

Toward a New Drug History of Latin America: A Research Frontier at the Center of Debates

Paul Gootenberg and Isaac Campos

Abstract This introduction brings the issue of Latin American drug trades and cultures into conversation with the region's historiography. Illicit drugs are now notoriously associated with Latin America and represent untold billions in exports, generating over the last three decades tremendous violence, instability, and public controversy. Yet historians are just starting to seriously research the topic. Psychoactive drugs, broadly conceived, have been central in Latin American history from pre-Columbian times to the present; this piece offers a long-term periodization of drugs to uncover and analyze their complex and often-surprising roles. Rather than fetishize drugs, the essay maintains that they can be productively woven into the largest contexts and problems of Latin American history. After analyzing three methodological concerns of drug history—issues of transnationality and scale, the place of drugs in commodity studies, and the social constructivist approach to drug meanings and effects—the special issue editors introduce three exemplary new essays on the history of drugs in Latin America.

“**D**rugs,” at least the criminalized, menacing kind, are everywhere in twenty-first-century dispatches about Latin America. The Andean region, despite decades of US-sponsored drug war, still exports some 600 metric tons of illicit cocaine a year. The yearly consumption value alone of drugs in the Western Hemisphere is guesstimated at around 150 billion dollars. Trafficker violence that not long ago blighted Colombia's cities has spread to Mexico, where tens of thousands have horrifically perished in the country's worst social meltdown since the Cristero revolt of the 1920s. Mexico remains a bustling cross-border supplier of illegal cannabis, heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine to desirous consumers in the United States, though much of that trade, and its “cartels,” is shifting perilously to smaller Central American nations, notably Honduras and Guatemala. Governments and police already notorious for old-style graft are caught in a torrent of drug-induced corruption, including billions in drug profits laundered through Caribbean banks. And Latin America is taking drugs too: Brazil, for example, is now the world's second-biggest consumer of Andean cocaine after the United States, fueling fierce gang warfare in the favelas, while the Argentine and Chilean middle classes smoke marijuana at rates similar to those for disaffected European youth. Drug addiction, beyond problems with

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alcohol, is now recognized as a public health hazard across the region. Meanwhile, the prefix “narco” is attached to myriad cultural and political actors and has gained its own commercial and popular currency. And, for the first time, a diverse group of Latin American political elites are voicing fresh opinions about solving hemispheric drug problems, sometimes against the strict international prohibitionist system long advocated by Washington. Who has not heard of Bolivian president Evo Morales’s passionate defense of the indigenous coca leaf, the mounting calls from Colombian officials to debate new strategies in the drug war, or Uruguay’s recent experiment as the hemisphere’s first pot-legal nation?¹

These issues are certainly topical, but we argue that drugs, broadly conceived, have long pervaded the social, economic, and cultural history of the Americas. In this special issue of *HAHR*, we, two archival historians who study that drug past, want to introduce a new drug history for the Americas, though admittedly, the old kind barely got a start.² We argue here that the fetishization of drugs by prohibitionists and enthusiasts alike has been no accident. Whether due to the resemblance between drug-induced and spiritually inspired ecstasy, or the way that drugs can undermine the *razón* on which Western civilization has supposedly hinged, or their life-and-death medicinal implications, these are no ordinary goods. Thus drugs also possess, we believe, extraordinary potential for expanding historical study. At the same time, drugs have been closely tied to fundamental themes and developments throughout Latin American history.

Here we will introduce these ideas in three parts. First, we offer a long-term periodization of drugs in Latin America that frames the big picture and problematizes present distinctions between licit and illicit drugs. Second, we propose a brief set of explicit suggestions on the methodological possibilities of drug history. Third, we present three new essays, focused specifically on the tumultuous long 1960s in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico, that exemplify how drugs can open new frontiers at the center of our field.

Defining Drugs

Drugs, as anthropologist Sidney Mintz taught us with his penetrating idea of “drug foods,” are far more than today’s multibillion-dollar, illicitly trafficked

1. On the value of drugs produced in Latin America, see Organization of American States, General Secretariat, *Drug Problem*. On generally inflated drug value statistics, see the critique by Reuter, “Political Economy”; or, generally, Andreas and Greenhill, *Sex, Drugs, and Body Counts*.

2. Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*; Campos, *Home Grown*. See note 7 below on the broader historiography.

cocaine, marijuana, and meth, and this wider scope helps to define their deeper place across the landscape of Latin American history.³ The modern interdisciplinary field of drug studies favors such a broad-tent definition. Drugs include legal and soft stimulants like coffee, *yerba mate*, cacao, tobacco, and even, arguably, sugarcane-derived sucrose itself. They also include scores of Native American ritual hallucinogenic plant drugs such as peyote, “magic mushrooms” (usually psilocybin), ololiuqui (Mexico’s sacred morning glory seed), *Salvia divinorum*, Amazonian ayahuasca vision vine (yajé), *yopo* snuff, San Pedro (a mescaline cactus of South America), and the countless datura and other alkaloid-rich *Solanaceae* species deftly employed by indigenous shamans in parts of Colombia and Ecuador. Drugs also properly include the many well-known alcoholic beverages that have arisen out of Latin American cultures and export zones: chicha, pulque, aguardiente, pisco, tequila, cachaça, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Nicaraguan rums, Chilean wines, and the famously branded bottled products of the Mexican beer industry. The touristy margarita, for example, is a global signifier of good times *a la mexicana*. And in the very broadest definition, drugs also include the overlapping histories of myriad medical, herbal, and pharmaceutical products of the region. Antimalarial cinchona (Peru Bark), for example, was a result of the purposeful bioprospecting expeditions of early European colonial powers; native hallucinogens (and of course cannabis) are still thought to have hidden therapeutic potential.⁴ Such botanic traditions have survived and been transformed over the centuries through internal colonization of national materia medica, in modernist developmental projects of the high-tech Mexican and Cuban pharmaceutical sectors, and today in New Age natural exports such as Andean *uña de gato*. The drug prospecting continues today with the patent mining of Central American rain forest knowledge by global pharmaceutical giants.⁵

Drugs, in short, are everywhere in Latin American history, but that ubiquity has nonetheless produced some distinct contours that can be sketched within a long-term, four-part periodization: pre-Columbian, colonial, a long nineteenth century of national drugs, and today’s globalized illicit drug circuits, which erupted in the mid-twentieth century.⁶ In offering this framework, we

3. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*; or Mintz’s suggestive “Forefathers of Crack.” For broader definitions of drugs, see, for example, Weil and Rosen, *From Chocolate to Morphine*; Goode, *Drugs*; or a more recent iteration, Kleinman, Caulkins, and Hawken, *Drugs and Drug Policy*, esp. chapter 1, “Why is ‘Drug’ the Name of a Problem?” (1–14).

4. Pierce and Toxqui, *Alcohol*. On the relation between intoxicating drugs and medicine, see Mann, *Murder*; Schiebinger and Swan, *Colonial Botany*. For an exemplary study of twentieth-century pharmaceuticals, see Soto Laveaga, *Jungle Laboratories*.

5. Hayden, “From Market”; Greene, “Indigenous People.”

6. This periodization is partly inspired by Bauer, *Goods, Power, History*.

hope to underscore how drugs provide a window for looking afresh at some of the biggest questions in Latin American history: the workings of pre-Columbian states, the imprint of colonialism, the rise of national identities and racialist civilization discourses, the regulation of a normalized body and consciousness, state formation, the rise of modernist biomedical sciences, and, most recently, the impacts of Cold War developmentalism, agrarian change, social violence, authoritarian regimes, and neoliberal globalization.

