Tanya Domi:
Hello, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project recorded at the CUNY Graduate Center. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating groundbreaking research, assisting New Yorkers and informing the world.

The Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino studies located at the CUNY Graduate Center works to promote the study and understanding of Latin American and Caribbean cultures and the communities established in the United States by peoples from this vast and extraordinarily diverse region, with a special focus on the New York City metropolitan area and more broadly on the United States. It was inaugurated in October 2001 with the support of a broad cross section of Latin American and Latino studies faculty specialists representing academic disciplines in the arts, social sciences, and humanities from every CUNY college. The core mission of CLACLS is to actively support and advance doctoral programs of the Graduate Center and to provide opportunities for Latino studies at the PhD level. Founder and executive director, distinguished Professor Laird Begot announced new directors of the center this past summer. Joining the Thought Project for this episode is Director Professor John Gutierrez of John Jay College and Associate Director, Professor Mila Burns of Lehman College.

John Gutierrez is an assistant professor in the Department of Latin American and Latinx studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He is a historian of the Spanish speaking Caribbean islands. He specializes in the history of Cuba and specifically the history of health, medicine and disease during the early 20th century. He earned his undergraduate degree at Vassar College and his doctorate at the Graduate Center where he was a recipient of the Ralph Bunch dissertation fellowship. He has worked in the nonprofit sector as a political consultant on campaigns ranging from the New York City Council to the New York State Legislature, from the New York City's mayoral races of 2005 and 2009 to the New York State gubernatorial election of 2006.

Before joining the faculty at John Jay, Dr. Gutierrez was an Associate at Miri Group specializing in communications, policy analysis and fundraising. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Friends of New Jersey, Hispanic Research and Information Center at the Newark Public Library. He joined the Board of Trustees of the Amber Charter School in 2015.

Dr. Mila Burns, interdisciplinary profile influences her research with an emphasis on media, anthropology and history. For almost two decades, she has been a prominent journalist in Brazil and New York. She is currently the anchor and editor-in-chief of American News, a newscast dedicated to the Latino community broadcast at TV Global International.

Welcome to the Thought Project, John Gutierrez and Mila Burns.

Mila Burns:
Thank you so much, Tanya.

John Gutierrez:
Thanks, Tanya. Nice to be here.

Tanya Domi:
It's wonderful to have you guys here. I am delighted to host both of you today as the new directors at the Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies at the Graduate Center for this special episode of Thought Project. I'm also pleased to welcome both of you back to the Graduate Center because you're both Graduate Center alumni. Both of you have PhDs in history, and because both of you are uniquely accomplished practitioners, John as a political consultant in New York politics during his
career and Mila as a prominent journalist in Brazil and New York, and is also currently the anchor and editor-in-chief of America News, a newscast dedicated to the Latino community broadcast at TV Global International. And because you’re both scholars and practitioners, I can’t think of a better combination in higher education and in your respective scholarly fields to come back to CLACLS at this time in higher ed. So can you give me your thoughts about your ideas, your initiatives, your priorities for CLACLS? And could you start, John, let’s talk about this.

John Gutiérrez:
Sure. Thanks Tanya. It's lovely to be here, and I know that Mila and I feel very happy to be back at the Graduate Center and certainly at the CLACLS. CLACLS has been around for more than 20 years. It was founded by Professor Laird Bergad. I was the Founding Administrative Director. This was a moment when the Graduate Center really didn't have a significant presence in the Latino community in the city, and the center was designed to address that issue. And I think it's done a very good job of doing that over the last 20 years. But this is a moment of transition. One of the reasons that Mila and I were happy to come back is because we both have a lot of ideas about how to expand the CLACLS footprint, not just at the Graduate Center, but throughout CUNY and throughout the city of New York.

I think the Latino community in the city is much different than it was 20 years ago. It’s certainly much more diverse. We knew that that was going to happen. It was part of the organizing frame for the organization 20 years ago, but we know now that there is a lot of work to be done with communities that don’t get a lot of attention in the city. So for us, that's a major issue. And then I think we're both alums. We remember what it was like to be Latino students at the Graduate Center, to be a lonely experience as Mila has reminded me a number of times.

