

U.S./INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Especjos de la guerra fría: México, América Central y el Caribe. Edited by Daniela Spenser. Mexico: Ciesas/Porrúa, 2004. Pp. 392. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index.

Daniela Spenser has gathered a remarkable international ensemble of scholars who collectively ask what the East-West Cold War meant in Latin America. They answer that Latin Americans lived it not as an abstract conflict between economic and political systems but as a daily struggle marked by violence and pain, an intensification of what they already knew to be North-South tensions. After a useful introductory chronology by Friedrich Katz, the rest of the book is organized into four parts that highlight the methodologies of the contributors: historiography and theory, diplomacy and politics, the “*cotidianidad de la guerra fría*,” and transnational issues. In the first part, Richard Saull argues that the Cold War in Latin America must be re-imagined as an episode in the longer-term expansion of global capitalism into a southern hemisphere undergoing social upheaval, while Gilbert Joseph encourages scholars to write the social and cultural history of grassroots groups rather than Cold War “grand strategy.”

One common conclusion of the book places Mexico in a fragile position between revolution and authoritarianism. Katz, Lorenzo Meyer, Jürgen Buchenau, and Eric Zolov all comment on the balancing act maintained by Mexico’s ruling party. In the Cold War, the PRI drew on its own past to encourage the rhetoric of revolution from below elsewhere in Latin America. But it did so precisely because it held such a monopoly of force at home. Mexico’s role often became to champion every nation’s territorial integrity while holding back the forces of revolutionary violence—a neutralism that strangely satisfied U.S., Soviet, Guatemalan, Cuban, and Nicaraguan officials. These contributions remind U.S. scholars, especially, of the behind-the-scenes importance of Mexico City in major Cold War episodes.

Less surprisingly, Cuba is also prominent. Piero Gleijeses argues that we can understand much about the Cuban Revolution by grasping that its African policy of the 1960s and 1970s embodied much of its idealism. Adolfo Gilly and Daniela Spenser, meanwhile, bring non-U.S. perspectives to the 1962 missile crisis, thus transcending the “thirteen days” approach as conceived in Washington. Gilly, who was both a journalist in Cuba in October 1962 and a participant at a conference forty years later in Havana, argues that ordinary Cubans were just as ready to provoke a nuclear exchange as was Fidel Castro and confirms that the Cuban leadership had a serious falling out with Moscow after the resolution of the crisis left Cuba unprotected. For the Soviets, writes Spenser, what they called the “crisis of the Caribbean” had a different strategic meaning. Cautious before the missile crisis, Nikita Khrushchev now temporarily embraced guerrilla war for Latin America in order to mend fences with Cuba and shore up its own reputation after the humiliating about-face in the Caribbean.

Finally, Carlota McAllister and Ariel Armony focus on lesser-known theatres of the Cold War. McAllister writes that in the hamlet of Chupol, Guatemala in 1979 it was indigenous market women who successfully rejected the forced recruitment of their men into the state military. This local resistance against Cold War, centralizing modernization followed efforts by a local priest to create an alternative “market” not only for the local exchange of goods among the women but for their group empowerment through consciousness-raising. Armony uncovers a more widespread movement by Argentine’s “dirty war” military to spread its influence by strengthening the repressive apparatuses of right-wing Central American regimes. What became, among other things, the genesis of the Nicaraguan *contras* also signaled a rare independence from Washington for a conservative Latin American nation because the Carter administration opposed this Argentine offensive.

Though the quality of contributions varies, this path-breaking collection offers several superb ones. Those by Zolov, Büchenau, Gleijeses, McAllister, Spenser, and Armony are especially noteworthy because they imaginatively answer the call by Joseph to combine Latin American documents and interviews with U.S. sources. Spenser even throws in Soviet bloc documents. The result represents an admirable determination to increase dialogue between hemispheric scholars and thus create a more comprehensive and richly balanced view of the Cold War in Latin America. This is as good as international relations history gets. It deserves as wide a readership among U.S. audiences as it will no doubt receive in Mexico and the rest of Latin America.

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The U.S. Catholic Press on Central America: From Cold War Anticommunism to Social Justice. By Edward T. Brett. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. Pp. viii, 265. Notes. Index. \$45.00 cloth; \$22.00 paper.

A U.S. administration comes into office with an ideology-driven agenda headed by a genial president with no overseas experience who leaves the details to his staff and declares a region of the world a threat to U.S. security: the template for the present in many ways comes from the Reagan administration’s Central America policy in the 1980s. The obvious difference is that although that administration sent billions to support its allies, and sent small numbers of American advisors, U.S. troops did not go into combat. A major deterrent to deeper involvement was the fact that for a decade many Americans resisted and opposed those efforts, prominent among them those motivated by their faith. The United States Catholic Church institutionally took public stands against Reagan administration policy.

This was a new development, as Edward Brett documents in this book. The “Catholic press” here means a collection of magazines headed by the weeklies *America*, *Commonweal*, *National Catholic Reporter*, and *Our Sunday Visitor*, as