This, to be clear, is not an exhaustive historiography of the field, which remains too sparse and scattered for useful synthesis.⁷ Noting the pioneering contributions of older drug history, we can say that its strong roots in hemispheric diplomatic history left certain starting biases: toward Anglophone publication and state-centered archives and around the twentieth-century dilemmas of US drug problems, policies, or trafficking, as well as a tacit acceptance of drug war-era distinctions in which drugs were by definition illicit, demonized substances and other intoxicants (alcohol, tobacco, coffee, etc.) were not “drugs.” A longer-term periodization shows how such distinctions were historically constructed while also demonstrating that not all drug history originates in Washington. This conceptual turn is at the heart of the new drug history and is, we believe, vital for historically problematizing the dramatic late twentieth-century drug war era. It also provides a sense of how much work remains to be done on drugs and how future work can inform key themes in Latin American history.

Latin American Drugs through Four Eras

As often noted by ethnobotanists, the pre-Columbian Americas hosted by far the world’s richest and most diverse uses of mind-altering drugs: the so-called

7. Until the 1990s, the sole dedicated historian of drugs in Latin America was the intrepid US diplomatic historian William Walker III, whose drugs-related publications include his foundational *Drug Control in the Americas* as well as *Drug Control Policy* and *Drugs in the Western Hemisphere*. Around 1990, a number of new contributions began to appear, some in the form of historically minded political science such as González and Tienda, *Drug Connection*; and Toro, *Mexico’s “War.”* Other scholars, some of them historians, began pioneering domestic drug histories as well, notably in Mexico, Colombia, and Peru. See, for example, Astorga A., *El siglo*; Pérez Montfort, “El veneno ‘faradisiaco’”; Gutiérrez Ramos, “La prohibición”; Pérez Gómez, *Historia de la drogadicción*; Pérez Gomez, *Sustancias psicoactivas*; Gagliano, *Coca Prohibition*. Since then, as noted in the footnotes throughout this essay, the literature has been slowly advancing, if still fragmented. For a summary of existing historiography, yet still drawing heavily from literatures in politics, anthropology, and investigative journalism, see Gootenberg, “Drug Trades.”

“American drug complex,” with hot spots in Mesoamerica and western Amazonia. The hundreds of types of mind-altering intoxicants embraced by indigenous peoples have been tied to the filtering of ancient Asian shamanistic vision traditions across the Bering Strait and to the relatively rapid explosion of New World agriculture, which kept foragers toying with the tropics’ wildly diverse flora.⁸ Unlike in premodern Europe, however, in Latin America fermented beverages (although known) did not drown out other inebriants. The first era of Latin American drug history is thus pre-Latin. More study is needed to understand the concrete ways that sacred, ecstatic, or healing drug cultures became subsumed in or regulated by the more stratified societies and militant state systems that emerged after 500 CE in both Mesoamerica and the central Andes. What ways, for example, did hallucinogens—the “plants of the gods” such as *teonanácatl*—permeate and legitimate the religious, aesthetic, or state cosmologies of Mayans or Aztecs? How did officially sacred and regulated coca leaf tie the Incan state, Tawantinsuyu, with ordinary *ayllu* peasants?⁹

Whatever the answers, this first drugs era clearly ended with the Spanish and Portuguese conquest, an event that irrevocably changed the history of drugs worldwide. David T. Courtwright dubs this shift the “psychoactive revolution” of the early modern world, and a rising historical literature now explores both the intricate relations of European colonialism to novel drug commodities—such as cacao, tobacco, teas, and coffee—and the role of drugs in auspicious social and cultural revolutions among European consumers, even, some argue, the birth of the capitalist ethos.¹⁰ Portuguese mariners were vital agents of the new global medicinal and spice drugs trade connecting Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Indies, while Spain rigorously catalogued the medicinal plants of its conquered realms and made lucrative colonial goods out of cacao and tobacco, the one truly Pan-American pre-conquest drug.¹¹ Latin America was, in short, at the epicenter of these global shifts.

8. La Barre, “Old and New World”; Schultes and Hofmann, *Plants of the Gods*; Furst, *Flesh of the Gods*. For the popularization of ethnobotanical currents, see Devereux, *Long Trip*. See also the special issue “Alucinógenos del México prehispánico.”

9. Guzmán, “Hallucinogenic, Medicinal”; Dobkin de Rios, “Plant Hallucinogens and the Religion”; Dobkin de Rios, “Plant Hallucinogens, Sexuality”; Stahl, “Hallucinatory Imagery.” Obviously, this is a truncated summary of the pre-Columbian drug literature.

10. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*, 9–30; Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*; Goodman, “Excitantia.”

11. Schiebinger and Swan, *Colonial Botany*; Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*; Varey, Chabrán, and Weiner, *Searching for the Secrets*.

In broad strokes, American drugs moved in four directions under colonialism, though each category raises the historical question of why this drug over others. Some drugs, such as tobacco or cacao (both notable in pre-Columbian exchange), became widely creolized, commercialized, and even state-sponsored mercantilist goods by the late sixteenth century, though as Marcy Norton brilliantly shows in her recent study of Atlantic cultural networks, this does not mean that Europeans stamped out these products' American indigenous roots and spiritual connotations.¹² Other drugs, like Andean coca leaf, *mate*, and indigenous brews, were for various reasons imperfectly or only locally commodified. For example, in the case of *mate*, the Jesuits created a largely closed circuit of southern South American production and trade. In coca's case, initially Spanish authorities feared its ingrained religious, neo-Incan, or subversive nativist meanings and, after intense early ecclesiastical debates, sought to ban it. But, after 1570, it was officially tolerated in order to stimulate the global silver bonanza at Potosí, becoming a regional commodity circuit of the Andes—to cite another Courtwright concept—and, by the end of the colonial era, a cultural marker of Peru's degraded "Indian" caste.¹³ Coca was in fact among the first drugs critical to colonial labor regimes and to evolving colonial representations of natives.

A third diverse group of drugs, primarily comprised by what we classify today as hallucinogens (cacti, fungi, ololiuqui, even frog toxins), were deemed fully heretical and subject to extirpation by local authorities. It is indeed hard to imagine these drugs' sensory effects and ascribed divinatory powers as even potentially acceptable to Christian authorities. Their use either moved underground—in an early preview of today's prohibition and illicit drug cultures—or became associated with indigenous myth, madness, and mayhem, as in scattered trace New Spanish references to preconquest *tlápatl* or *tzitzin-tlápatl*. Indeed, so marginalized and secretive were some of these practices that up to the mid-twentieth century most experts regarded them as extinct or mythical—until rising postwar drug seekers encountered the coming out of mushroom shamans such as the now iconic Mazatec Indian María Sabina.¹⁴

12. Norton, *Sacred Gifts*. See also Goodman, *Tobacco in History*; Coe and Coe, *True History*; Foster and Cordell, *Chilies to Chocolate*; Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*, 31–66.

13. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*, 59–64.

14. For colonial traces of rituals, see Guzmán, "Hallucinogenic Mushrooms"; Campos, *Home Grown*, 39–65; Gagliano, *Coca Prohibition*, 47–98. On *mate*, see Folch, "Stimulating Consumption"; Estrada, *Vida de María Sabina*; Feinberg, *Devil's Book*. On renewed interest in these plants after World War II, see Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 47–87; or among bohemians, see Burroughs and Ginsberg, *Yage Letters*.

Most of these ritual psychedelics (to use a more recent term) survived along tropical or other frontiers, as with, for example, the drugs used by the remote and stateless clan groups in the Colombian Amazon.

