

WRITING INSURRECTION: U.S. LITERATURE AND THE POLITICS OF  
LATIN AMERICAN INTERVENTION, 1898 to 2010

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

Stories of defiant rebels, leering dictators, and wretched refugees have defined Latin America for U.S. audiences during the twentieth century. Most scholars assume that these narratives reinforce the conventional rhetoric of Latin brutality that justifies U.S. imperialism, but my dissertation reveals that an array of writers told such stories to undermine state power, contest military intervention, and to urge American readers to intercede for hemispheric human rights. In chapters devoted to the 1910 Mexican Revolution, the 1959 Cuban Revolution, and the Central American “dirty wars” of the 1970s and ‘80s, my dissertation studies popular print culture alongside canonical Anglo and Latina/o authors to illuminate the vital place of Latin America in U.S. culture and to understand how writers and intellectuals intervene in international politics.

The introduction situates my critical methods among those of current hemispheric scholars. Many have focused on the imperial narratives of fear and desire that characterize U.S. literature in the nineteenth century, but my research turns to the twentieth century to explore the cultural affinity and exchange that defy U.S. imperial aggression. To investigate this disconnect, I turn to the rhetoric of news writers and the narrative of fiction authors during the Spanish-American War. In 1898, the U.S. government frames its intervention in Cuba’s revolt as democratic resistance to Spanish tyranny. Richard Harding Davis and Stephen Crane emerge as ambassadors of revolution and translators of Latin American difference. Their popular journalism and fictional texts establish everyday Americans as guardians of Latin American freedom and plenitude.

The three chapters that follow also demonstrate how journalists and literary writers wield their power as U.S. subjects and citizens to support rebellion among Latin Americans threatened

by U.S. empire. Chapter 1 studies the Wilson-era writers who codify Mexico's people and politics for American audiences during and after the Mexican Revolution. In contrast to the U.S.'s pro-revolutionary policy during the Spanish-American War, during the Mexican Revolution powerful American politicians and commercial magnates support the dictator Porfirio Díaz and threaten military incursion to defend U.S. interests against poor and working-class "rebels." Journalists John Turner and John Reed and fiction writers Katherine Anne Porter and María Cristina Mena deploy progressive rhetoric to undermine armed interventionism. These writers champion Mexico's revolutionaries and hope that literature can inspire democratic fraternity between workers in both the U.S. and Mexico, even as entrenched racial hierarchies compromise their hopes for a republican Mexico.

Chapter 2 examines the cultural production surrounding the Cuban Revolution. U.S. covert operations in Cuba, made intensely public in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, galvanize an array of literary expressions in which the U.S. presence in Cuba is represented as clandestine and nefarious. Famous British author Graham Greene and the American political novelist John Kenneth Galbraith publish conspiracy thrillers that expose the imbrication of empires in the Caribbean. Public intellectuals such as Waldo Frank praise Fidel Castro's great experiment, and Cuban-American journalist and fiction writer Jose Yglesias humanizes rural Cubans under Castro in his memoir *In the Fist of the Revolution* (1968). My chapter points to a rich but under-examined revolutionary literature in the U.S. I also explore the uncertainty that plagued U.S.-Cuban relations in the early 1960s, suggesting that anxiety over the limits of U.S. power in the hemisphere motivates both covert military intervention in the burgeoning Central American Crisis and widespread protest of U.S. incursion in Latin America's political affairs.

My third chapter addresses how U.S. writers influence American public involvement in the Central American Crisis. Following the 1954 CIA-backed coup in Guatemala and the triumph of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979, journalists such as Joan Didion, the poet Carolyn Forché, and political novelist Robert Stone represent atrocity in Central America as evidence of the failure of U.S. neoliberal ideals. Resisting the popular conception of the region as the tropical breeding ground for corrupt guerillas and faceless indigenous migrants, their works contest such vexed stereotypes of Latin American identity to condemn U.S. economic and political expansion. Their arguments inspire public condemnation of Reagan's actions in the 1979 Salvadoran military coup and civil war.

Chapter 4 concludes my project with a comparative study of Latina/o literary production in the wake of a century of hemispheric political violence. Some of the most influential contemporary writers, including Cristina García, Sandra Cisneros, Achy Obejas, Héctor Tobar, and Francisco Goldman identify these conflicts as the source of modern race and gender relations in the U.S. Their counter-histories recover the cultural and political consequences of Latin American revolt and U.S. interventionism for the hemisphere. While officially authorized narratives have suppressed U.S. support for counterrevolution and terrorism, these texts uncover the discourses that have produced the migrant subject and the racial tropes that now dominate U.S. representations of Latin America.

My project contributes to current scholarship in American Studies and hemispheric literature by rethinking the disciplinary boundaries that separate genres and limit our objects of analysis. Tracing what Walter Mignolo calls the "idea of Latin America" from the Spanish-American War to today, my work reveals the common conversations that have inspired a century

of cultural expression and the conventional wisdom that continues to structure American attitudes toward the global South.

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## Introduction

During the fall of 1898, the United States celebrated its victory in the Spanish-American War with a series of “peace jubilees.” Hosted by several cities, among them Atlanta, Philadelphia, New York, and Washington D.C., the jubilees reaffirmed the U.S. people’s shared commitment to decolonization and democracy in Latin America (a paradox, given the imperial implications of the conflict). The Chicago Peace Jubilee in October featured an array of distinguished speakers, including then-President William McKinley and African-American intellectual and activist Booker T. Washington. Both orators urged the U.S. public to turn its attention to the hemispheric future; they predicted that the war’s resolution would shape the shared destinies of the U.S. and Latin America.

In the aftermath of battles fought on foreign soil, in terrible heat, amidst outbreaks of disease, and with inadequate supplies, the imperial promise of wealth and power offered by the acquisition of Spain’s former colonies lost much of its luster. As reports circulate about the suffering of U.S. troops and the likelihood of rebellion against U.S. occupation, McKinley argues that “duty determines destiny,” and thus projects that “freeing Cuba from its oppressors” will inevitably influence the political and moral futures of the U.S. as a nation (218).<sup>1</sup> McKinley posits an ethics of intervention in which the U.S., by entering and winning the war with Spain, has undertaken responsibility for the well being of its former colonies. How the U.S. comports itself under the weight of its obligations, for McKinley, will determine whether the nation progresses “toward a higher and nobler civilization” (219).

Washington, in contrast, focuses on the ethics of the war to argue for African-American citizenship rights, describing “how the negro faced death and laid down his life in defence of honor and humanity” (331). He cites the participation of black soldiers in the Spanish-American War as proof of blacks’ capacity to take on both the rights and the responsibilities of U.S.

citizenship, while warning that the U.S. people's failure to conquer their own racial prejudices will be "a cancer gnawing at the heart of this Republic that shall one day prove as dangerous as an attack from an army" (332). In short, Washington hopes that the humanitarian mission of the war will translate to justice for oppressed peoples within the nation-state. He presents a vision of revolutionary Cuba as a model for the U.S., uniting black and white soldiers under the banner of Cuban liberation. Like McKinley, he contends that the peace and prosperity of the U.S. hinge on its willingness to pursue its democratic ideals both within and beyond its borders.

The prophecies of these two political icons allude to the stakes of representing the U.S. as part of "the Americas." As this study demonstrates, many arbiters of public opinion, like McKinley and Washington, posit moral and affective bonds between the U.S. and Latin America that exceed the imperial interests of expansionist politicians and industrialists. I explore how such discourses envision and invite an ethical engagement with Latin America, especially during periods of revolution and political unrest. Political writers such as journalists, public intellectuals, poets, and novelists situate the U.S. public as vital members of the hemispheric community and craft transnational rhetorics that call on this imagined American people to align their democratic values with the revolutionary struggles of Latin Americans against oppressive regimes and U.S. neocolonialism.<sup>2</sup> Scholars such as Amy Kaplan, Gretchen Murphy, and Louis Pérez have uncovered how, during the Spanish-American War, narratives of righteous intervention in which the U.S. would "rescue" Cuba from the decadent Spanish empire reinforced or occluded U.S. imperial interests.<sup>3</sup> My study, however, shows how an array of writers used discourses of transnational belonging, responsibility, and alliance to contest the imperial and interventionist practices of the U.S. in Latin America, revealing the disparity between the ethics and ideals of the American public and the interests of its government officials and policymakers.

Political writers use affective terms, images, and narratives to describe and model an ethics of transnational commitment. Foreign correspondents fixate on the poverty of indigenous and working peoples and the valor of revolutionaries, contending that their plights should stir outrage among Americans committed to liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty. Often the first to record and interpret Latin American contexts and conflicts, sympathetic journalists portray themselves as cultural translators who can observe and interpret the unfamiliar customs and traditions of Latin peoples. Moreover, reporters model a principled U.S. interventionism that opposes the armed incursion of the U.S. military and the nefarious intrusion of commercial and political elites. By highlighting their own ethical bonds to Latin America, journalists endeavor to exemplify how everyday Americans can expose injustice and fight for human rights for the hemisphere.

Similarly, poets and writers of political fiction publish affecting portraits of Latin American peoples in an effort to incite public support for their struggles. Yet literary expressions also interrogate the terms (both lexical and practical) of U.S. engagement with foreign cultures. Literary writers probe the empiricist discourses of journalism, history, and political nonfiction to expose the complex power dynamics, competing interests, and clandestine negotiations that reporters cannot observe or verify. Poets and novelists also question their own role in perpetuating the violence and inequality they aim to combat. Despite their different positions and premises, however, this array of political writers shares a utopian vision for the hemispheric future, proposing that texts themselves offer a moral medium for transnationalism.<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, this analysis reappraises the relationship between U.S. imperialism and discourses of intervention, demonstrating how the transnational rhetoric of revolution bridges cultural and ethnic difference, undermines the institutional power of nation-states, and challenges disparate subjects to collaborate in the common pursuit of hemispheric human rights. Chapters

on the 1910 Mexican Revolution and the 1959 Cuban Revolution explore this fraught relation between writers and policymakers by studying journalists (such as John Reed and Herbert Matthews) and fiction writers (such as María Cristina Mena and Jose Yglesias) who laud Latin American insurrections, defend rebel leaders like Pancho Villa and Fidel Castro, and urge everyday Americans to picture themselves as members of a hemispheric community that opposes the tyranny of both Latin American and U.S. regimes. Turning to more contemporary contexts, I then examine the Central American crisis of the 1970s and '80s to suggest that key authors like Robert Stone, Joan Didion, and Carolyn Forché interrogate discourses of U.S. transnationalism, revealing how humanitarian rhetoric obscures atrocity. In doing so, these writers suggest that although literature cannot save Central America, it can expose and document the complicity of the U.S. in political violence. My final chapter compares Chicana author Sandra Cisneros, Cuban Americans Cristina García and Achy Obejas, and Guatemalan American Francisco Goldman, whose novels envision how Latina/os participate in transnational communities to navigate the contradictions of hemispheric belonging and to restore its democratic promise.

