

Comment

Many of the scholars and public figures featured in this issue of the Review are grappling with the toughest challenges in Latin America: democracy, development and globalization. Their findings range from contemporary issues to historical examinations; from economic analyses to cultural reflections. In all, these essays and interviews bring together a fascinating, thought-provoking and at times provocative mix of scholarship and commentary.

Jorge Taiana, foreign minister to Argentina's new president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, gives an exclusive interview for this edition of the Review. He speaks about issues of economic growth, trade and the role of the United States in Latin America. "If our country has made its mark in recent times," he emphasized, "it has been through its move to the vanguard of the defense of human rights."

Juan Gabriel Valdés, Chile's former representative to the United Nations who sat on the UN Security Council during the run-up to the Iraq war and then went on to lead the UN mission in Haiti, comments on Charles Ferguson's award-winning film on the Iraq War, "No End in Sight." Ambassador Valdés will be visiting the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) in February 2008.

Manuel Castells, the highly regarded sociologist and pioneering scholar of the "information society," explores the sources of Chile's economic success and challenges a widely held stereotype: he finds that a post-dictatorship "democratic liberal inclusive model" deserves the credit, not the economic policies of the Pinochet dictatorship. Castells highlights the importance of the Chilean model for all of Latin America, pointing to the economic benefits of social change. "Redistribution actually means expansion of the domestic market," he states.

Alain de Janvry and Elisabeth M. Sadoulet, both well-

known professors of Agriculture and Resource Economics at UC Berkeley, discuss agriculture and development in a Latin American context. "Agriculture has shown its capacity to trigger economic growth, reduce poverty and deliver environmental services," they write. "Yet, this power has increasingly been underused, at high social and environmental costs." De Janvry was co-director of the *World Development Report 2008*, one of the World Bank's key publications, and Sadoulet was a core team member on the report.

Laura Nader and Roberto J. Gonzalez, both distinguished anthropologists, write about the costs certain paths of development can extract in the context of Oaxaca. "Throughout the world, local knowledge developed over centuries — a priceless intellectual treasure trove — is withering away," they conclude. "It is as if, within a generation, the world's greatest libraries were being destroyed."

Noted Colombian journalist Daniel Coronell covers "The Little Cold War," the freeze in the relationship between Colombia and Venezuela. Coronell examines the causes and consequences of this diplomatic train wreck, finding that "both nations are headed by strong men who — notwithstanding opposite political leanings — possess great similarities."

Coronell has received Colombia's most prestigious award for journalism — the Premio Nacional de Periodismo Simón Bolívar — several times, most recently as "best columnist" in October 2007.

An interview with Rebecca Solnit, an award-winning writer and public intellectual, concludes this issue with a meditation on landscapes and divides. At a time of considerable tension over the U.S.–Mexico border, Solnit reminds us that the Río Grande is "not a divide between things but an oasis in a dry land that brings them together."

— Harley Shaiken

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Photo by David R. León Lara.

Harley Shaiken accompanies State Senator Gilberto Cedillo to a CLAS event.