

The LLILAS Advantage by STEVE DUDLEY

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MY MEMORIES OF LLILAS are foggy. I remember going to Mexico to the Latin American Studies Association Congress in a van with fifteen other anxious students and not attending a single panel. I remember very large parties at

the house where I lived with my fantastically garrulous and social roommate who rarely went to class but taught me everything I know about how to enjoy life. I remember learning how to cook and make beer. I remember spending a lot of time on my porch, then going to another porch and spending a lot of time there as well. I remember the music—always live, always in a rustic, genuine place with a lot of slow-cooked ribs within reach.

But while those great memories stir my soul when I think of my time in Austin, it's what I learned at LLILAS that keeps me employed and doing what I love. I currently run a small think tank that focuses on organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean called InSight Crime (insightcrime.org). My partner and I are both former journalists. I went into journalism after I finished LLILAS, first with an oil services newsletter, then a business news outlet, and eventually into the mainstream with National Public Radio, the *Washington Post*, and others.

I have spent my entire career working on issues in Latin America and the Caribbean, and from the start, I felt that LLILAS had given me an advantage over my colleagues. The intellectual foundation I obtained in Austin gave me a different optic from which to probe leftist guerrillas during my first years as a freelancer in Colombia. I had spent most of my time at LLILAS studying Colombia, particularly the leftist guerrillas there, so meeting them in person was a tremendous opportunity to test what I'd learned in graduate school.

Most of the guerrillas I spoke to looked at me sideways when I asked them these long-winded, historical questions, but they obliged

and some of them relished the opportunity. One of them, alias “Simon Trinidad,” was a former banker and might have been a sociologist if he hadn't become one of the most feared commanders on the northern coast of Colombia. He and I spent a long time trying to determine how the rebels would actually implement a crop-substitution program in the areas under their control. (Trinidad was later captured, extradited to the United States, and convicted in a Washington, D.C., court of participating in the kidnapping of three U.S. Pentagon contractors; he is now in a Colorado prison serving a sixty-year sentence.)

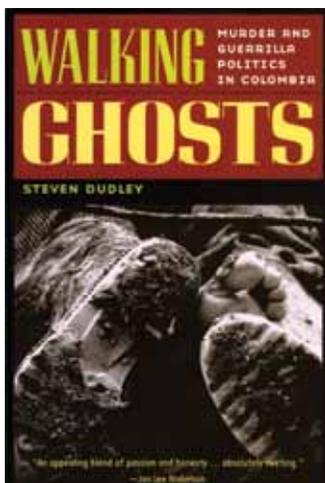
That same intellectual approach served me as well with the guerrillas' arch enemies, the right-wing paramilitaries. One of them known simply as “Pedro the Pretty One” was the commander of close to 900 men in the banana-growing region along the country's northern coast. As we drove along a lonely road one sweltering afternoon talking politics and guerrilla warfare, he posed a question: “If you had to choose between being a guerrilla and being a paramilitary, what would you choose?”

Of course, I thought carefully before I answered. “Pedro,” whose real name is Raul Hazbun, had led a bloody takeover of the area he commanded. His men had killed hundreds of suspected guerrilla sympathizers. He had sent men to kill union leaders inside a Coca-Cola bottling plant that led to a civil suit in the U.S. It later emerged that he also was the mastermind of the pay-for-protection scheme that got Chiquita Banana into a terrible fix with the Justice Department and is now the largest

civil justice suit to ever be heard in a U.S. courtroom (\$15 billion). “Well, Pedro,” I replied, slowly, feeling as if I were in one of those small rooms in Sid Richardson Hall and hadn't done the reading, “I would probably be a guerrilla.”

Pedro paused and smiled.

“Me too,” he finally said.



Walking Ghosts, Dudley's 2004 book about the guerrillas and paramilitary in Colombia, was based on his coverage of the civil war there.

I reached that “intellectual” stage with people like Pedro and Trinidad in part because of my experiences at LLILAS. We were not debating life and death. We were in the classroom debating ideas. I wasn’t sucking information from them. I was learning about who they were and how they thought through deep and difficult problems.

These days I am the “big” thinker of our organization. The Internet has changed everything about how we manage and present information, and part of that game is illustrating that you are taking on the big questions. We spend a lot of time trying to figure out things like: How much are the Zetas making on small-time drug trafficking in Monterrey? Do the Rastrojos in Colombia control the entire chain of distribution? Does the kingpin strategy make for more or less violence? Should governments negotiate with street gangs?

We produce numerous news and analysis articles every day and are producing numerous longer investigations that range from measuring potential violence during elections to studying the financial ledgers of criminal groups to better understand their criminal portfolios. We are currently in the midst of coordinating a four-partner investigation into human rights and organized crime, which will appear simultaneously on the five websites in two different languages. And we are coordinating numerous other think tanks on a project that explores the relationship between elites and organized crime.

What sets us apart is the same intellectual, rather than journalistic, curiosity that set me apart from my colleagues. And that is due, in large part, to my experiences at LLILAS. When I arrived at the University of Texas at Austin in August 1996, I had narrowed my career choices to two: journalism or work for a nongovernmental organization. What I did not know is that I was going to do both at the same time. What I did know was that LLILAS would prepare me to do either. ✨

Steve Dudley graduated with an MA from LLILAS in 1998. He is author of Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia (Routledge, 2004).



Steve Dudley (second from left) and classmates prepare to depart for LASA 1997 in Guadalajara. Prof. Henry Selby (in red cap) rented a van and drove the students down to Mexico to participate in the conference.

CHAIR ESTABLISHED IN LATIN AMERICAN ART HISTORY AND CRITICISM

Prof. Andrea Giunta has been appointed to the newly established Endowed Chair in Latin American Art History and Criticism in the Department of Art and Art History, College of Fine Arts. President Bill Powers allocated \$1 million in proceeds from the Longhorn Network to create the chair. A \$1 million matching gift from an anonymous donor will endow the Center for Latin American Visual Studies (CLAVIS) program. Giunta founded CLAVIS in 2009 and currently serves as director.

In 2008 Giunta cofounded the Permanent Seminar, an arena for presentations and joint debate. By using the Permanent Seminar and CLAVIS, Giunta has sought to build a nexus of initiatives for the study of Latin American art by reaching out to other programs across the country, as well as within Texas between the University of Texas, Southern Methodist University, and Rice University.

Giunta is also working with Mari Carmen Ramírez, curator of Latin American Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, to forge relationships between the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) and CLAVIS to combine UT students’ research practices and the ICAA archives.

The endowed chair was created to help the Department of Art and Art History retain outstanding faculty in Latin American art history and consolidate the university’s long-standing distinction as one of the leading research and teaching institutions in Latin American art history and criticism.

The \$1 million endowment to the CLAVIS program will fund student scholarships and fellowships, visiting scholars and artists, and student travel. CLAVIS brings together scholars, museum and library professionals, and collections in Latin America, the United States, and Europe to outline a complex vision of Latin American art and its evolving modernity.

