

Castleberry Peace Institute University of North Texas FALL 2020 Newsletter



Greetings Friends and Supporters of the Castleberry Peace Institute,

It has been an unusual time for the Castleberry Peace Institute since our last newsletter. We have some good news to announce, and we would have more news to report on our efforts in Colombia, but alas, the virus struck and travel has stopped. We still have many things to be thankful for. Most especially, this fall marks the 10th Anniversary of the founding of the Castleberry Peace Institute under my predecessor, Professor David Mason. We will have a wonderful celebration next year instead.

Our edited volume, ***As War Ends: What Colombia Can Tell Us about the Sustainability of Peace and Transitional Justice***, was published in July, 2019 by Cambridge University Press. Prof. Jacqueline Demeritt (UNT) and Mauricio Uribe (EAFIT University, Medellin Colombia) have been my invaluable partners and co-editors.

We are also starting a digitization project with our partners in Medellin, Colombia. We are partnering with the Pontifical Bolivarian University and the Digital Projects Division of the UNT Library to digitize the collections of the Altavista Casa Museo Manzanillo.

The museum's document collection spans decades of history as this small community outside Medellin has weathered many of the conflicts in Colombia. UNT students are digitizing these materials so the people of the Altavista community will have access to all of their stories.

We have also published the first edition of the Castleberry Peace Institute Annual Human Rights Atrocity Risks Report. This report was written by our outstanding undergraduate students and analyzes the risk that there will be a major human rights atrocity in several different countries. We hope to make it a biannual publication that will be of use to the community, business and government. It is available on the CPI website.

The Castleberry Peace Institute would also like to recognize the ongoing support of the Dallas Peacemakers organization. Thanks to their outstanding generosity over our ten years, and a recent, substantial contribution to our general fund, CPI is able to support projects that advance peace studies research, teaching and peace building activities around the globe, and especially with our focus in Colombia.



Finally, we have one sad piece of news. Our dear friend and wonderful colleague, Dr. Milan Reban recently passed away. There is a very moving remembrance of Milan from Dave Mason later in the report.

Thank you again to all of our supporters and please watch for our activities on Facebook!

**Jim Meernik Director, Castleberry Peace
Institute**

Students Abroad Spotlight *by Abbegael Smith*

Many words have been used to describe what was once the world's most dangerous city: Medellín, Colombia. But when asked, Jessica Lucas, (UNT 2020), only had one: "it's just beautiful, it's green everywhere, it's so beautiful." A decade ago, few would dare to visit the country because of the violence it has been subjected to for several decades. Lucas, along with UNT students Enrique Martinez and Victoria Nevarez under the direction of UNT professor, Dr. James Meernik, were given the opportunity to travel to Colombia in the fall of 2019 after conducting several independent research projects. The research projects covered such topics as sexual violence, security in the state, and internal displacement. They presented their research at a conference at the Pontifical Bolivarian University.

After concluding the trip, the students' research topics of interest expanded to include the disappearances and more specified research analyzing each village, rather than the country in its entirety. Nevarez was able to speak to the professors of the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in her native language, an opportunity she had never been provided with before. Through this interaction, she realized that "yes, [the professors] are academics but first they're activists in their community because if something goes wrong, they could be in those shoes one day. They could lose their academic status." It was from this interaction, she decided to conduct individualized village research which she is still currently pursuing. Though the intention of the trip was for the students to present their original projects at the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, they were also able to see the country up close, rather than simply reading about it.

Martinez expected a larger culture shock within his surroundings and thought the people would be more cynical given their history but found that "[Colombia is] a little similar to here but the people are very generous and very supportive." Similarly, Lucas had difficulty reconciling everything she had been told about the dangers of the country coupled with the research she conducted regarding sexual violence with the people she saw until the next day of their trip. In Medellín, the group visited the Museo Casa de la Memoria (House of Memory Museum) and Comuna 13 (Commune 13), two sites that are devoted to honoring the victims of the country's violence. In 2006, the Victim Assistance Program with the help of various scholars began accumulating a more accurate recount of the country's history for what would eventually become the Museo Casa de la Memoria. The three-floor museum begins like many others with various displays providing honest information but at the end of the tour, there's a black room with small holes in the walls to allow for light. The room is covered in photographs of those who are missing or have died as a result of all the conflict and acts as a tribute to assure people "they will not be erased," said Nevarez. The museum stands as a powerful monument to the people and brought Lucas to tears, "it's informative yet heartbreaking."

