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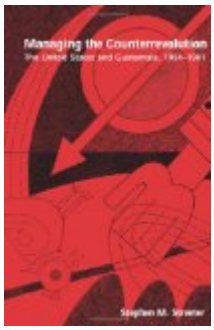
Stephen M. Streeter. *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961.* Ohio University Center for International Studies. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000. xv + 384 pp. $30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-89680-215-5.



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What Came Next: Building a Guatemalan Dictatorship after 1954

For forty years, scholars in the United States and from throughout Latin America have written about the United States, Guatemala and the coup d'etat of 1954 that overthrew Jacobo Arbenz. That episode has come to be understood by scholars and others as the archetypal extreme of American imperialism in the Americas. This apogee of American intervention was particularly egregious for its combination of the CIA-sparked coup, the overwhelming power of an American multinational (United Fruit) in a small Central American nation, and the high level ties between the multinational and Washington policy makers. That combination underscored the force of U.S. domination in the Americas, even if the coup represented a far more dramatic level of American force and dominance than in most cases of U.S.-Latin American conflict. For years, the decade that followed 1954 marked a historical postscript to the coup, an understudied anti-climax that simply confirmed the worst of what investigators understood about the devastating effects of dictatorship and United States imperialism. Stephen M. Streeter has corrected our limited understanding of 1950s Guatemala and U.S.-Guatemalan relations in an outstanding analysis of what came after the coup. In light of what we know about U.S.-Latin American relations between 1954 and 1961, there is little here that will surprise readers. This is a familiar story of frustrated social and political reform in a Latin American country, military thugs, elite politics of corruption and brutal repression, fierce American anti-communism, and the crucial U.S. role in building a violent state authoritarianism in Latin America. It is a story that Streeter tells compellingly and has researched exceptionally well.

Streeter's goal is not to offer a new analysis of PBSUCCESS, the CIA's covert attack on the Arbenz government. That ground has been well covered. He does provide a good overview of the decade-long period of political, social and economic reforms that helped transform Guatemala after 1944 and that made Jacobo Arbenz's government intolerable to Washington. *Managing the Counterrevolution* shows remarkable research and atten-

tion to detail on how the U.S. government structured its relations with Guatemalan authorities in the 1950s, reacted to perceived communist threats, and orchestrated a ferocious repression of left-of-center political activity. Streeter covers United States Information Agency (USIA) propaganda efforts to convince Guatemalans that they would live better in a "free" society. He also discusses the problems the State Department had in dealing with a mainstream American press that grew more and more suspicious of the post-1954 repression in Guatemala. On American propaganda and U.S. efforts to influence organized labor politics in Guatemala, Streeter provides important new material and analysis. There is some attention to Guatemalan popular culture in the context of U.S. intervention, Guatemalan labor politics, and the response to the rise of the right. The study would have benefited from a still greater focus on student protest, military politics, social movements and other aspects of Guatemalan history in the shadow of Eisenhower administration interventions.

Streeter does extremely well in his consideration of the corruption of high-level political power in Guatemala through U.S. influence. He provides a fascinating assessment, for example, of how Americans tried to influence President Miguel Ydigoras, with only limited success. During a visit to Washington in early 1958, Ydigoras tried to suggest that his administration would be politically progressive. He would promote economic growth (with the help of as yet uncommitted U.S. financial aid) and would allow the return of communist exiles. He also made clear that he had a less rigid and all-encompassing definition of Guatemalan communists than did Americans observing Guatemalan politics. But on the return of communist exiles, Ydigoras was less progressive than he was intent on keeping his political enemies on the left close by, so as to make certain that the political movements they represented did not become too powerful. Ydigoras, in fact, became more and more authoritarian and repressive over the next two years to the point that American officials became concerned that he might provoke a nationalist backlash that could in turn open the door for a return of the left to government. In the end, though, despite its reservations, the U.S. government found more in Ydigoras that they liked than they disliked. In spite of Ydigoras's corruption and his tendency to generate opposition among university students and others on the left, the Americans backed his creation of what Streeter calls a strong counterinsurgency state. Between 1958 and 1960, as part of a larger set of policies that tied military assistance to anti-communism in the Americas, Guatemala received $300,000 in military aid from the United States and the same amount to combat counterinsurgency. This latter funding went for material to counter riots, as well as unspecified funds to train internal security forces. In 1958, when Guatemala threatened to attack Belize and Mexico, the United States withheld military aid. Once that danger was gone, the Eisenhower administration used military aid to fight internal political dissent in Guatemala.

