

FOREWORD

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The last twenty years have witnessed nothing less than the remaking of Latin American Cold War history, as the field has burgeoned into a veritable growth industry. For decades, study of the region's postwar conflict was dominated by mainstream diplomatic and foreign relations historians who conceived of it largely in bipolar terms and were preoccupied with grand strategy and U.S. policy and sources. Since about 2000, however, scholarship has been significantly reoriented by Latin Americanists who, without marginalizing international conflicts and rivalries, have more often approached the Cold War from the inside out—and often “from below.” In the process they have begun to flesh out a distinctive *Latin American Cold War*, rather than merely studying the dynamics and collateral damage of superpower rivalry *in* a peripheral region. These scholars speak the region's languages and read voraciously across disciplines, employing tools and concepts from area studies, political and social history, anthropology, political science, cultural studies, and studies of technology, health, and medicine. They seek out (and work to declassify) new archival sources as well as pose new questions to older documentary collections. In part owing to more productive conversations with mainstream diplomatic historians and foreign relations scholars, more ambitious transnational and transregional analyses have emerged, steeped in multisited archival and oral history research strategies. Since the early 2000s, bolstered by the creation of new international research clusters, the organization of numerous conferences and symposia, and a series of collective volumes and special journal issues, a new self-identified generation of historians and international relations scholars with a penchant for “border crossings” has reshaped Latin American Cold War studies. Anne-Emanuelle Birn's and Raúl Necochea López's *Peripheral Nerve: Health and Medicine in Cold War Latin America* constitutes a signal contribution to this new watershed of scholarship.

As the book's title cleverly indicates, while Latin American countries ambiguously resided on the periphery and semiperiphery of Cold War-era

theoretical imaginings, they invariably exhibited nerve, whether via quiet audacity or full-blown impudence. Such nerve also meant that Latin America's Cold War was rarely cold. Indeed, few periods in the region's history were as violent, turbulent, or transformative as the half century that ran roughly from the end of World War II through the early 1990s. One would have to go back to the early nineteenth-century wars of independence to find the same level of mass mobilization, revolutionary upheaval, and counterrevolutionary repression. Yet the international connections, organizational capacities, and technologies of death and surveillance at work in the late twentieth-century Cold War render that earlier cycle of violence almost quaint by comparison. Latin America's late great novelist Gabriel García Márquez graphically evoked this "outsized" and "unbridled reality" in his 1982 Nobel acceptance speech. Conjuring up a litany of grisly and apocalyptic events—the dirty wars, disappearances, and displacements of the 1970s and early 1980s that had turned Central America and South America's Southern Cone into killing fields and barrios—he told his Nobel audience that he had been obliged to develop a new literary genre, "magical realism," to assimilate the period's mind-boggling occurrences and, as he put it, "render our lives believable."

How do we account for such cataclysmic violence? To be sure, Latin America's past has always been marked by alternating cycles of social reform and intense conservative reaction, in which the influence, aid, and intervention of imperial powers have figured prominently. Even so, the dynamics of the Latin American Cold War were embedded in a particularly ferocious dialectic linking reformist and revolutionary projects for social change and national development, with the excessive counterrevolutionary responses they triggered, in the decades after World War II. This dialectic, which several of the contributors to *Peripheral Nerve* engrossingly document and which played out in intertwined domestic and international arenas of political, social, and cultural power, shaped Latin American life in the late twentieth century and, as the editors demonstrate in the epilogue, has "lingerings and echoes" in the new millennium. At a macro level, the Cold War was a struggle between two postwar "rookie" superpowers—the United States and the USSR—over shifting geopolitical stakes and ideological visions of how the world should be organized. But what ultimately gave the Latin American Cold War its "heat" were the politicization and internationalization of everyday life. On a variety of fronts across several decades, Latin American elites and newly expanded and empowered popular classes participated in local and national political contests over land, labor, the control of markets, the disposition of scientific, medical, and health resources, and what constituted citizenship

itself—contests that rarely escaped the powerful undertow of the larger superpower conflict.

Peripheral Nerve advances our understanding of the region's Cold War in many consequential respects. Above all, it challenges the conventional historical narrative that, in health and medicine, as elsewhere, Latin America's Cold War history was circumscribed and constrained by the hegemonic dominance of the United States in its imperial "backyard." Rather, without negating the historical dynamics of U.S. power, the collection inflects what Anne-Emanuelle Birn describes in her introduction as the repeated "defiance of Latin American actors who sought alternative channels of health and medical solidarity" with the Soviet Union and its allies, and via South–South solidarities within and beyond Latin America. The book's examination of Latin America's relations with the Second World before, during, and after the Cold War redresses a serious imbalance in the burgeoning literature, while extending the new scholarship's appreciation of the regional struggle's "multivalent, multilevel nature," as Birn writes in her introduction.