After the museum, the group went to Comuna 13. Comuna 13 is a district in Medellín that is now world famous for its street art but was once known as a major location for violent conflict because of its proximity to highways and the smuggling routes in the mountains behind the community. Tracing back to the 1980s, the area had a history of trafficking drugs and guns because of Pablo Escobar, an infamous drug lord who resided in Medellín. After the Colombian military reclaimed the area from urban guerillas in 2002, Comuna 13 residents took to the streets through art and hip-hop. The people began by adding white cloths in their art but evolved into several recurring themes including elephants as a promise to never forget their history. "[The people of Colombia have] been silenced for so long or they just stood aside that now [they know], if they want to have a choice, they cannot be silent," Nevarez explains the phenomenon. The people are working diligently to unite their country through various acts and demonstrations throughout the country like the museum. The Castleberry Peace Institute is proud to give UNT students these amazing learning opportunities.



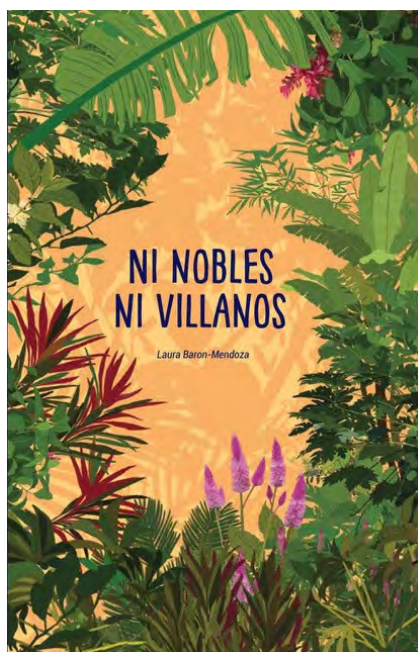
FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: Professors Esparza & Silva *by Abbegael Smith*

On its face, the fact that second generation judges support more permissive immigration policies than foreign-born judges and the controversial nature of Mexico's decision to centralize its police appear to have no similarities except both topics involve political science. After broadening one's scope, however, it becomes apparent that they are topics of research Dr. Andrea Silva and Dr. Diego Esparza have chosen to pursue, respectively. Professors conduct research primarily to answer practical questions or questions where their answers seem obvious, as noted by Silva. While the answer may appear obvious to some, research often provides concrete, empirical evidence to support one's claims. Neither Esparza nor Silva grew up with the intention of becoming a professor at the University of North Texas (UNT), yet both attribute the science aspect as the deciding factor for earning their PhDs. If science helped determine which career to choose, their upbringing determined what types of research to conduct.

Prof. Esparza's current research interests lie in public security which has led him to focus on policing and civil-military relations as well. As a child, his mother would watch the Spanish language news which did not censor its images or topics of the real-time violence occurring especially during the time of several civil wars in Central America. From this news exposure, Prof. Esparza struggled to reconcile his indoctrinated American mentality of "the police are heroes, the military is great" with the images he saw on tv of the Central American militaries killing their own people. He asked his mother once about this phenomenon, but his mother replied with an answer of inevitability: "that's just how the police are." The entire situation struck him as unjust and has provided the motivation for his research projects. Similarly, Silva's research focus comes from interactions with her parents as well.

Prof. Silva's research is often racially and ethnically driven including topics such as immigration and representation in the United States. She recalls always seeing life through a racial/ethnic lens because her parents are immigrants. At a young age, she remembers seeing the difference in how people treated her parents and how her parents had "different expectations of how policy worked." Consequently, Silva has decided to spend the rest of her academic career proving not only that there are generational discrepancies in expectations but also explaining why the discrepancies exist.

