

Andra B. Chastain, Timothy Lorek, eds. *Itineraries of Expertise: Science, Technology, and the Environment in Latin America (INTERSECTIONS: Histories of Environment)*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020. 366 pp. \$40.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8229-4596-3.



Reviewed by Joshua Frens-String (UT Austin)

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Commissioned by Casey M. Lurtz (Johns Hopkins University)

What events and historical processes should be considered a part of Latin America's Cold War experience? Who were the Latin American Cold War's principal protagonists? How did a decades-long standoff between the United States and Soviet Union alter the political direction and meaning of domestic struggles for development in the region, many of which predated the outbreak of that larger global conflict? In recent years, questions like these have opened up exciting new lines of historical research on twentieth-century Latin America. Historians Andra B. Chastain and Timothy W. Lorek's illuminating new edited collection, *Itineraries of Expertise: Science, Technology, and the Environment in Latin America's Long Cold War* sits squarely within this growing scholarly discussion.

The framework for Chastain and Lorek's collection follows Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph's appeal that historians of the region examine more deeply the relationship between the global Cold War and Latin America's "century of revolution"—an era Grandin and Joseph identify as running from the outbreak of the Mexican Revolu-

tion in 1910 through the civil wars in Central America in the 1980s.[1] Indeed, the case studies compiled in *Itineraries of Expertise* reaffirm the need to extend the periodization of Latin America's Cold War back to at least the 1920s. Those same articles also demonstrate the value of extending analyses of the Cold War forward by connecting the dots between the scientific work of the pre-1989 world and the new forms of knowledge that were deployed after the superpower conflict concluded.

At the same time, this valuable collection builds upon two decades of scholarship that has successfully displaced credentialed diplomats and military officials as the only protagonists of the region's Cold War.[2] In their stead, Chastain, Lorek, and their contributors recognize a wide cast of less traditional cultural and scientific actors—everyone from agronomists and veterinarians to engineers, architects, and conservationists. Together, the volume's authors show that while global Cold War dynamics frequently conditioned the production, distribution, and application of technical knowledge, more often than not "the use of sci-

ence and technology in pursuit of development transcended geopolitical divides” (p. 14).

Of equal significance, *Itineraries of Expertise* also offers a thorough reappraisal of the role that “experts” played in twentieth-century state-building processes. In this way, the collection speaks not only to those who work on Latin America, but also to scholars engaged with other parts of the Global South. In a display of intellectual dexterity, the book’s essays challenge both the universalizing tendencies of Cold War-inflected modernization theory and the dependency school of development. But the volume also pushes back against the well-intentioned critiques of technical expertise that many “post-development” scholars offered as the global Cold War drew to a close. As the volume’s co-editors recognize, “high-modernist development schemes and the experts who promoted them” did at times come into conflict with the needs and demands of local populations. But in other critical moments, the ideas of experts “aligned in unexpected ways with local worldviews” (p. 13). At a time when the world is experiencing an upswell of attacks on scientific work from a variety of corners, but especially from the global political Right, understanding the complicated processes through which nations sought, established, and disseminated technical authority is an especially relevant task, as Chastain and Lorek acknowledge in their introduction (pp. 4-5).

The development of these larger interventions unfolds in a mostly chronological manner across eleven originally researched chapters, and under four thematic banners. After Gilbert Joseph’s incisive review of the historiography on Latin America’s long, cultural Cold War, Tore Olsson, Timothy Lorek, and Mary Roldán take readers to rural modernization initiatives in the rivers, lands, and classrooms of Mexico and Colombia, illuminating what the editors refer to as the “agrarian antecedents” of Cold War-era knowledge circulation. From there, a series of essays by Reinaldo Funes-Monzote and Steven Palmer, Thomas Rath, and

Pedro Igancio Alonso and Hugo Palmarola examine novel case studies of scientific exchange, including in the livestock breeding centers of the Cuban Revolution; the foot-and-mouth laboratories of Mexico, Brazil, the United States, and the United Kingdom; and at the NASA space research facilities of Chile.

In the book’s third section, Mark Healey, Fernando Purcell, and Andra Chastain consider the transnational currents that shaped the work of architects, dam builders, and urban planners as they constructed critical aspects of the region’s built environment. Meanwhile, in the book’s last section, scholars Emily Wakild and Javiera Barandiarán explore the afterlives of Cold War expertise in the areas of wildlife conservation (in Peru) and environmental planning (in Chile). A final essay, by Eden Medina and Mark Carey, two historians of Latin America whose work engages the broader fields of science and technology studies and environmental studies, situates the book within broader conversations about science, knowledge production, and the Cold War.