To lend context to this literary and cultural history, I examine U.S. discourses of revolutionary hemispherism within the historical context of U.S. imperialism, whose advocates within and outside of the national government endorsed dictatorship and state-sponsored oppression in Latin America throughout the twentieth century. I explain how a variety of writers have developed transnational rhetorics in response to this political climate and intervene within a larger national conversation about the role of the U.S. in the hemisphere and beyond. Finally, I outline the trajectory of this dissertation, suggesting how each of its parts contribute to burgeoning Hemispheric American Studies as the field aims to better situate the U.S. within the intricate political, cultural, economic, and historical matrix of the Americas.<sup>5</sup>

## Political Writing and the Discourse of Transnationalism

Since the inception of the “Latino Boom” in the 1980s, historical fiction has become a dominant mode for Latina/os (and other writers of color), whose multi-generational family sagas chronicle histories of revolution and dictatorship and sketch their ongoing legacies for contemporary Latina/o communities. These writers call for a new mode of hemispheric scholarship that connects their voices—not only to each other, or even to their mutual critique of U.S. imperialism—but to a national literary dialogue about the contradictory relationship between U.S. policies of intervention and the people affected by those policies (in the States and beyond). Some of the same revolutions and conflicts that capture the imaginations of Latina/o writers also dominated U.S. headlines for years, even decades, and inspired thousands of news articles, political treatises, stories, poems, and novels; these visions of transamerican history and community anticipate those of contemporary Latina/o writers.

The 1910 Mexican Revolution, the 1959 Cuban Revolution, and the Central American Crisis of the 1970s and ‘80s each began as popular uprisings against authoritarianism. In each case, U.S. military intervention worked against the interests of rebels and civilians, fracturing the popular “narrative of rescue” that guided U.S. attitudes toward Cuba during the Spanish-American War. The result, in the pages of print media, was a heated, longstanding, and recurring debate about how (or *if*) the U.S. should intercede and what individual citizens could do to spur their government.<sup>6</sup> This ethical debate reveals these how these writers project their alienation from U.S. state power onto Latin American struggles, often with productive results. Popular journalists and other writers express sympathy and solidarity with peoples subject to state violence, resisting the presumption of Latin inferiority that has long characterized official policy.<sup>7</sup>

The transnational histories uncovered by so many Latina/o authors build on the groundwork laid by twentieth-century print media. During these political flashpoints, popular journalists question U.S. military intervention and imagine alternatives that they believe better suit the democratic values long considered integral to the U.S. nation.<sup>8</sup> Some commentators base their claims on liberal tenets such as individual rights, industrial and commercial development, and free elections. Leftist writers focus more on advancing human rights, autonomy, and opportunity for indigenous communities and working classes, and remedying the uneven development wrought by U.S. economic imperialism, but despite their different ideologies, these public thinkers agree that U.S. people can honorably engage and promote progress in Latin America.<sup>9</sup> Writers of political nonfiction and popular authors pick up these narratives of ethical interventionism, contending that literature itself can serve as a vital forum for transnational political engagement and may even influence U.S. foreign policy by rallying the U.S. people to join their public protest.

When selecting exemplary literature for this study, I have included texts based on their political and cultural interventions rather than choosing on the basis of genre. Many of the authors who participate in debates about Latin America use multiple genres. John Reed, Katherine Anne Porter, John Kenneth Galbraith, Jose Yglesias, Joan Didion, Carolyn Forché, Cristina García, Achy Obejas, and Francisco Goldman have all written both fiction and nonfiction. Most of these writers even worked as journalists, covering the same conflicts that appear in their stories and novels. Thus the generic line between fiction and nonfiction, rather than a principle of inclusion, adds dimension to my larger argument about the pivotal and multifarious role of print media in imagining the revolutionary hemisphere and modeling transnational engagement for U.S. audiences.

I classify the body of texts I constellate here as “political writing,” and borrow from Anthony Hutchison’s practical definition of its usefulness: “As opposed, then, to the perennial focus of contemporary critics on the politics of representation (in which every fictional text inevitably has a stake), my concern here [is with texts] that explicitly seek to *represent politics*” (xvii).<sup>10</sup> As Hutchison explains, political and literary cultures have always informed and challenged one another. I explore writers whose journalism, short and long fiction, and popular nonfiction represent hemispheric politics and imagine how U.S. subjects can influence them. This expansive sense of “U.S. literature” captures a debate that took place for the benefit of distinct, but interconnected, publics: readers of newspapers and magazines, followers of political fiction, nonfiction, and the imagined constituents of presidents and policymakers.

The writers I study staged this debate on multiple fronts in order to shape an ethical hemispheric consciousness. This is “transnationalism” at its best: these writers deploy the power of U.S. citizenship in the interest of a hemispheric community.<sup>11</sup> Thus, this archive also coheres in its emphasis on futurity. Because all of these writers are invested in representing politics, their texts examine potentialities, dangers, and possibilities. Such texts envision the prospective consequences of past, present, and future interventions by agents of the state and empower individual Americans to affect those futures.

### **Revolution and Empire in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Print Culture**

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century discourses of transnationalism have built on the foundation laid by political writers during the revolutionary age of the Americas (roughly 1776-1898). In the nineteenth century, many in the U.S. saw Latin America as both vitally important and exceptionally dangerous. By 1823, many of the colonies held by France, Spain, and Portugal in the New World had declared independence, and that year’s Monroe Doctrine famously articulates U.S. national investment in and support for the decolonization of Latin America.<sup>12</sup>

The Monroe Doctrine characterizes the dual discourse of right and responsibility that heads of state like McKinley would later invoke. Yet the burgeoning culture of revolution in Latin America made its way into U.S. headlines as the violent chaos of lawless savages. Historian Lester Langley identifies how “From Mexico to Argentina, reports of U.S. agents or travelers were filled with tales of plunder, anarchy, disorder. A U.S. emissary to Buenos Aires in 1832 solemnly reported, ‘There is here neither law or liberty—no sense of national honor or national justice or national dignity’” (211). Such assertions, made official on the pages of government documents and national newspapers, reinforce the popular sentiment that the U.S. must bring its national purpose and progress to its unruly southern brethren.

Another watershed moment in the advent of U.S. empire was the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848). Following the defeat of Mexico and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the U.S. annexed a large portion of Mexico’s northwestern territory and established its military dominance of the hemisphere. Furthermore, the war served to consolidate U.S. national identity in opposition to the supposed inferiority of Mexico. Shelley Streeby underscores this point in *American Sensations* when she writes: “During the war, formulations of a fictive, unifying, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ national identity were disseminated in sensational newspapers, songbooks, novelettes, story papers, and other cheap reading material. Through this popular literature, a heterogeneous assortment of people imagined themselves a nation, staging their unity against the imagined disunity of Mexico, which was repeatedly called a ‘falso nation’ in the penny press” (39). Streeby echoes Benedict Anderson in her sense that popular print culture does important nation-building work, but she also identifies how representations of Mexico’s foreignness helped bolster a national sense of self.<sup>13</sup>

The twin discourses of imperial privilege and duty emerged forcefully in debates about the newly acquired Mexican territory. One instructive voice in this debate is Edward Deering

Mansfield, whose history *The Mexican War* (1848) attempts to predict the hemispheric—even global—consequences of U.S. victory. Written within months of the war’s conclusion, the history registers the U.S. public’s uncertainty about what has been won in this skirmish: “The gain may be stated, in general terms, as the provinces of New Mexico and New California. But what are these? Who knows them? Who can estimate them? Taken as so much surface of the earth, this is a vast space; but a space absolutely hid from the eyes of civilization—an untrodden, untenanted wilderness!” (349).<sup>14</sup> Mansfield finds the rewards of the war much less quantifiable than the costs: he provides neat tables and detailed lists to establish exactly the financial losses and human casualties incurred by the U.S., and he worries that most of the acquired area will prove unsuitable for settlement. Yet the history’s conclusion also imagines the new territory’s potential for the U.S., and thus, for humankind:

[T]here is a future value which may not now be counted, in the fine ports and broad coast which look out on the noble Pacific. Beyond that live four hundred millions of the human race. Soon their minds, as well as their commerce and their kingdoms, will be open to the purer and brighter light of Christianity. We shall hurry the men and the produce of our land, in mighty railroads to the Pacific! Great cities we shall have there! Nations will come to us, and we shall go to them! And this continent will be the highway for the multitudes of the world, and the glorious light of Christian Progress! (350)

Mansfield’s example clearly advances the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, but this passage also illuminates the moral duty that follows on the heels of imperial expansion. Punctuated with exclamation points, Mansfield’s writing issues a promise to bring the entwined gifts of commerce and Christianity to the conquered territory and, through it, to the world beyond. Mansfield’s troubling erasure of the Mexican and indigenous peoples who “tenant” the territory

reinforces his claim that Mexico is little more than a gateway to new markets and resources, but just as his Christian mission justifies the losses incurred by the war, so does it challenge the burgeoning U.S. empire to live up to its promise as a new kind of world power, an ethical empire.

Following the U.S.-Mexican War, many powerful Americans hoped to annex further Latin American territories. For example, Presidents Polk and Pierce offered to purchase Cuba from Spain (in 1848 and 1854), and policymakers and public writers debated the problems and possibilities of Cuban annexation throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. A variety of government officials, including President Grant, also sought to annex Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic) several times during the 1850s, '60s, and '70s. Concurrent with and in opposition to official efforts, private militaries went on filibustering expeditions to promote rebellion and capture territory in countries such as Mexico, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Cuba. The period's famous filibusters (such as William Walker and John O'Sullivan, who coined the term "Manifest Destiny") provoked a mixed response among the print media. As Rodrigo Lazo points out, some represented filibusters as seedy mercenaries and pirates, but their exploits also inspired enthusiastic reports and sensational novels because many "saw in the filibusters the romantic spirit of an age when the United States appeared destined to overtake the continent" (6).<sup>15</sup> The filibusters' popularity relied on the presumption that U.S. governance would be as beneficial to Latin America as Latin America's natural resources and trade routes would be to the U.S. Opposition to annexation and filibustering came alternately from anti-imperialists (such as exiled Cuban revolutionary José Martí) and from xenophobes who feared that Latin America's racial and cultural difference would taint the U.S.<sup>16</sup>

In short, long before its 1898 military intervention in the Cuban War of Independence, the U.S. cultivated ties to Latin America that established the political, economic, and cultural

conditions for the discourse of hemispherism that has evolved in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At the turn of the century, diverse portraits of Latin America circulated in the U.S. public sphere. Policymakers announced and implemented new ventures in the south, especially in pursuit of a transoceanic canal that would connect the Atlantic to the Pacific and give the U.S. control over a vital global trade route (a dream that would manifest in the Panama Canal, completed in 1914). In response to these political conversations, literary giants such as Richard Harding Davis and O. Henry portray Latin America as a land of intrigue, instability, and opportunity—a space that draws brave frontiersmen and nefarious mercenaries alike. Journalists diligently issue reports of myriad Latin revolutions and uprisings. Travel writers laud the tropical beauty of the region but worry about the radical alterity of indigenous culture and the dissipated legacy of the Spanish empire.

The nineteenth century saw broad popular support for imperial expansion and military intervention, frequently justified by these appeals to the moral exceptionalism of the U.S. nation-state.<sup>17</sup> The 1898 Spanish-American War built on this array of narratives, but the strong ethical bent of political writers before and during U.S. military involvement in Cuba created the conditions for a new rhetoric of intervention, one that used democratic principles long ingrained in the U.S. national self-conception to argue against the misuse of its power by agents of the state. During the war itself, however, the interests of empire and the moral duty of the U.S. people seemed perfectly aligned. Theodore Roosevelt, then a prominent statesman and a key voice in the Department of the Navy, found his purpose in the war and won fame and the vice presidency as a result. As Roosevelt succinctly states in *The Rough Riders* (1902), “I had preached, with all the fervor and zeal I possessed, our duty to intervene in Cuba, and to take this opportunity of driving the Spaniard from the Western World. Now that my party had come to power, I felt it incumbent on me, by word and deed, to do all I could to secure the carrying out of

the policy in which I so heartily believed” (1). Throughout his account, Roosevelt assumes that his readers will understand *why* the U.S. must oust Spain from Latin America. Literary scholar María DeGuzmán offers a lucid account of the long history of antipathy between the U.S. and Spain, one result of which is that many in the U.S. equated old-world empires with tyranny and cultural decadence.<sup>18</sup> Roosevelt relies on those prejudices, but he also presupposes the necessity of U.S. intervention to the future of democracy in Cuba.

