

# RECENT TENDENCIES IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WOMAN IN LATIN AMERICA

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## Resumo

Trata das tendências atuais da historiografia sobre a mulher e das relações de gêneros na América Latina que extrapolam as fronteiras dos países. Progressos significativos foram registrados nos últimos anos neste campo relativamente novo. Destaca a necessidade de estudos comparativos. A bibliografia do México e do Brasil são as maiores. As mudanças sócio econômicas do século XX reforçam a necessidade de pesquisas sobre a mulher pois ela é parte essencial para que se tenha uma perspectiva multidimensional da realidade passada e presente.

In recent years, the historiography of women and gender relations in Latin America has developed dramatically, yielding an impressive crop of works which have considerably enriched our knowledge of the complexities of women's roles and activities and of gender relations in society. Twenty years ago, this field of historical study suffered from universal neglect, but it began to grow in the 1970's, and especially the 1980's, providing us with new perspectives on history.

For too many years, when we examined historical studies in any part of the world, it was quite evident that women were almost always missing or misrepresented. Conventional history not only neglected women but also subjected them to stereotyping and distortion. Historians did not give women

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credit for the roles they played in the development of their countries, even though, as we well know, without women, history, as it has been written, remains incomplete. Yet, for many years, women seemed peripheral to the main concerns of historical writing, and, therefore, were defined as marginal to historical development. As long as historians devoted their major efforts to investigating the transmission and exercise of power, women continued to be basically ignored in Latin America as in other areas of the world. There was little room in political, diplomatic, or military history for women, who for so long have been largely outside the power structure. But in recent decades, this traditional historical concentration on elites and upper classes and on great public events like national elections, wars, civil strife, or revolutions, has given way to new approaches. Scholars have brought to light information about social groups previously considered too unimportant or obscure to merit investigation.

With the rise of social history and of economic history, and with the growing concern for groups out of power, women began receiving more attention. Scholars realized that it cannot be simply assumed that what is said of men historically holds equally true for women. Men and women have generally occupied different positions in society, and we cannot automatically study women within the same conceptual framework or apply exclusively male criteria to women. On the contrary, women must be studied on their own terms, in the light of their activities and their positions within their societies. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that any study of the status of women or their roles and activities is tied to the roles and activities of the men of the same society. History does not occur in a vacuum. Women form part of the society in which they live, and, therefore, share in the values of that society.

The purpose of this article, however, is not to dwell upon the nature and significance of women's history nor to trace the development of that history as a field of scholarly inquiry in any one specific country, for some such studies exist.<sup>1</sup> Rather, let us consider some recent

(1) Although much else has been written in recent years concerning the study of women's history, the essays of Gerda Lerner, one of the pioneers of women's history in the United States, remain most pertinent, and these collected essays also illustrate the development of that history: Gerda Lerner, **The Majority Finds Its Past. Placing Women in History** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). The internationalization of research in women's history is clearly demonstrated by the articles in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall, eds., **Writing Women's History. International Perspectives** (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), which not only treat theoretical issues but also describe the state of research in women's history in a number of European countries as well as in several nations in Asia, Africa, and North and South America. Mexico and Brazil, the focus of more studies on women than other Latin American countries, have also benefitted from bibliographical research on women. See Asunción Lavrin, "La Mujer en Mexico: Veinte años de estudio, 1968-1988. Ensayo historiográfico," in **Memorias del simposio de historiografía mexicana** (México: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, UNAM, 1990), pp. 545-579, and Fundação Carlos Chagas, **Mulher brasileira. Bibliografia anotada** 2 vols. (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1979-1981).

