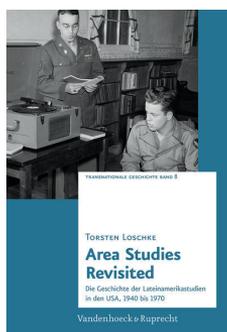




AREA STUDIES REVISITED DIE GESCHICHTE DER LATEINAMERIKASTUDIEN IN DEN USA, 1940 BIS 1970

by Torsten Loschke
(A Book Review)



Ups and downs, individual engagement and political interest, institutional incentives, lack of money and little sustainability in the maintenance of specific Latin American programs: these are—roughly speaking—the results of a well-written and carefully researched book on Latin American Studies in the United States by the German historian Torsten Loschke.

In order to find out why, under what circumstances and to which extent the federal government, foundations and universities invested in Latin American Studies, Loschke examined papers of the Rockefeller, Carnegie and Ford Foundations, documents of the Office of Inter-American Affairs under Nelson Rockefeller's guidance, and the Office of Education. He consulted the archives of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), the collections of the Duke, Columbia, and New York University as well as the University of South Carolina in Chapel Hill and Durham.

This volume owes its length to the practice of quoting extensively from the sources. Loschke not only provides the reader with decisions in science policy, but he reports recommendations and memoranda given and written by scholars, politicians,

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and foundations' employees. Thus, his study examines equally the ideas and goals, the successes, failures and unrealized projects of area studies policies. Numerous examples, some of which have an anecdotal quality, tell about a philanthropic banana vendor who realized his dream of a Middle American Center in New Orleans or about an ambitious former librarian at Duke University who had unsuccessfully engaged in anti-segregation politics and, after having changed to Vanderbilt University, set up a Latin American program in order to humiliate his former colleagues.

These multi-layered insights into discourses and motives relativize the assumption that universities are simple vicarious agents of federal policies towards Latin America or that philanthropic institutions like the Ford Foundation are nothing but agents of US imperialism. The latter perspective was defended by adherents of the theory of dependence. Loschke also disagrees with Robert McCaughey's arguments that third-party donors are capable of realizing their goals. Loschke's work makes clear that the history of Latin American Studies in the US does not allow general statements about the relationship between science and politics. It demands a careful interpretation of the complex entanglements of actors, institutions, and strategies. Thus, the author applies Mitchell Ash's pragmatic reflections on science and politics as interdependent resources. Ash's approach is based on a broad definition of resources, which comprise financial, cognitive, institutional, and rhetorical aspects.

Torsten Loschke's analysis is chronologically structured. He focuses on the period between 1940—when the inter-American academic exchange was already in full swing and the federal state had just stepped onto the cultural-political stage—and 1970, a couple of years before military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina would terminate fragile democracies and the Chicago Boys being sent down to engage in local politics. Before 1940, the “field” was scattered and mostly shaped by single actors of distinct disciplines—such as the historian Herbert Eugene Bolton at the University of California in Berkeley (and his numerous disciples), the anthropologist Robert Redfield at Chicago University, and the geographer Preston James at the University of Michigan. The Rockefeller Foundation

and Laura Spelman Rockefeller helped to finance research of contemporary topics and fostered social science.

From 1940s onwards, according to Loschke, institutional funding policies cemented single incentives into an institutional structure. In this context, the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA)—a network of state, non-governmental and private actors—brought together older forms of regional practice and philanthropic engagement under the umbrella of the State Department. During World War II, Inter-American Training Centers combined language skills in Spanish and sometimes Portuguese with background knowledge of Latin America, and cultural dos and don'ts. The training centers were considered “pioneers” in the field of area studies, although they were often short-lived. The activities of the OIAA, together with the Research and Analysis Branch of the newly founded Office of Strategic Services (the for-runner of the CIA) and the Army Specialized Programs at several universities, widened the thematic spectrum of Latin American Studies.