At the outbreak of the latest Cuban rebellion in 1895, Richard Harding Davis and Stephen Crane were among the first correspondents to represent the conflict for the U.S. public. Both write in sensational detail about acts of cowardice and atrocity perpetrated by Spanish troops, as well as about the poverty and desperation of the Cuban people. Richard Harding Davis urges principled intervention by the U.S. government, first in his letters from Cuba to the *New York Journal* and later in his collection *Cuba in War Time* (1898):

The matter lies at the door of Congress. Each day's delay means the death of hundreds of people, every hour sees fresh blood spilled, and more houses and more acres of crops sinking into ashes. A month's delay means the loss to this world of thousands of lives, the unchecked growth of terrible diseases, and the spreading devastation of a great plague. It would be an insult to urge political reasons, or the sure approval of the American people which the act of interference would bring, or any other unworthy motive. No European power dare interfere, and it lies with the United States and with her people to give the signal. If it is given now it will save thousands of innocent lives; if it is delayed just that many people will perish. (140-143)

Davis, like so many other transnational writers, foresees a hemispheric future replete with either cooperation and prosperity or neglect and catastrophe. He expertly aligns the humanitarian

impulse of the “American people” with the political interests of Congress, and he flatters both by citing the power of the United States to “save thousands of innocent lives.” Davis presages the many journalists and politicians who would call on public sympathy for and investment in Latin American decolonization to garner support for the rebel cause in Cuba. Indeed, since Davis’s book version appeared on shelves just after the U.S. invasion, it included an interactive map of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, with the following directions: “Cut out the flags on the margins and run a pin through the left end of each. Follow the war news carefully each day, and pin a flag through the cities as they are held or captured by the respective armies.” The map, like the text’s many graphic illustrations, adds a concrete visual reference for an offshore struggle that must have seemed distant and foreign to many Americans. Furthermore, the map asks readers to invest themselves in the daily movements of armies and the territories lost and won in the war. Pinning the U.S. flag to colorful island regions with exotic names, Davis’s readers could participate in the conquest, claiming these faraway regions for democracy.

Stephen Crane’s most famous dispatches, written after U.S. intervention in 1898, also imagine a moral mission that unites the U.S. public with soldiers in the field. He details the heroic deeds of U.S. generals and troops against the criminally crafty Spanish. He even compares the U.S. troops to their Cuban counterparts, bemoaning that the Cubans cannot live up to the ideal exemplified by U.S. soldiers:

To put it shortly, both officers and privates have the most lively contempt for the Cubans. They despise them. They came down here expecting to fight side by side with an ally, but this ally has done little but stay in the rear and eat army rations, manifesting an indifference to the cause of Cuban liberty which could not be exceeded by some one who had never heard of it... As a matter of fact, the Cuban soldier, ignorant as only such isolation as has been his can make him, does not

appreciate the ethics of the situation... The American soldier, however, thinks of himself often as a disinterested benefactor, and he would like the Cubans to play up to the ideal now and then. (1009-1010)<sup>19</sup>

Crane disparages the weakness of the insurgents, never connecting the conditions of near-starvation under which they've been fighting with their current enthusiasm for rations, and never demonstrating any sense of Cuban ambivalence or antipathy toward U.S. incursion. Instead, he suggests that U.S. forces, with their internationalist consciousness, must guide Cuba's people to the "liberty" of which they seem so ignorant.

By appealing to the U.S. public to support the war's causes and its consequences, dispatches by Davis and Crane establish everyday Americans as guardians of Latin American freedom and plenitude. Because they employ multiple generic modes, including journalism, fiction, and poetry, these writers also emerge as important ambassadors of revolution and translators of Latin American difference. Their style of reportage, in which the journalist becomes a principal character in the story of faraway war, exemplifies a mode of transnational engagement distinct from both military and commercial incursion. War correspondents such as Crane and Davis expose oppression and reinforce basic tenets of democracy: free in speech and highly mobile, they embody a mode of transnationalism ostensibly free from the mercenary self-interest of politicians and magnates.

### **Interventionism in the Hemispheric "American Century"**

Transnationalism is shaped by catastrophe.<sup>20</sup> Because foreign correspondents have played such a key role in mediating the U.S. popular conception of Latin America, this conception has overwhelmingly centered on political conflict. In the twentieth century, revolution and civil war in the region animate innumerable transnational texts by as many political writers. Reporters and commentators inundate newspapers and magazines with ethnographic histories of the regions

under fire and forecasts about the outcomes of the conflicts and their significance for the U.S. Bound fiction and nonfiction books about Latin America, produced more slowly than journalism and propaganda, inevitably respond to their portraits of the climate of unrest among the U.S.'s "southern neighbors."

In this context, advocates of the "American Century" have used transnational discourses of democratic duty to articulate the stakes of U.S. global power.<sup>21</sup> That duty seemed particularly pressing in the case of Latin America, which the Monroe Doctrine and its 1903 Roosevelt Corollary have identified as vital to the freedom and security of the U.S. Citing the geographic proximity and historical alliance between the nations of the Americas, Democratic and Republican administrations alike (from Theodore Roosevelt, 1901-1909, and Woodrow Wilson, 1913-1921, to Jimmy Carter, 1977-1981, and Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989) have used the rhetoric of the U.S.'s democratic mission to validate military intervention (from overt invasion to covert counterinsurgency) in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Panama, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, among many other nations. In the early twentieth century, policymakers focused on securing "stability" in order to promote the burgeoning economic investments of U.S. magnates. During the Cold War, governors continued to seek the stability offered by right-wing dictators and military regimes, preferring authoritarian tyranny to the inchoate threat of leftist insurrectionary movements which they supposed must be in league with the U.S.S.R.

This dissertation contrasts the interventionism of these state officials with the writers who imagine and articulate relationships that surpass, and sometimes even defy, the power dynamics of nation-states. Hemispheric Americanist scholars, especially José Limón and Rachel Adams, have examined geographic discourses of transnationalism to establish how cultural identification transcends borders.<sup>22</sup> My focus on "the Americas" enables me to theorize how the bonds the U.S.

has long felt toward Latin America go beyond their geographic connection. Their common location offers a useful analogy for the complex network that links the U.S.A. to nations as nearby as Canada and as distant as Argentina, while the Caribbean countries, separated only by a little water, public discourse references as “neighbors.”<sup>23</sup>

Although geographic analogies have long been used to unite the hemisphere’s array of distinct nations and cultures, this study centers on the political writing by which hemispheric sympathy and alliance are cultivated because, in the case of Latin America, our relationship is uneven, characterized by periods of furious conversation that punctuate long periods of relative ignorance and neglect. In other words, geographic proximity alone cannot inspire transnational community. I argue that the proximity of violence awakens the imagination, stirs concern for the peoples subject to that violence, and asks the U.S. public to reconsider its own relationship to those peoples. The writers I analyze share a sense of ethical and emotional investment in Latin America, which they hope to impart to their readers.

In addition to examining the discourse of hemispheric community, I also explore its consequences for peoples within that community. When advanced by writers from the privileged position of U.S. citizenship on behalf of peoples suppressed by the race and class hierarchies in Mexico, Cuba, and Central America, transnational sentiments are often fraught with negligence, contradiction, even xenophobia. Because the chapters proceed chronologically, I trace an evolving conversation about hemispheric politics that becomes increasingly troubled by the inherent paradox of U.S. democratic empire and by the vertiginous results of its contradictory ambition to promote democracy and popular sovereignty through foreign incursion. To that end, my last chapter focuses on Latina/o writers, who imagine how transnational subjects respond to and build on the discourses of hemispheric community and coalition that emerge in times of war.

These writers explore how U.S. hemispherism affects Latin American diasporic communities in the U.S. and model a renewed transnational project centered on human rights.

The first three chapters demonstrate how journalists and literary writers wield their power as U.S. subjects and citizens to support rebellion among Latin Americans threatened by U.S. empire. Chapter 1 studies the Wilson-era writers who codify Mexico's people and politics for American audiences during and after the Mexican Revolution. In contrast to the U.S.'s pro-revolutionary policy during the Spanish-American War, during the Mexican Revolution powerful American politicians and commercial magnates support the dictator Porfirio Díaz and threaten military incursion to defend U.S. interests against poor and working-class "rebels." Journalists John Turner and John Reed and fiction writers Katherine Anne Porter and María Cristina Mena deploy progressive rhetoric to undermine armed interventionism. These writers champion Mexico's revolutionaries and hope that literature can inspire democratic fraternity between workers in both the U.S. and Mexico, even as they expose the entrenched racial hierarchies that trouble literary transnationalism.

Chapter 2 examines the cultural production surrounding the Cuban Revolution. U.S. covert operations in Cuba, made intensely public in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, galvanize an array of literary expressions in which the U.S. presence in Cuba is represented as clandestine and nefarious. Famous British author Graham Greene and the American political novelist John Kenneth Galbraith publish conspiracy thrillers that demonstrate the imbrication of the U.S. in Cuba. Public intellectuals such as Waldo Frank praise Fidel Castro's great experiment, and Cuban-American journalist and fiction writer Jose Yglesias humanizes rural Cubans under Castro in his memoir *In the Fist of the Revolution* (1968). This rich (but under-examined) revolutionary literature advances the paradoxical hope that people in the U.S. can promote and defend Cuban sovereignty, which in turn liberates U.S. democracy from the corrosive influence

of U.S. empire. Moreover, I suggest how the uncertainty that plagued U.S.-Cuban relations in the early 1960s motivates political writers to protest covert military intervention in Central American conflicts in the decades to come.

My third chapter addresses how U.S. writers influence American public involvement in the Central American Crisis. Following the 1954 CIA-backed coup in Guatemala, the triumph of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979, and the 1979 Salvadoran Civil War, journalists such as Joan Didion, the poet Carolyn Forché, and political novelist Robert Stone represent atrocity in Central America as evidence of the failure of U.S. neoliberal ideals. Resisting the popular conception of the region as the tropical breeding ground for corrupt guerillas and faceless indigenous migrants, their works contest such vexed stereotypes of Latin American identity to condemn U.S. economic and political expansion.