tendencies in the historiography of women and gender relations in Latin America extending across national boundaries. Although comparative historiographical studies are as rare as comparative histories of women, attempts at comparative inquiries can be made. In this article, only a small number of works in the rapidly developing field of the history of women in Latin America can be singled out, but they should prove indicative of the scholarly work being done. The comprehensive bibliographies on Latin American women already published can be of great service to those seeking works on women in Latin America.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the earliest studies of women in Latin American history, as of women elsewhere in the world, concerned notable women, "important" women left out of traditional history, and their uncommon achievements.<sup>3</sup> This approach was a form of compensatory or remedial history. It served as a necessary counter to conventional history, to a traditional view of women as a second sex or deviant from the dominant male sex. This approach sought to rectify the errors and omissions of conventional history by asking: who were the women missing from history, who were the women of achievement, and what did they do? Although this type of history can tell us of notable women, while attempting to fit them into the old categories of chronological history, it does not inform us about the great mass of women in history. Of course, this is not to say that biographies have no value. Biography, but with analytical profundity, is undergoing a renaissance in various countries, and women's history offers a most productive avenue for the investigation of the relationship of women as individuals with their socio-cultural milieu. Furthermore, Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz of Mexico, the most famous woman and one of the most celebrated writers of the colonial period in Latin America, has attained a literary and historical canonization which removes her from any easy categorization. The only Latin American

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(2) One of the earliest comprehensive bibliographies, but only for women in Spanish America, was Meri Knaster, **Women in Spanish America. An Annotated Bibliography from Pre-Conquest to Contemporary Times** (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977); it demonstrates the strongly anthropological nature of works written in the 1960's and early 1970's. The volume edited by K. Lynn Stoner, **Latinas of the Americas: A Source Book** (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), intended as an update of the Knaster bibliography, includes Brazil and material published since the appearance of the bibliographies produced by the Fundação Carlos Chagas.

(3) William Galvan, **Minerva Mirabal: historia de una heroína** (Santo Domingo: Editorial de la Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, 1982), and Alipio Valencia Vega, **Simona Josefa Manzaneda: por patrioto, pero "chola", un infamante suplicio acabó con su vida** (La Paz: Librería Editorial Juventud, 1978) are only two examples of biographies of "heroic" women.

woman who has been the subject of more biographies is Eva Perón of Argentina.<sup>4</sup>

The feminine world of the cloister merits detailed historical investigation. Although no other nun approached Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz in fame or achievement, nuns formed the largest group of literate females in colonial Latin America, a period in which the majority of women were illiterate, and, therefore, had no opportunity to record their own history. Furthermore, since historians are largely dependent upon written records and on the availability of those records, the world of the convents does not represent the same obstacles to historical investigation as do many other female worlds, yielding valuable publications on nuns and convents in parts of both colonial Brazil and colonial Spanish America.<sup>5</sup>

Not just the religious experiences of nuns, but those of witches, saints, and other holy women as well are beginning to receive scholarly attention. Recent research suggests that female religious roles may not only create opportunity for women to exercise power but may also enable them at times to head popular protest movements. Articles have appeared on a few of the movements led by holy women, such as the protest movement led by a guachichil witch in Mexico in 1599.<sup>6</sup>

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(4) The enumeration of published titles on the most popular figures, Eva Perón, Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, and La Malinche (or Doña Marina), mistress and aide to Hernán Cortés in the conquest of Mexico, would fill several pages of notes. See Knaster, **Women in Spanish America**. La Malinche, unfortunately, has become a symbol of treason to her people, an ironic fate for someone sold as a slave by her family. The abundant literature on Evita Perón is generally poor in quality and politically biased, although, she like Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, has been the recipient of a few scholarly book-length studies, including Marysa Navarro, **Evita** (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 1981); and Julie M. Taylor, **Eva Perón. The Myths of a Woman** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); on **Sor Juana**, see Octavio Paz, **Sor Juana Inés de las Cruz o la trampa de la fé** (Barcelona: Seix-Barral, 1982). Alberto Ciria analyzes some of the literature on Evita in "Flesh and Fantasy: The Many Faces of Evita (and Juan Perón)," **Latin American Research Review** 18, n° 2 (1983), 150-165.