At the same time, the collection is invaluable for the manner in which it deepens two particularly fertile veins in the new literature. First, there is the issue of Cold War chronology and temporality—the need to examine both the broader contexts and specific conjunctures in which Latin American state and society experienced the challenges and opportunities of life in revolutionary and counterrevolutionary times. Much of the new scholarship stresses the importance of applying a more encompassing frame of analysis to the Cold War decades (even as some wonder if the conflict ever really ended in the early 1990s, or morphed into an unsettling new phase that continues today). In an earlier collaboration among international scholars, *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*, Greg Grandin and I argue that the region's Cold War decades should be placed in the broader context of Latin America's "revolutionary twentieth century," which simultaneously constituted a "long Cold War" (especially in North–South relations), articulating longer waves of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary phenomena. That was because Latin America's revolutionary twentieth century coincided with the rise of U.S. hemispheric and global hegemony, with both dynamics proceeding along parallel tracks, and each informing the shape the other took. This "century of revolution," which ran at least from the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (if not the political and social repercussions of the wars of 1898) to the Central American insurgencies of the 1980s, was effectively defined by sequential attempts by Latin American reformers to transcend what had become an unsustainable model of exclusionary nationalism, restricted political

and social institutions and gender relations, persisting rural clientelism, and dependent export-based development. Although the experience of each country's involvement in this nearly century-long cycle of insurgent politics aimed at reform and liberalization, as well as each nation's relationship with the imperial hegemon, was *distinct*, many shared similar patterns of radicalized reform, followed not infrequently by revolution, civil war, and counter-revolutionary state terror. Moreover, each successive bid to transform society generated domestic experiences and international responses that shaped subsequent attempts.

Yet, within this *longue durée* of U.S. hemispheric hegemony and resistance to it, Grandin and I contend that the Cold War proper (c.1947–1990) constituted a particularly consequential juncture. This was evident in terms of the massive infusion of counterinsurgent aid and expert personnel, the dramatic narrowing of political space and options, and the manner in which a deadly combination of rational, precise counterinsurgent technologies (typically imported from the United States and its allies) and more vengeful local sentiments and tactics honed the new internal security state and the bureaucratic strategies of terror that undergirded it.

Although Birn and Necochea López do not explicitly engage the notion of a “long Cold War,” they consistently argue against rigidly circumscribing the Cold War period. In her insightful introduction, Birn provides a fresh “prehistory” of the Cold War that not only recognizes the multivalent nature of U.S. power but also inflects Latin America's largely neglected connections with the Eastern Bloc, particularly in the area of health and medicine. She then usefully periodizes the early, middle, and later stages of the Cold War decades; indeed, these phases help to structure the three thematic sections of the collection.

Peripheral Nerve also contributes powerfully to what is likely the most important recent development in regional Cold War studies: the elaboration of its multistranded cultural dimension. For if the field has become a growth industry in the last fifteen years, its leading edge may well be efforts to tease out the complex, power-laden *cultural* processes, relationships, exchanges, and institutional forms that antedated and shaped the late twentieth-century conflict, and had consequences beyond its denouement. Although foreign diplomats and grand strategists, military juntas and intelligence apparatuses, leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary forces, CIA-backed coups and covert operations have remained at the center of traditional accounts of the Cold War in Latin America, beneath or in the wake of the conflicts they orchestrated, the Latin American Cold War was waged by technocrats and experts—an array of scientists and engineers, doctors and health workers, agronomists and ar-

chitects, scholars and economists. The webs of expertise they wove served to materialize the political ideologies and grand strategies of the era; moreover, as *Peripheral Nerve* fleshes out in some detail, such medical and scientific experts underwrote forms of resistance and shaped alternative solidarities and destinies that challenged imperial forces of both the Right and Left. One of the pleasures of this rich collection is that, apart from narrating fascinating, at times poignant, transnational stories of little-known Argentine psychiatrists, U.S. nurses, Cuban international health workers, and Brazilian parasitologists, it also provides glimpses into the medical and health-related careers of high-profile Latin American leaders such as Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, and Michelle Bachelet. In the process, the volume's contributors underscore the fact that the appeal of the superpowers' mass utopias was predicated on dreams of development and modernization that were appropriated in a variety of contexts and ways, often with different results. These dreams and aspirations fueled complex political and cultural struggles likely just as consequential as the paroxysms of insurgent and counterinsurgent violence the period witnessed. And these micro-struggles relied on a myriad of specialized, transnational experts and cultural intermediaries whose role in the region's Cold War is just beginning to receive its due.

