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INTERVIEW: *An Interview with Peter Klarén*

ABSTRACT: An interview with Peter Klarén where he discusses his studies and his career of many decades as a prominent Peruvianist.

KEYWORDS: Peru, APRA, George Washington University, Orden del Sol, Latin America

CAN YOU SAY SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD AND UPBRINGING, YOUR PRE-COLLEGE EDUCATION?

At the age of six I contracted polio. It was the most serious type, called Bulbar, which attacked the lungs and was life-threatening. This necessitated being placed in an iron lung to facilitate breathing. After a few days I passed the critical stage and was transferred to a children's hospital that specialized in the Sister Kenny method of treatment. It involved applying hot compresses and gentle movement instead of immobilizing the affected limbs with casts. After six weeks I was able to return home, but continued a regimen of regular exercises for another year or more. In all I missed part of a school year, but was able to continue on to the next year without delay.

WHEN AND HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INTERESTED IN HISTORY?

I had a small bedside Emerson radio which became my companion during my recovery and thereafter. I loved listening to the regular newscasts, in particular, which reported domestic and international events in the post-World War II world and captured my imagination. Later on, in Mr. Tindall's history and international affairs class, in high school, I was always the student who responded to his questions. Perhaps this was a harbinger of things to come. Later in high school I gravitated towards classes in Spanish as my foreign language specialty.

My math teacher had an eye-catching phrase attached to a large clock above the blackboard designed to catch students' attention: "Time passes: will you?"

WHAT WERE YOUR YEARS AT DARTMOUTH LIKE?

My first introduction to Dartmouth was a stern admonishment from the provost at our inaugural all-class meeting. In it he gravely intoned that, if we didn't buckle down to serious study, it was likely that the persons sitting to our right and left most likely would *not* be attending graduation in four years. Years later the award-winning movie *Animal House* appeared allegedly modeled on an infamous Dartmouth fraternity house to which the provost may have in a general way been referring.

What was notable about Dartmouth in contrast to today was there was *no coeducation* until the late 1960s (about, as you will see, the time Sara and I later arrived). Weekends turned out to be a mass exodus south on Route 5 for dates at the Seven Sisters. Like *Animal House* this made for a variety of high jinks, some of which became part of fraternity lore for years.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOUR INTEREST IN HISTORY CONTINUED TO DEVELOP?

My early interests in history and Spanish continued at Dartmouth. The department had a trove of professors mostly trained at Harvard mainly interested in teaching rather than research, so classes were lively and appealing. My Spanish teacher was an émigré from the Spanish Civil War, which brought a fascinating perspective to the classroom.

My interest in history and politics was stimulated by the Great Issues course which was required of all students. It was introduced at the college by President John Slone Dicky, a former Secretary of State who sought to deepen the knowledge of students in foreign and current political affairs. The course included lectures by prominent politicians and intellectuals in government, economics, and the arts to prepare undergraduates as informed citizens. Students were required to write weekly critical commentaries on the oral or written presentations of the presenters.

Finally, as a major in history I was required in my senior year to write a senior thesis based on original research. I chose to write on the Oneida Community, a utopian community founded in 1848 near New York. I did a lot of work in the archives there, and it stimulated my interest in possibly later going on to do graduate work, where this type of study is prioritized.

CAN YOU SAY A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THAT ARCHIVAL EXPERIENCE RESEARCHING THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY?

Visiting the Oneida Community in New York State was very helpful to me in my college history research project. Rather than drawing purely from documentary evidence or written descriptions of Oneida's grand experiment in communal living, it showed me a different, sometimes more accurate picture of how the place was constructed or put together and operated. Beyond this, just seeing the actual community, even today more than a century later from its foundation, gave me a personal sense of excitement and enrichment in writing the paper.

For example, the current population consists of many of the relatives of the original Oneida inhabitants, many of whom have worked to continue to provide knowledge about it. Indeed, many have stories that have been passed down generationally, further enriching our understanding of how the community worked.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO GET A PHD? DID YOU DO SO IMMEDIATELY AFTER COLLEGE?