(5) Asunción Lavrin has produced the most studies of nuns and convents in Mexico, including "The Role of the Nunneries in the Economy of New Spain in the Eighteenth Century," **Hispanic American Historical Review** 46 (November 1966), 371-393; and "Values and Meaning of Monastic Life for Nuns in Colonial Mexico," **The Catholic Historical Review** 63 (October 1972), 367-387, although others, like Josefina Muriel, **Los recogimientos de mujeres, respuesta a una problemática social novohispana** (México: UNAM, 1974) have also contributed. For Brazil, see Susan A. Soeiro, "The Social and Economic Role of the Convent. Women and Nuns in Colonial Bahia, 1677-1800," **Hispanic American Historical Review** 54 (May 1974), 209-232. Electra Arenal and Stacey Schlau, **Untold Sisters. Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Words** (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), provide us with some of voices of Spanish American nuns themselves.

(6) Ruth Behar, "The Visions of a Guachichil Witch in 1599: A Window on the Subjugation of Mexico's Hunter-Gatherers," **Ethnohistory** 24, n° 2 (1987), 115-138.

One of the major preoccupations of women's history in recent years has been the investigation of various movements to improve women's social and legal status. Among the large number of resulting publications are well-documented studies focusing on women's rights and suffrage activities in individual countries like Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, and Brazil.<sup>7</sup> Non-feminist organizations have also received attention, albeit less attention, from historians writing about right-wing women in Argentina in the first decades of the twentieth century or women in Mexico's cristero rebellion in the 1920's.<sup>8</sup> Although a few historians have written on such subjects as women and working-class mobilization,<sup>9</sup> recent women's movements tend to attract political scientists rather than historians.<sup>10</sup>

Another strand of women's history, moving away from movements and organizations, seeks to document the daily activities of the great mass of women, concentrating on so-called "common women," their lives and labor. But more attention has been paid to women's "public" activities than to their domestic experiences. Many works on women, after all, have sought to combat the old stereotype of the passive, sheltered Latin American female, and they did so successfully. Numerous studies, focusing on different countries and different time periods, clearly demonstrate that the

(7) These include: Branca Moreira Alves, **Ideologia e feminismo. A luta pelo voto no Brasil** (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1980); June E. Hahner, **A mulher brasileira e suas lutas sociais e políticas: 1850-1937** (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1981) and **Emancipating the Female Sex. The Struggle for Women's Rights in Brazil. 1850-1940** (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Marifran Carlson, **Feminismo! The Woman's Movement in Argentina from its Beginnings to Eva Perón** (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1988); Berta Hidalgo, **El movimiento femenino en México** (México: Editores Asociados Mexicanos, 1980); Anna Macías, **Against All Odds. The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940** (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982); K. Lynn Stoner, **From the House to the Streets. The Cuban Women's Movement for Legal Change, 1898-1940** (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). A rare international perspective is taken by Francesca Miller, **Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice** (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1991).

(8) Sandra McGee Deutsch, "The Visible and Invisible Liga Patriótica Argentina, 1919-28: Gender Roles and the Right Wing," **Hispanic American Historical Review** 64 (May 1984), 233-258; Barbara Ann Miller, "The Roles of Women in the Mexican Cristero Rebellion: Las señoras y las religiosas," **The Americas** 40 (January 1984), 303-324.

(9) See, for example, John French and Mary Lynn Pedersen, "Women and Working-Class Mobilization in Postwar São Paulo, 1945-1948," **Latin American Research Review** 24, n° 3 (1989), 99-125.

(10) See, for example, the volume of essays edited by Jane Jacquette, **The Women's Movement in Latin America. Feminism and the Transition to Democracy** (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989). Sonia E. Alvarez's work on Brazilian women in the transition to democracy in that volume is found in an expanded version in **Engendering Democracy in Brazil. Women's Movements in Transitional Politics** (Princeton University Press, 1990).

majority of women among the lower strata of society have always formed part of the labor force and that some women among the elites have administered property or directed family enterprises.<sup>11</sup> But we lack comparative studies that can unite these investigations. Nor are large chronological periods easily covered, unless the historical studies of women's status focuses on a very specific subject, such as the impact of the change from oral to written culture and the enforcement of matrimonial promises in Mexico or the disappearance of the dowry in São Paulo.<sup>12</sup> Another, but relatively infrequent, type of study involves comparisons of the positions and activities of men and women within a particular society. We need comparisons of the differential impact of major events upon women and upon men, such as analyses of the differential impact of the Spanish conquest on indigenous men and women.<sup>13</sup> It is still necessary to stress that we can never automatically assume that what is said of men historically hold equally true for women.