To date, most studies of the region's cultural Cold War have focused on the usual subjects of cultural history—the intellectuals, students, artists, writers, and political and social thinkers who sought a higher profile in the conflict and often were important catalysts at diverse points on the ideological spectrum. Similarly, several studies of certain signature projects of “development” (like the Alliance for Progress) and critiques of the vexed concept itself have emerged and narrowed the gap between Latin Americanist scholarship and more robust interdisciplinary work on this theme for other areas of the Global South. But what *Peripheral Nerve* and some other new research argue compellingly is that the experts, technocrats, and cultural and political intermediaries behind these projects have routinely been elided. Only now are scholars beginning to flesh out their roles in various infrastructural, scientific, and environmental projects, medical clinics and communal health crusades, educational and housing missions, biological research and agricultural experiment stations. They contend that by examining these experts' concrete plans, travels, networks of collaboration, and manner of negotiating their work at both higher levels and at the grassroots—with national leaders, U.S. and Soviet Bloc agencies, transnational foundations and think tanks, and, not least, the local populations they studied and served—we can develop a more nuanced history of Cold War Latin America.

Another new edited volume, Andra Chastain and Timothy Lorek's *Itineraries of Expertise: Science, Technology, and the Environment in Latin America's Long Cold War*, like *Peripheral Nerve*, makes particularly important contributions in this regard. Both collections provide detailed analysis over decades of experts who were both peripatetic and locally situated, who often saw or portrayed themselves as "neutral," removed from politics, even as their work fed directly or indirectly into prevailing geopolitical agendas. In establishing these transnational dimensions of Cold War expertise, both works contribute to a Cold War history that is attentive to history's contingencies and capable of transcending frayed, dichotomizing paradigms of interpretation. Read together, these new volumes showcase how experts traversed a variety of boundaries: between the city and the countryside, between northern and southern nations, between Southern and Eastern Bloc destinations, and within the Global South. They demonstrate how experts' itineraries and collaborations tended to strengthen, but occasionally undermined and complicated the imperatives dictated by Cold War geopolitics. In the process, this new research forces us to reconsider other binaries in conventional Cold War studies: between so-called "developed" and "developing" nations, between the First (or Second) World and the Third World, and between the Global North and Global South. Congruent with recent turns in transnational studies, by highlighting multiple agents, sites, and scales of expertise during the Cold War, these new collections accentuate a blurring of the "local" and the "foreign," especially where the production of knowledge is concerned.

Yet another collection published in Italy and then in Argentina, edited by Italian cultural historian Benedetta Calandra and her Argentine colleague Marina Franco, attempts to assess the state of scholarship on *La Guerra Fría Cultural en América Latina*. Like *Peripheral Nerve* and *Itineraries of Expertise*, this international volume—which assembles a team of interdisciplinary scholars, mostly from Italy, Spain, and Latin America—stresses the *emerging* nature of studies on Latin America's cultural Cold War. Unlike the more robust bodies of work on Europe and the United States, studies of Latin America's Cold War cultures still remain modest and dispersed, with immense gaps. Nevertheless the collection's contributors (like those of *Peripheral Nerve* and *Itineraries of Expertise*) argue for a "long Cold War" in the cultural realm. They suggest that the pivotal political events and watersheds of the Cold War proper were *not* congruent with longer-running cultural and intellectual formations. The latter, they argue, date back at least to the positivist and progressive "civilizing" and "modernizing" missions of the early twentieth century, and then took an important turn in the 1940s and 1950s when a more muscular technocratic capacity,

influenced substantially by New Deal mindsets and welfarist policies, gained ascendance throughout the hemisphere.

Without neglecting or whitewashing what they call “scandalous” high-profile episodes like the U.S. Department of Defense’s manipulative, counter-insurgent use of social science research in initiatives like Project Camelot, the contributors to the Calandra and Franco volume prefer to tease out *nuances* in the deployment and resistance of imperial cultural power. They eschew just-so stories of hegemony and broad instrumentalist applications of “soft power,” arguing instead for historicized, case-specific analyses of imperial contact zones, agents, and more contingent, even ambiguous forms of local reception. To cite one example, the essay by Chilean historian Fernando Purcell on the Peace Corps offers a fine-grained treatment of that organization that emphasizes the multivalent relationships and often autonomous identities that U.S. Peace Corps volunteers forged with their host communities. Interestingly, other recent work reveals that a stream of former Peace Corps volunteers went on to long academic careers in Latin American studies that were characterized by an abiding critique of U.S. foreign policy, interventions, and the concept of “development” itself.

