Encuentros, Summer 2001

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Summer 2001

Encuentros 2001

Winifred Creamer Identifies the Hemisphere’s Most Ancient Urban Center

At the same time that slaves were constructing the pyramids in Egypt, workers on a desert terrace in Peru were building towering monuments in what archaeologists now say is the oldest city in the Americas. Professor Winifred Creamer of the Northern Illinois University Department of Anthropology is part of the team that has dated the Peru site to ca. 2627 B.C. Professor Creamer’s research has been funded, in part, by a series of summer grants from the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies.

Caral, 200 kilometers north of Lima, is one of 18 sites in the Supe Valley of Peru, a region that has fascinated Professor Creamer for several years. It is located about 23 kilometers from the Pacific coast and consists of a huge central plaza surrounded by six pyramids, known to scientists as platform mounds. The largest is five stories high and covers an area roughly the size of four football fields. When Caral was thriving, the mounds would have looked like terraced rectangular platforms. Each platform was bordered by large base stones held together by stone masonry and then faced with colorful clay plaster. Though they now resemble giant, grassy molehills, the mounds were originally terraced with stairs, courtyards, and ceremonial rooms. Professor Creamer reported that, unlike other pyramid sites in the Americas, where ceremonial structures are isolated from residences, the Caral site appeared to be a fully integrated community, with the pyramid area “very much the center of town.”

What sets Caral apart from other sites is its unusual mix of technological simplicity and organizational sophistication. The team has found no pottery, Professor Creamer said, and no evidence of elaborate burials or brilliant ornaments. The few artifacts that have been recovered were made of bone or wood, and tools were crudely fashioned digging and grinding stones.

Creamer said that laborers hauled rocks in woven bags made from reeds and dumped their burdens—bags and all—inside retaining walls. Radiocarbon analysis of the remains of the bags date the site to between 2627 B.C. and 2000 B.C., roughly contemporary with Egypt’s Great Pyramids and as much as 1,400 years older than Mexico’s Olmec civilization, which sites are generally regarded as the first complex urban centers in the Americas.

The new research shows the city was thriving 4,600 years ago, before ceramics were being made elsewhere in Peru. This pushes back the beginning of city life in the Americas by 800 years. For years, researchers assumed that complex civilizations did not arise until people started cultivating grains and making pottery for cooking and storage. A more current theory argues that complex societies evolved first in coastal areas.

The new dating of Caral suggests that both theories could be wrong. The city’s inhabitants appear to have used irrigation to grow squash, beans, and cotton. But no corn has been discovered. “We assume,” said Professor Creamer, “that providing a surplus of food is one of the first ways of concentrating wealth. One of the really intriguing aspects of our research is that there wasn’t a product like corn in the Supe Valley, but they still managed to develop in this complex way.”
Faculty Publications and Activities

Michael Gonzales
Professor of History and Director of the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies

Publications:

Peter Gutierrez
Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology

Publications:


Conference Papers:


Frances Jaeger
Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Publications:
(Forthcoming) “El sujeto indígena y la modernidad en *Leyendas de Guatemala y El espejo de Lida Sai*” article for book *Cien años de magia: Lecturas de Miguel Angel Asturias en el centenario de su nacimiento.* Edited by Oralia Preble-Niemi.


Book Review:

Conference Papers:

Jorge Jeria
Associate Professor, Department of Counseling, Adult and Health Education

Publications:


Conference Papers:


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Faculty Publications and Activities

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Paulo Freire, Instituto Tecnológico de Oriente (ITESO), Guadalajara, Mexico.

Professional Activities:
(2000, Spring) Director, International Education Seminar, Brazil. Planned and executed a program for graduate and undergraduate students from Northern Illinois University on “social movements, Freireian theory and Afro-Brazilian culture in Northeast Brazil” in cooperation with Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, and Universidade Estadual de Bahia, together with “8 de Março,” a Brazilian NGO working in non-formal education and women’s rights.

(2000) Contract with the Ministry of Education, Chile. “Programas de becas al exterior” [International scholarship program for Chilean educators]. Adult education training and cultural visit for 22 adult education teachers from Chile for a total of six weeks at Northern. (In conjunction with the NIU International Training Office and College of Education, Department of Counseling, Adult and Health Education and faculty of adult education) Program presented totally in Spanish.

Guadalupe Luna
Associate Professor, College of Law


Eloy E. Merino
Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Publications:
(Forthcoming) “El silencio falangista en varios textos del franquismo temprano” in Revista Monográfica.