This is powerful indictment of how American Cold War obsessions with communism helped create a deadly Guatemalan authoritarianism. In the end, though, it is not clear that Streeter manages to square an important theoretical circle. Hegemony theory in the writings of Robert W. Cox, Thomas J. McCormick, and Bruce Cummings are at the core of this analysis. For Streeter, a conceptual framework of hegemony helps explain a range of problems that include the nature of American anti-communism in Guatemala, the imperative to overthrow Arbenz and to manage the rightist counterrevolution that followed, and the clashes between the U.S. government and corporate interests, sometimes at odds on policy. Beginning with his theoretical emphasis on hegemony, the author is concerned with not reflecting a view from Washington. He succeeds arguing effectively, for example, and as a gentle admonishment of those who have not done so, that to understand the 1954 intervention and its consequences, it is

essential to understand U.S. action from a Guatemalan history perspective. But if this understanding of Guatemalan history is crucial, to what extent does it matter that Streeter was not able to make use of many archival sources from Guatemala? This question should not be read as a criticism of Streeter's research or analytical skills. In fact, his Gramscian approach to U.S. imperialism may well have led the author to precisely this set of qualms. Guatemalan primary sources clearly do not exist or are not accessible in a manner equivalent to what is available in the United States.

If we apply a Gramscian model of hegemony to U.S. intervention in Guatemala--as Streeter does--does ***Managing the Counterrevolution*** not in the end reflect the hegemonic power under scrutiny? Does the inability to access Guatemalan primary sources not, in fact, shape what becomes a component of the hegemonic literature on the subject? In the absence of Guatemalan archival sources and in the context of the resulting imbalance of how and where knowledge on this problem set emerges, to what extent does Streeter's analysis reflect what hegemony implies--the diffusion of one concept of historical reality? One example of why the application of a hegemonic discourse to the book itself may matter comes in our understanding of Guatemalan military politics, governance, and repression. On the whole, Streeter views the officer corps as incompetent. He draws his information from the analysis of American officials. But if, as he also argues, Americans frequently got it wrong on Guatemala, can he assume that they got it right on the incompetence of Guatemalan repressors, or on an analysis that assesses the military on the basis of competence or incompetence? There are very few Guatemalan sources on which the author draws to analyze the lethal or bureaucratic effectiveness of the armed forces. Yet his conclusion is immensely important to the overall analysis because it helps explain his argument that Americans managed the post-1954 counterrevolution in Guatemala. Is it possible that Guatemalan sources--oral or written--might give or might have given a different perspective on the strength and independence of the 1950s Guatemalan military as repressors, thereby altering the role of the United States in that repression?

Whatever the answer, Streeter's probing consideration of this episode in U.S.-Latin American relations shows an unmitigated disaster for Guatemala. The Eisenhower administration fought what it believed was communism by promoting ineffectual liberal development strategies, by providing inadequate aid, by training and arming the Guatemalan military, and by priming corruption in Guatemalan politics. Poverty skyrocketed during the 1950s, dictatorial repression became entrenched, and resistance to the new order was smashed. Streeter shows expertly that Guatemalan leaders negotiated some freedom of action, essential in the contexts of their own local power politics and an ongoing undercurrent of anti-American nationalism, provided that they followed the essential lines of U.S. economic and strategic policies in their country. Streeter demonstrates that the State Department's exaggeration and oversimplification of a supposed communist menace helped create conditions for a decades-long civil war in Guatemala that resulted in the deaths of as many as 200,000 unarmed Guatemalans after 1960. ***Managing the Counterrevolution*** is fascinating and essential reading.

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