

IN MEMORIAM: *Jaime E. Rodríguez O.* (1940–2022)

* **T**he email from John F. Schwaller, editor-in-chief of *The Americas*, saddened me beyond words. In it, I learned that my mentor and friend Jaime E. Rodríguez O. had died on June 27 after a long illness, at the age of 82. Jaime was instrumental in fostering my career, and in furthering scholarly writing on the history of Mexico. His wife, Linda Alexander Rodríguez, also a scholar, died a month before him. Jaime and Linda dedicated their lives to the history of Mexico and Ecuador, respectively.

In that endeavor, Professor Rodríguez stood apart.

Jaime was born in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in 1940, and came to the United States with his mother Beatriz Ordoñez, in 1948. They were very close, and perhaps his relationship with her was the foundation of his highly supportive approach to female scholars. That was furthered and deepened when he attended graduate school in Latin American History at the University of Texas, Austin. His dissertation adviser was Nettie Lee Benson, the great historian of Mexico's early independence period. He often joked that she was his "doctor-mother," after the German reference to thesis advisers as "doctor-father." He bristled at the way she was ignored by historians despite her significant and pioneering work and recognized only for her magisterial contribution as the head of the Latin American Library, later named for her.

In Austin, Jaime met and married Linda Alexander, then a fellow graduate student, who wrote an important work on the history of Ecuador, *The Search for Public Policy: Region, Politics, and Government in Ecuador, 1830–1940*. Her book won the Hubert Herring Memorial Award for the best book published in 1985 from the Pacific Coast Council of Latin American Studies.

* Barbara Tenenbaum retired in 2015 from her position as the first Mexican Specialist in the Hispanic Division of the US Library of Congress. She has had a distinguished career in teaching and publishing as well. She was editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture* (5 vols., 1995), and has published books and papers on many aspects of nineteenth-century Mexican history and politics. Tenenbaum was honored with the Águila Azteca Award by Mexico in 2015, the highest award conferred by that country on foreigners.

After completing his doctorate, Jaime served as a member of the History Department at the California State University, Long Beach, from 1969 to 1973. From there, he went to the University of California at Irvine and would remain there for the rest of his career. During his tenure, he served as Dean of Graduate Studies and Research (1980–1986), and director of the Mexican/Chicano Program (1984–1992). In 1982, he was one of the founders (and later a director) of the Latin American Studies Program (1982–1991). In 1985, he founded the influential journal *Estudios Mexicanos/Mexican Studies*, which is still being published by the University of California Press.

While he held important positions at his university, he also put together six conferences on the history of Mexico. I participated in five of the six, held at the University of California, Irvine. The trip there could be daunting, but the conference sessions on the independence of Mexico, Mexican and Mexican-American experience in the nineteenth century, patterns of contention in Mexican history, the development of the Mexican political system, and Mexico in the age of democratic revolutions were special. Jaime designed the meetings to facilitate communication between scholars, and many friendships began there. In contrast to the case with many meetings, Jaime made sure everything from the lodging to the food were first-class. After each of these conferences, he arranged for the publication of the papers. All of these get-togethers were memorable and produced many consequential contributions on these subjects.

At the same time, Jaime and Virginia Guedea, a professor at UNAM, produced *Five Centuries of Mexican History*, one of the conferences put together by a board of the Mexican, Canadian, and North American scholars and held in San Diego in 1991. They edited the two-volume collection containing memorable papers by eminent scholars Woodrow Borah, David Weber, Elias Trabulse, Juan de Ortega y Medina, and Alicia Meyer, among others.

Jaime knew scholars throughout Europe and Latin America, in Mexico and Ecuador in particular, and in the United States and Canada. He cared deeply about bringing scholars together to enrich the writing the history of Mexico and the United States. To this end, he secured a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation for himself, Christon Archer (University of Calgary, Canada), and Virginia Guedea to spend six months at the foundation's estate, the Bellagio Center in Italy.

I first came to know Jaime through Father Antonine Tibesar, long-time editor of *The Americas*. Jaime had recommended my first scholarly article, "Merchants, Mining, and Mischief," for publication, and it appeared in this journal in 1979.

When I first met him, I thanked him for recommending my paper, and since we were both interested in the same post-Independence Mexico, suggested that we were bound to get to know each other. He was very supportive of my work and helped me and innumerable scholars navigate the difficulties of doing research in Mexico in general, and in Mexico City in particular.

Jaime was always careful of his appearance and cut an elegant figure with his beard. He mentioned to me that a Spaniard had once told him he looked like a *conquistador*, a comment that Jaime hardly regarded as a compliment. He had a very subtle sense of humor, conveyed largely with a twinkle in his eye, so you would know he thought his statement was funny or meant that way. I think he also appreciated the humor I brought to my work.

His contributions to the history of Mexico were immense and long-lasting. While other scholars devoted their work to flashier subjects like the Porfiriato and, most especially, to the Revolution, Jaime stuck to the years from 1750 to 1850. He published many books and articles in the field, arguing that Mexico had missed an opportunity by not becoming a partner with Spain in a commonwealth structure. One of his most important contributions, I think, can be found, strangely enough, in a small pamphlet titled *Down from Colonialism*. In it, he shows that the situation in Mexico worsened considerably after Independence despite the promises of the reverse. For those of us who like statistics and other numerical indicators, it was well argued and very insightful.

Jaime never forgot the impact of political culture on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Latin America, and his understanding of its role in the history of that period was an excellent corrective to the work of scholars who did not. His approach was often better understood and appreciated by scholars outside the United States. Its fullest expression can be found in *We Are Now the True Spaniards: Sovereignty, Revolution, Independence, and the Emergence of the Federal Republic of Mexico, 1808–1824* (Stanford, 2012). The title phrase came from a comment he found in the archives and refers to the deposing of King Ferdinand VII in 1808 and his replacement by Napoleon's brother, Joseph (José I). He argued forcefully that Mexico almost became the most important part of a confederation of the republics that had achieved independence in the 1820s. While English-language scholars focused mostly on the leaders of the insurgency, Jaime emphasized the other side—supporters of continuing attachment to Spain in some mutually satisfactory arrangement. He reminded fellow historians that it was foolish to think that Latin Americans would or could emulate the politicians of the United States, a lesson hardly lost on most savvy commentators in the rest of the world. It is noteworthy that more scholars today are adopting Jaime's point of view.

Few scholars can match Jaime's energy and total dedication to the university and to the history of Mexico. His various books, as well as his work as founder and editor of *Estudios Mexicanos*, serve as a very high bar for future historians to match, let alone surpass. Those of us who greatly benefitted from his mentorship, and from knowing him as a dear friend, will remember with affection and gratitude his immense legacy of thoughtful analysis and wide-ranging diligent research. His life serves as a reminder of what a devotion to historical truth looks like. May his memory be a blessing.

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