A few notable patterns stand out in this valuable collection of essays, and in many cases, these patterns constitute potential points of departure for future researchers. The first is the overwhelming prominence of the countryside as a space where scientific knowledge circulated across the region. Even more than the initial site through which the Cold War “entered Latin America” and through which Latin America’s domestic struggles “entered global circulation” (p. 16), as the book’s first section suggests, the rural landscapes of the region appear as ever-present fixtures throughout the twentieth century. Future scholarship might build upon this observation by, for example, exploring more systematically how the ideas of technical experts affected not only rural space but urban spaces as well. Case studies of rural dams, home building, and agricultural modernization in its many forms beg important questions. For instance, to what extent were rural development ef-

forts meant to actually serve the needs and demands of rural populations? When and why were such efforts, in fact, meant to protect the interests of urban groups—whether by halting rural-to-urban migration, increasing urban food security, or developing new sources of electrical power for urban industrialization? And how might we distinguish between efforts to “uplift” rural populations, as opposed to simply “containing” their political power?

Put another way, many of the contributions in *Itineraries of Expertise* raise the following question: can histories of rural development in the region, particularly ones that are centered around the work of Latin American experts, be written without also exploring the different forms of spatial inequality that such work at times challenged but in other moments reproduced? By extension, we might also ask if a history of the more technically inclined “hard sciences,” which are the primary focus of this volume, can be written without also engaging with a history of the social sciences, and in particular disciplines like sociology and economics from which many of the assumptions about “development” first emerged in the twentieth century.

A second theme that runs throughout this excellent collection relates to the nature of the transnational networks of expertise. In Mexico (as described in Olsson and Rath’s respective articles), in Chile (as described by Purcell), and in Colombia (as described by Roldán), we see the familiar faces of US technical experts—even if, as the authors rightly point out, the old notion that knowledge always flowed unidirectionally from an industrialized US to a static, underdeveloped Latin America does not match the historical record. But what stands out even more in *Itineraries of Expertise* are the lesser-known transnational actors. In exploring agricultural development in Colombia, Lorek, for example, shows that it was not the mainland US but rather its colonial subject, Puerto Rico, that became a hub of agrarian exchange for

Colombian agricultural modernizers like Ciro Molina Garcés. (Lorek also points out that Catholic humanist tendencies focused on establishing harmony with, not domination of, the natural world influenced the Colombian agronomist’s vision of a green revolution).

Similarly, in Cuba, as described by Funes-Monzote and Palmer, it is not Cuba’s Cold War ally, the Soviet Union, that provided technical assistance to the revolution’s new dairy sector, but rather Canada, a country which, like Mexico, walked the narrow passageways between the world’s two superpowers as the inter-American Cold War intensified. What is more, Funes-Monzote and Palmer point out that the “impetus for this partnership” came not from the Canadians but from the Cubans themselves (p. 138). Finally, in Chastain’s chapter on Santiago’s underground subway system, we see how French engineers acted as interlocutors for Chilean urban planners—though as Chastain again emphasizes, “this was not a story of foreign experts parachuting in and ignoring local needs” (p. 238). Numerous international and inter-American agencies also stand out as key facilitators of technical exchange in this collection. Among them are the Organization of American States-backed Centro Interamericano de Vivienda y Planeamiento (CINVA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Identifying these less-studied paths through which knowledge moved is a critically important contribution, and once again, it opens up important doors for future researchers.

Indeed, for historians of the Americas, the volume’s ability to use the history of science, technology, and the environment to restore agency and ideas to both Latin America and other non-US, non-Soviet actors complements recent international histories of the region that have similarly revealed the agency (and at times autonomy) of countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico as

they pursued their own political and economic interests and built their own alliances, beyond the US and USSR.[3] In this sense, *Itineraries of Expertise* not only further disrupts the conventional view that the mid-twentieth-century world was neatly divided into two geopolitical poles; it also presents compelling ways for historians to stitch transnational approaches to twentieth-century Latin America, many of which emerged out of the “cultural turn,” back together with more traditional political and economic approaches to the region’s international history.

Joshua Frens-String is an assistant professor of Latin American history at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of Hungry for Revolution: The Politics of Food and the Making of Modern Chile, forthcoming from University of California Press in 2021.

Notes

[1]. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, eds., *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counter-insurgent Violence during Latin America’s Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[2]. For example, Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[3]. For example, Ariel Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977-1984* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997); Tanya Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Renata Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

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