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Chronicle of a Myth Foretold: The Washington Consensus in Latin America

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This volume arose from a 2002 request for proposals issued by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation on “Urban Studies and Demography.” In response to that request, we submitted a proposal to undertake a program of training and research on “Social Responses to Structural Adjustment in Latin American Cities.” Douglas S. Massey and Jere Behrman served as co-principal investigators on the project, supported by Magaly Sanchez R. as a postdoctoral research associate. The grant was made to the University of Pennsylvania, where Massey and Behrman were on the faculty, and it supported work carried out during academic years 2002–2003 and 2003–2004.

In addition to a small grants program to support pilot research conducted by faculty and students affiliated with the Population Studies Center and the Urban Studies Program at Penn, during the first year of the award Massey, Sanchez, and Behrman collaborated in organizing a weekly seminar series that brought in specialists from throughout North and South America to make presentations on the consequences of structural adjustment within different countries. The papers presented offered such a coherent chain of evidence that yielded such clear and consistent conclusions that we decided to gather them together in a volume that would illustrate what happens when a massive social experiment is launched in a major world region without a firm understanding of the complexities involved.

The resulting volume is literally beyond the capacity of any one of us to produce, as it draws upon knowledge, expertise, and experience that is far too varied to be contained in a single human being. The chapters draw upon substantive and theoretical knowledge from the disciplines of sociology, economics, demography, anthropology, and urban studies and cover numerous countries in Latin America. The final product reveals how the idea for structural adjustment arose, the means by which it was applied to diverse countries throughout the region, the negative consequences it had within major economies, and the lessons learned from that experience.

We are grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its financial support and to Carolyn Makinson, its program officer for population, for her encouragement and advice. But we are also mindful of the situation of the subjects of our study. The 1980s are commonly called *la década perdida* (“the lost decade”) by Latin Americans, and after a promising start early in 1990s the subsequent decade fared little better. Regionwide GDP fell in absolute terms during the 1980s and increased by an anemic 2 percent during the 1990s. Bearing in mind the widespread material suffering these figures imply, the editors would like also to dedicate this volume to the millions of people throughout Latin America and the Caribbean who had their world turned upside down by the economic turmoil of the late twentieth century. It is they who ultimately contributed the most to this volume, sacrificing much of their prior progress and material well-being to prove a point.

Biographies

Douglas S. Massey is the Henry G. Bryant Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Prior to joining Princeton's faculty in 2003, he served on the faculties of the University of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania. He is currently president of the American Academy of Political and Social Science and past president of the Population Association of America and the American Sociological Association.

Magaly Sanchez R. is a professor of urban sociology at the Instituto de Urbanismo, Universidad Central de Venezuela. She is also a senior researcher at Princeton University's Office of Population Research. Her existing work investigates segregated areas in Urban Latin America, gangs, street kids, and violence. Recent research focuses on international migration and the formation of the Latino transnational identity in United States.

Jere R. Behrman is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Economics and a research associate of the Population Studies Center at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a leading development economist who has published more than 250 professional articles and 30 books and monographs on these topics and has worked with a number of international and national development organizations. He was a member of the IFPRI External Evaluation Team for PROGRESA and the Instituto Nacional de Salud Publica External Evaluation Team for Oportunidades.