Both Professor Silva and Professor Esparza acknowledge that they have been privileged to work with most of the "superstars" in their respective fields because of opportunities provided by UNT. At UNT, both professors hold the position of "Assistant Professor" as they strive for tenure, not only for job security but also for academic freedom to pursue other topics of research with less limitations. Absent of absolute academic freedom, however, Professors Esparza and Silva still conduct their research projects with an overarching goal in mind. For Prof. Esparza, he includes the policy relevance of his research to allow for real-world applications of institutional change because he wants to dissuade people, like his mother, who approach the topics of police abuse and institutional abuse with an inevitable mindset. Prof. Silva's end goal relates to how she finds inspiration for many of her projects: outlandish claims made by people on the news. Her goal is to explain trends with an ethnic and racial lens and have such trends be recognized by the public to decrease people's ability to make wanton claims. Both professors thoroughly enjoy the occupation they chose, both for its research aspects and the ability to teach and encourage new scholars. Regarding her occupation as a professor, Prof. Silva attributes her success to her dedication: "I'm not the smartest person, but I do work the hardest." Rather than status or intelligence, Silva believes it is hard work that separates those that achieve their goals and those that simply read about it.



The Castleberry Peace Institute is pleased to announce the publication of ***Ni Nobles Ni Villanos*** by Laura Baron Mendoza. The book is the story of former members of the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army) who are seeking to re-enter Colombian society after years in the jungle fighting a guerilla war. They have settled in the northern Uraba region of Colombia where they have demobilized and are reintegrating into the community. The Castleberry Peace Institute is proud to help support publication of these revealing stories of men and women who have known much extraordinary violence and now seek some semblance of normality to live out their lives. Laura Baron Mendoza works with Lawyers without Borders in Bogota, Colombia.

PEACEBUILDING SPOTLIGHT

The Castleberry Peace Institute is proud to sponsor several community peacebuilding projects in Colombia. We are supporting the creation of a women's collective community vegetable garden in the community of Altavista outside of Medellin. Community members broke ground on the garden just recently. Castleberry is also supporting a project to promote tourism in Alatvista, which is incredibly beautiful, filed with many exotic birds and is the last community in Medellin before the beginning of jungle terrain. Both projects are designed to help the community recover from years of conflict, as well as more recent issues with newer armed groups using the traditional trails in this area to smuggle contraband. CPI will continue to post updates in Facebook as projects progress.



Remembering our friend and colleague Professor Milan Reban



Our friend and retired colleague Milan Reban died on September 13. Milan was a great friend and colleague to many of us over his long career at UNT. And he was a valued teacher and mentor to hundreds of students who took his classes. For many of them, his friendship and mentorship continued long after they graduated from UNT. Milan Reban truly did touch the lives of many of his students.

Milan was born in Czechoslovakia in 1934. As a child, he lived through the Nazi occupation of his homeland. After World War II ended and a Soviet-backed Communist Party regime took power in Czechoslovakia, Milan and his family escaped across the border into the Federal Republic of Germany. Eventually, he settled in the United States. He earned his undergraduate degree from University of Miami, his Master's degree from Vanderbilt and his Ph.D. from Michigan State University. At that point, he joined the faculty of the Political Science Department at UNT (then North Texas State University) and served as a valued teacher, mentor, and colleague at UNT for more than four decades.

His contributions to UNT's development as a university were substantial, especially in the areas of internationalizing the curriculum generally and strengthening the department's international studies offerings specifically. His contributions were recognized by the University when in 1985 he was named the inaugural recipient of UNT's Distinguished Service to International Education Award. He taught a variety of courses in international and comparative politics, including Soviet Politics, East European Politics. He was a much loved and well respected classroom teacher, and that fact was certified in 1976 when he was chosen by the student body as the winner of the Fessor Graham Award 1976, which is "the highest honor given by the student body".

His value to our department and the University went beyond these formal markers of achievement. He was a good friend and a great colleague. Many of us cherished the times he would pop into our office (or we into his) to swap stories and jokes. All who knew him would agree that he was a master story teller who could keep the interest of his students and of his colleagues as well. He lived his life joyously, and loved his family intensely. Music and dancing were the fuel for his joy, and that joy was contagious. Our lives are better for having known and worked with and just hung out with Milan Reban, and we will miss him greatly.

This link will take you to a recording of an interview with Milan in which he recounts his life as a child in Czechoslovakia under Nazi occupation.

<https://soundcloud.com/ollipod/episode14>

In lieu of flowers, the family invites you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, which provides clean water, health care, shelter, education and empowerment support to refugees and displaced persons. www.rescue.org. There is a Dallas chapter of IRC and our Peace Studies students have interned there over the years.