

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

BEING A GOOD CITIZEN IN OUR SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY

In many ways, the ideal of citizenship has become the quintessential issue of debate within and across disciplines given the recognized complexities of today's academic world. Indeed, this is a growing area of interest for many of the Latin American Studies Association's members and *Latin American Research Review's* readers. The resultant discussions can be esoteric or practical, but they rarely reflect on what it means to be a good citizen in a scholarly community, even though we all belong to one. While we readily accept the fact that we have certain obvious rights and responsibilities as scholars, we rarely reflect on what those might mean in relation to a journal like *LARR*. This is particularly true today, when I think all of us would agree that there are increasing demands on our time that necessitate that we make sometimes-difficult decisions about how we allocate those precious hours (even minutes) over which we still retain some semblance of control.

This is particularly important for a journal like *LARR*, which, in many ways, depends on people's feelings of civic duty. Most obviously, we depend on our contributors' honesty in claiming to send us original, unpublished work when we receive their manuscripts for consideration. Similarly, we must depend on the objective, professional opinions of the reviewers who provide essential feedback on manuscripts in order to maintain *LARR's* reputation for excellence, while at the same time helping individual authors complete the best articles possible, given the constraints of knowledge, theory, and time.

Less obvious is the considerable effort that goes into orchestrating the various inputs from the larger scholarly community that make *LARR* the preeminent journal in its field. For example, each year we send out approximately thirty manuscripts for external review. This requires that, at a minimum, we identify ninety reviewers to assess them, although we frequently contact five or more individuals per manuscript before three actually agree to review it. We use a variety of sources to identify potential reviewers, including the LASA membership database, but finding the right reviewers, much less the right balance of reviewers for each manuscript, can be daunting. This is especially true when we review multidisciplinary or particularly innovative manuscripts, because in these cases it is not always apparent who the "right" reviewers might be. Yet these are precisely the kinds of articles that we want to encourage authors to submit to *LARR*. As a result, the task of lining up three reviews can be the longest part of the whole process, from receiving a manuscript through to the final decision regarding its publication.

A similar challenge exists in trying to find appropriate authors for *LARR*'s book review essays. We publish up to twenty-one book review essays per year and put considerable effort into defining exciting, cutting-edge themes. Identifying appropriate potential authors is oftentimes less challenging than finding manuscript reviewers, but given the time commitment a review essay necessarily entails, it is often much harder to find potential authors who also have the requisite time.

The literature on citizenship frequently neglects what is really the flip side of rights: responsibilities. What do we expect from our good citizens? In truth, we do not demand too much. First, if you receive a request to review a manuscript, we ask only that you take such requests seriously. Timing, changing research interests, other commitments, and so on frequently mean that you cannot agree to review a manuscript, however much you might want to. In reality, we would prefer that you decline to review a manuscript rather than accept to do so if you are fairly certain that it will be impossible to meet a reasonable deadline for the review. But if you cannot accept our invitation to review a manuscript, *please* let us know quickly so that we can keep the review process moving along smoothly. Suggestions of potential alternate reviewers are always appreciated as well. Similarly, if you agree to review a manuscript and find that unexpected events make it difficult to meet the deadline, let us know. We can be flexible, especially because it can take considerable time to find an alternate and because we want your input—that is why you would have been asked in the first place. Finally, please complete your research profiles for LASA. This is potentially a tremendous aid to us in trying to identify the best reviewers for any given theme. And if you do agree to review a manuscript for *LARR*, we will wait at least a year before we ask you again—that is our promise.

There is also something that *LARR*'s readers can do with regard to the book review essays. If you have completed your dissertation and are interested in writing a review, by all means let us know. A quick e-mail to larr.editorial@mcgill.ca indicating your availability and research expertise would be much appreciated. It is a great opportunity to be published in *LARR*!

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