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Nación’s reporters to do such outstanding investigative work: a weak president who had abandoned his party, thereby strengthening the judiciary’s ability to uphold the rule of law; a healthy balance sheet ("a poor newspaper cannot be independent"); and competition, which led to other Costa Rican news organizations joining the chase for new leads in the ongoing scandal. Urbina-Gutiérrez’s method in root out the story may sound familiar: “Follow the money.”

It almost certainly rings true. Mabel Rehnfeldt; honored for her investigative reporting for Paraguay’s largest newspaper, ABC Color. A relentless journalistic force against corruption and abuse of power in Paraguay, Rehnfeldt writes in the tradition of the great muckrakers of the past century. Her targets include abuses by police, inhuman prison conditions, juvenile delinquency, theft and corruption in the state petroleum monopoly, and critical analysis of the military budget.

But as Rehnfeldt explained at the panel event, the cost of muckraking in her country remains high. It exacted its toll on her personally in 2003, when unknown assailants tried (and failed) to kidnap her family. Paraguay, Rehnfeldt explained, is a land of six million people, half of whom live in poverty, and the other half, in extreme poverty. Its strategies to improve the environment, “your generation’s greatest struggle.”

It is thanks in large part to the relentless efforts of Tim Padgett that Latin America stays on the radar screen in the United States. Since 1990, he has covered the region’s stories for Newsweek and then for Time, where he remains today. Padgett’s most recent articles have dealt with the migrant smuggling business, the growing use of cocaine in Latin America, the growing strength of Cartagena del Sur in Colombia and the rise of the NAFTA generation in Mexico. His work also includes groundbreaking stories on the presidency of Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and Brazil’s landless peasant movement.

In her Columbia address, Walker spoke of the “shug-gols” pace of change since the election of Vicente Fox in 2000 ended the 70-year reign of the country’s PRI party. Mexicans now openly critici-


cizing the Fox government—which, on the one hand, is a good sign, as formerly, no criti-

cics would give her their names, she said. On the other hand, Walker wonders how long the country will continue on the road to democracy. The next presidential elec-
tions are only one year away, and the PRI party is already strengthening, she said.

Finally, Walker noted that the Mexican press has grown obsessed with reporting on politics and drug trafficking, stories on immigration, poverty, health and education have been getting short shrift. During the question-and-answer session following the panel discussion, Urbina-Gutiérrez explained that while Latin America may be vital in terms of its environment and natural resources, “we have managed to make ourselves irrelevant globally” by renouncing the rule of law. Civil society protections of the United States don’t exist south of its border, he maintained.

Padgett concurred with this point but then added that Americans, too, cannot afford to become complacent about the strength of their own rule of law and civil-society protection. “Our recent hurri-

canes raised open the consequences of such complacency,” he said.

All five Cabot medalists agreed that taking on the challenges of reporting on Latin American political, eco-


comic and social issues had enriched their lives sub-


dstantially. At the dinner given in their honor, President Bollinger praised them for “giving voice to the voiceless in the face of great adversity.”

"Helping the helplessness about lasting social change," 2005 Cabot Prize-winning journalists, from left: Mabel Rehnfeldt, Tim Padgett, Miriam Leitâno and S. Lynne Walker.

also realistic in assessing what he referred to as its “missed opportunities.” On terrorism, the panelists didn’t lay a clear condemnation of “terrorism in all its forms and manifesta-
tions” at the feet of “every, wherever and for whatever purposes.” Unfortunately, he said, “We didn’t even come to a single sen-
tence, about how to tackle one of the most urgent challenges of our time, the threat of weapons of mass destruction,” Annan said. Thus it would now be up to the General Assembly to conclude a convention against international terrorism at a later date.

Another missed opportuni-
ty was the lack of a clear plan for reforming the UN Security Council, Annan said. Indeed, despite breakthroughs on human rights, there is still no guarantee that the Security Council will act swiftly in response to human rights abuses. Answering a question on the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, for example, Annan said that the prolonged debate over whether genocide had been committed had made it impossible for the UN “to move with the speed that is required.”

During the panel discussion following Kofi Annan’s address, conference participants tackled issues raised by Security Council reform and also looked at proposals for establishing parallel organiza-
tions to the UN.

Anne-Maria Slaughter, dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, noted that because the current council cannot speak for the world, reform is needed “or the Security Council’s portion of policy research will be up to the UN by member states and establishing benchmarks for the organiza-
tion’s performance.”

The panel discussion echoed Annan’s concluding comments that “more fund-
ing” will be needed to get gov-


ernments and representatives in the assembly to reach a con-
sensus and take action. To do that, Annan said, the UN “must convince a broad majority that a more efficient UN will better serve, and be more account-
able to not just one or a few member states, but to all of them.”

2005 Cabot Prizes winning journalists from left: Mabel Rehnfeldt Tim Padgett Miriam Leitâno and S. Lynne Walker.

In 2004, La Nación’s investigative unit uncovered political corruption at the highest level, for which it received a special citation at this year’s Cabot Award ceremony. Alejandro Urbina-Gutiérrez (middle) accepted on behalf of La Nación’s team, which also includes, from left, Giannina Segnini-Picado, Mauricio Herrera Ulloa and Ernesto Rivera-Casasola.