With the end of the Cold War, the Middle East has all but replaced Latin America as the focus of both U.S. public anxiety and military interventionism.<sup>24</sup> Contemporary debates about Latin America tend to center on the drug trade or illegal immigration, focusing on these dangerous transgressions of Latin subjects rather than on the liberatory potential of hemispheric cooperation. Chapter 4 concludes my project by analyzing contemporary Latina/o novelists who take up these enduring debates about the ethics of U.S. interventionism and trace how U.S. participation in Latin American political violence continues to shape lives in both Latin America and the U.S. Some of the most influential contemporary writers, including Sandra Cisneros, Cristina García, Achy Obejas, and Francisco Goldman, have published historical novels that position Latina/o migrants and their families as members of transnational communities that transcend the borders (and waterways) that separate the U.S., Mexico, Cuba, and Central America. Latin American diasporas embody the mobility of hemispheric subjectivity, but carry with them the racial legacy of U.S. exceptionalism and the cultural memory of trauma. Through

multi-generational family sagas, the writers I study demonstrate the parallels between race and class legacies in the U.S. and Latin America. They also show how Latina/o peoples and cultures adapt and thrive in the face of long histories of violence, deploying hemispheric rhetorics and networks to restore erased histories and pursue justice for Latin Americans and Latina/os alike.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In his speech at the Atlanta Peace Jubilee, McKinley also celebrated the Spanish-American War for reuniting the U.S. north and south in the common cause of Cuban liberation. For the text of both of these speeches, and for Booker T. Washington's, see *Patriotic Eloquence Relating to the Spanish-American War and its Issues* (1900).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study, I use the terms "hemispheric" and "transnational," as well as their noun forms "hemispherism" and "transnationalism," to describe discourses and narratives that do not just cross borders, but transcend them. These terms, for me, are not interchangeable. I tend to use "transnational" when describing the rhetorical connection between two nations, such as between the U.S. and Mexico, and "hemispheric" when evoking unifying discourses that encompass multiple cultures or national identities. I also build on Benedict Anderson's famous thesis that print culture imagines and reifies nations as cohesive communities. See Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Kaplan's *Anarchy of Empire* (2002) argues that anti-imperialists and imperialists often share "the representation of U.S. intervention as a narrative of rescue: of Cuba and the Philippines from the tyranny of an Old World empire on the one hand, and from the anarchy of revolution and self-rule on the other" (92). Kaplan explains how this narrative disavows the centrality of imperialism to U.S. identity by casting it as "an aberration from the national commitment to freeing the captive" (92). See also Murphy's *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and*

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*Narratives of U.S. Empire* (2005) and Pérez's *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Thus, the relationship between political nonfiction, fiction, and poetry is reciprocal; literary expressions examine and question cultural history even as cultural expressions inspire new literary genres that challenge the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction (such as the parodic conspiracy novel and the family saga, which I explore in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively).

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Levander and Robert Levine eloquently articulate this ambition in their collection, *Hemispheric American Studies* (2008), which “focuses on the complex ruptures that remain within but nonetheless constitute the national frame, while at the same time moving beyond the national frame to consider regions, areas, and diaspora affiliations that exist apart from or in conflicted relation to the nation. [...] By examining the intricately intertwined geographies, movements, and cross-filiations among peoples, regions, diasporas, and nations of the American hemisphere, the collection seeks to contextualize what can sometimes appear to be the artificially hardened borders and boundaries of the U.S. nation, or for that matter, any nation of the American hemisphere” (2-3). This dissertation contributes to current hemispheric scholarship by rethinking the disciplinary boundaries that separate genres and limit our objects of analysis. Tracing what Walter Mignolo calls the “idea of Latin America” from the Spanish-American War to today, my work reveals the common conversations that have inspired myriad writers, both mainstream and under-read. I also interrogate the conventional wisdom that continues to inform American attitudes toward the global South.

<sup>6</sup> Although television, film, and other visual and artistic media have also contributed to the U.S. public's understanding of its place in the hemisphere, since the nineteenth century political writing—especially journalism, nonfiction, and novels—has often provided the terms and images

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on which such portraits build. This study focuses on print, although I sometimes briefly discuss images and films that reinforce the rhetorics that unfold in texts.

<sup>7</sup> Here I allude to the twin ideologies of military interventionism and economic development. For an excellent study of the often-pernicious implications of the latter, see María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination of the Americas in the Age of Development* (2003).

Saldaña-Portillo explores how “A normative theory of human transformation and agency, then, is at the heart of the discursive collusion between revolutionary and development discourses. Why might this be so? As narratives of liberation, both discourses share an origin in imperial reason: in those Enlightenment doctrines of progress, evolution, and change that were historically articulated with the practice of European colonialism and colonial capitalism” (7).

<sup>8</sup> David Kazanjian’s *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (2003) uses the term “flashpoint” to evoke particularly transformative moments in history. Throughout this dissertation, I study cultural production during the Latin American revolutions and political crises that I think of as hemispheric flashpoints.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, even the idea of “progress” means very different things to these different factions.

<sup>10</sup> Hutchison focuses specifically on “political fiction,” but my work troubles even the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. See *Writing the Republic: Liberalism and Morality in American Political Fiction* (2007).

<sup>11</sup> David Luis-Brown’s concept of “hemispheric citizenship” informs my understanding of how political writers can promote hemispheric consciousness. In *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States* (2008), Luis-Brown describes the project of “writer-activists” in decolonized Latin America as working “to turn critical perspectives on U.S. imperialism in Latin America to the political advantage of

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the oppressed in both regions. [...] Dissenting U.S. citizens, for instance, can use the political and material privileges afforded by U.S. citizenship to oppose neocolonialism and therefore support the restoration of a range of rights to the inhabitants of affected countries” (19). Luis-Brown traces a literature of alliance between racialized peoples in the U.S., Mexico, and Cuba, comparing Harlem primitivism to Cuban *negrismo*, for example. In contrast, I focus on a broader popular portrait of hemispheric community in which an array of U.S. writers on both the right and the left use transnational discourse to support revolutionary movements against the interests of nation-states.

<sup>12</sup> As Gretchen Murphy has illustrated, Monroe establishes the U.S. as the guardian of Latin America’s burgeoning democracies, but “by proscribing future European colonization, this logic promoted U.S. expansion. Land closed to European colonization was still open to American colonization, presumably because of an American political difference that would guarantee the democratic independence that was already somehow essential to the land” (6). Murphy explores how that incredibly adaptable document would, despite its dizzyingly contradictory logic, guide U.S. foreign policy in the centuries to come.

<sup>13</sup> Other scholars of nineteenth-century hemispheric relations, such as Kirsten Silva Gruesz and Anna Brickhouse, have elucidated more positive literary and cultural exchanges between the U.S. and Latin America. Brickhouse’s network of “Transamerican literary relations” and Gruesz’s concept of “ambassadors of culture” demonstrate that some of the most famous U.S. literati read and translated Spanish-language texts (from writers in the U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean) and presaged the discourse of hemispherism that I trace in the twentieth century. See Gruesz’s *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (2002) and

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Brickhouse's *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (2004).

<sup>14</sup> This doubt presages McKinley's anxiety about the mixed consequences of the Spanish-American War.

<sup>15</sup> For an account of filibustering and annexation in both popular culture and Cuban exile literature, see Lazo's *Writing to Cuba: Filibustering and Cuban Exiles in the United States* (2005).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Martí's "Cautions against Annexation to the United States" (1895).

<sup>17</sup> Gretchen Murphy refers to this phenomenon as "geographic morality" (97). Historian Louis Pérez's *Cuba in the American Imagination* finds U.S. moral justification ongoing: "Throughout the twentieth century and beyond, the Americans projected power and pursued national interests as a matter of national character transacted in the form of moral conduct. Character was destiny, and destiny had conferred on the United States a special duty. All in all, it was a self-confirming process: the normative determinants of self-representations provided the moral logic of self-interest" (265). While I do not dispute that policymakers invoke the democratic mission of the U.S. to rationalize interventionism, I also point out how writers turn this logic against the interests of empire.

<sup>18</sup> See *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (2005).

<sup>19</sup> From "Stephen Crane's Vivid Story of the Battle of San Juan," *Crane: Prose and Poetry* (1984/1996).

<sup>20</sup> In other words, political conflicts and acts of violence often provoke expressions of commonality among U.S. Americans, which usually accompany and sometimes even motivate

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U.S. diplomatic or military involvement. Most recently, Iraq, Egypt, and Libya have stirred transnational sentiment among Americans alongside the forceful intervention of the state.

International political and ethical investment also emerges in response to natural disasters, such as last year's earthquake in Haiti or this year's in Japan.

<sup>21</sup> *Time* publisher Henry Luce coined the term in 1941 to argue that the exceptional power of the U.S. entailed the "duty" and the "opportunity" to intervene militarily, economically, and politically. Luce urged Franklin Roosevelt to intervene in World War II, but he also contended that the U.S. should forge democratic alliances to secure new opportunities for industry and trade. See James L. Baughman's *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (2001) for more on Luce's sense of how U.S. journalism participated in the international reach of the U.S.

<sup>22</sup> For Limón, the U.S.-Mexico border region is "Greater Mexico," a space constituted by mutual desire, ambivalence, and trauma. Adams studies an array of subjects who imagine themselves within cultures of "North America," who feel and forward connections to peoples and cultures in Canada and Mexico and see them as part of their own transnational subjectivity. See Limón's *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (1998) and Adams' *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (2009).

<sup>23</sup> Because I focus on a few major flashpoints in the twentieth century, I neglect countries like Canada, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, who have also figured vitally in U.S. conceptions of the hemisphere. I also neglect countries such as Haiti and Brazil, whose national languages are French and Portuguese, respectively, rather than Spanish, but I hope that my conclusions in this study can shed light on these transnational relationships as well.

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<sup>24</sup> Today narratives of atrocity and repression in Muslim nations like Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, along with discourses of U.S. democratic/humanitarian duty, saturate both the news media and popular television, fiction, and film. Although these nations and their popular struggles lie outside of the purview of this project, my emphasis on ethical narratives of transnational engagement resonates in this current context as well.

## Chapter 1

### U.S. Writers and Mexico's Transnational Revolution

By the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in November of 1910, the U.S. had secured substantial economic and military might in Latin America. Thousands of United States citizens lived or owned property in Mexico. Railroad, cattle, mining, and oil magnates had invested millions of dollars and owned millions of acres. Expatriates congregated in Mexico City's American Colony. Other communities of settlers, including polygamous Mormons, migrated to the Mexican frontier to escape the strictures of U.S. governance. After Francisco Madero called from his prison cell for nationwide revolt against Mexico's autocratic president Porfirio Díaz, journalists from every major newspaper in the States descended on the capital, border towns, and other strongholds of revolutionary activity. All of these interested parties believed that the outcome of the revolt would shape the future of the hemisphere.

This chapter offers a new perspective on the fraught heritage of U.S.-Mexican relations by examining the role of the Mexican Revolution in the literary and cultural history of the U.S.<sup>1</sup> The Mexican Revolution offered many in the U.S. a new vision of exchange between the two countries—one that opposed the domination of state elites and advanced the cultural and material prosperity of working people. In this era, progressive political writers craft a discourse of activism to help the U.S. public imagine new possibilities for hemispheric democracy.<sup>2</sup> That discourse revolves around portraits of indigenous Mexicans. Leftist journalists John Kenneth Turner and John Reed use the figure of the Mexican *indio* to represent the vitality of Mexico's history and culture and to engage readers in its political plight. Their texts endeavor to inspire readers to champion Mexico's proletariat, changing the tenor of U.S. intervention and bolstering Mexico's revolutionary future.

Fiction writers María Cristina Mena and Katherine Anne Porter, like Reed and Turner, explore revolutionary Mexico through stories of indigenous peoples, but these stories challenge progressivism's optimistic rhetoric about transnational revolution by interrogating the power dynamic between the U.S. and indigenous Mexico. Mena and Porter portray *indios* as foreign and inscrutable to both U.S. travelers and upper-class Mexicans. Refusing to align the humanitarian impulse of American progressives with the interests of Mexico's underclass, Mena and Porter suggest instead how transnational literature can expose the limits of transnationalism itself.