And we want to make sure that the Graduate Center is a welcoming place for Latino and Latin American doctoral students. We have remarkable intellectual capital at the Graduate Center, remarkable professors, experts in every field, and we need to make sure that Latino students are ending up in the classroom. So for us, expanding the footprint, increasing the participation of Latino students in the doctoral programs, those are two priorities. I know that Mila has some other ones that she'll share, but those are really important to us.

Mila Burns:
I think you did a great job summarizing them, John. Thank you so much for that. But I would add that we really feel like its time for us to also expand the idea that some people have about the CLACLS because we did so much work and our scholarship without any modesty is really fabulous in the work that has been done in the past 20 years, especially concerning the Latino data project is really very, very important to the Latino community and to scholars working with Latinos in this country. We have been collecting data on a community that is not actually a part of the census data. You cannot really look at Latinos. You look normally at Hispanics. So we've been developing this in a way for the past 20 years that really created a new body and a new level of interest towards our community. I do think though, that we're more than that. We are that but we also are a center that wants to embody anyone who identifies with all things Latino and Latin America and Caribbean.

So even if you are a musician and you're writing songs that are not connected at all with Latin America, but you identify as Latino, come. Come to us, we are here for you. If you are a chemist and you’re doing work on something that is not connected at all with Latin America, but you identify with something Caribbean or anything, we are here for you. And that's also part of what we want to do. When John mentions the amount of brilliant intellectuals and the amount of amazing scholarship that is being done at the Graduate Center, we also want to be doing our Latino data projects on transportation in
partnership with Urban Studies, let's say, or doing our work on education in partnership with all the scholars at the GC who are working on questions of class, ethnicity and education. So the idea is also to expand the center in a way that it is not isolated, is not far from other scholars, being and embracing the interdisciplinary character that is so foundational to who we are and to our identity as a center.

On top of that, I will add that we also want to be a home for students, but for faculty members too. People who are in this wide rich CUNY system, not necessarily at the GC only, but who want to join us, want to reach out to us, want to be part of the GC community in any capacity as faculty, as suggesting events or anything that we do, we welcome that too. And we want to be this place where if you need to look for anything, let Latino, Latin American or Caribbean at the GC we're there for you.

Tanya Domi:
Well, that sounds like a good new way to approach, But also, given that we went through COVID and that period, I would think everybody would be looking at a reset. And knowing what a lot of communities experienced during COVID, I would think that post COVID, that could even accentuate some priorities even more so.

Mila Burns:
For one thing, we could see that recently in our person events that are really packed. People are looking forward to looking at each other, to sharing experiences and projects and communicating and collaborating, I think. We've been isolated for too long, for good reason. It's about time that we start exchanging ideas and collaborating again and being the lively and electoral space that the GC has always been. Right, John?

John Gutiérrez:
Yeah, I agree. I think this is a new day for a lot of institutions. Things have changed in the city, obviously. And I also think that the questions of recovery in the city over the course of the next several years are questions that should be debated at the Graduate Center. We have enough expertise at the Graduate Center to begin to offer some possible solutions. And those possible solutions to the city's challenges should incorporate everyone. I'm thinking here of in the aftermath of 9/11, Tanya, you probably remember Mike Wallace's New Deal for New York-

Tanya Domi:
Right. Yes.

John Gutiérrez:
Who was a distinguished professor at the GC in the history department. We need to start thinking in those terms. And I think that given the disproportionate impact of COVID on Latino communities, I want to see us draw on that expertise to begin to articulate a vision of Latino recovery in the city. Because the recovery of the Latino community in New York is going to drive the recovery of the city as a whole. And we have a responsibility, especially given the impact on our students across CUNY. This is the work that we should be doing. So there's a general COVID reset, but there's a COVID specific response that I think we also need to be very mindful of over the course of the next several years.

Tanya Domi:
Well, that makes a lot of sense. And just given your orientation, how do you think the mayor's responding to or engaging with Latino communities? There are Colombians, there are Peruvians, there's so many different subgroups and how the pandemic affected them could be quite vastly different.