Books:

Conference Papers:

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Gregory Schmidt
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science

Publications:

Conference Papers:

Francisco Solares-Larrave
Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Publications:


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The Center Welcomes New Faculty Associates

**Frances Jaeger**

I am originally from the Chicago area, so coming to Northern Illinois University is like returning home. I double majored as an undergraduate (music and Spanish) and received my B.A. degree from Elmhurst College in 1989. My M.A. (1991) and my Ph.D. (1996) degrees are both from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While completing graduate school, I spent a year in Spain, a summer in Brazil, two summers in Paris, and two summers in Central America.

Shortly before completing my dissertation on women poets of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, I was a visiting assistant professor at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, during the 1996-97 academic year. After a year in the Pacific Northwest, I spent three years as an Antonio G. Solalinde visiting assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. One of my areas of interest is literature and revolution, which is why my dissertation is on the works of Gioconda Belli, Daisy Zamora, Michele Najlis, and Vidaluz Meneses and Rosario Murillo, who were poets and active participants in the Sandinista Revolution. I have also published papers on the works of Roque Dalton, Ernesto Cardenal, and Miguel Angel Asturias.

A recent interest of mine has been Panamanian literature. In the summer of 1999 I was invited by the Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá to give a presentation on Panamanian women writers for the Primer Congreso internacional de literatura panameña, which was organized to commemorate Panama’s regaining control of the canal. During the conference I was fortunate to meet Gloria Guardia and Rosa María Britton, and as a result I have been working on a series of projects connected with their work. The paper I read in Panama will soon be published in a special volume organized by Revista Iberoamericana, and I recently presented another paper on Gloria Guardia’s latest novel, Libertad en llamas, this fall at the Mid-America Conference on Hispanic Literatures. Moreover, my entries for Rosa María Britton and Gioconda Belli have just appeared in Noted Twentieth Century Latin American Women: A Biographical Dictionary. Presently I am working on an article about Libertad en llamas and another on the poetry of Humberto Ak’abal, a noted Mayan poet of Guatemala.

**Francisco Solares-Larrave**

Originally from Guatemala, I received a B.A. degree in literature and philosophy from Universidad Rafael Landívar in 1987. My first collection of short stories was published in 1982, followed by two more in 1985 and 1986, when I also published a short study on Rafael Arévalo Martínez’s fiction.

In 1988 I arrived in the U.S. with a Fulbright/LASPAU fellowship to pursue an M.A. degree in comparative literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1990), where I also received a Ph.D. in Spanish (1997). I taught Spanish language and culture at Indiana University Kokomo (1996-1997) and returned to Guatemala, where I created and directed the first graduate program in Spanish American literature at Universidad Rafael Landívar (1998-2000), guest-edited two issues of the journal Cultura de Guatemala, and also published a collection of short stories.

My field of specialty is modernismo, especially Rubén Darío, and 19th-century historical novels, but I have also published articles on writers such as Armando Chirveches (Bolivia), José Milla, César Brañas and Miguel Angel Asturias (Guatemala), and Fernando del Paso (México). My latest research is on Argentine and Mexican 19th-century historical novels, and I presented papers on this topic in Madison, Wisconsin, at the Mid-America Conference on Hispanic Literatures, and at the MLA National Convention in Washington, D.C.
November 2000: Award-Winning Author and Former Nicaraguan Vice President Sergio Ramírez Mercado Visits NIU

Sergio Ramírez Mercado, former vice president of Nicaragua and award-winning author of novels and short stories, visited NIU in November 2000. During his two-day stay, Ramírez gave two talks to students and faculty.

His first talk, titled “Nicaragua: The Last Revolution of the 20th Century,” took place on November 8 at the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies. Ramírez spoke about his experience as a participant in the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua and the subsequent collapse.

For his November 9 talk, Ramírez addressed an audience of both undergraduate and graduate students. Shortly before his talk, Ramírez met with Professor Frances Jaeger’s Caribbean literature course and exchanged views on Nicaraguan literature. His second talk, titled “Shared Trades: the Writer and the Politician,” dealt with the choices a writer confronts when social and artistic concerns force him or her to participate in politics.

Ramírez, who only a short time ago was a visiting professor at the University of Maryland, has received several awards and recognitions in Spanish America, Europe, and the United States: the Dashiell Hammett Fiction Award (U.S.), the Alfaguara International Novel Prize (Spain), the Premio de Novela “José María Arguedas” (Cuba), and the Prize Laure Bataillon for Best Foreign Book (France). He has written the novels Castigo Divino (translated into English as Divine Punishment), Te dio miedo la sangre (translated as To Bury Our Fathers), Baile de máscaras, Tiempo de fulgor, and Margarita, está linda la mar, which won the Alfaguara Novel Prize in 1998.