The Mexican Revolution offered writers and public intellectuals of multiple nationalities the occasion to challenge the democratizing jurisdiction of the U.S. In Mexico, advocates of revolution claimed the *indio* as the authentic Mexican body, celebrating a *mestizo* heritage as race and class inequalities persisted.<sup>3</sup> In the U.S., debates about Mexico's Native population collided with anxieties about Mexico's revolution and its consequences for the hemisphere. Baffled by the revolt of Mexico's indigenous subalterns, Americans' print media attempted to describe an ostensibly inexplicable revolution to an anxious U.S. audience. The result, for writers like Turner, Reed, Mena, and Porter, is a public discourse in which the *peon*, the guerrilla, the dictator, and the whore emerge as the resonant archetypes for Latin America.

These literary activists reveal the primacy of the Mexican Revolution to a century of hemispheric political and cultural relations—and to the racialization of Chicana/os and Latino/as in the States.<sup>4</sup> Later writers as widely read as the Chicana poet and novelist Sandra Cisneros and the Mexican author and diplomat Carlos Fuentes have published historical fictions that explore the diverse roles American citizens and soldiers played in the conflict. This chapter revives the international cultural and political history that informs their work and posits Turner, Reed, Mena,

and Porter as central participants in an international debate about the entangled futures of Mexico and the U.S. As all of these writers agree, the revolution galvanizes uneven, ongoing concerns about U.S. intervention in Latin America, the place of Mexican migrants in the U.S., and the dual threat and promise of liberal democracy in the third world.

### **Mexico in the Age of Díaz**

At the turn of the twentieth century, U.S. print representations and public perceptions of Mexico responded to narratives and images of Latin American revolt and lawlessness that date back to the early nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> In 1810, Mexico was among the first of Spain's colonies to declare independence, but throughout the nineteenth century the new nation was overrun by coups from within and invasions from without (most famously by the U.S. in 1846 and France in 1861). U.S. print media editorialized these political turns with sensational gusto; Shelley Streeby has documented extensively the dime novels and penny papers through which the U.S. charted its imperial relationship to Mexico in the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century dime novels first popularized the conventional Mexican bandit. These sensational fictions (such as *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*, 1854) tend “to uphold the rule of law and to reproduce racialized stereotypes of Mexican savagery and lawlessness that can be traced to the U.S. Mexican War era” (Streeby 255). These texts fixate on the racial *mestizaje* of Mexico, casting its indigenous peoples as helpless primitives and its *mestizo* working class as a volatile mix of Spanish debauchery and Indian mystery.

In the midst of rampant portraits of Mexican political instability and cultural barbarity, U.S. companies invested heavily in uncovering and exploiting Mexico's natural resources. The long reign of liberal autocrat Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) brought further opportunities for U.S. commercial investment in Mexico. In addition to ranching, mining, and farming, U.S. magnates

contributed to and reaped massive financial gains from industrial development and especially from the burgeoning Mexican railroad system. Because Díaz's liberal economic philosophy welcomed foreign investment and because his authoritarian regime quashed rebellion, U.S. print media praised the *Porfiriato* as an era of stability and progress. In the 1890s and 1900s, the overwhelming majority of books and articles about Mexico were devoted to Porfirio Díaz and his governance.

Today Díaz is widely figured as a despot, and deservedly so. Díaz, himself an insurgent who ascended to power in the 1870s, paved his autocracy with revolutionary rhetoric, but under Díaz the gap between the impoverished underclass and wealthy aristocracy rose. Foreign investors, often but not always American, lined the pockets of government officials and landowners, deepening further the already exploitative conditions of urban and rural laborers. Debt *peonage* on the country's abundant and lucrative plantations was tantamount to slavery. Hunger and sickness in the cities expanded just outside of the boundaries of Díaz's booming commercial zones. Many newspaper accounts parroted the political agendas of the Roosevelt and Taft administrations; both presidents praised Díaz for industrializing Mexico and taming its discontented populace. In 1908, James Creelman published a famous and widely accepted account of Díaz in his article for *Pearson's*.<sup>6</sup> "President Díaz, Hero of the Americas" endorses the dictator as a hemispheric hero on whose shoulders rests a burgeoning democracy. Creelman positions himself as a skeptic whose every objection the president lays to rest. He quotes their interview as follows:

"But you have no opposition party in the Republic, Mr. President. How can free institutions flourish when there is no opposition to keep the majority, or governing party, in check?"

“It is true there is no opposition party. I have so many friends in the republic that my enemies seem unwilling to identify themselves with so small a minority. I appreciate the kindness of my friends and the confidence of my country; but such absolute confidence imposes responsibilities and duties that tire me more and more.

“No matter what my friends and supporters say, I retire when my present term of office ends, and I shall not serve again. I shall be eighty years old then.” (241-242)

Just as Díaz allays Creelman’s quarrels and doubts, so Creelman hopes to dispel rumors in the U.S. about the anti-democratic policies of his regime. For Creelman, Díaz is an aging idol, weighed down by his cares as the nation’s paterfamilias. The article ends by quoting then-Secretary of State Elihu Root, who praises Díaz for promoting “justice and liberty,” those democratic ideals espoused by both U.S. liberals and conservatives (277).<sup>7</sup> Root subtly exhorts U.S. readers to support Díaz with the zeal that he and then-President Roosevelt modeled: “If I were a poet I would write poetic eulogies. If I were a musician I would compose triumphal marches” (277). Root calls on artists and writers to endorse the autocrat for the sake of a hemispheric future, and the journalist Creelman takes up his call, transcribing and disseminating his endorsement. Both imply that support for Díaz is the duty of American and Mexican alike. Implicitly, both invoke the power of print to construct truth and to sway readers.

As the champion of liberalism, Díaz also became an exemplar of the potency of U.S. capitalist democracy in the hemisphere. During his regime Díaz represented (for Americans and other profit-minded onlookers) the fantastic promise of Mexico. As a figurehead, he offered an image of Western liberal authority, of civilized guardianship over a still-savage state. Perhaps the

prototypical Latin American dictator, Díaz would inspire future portraits of Mexican power. The revolution's heroes would stand in contrast to him. Future autocrats would be compared to him. In short, Díaz became as much a symbol of revolution as of tyranny. Before 1910, the U.S. debated his faults and virtues, but reiterated his potency as a bastion of progress. Most Americans failed to acknowledge the U.S.'s imbrication in the violence of his regime. By promoting his policies and suppressing the voices of his antagonists (like the exiled revolutionary leaders, brothers Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón), journalists like Creelman bolster confidence in U.S. republicanism, even as they reinforce conceptions of Mexican cultural inferiority.<sup>8</sup>

In 1909 John Kenneth Turner challenged the Mexican president's popularity among Americans in his series of articles for *American Magazine*, "Barbarous Mexico."<sup>9</sup> Turner exposed the rampant corruption of Díaz's regime and its abuse of disenfranchised indigenous peoples, plantation workers, and the urban poor. Turner's articles, and his expanded book-length version of *Barbarous Mexico* (1911), reverse the dominant portrait of Mexican indigenous savagery and upper-class civility, casting Mexico's indigenous peoples (the Yaqui and Maya in particular) as a civilization under assault by "barbarous" plantation foremen, greedy industrialists, and by Díaz himself.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he highlights U.S. complicity in the oppression of the Mexican people, asking U.S. readers to fight against imperialism and *for* democracy in Mexico.

Turner explains that "the term 'barbarous' which I use in my title is intended to apply to Mexico's form of government rather than to its people" (Preface). Although his eye-catching headline seems to promise a sensational portrait of a dangerously different nation, Turner invokes commonalities between the U.S. and Mexico, allying the ethics and values of middle-

class Americans with those of indigenous Mexicans. Turner employs the rhetoric of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights to argue for the urgency of revolutionary action in Mexico: “Mexico is a country without political freedom, without freedom of speech, without a free press, without a free ballot, without a jury system, without political parties, without any of our cherished guarantees of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (3-4). For Turner, Mexico has been denied those rights and freedoms considered the purview of Americanness. Thus, *Barbarous Mexico* appropriates the catch phrases of American exceptionalism to project a shared purpose between two American nations. He asks Americans to support Mexicans as they achieve the democratic promise that their northern neighbor exemplifies.

*Barbarous Mexico* focuses on the Maya and Yaqui, two indigenous cultures under assault by the *Porfiriato*, as alternatives to American civilization. Turner exaggerates the differences between indigenous Mexicans and U.S. Native peoples; he argues, for example: “The Mayas had a civilization of their own when the Europeans ‘discovered’ them, and it was a civilization admittedly as high as that of the most advanced Aztecs or the Incas of Peru” (8). Of the Yaqui he asserts: “The Yaquis are called Indians. Like the Mayas of Yucatan, they are Indians and yet they are not Indians. In the United States we would not call them Indians, for they are workers. As far back as their history can be traced they have never been savages. They have been an agricultural people” (28). For Turner, the Mayan and Yaqui pre-Columbian civilizations and “agricultural” mode of subsistence connect their histories and values with those of U.S. whites. His insistence on the validity of Mexico’s indigenous cultures coexists uncomfortably with his disturbing assumptions about American Indians.

He goes on to elicit admiration and sympathy for the Maya and Yaqui by extolling their physical beauty: “The Mayas ... look like no other people on the face of the earth. They are not

like other Mexicans; they are not like Americans; they are not like Chinamen; they are not like East Indians; they are not like Turks. Yet one might easily imagine that fusion of all these five widely different people might produce a people much like the Mayas. They are not large in stature, but their features are remarkably finely chiseled and their bodies give a strong impression of elegance and grace. Their skins are olive, their foreheads high, their faces slightly aquiline” (8-9). Instead of portraying the Maya as picturesque primitives, Turner sees them as an aesthetic composite of the world’s ancient civilizations. Similarly, he praises the physicality of the Yaqui as a testament to their cultural merit: “The Yaqui certainly has an admirable physical development. During my journeys in Mexico I learned to pick him out at a glance, by his broad shoulders, his deep chest, his sinewy legs, his rugged face. The typical Yaqui is almost a giant, the race a race of athletes. Perhaps that is just the reason why he has not bent his head in submission to the will of the masters of Mexico” (29).

When Turner describes the atrocities suffered by indigenous peoples like the Yaqui and Maya, he lingers over the “extremely human character of the people” (48). He proves their humanness by connecting their modes of thinking, speaking, and feeling with his own: “The Yaquis are Indians, they are not white, yet when one converses with them in a language mutually understood one is struck with the likenesses of the mental processes of White and Brown. I was early convinced that the Yaqui and I were more alike in mind than in color. I became convinced, too, that the family attachments of the Yaqui mean quite as much to the Yaqui as the family attachments of the American mean to the American” (48-9). Turner connects “White and Brown” through shared family values in addition to their shared “civilizations.” As evidence for the importance of kinship bonds to the Yaqui, he cites a tale that eerily echoes the stories of families separated under U.S. chattel slavery:

The Yaqui woman feels as keenly the brutal snatching away of her babe as would the cultivated American woman. The heart-strings of the Yaqui wife are no more proof against a violent and unwished-for separation from her husband than would be the heart-strings of the refined mistress of a beautiful American home.

The Mexican government forbids divorce and remarriage within its domain, but for the henequen planters of Yucatan all things are possible. To a Yaqui woman a native of Asia is no less repugnant than he is to an American woman, yet one of the first barbarities the henequen planter imposes upon the Yaqui slave woman, freshly robbed of the lawful husband of her bosom, is to compel her to marry a Chinaman and live with him! (49)

Turner compares the “Yaqui woman” explicitly to “the refined mistress of a beautiful American home,” bridging cultural differences and material circumstances with sentimental descriptions of their common family bonds. Furthermore, he subtly summons white anxiety about miscegenation to stir sympathy for the Yaqui, equating the sexual violence of forced marriage with the racial indignity of replacing a “lawful husband” with a “repugnant” Asian migrant.