Although the growth of the history of the family in Latin America in recent years has added greatly to the body of knowledge about women, gender roles within the family have not been a prime concern of historians of the family. Unlike social scientists, who are especially concerned

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(11) These include: Silvia M. Arrom, **The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857** (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); "Women in a Noble Family: The Mexican Counts of Regla, 1750-1830," in Asunción Lavrin, ed., **Latin American Women. Historical Perspectives** (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 129-149; Sandra Lauderdale Graham, **House and Street. The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Maria Odila Leite da Silva Dias, **Quotidiano e poder em São Paulo no século XIX: Ana Gertrudes de Jesus** (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980); Donna Guy, "Women, Peonage, and Industrialization: Argentina, 1810-1914," **Latin American Research Review** 16, n° 3 (1981), 65-89; John E. Kicza, "La mujer y la vida comercial en la ciudad de México a finales de la colonia," **Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades** 2, n° 4 (September-December 1981), 39-59; Carmen Ramos, "Mujeres trabajadoras en el México porfiriano: género e ideología del trabajo femenino, 1876-1911," **Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe**, 48 (June 1990), 27-44; and Vivian Valls, **Working Women in Mexico During the Porfiriato. 1880-1919** (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1978).

(12) Patricia Seed, "Marriage Promises and the Value of a Woman's Testimony in Colonial Mexico," **Signs. A Journal of Women in Culture and Society** n° 2 (1988), 252-276; Muriel Nazzari, **Disappearance of the Dowry. Women, Families, and Social Change in São Paulo, Brazil (1600 1900)** (Stanford: Standord University Press, 1991).

(13) See, Iris Blanco, "La Mujer en los albores de la conquista de México," **Eco** 11 (Spring 1980), 249-270; Elinor C. Burkett, "Indian Women and White Society: The Case of Sixteenth-Century Peru," in Lavrin, ed., **Latin American Women**, pp. 101-128; Inga Clendinnen, "Yucatec Mayan Women and the Spanish Conquest: Role and Ritual in Historical Reconstruction," **Journal of Social History** 15 (Spring 1982), 427-442; Irene Silverblatt, **Moon, Sun, and Witches. Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

with the nature and changing character of relations among family members, and with the survival of the family as an institution in contemporary urban and rural contexts, historians have shown more interest in the process of family formation, family networks, and the patterns of marriage established during the colonial and post-independence periods. They have demonstrated the most concern with notable or elite families, unlike social scientists who focus on the poorer strata of society. This is explainable by the nature of the documentation available to historians. It is inherently difficult to trace over time the people who did not possess property, and, who, therefore, had no concern for its transmission; these people would not leave such documentation supporting marriage as wills, testaments, bills of sale, or litigation over property. It is those sources that have furnished significant information on the economic and political connection of families and the mechanisms used to establish and transmit them. But this information on the exterior behavior of families tends to ignore the families' internal dynamics. At times, the focus of some of these studies on the so-called family strategies of elite families reduces women to mere objects of transaction, appendices of male family members.<sup>14</sup>