After graduation in 1960, however, I first took off with my best friend on a four-month sojourn around Europe for some rest and relaxation and personal discovery, starting in Scandinavia and concluding in Spain. We stayed in inexpensive youth hostels and traveled on Eurail passes, eventually landing in Spain, where I lived with a family for a month or so. Spain and Madrid made a big impression on me, having previously studied the language in high school and college. In particular we spent a couple of days in Palamos, a quant fishing village on the coast near Barcelona which had changed very little from the old days.

Returning home in the late fall, I was confronted with three possible options on what to do: (1) First, was the draft since the war in Vietnam was heating up. But fortunately, I failed to pass the physical exam because of an old back injury from basketball and was ranked 1Y—call-up only in the case of a national emergency. At the time, although I didn't realize this, the next eight years in graduate school were spent in what turned out to be a huge head start in my eventual career in teaching, rather than time spent in the army! (2) Second, employment in the business sector, which was both unappealing and unavailable because of the scarcity of jobs. (3) The third option was graduate school to pursue an MA with a concentration in Spain and Iberian history with the idea of high school teaching. (Interestingly a PhD never entered my mind nor did South America or Peru!) The problem was it was late in the year, and most colleges did not accept

applications at mid-academic year. A family friend who knew that the West Coast was surging financially and economically and that UCLA was part of that surge (fast becoming the UC Berkley of the south to which it aspired) suggested I apply. I did late in the year and was accepted. OFF I WENT!

CAN YOU SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT AT UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES AT THE TIME—WHOM YOU STUDIED WITH? DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS MORE GENERALLY ABOUT UCLA AT THE TIME YOU WERE THERE?

Upon my arrival in January 1961, I was stunned by the size and grandeur of the University, located as it was in the hills of West Los Angelos, not far from the Pacific Ocean, a stone's throw from adjacent Santa Monica. It had shot up from a small city college into a major national university, marked not the least by its dominant basketball teams of the late 1950s and 1960s, coached by the legendary former English teacher John Wooden. To take just one high mark academically was its majestic library, whose Latin American collection was the pride of its standout Latin American faculty in the social sciences like anthropology and archaeology. After Dartmouth College, a small, if beautiful campus, UCLA seemed overwhelming.

I soon discovered that Latin America as a field of study far eclipsed as a field of study in personnel, resources and expertise than that of Spain and Iberia. This was partly due to the result of the impact of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, which became a focus of US foreign policy within the larger context of the Cold War. As a result, greater financial resources were becoming available, both private and public, for the training of Latin Americanists. For me this meant from the outset and over time various work-study opportunities in the Latin American Studies Program in the department as well as fellowship opportunities in history and politics and eventually teaching assistantships. These all would lead me into the MA program in Latin America and, if successful, possibly the doctoral program.

From practically the outset I also became accidently acquainted with Sara, an attractive, petite UCLA senior from Peru who happened to arrive late in our class in Mexican history and take the only seat left next to me. From that moment we went on to become fast friends and eventually life partners after marriage in 1964. Sara graduated shortly thereafter and entered the graduate program in Latin American literature. We advanced virtually together over time with teaching assistantships towards the doctorate, taking our preliminary exams on the same day (what a crazy idea that was!).

In any case, as you can imagine, for the rest of our lives together we carried on a continuous dialogue on Latin America and especially Peru. Nothing we presented or wrote in our respective fields failed to draw our individual comment and attention. As for UCLA, I began as a student in the department of history under Professor Robert N. Burr, a specialist on Chile and Latin American foreign policy, taking his seminar the first year, which led me to work on a research paper on Peru. After some investigation I believed Peru had been little-studied by Latin American historians (unlike other disciplines (like anthropology) which chose to work on the larger countries like Mexico and Brazil). Therefore, I thought I would have a better chance of making my mark in the field more readily (more on this below).