Other work by Ramírez that has been translated into English includes Nicaragua, the Quest for Peace and Hatful of Tigers: Reflections on Art, Culture and Politics. Other books of essays and novels have been translated to French, German, Portuguese, and Chinese.

Ramírez’s visit to NIU was sponsored by the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies, the Graduate School, and the Department of Political Science.

Luisa Campuzano, Universidad de la Habana and the Casa de las Americas, spoke at the Center on September 26, 2000. Her topic was “Narrativa de mujeres y crisis de los noventa en Cuba.” Campuzano founded the Programa de Estudios de la Mujer de la Casa de las Americas in 1994, and has edited the journal Revolucion y Cultura since 1998. Among her many publications are Quiron o del ensayo y otros eventos (1998) and Las ideas literarias en el Satyricon (1984). The latter won the Critic’s Award.

On October 12, 2000, the Center hosted Mexican environmental activist Carlos Beas, who spoke on “Environmental Democracy and Human Rights in Mexico.” Beas’ presentation focused on the environmental impact of the proposed eight-lane highway that would traverse Mexico’s Isthmus of Tehuantepec. His talk was cosponsored by the Sierra Club, DeKalb’s Inter-Faith Network, and the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies.

Annual Latino Leadership Conference

On February 23-24, 2001, the Voz de la Alianza Latina Estudiantil (VALE) hosted its sixth annual Latino/ a Leadership Conference. The theme this year was “Remembering Our Past to Live for the Future.” Designed to address issues concerning the Latino community, the conference featured workshops on such topics as business, culture, the community, arts, education, and the media. The conference also hosted well-known speakers in the Latino community, among them Lt. Colonel Consuelo Kickbusch, George Mendoza, and Juan A. Ramírez. The conference also promoted Latino culture through various events such as the Noche Cultural and the special presentation of Bernadette Balatas in Faces of America. The Center for Latino and Latin American Studies helped sponsor the conference and awarded scholarships to 35 students to attend. Michael J. Gonzales, director of the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies, received a conference award for his outstanding contributions and distinguished service to the Latino community.

CLAS Research Awards Granted 2000-01

Graduate Student Research Awards

David M. Goldberg, Political Science doctoral student, traveled to Peru for dissertation research during the summer of 2000. While in Lima, he conducted interviews with 15 public officials, among them members of the Peruvian Congress and the electoral monitoring office; representatives from nongovernmental organizations, the press, and the military; and officials from the U.S. embassy. He also collected data relating to the country’s recent elections and the allegations of fraud that followed in its wake.

Goldberg expanded his topic after his trip to Peru. “At the time [I left],” he recalls, “my intention was to investigate the likelihood of building democratic institutions in Peru under the Fujimori regime.” The collapse of Fujimori’s government and Fujimori’s resignation “increased the practical and theoretical significance” of Goldberg’s work. “Specifically, I examine the question of whether international cooperation among nation-states, transnational organizations, and nongovernmental organizations combines to create an international regime supportive of democracy in the Western Hemisphere.”

Goldberg plans to pursue an academic position after completing his degree.

Eva Martínez spent the summer of 2000 working in Comayagua, Honduras. Martínez is a master’s level student in the Department of Anthropology and studies with Professor Winifred Creamer. The Center supported her work with a grant of $1,000.

Martínez’s research was part of a restoration project titled Proyecto Arqueologico Catedral de Comayagua, sponsored by the Instituto Hondureno de Antropologia e Historia (IHAH)

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and the Cooperación Española de Desarrollo. The goal of the project is to restore the Catedral de la Inmaculada Concepcion de Valladolid de Comayagua, which dates to 1564. Built primarily by Mexican and Guatemalan laborers, the church is an adobe, tile, and wood structure.

During last summer’s excavations, Martínez unearthed many pottery shards that date to the colonial period and nineteenth century. Her goal is to identify and date the shards and place them in historical context.

Martínez plans to enter the Ph.D. program at the University of Pittsburgh in fall 2001.

Richard J. Tapia, doctoral candidate in Adult Continuing Education, conducted interviews in Wisconsin, the Southwest, and the Chicago area during the summer of 2000. The Center supported his research with a grant of $1,000.

Tapia’s research examines identity formation among Latino/Hispanic males as an outgrowth of colonization. Whether interviewees think of themselves as indigenous or as Hispanic is one of the important questions he seeks to answer.

