to love, marriage, and beauty products in *Mission to Moscow* (1943); however, the characterization of the USSR, led by “Uncle Joe,” resisted feminization. Films about China, which recalled the Rape of Nanking and the plight of orphans, encouraged the perception that the Chinese needed protection. The OWI pressed for a manly presentation of the Chinese and was disappointed when *Flying Tigers* (1942) showed only U.S. soldiers fighting for China.

As Bennett’s investigation reveals, Hollywood’s cooperation with Allied officials sometimes failed to produce the best results. In response to changes suggested by the Chinese consul T. K. Chang and approved by the OWI, MGM adjusted its script for *Dragon Seed* (1944), which starred Walter Huston and Katherine Hepburn in yellow face. “Unimaginably bad” (p. 247) was the verdict of critic James Agee. Bennett shows how the soft power of film provoked unintended reactions. In Britain, a member of Parliament denounced U.S. movies for corrupting British youth. Soviet filmgoers responded to the luxury products displayed in *Mission to Moscow* with amusement and depression. Back in Hollywood, conservatives condemned the influence of “Communists, radicals, and crackpots” (p. 210) in the film industry.

Hollywood’s wartime collaboration with Allied officials created an illusion that served a purpose, Bennett concludes. His study details the multiple influences and conflicting agendas that contributed to the making of films as cultural diplomacy. Bennett offers a balanced evaluation of the effectiveness of film as propaganda as well as the limitations of Allied collaboration. The realization of “One World,” of course, was not to be. As Bennett neatly foreshadows throughout the book, Hollywood continued to play a major role in the Cold War against enemies foreign and domestic while still projecting the American way.


Reviewed by Thomas Rath, University College London

Latin America’s Cold War was notoriously hot. Stephen G. Rabe entitled his survey of the period *The Killing Zone*. Historians and political scientists have often portrayed Mexico as the exception to the rule of polarization, upheaval, and violence so visible elsewhere. In a timely and thoroughly researched book, Renata Keller challenges this idea by tracing the Cuban revolution’s many effects on Mexico’s domestic politics and international relations in the 1960s and 1970s.

Chapters proceed chronologically and describe a neat narrative arc. A first chapter sets the scene and describes how Mexico’s social revolution of 1910–1920 gradually morphed into a new regime. Integrating a host of new secondary research, Keller argues that, by the 1950s, the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI) exercised control that was “firm yet flexible” (p. 49). Chapters 2 and 3 describe how the Cuban
revolution elicited profound enthusiasm among Mexican leftists, led by powerful former president Lázaro Cárdenas and a growing sense of disquiet and fear among conservative Catholics, students, business executives, and PRI officials. Chapter 4 shifts the focus to more traditional diplomacy and describes how Mexican president Adolfo López Mateos successfully resisted U.S. pressure to break relations with Cuba. Counterintuitively, Keller demonstrates how the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and John F. Kennedy’s assassination a year later helped to consolidate U.S. acceptance of Mexico’s independent policy. Chapters 5 and 6 describe the increasingly acute (and often downright paranoid) fear of Communist-orchestrated upheaval within the Díaz Ordaz administration and the state’s suppression of students and leftist guerrillas. Repression was not a wholly domestic business. Even as Mexico’s police, spies, and soldiers tortured and killed Mexican citizens, they enjoyed cozy relations with U.S. agencies. In turn, Mexican spies and diplomats kept a close eye on Cuban efforts to export revolution.

Keller’s deep research in U.S., Mexican, and Cuban archives allows her to tack skillfully between international and domestic contexts throughout. She is particularly astute when analyzing Mexico’s domestic intelligence agencies. She approaches spy reports with a healthy skepticism, cross-referencing where possible, and makes an important argument about official perception. She persuasively debunks the Mexican government’s assertions that Mexico was the victim of an international Communist conspiracy. Sadly, historians will now read the analysis with mixed feelings. Keller shows the insights that can be gleaned from espionage reports, but this makes the restrictions the Mexican government has placed on them all the more galling.

Two other findings stand out. First, Keller deepens our understanding of the Janus-faced nature of Cold War diplomacy. Scholars have long suggested that Mexico’s progressive foreign policy was designed to satisfy (and distract) domestic critics on the left. Keller provides the most thorough substantiation of this idea to date and also shows several lesser-known hypocrisies. Cuban officials praised the Mexican regime in public but offered blistering criticism in private, funneled propaganda into the country, and even provided training to a few would-be guerrillas. U.S. diplomats, despite their public posture, eventually came to appreciate Mexico’s continued relations with Cuba for its apparent benefits: stability in Mexico and opportunities for intelligence-gathering. Second, Keller argues that much of the ideological conflict triggered by the Cuban revolution took the form of a debate over the legacy of the Mexican revolution. Mexico’s revolutionary mythology is now a fairly well-worn theme for social and cultural historians, but Keller connects it to international relations in an original and revealing way, avoiding unhelpful dichotomies separating domestic and international ideologies. Cárdenas’s sympathies for the Cuban revolution have long been known, but Keller provides the most detailed account yet of their depth and effects. The book thus fleshes out a crucial chapter in what we might call the “long” Cardenismo. Still, some concepts and categories deserved more extensive analysis. Keller uses the Cold War as a historiographical concept, but it is not clear how this metaphor was used in Mexico at the time.
Keller provides a working map of Mexico’s Cold War terrain that historians will be eager to explore further. The book is peppered with examples of political conflicts across Mexico but does not really explore the regional dynamics that gave rise to more conflicts in some places than in others. U.S. power is largely something exercised through diplomats and spies, leaving open the question of how it related to broader processes of social and cultural integration. At times Keller’s argument about official credulity in the face of conspiracy theories seems to downplay other possible explanations or to strain the evidence. Cynical intergovernmental competition and official entrepreneurship may have played a larger role in encouraging exaggerated reports than Keller allows. One might question whether Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s unpublished memoirs can really be treated as an “unfiltered” source (p. 216), given the lies they contain about repression at Tlatelolco. Finally, Keller’s work will also contribute to an ongoing debate about democratization. In her conclusion, she briefly suggests that Mexico’s Cold War effectively stripped the regime of its ability to claim a revolutionary legacy, but she (wisely) hesitates to give too much weight to this factor in democratization. Alongside the repression, Keller paints a picture of a flawed, corrupt, but consequential public sphere, and her book will encourage more work on this understudied theme.

This important book deserves a wide audience among scholars of the Cold War and will also provide a guide and necessary point of reference for future explorations of Mexico’s turbulent recent history.


Reviewed by Allan R. Millett, University of New Orleans

Passing the Test uses contemporaneous interviews and reports to conduct a retrospective on Korean War ground combat in April–May 1951. The focus is on the Eighth U.S. Army except for two battles that involved Australian and British troops. The strategic context is the Fifth Offensive of the Chinese People’s Volunteers Force (CPVF), its last “win the war” effort, which failed. A limited Eighth Army offensive then drove the Communist coalition forces well above the 38th parallel. The book is the final segment of a trilogy on 1951 operations.

Most of the readers of the JCWS will find this book too operational and too technical. The book is based on interviews conducted by active-duty officers with combat arms officers and non-commissioned officers about recent actions, most of which were successful. The principal editor and compiler, the late Colonel William T. Bowers of the U.S. Army, was a combat veteran turned historian who wanted to tell the story of the Eighth Army’s eventual battlefield effectiveness. For someone unfamiliar with the U.S. Army of 1951, this book may be difficult reading.