(14) Among the studies of elite families, frequently stressing family strategies, are those by Diana Balmori, Stuart Voss, and Miles Wortman, **Notable Family Networks in Latin America** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Dain Borges, **The Family in Bahia, Brazil, 1870-1945** (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Bill J. Chandler, **The Feitosas and the Sertão dos Inhaúma. The History of a Family and a Community in Northeast Brazil, 1700-1930** (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972); Guillermo de la Cuadro Gormaz, **Familias chilenas; origen y desarrollo de las familias chilenas** 3rd ed. (Santiago: Editorial Zamorano y Caperán, 1982); Paul Ganster, "La familia Gómez de Cervantes: linaje y sociedad en el México colonial," **Historia Mexicana** 31, n° 2 (1981), 197-232; John E. Kicza, **Colonial Entrepreneurs. Families and Business in Bourbon Mexico City** (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuri, ed., **Familias novohispanas: siglos XVI-XIX** (México: El Colegio de México, 1991); Doris Ladd, **The Mexican Nobility at Independence. 1780-1826** (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976); Larissa A. Lomnitz and Marison Pérez-Lizaur, **A Mexican Elite Family, 1820-1980** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); John F. Schwaller, "Tres familias mexicanas del siglo XVI," **Historia Mexicana** 31, n° 2 (1981), 171-196; Patricia Seed, **To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts Over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821** (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva, **Sistema de casamento no Brasil Colonial** (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1984). Lomnitz has also studied working-class families in Mexico: **Como sobreviven los marginados?** (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1975). In studying family strategies, John Tutino, for one, has examined the question of decision-making by mothers, not just by fathers, in "Power, Class, and Family: Men and Women in the Mexican Elite, 1750-1910," **The Americas** 39 (1983), 359-382. See also Ann H. Johnson, "The Impact of Market Agriculture on Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Chile," **Hispanic American Historical Review** 58 (November 1978), 625-648; Katia de Queirós Mattoso, **Familia e sociedade na Bahia do século XIX** (São Paulo: Corrupio, 1988); Alida Metcalf, **Family and Frontier in Colonial Brazil. Santana de Parnaíba, 1580-1822** (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); and Eni de Mesquita Samara, **As mulheres, o poder e a família. São Paulo, século XIX** (São Paulo: Marco Zero, 1989), whose research extends well beyond elite families.

While the history of elite families can trace one part of its own ancestry to the tradition of genealogical studies that exists in almost all Latin American countries, another strand of family history exhibits ties to demographic history, which developed under the inspiration of the French Annales school. Parish baptismal records and the censuses carried out since the late eighteenth century provide excellent source materials, although their investigation calls for teams of researchers or much patience. The resulting historical research on family structure, marriage, and fertility challenged some of the traditional assumptions about the Latin American family in the past, especially the old perception of the Latin American family as just a patriarchal and hierarchical institution. Recent work shows the existence of female-headed households parallel to the patriarchal family. In fact, the nuclear family, not the extended family, appears to have been the prevalent family form in the past. A high proportion of Latin American households, especially in urban areas, were headed by women, not by powerful patriarchs. Such family patterns existed in many areas and different periods, from eighteenth-century Lima to nineteenth-century Brazil and Mexico, thus putting into historical perspective a phenomenon that had previously appeared to be just a twentieth-century problem. However, all the variations in family structure remain to be researched in geographically distant regions with different cultures and economic structures, among different ethnic and racial groups. Structural changes could have occurred in response to such pressures as the massive depopulation caused by disease in the sixteenth century or the waves of European immigration to Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay in the nineteenth century, or migrations from the countryside to the cities. Much work remains to be done. What is clear is that there has been no such thing as a single Latin American family pattern.<sup>15</sup>

(15) See, among others: Rodney Anderson, **Guadalajara a la consumación de la independencia; estudio de supoblación según los padrones de 1821-1822** (Guadalajara: Unidad Editorial del Estado de Jalisco, 1983); Thomas Calvo, **La Nueva Galicia en los siglos XVI y XVII** (Guadalajara: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1989); Iraci del Nero da Costa, "A estrutura familiar e domiciliar em Vila Rica no alvorecer do século XIX," **Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros** 19 (1977), 17-34; Elizabeth Kuznesof, "The Role of the Female-Headed Household in Brazilian Modernization: São Paulo 1765-1836," **Journal of Social History** 13, n° 4 (1980), 589-611, and "Household Composition and Headship as Related to Changes in the Mode of Production: São Paulo 1765-1836," **Comparative Studies in Society and History** 23, n° 1 (1980), 78-108; Robert McCaa, **Marriage and Fertility in Chile. Demographic Turning Points in the Petorca Valley, 1840-1976** (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983); Maria Luiza Marcilio, **La Ville de São Paulo. Le Peuplement et Population 1750-1850** (Paris: Nizet, 1968); Claude Morin, **Santa Inés Zacatelco (1646-1812): contribución a la demografía histórica del México colonial**. (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1973); and Donald Ramos, "Marriage and the Family in Colonial Vila Rica," **Hispanic American Historical Review** 55 (May 1975), 200-225.

