One of Kaufman’s more controversial arguments is the link between Plowshare tests and the emergence of the modern U.S. environmental movement in the 1960s. As early as 1959 AEC efforts to get approval for the Chariot project resulted in government funding for a major bioenvironmental study on the possible impact on the Alaskan environment. Kaufman acknowledges the seminal role of Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* (published in 1962) in spurring environmentalism, but he suggests the impact of the book was magnified by the growing sensitivity over nuclear contamination from testing.

Kaufman covers much of the same ground that Scott Kirsch does in his *Proving Grounds: Project Plowshare and the Unrealized Dream of Nuclear Earthmoving* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), though Kirsch writes from the perspective of a historical geographer. Kaufman’s *Project Plowshare* is thoroughly researched and does a fine job of weaving together the scientific, political, environmental, and diplomatic strands of the Plowshare program. The volume is also quite readable, though a bit repetitive at times. *Project Plowshare* will be of interest to historians of science, the Cold War, the U.S. nuclear program, and the U.S. environmental movement.


Reviewed by Radoslav Yordanov, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University

At first glance, books about the markedly different subjects of the gangster presence in Cuba in the 1950s and early 1960s and the life of Celia Sánchez Manduley seem highly improbable candidates for a combined review. Whereas the former book delves into the activities of Mafia godfathers Meyer Lansky and Santo Trafficante, Jr., in Cuba before and during the early years of Fidel Castro’s regime, the latter explores the myth of the Cuban national godmother, Celia Sánchez. The journalist Jack Colhoun discusses the Mafia’s efforts at the behest of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to overthrow Castro, and the academic historian Tiffany A. Sippial explores the media-shy Cuban revolutionary heroine. The books offer two notable recent examples of writing on Cuban history and stand out for their methodological thoroughness and innovativeness, taking 18 years for Colhoun to complete and 22 years for Sippial. Colhoun goes the extra mile in researching a sensitive and controversial subject while keeping a level-headed approach and objectivity. Sippial, on the other
hand, provides a highly personal, intimate view of one of Cuba’s most beloved female revolutionaries. Although the scholarly literature on Cold War–era Cuba has burgeoned in recent years, both of these books deserve a place on the specialist’s bookshelf.

Colhoun significantly expands the vision of nocturnal Havana presented in T. J. English, *Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba . . . and Then Lost It to the Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), p. xii, in which the connections among U.S. gangsters, U.S. corporations, and the Batista regime became a ubiquitous symbol of corruption. Colhoun takes a more ambitious approach and tells the story of *gangsterismo* in the context of the history of U.S. policy in Cuba and the Cold War in the tumultuous 1950s and 1960s. His account of U.S. policy in Cuba is also based on an impressive collection of declassified “executive branch reports, minutes of meetings, memorandums of conversation, and U.S. intelligence estimates on Cuba made available to researchers by the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson presidential libraries” (p. xi). The main narrative of Colhoun’s account starts with the departure of President Gerardo Machado, which allowed Sergeant Fulgencio Batista to ascend to the highest positions of power in Cuba. Batista added to the combustive cocktail of corruption and violence a new kind of “neocolonial corruption” called *gangsterismo*. From Palacio Presidential he engaged with North American *mafiosi*, sharing the profits from their gambling empire on the island and thus further deepening the sociopolitical cleavages in the country.

The climate of pervasive political corruption engendered a new Cuban nationalist movement led by Castro in the 1950s. Castro clashed with Batista, drawing inspiration from the legacy of Cuban independence leader José Martí, and, as Colhoun notes, “the past would be prologue in neocolonial Cuba” (p. 3). The rebel army’s entry into Havana in January 1959 dramatically changed yet again the political landscape of the country. As early as May 1959 the mafia accountant and Havana’s gambling *supremo*, Meyer Lansky, with characteristic analytical acumen warned the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that “the entire [Cuban] government will soon be communistic,” offering to furnish the FBI with additional intelligence about Communist activities in Cuba (p. 43). Simultaneously, in Washington, the hardened Cold War discourse increasingly reinforced the confrontation between the United States and Castro’s regime, a confrontation that had its roots in Cuba’s tumultuous history and the U.S. involvement on the island since the closing years of the nineteenth century (p. 61). Colhoun maintains that even though Castro was an avowed Marxist-Leninist, the Cold War distorted Cuba’s “revolutionary nationalist political process” (p. 64).