The final form of colonial drugs inspired major global capitalist complexes in which expanding metropolitan demand for intoxicants was fitted to the labor and ecosystems opened by colonialism. One dramatic example is Caribbean rum, which in imperial rivalries articulated the vanguard sugarcane plantation industry to the African slave trade, New England merchant smugglers, Atlantic sailors, and European imbibers of spirits. Another was coffee, an East African plant cultivated extensively by the French in Saint-Domingue before making a dramatic late colonial economic march across Portuguese Brazil.¹⁵

Here, in the transition from the colonial period to our next major drug era, we see perhaps most clearly the close relationship between drugs, drug foods, and empire. While the Spanish Bourbons used lucrative tobacco and alcohol monopolies to try to preserve an overextended empire, the Haitian Revolution propitiously brought a late eighteenth-century sugar boom to Cuba. A new colonial compact built on sugar and slavery then helped preserve Spanish rule there for another century. The same revolution helped spur coffee cultivation in Brazil, where the move from one drug food—sugar—to another—coffee—played a key role in prolonging the vitality of both slavery and empire. But by the 1880s, ironically, by shifting the nation's political geography, coffee eventually helped to bring these same national institutions down.¹⁶

These developments were symptomatic of the larger trends that define our third major historical era for Latin American drugs: a long nineteenth century, stretching from roughly the time of Alexander von Humboldt's travels and other Bourbon-era botanical expeditions down to World War II. The period saw the emergence of global mass markets for a number of key drug commodities as well as the "rebranding" of others into invented national traditions. For example, coffee, freed from the restraints of mercantilism, continued a striking, globalizing path of exponential growth. Brazil's nineteenth-century transformation into the global coffee superpower—with all its forward developmental impact—was also closely tied, as Steven Topik shows, to the

15. Smith, *Caribbean Rum*; Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*; Nater, "Colonial Tobacco." The historiography on Latin American coffee is vast: start with Roseberry, Gudmundson, and Samper Kutschbach, *Coffee, Society, and Power*. See also Clarence-Smith and Topik, *Global Coffee Economy*.

16. For sugar in Cuba, see McGillivray, *Blazing Cane*; Scott, *Slave Emancipation*; or the classic on two drugs, Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*. On coffee's political impact in Brazil, see Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, 33–34.

birth of mass-market capitalism in the United States. In different ways, by 1900 the states and fates of Colombia and virtually all the nations of Central America also became tied to the global taste for a single stimulant, caffeine, which in the eighteenth century became the drug of choice for Europe's "industrious revolution" and which is still the world's most widely used intoxicant.¹⁷ National drug cultures also consolidated in novel forms. For example, Southern Cone sociability and sensibilities became synonymous with taking stimulants in the form of regionally specific mate tea in gauchoesque fashion. In Mexico, one regionally specific form of mescal (distilled blue agave cactus) was elevated into tequila, along with a complex of Jaliscan customs (such as mariachis) that colored constructions of *lo mexicano*. Chilean elites became proud of their respectable viticulture—after all, Chilean reds are actually the sole survivors of grape blights that decimated classic European vineyards in the late nineteenth century. Imperial rum routes splintered into revered national spirits and cocktails, such as Cuban rum and mojitos. Each Latin American nation, usually thanks to German migrants, industrialized "national" beers, mostly pilsners. Even the lowly Andean coca leaf underwent a kind of nationalist resuscitation in the late nineteenth century, lifted by local Peruvian science, modern botany, and the German discovery of the miraculous cocaine alkaloid in the 1860s. A national modernizing cocaine industry (centered on central Andean Huánuco) dominated global production of the drug by 1900. Exuberance for coca even made it, through a new and sinuous overseas export route, into the secret (1886) formula of the soon emblematic North American soft drink Coca-Cola.¹⁸

These licit and often-celebrated drug developments evolved concurrently with the less conspicuous consolidation of new regional or subaltern drug cultures and the stigmatizing, marginalizing, and sometimes even criminalizing response to them by civil society and authority. In Mexico, for example, the European import cannabis, after an obscure colonial history, was transformed into the supposedly indigenous *maribuana*, becoming synonymous with insanity, violence, and desperately oppressed groups such as Porfirian prisoners and soldiers. Hygienic anticannabis discourses and restrictions came into play, duly noted in the making of the reformist 1917 constitution, and began seeping into the United States, where they provided the foundation for 1930s "reefer madness" campaigns and marijuana's belated US prohibition (in 1937).

17. See Topik and Samper Kutschbach, "Latin American Coffee"; Clarence-Smith and Topik, *Global Coffee Economy*; de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*.

18. Whigham, *La yerba mate*; Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*, 15–102; Valenzuela-Zapata and Nabhan, *Tequila!*; Pozo, *Historia del vino*; Smith, *Caribbean Rum*; Sánchez Santiró, *Cruda realidad*.

Meanwhile, in the Caribbean a confluence of African slave and (East) Indian indentured laborers formed the “ganja complexes” of Jamaica and Trinidad, making cannabis into a rural workers’ salve and, eventually, a significant element in the protonationalist, Garveyesque Rastafarian religious movement of the 1950s and beyond.¹⁹ Brazil’s African-inflected *macomba* cannabis culture, still largely unstudied, also emerged from the ashes of slavery, while Chinese migrants, shopkeepers, and laborers—“coolies”—in Peru, Cuba, and northern Mexico became synonymous with the use and sale of opium. Local cultivation of opium poppy, in part medicinal, emerged alongside this—sometimes, as in Peru, regulated as a state monopoly. Overall, as in the United States and Europe, by 1910 opiates had become infused with Orientalist, racist, degenerative, and gendered discourses that helped fuel later prohibitions. Though, to be clear, some bohemian elites sampled them (along with recreational cocaine, cannabis, absinthe, and ether), while, at least in Mexico, ordinary folk demonstrated as much or more prejudice against these drugs and their users as the political classes (“everyday” views of drug use in other parts of Latin America have yet to receive much scholarly attention).²⁰

There is no doubt, however, that eugenics and related strains of medical thought made drug use, especially alcoholism, a mark of lower-class decay from Chihuahua to Patagonia. In the Andes, for example, coca went from briefly heroic to an Indian “addiction.” We need to know more about these precursory regionalized drug cultures, for they would have surprisingly significant futures. Furthermore, modernizing elite responses to them reveal much about the anxieties, prejudices, and intellectual influences of the day. Each case seems to have reworked neocolonial civilizational and puritanical discourses, with drugs becoming symbolically potent markers for a kind of inward-directed “Orientalism.” Indeed, cannabis and opium, historically the two “Oriental” drugs par excellence, helped consummate the comparison between Latin America’s supposedly degenerate Indians and the teeming Asian masses of nineteenth-century Orientalist fantasy. Each kind of drug became laden with cultural and capitalist contradictions, too—for example, as to whether drug use stimulated or enervated the willingness of peasants or plantation laborers to work.²¹

19. Campos, *Home Grown*; Rubin, *Cannabis and Culture*; Angrosino, “Rum and Ganja.”

20. Hutchinson, “Patterns of Marihuana Use”; Astorga A., *El siglo*; Gutiérrez Ramos, “La prohibición”; Meagher, *Coolie Trade*; Campos, *Home Grown*, 123–54; Henman and Pessoa, *Diamba sarabamba*.

21. Gagliano, *Coca Prohibition*, 119–63; Fischer, “¿Culturas de coca?”; Campos, *Home Grown*, 123–54; Jankowiak and Bradburd, *Drugs, Labor, and Colonial Expansion*.

These developments spurred Latin America's zigzag insertion into restrictive world drug-control regimes by the 1930s, a process that capped the region's long nineteenth century of drugs. Clearly the key process here is the twentieth-century construction of strong illicit drug categories in which the newly prohibited ultimately help to erase the memory of previous arrays of drugs, with many traditional intoxicants no longer categorized as drugs at all (as in the ubiquitous but redundant phrase "drugs and alcohol"). Here also big questions remain: Were global drug prohibitions imperially pushed onto weak Latin American nations, or were there, as new research demonstrates for Mexico, also deeper local inspirations for antidrug crusades?²² Were there any alternative conceptions or practices about drugs, such as medicalization or regulated state sales and monopolies, that might have emerged instead of complete prohibition and criminalization?²³ There was, we submit, a surprisingly complex midcentury interplay of Latin American drug politics and US and global antidrug imperatives. For one thing, a number of countries had their own specific drug restrictions in place well before the United States got directly involved. There is plenty of work to do in Latin American archives on the usually quiet emergence of these policies around the region. The birthing process of drug prohibitions was rarely on the front page of contemporary newspapers, yet the consolidation of these policies by the 1950s laid the foundation for today's massive illicit drug export bonanza.