Through pointed references to their civilized cultures, physical beauty, and current suffering, the text exhorts U.S. public compassion for indigenous and working Mexicans. Furthermore, Turner invokes American shame about chattel slavery to stir indignation for debt slavery in the Yucatan. He compares the condition of Mayan and Yaqui *peons* to that of African Americans under slavery, claiming that “the black man” never suffered like the *peon*: “Our slaves of the South were almost always well fed, as a rule they were not overworked, on many plantations they were rarely beaten, it was usual to give them a little spending money now and then and to allow them to leave the plantation at least once a week. Like the slaves of Yucatan

they were cattle of the ranch, but unlike the former, they were treated as well as cattle” (25). This analogy offers U.S. readers the opportunity to correct the history of racial enslavement and oppression that continues to haunt both Mexico and the U.S. The comparison connects those legacies, although Turner tempers the parallel by assuring U.S. readers that their own forbears, even in their darkest moments, have been less cruel than the barbarous Mexicans who exterminate and enslave the Yaqui and Maya.<sup>11</sup>

Although Porfirio Díaz is Turner’s most explicit antagonist, *Barbarous Mexico* is populated with mercenary villains like the plantation overseers, who blithely brag about their arbitrary brutality. Just as he associates Mexico’s system of *peonage* with U.S. chattel slavery, Turner ties the sensationally cruel overseers to the U.S. investors who fund them: “it has been so easy for such Americans as William Randolph Hearst, Harrison Gray Otis, E. H. Harriman, the Rockefellers, the Guggenheims and numerous others each to have obtained possession of millions of Mexican acres” (106). Turner also rails against U.S. press giants whose financial ties to Mexico motivate their endorsement of Díaz. In contrast to ignorant tourists, duplicitous investors, and most obviously in contrast to the threatened intercession of the U.S. military, Turner paints himself as a lone warrior who brandishes only a pen on the side of justice for Mexico.

Turner casts himself as a defender of U.S. democratic values in Mexico. He stresses his own affective reactions to the brutalities he witnesses and the *peons* he meets. Furthermore, *Barbarous Mexico* characterizes Turner as a protagonist in the revolutionary story, asserting his authority as an enlightened interpreter. Turner represents himself as a different type of traveler. Posing as an American industrialist-investor to explore the henequen and tobacco plantations in Southern Mexico, Turner justifies his subterfuge by arguing that he intercedes in Mexican affairs

to learn about and expose the injustices he sees. He hopes that his readers will learn from his story and take up his cause: “For the sake of the ultimate interests of this country, for the sake of humanity, for the sake of the millions of Mexicans who are actually starving at this moment, I believe that the Diaz system should be abolished and abolished quickly” (294). Turner defends the rights of the Mexican Indian and endorses rebellion against Díaz, rejecting popular reports of rebels’ threat to U.S. interests in the region.<sup>12</sup> Turner hopes that citizens will speak up if the U.S. tries to invade and reinstate the *Porfiriato*: “That will be the time for decent Americans to make their voices heard. They will expose, in no uncertain terms, the conspiracy against democracy and demand that, for all time, our government cease putting the machinery of state at the disposal of the despot to help him crush the movement for the abolition of slavery in Mexico” (295). *Barbarous Mexico* anticipates the debate that would consume reporters and writers throughout the years that followed. Turner asserts that the mission of U.S. democracy precludes military intervention, but he believes in the ethical intervention that U.S. journalists and activists can enact.

### **U.S. Journalists and the Making of Revolution**

The Mexican Revolution was by no means the genesis of tension with the United States, but its outbreak spurs writers, intellectuals, and statesmen to modify the dominant narratives by which they had long coded Mexican subjectivity. Reified by dime novels and reinforced by post-*Guadalupe-Hidalgo* military policy, those narratives cast Mexicans as lawless bandits and indolent Indians who required the strong authority of U.S. soldiers of fortune and Mexican generals to lead them into civilization; yet such established discourses fail the writers who attempt to account for the revolt of disenfranchised urban and rural laborers. Newspapers and travel narratives translate a revolution that, for the American public, is both impossibly foreign

and disturbingly close to home, replete with competing factions who each claim to fight for democratic ideals. Public approval of the liberal autocrat Díaz, for example, gives way to anxiety about the indigenous and impoverished Mexicans whose capacity for resistance became dramatically apparent. While President Wilson and the U.S. military threatened and prepared to invade Mexico, the American public turned to the mass media to gauge the significance of the Mexican Revolution for the U.S.<sup>13</sup>

When rebellion broke out, most U.S. onlookers failed to recognize the importance of Madero's call and the disparate uprisings it inspired. One 1910 *New York Times* puzzles over "The Situation in Mexico" but assures its readers that "the guiding spirit" of Díaz will eventually triumph. Articles in the *Times* presage the difficulty that later writers have as they seek meaningful terms and images to explain the Mexican Revolution. The paper struggles to find language that would generate interest in the conflicts without legitimating revolutionary activity. The writer prefers terms like "rebellion" and "riot" to "revolution": "The general belief all over the civilized world is that President Díaz will suppress the rebellion, or series of little rebellions, in his country, and restore order; and the general opinion is that the crushing of the rebels—they are scarcely to be called revolutionists—will be for the ultimate good of Mexico" (10). The article evades any implication of Mexican revolutionary unity by demoting its widespread insurgence to a "series of little rebellions." The anonymous article also claims authority over "general" belief and opinion, daring readers to disagree with "the civilized world" that Díaz will prevail in restoring order.

*The New York Times* also reveals the racial anxiety behind support for Díaz by asserting that "The sooner Gen. Díaz silences Madero, however, the better it will be for the peace and credit of his country. The most pitiful revolution is dangerous in a country whose population

includes 52 different varieties of Indian” (“Madero’s Little War” 8). The warning that populist rebellion—however “pitiful”—carries with it the threat of indigenous uprising anticipates the threat that would preoccupy *The New York Times* in the years that followed. On November 23, 1910 the *Times* features a two-page tour de force, “Troops Retake Mexican Cities,” whose headlines warn that Americans who are leaving the country “Tell of Strong Feeling Against Them—Railways Are Crippled and Passengers are Killed by Bullets” (1). Including a map that shows “districts in which disturbances have occurred and the cities already attacked,” less than two weeks after the outbreak of revolution *The New York Times* launches a nation-wide campaign for public attention to Mexico and its leaders.

Perhaps the most famous foreign correspondent to travel to revolutionary Mexico was John Reed. A prominent Leftist who would become even more famous for his stories of the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and for his early death (of typhus in 1920), Reed disputes the dominant narrative that characterized newspapers like *The New York Times*. Like John Turner, Reed rejects such claims about Mexican cultural inferiority by positing a sentimental connection to Mexico. He helps to shape the U.S. perspective on intervention even as he stirs international sympathy for anti-imperial ends. Reed cultivates pathos to encourage Marxism, but he also sees himself (like Turner) as a literary ambassador for a threatened Mexican culture whose beauty and history he fights to preserve.<sup>14</sup>

Both Leftist humanitarians published in popular venues. Turner’s series appeared in *The American Magazine* (as did some of Mena’s short stories a few years later); Reed published in *Collier’s*, *Metropolitan*, and *The Masses*. Chronicling his travels through Mexico in the heyday of revolution, John Reed’s *Insurgent Mexico* (1914) reconciles assumptions about Indian passivity with the radical agency enacted by Villa’s revolutionary troops. Reed finds the peasant

rebellion a productive chaos that disrupts the narrative conventions by which Americans constructed Mexico as a frontier of empire. Reed exemplifies the changing status of Mexico's indigenous peoples; despite their continued subjugation, during (and after) the revolution they symbolized Mexico's pre-national cultural identity. Mexican intellectuals would call this trend *indigenismo*, but for Reed, Mexico's Indians recall U.S. cultural anxieties about the "Vanishing American Indian."<sup>15</sup> As he describes the *peons'* proximity to "nature," their antiquated farming and domestic practices, and quaint coupling rituals, he reminds his readers of a pastoral simplicity that many believed the U.S. had lost forever (31). If Mexico represented the last American frontier, then the *Porfiriato's* attacks on the *peon* threatened an inter-American mythology.

Reed hopes that the revolution will salvage that simpler culture for Mexico's future.<sup>16</sup> The journalist's ethnography of the Indians' arcadia teaches readers to respect cultural difference by appealing to pre-industrial nostalgia. He ties the *peons* to the rebels who fight for them, lauding the Villistas as moral and just, despite the roughness that their *mestizo* genealogy seemed to signify. Reed praises the revolutionaries' integrity in the face of difficult circumstances, distinguishing them carefully from the collective "American" account of Mexican banditry. He explains how "Americans had insisted that the Mexican was fundamentally dishonest—that I might expect to have my outfit stolen the first day out" (46). He marvels that the rebels never rob him: "for two weeks I lived with as rough a band of ex-outlaws as there was in the army. They were without discipline and without education. They were, many of them, Gringo-haters. They had not been paid a cent for six weeks and some were so desperately poor that they couldn't boast sandals or serapes. I was a stranger with a good outfit, unarmed.... And I never lost a thing" (46). Reed finds the generosity of the rebels even more astonishing: "I was not permitted

to pay for my food; and in a company where money was scarce and tobacco most unknown, I was kept supplied with all I could smoke by the *compañeros*” (46-47). For Reed, the unlearned rebels demonstrate the prescience of Marx; their inherent honesty evinces the integrity of the Mexican proletariat. He legitimates their cause with tales of their merit. Because the insurgents refuse to steal from Reed despite their unruliness, poverty, and ignorance, their principles must triumph over the theft and dissimulation of the powerful *Porfiriato*.

Reed justifies his own place as an interlocutor in Mexican culture by making a case for the righteousness of the revolution: “It was a land to love—this Mexico—a land to fight for... and as I looked at the gay, lovable, humble *hombres* who had given so much of their lives and of their comfort to the brave fight, I couldn’t help but think of the little speech Villa made to the foreigners who left Chihuahua in the first train: ‘This is the latest news for you to take to your people. There shall be no more palaces in Mexico. The *tortillas* of the poor are better than the bread of the rich. Come!’” (57). This passage elucidates the affective bond that Reed feels with Mexico, embodied in the “lovable” rebels with whom he travels. Furthermore, it illustrates the political implications of his bond. Here the voices of Reed and Villa unite, both working to disseminate abroad the vision of Mexico as a land of the righteous “poor.”

Reed’s literal presence as an ambassador of the revolution models the engagement he hopes to promote in the U.S. By recounting his travels among the troops, his conversations with Villa, and the friendships he cultivates, Reed erases national, racial, and class differences with fraternal feeling and mutual dedication to “Liberty.” He channels the approval of one Villista thus: “This *compañero* [Reed] comes thousands of miles by the sea and the land to tell his countrymen the truth of the fight for Liberty. He goes into battle without arms, he’s braver than you are, because you have a rifle” (52). Despite his sympathy for indigenous Mexicans and his

zealous support of Pancho Villa, Reed's *Insurgent Mexico* navigates among patronizing, exoticizing, and sometimes controversial descriptions of generals, rebels, and Natives.<sup>17</sup> His "Insurgent" Mexico begs for intercession, and Reed offers himself as a model of cosmopolitan Leftist intervention who raises awareness in place of complicity.