Consequently, in 1960 the CIA changed its tactics from rendering assistance for the counterrevolution in Cuba to building a network of Cuban exile groups and running raids on targets in Cuba from bases in the United States. The Eisenhower administration devised a new strategy for Cuba. On the surface the administration claimed to uphold the principle of non-intervention in Latin America, but in reality it sought
to overthrow the Castro government (p. 83). The culmination of this was the secretive CIA-Mafia attempt to assassinate Castro, which formed an essential part of the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. Colhoun cites an FBI report indicating that the CIA’s Deputy Director for Plans, Richard M. Bissell, Jr., “told the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy] that some of the CIA’s associated planning included the use of [Sam] Giancana and the underworld against Castro.” Another FBI memorandum shows that Robert Kennedy was also informed by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that the CIA and the Mafia were covertly cooperating in what CIA Director of Security Sheffield Edwards termed “dirty business” (p. 127). In sum, Colhoun’s exhaustive research convincingly shows how the Mafia supplied financial assistance and arms to Cuban exile groups in the United States, whose CIA payments for paramilitary incursions had been discontinued, thus demonstrating how Cuban politicians in exile collaborated with the Mafia in the early 1960s in Miami as they had in Havana until 1959.

Moving away from the richly drawn picture of high-stakes clandestine operations in Washington, Miami, and Mafia circles in Colhoun’s book, Sippial provides an insightful analysis of what made the Castro regime so difficult to eradicate. Her heroine, Sánchez, came from Cuba’s easternmost province, Oriente, which was far away from the glitzy Havana nightlife but stood at the center of the guerrilla movement that brought down Batista’s dictatorship. By tracing the living memory of the legendary figure, who provided logistical support to Castro’s M-26-7 in the Sierra, Sippial produces what she describes as the “first critical biography of one of the most influential female political leaders in twentieth-century Cuban history” (p. 5). Sippial’s two-decade-long investigation into Sánchez’s life, involving field, archival, and oral history research, faces the arduous task of taking the Cuban female revolutionary, who is among the few highly influential Cubans familiarly referred to by her first name, from the shadow of the “bearded male heroes whose life stories continue to dominate our understanding of the Cuban Revolution” (p. 5). Unlike previous biographies of Sánchez, most notably Nancy Stout’s admiring portrait in One Day in December: Celia Sánchez and the Cuban Revolution (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013), which unconditionally accepts the heroic legacy of Celia’s revolutionary self-denial as framed by her official biography, Sippial employs a more analytical treatment, resorting to an insightful combination of feminist biography and cultural history, spliced with candid, first-person narration, describing the tribulations of her lengthy research into the challenging yet intellectually rewarding Cuban setting. She also examines Sánchez’s purposeful, strategic framing within Cuba’s new brand of revolutionary womanhood. Thus, the expansion of Sánchez’s image beyond her dedication and humility by seeing her as a strategic person is one of the major contributions of this biography.

Ultimately, by carefully balancing memory recovery and interpretation, Sippial’s account is a study of the making and remaking of one of Cuba’s most admired national heroines. Although Sippial is careful not to recast Celia solely in terms of gender roles, she describes her narration as “feminist biography” in revealing the historical
and cultural process through which Sánchez embodied Cuba’s New Woman (p. 6). Sippial justifies her analytical approach by citing the Havana-born literary scholar José Quiroga, who argues in his Cuban Palimpsests (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 2, that “memory and not history will allow us a more perceptive vision of the Cuban present and its future.” Sippial sees writing Sánchez’s biography as a form of palimpsest that “blends memory, mythology, and experience into an evolving story of one significant woman’s life. Through the interjection of new voices and experiences, the mythology surrounding Sánchez is continuously redefined and reinvented” (p. 195).

