are claiming enhanced readiness and practical capacity to enter these policy domains in a context of authoritatively declared crises in the social and natural sciences and pervasive disjuncture between social scientific endeavors and technocratic policy management. In 1992 a Gulbenkian Foundation commission called for a comprehensive "restructuring of the social sciences; signaling a widespread concern about the bounds of traditional disciplines and distinctive scientific "cultures." "Scholars," the commission noted, "feel dismayed at the state of the social sciences, but very little is being done collectively to change the situation."[2]

The centrality of Latino and Latin American Studies in this connection and the linking of these intellectual resources to the challenges of analyzing global and hemispheric changes has become a salient theme in these contentious debates.[3]

This is a far cry from the reigning mentality some three decades ago, when Daniel Bell, speaking for the National Commission on the Year 2000, declared confidently that there would be no foreseeable economic or political challenge in what remained of the century that the U.S. economy and political structure could not resolve. More recently, however, Bell has come to see the work of essaying projections into the next century as akin to "lighting a small candle in the middle of a hurricane to see if there is a way out."[4] Uncertainty has penetrated even the natural sciences. Physicist Murray Gell-Mann, a 1969 Nobel prize winner who is currently probing the dilemmas of reconciling the adaptive strategies of human communities with those driven by natural evolution on a planetary scale, echoes Bell's imagery. Immanent contradictions in the adaptive schemata of the biosphere over some four billion years are, in Gell-Mann's view, now poised to converge destructively in a not-too-distant future with cognate processes of human adaptation over some 100 million years. Speaking of Project 2050, recently launched to map paths toward "sustainable" development—that is, a future in which both human communities and the natural environment may prosper--he says, "We are all in a situation that resembles driving a fast vehicle at night over unknown terrain that is rough, full of gullies, with precipices not far off. Some kind of headlight, even a feeble and flickering one, may help to avoid some of the worst disasters."[5]

The Gell-Manns among scientists see poverty-stricken, tropical nations as prime settings for the unfolding of this apocalyptic vision. In this light, they can construe ongoing debt swaps between the United States and Latin American nations that include some provisions for environmental measures as "planetary bargains."[6] However, equally pressing planetary bargains remain to be undertaken within the United States, especially in communities along the U.S.-Mexican border and in major cities across the country where Latino peoples are highly segregated and subject to environmental hazards.[7]

Other, less abstruse forms of U.S.-Latin American interdependence have been widely acknowledged for some time, but their implications in terms of U.S. policy, especially with successive changes in U.S. national administrations, remain obscure. Experts are realizing that there is now no clearly framed U.S. policy toward Latin America and that whatever stances are improvised will depend mainly on how the United States manages its own internal social crisis. Abraham Lowenthal, a seasoned Latin Americanist and executive director of the Inter-American Dialogue,

has stated the matter forthrightly: "The single greatest factor that will define U.S.-Latin American relations in the decade of the 1990s will be whether and how the United States confronts its own economic and political agenda."[8]

Should these insights prove accurate, they add to the conditions under which significant contingents of U.S.-based Latinos will be drawn into social movements across national boundaries. The limited democratization that has been part of more than a decade of neoliberal economic reform in most of Latin America has done little to cushion the impact of deepening absolute poverty and undiminished inequality and even less to muster hopes and popular support for reforms by government decree.' The inefficacy of traditional left and labor organizations in the present circumstances seems also to have set in motion a combined movement of ethnic, gender, and regional resistance partly modeled on and readily linked with its counterparts in the United States, as John Brown Childs has observed:

> **As** ethnic and gender demands come into Latin America's social consciousness, positive outcomes can fortify the future of tridimensional alliances (ethnicity, gender, class) on a basis of equality. . . . From this communal point of reference, and in association with a set of political commonalities, movements can become transnational indeed. It is in this communal space where there are clear bases for creating transcommunal cadres as answers to transnational attacks.
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> To not develop such transcommunal cadres for the 21st century is to risk a weakened, divided and conflicted marginalized general population confronted by a well-united ruling social bloc that is actually quite demographically diverse but which is separated by class and privilege from the rest of the America[s].[10]

At the Bellagio conference and in this volume we chronicle in a critical spirit the structural processes and active interventions taking place within and outside U.S. Latino communities. These have produced a complex of challenges and opportunities for resistance and constructive action in *so*-cial policy, some of which are explored in the chapters that follow.