John Gutiérrez:
Let me start off by saying that I love that the mayor's a CUNY alum. He is a John Jay grad. I teach at John Jay. I'm very happy that he's in City Hall, and I have high hopes for his Administration. I think reaching these communities is difficult, for a number of reasons. There are linguistic barriers, there are cultural issues, there are legal and immigration issues. We can't forget that we spent the last several years in this country targeting immigrants, both documented and undocumented, and that created obstacles to reaching people. I think the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs is well positioned to do some important work. We obviously would love to partner with them. So this is a shout out to them. Give us a call. We do want to talk to you a little bit about what we're doing, but it's going to require a lot of work.

It's also going to require our work at the community level. I think one of the challenges is to recognize the importance of community based organizations who know our communities best. Those organizations a lot of times don't have a connection with CUNY, let alone the Graduate Center. And where I think one of the things that we can do at the Graduate Center and at the CLACLS is to establish those connections and facilitate some entryway where those organizations that understand communities best, have a pathway to make recommendations that really are going to make a substantial difference.

Tanya Domi:
So you plan to probably leverage media and probably leverage relationships here?

John Gutiérrez:
I think that's right. We're lucky in that Mila has an enormous amount of media experience. She's an accomplished media professional. So we're in good shape on that end. And I have a long history of working with the Latino nonprofit sector. So we really hope that we can bring these two things together. As I said at the beginning, we really want to expand our presence, not just at the GC, not just at CUNY, but across the city. I think we're in a good position to do that.

Mila Burns:
But also inside the GC and inside CUNY, that's the fabulous part of that. And I think, Tanya, when you mentioned the media aspect of that, we've been talking a lot about that. We have so much to offer to GC students, including grants, summer grants that are somehow known by them. But we currently have two post-doctoral fellows working with us. We have administration, we have social media. We have at least four other positions that are occupied currently by students, GC students. I was a GC student working at the CLACLS. And I do think that in many cases, people don't know about that because we have to spread the word. And in that sense, the GC is also a big help for us. And the CUNY system is also a big help for us. So when John talks about media partnerships, this is a big part of that.

We've been featured everywhere. You name it. Yesterday it was the Brazilian magazine Visa, the day before, FA, CNN and Español, many, many different places. But we want as much to be at the GC web page as we want to be at CNN and Español. So this is a very important part of who we are. And I know that maybe our listeners are thinking that this is a very bold agenda. We want to be everywhere. You
want to be in the city, you want to be beyond the GC, but you also want to be inside the GC. Well, yes, that's the case. That's what we want to do.

Tanya Domi:
Well, that makes sense. And there's so many faculty inside the Graduate Center and across the CUNY system that are engaging on Latino issues, and there's a lot of experience and knowledge here that the CUNY can offer to the city and to NGOs, as John has pointed out and I know personally the work of Rob Smith in sociology at Peru who's been working-

John Gutiérrez:
The Mexican community.

Tanya Domi:
Yeah, yeah. The Mexican community. And I've helped place op-eds by him and the work that he did advocacy wise, with filing amicus curiae brief for the Supreme Court decision in 29 that upheld DACA at least momentarily. So there's a lot of intellectual capacity here, and I think this is the time CUNY can shout it out, but CLACLS is strategically situated to carry this out. What programming are you working on? I know you guys did roll out a book reading recently, but what are you looking at in terms of programming? And are you looking at it from a strategic as well as an important activity of CLACLS in general?

Mila Burns:
Yes, Tanya, definitely. So thank you so much first for saying that we are strategically positioned for that. I totally agree with that. And in terms of events, I'm going to break the news. This is something that we talked in our most recent staff meeting for our upcoming events. One of the things that we really want to do is as echoing this agenda that we've been talking about partnering with other institute centers and departments at the Graduate Center. So we are trying to come up with events that are going to make this connection possible. We're going to try to run the extra mile ourselves instead of waiting for people to reach out to us and to join our events that have been incredibly successful lately. So the idea is that we walk this extra mile and we reach out to other departments. So I can tell you, for instance, that ERDAC is a very important partner for us, has been.