UCLA was at the height of its GOLDEN YEARS of growth and expansion from roughly 1920 to 1965. When I arrived in 1961, the department of history was flush with a crop of young new professors whom we had the opportunity of studying with. I recall taking my first graduate seminar with a major US professor who chose the class topic of "the rise and development of the US supermarket industry." I was intrigued with the question and plunged into my assignment. One of the other professors of note in the department that I recall at that time almost sixty years ago was Robert Dalek, with whom my old friend from Dartmouth was studying at the time. Also present was the esteemed professor of medieval France Andrew Losske, whose course we all chose to take. Professor Robert Burr, a Chileanist hired recently by the department from the University of Pennsylvania, was the major Latin Americanist who had accepted me to advanced study.

I soon completed my course work for the MA and PhD degrees, and with Sara in the same degree path in Latin American literature we passed our respective prelims and headed to Peru in 1965–66 with the financial assistance of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). While Peru was relatively peaceful at this moment, the US was erupting into widespread anti-Vietnam War protests as well as Martin Luther King's cry for freedom for black Americans, spearheaded on university campuses around the country. Largely ignorant of these developments while in Peru, we anxiously awaited the arrival of the latest *Time* magazine to stay abreast of all these seemingly monumental events back home.

When we arrived back in the US in 1966, me with hepatitis, which is another story, we were granted our doctorates and entered a tight job market, while the universities were convulsed in the widespread protest movements that were roiling the country. Our first jobs took us to Washington State and Idaho with

campuses in turmoil and having to deal with classes with student disruptions for which we were completely unprepared.

In addition to these challenges both Sara and I found it difficult to adjust to the change going from our lovely years at UCLA and West Lost Angeles by the sea to the barren, rural Palouse countryside of WSU and Idaho. Who wouldn't? The entire ambience was disconcerting to us to say the least, so we soon determined to try to leave when suddenly the prospect for Sara brightened with an offer from Dartmouth. Here enters the brand new problem of separate jobs and possible long commutes which we would soon face, which are described in another section of this long treatise.

WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST JOBS LIKE FOR YOU AND SARA AFTER FINISHING THE PHD?

Our first jobs took us to Washington State University and the University of Idaho, located only 8 miles distant across the border from each other. Seemingly we were set for life if all went well. But after two years Sara was offered a job at Dartmouth, my old alma mater. Dartmouth was in the midst of becoming coeducational and in need of more female professors, which favored Sara, but worked against hiring me. Nevertheless, we both resolved to go, and I chose to go in hopes over time of finding a teaching job wherever I could. Dartmouth already had a senior Latin American historian, but did what it could to assist me, appointing me a special assistant to the college librarian after our first year in 1971 and assistant editor of the Papers of Daniel Webster, which were being edited at the college on a grant, thereafter in 1972. I also continued to revise my doctoral dissertation that was being reviewed for publication and would be accepted a little later by the University of Texas Press. The following year I was offered teaching positions at the University of New Mexico and George Washington University. I chose GW for a more workable plan to begin a commuting marriage between Hanover and Washington, DC, that would last to our surprise for the next eight years.!

To give you an idea of how this commute worked in practice for so many years, I would leave DC on Thursday after my last class at 4:00 p.m. and fly to Boston, then a connecting small plane (later an express bus) to Hanover, arriving at our house at around 10:00 p.m. I returned to DC on Sunday night, leaving Hanover at 6:00 p.m. for the reverse cycle Boston and DC. The commute was only possible because it occurred only in the fall and spring terms: Dartmouth was on the four-quarter academic year, so Sara spent her winter term in DC with me, and

I spent my summer "term" in Hanover, since GW was on a two-semester year. Sounds complicated, and, yes, it was, but workable, perhaps even enjoyable.

On one short flight from Hanover, I sat next to Nobel Economics Laureate Milton Friedman, who thought that my situation was unique because of its distance and duration over the years. Mostly he had heard of much shorter distances. And most failed, but this one didn't!

The commute ended soon after we had a baby in 1980. Sara soon went on the job market around Washington in earnest and landed a position as Chief of the Latin American Division of the Library of Congress. But after two years, put off by the bureaucratic routine at the library, she accepted a job offer at Johns Hopkins University, which she held for the next twenty-five years until her retirement. We lived outside of Washington in the Virginia suburbs, but she still commuted an hour each way a couple of times a week to her classes in Baltimore, and I to mine at GW.