“What I’ve been able to gather is that there are lines being drawn between those who believe themselves to be Hispanic and those who see themselves as indigenous,” writes Tapia. His interviews identified deep resentment among the “indigenous” males when they spoke of colonization and its consequences on their own lives. “Most if not all of those who identified themselves as indigenous were more politically aware. . . . Those who identified themselves as Hispanic, Latino, or Chicanero were less aware of a collective identity and the history of the Americas.”

Those who view themselves as indigenous tolerate only the terms Latino and Hispanic. To do otherwise, they say, would expose their vulnerability in the face of prejudice. Some use the term Mexican or Tejano, but others point out that “Mexican doesn’t mean indigenous. Mexican is a national identity.”

“When did you first know you were indigenous?” Tapia inquired of one interviewee. “I always knew,” the man replied, “because when it rained my grandmother would go out and symbolically divide the clouds in the four sacred directions. She would do this to stop the lightning and thunder.”

In contrast, those who identified themselves as Latino or Hispanic talked about white ancestors. “Because of one white ancestor,” observed Tapia, “they believed that they could not be indigenous.” Spanish family name and the ability to speak Spanish also qualify a man for a Hispanic identity. They “never questioned the history or process of acculturation . . . by the hegemonic Hispanic and North American cultures.”

After completing his doctoral dissertation, Tapia hopes to create a documentary film based on his research.

Faculty Research Awards

Professor Winifred Creamer, Department of Anthropology, continued her research along Peru’s coast during summer 2000. The focal point of her study is a series of river valleys situated about 200 km north of Lima—Huaura, Supe, Pativilca, and Fortaleza. The Center for Latino and Latin American Studies supported Creamer’s trip with a grant of $2,500.

Creamer reports that the research was an important first step in an investigation of the role of maritime resources and environment in the development of the earliest civilization in the Americas.” Initial observation revealed monumental architecture in the Supe Valley, which suggested that extensive agricultural production supported the valley’s pre-colonial population. “The Supe Valley, however, has relatively low potential for surplus production.”

That the Supe Valley’s agricultural potential appears quite limited suggests interdependence among the four valleys. Creamer says that a “multi-valley economic and political system may have developed during the late Archaic period.” She intends to research this possibility during summer 2001.

Professor Eugene Perry, Department of Geology, visited three Latin American environmental research sites during summer 2000. The sites included the Reserva de la Biosfera, Río Lagartos, Yucatán; Alternancias in Tehuacan, Mexico; and the Tropical Research Institute of the Smithsonian Institution in Panama City, Panama. He also collected samples for his ongoing study of the Yucatán Peninsula’s groundwater. The Center supported his travel and research with a grant of $2,500.

Professor Perry identifies the Reserva de la Biosfera as the most “viable” site he visited. Situated on a thin, undeveloped coastal fringe, the region is home to dozens of protected species including flamingos, sea turtles, and other rare fauna. “The reserve,” he reports, “is used as an ecology training center, and plans envision zones of restoration and protection as well as peripheral zones in which farming, fishing, aquaculture, tourism, and salt production are allowed under controlled conditions.”

Ecological effects of the salt-works, however, are potentially harmful. Administrators are “pushing plans to increase production by modifying flow patterns of the Río, with a probable devastating effect on aquatic organisms.”

Professor Perry has cautioned reserve personnel about the damage he anticipates. He hopes to consult with them in a way that will help prevent this and other ecological threats to the estuary.

Professor Perry sees ways in which he could be making contributions in Tehuacan and Panama, but the political climate in both areas impedes involvement at the present time. Farmers in Tehuacan, he observed, need help developing agricultural strategies better suited to the region’s dry climate and depleted soils, and Perry thinks a regional hydrogeologic study would be useful. Pollution along the Panama Canal endangers migratory wildlife, but since Panama now controls the canal, it is difficult for non-Panamanian geologists to initiate conservation projects.
Latinos, Mexican Immigrants, and the DeKalb Community

Since late August, the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies at Northern Illinois University has been involved in a unique investigation of issues surrounding Latinos, and in particular Mexican immigrants, in the city and county of DeKalb.

Graduate students Christina Sandoval (third-year law) and Reese Alexander (doctoral candidate in Political Science) have been examining the working and living conditions of this little-understood, but growing, population of DeKalb.

"With Latinos now the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population, and with the suburbs and rural towns increasingly becoming a popular point-of-entry for many immigrants to the United States, it made sense for the Center to make a contribution towards a broader understanding of the issues involving immigrant residents by focusing on the Latino population right here in DeKalb," said Reese Alexander. "With the economy of the county being historically based on agricultural production, manufacturing, and services, DeKalb offers a wide range of attractive work opportunities for low-skilled immigrant workers."