And we only want to expand this collaboration in terms of generating scholarship, but also in terms of programming and creating events together. There's so many interests that are common to our institutes and centers and departments, and that's part of what we want to do. This semester we had several events that were really incredible. We just had a book launch recently, as you mentioned, Pierre Losson's new book, a former student at the Graduate Center who had a very insightful discussion about art objects and how some political actors work to recover those objects. And I can't use the word repatriation because a big part of the book is discussing the concept of repatriation and return, but returning those items to home countries, including Columbia, Peru and Mexico. We also had recently a film screening about Brazilian council women Maria Lí Franco, and the violent murder of Maria Lí Franco and how that impacted politics in Brazil.

And this was an event full of people discussion with the director was really, really insightful and brought a lot to the debate. We have an upcoming concert on November 10th. This is going to be a big one. Brazilian classic guitar players, and some of the greatest names. As a Brazilian, I can say that. And this is an event in partnership with a Brazilian Consulate. So we have many events that are doing this
movement already of reaching out, and this is part of our identity and of what we've been doing for years now. But we want to do more than that and continue this partnership with other departments, other disciplines, and other fields, including outside the GC. Am I forgetting any other important event that we have coming up soon, John?

John Gutiérrez:
No, I did want to go back, Mila for a second to what Tanya was mentioning about the faculty outside of the Graduate Center. If you've been at the Graduate Center, you know we have this unusual arrangement-

Mila Burns:
Consortial.

John Gutiérrez:
This consortial arrangement. Both Mila and I are at senior college campuses, and I think that unless you are a central line appointment, the Graduate Center sometimes can exist out there somewhere. And one of the things that we know is that the CLACLS can be a meeting place for faculty working on Latino studies or Latin America who may be at Queens College or at Brooklyn or any of the senior college campuses or even our community college campuses, where we have an enormous amount of faculty talent. We want people to feel at home. We want our faculty to understand that they can come talk about their books, talk about their research, and they're going to find a receptive ear. I think that that's something that Mila and I have been talking a lot about and of taking advantage of the rich resources that we have, just bringing them to 34th and fifth. We want people to feel that this is their place. We'll be doing more book launches, we'll be doing more book talks, more panel discussions. We really want to highlight the work of CUNY Faculty. That's important to us.

Tanya Domi:
And that would make sense because you have a graduate students pursuing PhDs and they need faculty to help. Advise them on their research proposal, on their field work. And that yields to collaboration and mentoring, that's just absolutely central to a PhD student being successful and graduating.

John Gutiérrez:
Well, I'll give you an example. I was speaking to Professor Woodward from the Poli Sci Department yesterday because she was the dissertation advisor for Pierre Losson's book. And when she laid out all of the different faculty, political science, history, art history, anthropology, all of these people who came together to be on this committee, you get a sense of this interdisciplinary nature of learning. And I think that as Mila was saying before, there tends to be isolation in terms of departments, in terms of centers and institutes. And one of the things that we want to do is get rid of a little bit of that isolation. Bring people together who have a common interest in Latin America or the Latino communities of the US and have them talk to one another right outside of their disciplinary confines.

I think that's where the richest work is going to happen. This isn't obviously a knock on individual disciplines. I'm a historian. Mila as a historian, very comfortable in that world. But there is an opportunity here for in interdisciplinarity that's going to benefit doctoral students and I think ultimately benefit the research that they produce.
Tanya Domi:
Yeah, I mean, I also teach at Columbia, and I'm a regionalist in the Balkans, Southeastern Europe. And you're talking about anytime you study in a specific region, the deeper you go into that scholarly work, the more interdisciplinary it becomes. It just does. So the more you learn about the politics, the more you learn about the history of the politics, then you learn about the anthropology around that. And then the sociology. And that's so rich about regional studies. There's something about it, and I know CUNY doesn't use that term, but in essence, CLACLS is a reflection of that. A study of a specific region that is broad and extensive. But I think the more you can leverage intellectual knowledge across disciplines, I think the better the research is, the more compelling it is.