Reed contrasts himself with the American "soldiers of fortune" who join the Villista rebels in search of "excitement" and "loot" (157, 169). Daniel Lehman tellingly reveals how Reed erases the American gunrunner and war profiteer MacDonald from his dispatches, routing his words and actions through other minor—usually Mexican—characters in the text. Reed fictionalizes MacDonald in the short story, "Mac—American" (1914). Lehman, like many critics before him, views the fictionalized Mac as the sort of quintessential mercenary American that Reed pits himself against. I argue, in contrast, that by telling Mac's story—that of a drunk and a drifter who "had seen many places and been many things: railroad foreman, plantation overseer in Georgia, boss mechanic in a Mexican mine, cow-puncher, and Texas deputy-sheriff," Reed creates a composite character whose collusion in the viciousness of U.S. history bleeds back across the border (45). Mac has been a brawler and a seducer of women. He helped to hunt an escaped plantation worker, an experience he describes with stomach-turning relish. The real-life MacDonald with whom Reed traveled, the man who aided his mobility in Mexico, reappears in his fiction to embody the violent past that the U.S. denies when it forces liberal democratic ideals on emerging nations like Mexico. Mac's racism against the black plantation worker collapses into his disdain for Mexican women. Reed depicts Mac as "an American in the raw" whose role in the world is to breed white, male, American power (43).

Although Reed criticized American duplicity in Mexico in stories such as "Mac—American," his confidence in the Left drives Reed to assert a commonality of purpose between

the Villista revolutionaries and the American intellectuals whose literary and journalistic interventions advocated the Mexican underclass in U.S. periodicals. Reed also positions himself as the spokesperson for the abject peasantry. During one conversation with two *campesinos*, Reed channels their fears to reinforce the significance of his rhetorical intervention: “‘It is said,’ remarked the old man quaveringly, ‘that the United States of the North covets our country—that gringo soldiers will come and take away my goats in the end....’” His young companion replies, “‘The rich Americanos want to rob us ... just as the rich Mexicans want to rob us’” (170-1). This episode submerges Reed’s voice, ventriloquizing the *campesinos*’ fears to exhibit the author’s quiet sympathy. The *peons*, of course, are nameless figures for the just proletariat that Reed espouses: “I suddenly conceived these two human beings as symbols of Mexico—courteous, loving, patient, poor, so long slaves, so full of dreams, so soon to be free” (170). As the champion of working-class virtue, Reed gives back what “rich Americanos” have taken: “after much urging we finally persuaded them to accept a few *tortillas* and *chile*. It was ludicrous and pitiful to see how wretchedly hungry they were, and how they attempted to conceal it from us” (169). As the proud *peons* accept his help, they bolster the message that this self-effacing narrator will deliver to empathetic Americans. Reed dwells on their poverty and courtesy, implicating American soldiers in their plight but exculpating himself. Thus *Insurgent Mexico* reestablishes Reed’s authority on the chaotic revolutionary front even as it denounces interfering opportunists such as the “soldiers of fortune.” Reed claims to speak to American readers on behalf of Mexico, but his interpretive prose renders speaking subjects as anonymous symbols.

Through sympathetic portraits of Mexico’s oppressed peoples, especially *indios*, journalists such as Turner and Reed champion the revolution and ask U.S. audiences to invest in its heroes and causes. Furthermore, they seek to embody and model an ethical interventionism

that works against the interests of both the U.S. and Mexican states. By translating Mexico's revolution for Americans, exposing injustice and risking their own lives in the process, these writers hope to restore the democratic promise of the U.S. in the hemisphere. The stories of Mexico that they publish in the U.S. are vital to this project because they bind the moral and ideological principles of these nations. Their texts call for transnational unity among working people, identifying the pivotal role of print culture in imagining a new future the hemisphere. Yet, even as their texts champion the revolutionary cause of indigenes and laborers, they tend to marginalize the suffering people for whom they advocate.

### **María Cristina Mena's Indian Revolution**

For Turner and Reed, the figure of the Mexican *indio* embodies the mission of Mexico's revolution and impels humanitarian intervention from sympathetic Americans. In contrast, fiction writer María Cristina Mena uncovers a revolutionary context in which U.S. influence and Mexican revolutionary action silences indigenous subjects and exacerbates class and gender inequalities. Mena's stories contest the incursion of cosmopolitan elites (such as U.S. travelers and Mexican aristocrats) into the daily affairs and broader revolutionary struggles of poor and working peoples. Her stories are fraught with misunderstanding and inequality, suggesting that the needs of Mexico's indigenous peoples can never align with those of the wealthy and powerful—even with influential revolutionaries like Pancho Villa. Thus, Mena posits fiction as generic forum for transnational engagement that can highlight the inscrutability of indigenous peoples and interrogate the motives that drive elites to invent alliance and identification with subalterns.

Although Mena's magazine fiction failed to win her the lasting recognition that her friend D. H. Lawrence enjoyed for *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) or the popular success that Reed

achieved, scholars of Chicana/o literature have since recovered her portraits of Mexican subjectivity, culture, and revolution to argue for Mena's place in Mexican American literary history. Scholars such as Raymund Paredes and Tiffany Ana López have debated Mena's sometimes patronizing, usually romantic take on the "*Inditos*" she cast as the "blood," "passion," "melancholy," and "music" of Mexico (Mena, 10).<sup>18</sup> I contend that Mena's stories highlight the illegibility of Mexico's indigenous peoples.<sup>19</sup> Like Turner and Reed, Mena's privileged position (her wealth, education, and whiteness) vexed her interpretations of Mexico's subaltern revolution. Mena believed that the *indio* was vital to Mexican culture, but her search for Mexican proletarian subjectivity, like the racializing accounts of Mexico to which she responded, obscures the resistance of indigenous Mexicans. Confronted by the determinism of a liberal system that didn't allow for the triumph of subalterns, Mena dramatizes the gap between the rhetoric of revolution and its practice, rejecting Mexico's prospects for a revolutionary future.

Mena was among the first imaginative writers in the U.S. to represent revolutionary Mexico. A recent migrant to the U.S. who saw herself as a "refugee" from the increasingly volatile economic and social climate of revolutionary Mexico, Mena wrote in English, acting as translator and interpreter of a Mexican life that she distinguished from the stories of violent strife (like Reed's) that filled newspapers in 1913. Amy Doherty and Charlotte Rich offer compelling accounts of Mena's critique of American imperialism. Indeed, Mena's negative portraits of American travelers in Mexico certainly suggest her skepticism about the terms of cultural exchange. Short stories such as "The Gold Vanity Set" (1913) and "The Education of Popo" (1914) vent her frustration with American cultural tourism.<sup>20</sup>

"The Gold Vanity Set" is less a tale of revolt and more a sympathetic portrait of indigeneity that illustrates for U.S. readers the dubious place of American capital in Mexico. Don

Ramón, despite the profit he makes from the “invasion” of American tourists, “looked a little resentful at these inquisitive strangers occupying the benches of his regular customers, who obsequiously folded up their limbs on straw mats along the walls” (3). Mena asserts that “business in the Mexican mind is dominated by sentiment” (3). Don Ramón’s worldliness and Spanish manners stand in stark contrast to Petra’s *india* naïveté, but for Mena they share a sentimental relationship that defies the expediency of U.S. commercial relations. When Don Ramón translates Petra’s odd behavior for Miss Young and Mena’s U.S. readers, explaining that she has stolen Miss Young’s vanity set to give in homage to the Virgin of Guadalupe, he marvels that “The ways of the Indito are past conjecture, except that he is always governed by emotion” (10). Don Ramón goes on to explain: “You may observe that we always speak of them as *Inditos*, never as *Indios*,” he said. We use the diminutive because we love them. They are our blood. With their passion, their melancholy, their music and their superstition they have passed without transition from the feudalism of the Aztecs into the world of today, which ignores them; but we never forget that it was their valor and love of country which won our independence” (10).

Like John Reed’s descriptions of *peons*, Mena’s (Don Ramón’s) description of Petra and the “Inditos” emphasizes their inscrutability, with ways that are “past conjecture.” The text can only make sense of them as a people “governed by emotion,” separate from the *patrón* and the “we” that is, in this passage, the Mexican people. Don Ramón believes that his ruling class has inherited the “blood” of their indigenous counterparts, and further that indigenous blood “won our independence.” He refers to Mexican independence from Spain, but Mena alludes also to the renewed war for independence taking place in her moment, a war in which indigenous *peons*, the

*mestizo* working class, and privileged educated classes fought with and against one another for “valor and love of country.”

“John of God, the Water Carrier” (1913), like “The Gold Vanity Set,” lovingly caricatures Indian “superstition” as a melancholy response to the upheaval of modernity (10). The tale begins in the midst of a terrible earthquake. Perhaps that earthquake reminded readers of the turmoil and disorder of the revolutionary scene. In these and other stories, Mena uses sexualized contact to represent the cultural contact that has changed the face of Mexico. In “The Gold Vanity Set,” Petra takes the vanity set to put an end to her husband's abuse, triggering a chain of events that ends in Miss Young’s blithe deference to Indian beauty and difference. In “John of God,” Juan de Dios attempts to take a runaway horse, only to find himself caring for the daughter of a woman trampled to death by that horse. His love for the daughter, in turn, leads him to a life of asceticism in the capital, where he carries water just as his father had done, ignoring the new “patented American force-pumps” in favor of tradition (20). Petra and Juan de Dios both view chance events and coincidences as signs from God. A particularly strong storm convinces Petra’s husband to quit beating her, but she attributes her luck to God. Juan de Dios’s brother Tiburcio falls in love with Dolores and tries to take over his burdens as water-carrier, but the resulting muscle pain leaves Tiburcio unable to move, convincing Juan de Dios that his curse has crippled Tiburcio. To repent and pay for his crime, Juan de Dios renounces Dolores and devotes his own life to daily pilgrimage. In contrast to Turner and Reed, Mena represents her *Inditos* as incompatible with the increasingly modern world around them.

If Mena’s *indios* are ruled by blind religious zeal, her aristocrats are bound by fanatic traditionalism. María Concepción attempts to woo a working-class hero (a bull-fighter), rebelling against the old-world classism of her father only to find herself caught in a cycle of endless

feminine subjection. In “The Education of Popo,” an adolescent Mexican bourgeois finds himself ensnared in the careless wiles of an American divorcée. Alicia Cherry entangles herself in Mexican affairs, exposing her ignorance of Mexican culture and doing more harm than good in the process. In short, Mena’s Americans misunderstand and misrepresent Mexico, but her *peon* underclass retreats further into narrative inscrutability as mercenary rebels rise to power.

Stories like “The Emotions of María Concepción” (1914), “Doña Rita’s Rivals” (1914), and “Marriage by Miracle” (1916) critique the hypocrisy of the Mexican aristocracy, who failed to recognize their dependence on the indigenous and *mestizo* working classes and who celebrated the liberal consumerism imported along with American tourists and goods. Such stories respond to the debates about Mexico’s racial and cultural character in the mainstream periodicals in which Mena published. Most of her stories appear in *Century Magazine*, an illustrated monthly that combined political essays on the U.S. government’s military and immigration policies with fiction, human-interest stories, and ethnographic travel narratives.<sup>21</sup> Mena allegorizes the tumult and international crisis of the revolution to champion Mexican culture for *Century*’s middle-class readership. Moreover, Mena’s readers could readily recognize that facet of her writing, familiar as they were with dispatches from the border.