Sippial’s cultural history and feminist biography of Sánchez’s life and legacy follows the standard chronology of the Cuban revolution, putting the heroine in the center, with each chapter shifting from the catch-all wider lens of revolutionary genealogy to the hyper-focused archaeology of Sánchez’s life and afterlife. To underpin this multifaceted research methodology, Sippial conducted numerous interviews and consulted an impressive array of official, personal, and cultural sources and artifacts, imagining and reimagining Sánchez as a woman, a state official, and, ultimately, a revolutionary icon. In so doing, Sippial seeks to encourage the reader to differentiate between the “real” Sánchez—the person behind the myth—and her symbolic embodiment of Cuba’s New Woman (pp. 10, 107). The discourse-rich biography is as much a work of narrative creation as one of meta-narration. Sippial not only retells the story of Sánchez’s life but also looks into the meaning of it for “people living in Cuba and beyond” (p. 17).

The early years of Sánchez’s life, sketched in the opening chapters of the book, hint at the grassroots origins of both socialism and Communism in her childhood and adolescence, through the influence of her father and her cousin. Embracing the radicalization of Castro’s regime in the early 1960s, she demonstrated to Cuba’s political elite her ideological credibility and compatibility (p. 152). Ideologically, her public image incorporated the traditions of her father’s generation of political activism and the radical political strands of the revolutionary generation, making her both a “martiana and a fidelista.” Working at Castro’s side, she became his “right-hand woman” (p. 174). Sippial, however, does not limit her search for the memory of Sánchez to the island alone. Following Quiroga’s multispatial strategy of reconstruction of la Cubandita, she crosses the Straits of Florida to embed the “dissident” view of those living their alternative version of Cuban-ness sin Fidelismo. Her work in southern Florida within the Cuban exile community in the United States thus turns up the countermemories of Sánchez’s relationship with El Líder Máximo, filled with malicious rumors and interpretations of their personal relationship. Despite the dismissive portrayals of Sánchez as merely Castro’s housekeeper, secretary, or lover, she was, Sippial argues, “an indisputable political heavyweight” (p. 124) who carved her own space away from the limelight, operating from her secluded quarters in Havana’s Vedado neighborhood, allowing her to feel both unencumbered by the sting of public scrutiny while finding her at arm’s length of those who needed her the most. Sippial argues that Sánchez, as a woman at the center of government yet outside the public eye, performed the role of
national godmother through the many children she adopted (Sánchez never had her own children; p. 134).

The authors of *Gangsterismo* and *Celia Sánchez* are best seen as master bricoleurs rather than mere collectors of the past, blending elements of mythical thoughts that lie halfway between memory and history. Like Quiroga's *Cuban Palimpsests*, the accounts of Colhoun and Sippial are multilayered records, superimposing, on the one hand, histories of corruption, protest, and foreign intervention originating in pre-Castro Cuba, postrevolutionary Havana, and clandestine Miami and, on the other hand, memories and images of Sánchez from Manzanillo, Sierra Maestra, Parque Coppelia, Vedado, and Calle Ocho in Miami's Little Havana. The process of remembering is also one of uncovering. In scraping out the story one layer at a time one makes the older text jump to the fore, as Quiroga suggests. In the Sánchez story, her childhood in Media Luna, Manzanillo, and Pilón is where her upbringing in the distant province met Cuba’s combustive ideological milieu, which helped reinvent it at a time when the center was corroded by neocolonialist pressures, political corruption, and mafia profiteering, just as the older text in Colhoun's palimpsest shows us.


Reviewed by Andrea Benvenuti, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

As someone who moved “down under” relatively late in his life, I have always found mystifying the oft-repeated claim that Australia failed to engage with Asia during the early Cold War years. How could it possibly be—as the prevailing Australian academic wisdom would have us believe—that a country so close to Asia was able to overlook this region when its national interests were so inextricably bound to it? Why did it take Canberra so long to awaken to Asia’s political, economic, and strategic importance and engage meaningfully with it?

Years spent researching Australia’s involvement in Asia have not, in some ways, brought me any closer to solving this apparent puzzle. When weighed against hundreds of declassified Australian government files and other available historical records, one thing seems clear: that by the end of the 1960s, Australian efforts to engage with the region—and especially with Southeast Asia, where Australia’s primary strategic interests lay—had succeeded in tying Australia closely to it. Yet, despite all the available archival evidence, the widely accepted view in Australian academic circles still suggests that after a promising start in which Ben Chifley’s Labor government (1945–1949) supported Indonesia’s quest for independence from Dutch colonial rule and, more generally, strove to expand Australia’s regional links, the appointment of Robert Menzies as prime minister in December 1949 reversed Australia’s incipient engagement