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Guerra Fría y propaganda: Estados Unidos y su cruzada cultural en Europa y América Latina

This volume provides us with a valuable collection of essays dealing with themes such as U.S. propaganda and cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, which were not the traditional focus of historical narratives, although their importance has been growing over the past few years. Furthermore, the book brings together analyses on Latin America and Europe (with a particular interest in Spain; three out of ten chapters focus on this country), and by doing this it contributes to eroding the artificial historiographical barriers separating the different regions of the “Global Cold War.” The book focuses on the first years of the so-called bipolar conflict, 1947 to 1953, and navigates the frequently difficult-to-separate waters of political propaganda and cultural relations.

As the editors of the volume, Antonio Niño and José Antonio Montero, state in the introduction, *Guerra Fría y propaganda* helps us to understand the differences between the propaganda strategy designed for Europe and the one designed for Latin American. Among them were the greater intensity of the effort in Europe (at least until 1960) and a shared perception by many Europeans and Americans of the threat represented by the Soviet Union, unlike the situation in Latin America where the communist forces were marginal and many believed that the most important threat to their sovereignty came from the United States. The introduction to the book offers an informative guide to the issues of propaganda and “cultural diplomacy” within the frame of the particular history of U.S. attitudes toward those issues. However, with

few exceptions, the chapters included in the volume do not carry out the comparative agenda announced in the introduction and the reader should infer the differences between Latin America and Europe by his/her personal reading of the case studies. Particularly striking is the absence of a discussion of Geir Lundestad’s well-known thesis of the United States as an “empire by invitation” in Western Europe, which might have been useful in a comparative approach like this.

I cannot discuss here every chapter in the book, but some of them deserve further comment. The first, by Jessica Gienow-Hecht, is a thought-provoking and enlightening one. The author asserts that—at least as far as cultural aspects were concerned—the United States did not win the Cold War in Europe. Convincingly and supported by some recent contributions, Gienow-Hecht shows that the process of “Americanization” in Europe was always a contested one and that it did not bring about a homogenization of the different “European cultures,” and that Europeans were mostly successful in resisting or reinterpreting American cultural messages. If this process can be understood as a failure or even a defeat for the United States it is because the goals of the United States in the Cold War were extremely ambitious. According to Gienow-Hecht, the United States aimed not only to defeat communism but also to shape European mentalities by suppressing the traditional anti-Americanism of the Old World. However, this might be a “maximalist” (or a sort of Foucauldian imperial governmentality) ap-

proach to the issue of power; and as the author shows in her chapter, the agenda of the United States in Europe was not clearly defined and was subjected to variations across time and discussions among U.S. officials, the army, and the Europeans themselves. In fact, as Nicholas J. Cull shows in his contribution to the book (“Ganando amigos...”), if we consider more modest goals, such as the attempt at influence the Italian elections of 1948 or (not so modest) the goal of reinforcing the strategy of containment, American public diplomacy in Western Europe cannot be easily described as a failure. In the end, empires (including the United States) usually learn their own capacities and limits and, thus, modify their expectations and ways of ruling and shaping other people’s behavior.

Giles Scott-Smith, in his chapter on the Foreign Leader Program and the elites of Western Europe, offers some insightful reflections on the connections between private and governmental actors in the promotion of U.S. cultural ideology abroad. Although the chapter focuses on Western Europe, it shows the significant connections between the situation in Latin America and the European evolution. Besides, Scott-Smith’s chapter is a well-documented and informative assessment of the working of the Foreign Leader Program in several countries of Western Europe. It analyzes the process of selection of the European leaders who visited the United States under the sponsorship of the program and the possible impact of those visits. In particular, the Foreign Leader Program buttressed the building of a transnational/transatlantic elite, which was an important prerequisite of the informal empire built by the United States in Western Europe.