Which brings us to our fourth and final period in Latin American drug history—the development, starting roughly in the 1940s, of the highly profitable, commercially dynamic, and now spectacularly violent illicit drug export markets of the late twentieth century: the era of global illicit drugs. A plethora of often-lurid journalistic accounts aside—the *narco-libros* that clutter airport bookstores from Mexico to Colombia—we know little so far from archival research about recent drug history.²⁴ Did outside drug authorities move in to contain quietly spiraling midcentury smuggling trades, or, conversely, did the

22. Campos, *Home Grown*.

23. Walker, *Drug Control in the Americas*, chronicles this process and a few alternatives; see Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*, 143–88, on local control projects. On global prohibition regimes, see McAllister, *Drug Diplomacy*; or, for a more critical take, McCoy, "Stimulus of Prohibition." As a variety of US economic imperialism in Latin America, see Reiss, "Policing for Profit."

24. Some initial archival research includes Astorga A., *Drogas sin fronteras*; Astorga A., *Mitología del "narcotraficante"*; Carey, "Selling"; Mottier, "Drug Gangs"; Gootenberg, "Pre-Colombian"; Sáenz Rovner, *Cuban Connection*. Some journalistic accounts help; for example, see Osorno, *El cártel*; Grillo, *El Narco*.

criminalization of once licit economic and recreational activities lead to the intensification, expansion, and “cartel”-ization of the trade, as well as, eventually, escalating violence along these illicit routes? Do the social geographies of illicit production and distribution zones—in the remote eastern Andes, northwestern Mexico, and transit sites like Colombia, Paraguay, and many more—truly map onto belts of political and social marginalization, as is often asserted? Or did they sometimes represent, as in the cases of Havana and Medellín, hotbeds of middle- and upper-class Latin entrepreneurialism? Is there, as some assert, a rustic outlaw culture among drug-growing peasants or trafficking groups that will impel us to classify them as social banditry or even as social movements? Have illicit actors fostered social breakdown, resistance, or community in their locales? How did Cold War politics and the waning of earlier national social reforms, such as land redistribution, and the frustrating politics of modernizing development—at their peak as drug trades took off—lead into the era of drug capitalism? Does drug smuggling share social affinities and practices with neoliberal free-trade mentalities? The looming question for economic historians of a region long marked by cyclical export booms is why the largest boom of the late twentieth century—with prohibition-inflated revenues topping 100 billion dollars annually—developed in spheres of illicit commerce. Why—and here as well the process is problematically circular—has the drug war, escalated with US policies after 1970, been utterly unable to contain this quintessentially Latin-controlled business? How much can we blame on the well-studied and oft-criticized contradictions of supply-side drug war policy, and how much of this paradox is peculiar to the region’s history?²⁵

These are all questions that invite fine-grained historical analysis. Historians are beginning to flesh out some of these issues by carefully tracing the genealogies and geographies of the illicit flows and networks of people involved. One consistent hot spot is of course Mexico, which has long been a purveyor of myriad illegal mind-altering substances along the borderlands with the United States: patent medicines and vials of the first illegal drugs in the 1910s, booze during Prohibition, opiates during and after World War II, marijuana by the sixties (when it was branded as *oaxaqueño* or Acapulco gold), transshipments of high-margin cocaine during the neoliberal 1980s and 1990s, and by 2000 amphetamines and counterfeit pharmaceuticals. Historians may

25. The United Nation’s annual *World Drug Report* is the general source for such rough drug-market estimates; see also Organization of American States, General Secretariat, *Drug Problem*. For a methodological critique of aggregate revenue numbers, see Reuter, “World Drug Report.” For one of many devastating critiques of repressive policy, see Bertram et al., *Drug War Politics*.

ponder if these border smuggling waves are episodic or are structurally tied to Mexican politics and the complex regional aftermaths of, say, the centralizing and agrarian policies of the Mexican Revolution. New research into the longer origins of the Sinaloa Cartel and its spread and fragmentation during the 1980s might answer such questions.²⁶ The reappearance from the shadows of Mexico's indigenous drug cornucopia (i.e., peyote- and mushroom-using peoples and villages) also relates to modern politics and has a complex cultural resonance with both the rights discourse of *indigenismo* and the impact of transnational social movements such as hippies and wealthier New Age niche cultures.

In the Andes, by contrast, the illicit flows have been dominated by cocaine, still the most lucrative and violence-enveloped drug export in the Americas. As new scholarship demonstrates, the nineteenth-century discovery of cocaine (first as a medical good) had much to do with reworking long-standing Andean coca traditions as well as the technical and business innovations of Peruvians themselves.²⁷ The same holds true when cocaine reemerged as a locally made illicit drug after 1947 and was first exported north mainly by Chilean and Cuban smuggling rings, though Bolivian "chemists" and peasants also proved critical to forging cocaine capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, Colombia, while surely an avid nation of smugglers (much like the United States, as Peter Andreas reminds us), had little to do with drug trafficking save for cigarettes and nationally branded coffee until the 1970s.²⁸ Arising apart from a Caribbean-rim La Guajira marijuana boom (the iconic Colombian gold of the 1960s and 1970s), global cocaine traffic was utterly transformed in 1970s Colombia. Drugs also transformed Colombia, as a result of geopolitical shocks to the cocaine trade formed, since its early Cold War criminalization, in the eastern parts of Peru and Bolivia. We still lack a researched account of the rise of the misnamed, highly entrepreneurial Colombian "cartels," but by the mid-1980s, Colombia swiftly adapted its own peasant coca capitalism to feed the expansive trade.²⁹ This was a key chapter in the agrarian transformation, via

26. Astorga A., *Drogas sin fronteras*; Astorga A., "Mexico"; Recio, "Drugs and Alcohol"; Mottier, "Drug Gangs." A nuanced rural sociology of drug zones is Maldonado Aranda, "Stories of Drug Trafficking." A dissertation in progress by Froylán Enciso (History, Stony Brook University) explores Sinaloan origins.

27. Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*.

28. González-Plazas, *Pasado y presente*; Andreas, *Smuggler Nation*; Sáenz Rovner, "La 'prehistoria.'" On trafficking routes and the early Cold War, see Gootenberg, "'Pre-Colombian.'"

29. There are, however, convincing biographies of figures such as Pablo Escobar, including Salazar J., *La parábola*; Mollison, *Memory*. See also the analysis of trafficking in Kenney, *From Pablo to Osama*.

intensive peasant migration, of the lowland tropical Andes, where coca emerged by the 1990s as this vast region's most strategic crop, with notable social, environmental, and political impacts from Colombia to Bolivia. Equally underdeveloped is the modern history of coca leaf in Bolivia and Bolivia's incubation, starting in the revolutionary 1950s, of illegal cocaine routes north. The indigenous, cultural, and international ethnographic revalorization (after 1970) of national herbal coca leaf in Bolivia cries out for historical research, perhaps as the foil to globalizing illicit cocaine.