DID YOU MEET HAYA DE LA TORRE IN PERSON? WHAT WERE YOUR ENCOUNTERS WITH HIM LIKE?

APRA and Haya were arguably the most important subjects open for new research on Peru for which I could make a significant mark in the profession, as mentioned earlier. After receiving my MA degree, I proceeded to the doctorate, receiving a foreign area fellowship (Ford Foundation) in 1965 for field work in Peru on the subject APRA. At first, I conceived of working on a history of the party but quickly realized that this was an overreach and scaled it down to why the party seemed to originate and take root on the north coast and in Trujillo, Peru's second largest city and Haya's hometown. (Politically, the north coast later became known as "el solido norte Aprista").

On a research trip to Trujillo, I discovered the Archivo de la Camara de Comercio, Agricultura e Industria for the Department of la Libertad for the years 1904–32 in the Chamber's main headquarters. Given complete access to it, I was able to form the thesis for my dissertation and future book on how the thirty-year expansion of the sugar industry modernized, dislocated, and adversely transformed the region, giving rise to the popular protest of APRA.

Over the course of several years, I had two personal interviews with Haya. The first was at midnight at the Casa del Pueblo in Lima when Haya generally held forth with his party leaders and workers and guests like myself after the day's work. He also on a later occasion after my book had appeared in Spanish

translation invited me for tea to his private residence, which was called INCA-WASI (house of the Inca). On both occasions he was personable and friendly, offering me any assistance in my work.

More significantly, Haya was interviewed by *Caretas*, Peru's leading news magazine, in which he was asked his reaction to my book, which had made a big impression in Peru upon its publication in Spanish by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP). He thought that I had exactly put my finger on how, in a negative sense, Trujillo and the north coast had been totally absorbed by the industrialization and expansion of the sugar industry, provoking a widespread, negative impact on the region during the early twentieth century. He was unhappy, however, that I had portrayed much of his political actions in a negative light. Of course, he tried to change my mind.

DO YOU RECALL YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH HAYA DE LA TORRE WHERE HE ASKED THAT YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT HIS POLITICAL ACTIONS?

Unfortunately, it was just too long ago to recall the meeting's specifics.

DID YOU GET A CHANCE TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF PERU WHILE DOING RESEARCH?

In 1976 we decided to make a sightseeing trip around South America starting in Brazil and then proceeding to Argentina, Chile, and Peru. Unbeknownst to us, the region was beginning to experience some of the effects of the Cuban Revolution, where pro-Castro leftists had unleashed their wrath against the prevailing governments.

Upon landing in Buenos Aires and getting settled, we chose to begin the next day doing some sightseeing by taking a train ride at the main railroad depot near our hotel and ride to the end of the line. We would take in the sights of the city and region, lunch at the last stop, and then return on the next train back to the city.

All went well until we arrived back in Buenos Aires and followed other passengers to the exit, where we were asked to surrender our ticket stubs. This was routine for locals, but we had no idea that it was required in order to be allowed to leave the station. In the eyes of the authorities, this was suspicious, an odd couple—a young gringo and a Peruvian woman traveling together, might

they be terrorists? We were immediately detained and led off to be interrogated by the head of the special station police. Only after a very uncomfortable, heated hour of discussion were we allowed to leave because we were supposedly, Sara had argued, expected at a meeting in the US embassy that afternoon. Thoroughly frightened, the next day we immediately left for Lima, only to arrive in the midst of widespread looting and rioting against the Velasco government and a "toque de queda" or curfew that closed down all street traffic after 7:00 p.m. So much for our quaint ideas of sightseeing!

WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU NOTED IN LIMA FROM THE TIME YOU DID YOUR RESEARCH THERE?

