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Remembering the Creation of The CISEUA-CISAN

A Historical Recounting Of the Creation of the CISAN

I am proud to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the Center for Research on the United States of America (CISEUA), later to become the Center for Research on North America (CISAN). And I am honored to have been charged with creating them and heading them for their first eight years. I take this opportunity to explain how they were created and consolidated.

As the founding coordinator of the Master's Program in Mexico-United States Studies, at what was then the

National School of Higher Studies in Acatlán (ENEP Acatlán), the first teaching program in Mexico—or, to my knowledge, in the United States—to concentrate on this bilateral relationship, I was always on the lookout for specialists in U.S. politics, economy, society, and culture to teach classes. Unfortunately, there were very few “Americanists,” and even fewer dedicated to the study of different aspects of bilateral relations. So, I began to search through different UNAM institutions; that led an interdisciplinary group to organize the First Mexico and Latin America vis-à-vis the United States Congress in 1987. At that time, it became clear that the study of the United

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The Humanities Coordinating Office asked the interdisciplinary group to formulate a project to create a study center on the United States. In August 1988, I enthusiastically and happily accepted the honor of UNAM Rector Jorge Carpizo's appointment as the person in charge of creating a regional center.

In the beginning, the project was a program; later, in February 1989, the University Council approved it as the Center for Research on the United States of America (CISEUA). A few months later, I was appointed its director, and since then it has gradually incorporated academic personnel from different institutions such as the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE) and El Colegio de México (Mexico College). The CISEUA boasted academics from different disciplines whose research proposed diverse nuances and perceptions about the same object of study, the United States, considering it as part of the North American region, to achieve greater comprehension of the complex regional reality.

In the early 1990s, we saw growing debate about the possible creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). That prompted me to begin the paperwork needed to include the study of Canada in our institution. So, in May 1993, the Center for Research on North America (CISAN) was created to include research on Canada and its relationship with the region's other two protagonists. If I encountered great difficulties in finding special-

ists in the United States, doing the same for Canada was even more arduous and complicated, and it was necessary to motivate academics to delve into the study of this country, until then unknown to Mexicans.

For the eight years I was the director of CISEUA-CISAN, we had important economic support from inside the UNAM for the creation of research positions, to encourage collective projects, organize congresses, and to create an important library about the region. We also received almost US\$1 million in support from the MacArthur Foundation, which rewards unique/brilliant projects, as well as from the Hewlett Foundation, Mexican banks, and the embassies of both the United States and Canada. In this period, we were also charged with renewing the publication of the magazine *Voices of Mexico*, which has won a great many prizes and honors for its excellence. The journal *Norteamérica*, created later, registered with the National Council for Science and Technology (Conacyt), has received many awards and is recognized nationwide; today, specialists from many international academic institutions send their essays to be published in it because of its international prestige. Lastly, in 2004, in order to ensure that all the researchers participate in a teaching project, we began the classroom and long-distance diploma course "Multidisciplinary Perspectives about North America," which I have coordinated since its foundation. This course has educated many holders of bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as professionals who need to update their expertise in the many topics related to the region from different disciplines and perspectives.

The CISAN has continued to become stronger and stronger daily and has created a highly recognized institutional space nationally and internationally. All of us at CISAN, the staff, former directors, as well as the current director,¹ all of whom have invested so much effort into this important project, are very proud of this. Today, the researchers specialize in different topics indispensable for understanding the North American region and the impact they have on bilateral and trilateral relations. **MM**