Chapters 4 through 6 of the book explore U.S. cultural diplomacy in Spain. Antonio Niño analyzes the American propaganda effort in Spain that sought to compensate for the possible negative impact of the 1953 agreement between the United States government and the Franco regime and to overcome the resistance of the “hawks” of the regime to the influence of “American values.” Ultimately, and despite some ambiguities, the U.S. government decided to focus its efforts on the Spanish elite, and by neglecting urban middle classes and workers it created (or reinforced) an enduring and negative image of the United States in Spain. But, as Niño rightly underlines, in Spain the risks of a communist takeover were minimal and the position of Franco’s regime as an ally of the United States was fully guaranteed. In fact, one of the most interesting contributions of the paper is to identify the peculiarities of the Spanish situation within the European context. Pablo León Aguinaga explores

in his contribution the content of American propaganda addressed to Spain between 1945 and 1961, which was elaborated according to three main principles that the author refers as “the American friend” (emphasizing the links between the American people and the Spanish people), “American leadership” (emphasizing the role of the United States as a superpower), and finally “the American model” (promoting American values and history). As in the case of the previous chapter, León Aguinaga shows the peculiarities and limits that a dictatorial regime imposed in the strategy designed by American propagandists in Spain. Finally, in the block of chapters devoted to Spain, Lorenzo Delgado in his chapter describes the policy of the Foreign Leader Program and the Education Exchange Program in Spain during the 1950s.

Chapters 7 to 9 of the book delve into the Latin American cases. Miguel Rodríguez’s contribution poses a crucial question: did U.S. cultural propaganda have a particular strategy toward Latin America? The author explores the cultural policy of the United States toward Latin America since the interwar period and also the consequences of the beginnings of the Cold War in Europe, namely, the neglect of Latin America by U.S. authorities, not only in the cultural field. Yet, beyond this, there is no clear answer to the question posed above, since Rodríguez does not systematize his study of U.S. strategy in a comparative framework, either with Europe or with other “peripheral” regions.

José Antonio Montero analyzes public diplomacy with respect to Mexico from the end of World War Two to the early phase of the Cold War. The author, in a well-researched, complex, and informative chapter, convincingly demonstrates the significant change that occurred between the Good Neighbor policy and the Cold War era for Latin America in general and for Mexico in particular. Under the Good Neighbor paradigm the form and content of U.S. cultural policies were cautious in their approach to Mexican society, with the aim of minimizing the impact of the profound anti-Americanism of many Mexicans. (Nonetheless, the author asserts that the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 meant the end of the sympathy of progressive Mexicans for the Nazis; it would have been interesting to introduce in this picture the impact of the Spanish Civil War among Mexicans and on the relationship between Mexico and the United States). The Cold War meant that an ideological and cultural framework developed by United States in an European or Asiatic context was transferred to Latin America without attention to local circumstances. This meant also that many times the strategies envisioned in Washing-

ton clashed with the ideas of the representatives located in Mexico, as the evidence shown by Montero proves. Other times, those in charge of U.S. cultural policy in Mexico preferred to heed the directives emanating from the State Department in order to improve their opportunities in their administrative careers. One further question that the author might pose is if the different behaviors of the U.S. “cultural diplomats” in Mexico responded only to considerations about their careers or also to the arrival of “new men” not linked to the ethos of the New Deal and the Good Neighbor policy.

In the last chapter devoted to the Latin American cases, Hugo Rogelio Suppo analyzes U.S. propaganda in Brazil between 1946 and 1964. The chapter rightly notices how the United States perceived Brazilian nationalism as a threat akin to communism. Yet the author offers a somewhat confusing narrative in which the United States seems to be behind every single conspiracy and coup, but without a complex analysis of the impact and

strategy of U.S. cultural diplomacy in the country.

In the chapters devoted to the case studies of Spain and of Latin America the reader misses a dialogue across the different chapters and an attempt to establish some broad, encompassing comparisons, which would have provided a clearer picture of U.S. public diplomacy and propaganda during the period. For instance, the traditional image in Spain of United States as a “materialist” country reminds one of the image built by Rodó and other Latin American intellectuals in the early twentieth century; the evolution of conservative elites, both in Spain and in Latin America, from a position of open “anti-Americanism” to one of sympathy for the United States is another good example. Nonetheless, this book is an important contribution to our knowledge of the period and will be useful both to scholars interested in cultural issues and those interested in the history of the global Cold War.

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