When I was doing my dissertation research in Peru in 1965–66 during the Belaunde presidency, I could literally walk anywhere freely and completely, without any adverse incident. I was suffering from a bad back and as a remedy regularly walked all over downtown. We also drove our little Volkswagen car everywhere in the city, including from Lima to Arequipa safely. This changed beginning in the 1970s under Velasco and in the 1980s with the emergence of the Shining Path insurgency. Today street crime and other such incidents are widespread and gang violence is pervasive. Peru's politics also continue to be very chaotic. For example, the country currently has some forty or more candidates for the next presidential elections. However, the economy, operating under a number of strict reforms, is functioning in a relatively stable fashion with the sol almost equivalent in value to the dollar.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO WRITE A TEXTBOOK OF PERUVIAN HISTORY?

Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of academics began to emerge in the US, Europe, and elsewhere like Peru began revising traditional views in their various disciplines at the time of widespread opposition to the Vietnam War and the aforementioned Cuban Revolution. The end result was a new set of revisionist historical studies recasting the traditional history and politics of Latin American societies.

In an attempt to respond to this innovative trend in historical studies, Oxford University Press commissioned a new country-specific series of histories under the general editorship of the noted historian of Brazil Tom Skidmore to capture this trend. Tom approached me to write such a volume on Peru in 300 pages (Oxford's stipulation), incorporating the new and often revisionist research that had appeared over the past thirty years or so. (Incidentally Cambridge University

Press did much the same thing in a different way in its multivolume *Cambridge History of Latin America*, to which I also contributed).

However, I ran into one problem—I delivered a 500- rather than a 300-page manuscript after a decade of work. When I received the news from the editor of the press to cut my manuscript by 200 pages, I was outraged. My response was penned at 3:00 a.m. after several restless nights of sleep: How should I be expected to produce in the same amount of space a country with a 10,000-year history such as Peru compared to, say, Cuba or Argentina! A battle royale ensued between my defender, Skidmore, and the editor of the Press in which the former, to my relief, prevailed. Five hundred pages it would be!

How was the Spanish translation of your book received in Peru?

To my surprise the publication of the Spanish edition of my Oxford book by the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos (IEP) in 2003 turned out to be a smash hit. Entitled *Nacion y sociedad en la historia del Perú*, it is now in its eighth printing after almost twenty-five years. Of course, I never expected such a popular reception like this, but when the Minister of Foreign Relations made the book mandatory reading for the entire diplomatic corps, I knew something was up. Similarly, the book has been widely assigned in secondary-school and college classes as well. In the past twenty-five years, Peru's educational system, particularly at the college level, has soared dramatically, giving further impetus to the book's circulation.

How did you respond to the receipt of Peru's highest honor, the Orden del Sol?

This was totally unexpected. Possibly it was made as a result of the grand success of my aforementioned history of Peru in Spanish. The award was made by the Peruvian ambassador to the US in a ceremony at the Peruvian Embassy here in Washington. It was attended by maybe 100 guests drawn from the Peruvian community here in DC, various government and Peruvian officials, and my many colleagues and friends in the city. I was, to say the least, absolutely stunned when I heard the news! It was a grand event, oh, and I received an official plaque signed by the President and Minister of Foreign Relations. I can send you a copy of it on my cell phone if you like.

WHAT DO YOU RECALL ABOUT YOUR FORTY YEARS OF TEACHING AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY?

For most of my years at GW I was a professor of history and the Elliot School of International Affairs (ESIA). The latter was a stand-alone flagship department in the social sciences which was composed of one or more professors from the regular departments like history, economics, political science, and so on. It alone was the largest department in the social sciences and housed all of the various programs such as the Latin American and Hispanic Studies Program (LAHSP). This brought me into contact with a broad range of disciplines and professors, and added an interdisciplinarity to majors in ESIA. So, in a sense, I held two hats, one in history and the other in international affairs. This proved very rewarding indeed, intellectually and personally. It also led to my receiving the teacher of the year award by my colleagues in the social sciences.

YOU ALSO DIRECTED THE LATIN AMERICAN AND HISPANIC STUDIES PROGRAM (LAHSP)?

I served as director of LAHSP for more than two terms. This was a challenge because over the years the program was fairly small and you might say starved of funds among the various other much larger programs (eg. European, Asian, etc.). My strategy for LAHSP was to reach out to other government agencies and programs in DC to try to affiliate with them my GW-based program, which I did successfully with the Woodrow Wilson Center of International Affairs, specifically, its Latin America program, which included their group of fellows from Latin America. In effect this gave them another university-based program to add to their invitees to their speaker events and discussion programs. Our students benefited with advice from the Wilson scholars, since they were required to produce a term paper based on field work, if possible, in Latin America from a particular country.