Mila Burns:
Yes. And I do think, Tanya, that many of our current problems come from the fact that we tend to be very disciplinary and we forget to ask the proper questions. So even in politics, if we think of the issues of the moment and things that we are discussing, if we criticize the Supreme Court, this is not a legal issue. In many cases this is education, this is sociology, this is psychology. And many of the issues that we're discussing today have multiple aspects, can profit from a discussion that is interdisciplinary in nature, can profit from approaches and methods and insights from multiple disciplines. And I think it's going to affect, again, not to be too bold on that, but I think this is also something that affects, as John said, our students, our faculty, their researches and the world. Because when we start asking questions and borrowing from each other in an interdisciplinary way, we're asking better questions. And we are addressing issues with way more efficacy than what we're doing without doing that.

Tanya Domi:
That's really interesting. So I also want to ask you, do you have any students that are pursuing masters in Masters programs? It's been a real effort by the Graduate Center to particularly maybe in the migration masters program. Any thoughts on that?

Mila Burns:
Not only migration Tanya, but quantitative studies as well, for example. And of course the MAOS program has been a partner of ours for many, many years. And we'll continue being so not only in terms of supporting students, but even curriculum development is something that we love to do, we're passionate about and we love working closely with the MAOS program on that. But we have been having fellows from quantitative studies from that master's program for a few years now. I think since the inception of the program. We have a current fellow coming out to join us this semester and the migration program, of course. So this is also part of this expansion idea that we have. A surprise for me because many of those programs are not from my time at the GC as a student there. So I arrived with those great, great news that we could have other partners and that meant reaching out to students. As I mentioned before, the Latino data project has been a force in this country in terms of quantitative research related to Latinos. And this is something that if we have a program in quantitative studies at the Graduate Center, it's only natural that we're going to be working closely. But you're right, when you add to this list migrations and when you add to this list, the MAOS program, and so many others, because if we're reinforcing this idea of interdisciplinarity, that's where we want to go. So we want to be able to be displaced, as I said before, where everything that connects to Latin America is welcome. And this research is developed. And this is very important to say, not only for PhD students. One good example that I always like to cite, and my poor student, I think she can't stand anymore, the fact that I'm bragging about her to everyone I meet.
But Deamelka Rivas, who currently works with us at the CLACLS, was my student in my first semester at Lehman College teaching there, and now she's a student in the history department at the Graduate Center. I don't want to work with someone like Deamelka when she gets to the Graduate Center. This work has to start when she's an undergrad at Lehman or even before that, in some cases, reaching out to people who are making a difference in non-profit, in the media on YouTube, you name it, but who are impacting the community somehow and can offer things that are going to make our researchers and our scholarship better. So I can cite Deamelka, but I can also cite Kathy, who's also a student in the history department who worked with me as a student at the Graduate Center in the Latin American Cold War. And together we developed projects on Puerto Rico, and I saw the papers that she wrote.

So the work goes beyond the classroom with us. Lydia Tapia is one of the fellows of the program crossing Latini Dathes and I mentioned our two postdocs, Sebastian and Andraina who are publishing a lot of amazing articles and amazing work that they refer as being the result of the work that they had at the CLACLS. Not only because we give them the room literally and figuratively space to do and develop this research, but we give the intellectual, the financial, the mental health support that many of us do need during this process. I, for one, can give myself as an example, without the support of the CLACLS at the time I was a student at the GC, I'm not a hundred percent sure I would have finished my doctoral program because that support was crucial for me. And that's where we want to be.

Tanya Domi:
Okay. So John, I want to veer off now into these upcoming elections.

John Gutiérrez:
Oh boy.

Tanya Domi:
Yeah. The midterms were less than six weeks out, and there's been a lot of discussion in national media on the Latino vote in Texas and Latino vote in Arizona. And of course there's a Latino population that I know because a CLACLS Latino data reports over the years and me working with those and promoting those, I became intimately familiar with the different Latino voting population in many, many different states throughout the country. And actually Georgia has a sizable representation there that could really make a different in the US Senate and gubernatorial race there. So just in general, I'd like to have your thoughts on, are the major parties paying attention to the Latino vote in an effective way with some knowledge? Has that knowledge grown since 2020? And I might add that Biden, the Democratic Party did not do well down ballot in 2020 because I think they really thought one message fits all and they missed the boat. What are your thoughts on this?

John Gutiérrez:
Right. Let me start with the 30,000 foot view here.