A final area for study in this most recent period of Latin American drug history involves the myriad transit zones, which for political geography or entrepreneurial verve became critical to drug exports. Such spaces (along with northern Mexico) are perhaps best seen as borderland territories in the larger story of imperial friction, overlap, and border making.³⁰ Panama, where the Canal Zone cut and demarcated new spheres of illicit and licit commerce, has long served as a smuggler's paradise for cross-border vice, including all sorts of drugs. Viewed in terms of US informal empire, it was comparable to "offshore" sin cities such as Tijuana, Mexicali, and Havana from the 1920s to the 1950s. George H. W. Bush's 1989 invasion to oust former US ally and drug kingpin President Manuel Noriega was a high point but not an end point to the isthmus as a hot spot of strategic transshipments and money laundering. Meanwhile, Cuba's prerevolutionary tourist- and mafia-fostered drug scene was nurturing a new Latin-inflected taste for cocaine throughout the Americas during the 1950s. As counterrevolutionary exiles swept across the hemisphere, including Miami, some of these same gangsters professionalized and internationalized the burgeoning cocaine trades of the 1960s and 1970s, keeping it a largely Latin American (rather than a global mafia) enterprise, as it still is today.³¹ Historians may note that Cold War conflicts, politics, and ideologies, in their broadest senses (including modernization projects and transforming visions of indigenous cultures), had much to do with the shifting early routing of drugs—a politics that exploded by the 1980s in various accusations, against both Left and Right, of drug trafficking during the Reagan-era Central American civil wars and the purposeful (and persistent) labeling of local insurgencies as "narco-terrorist." Drugs as a factor in such 1980s struggles needs serious, nonconspiratorial evaluation: Were

30. Adelman and Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders"; Bender, *Run for the Border*. This topic is ethnographically approached by Campbell, *Drug War Zone*; or through transnational lives in Carey, *Women Drug Traffickers*.

31. Gootenberg, "Pre-Colombian"; Sáenz Rovner, *Cuban Connection*; Cirules, *Mafia in Havana*; Scott and Marshall, *Cocaine Politics*; Marcy, *Politics of Cocaine*; Dinges, *Our Man*; Scalena, "Illicit Nation."

drugs genuine socially rooted “conflict goods” or mostly ideological ammunition inflaming a polarized region?³² Other transit sites include Caribbean drug-stopover and profit-cycling zones from Haiti and Jamaica (where a national drug culture in ganja drew outside fascination and even drug tourism) to the Bahamas and other Anglophone laundering centers. The scattering of drug trades under pressure is now entering a stage of wider dispersal across places such as the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador, and Venezuela as well as, with the rapid globalization of Latin American illicit, Europe and Asia through Brazil (via Africa) and now Argentina.³³ Historians will no doubt ask different questions than, say, criminologists and international police officials as to why certain routes rise rather than others and what determines their relative propensity for violence and mayhem.

Modern trafficking flows surged in tandem with states, politics, and larger power relations and thus are the growing subject of concern for political and other social scientists. For example, some analyze the comparative place of narco-trafficking and social violence in the regional and state-building processes of Colombia and Mexico. State elites and organized crime appear as often in cahoots as in conflict, depending on the historical balance of forces, and these relationships (going beyond easy labels like “corruption”) have a lot to do with the ability to contain the violent underbellies of illicit trades.³⁴ For example, a common assumption about Mexico—just now being seriously plumbed in archives—is that informal pacts reigned among postrevolutionary elites and the army, especially in distant border areas, to regulate illicit activities such as drugs or to funnel them into the political system. In this scenario, the strong-state Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was able to control the havoc, as well as rustic Sinaloan peasants, until the late 1980s, when Mexican cartels proved ungovernable (or indeed captured parts of the state) as the exceptional power of the PRI waned. The horrific drug war violence of the twenty-first century is read against this unique political past. Historians are

32. Paul Collier, “Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy,” last modified Apr. 2006, accessed 19 Aug. 2013, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~econpc0/research/pdfs/EconomicCausesofCivilConflict-ImplicationsforPolicy.pdf>; Cooper, “Conflict Goods.” On the “narco-terrorism” label, see Scott and Marshall, *Cocaine Politics*, 23–50.

33. On latest routes, see Organization of American States, General Secretariat, *Drug Problem*.

34. For a peek at this exploding literature, see Snyder and Durán Martínez, “Drugs, Violence”; Bailey and Taylor, “Evade, Corrupt, or Confront?”; Aguilar Rivera, *Las bases sociales*. One of the first to stress such pacts was Lupsha, “Drug Lords.” Or see Astorga’s take in “Drug Trafficking.”

beginning to enter these debates by questioning how monolithic and all-encompassing the PRI's state-building power really was while looking back at ongoing historical sources of Mexican social violence and entropy.³⁵ In sharp contrast, Colombia is usually read as a case in which regional power and entrepreneurial autonomy prevailed against an unusually weak central state—until the civil war–scale violence of the 1980s (as traffickers like Pablo Escobar sought to break into politics) forced the country, heavily assisted by the United States, to build up its state, security apparatus, and services to tame its unruly illicit businesses, cities, and peasantry. Historians can bring their own longer lens to these big issues of power and politics in which drugs played a dynamic role.

In a different vein, there are also plenty of drugs to study in terms of domestic consumption, without making a strict dichotomy between export and national drug cultures. Most countries of Latin America lack national drug histories for the twentieth century.³⁶ We know that cocaine and opiates had become early recreational drugs in urban music scenes and in clubs (especially in Brazil and Argentina), brothels, and sailor hot spots in many parts of the Americas, evident by the 1910s.³⁷ At midcentury, foreigners ranging from Harvard ethnobotanists to bohemians such as William S. Burroughs often ventured to exotic locales of Latin America as precocious drug tourists and then published on what they found. During the long 1960s, urban middle-class youth in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere joined the rebellious drug cultures associated with global rock music, cannabis smoking, and other youth movements. This must have sparked many peculiar transnational encounters in a region where Afro-descendants and Indians had rich stocks of accumulated drug knowledge. In a striking example, modern *jipis* (hippies) from Mexico City, along with foreign kin, decamped to places like Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca, for close encounters with the “authentic,” sometimes lionized psychedelic pioneers: shamans of local rural indigenous folk.³⁸ The history—and politics—of these encounters has

35. Smith, “Rise and Fall”; Knight, “Narco-Violence.” An early study is Sandos, “Northern Separatism.”

36. Exceptions include Campos, *Home Grown*; Sáenz Rovner, “La ‘prehistoria’”; Pérez Montfort, “El veneno ‘faradisiaco’”; Weissmann, *Toxicomanías*; Venâncio and Carneiro, *Álcool e drogas*; Pérez Gómez, *Sustancias psicoactivas*; Pérez Gómez, *Historia de la drogadicción*; Fernández Labbé, *Drogas en Chile*.

37. Resende, *Cocaína*; Guy, *Sex and Danger*, 148–50; Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*; Scalena, “Illicit Nation.”

38. Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 106–11. On drug adventurers in Latin America, see note 14 above; an ethnobotanist's account is Davis, *One River*.

yet to be fully written. That these drug scenes germinated under authoritarian regimes, and along the edges of rising illicit drug corridors, may have lasting implications, given the new sets of national norms and laws that drug use and scares generated and the growing spillover, after 1980, of massive cocaine and cannabis exports into urban shantytowns and impoverished peasant hinterlands. For one thing, these Cold War political encounters may have something to do with the long tendency (just now receding) of Latin American elites to support the global drug war, despite its ineffectiveness and flagrant collateral damage—skyrocketing violence, corruption, rights abuses—at home.

In sum, this overview has served to show the many ways that drugs, in their broadest sense and well before the notorious narco-trafficking of the late twentieth century, have been integral to many of the pivotal developments in Latin American history. This long history, in turn, is a key to knowing how illicit and licit drug cultures divided in the twentieth century and how massive trafficking was born. Deeper research is just beginning. However, drugs also offer a new prism for looking in fresh, surprising ways at the cultural, social, and political history of the Americas. We will now turn to some new methodological possibilities offered by the new drug history.

