

In This Issue

Articles in this issue study different forms of cultural and political activism in twentieth-century Brazil, Guatemala, and Cuba, as well as conflicts over the creation, representation, and authenticity of cultural forms.

Paulina Alberto examines the controversy surrounding the alleged creation of a cultural movement, called “Black Rio” (using the English term “black”), in which young Afro-Brazilians in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-1970s adopted African American soul music, dance, and clothing styles. Participants in this controversy included the secret police, intellectuals on the right and the left, and the young followers of soul music themselves. The police had to assess whether the movement constituted a threat to order and national security. Right-wing nationalist intellectuals characterized soul music as an inauthentic cultural idiom that threatened to destroy Brazil’s cherished racial harmony and *mestiçagem*. Leftist intellectuals, in turn, concurred with analysts from the right that soul was an imported cultural form, but dismissed it as a mere commercial scam preying upon innocent Afro-Brazilian consumers who had limited understanding of this “neocolonialist publicity campaign.” Only the participants, including a small group of young activists linked to the emerging black movement, contested the alleged lack of authenticity of soul music. They noted that other cultural products made in the United States circulated freely in Brazil without controversy and charged that attacks on the movement were another expression of Brazil’s ingrained racism.

Conflicts over authenticity, culture, and representation are also central to Betsy Konefal’s essay, which analyzes the protest of a group of *reinas indígenas*, or indigenous pageant queens, against the massacre of indigenous campesinos in the community of Panzós, Guatemala, in 1978. Konefal explains how state-sponsored *indigenista* events such as the annual Folklore Festival, which celebrated the “Mayan soul” of the nation, became sites of conflict and contestation. As “symbols of authentic Mayan identity,” indigenous women were in a privileged position to protest state violence against Mayas; indeed, “the state’s own celebration of Guatemala’s Mayan authenticity provided protestors with compelling language and imagery with which to denounce the crass inconsistencies

in government actions.” The author interviewed many of the people who had participated in the protest and who came from different mobilization experiences and linked concerns over indigenous culture and rights with questions of social and political justice. Although protesters were ultimately unsuccessful in boycotting the Folklore Festival, they countered the official representation of the dead at Panzós as *engañados*, or “tools of leftist insurgents,” claiming instead that they were the real, authentic *indios*.

The cultural and political activism discussed in these papers frequently took place at the local (community, village, neighborhoods) level, which is the subject of Adriano Luiz Duarte’s article. In his dissection of what is commonly known as the “populist era” of Brazil, from the 1940s to the 1960s, Duarte investigates the little-known activities of neighborhood associations. These associations sought to obtain concrete and immediate gains for poor, working-class neighborhoods, from paved streets and running water to health clinics and better transportation. The Communists created Comitês Democráticos e Populares (CDPs) to build a popular following in these neighborhoods, whereas the middle sectors of the poor suburban neighborhoods gravitated toward competing Sociedades Amigos de Bairro, or SABs. Despite differences in social composition and procedures, both the CDPs and SABs helped publicize neighborhood problems and, in the context of an expanding electorate, articulated claims to local authorities and political figures. Studies of populism have neglected this neighborhood experience, which was central to the lives of workers.

Many of the conflicts studied in this issue were informed by Cold War concerns, especially by fears of Communist infiltration, which in the Americas came to be incarnated by the Cuban revolutionary example. Lillian Guerra offers a new interpretation of the old debate concerning the causes that led to the radicalization of the Cuban revolutionary process in 1960. In this interpretation, the process of radicalization was paved by the transformation of *fidélismo* into a new cultural religion. The revolution was portrayed as a moral paradigm, “a divinely sanctioned struggle to create a uniquely moral society on earth,” with Fidel Castro and the most humble supporters of the revolution as the incarnation of Jesus. Rites of inclusion in the revolution, from mountain climbing to symbolic burials of opposition newspapers and property owners, helped differentiate supporters from enemies. Supporters included traditionally disenfranchised sectors of society, such as blacks, who found the inversion of traditional social roles appealing. Those who sought to preserve those traditions and individual freedoms—Catholic activists, newspaper editors, university professors—were excluded from the new moral community as enemies of a millenarian struggle for collective redemption.