

# **Inter-American Notes**

DAVID W. WALKER (1948-2001)

A few years ago at a RMCLAS meeting in Santa Fe, David Walker had organized a panel that included John Coatsworth as commentator. It is quite possible that John Coatsworth never knew he was on that panel, but he was not in attendance at that meeting. There was a name-tag prepared for him, however, and the night of the awards dance—a Ray Sadler idea to get away from another dull banquet—David picked up that name tag and started wearing it. Clad in his usual jeans, boots, and other cowboy regalia—the farther away from Texas he went, the more Texan he became—David began asking all the women in attendance if they would like to dance with “John Coatsworth.” It was great fun. After every woman in the place had their chance, he began giving the males a chance to dance with “John Coatsworth.” I suffered through the experience. David LaFrance did. There may have been others—my memory is not that great as David was not the only one drinking tequila that night. I do not know if John Coatsworth ever heard of the night his name was so abused, but, if so, I bet he understood. After all, he was one of the major influences in the career development of this fine historian and incredible personality, David W. Walker.

David Walker died this summer—a life lived to the fullest with a career advancing rapidly—in a sky-diving accident in South Texas. David leaves Gracie and their four children, Robert David Francisco, Juanita Elizabeth, Ana Victoria and her twin, John Henry, who has heroically fought cancer and inspired all the family the last few years. His death also leaves many of us among his good friends in something of a state of disbelief—how could this be? David no longer with us?

David has one of the most revealing web sites I have ever run across, if it is still around (<http://www.msu.edu/user/walkerd>). From this you can learn that he was born in Natchitoches, Louisiana, grew up in the refinery suburbs of Houston, Texas, and went on to an undistinguished academic record until duty in Vietnam called. David never got over Vietnam, as only John Hart and a few others he confided in can attest. His experiences there weighed heavily on him all the rest of his life. On his web site, he commented that his main concern as a historian of agrarian revolu-

tion in Durango was influenced by his questioning “why do some people chose to resist—no matter what the cost?”—a question he carried home from Southeast Asia. I met David when he returned from Vietnam. He came to Texas A&I University in Kingsville (now swallowed up in the A&M system and carrying a different name), where I had the pleasure of introducing him to Latin American and Mexican history. What a joy to have such a bright, inquisitive student! But it was not always easy. David was brighter than most people he encountered in his life—but his problem was that very often he let people he met know it. He started graduate work with me and I remember a seminar where I had each student write a paper and also critique another student paper. That was all well and good until David’s turn to critique came up. Virtually the entire class was cowering under his devastating, and correct, critique. David Walker was always honest, brutally honest sometimes, in a world where such an attribute is not always valued.

David did not finish his master’s with me but instead went to the University of Houston, where he studied under John Mason Hart. He not only became one of John’s best ever students, but he became a fast friend. From Houston, David went to Chicago and studied under Friedrich Katz and John Coatsworth. He admired all three of these distinguished scholars immensely, and, from what I have been able to determine, much of that admiration was mutual.

After leaving Chicago, David taught at eight different universities, before he seemed to find a home at Michigan State University in 1991, with Gracie happy to be working in Lansing schools, and the growing family putting down some roots. Before landing in East Lansing, David published his well-received *Kinship, Business, and Politics* (University of Texas Press, 1987) and numerous articles. He was well along on another book, which still may be produced, on the agriculture society and agrarian radicalism in Durango. Work on this project was set aside when David took a year to be with his ill son. He knew what was important in life.

His recent fascination with sky diving is amply discussed on his web site under the heading: “The Dangerous Pursuit of Leisure: Trying Not To Become History.” At the conclusion of the section, he wrote, “If you can’t be good, DO BE LUCKY.” On his last dive, he was neither—but I consider myself lucky to have known him—a sentiment I know I share with many of our colleagues.

Ward S. Albro

## AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND PRIZES

### GUGGENHEIM AWARDS

The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation has announced its awards for advanced research for 2001. The editors congratulate the following scholars of Latin America who have been included among those selected.