HOW ARE YOU LIKING RETIREMENT?

I retired at the age of seventy-five, after more than forty years. During the next decade in retirement, I played a lot of golf, tied up some ongoing research and writing, and worked on the genealogy of my family, which included old New England (the Mayflower actually), England, and Sweden. The last couple of years, however, have been difficult due to some inevitable health difficulties.

CAN YOU SAY A LITTLE MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE FOUND OUT ABOUT THE GENEALOGY OF YOUR FAMILY?

In the course of pursuing my family's genealogy, I discovered an important family presence in New Bedford, MA. During the mid-nineteenth century, New Bedford was for a time the wealthiest city in the US. This was due to the city's whaling industry, which provided the whale oil that illuminated America's cities before the discovery of electricity by Edison. It turns out that various family members were connected to whaling, from the bottom up of workers for the whalers who came from the farms who sought high adventure at sea and beyond to the major ship chandlers (whaler outfitters) and officers and investors/owners of the ships that plied the same Pacific seas. Indeed, I found the photograph of a family member who was second mate on a major whaler who was in line to be the ship's captain on its next voyage. However, he never got the chance, having lost his life drowning as the lead harpooner, who was pitched overboard while trying to harpoon one of the sea monsters.

Moreover, once the industry faded in the wake of the illumination of electricity instead of whale oil, several astute former whalers had already moved to invest their profits into the bourgeoning cotton mills that were proliferating to process the fabric from the materials shipped from the south. *A large part of New Bedford's history during this period is depicted in the holdings of the city's major museums.

But the story of the New Bedford's part of the family doesn't stop there. It turns out that another Klarén this time from Sweden arrived in Boston from Gothenburg in the late nineteenth century, having been accepted for admission at the leading advanced school of Episcopalian Studies at Harvard, with the aim of becoming a minister in the US. Upon graduating with full honors a couple of years later, he was hired by the Episcopalian church in New Bedford as a young priest. From there he wasted no time, astutely or not, in wooing the only daughter of the vicar, an action that immediately thrust him into the ranks of the city's elite and a career of later similarly important appointments elsewhere.

Finally, in a completely separate instance, I've also discovered that another earlier related family member was aboard the Mayflower when it arrived with 106 passengers in the New World. We are descended through the Howland line, also of New Bedford, to a young indentured servant named John Howland from the town of Fenstanton, Huntingdonshire. Together with his wife, Elizabeth, they settled in the colony of Plymouth and eventually had ten children, who in turn sired the astounding number of eighty-eight grandchildren and so on.

Source: Nathaniel Phillbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community and War* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 32 and passim.

Dr. Iñigo Garcia-Bryce is Professor of Latin American History at New Mexico State University and has been Director of the Center for Latin American and Border Studies. His publications include *Haya de la Torre and the Pursuit of Power in Peru and Latin America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018) and *Crafting the Republic: Lima's Artisans and Nation-Building in Peru, 1821–1879* (University of New Mexico Press, 2004). His courses include "Rebels, Guerrillas and Terrorists in Latin America," "The Cold War in Latin America," and "Oral History." He is currently working on an oral history of rank-and-file members of Peru's APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) party during the 1930s and 1940s. He grew up in Peru and returns frequently for personal and professional reasons.

Peter F. Klaren is Professor Emeritus of History and International Affairs at George Washington University where he taught in the History Department and the Elliot School of International Affairs. He was Director of the Latin American and Hispanic Studies Program. He has published numerous works on the history of Peru, including *Peru: Nationhood and Society in the Andes* (Oxford University Press, 1999) and *Historical Dictionary of Peru* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017). In 2017 Professor Klaren was awarded the Orden del Sol del Perú by the Peruvian government, the highest honor bestowed by the nation, in recognition of his scholarship on the history and politics of Peru.

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