Thinking about Methods

Beyond the historiographical questions just raised, many with contemporary resonance, drugs present exciting methodological opportunities. Of course there are considerable challenges in historical drug research: uncovering and interpreting the often invisible, covert, charged, or ineffable worlds that surround illicit or mind-altering goods, or, when thinking about drugs, the pitfalls of received official discourse, biases, and categories. Each of these challenges requires critical awareness and caution to transcend but are not, we believe, qualitatively different problems from those surrounding other demanding recent historical topic areas such as, for example, subaltern history. Drug history is beginning to thrive as a theme of research on many parts of the world—notably in the history of opiates across Asia³⁹—but for Latin Americanists the topical possibilities remain wide open, marked largely by empirical gaps. It is true that drugs are sometimes exceedingly hard to find in the archive, save for taxed legal exports like coffee, or in institutions, such as a few official opium sales monopolies. But precisely for that reason, and for our skill at detectivesque

39. For example, Dikötter, Laamann, and Xun, *Narcotic Culture*; Brook and Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes*; Kingsberg, *Moral Nation*.

research that prizes, finds, and pieces together many types of scattered, fragmentary sources, historians have much to contribute in terms of new narratives and interpretations.

Drug history can and is fruitfully combined with a laundry list of historical subfields: social and cultural history; policy, diplomatic, and imperial history; Atlantic and world history; commodity and business history; ethnohistory and archaeology; the “deep history” of the brain and the senses; agrarian, subaltern, gender, and race history; legal and criminological history; the history of science and medicine; and environmental and ethnobotanical history.⁴⁰ Indeed, because drugs themselves are by their nature defined in many biological, social, cultural, and political dimensions, it is hard to conceive of drug history without intrinsically cross-disciplinary content.

That said, many of the choices for drug historians reduce to a simple interpretive divide: Does one stress the power and agency of individual drugs themselves? Or does it make more sense to weave drugs into the fabric of economic, cultural, political, and other histories—for example, looking at drugs through shifting filters of modernity? Histories of particular drugs are fruitful, though they also run the risk of what is variously termed the “pharmacocentric fallacy” or the “cult of pharmacology”—ascribing to particular drugs (or to specific compounds within them such as morphine, THC, or cocaine) an essential, irresistible chemical power to transform or overpower people and whole societies.⁴¹ Modern (and highly contestable) medical discourses of “addiction,” as well as most big conspiracy theories regarding the untold power of “cartels” and other undergrounds (like those about the connection between the Central Intelligence Agency and crack), suffer equally from this misleading magical fetish about the powers of drugs.⁴² Drugs are mystified as the lead culprit for many social ills imagined and real. As we think our own work demonstrates, historians can usefully focus on a single drug commodity through time. But we also believe it crucial to avoid the pharmacocentric fallacy, something made possible by integrating drug histories into larger questions, contexts, and currents of historical practice. This contextualizing strategy also helps, as elaborated below, to clarify some of the passions about drugs and their potential for bodily or social harm.

40. Smith, *Sensing the Past*; Smail, *On Deep History*, 157–89.

41. DeGrandpre, *Cult of Pharmacology*; Morgan and Zimmer, “Social Pharmacology.” For explicit discussions of methods in drug history, see Gootenberg, “Scholars on Drugs”; Campos, *Home Grown*, 7–38; Sherratt, “Introduction.”

42. For a drug history critique of contemporary “disease model” theories of addiction, see Hickman, “Target America.”

Indeed, for special reasons—for example, for being commodities that can directly alter thought processes and the senses and thus excite public emotions—drugs are an inviting site for cross-disciplinary analysis, in particular for the mixing of materialist and cultural methods, or, put differently, approaches that blend the realities and representations of drug worlds. Here, for fellow Latin American historians, we will articulate three core interdisciplinary methodological possibilities (though there are doubtless more): questions of transnationalism and scale, the wide field of commodity studies, and the sociocultural constructivism of drug experience.

Transnationalism and Scale

Most illicit drugs are concentrated substances, or are refined into such, that easily enter into cross-regional or cross-border flows. This geographic mobility marked even pre-Columbian cacao, tobacco, and the vast vertical ecological exchange of Andean coca. Scales then broadened when colonialism turned stimulants into pioneering items of globalizing imperial commerce. Seventeenth-century American tobacco, for example, was (along with silver and gold) one of the first truly global commodities; reciprocally, the nineteenth-century global demand for coffee helped solidify, and globalize, the fiscal, ideological, and bureaucratic foundations of several Latin American states. International legal regimes that began (for complex reasons) to regulate, restrict, and thus sharply delineate drugs after 1909, as well as the imperious cultural and political influences often behind them, are also formative transnational forces in the world of drugs. Birthed by these legalistic distinction regimes, the criminalized drugs of the latter twentieth century are among the most rapid-moving, powerfully driven, and globally sensitive economic enterprises. Of course, ironically, they came into being precisely because of political, legal, spatial, and cultural borders. By the 1990s, given their scale, these invisible criminal flows began to be analyzed as the predictable or rational mirror image of licit commodity traffic—the alleged dark side of contemporary neoliberal globalization.⁴³

Thus drugs present many of the same methodological challenges and choices that epitomize other major themes in the history of Latin America—historically a globalized, hybridized region—but more so. How to balance and

43. Schendel and Abraham, *Illicit Flows*; versus the more policy-oriented take in Stares, *Global Habit*; and Gilman, Goldhammer, and Weber, *Deviant Globalization*. See related discussion in Gootenberg, “Introduction,” 8–9. See Peter Andreas, “Gangster’s Paradise: The Untold History of the United States and International Crime,” *Foreign Affairs* (New York), Mar.–Apr. 2013, pp. 22–28, for a critique of exoticizing illicit trades.

integrate local, national, and global forces? The dynamic interplay between external power and local agency? Dependency versus autonomy? Traveling or transcultural meanings, discourses, and power? Cross-border identities and networks? And how can historians effectively connect in their narratives zones of production, commercial webs, and often-faraway sites and forms of consumption? Even amid the rage for transnational history, there is no one method to best address questions of scale. We believe, however, that drugs make an excellent topic to examine with what social scientists call relational and multiscalar analyses—those that closely connect different levels and geographies of power.⁴⁴ In this way, new studies not only fill gaps in drug history but also inform and advance new approaches to thorny problems in the field as a whole.

Commodity Studies

Commodities are of course vital in Latin American history, a history that is often interpreted as one damn commodity after another.⁴⁵ From one perspective, regarding drugs as essentially market goods makes perfect sense, since they are highly marketable, heavily traded, historically branded, and perhaps even addictive in their demand. Moreover, purposely reducing drugs to commodity status is a commonly adopted research strategy to neutralize the political distortions, social attitudes, and labels (“good,” “bad,” “alien,” “soft,” “hard,” “dangerous,” “recreational”) that often surround drugs.

There are two (and perhaps more) major developments in commodity studies since the 1980s to highlight for historical research on drugs. The first is the growing interest, especially among anthropologists, in the so-called “social life of things” or “cultural biography” of goods. These perspectives critically interrogate the genesis of what we think of as commodities, their meanings and value, changeability, and cultural relativity across time, cultures, and borders. The consumption, phenomenology, semiotics, and power of goods are paramount. This perspective, pioneered by Arjun Appadurai, was immediately applicable to drugs, which carry so much symbolic import and baggage, meanings that have changed radically over the centuries. For example, compare cocaine’s initial role as a heroic, modern miracle drug of the late nineteenth century to both its celebrity and menacing roles today. The scale of such

44. Again, anthropology advances historical debates: i.e., Burawoy, “Introduction”; Escobar, *Territories of Difference*. See also geographers such as Smith, *Uneven Development*; or sociologists such as Kahn, *Framing the Global*.