Tanya Domi:
Please.

John Gutiérrez:
Because I've read those reports too. Overwhelmingly, Latinos in the United States support the Democratic Party. I think we need to start with that baseline. I think part of the challenge is that, and we
know this from our work in Latin America, we know this from our work with the Latino Data Project, we have not one Latino community. We have numerous Latino communities with different histories, different political sensibilities. There are remarkable differences in terms of age structure, gender, length of residents in the United States, which affects people's political loyalties. So all of that is to say that when people talk about the "Latino vote", they're trying to flatten something that is remarkably textured. And I guess the frustrating part for me, looking at this from the outside, is that what I've just said is not new.

We've known this for a very long time. We've been talking about this for a very long time. And for some reason, the infrastructure of the Democratic Party in particular, has not really paid attention to that. And I think that you have organizations that have been trying to work outside of the party. And I'm thinking here of organizations like the Latino Victory Fund, for example, raising money, training candidates independent of the Democratic Party and its own fundraising machine because the Latino Victory Fund is willing to dive deep into those communities, into our communities and find talent and ask questions about what are people's priorities in a way that I think the Democratic Party as an institution has not done. I think you start seeing we have some problems with polling, obviously. Sample sizes tend to be very small for Latino communities. I think one exception here is the work done by Equis Lab, which is doing, I think some really remarkable work with large samples of Latino voters.

So we're getting a better handle on Latino policy preferences, policy concerns, in a way that we probably don't just looking at, you're one of the mill poll that looks at a thousand voters and 20 of them are Latino voters. So I think there are some bright spots here, but there's a lot of work to do in terms of mobilizing people, registering people to vote, giving them something to vote for. I think that's a big issue. I think the Republican party has enjoyed some success because there is a simplicity to their messaging. They're trying to make an argument about the economy, which is an easy argument to make right now. I think people are hurting despite the fact that gas prices are coming down. People feel inflation, especially in our communities where wages have not kept pace with the cost of living. And so those arguments resonate with people because I think they're pretty easy to understand because you feel them.

I think one of the things that I will say, and I haven't seen polling on this, but I'm curious to see where this lands is among young Latina voters this year. Because I think that the Dobbs decision, overturning Roe, I think we are about to see a lot of young women who may not necessarily have been involved in the political electoral process up until now, feel very, very motivated. I've heard this with my students. My classrooms are overwhelmingly young women, and you can hear the anxiety around this, and quite frankly, the anger around this issue. So I think that that's something to look forward to. But Democrats, they have a lot of work to do, and they have had a lot of work to do and haven't done it. And so we need to press to do the work.

Tanya Domi:

Interesting comments. And I agree you with many things that you said. I'll just say this. I did work on the Clinton campaign in 2016, and she hired Latinas to run her Latino outreach, and she outperformed Biden significantly in the Latino vote and took Nevada with us, top rate operation. There's a lot to learn there. And there's a lot of white guys inside the DNC that just haven't opened their minds. I want to make that comment, so-

John Gutiérrez:

I agree.
Tanya Domi:
I want to go now to Mila. Big, big major runoff in Brazil on the 30th of October between the current President Bolsonaro and quite Trump-esque figure in Latin America against the former President Lula, and some other governors will be elected on that date too. And what are your thoughts on this, and why should it matter to Americans? I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

Mila Burns:
How many hours or days do we have on this?

Tanya Domi:
Okay, okay. I want you to give a thumbnail overview and then after the elections, I'll have both of you back to talk just about these political outcomes. Okay.

