

## IN MEMORIAM: *Susan M. Socolow* (1941–2023)\*

Susan M. Socolow, a leading scholar of colonial Latin American history, died on July 21, 2023. She was eighty-two years old. Most of her career was spent at Emory University, where she was the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of History. During her long career at Emory, Susan played a key role in the development of the Latin American history program. Her last years were afflicted by Alzheimer's, which she faced with characteristic courage, aided at every moment by her devoted and loving husband, Dan Socolow.

Susan had a long and influential career as a historian of the Rio de la Plata's colonial and early national periods. Her natural inclination to challenge the efficacy of received wisdom had, from the beginnings of her career, signaled her scholarly ambition and intellectual courage and, on an occasion or two, provoked debate. The collective impact of her publications on this field stimulated the introduction of new sources and methods and ignited broad new interest among colonial historians. Her first two books, *The Merchants of Viceregal Buenos Aires: Family and Commerce, 1776–1810* (Cambridge University Press, 1978) and *The Bureaucrats of Buenos Aires, 1769–1810: amor al real servicio* (Duke University Press, 1987), proved crucial to the revitalization and growth of the field of colonial social history. Much of the popularity and dynamism of this field today flowed from these early achievements as well as from a stream of articles and book chapters authored by Susan on an array of topics that included urban demography, frontier captives, crimes against women, marriage and inheritance, and colonial commercial practices. In addition to her many research contributions, Susan also sought to

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make this new historiography available in university classrooms with the publication of *Women of Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Susan entered the profession in the 1970s as a member of a remarkable generation of young women historians who would soon transform the field of colonial Latin American history. Overwhelmingly trained as social historians, this innovative and productive cohort had little interest in the previously dominant narratives of conquest and colonial institution-building. Instead, they introduced a range of topics that revealed in new ways the diversity and complexity of these colonial societies. Susan's early work was framed by the energies that drove this broad reinterpretation. So, while both the merchant-class and colonial bureaucracies of the colonial Rio de la Plata were overwhelmingly masculine precincts, her analysis illuminated the agency of mothers, wives, and daughters who played crucial roles in forging family alliances, directing households, organizing economic resources, and solidifying collective social status. The success of her efforts played an outsized role in recruiting talented young scholars to colonial social history.

The quality and influence of Susan's scholarship has been recognized by many prestigious professional organizations and supported by numerous fellowships and grants, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, Social Science Research Council, and Tinker Foundation. The consequence of Susan's many enduring achievements were celebrated by her election to the Argentine Academia Nacional de la Historia (2005) and by her selection as recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the Conference on Latin American History (2012).

Susan's unrivaled success in recruiting talented young historians to our field has been key to elevating the place of the early Rio de la Plata in the larger field of colonial Latin American history. Her scholarship and her reputation for generously mentoring young scholars attracted multiple generations of bright and talented students from the Rio de la Plata to Emory's history department. At the same time, Susan proved reliably eager to sponsor and support graduate students from other programs that she met at scholarly conferences or in the archives. The beneficiaries of her generosity and encouragement, many of them now in midcareer, all testify to her tireless support and loyalty.

While our professional lives as researchers and authors are often conducted independently, our work also has a collective and public character. The experience of archival research throws us into contact with other scholars in unpredictable ways. Friendships are forged, ideas shared, and, most

importantly, suggestions about previously unexplored sources are generously offered by historians we encounter in these settings. Reading rooms, archive elevators, and neighborhood coffee shops and bars are all potential arenas of scholarly exchange. Similarly, conference participation allows us to test our unpublished work with our peers, discover colleagues with related research interests, and locate potential publishers. Collectively these venues provide a nurturing context in our efforts to reveal the past and prepare our discipline for the future. Throughout her career Susan has cheerfully committed to sustaining and nourishing collegial engagements in these formal and informal settings. I do not know a single historian of the Rio de la Plata who cannot recall interacting with Susan in one of these venues and receiving a spontaneous offer of collegial assistance or collaboration. It is my good fortune to have been one of the beneficiaries of her generosity.

From the beginning of her career, Susan recognized the crucial importance of scholarly organizations to the promotion and development of Latin American history in the United States. Even as a young scholar at the beginning of her career, Susan committed her remarkable energy to the promotion and success of specialist organizations committed to Latin American history. As her career developed, she made a similar commitment to the organizations that serve the discipline of history more broadly. Not inclined toward academic administration and sometimes frustrated by ill-disciplined debate, Susan willingly invested time and energy in tasks that expanded the resources afforded our small field. This service was acknowledged by her election to a series of organizational leadership positions as vice president of the American Historical Association (1989–1993), president of the Conference on Latin American History (1999–2001), and president of the Rocky Mountain Conference of Latin American Studies (2008–2009).

Susan loved being a historian of Latin America. She found enormous satisfaction in archival research, in scholarly debates, and in occasional intellectual dust ups. In recent years, even as Alzheimer's took its terrible toll, Susan routinely directed our phone conversations in two predictable directions: her pride in the achievements of her grandchildren and the happiness and satisfaction she found in her life as a historian. These foundational elements sustained Susan to the end. It is my hope that everyone who reads my brief memorial of her life finds this same pleasure and satisfaction in their own careers.

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