The ideological components of behavior, and not just within the confines of the family as the locus of socialization, will no doubt be of increasing interest to historians of women in Latin America. After all, many questions of ideas and culture have already received attention from these historians. Some of the earliest works in women's history, and not just for Latin America, contrasted "image" with "reality," seeking to break down old stereotypes about female behavior. But more recent investigations analyze the complexity of social norms as expressed in law, literature, religious and educational materials, and trial records, often demonstrating the fluidity of norms and some women's ability to manipulate them, even the lack of consensus over the application of norms in specific times and places.<sup>16</sup> Other studies focus on so-called deviant behavior like bigamy, concubinage, and marital separation, with some of the most recent research emphasizing personal relations and sexuality.<sup>17</sup> Here many questions relating to marriage and the family, culture and personal behavior can all converge. Studies of prostitution in a historical rather than contemporary setting have been attempted by several scholars, particularly for Argentina and Brazil, with their large immigrant populations in the early twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> This emphasis on the importance of cultural elements may also help us understand the strength, and limitations, of patriarchalism. Patriarchalism, after all, provides the context within which the relations of power and authority between men and women are defined.

Although we are still far from achieving a satisfactory level of knowledge concerning many aspects of the history of women and gender

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(16) See, for example, Luis Martin, **Daughters of the Conquistadores. Women of the Viceroyalty of Peru** (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

(17) A range of topics is demonstrated in the collections of essays edited by Sergio Ortega, ed., **De la santidad a la perversión: o de por qué no se cumplía la ley de Dios en la sociedad novohispana** (México: Grijalbo, 1986); Asunción Lavrin, ed., **Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America** (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); and Ronaldo Vainfas, ed., **História e sexualidade no Brasil** (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1986).

(18) Donna Guy, **Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires. Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina** (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Magali Engel, **Meretrizes e doutores. O saber médico e a prostituição na Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 1845-1890** (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1990); Marta Abreu de Esteves, **Meninas perdidas. Os populares e o cotidiano do amor no Rio de Janeiro na Belle Epoque** (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1989); Sandra Lauderdale Graham, "Slavery's Impass: Slave Prostitutes, Small-Time Mistresses, and the Brazilian Law of 1871," **Comparative Studies in Society and History**, 33 (1991), 669-694; Margareth Rago, **Os prazeres da noite. Prostituição e códigos da sexualidade feminina em São Paulo (1890-1930)** (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1991); and Luiz Carlos Soares, "Da necessidade do bordel higienizado. Tentativa de controle da prostituição carioca no século XIX," in Vainfas, ed., **História e sexualidade no Brasil**, pp. 143-168.

relations in Latin America, it is clear that significant advances have occurred in recent years in what, after all, still is a relatively new field of historical investigation. But until we can trace more of the changes that have occurred from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, we will continue to lack a comprehensive vision of this history. It is not necessary to list historical subjects in search of historians as long as historians remain alert and seize opportunities as they occur. However, we particularly need comparative studies, whether of women of the elite or of the lower strata of society, studies that encompass more than one country, since the world cannot be divided into air-tight national units. Of course, much of the history of Latin America has been written from the base of the nation-state. And some countries receive more attention than others. Mexico and Brazil are the focus of the largest number of works by historians of women and gender relations in Latin America, carried out by scholars based in those countries and in the United States. This is not surprising, however, considering the size of these countries and of their academic populations and the amount of scholarly production in other fields of history. It remains true that questions of national and regional differences, like those of class and ethnicity, cannot be ignored. However, while we seek to understand gender differences across time and space, we are not simply emphasizing those differences, but rather, seeking to comprehend them.

Socioeconomic changes occurring in the twentieth century only reinforce the need for a historical perspective and understanding of women's roles, status, and activities in Latin America, which, in turn, will enrich our knowledge of the Latin American past. Women are essential for achieving a balanced and multidimensional view of reality, past and present.