

*Symposium*

**Lula and His Politics of Cunning:  
From Metalworker to President of Brazil**  
*by John D. French*

*Introduction*

*Alfred P. Montero*

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Political scientists are fascinated with the role that personal leadership plays in politics, but we struggle with how to incorporate it comparatively and substantively into our varied approaches of study. This symposium will indulge the fascination with leadership. The focus is John French's rich and textured biography of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, *Lula and His Politics of Cunning: From Metalworker to President of Brazil* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

The subject's importance is without question. Lula stands beside only Getúlio Vargas as the most influential political figure in contemporary Brazilian history. And he is unquestionably one of the most important leaders in Latin American history since transitions to democracy changed the trajectory of the region beginning in the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s. Lula's political life encompasses the broad arc of the democratic period in Brazil, beginning with his role as the leader of the metalworkers' union of São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema in São Paulo during the late 1970s, a subject that has been the focus of John French's career as a historian.

The publication of *Lula and His Politics of Cunning* provided us at *LAPS* with an opportunity to have a symposium of political scientists consider the qualities of leadership that make Lula the political figure he is. Gathered here are some of the most insightful scholars of Brazilian politics. Each was asked to meditate on what French calls Lula's cunning, his intuitive ability to make connections with equals and followers alike, forging coalitions at strategic moments to move political and social projects forward. Whether this meant "tactically yielding to structures of power," as Anthony Pereira writes, or practicing a "politics of pragmatism and guile," as Timothy Power puts it, the qualities that make up cunning are particularly valuable in the democratic context. One might add that these qualities in democratic leadership are especially crucial to maintain democracy when it comes under severe strain.

After reading these commentaries, one might agree that the ideas contained herein merit more space than these pages can provide. The purpose here is simply to

reflect on Lula's case and to inspire further debate on the qualities of leadership, writ large, in the field of Latin American politics and political economy.

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