45. Topik, Marichal, and Frank, *From Silver*. On commodities in Latin American economic history, see Bulmer-Thomas, *Economic History*.

shifting meanings has also expanded to what Appadurai later called global “scapes.” Finally, new political ecology views commodities as key mediators between landscapes and peoples, another potentially fruitful optic for studying the social and political lives of plant drugs.⁴⁶

A second useful tool of commodity studies is the concept of global commodity chains, originally part of the grand political economy apparatus of 1970s Wallersteinian world-systems theory. The method (or perhaps metaphor) of the commodity chain—concertedly tracing the spatial, social, and political pathways and networks of goods across the globe, from producers to suppliers, distributors, and final consumers—is now familiar to Latin American historians studying export economies. Like the “social life of things,” this idea was quickly adopted by scholars to examine the border crossings of drugs, and it relates to global-local scale and to critiques of global market analysis as ungrounded, unpeopled, apolitical abstractions. Gootenberg uses this concept to map together the vast “glocal” connections of cocaine since the 1850s. However, in historical fashion, commodity chains expand from markets to include the reciprocal and frictional flows of ideas, law, medicine, people, and politics surrounding the drug. In the end, cocaine’s history demonstrates that the licit commodity chain dynamics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped to determine the formation of illicit chains after World War II.⁴⁷ Both these major approaches to commodity studies—the social life of goods and commodity chains—are useful for insulating research from the heated passions and labels that are so often attached to drugs, while at the same time facilitating the reflexive study of those same meanings and passions as they evolved over time.

Sociocultural Constructionism

One way to bring the passions and the experiential side of drugs fully into their materiality and politics is through what sociologists call social constructionism, a concept that enjoys a rich lineage in scientific drug studies.⁴⁸ Starting in the

46. Appadurai, “Introduction”; Kopytoff, “Cultural Biography”; Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 48–65; Robbins, *Political Ecology*.

47. Hopkins and Wallerstein, “Commodity Chains”; Bair, *Frontiers*; Topik, Marichal, and Frank, *From Silver*, esp. Topik, Marichal, and Frank, “Introduction”; and Gootenberg, “Cocaine in Chains.”

48. Sometimes called constructivism. A pioneering work was Becker, “History.” See also Weil, “Adverse Reactions”; Zinberg, *Drug, Set, and Setting*. An early constructivism is summarized in Goode, *Drugs*, 17–20.

1930s, psychopharmacologists and sociologists studying drug-using populations discovered that many of the supposed effects of drugs were to a large degree learned, imagined, or constructed by the expectations of the user. This finding, known as “set and setting,” suggests that drug experiences or even drug addiction become malleable according to the social contexts of users, an idea counter to standard biomedical determinism and medical “addiction” paradigms. Kindred perspectives have come out of the anthropology of shamanistic drug use, which highlights the active role played by group expectation; powerful hallucinogens are safely used in such guided or constructed contexts. On a societal scale, pharmacologist Richard DeGrandpre has coined the term “placebo texts” for this phenomenon: drugs are, and do, what our internalized social or political expectations narrate.⁴⁹ Historians can add a crucial temporal dimension to this dynamic. Tracing the way drug narratives shift over time may be key to understanding the largest setting of all: historical context. A dramatic example is cannabis. In nineteenth-century Mexico, medical elites perceived “marihuana” use not only as a deviant, subaltern practice but also as one, following both local and external Orientalist discourses, that literally caused “madness” and outbreaks of random violence among its users. For more obscure reasons, ordinary Mexicans maintained similar views of the drug and its effects. The power of this narrative, according to Campos, probably sparked actual mad outbursts and violence (later referred to as “reefer madness” in the United States), thus reinforcing the prohibitionist discourses that originally fueled the provocative behavior.⁵⁰ Here one sees how the “placebo text” might produce self-fulfilling prophecies on the ground (the “junkie,” the “crackhead,” the “*maribuan*”). Certainly marijuana’s apparent effects in Mexico a century ago were quite different than the mellow and recreational hue of the drug championed by countercultural American youth during and after the 1960s or the rising discourse and politics of medical marijuana as tonic today.

Change over time is the area in which our expertise as historians creatively informs larger understandings of drugs. This perspective also contributes to getting at how some drugs become socially integrated as “soft drugs” with a minimum of social harms while other drugs are constructed into “hard drugs” that (market and political forces aside) are often socially uncontained and thus do in fact wreak much social havoc and harm. All this—drugs, “placebo texts,” and related self-fulfilling prophecies—might also help explain why prohibitionist policies have long been so attractive, even addictive, for drug-fighting

49. DeGrandpre, *Cult of Pharmacology*, 103–37. See also Harner, *Hallucinogens*.

50. Campos, *Home Grown*.

bureaucrats. Thus, historical constructivism may help in the task of forging alternative understandings and responses to our punitive prohibitionist regimes, which are now both failing and losing political credibility throughout the Americas. The downside, however, is a penchant for concept abuse: the idea that everything, everywhere, is socially constructed is one of the academic clichés of our time.⁵¹

Constructivism also brings us back to historical concerns with agency and, indirectly, the normative, present-tense politics surrounding hemispheric drugs. If historians contest the idea that drugs per se possess chemical or demonic agency, this returns the question to historical contexts and to the ways in which people and peopled power structures (such as movements, nations, or states) have shaped drugs. In the global politics of drugs, blame prevails: on Colombian cartels or Mexican drug culture or, alternatively from the Left or Latin American critics, imperialist US drug policies or an insatiable American demand for pleasure drugs. Constructivism may help restore a balanced sense of historical agency and interaction instead of one-sided blame. Clearly it has been the interaction of specific conditions throughout the Americas that has spurred the growth and persistence of both drug trafficking and consumption. This vast and largely unexamined past may reveal negotiated outcomes, lost alternatives, or opportunities for change. As historical knowledge, these may inform the present conjuncture, in which governments around the hemisphere—Bolivia, Uruguay, Colombia, Colorado—are constructing new and perhaps decisive forms of global drug reform.

The Essays

The three essays that follow here exemplify a few of the main historiographical and methodological trends of the new drug history. They are offered in that invitational spirit, rather than being fully representative of the wide variety of drugs, historical eras, or forms of drug history possible for Latin America. Indeed, these three essays come together in their focus on modern drug scenes and drug politics rather than the longer-term panorama just seen of drugs in the Americas.

As in the United States, and elsewhere, the long 1960s represent a pivotal moment in the configuration of Latin American drug use, trafficking, and politics. Within the larger field of Latin American history, the period has also become the focus of exciting cultural and political historical research, with the

51. Hacking, *Social Construction*.

transnational Cold War at its core, along with the era's spiraling political and cultural conflicts.⁵² Drugs, however, remain conspicuously absent in this historiography. Yet this was exactly the period when Latin American actors (from the eastern Andes to northern Mexico) first joined en masse in the trafficking of illicit drugs to meet the rising demands of users to the north. These developments were hardly incidental to the marginalized rural poor or the disaffected regional entrepreneurs swept aside by 1960s US-led "modernization" drives, nor were they unaffected by Cold War realignments and ideological strife about internal subversion, modern lifestyles, and national values.

The major landmarks of postwar Latin American drug history are already visible: we know that Mexican drug cultures helped fuel the psychedelic turn of the sixties; we know that the Cuban Revolution and the Chilean coup helped to scatter drug traffickers to other parts of Latin America; we know that the postwar baby boom in the United States combined with a repressive Cold War atmosphere to spawn a drug-celebrating counterculture and, more generally, a spike in recreational drug use; and we know that the subsequent Nixon-era drug war crackdown and new agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration (1973) ended up fueling the growth of new illicit supply chains of unprecedented scale and profitability. But there is much left to be clarified. For example, how did the particular rural, political, and developmental histories of forgotten zones like Peru's Huallaga Valley or Mexico's Sierra Madre feed into intensified trafficking? What distinctive imprint did the predominantly white, middle-class, recreational, and permissive youth culture of cannabis smoking (fashioned in the United States and Western Europe) mean for the politics of poorer but mobilized urban youth in such distinct and socially conservative places as Mexico, the Dominican Republic, or Argentina? Did Latin American authorities take advantage of the alien symbolism of drugs (as representative of "Indians" or even gringo hippies) to justify broader crackdowns on dissent? How did the United States use the newly escalated drug war to redeploy or camouflage its counterinsurgency politics in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution? And, on the other side of the coin, how did Latin American leaders exploit public concern about drugs to justify their embrace of US political and diplomatic incursions? In all the current passion for the memory and cultural politics of this era, the roles of drug politics and drug experience are still largely forgotten.