The new cultural history of the Latin American Cold War that these three recent collaborative volumes exemplify is distinguished, above all, by their ability to interrogate and cross the temporal, spatial, and methodological boundaries that conventional diplomatic and foreign relations scholarship set in place. The peripatetic experts and technocrats under scrutiny in these works spanned generations of knowledge production, traversed multiple levels and ideological divides of the world system, and in many instances *themselves* came to embody transnational identities and “hybrid nationalities of expertise.” In this regard, an interesting feature of several of the essays in *Itineraries of Expertise* and *Peripheral Nerve* is the role that certain sites in the Global South, such as Mexico and Puerto Rico, and to a lesser extent Colombia, played in the creation of such hybrid identities, typically in the context of transitions from revolutionary and liberal welfare states to the neoliberal regimes that succeeded them. Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Colombia served as intermediary spaces and proving grounds for the kind of biological, medical, and agronomic research, and the type of social policies that would, in time, give rise to such institutional hallmarks of the regional and global Cold War as the Green Revolution and the Alliance for Progress.

There is much more that can be done by scholars to internationalize cultural (and political-economic) studies of the Latin American Cold War. As in many other societies belonging to the Global South, Latin American states and

the intellectuals, scientists, medical, and health professionals that collaborated with or opposed them frequently sought to balance between the First and Second Worlds, defying bipolar imperatives when they could and, in the process, entertaining for a time the possibilities of an incipient nonaligned Third World project. The essay in *Peripheral Nerve* by Marco Ramos on the scientific encounters and *desencuentros* of anti-imperialist Argentine psychiatrists in the 1970s and 1980s is particularly illuminating in this regard. The rise and fall of *Tercermundismo* and connections with the Non-Aligned Movement in Mexico in the 1970s under populist president Luis Echeverría was emblematic of various ill-fated Latin American attempts, by governments and popular movements alike, to identify with a distinct Third World experience during the global Cold War. Yet another new collective volume, *Latin America and the Third World: An International History*, edited by international historians Thomas Field, Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà, argues that, along with more recently decolonized nations in Africa, Asia, and the non-Hispanophone Caribbean, “Latin America must be treated as a fundamental participant in the Third World project,” incorporating perspectives for understanding the region that have often been foreclosed by “the traditional Western Hemispheric or regional framing.” In this respect, the editors seek to break out of what international historian Tanya Harmer has recently termed “the historiographical Monroe Doctrine.” This, the new volume’s contributors demonstrate, entails deeper research into Latin America’s political-economic and cultural relations with the Socialist Second World and more attention to Third Worldist political and cultural formations like the 1966 Tri-continental Conference in Havana, Cuba, and the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL), founded in its wake. It also entails examination of economic projects such as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the New International Economic Order, created in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively.

Peripheral Nerve provides many entry points for this kind of internationalist approach. It pioneers analysis of Latin America’s relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc during the Cold War and encourages us to deepen our appreciation of the idea of Latin America’s “alternative destinies and solidarities,” as Birn refers to them in this volume’s introduction, even in the “Giant’s Backyard.” One of the volume’s more provocative contributions is its excavation of the origins during the Cold War (and even before) of South–South collaborations that have gained greater traction under the Pink Tide regimes of the first decades of this century. (Of course, some will question the coherence and staying power of such collaborations, both within and beyond the area of medicine and health, as the Pink Tide continues to ebb.)

The outlook for future work in Latin American Cold War studies is quite promising, and Birn and Necochea López map out an ambitious agenda for studies of health and medicine in the epilogue. Where Latin America's Cold War connections with the Eastern Bloc are concerned, this agenda will become more feasible as greater numbers of international scholars master Slavic languages and Mandarin, and as the governments of these authoritarian states open up more of their archives.

Elsewhere, however, there are even greater reasons for scholarly optimism. As some wounds heal, and as a horizon of life replaces one of death in several of Latin America's former killing zones (notwithstanding drug and gang violence in Central America's Northern Triangle and flickering insurgencies in Nicaragua, Colombia, and Venezuela), a greater variety of studies reconstructing the social and cultural histories and memories of the Latin American Cold War has emerged. As forensic and truth-telling processes play out, the climate for new encounters with the Cold War—undergirded by newly declassified documents and greater access to oral sources in Latin America and the United States—warms. The cresting wave of interdisciplinary scholarship—represented so richly in *Peripheral Nerve*—augurs the possibility of further dialogue between more traditional and newer approaches to the regional and global conflict, thereby advancing the burgeoning literature on the cultural Cold War. With the historical record increasingly accessible at a variety of global locations, and with historical amnesia challenged at the international and national levels, as well as at the grassroots, Latin American and U.S. students are rediscovering new aspects of their nations' political, social, cultural, and transnational histories during the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. This development has enlivened our calling as teachers as well as scholars, both in the North and the South.