It is no wonder that the city of DeKalb, and the county more generally, has become a regional center for Latinos," he said.

In fact, outside of the Chicago metropolitan area, Rockford, and the area around Rock Island, DeKalb has the greatest concentration of Mexican immigrants in northern Illinois. The 1990 census indicated that the official Latino population of the county was 2,329, or about 3 percent of the population. What the 2000 census figures will reveal is not yet clear, but it should be a dramatic increase. Some suggest the current Latino population could be in the neighborhood of 10 percent of the total city population. Main reasons for this increase include a wide-scale migration from Mexico that began in 1994 and the growth of DeKalb as a far-western suburb of Chicago.

The high-level visibility of this community in recent years has generated interest in their working and living conditions. What has been documented so far is that, despite DeKalb's historic ties to commercial agriculture, most Latinos are employed in the manufacturing and service sector of the economy. This is generally a more permanent type of work experience. "As a consequence," Alexander noted, "Latinos are here to stay, with Latino home ownership becoming an ever more common phenomenon." Almost half of the beneficiaries of DeKalb's home-ownership assistance program in 1999 were Latinos.

Nonetheless, Sandoval and Alexander see a number of impediments that have so far blocked Latinos from becoming more prominent members of DeKalb's social, cultural, and political community. They note that the lack of legal documentation is an important barrier to integration, both legally and psychologically. Then there is language. Though most Latinos are either bilingual or monolingual English-speakers, many immigrants speak only Spanish, thus further marginalizing them in the eyes of the broader community. "There are many essential public services that so far have not done as much as they can to reach out to this community, and this undermines the confidence of Latinos in their new community and imposes a forced insularity on them," said Alexander.

Still, the researchers are optimistic that things are changing for the better for Latinos. This is because, in general, DeKalb is known as a welcoming place.

Faculty Publications and Activities


On-line:
"Las falacias que nos matan: consideraciones para la futura historia de la literatura guatemalteca" (essay) and "El color de la medianoche" (short story)

Forthcoming Publications:


Conference Presentations:


Renowned Journalist Elena Poniatowska Speaks at the Center

By Monique J. LeMaitre

Elena Poniatowska, 2001 recipient of the Alfaguara International Novel Prize in Madrid, Spain, for her novel The Skin of Heaven, visited the NIU campus last semester as a guest speaker of the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies. Her topic was “Women and Testimonial Literature in Mexico.” She is Mexico’s best known journalist, and one of Latin America’s most acclaimed women writers. The Alfaguara International Novel Prize is one of the most coveted literary prizes in the Spanish language. In the United States, Poniatowska is best known for her testimonial account of the student massacre by government troops that occurred in Mexico City’s Tlatelolco Square on October 2, 1968—just prior to the inauguration of the Olympic Games in Mexico. The English title of that book is Massacre in Mexico.

Elena Poniatowska is, among other things, one of the pioneers of testimonial literature, which is now studied as a separate literary genre in most literature departments around the world. Her books, which fall under that genre, are studied together with other testimonial texts such as Miguel Barnet’s Biography of a Runaway Slave or, more recently, I, Rigoberta Menchú in courses taught everywhere.

At the beginning of her journalistic career, Poniatowska helped Oscar Lewis gather the information he eventually used in the writing of his well known The Children of Sánchez. Her prolific literary production includes as well the biographies of fascinating photographer and political activist Tina Modotti, humble former Mexican revolutionary Jesusa Palancares, the great painter Juan Soriano, and independent Mexican railroad union leader Demetrio Vallejo.

Aside from her nonpolitical novels, such as La flor de lys and Paseo de la Reforma, most of her publications are intent on giving a voice to the voiceless, be they the urban poor, Indian farmers, or women. Her latest book is centered around a poor 14-year-old child in Tijuana, Mexico, who, after being raped, was forced by the local authorities to have the child—in spite of the fact that in the state of Baja California, abortion is legal in cases of rape.

Poniatowska is the recipient of several national and international awards for her journalistic and literary production, as well as of several honorary doctorates from U.S. universities. In the U.S. she has spent long periods of time as a visiting professor at universities such as Bryn Mawr, Columbia, California, and Florida.

Elena Poniatowska was born in Paris of a Mexican mother and a French father of Polish descent. She arrived in Mexico at age 8, and has always considered herself a Mexican. Her impressive literary and journalistic production leaves no doubt as to where she belongs.