

# Comment

This Review marks the transition to the next permanent chair of Berkeley's Center for Latin American Studies, Professor Natalia Brizuela. Fittingly, this issue reflects the breadth of research of CLAS affiliates and the strength of CLAS programs as we begin to exit pandemic isolation.

Cassandra Sweet opens with a sobering account of the differential impact Covid-19 has had in Latin America. Claudio Méndez adds a discussion of the social and political context of Chile's response, while Carlos Milani and Tiago Nery provide a grim assessment of Brazil, characterizing its treatment of Covid as catastrophic.

Covid is just one of the urgent contemporary issues our authors address, from a reconsideration of the racialized experiences of cross-border mobility from Central America offered by Irma Velásquez Nimatuj, to a confrontation with unprecedented droughts promising a new regime of hotter tropics that Jeff Chambers, Clarissa Fontes, and Bruno Oliva Gimenez call the "hypertropics."

CLAS responds to global challenges like these through a wide range of programming. An interview with Diego Mondaca, director of "Chaco," Bolivia's nominee for the 2021 Academy Awards, testifies to the success of our CineLatino series as a virtual film-screening program. Everardo Reyes, a student in the Beginning Nahuatl course that CLAS fostered and maintained with remote instruction throughout the pandemic, provides a poetic commentary on the importance of teaching Indigenous languages.

Equally important is confronting our need to improve. John Mundell writes about the successful activism of the working group, Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean, which questioned CLAS programming in the wake of 2020's Black Lives Matter protests and led directly to the AfroLatinx Voices roundtable series. As these contemporary events remind us, interrogating histories of race in Latin America is



Photo by Peg Skorpinski

Rosemary Joyce, CLAS Interim Chair Spring 2021.

an ongoing challenge and an urgent research focus — one that C. Darius Gordon contributes to with their important historical reflection on Black educational activism in Brazil.

Finally, a pair of articles leave us with a taste of history and culture. Gordon Frankie, Sara Witt, Ben Faber, and Rollin Coville review the importance of native pollinators in the life cycle of the avocado, a native plant of Mexico and Central America that is an important focus of commercial agriculture around the world, including California. My own article on cacao, the plant source for chocolate, considers some of the newest unexpected findings of its early history. Both articles relate contemporary cultivation of native Latin American plants to urgent global issues of climate change and social justice — a fitting way to demonstrate the importance of the interdisciplinary engagement fostered by CLAS.

It has been my pleasure to contribute to the forward momentum of CLAS during this historic transition.

— Rosemary Joyce