Mila Burns:
So first of all, people really tend to compare Bolsonaro to Trump. There are many reasons for that. They were good friends, one supported each other. Steve Bannon is behind both men. In Brazil, he's been actively working with the Bolsonaro family since before the last elections, but also during the past four years in government. And you see many strategies that are quite similar. In Brazil there was for instance just before this first round and attempt of canceling bus service in many poor cities in Brazil so that poor people did not go to vote because according to poll, there was an indication that the poorest part of the population supported Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva overwhelmingly more than Jair Bolsonaro. And that actually proved correct when we saw the result of the elections. A second important point is that voting is mandatory in Brazil. It's not an option in the US. So you have a voting rate in the US, let's say last elections, I think it was roughly 67% of people went to the polls and decided to vote. In Brazil this year, we had 80% of people voting, and the 20% who didn't vote, they actually should have voted. Even if we look at 20% being a very high number, that could have changed the result of the elections. It's way less than we saw four years ago. So this is also indicating that there's an interest and a will to participate in Brazil, including in the part of the population in the segments that are not necessarily have to go to the polls, like older people. It's not mandatory for them, but still it was a record breaking number of older people voting, or kids who are 16. From 16 to 18 is still not mandatory, but it was also overwhelming.

So you see that happening, and I think there are two aspects of that. When you ask about the relations with the United States, I think we have to think of the relations not only with the United States, but the relations with democracy itself. We have a current president that has mentioned in many, many times the importance of weapons. The number of weapons in the country has increased dramatically. It's just unbelievable. We are not a country known for having people talking about the right to have a weapon as you see in this country. And now this is what we talk about in Brazil, although it's a very violent country. It's really terrifying to see a country that has been suffering with violence for so long, not only legitimizing, but stimulating the use of weapons in a daily basis in Brazil, which is something that also scared some of Lula electors to show off how they felt and go in the poles wearing red, which is the color of the Workers' Party in Brazil.

With all that said, Tanya, I wanted to really focus on one aspect, which is the fact that Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva had over 6 million votes more than the current president, which is very, very unusual. And many people on the left were disappointed and feeling very sad about that and saying, "Oh, we should have won in the first round". No one has ever done that. Even Lula in the two terms and the 16 years that the
Workers' Party has been empowered with two other terms for former President Dilma Rousseff, they have not gone bad. This is a very impressive result actually, that puts the current president Bolsonaro in a terrible position. He's going to have to work very, very hard to get to those voters who didn't go to the polls, who didn't vote for me, especially because his level of projection is much higher than Lula's although there was this conversation about corruption in Brazil during the Workers' Party years and so on and so forth.

50% of Brazilians say they would never ever vote for Bolsonaro, and 40% say they would not vote for Lula. That's also a very, very big difference. And after that, whoever wins is going to have a very hard time governing in the next four years because no one got the majority of Congress in Brazil. We have 513 Congress people in Brazil. Bolsonaro to capture roughly 200 and Lula's allies 120. So everyone is going to have to make concessions. Everyone is going to have to dialogue to negotiate. It's going to be hard no matter what happens. And there was no fraud in our elections.

This is also something that is very similar to what has happened in the United States. Once your candidate loses, oh, it was fraud. So the feeling that we have in Brazil now, it's so weird that people are saying there was a fraud and saying, it's weird because Bolsonaro auto elected 200 Congress people. Therefore, that was not a fraud, but the Presidential election was a fraud. It doesn't even make sense. It's the same system. We have the best system in the world for elections, the safest one. So just let's stop with this conversation and work hard so that we have a democracy that is healthy and safe.

Tanya Domi:
We will regroup after these elections and we'll have another podcast. Now-

Mila Burns:
I would love that.

Tanya Domi:
So let's talk very quickly about your current scholarly work, John, and then Mila before we go.

John Gutiérrez:
Sure. So I'm a historian of Cuba, and my research focuses on the history of public health at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. I'm currently working on a book project about the anti tuberculosis movement on the island. We tend to think about places during the late 19th, early 20th century as being overrun by tropical diseases like yellow fever. And in fact, tuberculosis was the leading cause of death on the island as it was in places like New York and Paris and London. And so my work focuses on the way in which Cuban doctors and scientists and public health officials organize themselves around fighting this disease within the context of being seen as a place overrun by tropical disorders, by the outside world. So that's what I'm working on and hope to complete next semester when I'll be on sabbatical.

