Letter from the Editor

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Colegas e camaradas,

As many of you know, this is my last issue as editor of JLAG. It has been a rewarding and intense four years and I have been fortunate to work with a talented and dedicated team of associate editors, book review editors, guest editors, copy editors, International Board members, graphic designers, authors, reviewers, and collaborators. Before going any further, I would like to thank the core members of the JLAG team: Jörn Seemann, Johnny Finn, Eric Carter, Martha Bell, Jim Freeman, Andrew Sloyter, Kendra McSweeney, Brad Jockish, and the CLAG board. Your heavy lifting, conversations, and teamwork in bringing the 12 issues of my tenure to fruition were of vital importance to our collective success. As I have moved the editorship from the Universidade Federal Fluminense, to the University of Zürich, to New York University, JLAG’s form and content has been enriched through the conversas, inspiration, and support from colleagues in each of those institutions.

In taking over the editorship from David Robinson, my team and I were faced with persistent questions about how to open JLAG more explicitly to new contributors while maintaining the journal as a traditional and accessible outlet for CLAG members. In this project, I feel we have been successful as our full-text downloads have increased by around 10,000 per year, with more than 28,000 downloads in 2017. We are on pace to top this in 2018. A felicitous outcome of this readership increase is that we have a steady pipeline of articles and are publishing thicker volumes with extremely good content. Our rankings in citation indices have crept up steadily and we are attracting a broader, more diverse range of scholars to our pages. Increased readership has brought more money to CLAG and JLAG, allowing us to take longer working with authors and reviewers and to invest in copy editing. This extra revenue will result in more grants for students which will hopefully create a virtuous feedback loop with JLAG for years to come.

These gains might not have been possible without a number of other critical interventions that we undertook over the past four years. We instituted an online submission and review platform, created a new website for the journal and for CLAG (with thanks to Tim Norris). We introduced a JLAG forum section, JLAG Perspectives, JLAG Retrospective, and a series of special issues. We have started ad swaps with prominent Latin American academic publications, actively promote our articles on Twitter @JLatAmGeog, and will be hosting the second JLAG Annual Lecture at the 2019 AAG in Washington D.C. This year we published abstracts in Mandarin for the first time and have created significant momentum for the incoming editorial team, led by Johnny Finn, to pick up and run with.

As the Americas move deeper into turbulent political waters, maintaining JLAG as a site of sustained, critical engagement will
become ever more necessary. The unfolding traumas of the “border” between the United States and Latin America have never been more poignant; we have sought to publish authors who speak to the need for academics to engage public policy debates and to become more deeply involved in the lived realities of the regions most vulnerable populations. While I understand that there are some concerns about the “overt politicization” of academic debates, I hold that the academy is not a politically neutral site of intellectual production but rather an active political field. The need for critical scholarship that reaches beyond the academy has never been more urgent. While this is not, of course, the only form of political engagement that is open to us, it is one to which I hope these four years of my editorship have given some impetus for this to occur in the pages of JLAG.

This last issue of my tenure is the product of a classic CLAG interaction. Matt Fry and Elvin Delgado approached me back in 2016 with an idea for a special issue on the petroleum industry in Latin America. We met over pints at the AAG in Boston in 2017 and hashed out the broad outlines of a call for papers which we launched soon after. Over the past 18 months, this issue has taken shape bit by bit and is a major contribution to the literature on resource extraction, petro-geographies, and hydrocarbon realities. The articles are wide-ranging, with original, ground-truthed research that explores important theoretical and policy frameworks. This special issue has brought new authors into the JLAG fold, involved dozens of new reviewers, and neatly dovetailed with an excellent selection of book reviews (and reviewers) that together make a memorable and impactful compendium. As a complement, our JLAG Perspectives Forum bites deeply into the problematic of the México-USA border wall: always a source of food for thought and action.

Obrigado, gracias, auf wiedersehen, e aparecem lá em casa,

Christopher Gaffney