After the war, debates about the future of area studies were shaped by social sciences. According to Loschke, the Rockefeller Foundation considered private elite universities more worthy of support than public ones, whereas the Carnegie Foundation's decisions happened more accidentally than strategically, so, while at Vanderbilt, Duke, and New York University area studies thrived, most area studies programs in the rest of the country were precarious and dependent on third-party funding. Loschke defines the year 1958 as a turning point after Vice-President Richard Nixon's visit had aggressively being interrupted by mostly young protesters in Venezuela's capital Caracas. The manifestation against the US involvement into Venezuelan affairs, the Cuban Revolution, and John F. Kennedy's belief that “Latin America is the most dangerous area in the world” liberated more money for programs such as USAID, the Peace Corps, and scientific exchange programs. They led to a new but short phase of federal commitment to Latin American Studies before the 1970s. Loschke examines the profile and strategies of Title VI of the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which fostered a program for foreign languages, but the federal incentive lacked coherence and would survive more through permanent compromises than sustainable funding.

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But these increased activities were not always welcome in many Latin American countries. One of the most interesting examples in the book is the reference to the never realized Project Camelot, where the Pentagon earmarked six million dollars for interdisciplinary research to find out the reasons for the outbreak of revolutions in the “Third World,” so they could prevent them in the future. The project triggered debates about ethics, integrity, objectivity and credibility of science in times of the Vietnam War. Critics questioned the qualities of many scholars who swamped Latin America and neglected consulting local scientists, who felt exploited. The last chapters of Loschke’s book are dedicated to the policies of the Ford Foundation, which, as a missionary of science, helped to combine development aid with area studies.

Loschke’s study is an institutional history in a global context. This focus might be the reason why he leaves socio-political contexts completely out. This is a legitimate decision but somewhat surprising given the fact that the Southwestern United States was shaped by several waves of migration from Mexico and by a population of Mexican origin stemming from the time of the Mexican-American War (1846–48), when Mexico had to give up almost half of its territory to the US, which was then Americanized on rather unfriendly terms. Loschke mentions ethnic conflicts in reference to Irving Leonard and his comments concerning a future Latin American Center at the University of Texas when he raises the question whether “the prevailing racism towards Mexicans” could prevent Mexican students from enrolling at the university (67). Referring to this historical-political context could help to explain why—as Loschke writes—colleges and universities in the US South in particular became centers of Latin American Studies in the 1930s.

Where I don’t agree with the author (owing to my own research on the Office of Inter-American Affairs between 1940 and 1946) is when he claims that the political importance of Latin America did not only sink with the intensification of the East-West-conflict and the beginning of the Cold War but already in 1941. Indeed, other geographical areas now mattered more as they became directly involved into the war theaters. But until mid-1943, it was likely that the Third Reich could still win the war and create a powerful

sphere of economic influence in Europe, the Near East, and North Africa, which would hurt the United States. Thus, they sought to destroy as much influence of the Axis powers in the Western Hemisphere as possible in order to sustainably fill these newly created spaces. The US even pressured Latin American countries until 1944 to intern suspicious Axis nationals, block their assets, and nationalize them. The danger did not only loom from the Atlantic but from the Pacific as well. After Brazil, Peru had the second largest community of Japanese descendants, whom Washington did not trust.

Despite these critical comments, *Area Studies Revisited* is an important contribution that fills a gap in our knowledge and understanding of the complex history of area studies. Loschke rejects the current thesis that Latin American Studies were a mere product of the Cold War, and he adds the thesis that the area studies during World War II transformed itself from a core area of science policy to a side stage due to competing areas that began to expand.

This knowledgeable book ends with a radical statement by André Gunder Frank, made after his having been invited by the Joint Committee on Latin American Studies in 1967: "I am not prostituting myself to the CIA, the Pentagon or to any other institution of imperialism that is engaged in the self-same effort" (qtd. in Loschke 478). The history of Latin American Studies after 1970 and in the decades to follow is waiting to be written.

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