52. The best new overview of this work is Zolov, "Latin America." For recent examples, see Manzano, *Age of Youth*; Dunn, *Brutality Garden*; Langland, *Speaking of Flowers*; Franco, *Decline and Fall*; Sorensen, *Turbulent Decade*. See also Joseph and Spenser, *In from the Cold*; Grandin and Joseph, *Century of Revolution*.

Valeria Manzano's "The Creation of a Social Problem: Youth Culture, Drugs, and Politics in Cold War Argentina" begins to fill some of these empirical gaps. Here she explores how authoritarian Cold War military politics helped to construct a drug problem in modern Argentina. In contrast to Mexico or Colombia, the country did not significantly produce or transship internationally defined illegal drugs. As a result, more political controversy surrounded urban culture and the politics of emerging forms of drug consumption. During the 1960s, youth in rising counterculture movements began to use marijuana and amphetamines, which previously had barely raised the alarm of medical and judicial authorities. In 1970, Buenos Aires also became the first South American capital to host an office of the US Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and soon thereafter the Argentine Federal Police, the media, and politicians across the ideological spectrum began to talk of an emerging problem. As Manzano's essay shows, it was a problem that they were in fact actively helping to manufacture, entwined with the larger construction of the infamous Cold War subversive enemy within. Promoted by a motley array of new experts—doctors, psychiatrists, judges, police chiefs, military intelligence services, and journalists—that campaign helped forge a connection between youth, deviance, and subversion, leading Argentina to enact newly punitive drug laws that allowed the Argentine Federal Police to monitor broad areas of youth sociability such as schools, social clubs, and public plazas. One paradox—like the tension between Mexican jipis, shamans, and authorities seen below—is that most of Argentina's actual militant or armed groups abhorred what they saw as decadent, casual middle-class drug use. This drug-related repression reached its peak (but not end) during the 1976–1981 Videla dictatorship. Manzano shows the political as much as social or symbolic processes of building a drug regime and uncovers their authoritarian origins and fallout in places like Argentina.⁵³

Lina Britto's "Hurricane Winds: *Vallenato* Music and Marijuana Traffic in Colombia's First Illegal Drugs Boom" emerges from her work on the Greater Magdalena *marimberos*, the shadowy pioneers of Colombian drug trafficking pre-Escobar. The potential of drug history is exemplified in how Britto's essay contributes to the history of *vallenato* and its adoption into the modern Colombian nationalist imaginary, while demonstrating the tangible

53. In August 2009, the Supreme Court of Argentina voided most drug possession laws from the dictatorship as unconstitutional. Transnational Institute, "Argentina's Supreme Court 'Arriola' Ruling on the Possession of Drugs for Personal Consumption," *Drugs and Democracy* (blog), 1 Sept. 2009, <http://www.tni.org/article/argentinas-supreme-court-arriola-ruling-possession-drugs-personal-consumption>. On the depenalization movement rapidly unfolding across the region, see Youngers, "Drug Policy Reform," esp. 6–7.

sociocultural impacts of traffickers. Marimberos sprang from the most marginalized and excluded rural and urban sectors of the northern Santa Marta region. When drug war crackdowns in Mexico spiked demand for marijuana in the United States, these upstarts took advantage of their region's long coastline, many navigable ports, and proximity to the market. Their humble backgrounds made them eager to advertise their suddenly heightened economic status at a moment when the area's traditional cotton-growing elites were simultaneously attempting to win the region a more prominent place on the national stage. In the middle of this was the regional music, vallenato, which had long been disdained by local and national elites as the coarse accordion music of dark-skinned country bumpkins. Cotton growers took advantage of the moment to rebrand the region in part through an annual vallenato music festival, while the previously humble marimberos, with a defined taste for vallenato, began using the same music to advertise their wild exploits and sudden wealth. As these processes overlapped, drug money began financing vallenato, and musicians returned the favor with increasingly narco-related subject matter and thinly veiled trafficker panegyrics. All this fueled the music's meteoric rise to national prominence. These outlaw origins of now celebrated vallenato are largely laundered from the national consciousness, but Britto's deeper history of Santa Marta golden helps recover them.

Finally, Alexander Dawson's essay "Salvador Roquet, María Sabina, and the Trouble with *Jipis*" sheds light on the complex, sometimes ironic intersections of indigeneity, drugs, Western medicine, and law in late twentieth-century Mexico. Unlike in Argentina or even Colombia, the presence of strong indigenous traditions in Mexico had a mirror effect on the emergence of drug cultures during the 1960s. Drugs connected, sometimes paradoxically, uneven layers of modernizing Mexico's cultures and raise tricky questions about forms of cultural appropriation. In the late 1960s, Salvador Roquet, a highly respected doctor with the Mexican Ministry of Health, began treating psychiatric problems (notably addiction) by tapping into the burgeoning counterculture. Psychedelics, particularly peyote and psilocybin mushrooms, seemed to offer an alternative, fast-acting therapy. The well-connected Roquet, who collaborated with the state against countercultural leftist youth in 1968, opened a clinic in the tony neighborhood of La Condesa, where he eventually treated more than 1,000 (mostly wealthy) patients, many of them counterculture refugees. Ironically, Roquet saw indigenous drugs, and the therapies that he developed after observing Mazatec *curanderos* at work, as an ideal means of getting the "Indian" out of the *jipis*. Meanwhile, the press and the mainstream psychiatric community condemned the *jipis* as developmentally stunted, drug-addicted failures

of Mexico's materialist middle class. As the line blurred between jipi dropouts and student movement revolutionaries, Roquet mostly agreed with this assessment, as did his now famous collaborator, the Mazatec shaman María Sabina. Rather than an externally driven drug conflict in Mexico, indigenous drugs, symbolically and pharmacologically potent, reveal the sharpest contradictions of Mexican society and revolutionary nationalism.

We hope that *HAHR* readers, after taking in these essays, will fully appreciate the ways in which drug history can open a new lens on many of the central questions and themes of Latin American history. For better or worse, drugs permeate the Latin American present and in some cases dominate inter-American relations. The drug past of the Americas needs to be brought into the story, not only for intellectual clarification but also because stronger historical work around it can help guide us as we seek ways to better live with these drugs in the future.

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Paul Gootenberg studied at St. Antony's College, Oxford, and the University of Chicago, and he is SUNY Distinguished Professor of History and Sociology at Stony Brook University. He began his career as an economic historian of nineteenth-century Peru before turning to the history of drugs. He is the author of *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009) and editor of *Cocaine: Global Histories* (Routledge, 1999). He is currently helping the Beckley Foundation to coordinate an international report on cocaine's future possibilities and is starting on a new global commodity history of Latin America from 1500 to 2000.

Isaac Campos holds a PhD from Harvard University and is Associate Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati. His book, *Home Grown: Marijuana and the Origins of Mexico's War on Drugs* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), which explored the development of drug policy and drug war ideology in Mexico between the sixteenth century and 1920, was awarded 2013's Best Book Prize from the New England Council of Latin American Studies. His current project examines the history of illicit drugs in Mexico and greater North America between 1912 and 1940.