Tanya Domi:
Okay. That's very interesting, especially in these days when nobody accepts that these diseases actually still exist. Now we're seeing a return of polio, which is absolutely frightening. It's incredible. A global fund is now addressing that, and it'll be interesting. They're doing a full campaign. Can you imagine in the 21st century to address again, the second eradication of polio? So that research is important. So Mila, what are you working on? What's your current project?
Mila Burns:

Well, Tanya, as you know, I am what Brazilians call [foreign language 00:43:01]. It's like a crazy person who does a bunch of different things. And I like that, honestly. I'm very comfortable in my place as a person who does a lot of different things. My last book was on one specific album, Samba album by Dona Ivone Lara, who is, in my opinion, probably one of the best and most important and pathbreaking composers of our times in the world, I would daresay, who happened to be a Black woman in Brazil. And she was someone who really occupied spaces and places that were usually reserved for men, especially writing Samba, which is considered an intellectual work. It's not about singing, interpreting, she's doing more. And Dona Ivone Lara curiously had this album that brings debates about the Black movement, about feminism in Brazil, although she has never supported any political group, any questioning of anything connected to race or gender rights. But the album is all about that.

So I also raised the question of what we call activism and how limited this definition can be, especially for a person like her who was trying to challenge spaces and places that were stipulated that were the only ones that she could occupy. When you're trying to do something as revolutionary as that, it's very hard to do that with a flag in your hand saying, "And I'm going to do that this way because I'm a feminist". She just decided that she would create a tremendous impact in those fields with a different strategy. She has a song in which she says [foreign language 00:44:38]. So she was stepping lightly and little by little going places and really revolutionizing the way that women and Black women in particular felt in Brazil and the places where they could be.

So today in Brazil, if you talk to any female composer, they will mention her name and say that it were not for her opening this avenue for them, it would be very hard to think that they could be part of the conversation. This book was released in 2019 by Bloomsbury Academic and in 2020 or 21, I don't remember any, 20 in Brazil, a translation of that in Brazil and Portugal. And now I have another manuscript already submitted. I'm finishing the revisions after having received the reader's report about the Brazilian influence on the Chilean coup d'état of 1973. So it's a diplomatic history work, but that connects a lot to economic issues and political issues, of course, but also brings the voice of Brazilian exiles who lived in Chile at the time.

I was fortunate enough to have collected a lot of oral histories and being the first person to see the declassified documents of the Brazilian Truth Commission, many of them were in boxes when I got to the archives to start researching. So I don't even have... It's very hard because sometimes I send the chapters for very close friends and can you take a look. And they're like, "Well, this citation". I don't really have a way of citing this because the document was not cataloged when I got there.

But that attests to the tremendous influence that Brazil had on the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile. And this is something that we, and especially US scholars stand not to pay a lot of attention to, because we tend to look at US influence. Although I have to say that I am grateful for Peter Kornbluh, Tanya Harmer, and so many amazing scholars who have done the work before me and allowed me to start this investigation from a different point of view and not a lonely point of view. So I think that's pretty much what I'm working on now.

My next project, and I already started collecting some interviews for that one, dialogues a little bit with John in the sense that it's about Cuba too. I'm studying telenovelas, Brazilian telenovelas. We call them novellas, that were produced by TV Global during the Cold War, during the time when Brazil was under civilian military dictatorship and Cuba was under the Fidel regime. Apparently Fidel was a big, big fan of Brazilian telenovelas, canceled meetings so that he could watch the telenovelas. Baseball games in Cuba were canceled so that people could watch telenovelas. That's another project that I'm very excited about. I have to say, I had started research for this one, had to go back to writing the next book so that I
could send a final version of the manuscript. And it was very like bittersweet. I was enjoying so much this research, but I'm going to go back to that very soon.

Tanya Domi:
If you can believe it, these telenovelas are actually televised in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mila Burns:
Oh, they are. They are here, everywhere.

Tanya Domi:
They are a big hit. I have many friends-

Mila Burns:
They are big hits.

Tanya Domi:
I have many friends who watch them in Bosnia. They're subtitled in Bosnian language if you can believe it.

Mila Burns:
Yeah, we're good at soccer, Samba and telenovelas. We're very good at them.

Tanya Domi:
Thanks for tuning into The Thought Project, and thanks to our guests, Professor John Gutierrez of John Jay College and Professor Mila Burns of Lehman College of the City, University of New York. The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering and technical assistance by audio engineer Kevin Wolf and CUNY TV. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.