When Mena begins to refer more explicitly to the revolution, she iterates the struggle of the young bourgeoisie against the decadent aristocracy. In “Doña Rita’s Rivals,” for example, a widow of the old guard dies in despair as her pedigreed son falls in love with a prostitute and endeavors to use his musical talent to promote the *peon* revolution. Mena writes: “Jesús María was infected with that most dangerous of distempers, patriotism. Her child to be playing fearlessly with scorpions masquerading under specious titles—*reforma electoral, cumplimiento de garantías constitucionales, civilización para los peones, ¡Méjico para los Mejicanos!* He, son

of a general immortalized equestrianly in bronze, student at the military college, sole surviving hope of a line the perspective of which vanished among the lords and priests of an extinct civilization—he, Jesús María Ixtlan y Azpe, to be imperiling his future by concerning himself about the base fortunes of *los enredados!*” (72-3). Here the narrator slips into Spanish to reflect the protagonist’s fervent fear of revolution. She is, it turns out, right that his lust for revolution imperils her son’s health. He nearly dies of drunken depression after the death of his working-class lover, and despite his illustrious military heritage, Jesús María is a weakling, a man meant to sing about the revolution instead of bearing arms.

So what does it mean that Mena seems to favor neither the entrenched elite nor their delusional offspring? Or that she paints *indios* as charming simpletons while her *hacendados* are corrupted by American capital and power? Critics have emphasized Mena’s subversive response to contemporaneous conventions of genre, gender, and race, and have disregarded her pessimism. Her characters come to overwhelmingly ambivalent ends. Indeed, their successes seem arbitrary; Mena’s stories rely little on individual agency and much more on fortune, chance, and even magic for their resolutions. In “The Sorcerer and General Bisco,” for example, malevolent magic keeps Don Baltazar in power.<sup>22</sup> The *peons* who work and live on his *hacienda* are helpless; his magic almost conquers the rebel general Bisco (a fictional Pancho Villa), but the more intuitive magic of the story’s heroine and the chance appearance of a tarantula break the spell, allowing Bisco to kill Baltazar and spread tentative justice among the *peons*.

Despite his necessary role in achieving this “happy” result, Mena’s fictional Villa is no hero. The revolutionary “invaders” who trespass on Baltazar’s land wreak destruction and chaos in their “mood for feasting” (101). Mena describes the buildings set aflame, the toppled fences, and the poultry and pigs that stray “distractedly among the multitudinous legs of patriotism”

(101). She notes bitterly that the rebels are more concerned with sampling Baltazar's livestock than with liberating the *peons*. Like the cattle that the rebels slaughter, the *peons* are "saved" from Rascón only to find themselves subject to the whims of the revolutionaries: the "long-suffering *peons* would have made no attempt to resist El Bisco, savior of the poor, even if the absurdity of resistance had been less evident than it was" (101-102). Rather than liberate the *campesinos*, the revolutionaries merely replace the corrupt *hacendados*. "The Sorcerer and General Bisco" envisages no rebellion for those who crave resistance. Instead, it dramatizes how one tyrant after another rises to power.

Like Turner and Reed, Mena meditates on the disconnection between the verbiage of revolution and its material consequences. Consider how she interrupts her story to recount the naming of the rebel leader, whose name literally means "General Cross-Eyed":

Having become the Hotspur of a promising rebellion, with a victory-seasoned army some thousands strong to swear by his name, the sometime bandit had been dubbed general by an anxious revolutionary junta.... The envoy had surmised that General Purificación would be a style of dignity and good omen. But suddenly El Bisco had rebelled. He had no objection to being a general—in fact, he had decided to promote himself to that rank, junta or no junta—but on no account would he show disrespect to the *distintivo* under which he had made himself a terror to the rich and an idol to the poor. Since it was undoubtedly the will of God that he should remain cross-eyed in this world, let martial history emblazon him without hypocrisy as General Bisco. (100-101)

This passage comments ironically on "Pancho/Francisco Villa," the alias of the revolutionary leader born Doroteo Arango. Although consciously chosen to evoke commonality with the

underclass, the affectionate nickname belies his notoriety as a murderer, bandit, and rapist (as Mena and many in the U.S. believed). For Mena (and later Josefina Niggli), women are especially vulnerable to such lawless liberators, as Mena reminds us when Carmelita asks, “Has General Bisco come to kill the innocent, who have comforted the poor and plotted to shield them from a cruel oppressor? Does the valiant general destroy those who have blessed him as their savior?” (108). The source of Bisco’s name also resonates on the level of synecdoche. Mena’s general takes his name from the debility of looking in two directions and therefore seeing less. The general imperfectly perceives the situation at the *hacienda*, sweeping in only to find himself entrapped by the sorcery of the *hacendado*. As an analogy for the plight of revolutionary Mexico, the message is plain: the leaders of revolution are the least able to see clearly the past and future of the country they mean to save. Villa looks to liberate *peons* and to redistribute wealth, but his lust for violence and vengeance obscures those goals.

To resolve this dilemma, Mena turns to magic and mysticism, suggesting that only the supernatural can overthrow the *hacendado*’s power.<sup>23</sup> For Mena, magic offers both problem and solution to a revolutionary impasse in which masculine agents—from soldiers to landowners and dictators—conspire. Although Mena distinguishes between corrupt aristocrats like Baltazar and the sympathetic bourgeoisie (like Carmelita) who try to “comfort” and “shield” the poor, none of these can prevail because none are guiltless (108). The “*inditos*,” for Mena, most compellingly embody Mexican culture because they are least complicit in the power dynamics that threaten it. In “The Sorcerer and General Bisco,” Mena’s susceptibility to stereotype, even fantasy, suggests her skepticism about the revolution’s promise and its threat to indigenous peoples.

Mena’s final story of the revolution, “A Son of the Tropics,” builds radically on her earlier tales by refusing its *mestizo* revolutionaries any resolution at all. Although this story is

published in *Household Magazine* in 1931, Mena may have written it much earlier. Amy Doherty finds that Mena submitted a similar story entitled “The Son of His Master” to *Century* in 1914.<sup>24</sup> In “A Son of the Tropics,” Don Rómulo returns with his daughter Dorotea to their *hacienda*, La Paloma, after 20 years in Mexico City. The morning after a lukewarm greeting from the *peons*, Dorotea goes riding on the family’s *rancho*, where the revolutionary Rosario captures her. Rómulo’s overseer informs him of Dorotea’s capture, mentioning that Rosario is the son of Rómulo’s former mistress. The don goes after his daughter and is also captured, whereupon Rosario convinces the *peons* to execute the *don* despite his promises to give the people land and fair wages. Rómulo confesses that Rosario is his son, vowing as he does so to educate Rosario and to make him heir to the land and wealth of the *hacienda*. Ashamed of his blood-tie to the aristocracy, Rosario tells the *don* to make good on his promises to the *peons*. He then grabs one of the camp’s homemade bombs and throws it at his feet, killing himself instantly.

“A Son of the Tropics” comprises Mena’s most searching portrait of revolutionary subjectivity. Like others in Mena’s oeuvre, it takes place during the revolution, when the *don* comes home to a plantation ruled by “stagnation and ruin” (145). Mena returns to the naïveté of the young bourgeoisie (embodied by Dorotea) and the corruption of the aging aristocracy (in Don Rómulo). Also like most of Mena’s work, “A Son of the Tropics” ends in ambiguity: “The Sorcerer and General Bisco,” concludes with the literally and metaphorically obfuscated Aquiles and Carmelita groping “toward each other through the smoke” (111). “A Son of the Tropics” refuses to tell readers what happens to the *hacienda* after the death of the rebel leader Rosario. Here Rosario provides the story’s vexed moral: “Rosario has lived of the people, and so he will die. Without favors he made himself something. But now you have made him less than nothing. Master, I give you back your people, in whose faces you have covered me with shame” (150).

Rosario dies, not for his revolt, but for his unwitting complicity in the system against which he rebels. When he realizes his inescapable relationship to the ruling class, that he is legally entitled to the lands that he would take and the *peons* he would liberate, Rosario succumbs to his own ruin and to Mexico's.

Mena refuses the Leftist optimism that Turner and Reed evince because she cannot reconcile revolutionary ideals with the material realities that the revolt seemed to exacerbate. In "A Son of the Tropics," Mena blames this contradiction on the inadequacy of language. Rosario's scene opens with the young leader trying to type Plutarch: "Seated before a rude table at the mouth of a fern-grown cave, General Rosario was laboriously teaching his fingers the use of an American typewriter stolen from the hacienda" (145).<sup>25</sup> Rosario's struggle with the technology of the typewriter recalls the schism between the revolution's ideologies and its print dissemination. Mena uses allegory to distill the national condition of revolutionary Mexico; she juxtaposes the familial tragedy that the *don* and Rosario play out with the revolutionary story they mean to enact: "Don Rómulo was crawling along on two hands and one knee, dragging his hurt leg behind him and praying for capture. But from a political point of view it was of the highest importance. If the Revolutionary Encampment of the Morning Star needed one thing more than rifles and cartridges, it was a master of whom to make an example before all the world. And here was the one master of all others whom the commander-in-chief, General Rosario, most desired to execute in form" (144). Don Rómulo's physical impotence belies his symbolic importance. Rosario believes that such a symbol is more necessary to the revolutionary cause than its weaponry, but that symbol will prove too great for revolutionary action to uproot. In this scene, Mena stacks the control of the *hacendado* against the power of the revolutionary "commander-in-chief," ultimately exposing the inefficacy of both.

Rómulo's imbrication in Mexico's system of dominance implicates his illegitimate son. Although the father lives and the son dies, Rosario's demise signals the end of hope for the *hacendado* and for the *peons*. The political and personal valences of this scene are intertwined, yet the revolutionary rhetoric by which Mena's characters make sense of circumstance seems ill fitted. Rosario has become a general precisely because of his mastery of revolutionary language: "He reminded them of the large brotherhood he had preached to them, the longed-for union with all their countrymen then in arms for emancipation and justice... And, soaring from the past to the future, he sketched in sentences of fire the glory that awaited them, his comrades and himself, on battlefields made sacred by blood shed for liberty" (148). He even manages to sway the *don* and Dorotea, but Don Rómulo ends Rosario's revolutionary story when he reveals the blood connection between *peon* and master. Rosario kills himself with one of his own bombs, packed into a doorknob from the *hacienda*. The tools of revolution have become the means to his destruction and the story ends in stasis, refusing the fantasy of resolution to the Mexican (and American) revolutionary *mêlée*.

Mena's magazine fictions offer a useful counterpoint to earlier nonfiction by Turner and Reed. Turner urges U.S. activists to intervene on behalf of Mexican *indios*. Reed champions the 1910 revolt as an inter-American Leftist revolution, but Mena refutes their reformist intercessions by denouncing naïve U.S. tourists and duplicitous Mexican aristocrats. Yet Mena casts Native subjects as inaccessible to the language of hemispheric modernity. Her efforts to represent indigenous Mexico for the U.S. public dramatize the failure of established narratives to account for collective resistance. Thus Mena's *Inditos* retreat to narrative silence or, like the *peons* of "A Son of the Tropics," to further disenfranchisement under an unscrupulous *patrón*. Mena's stories illustrate that U.S. culture and ideals do not function south of the border, but her

stories also reveal the persistence of the period's racial narratives and tropes among radical writers as well as reactionaries.

### **Katherine Anne Porter and the Ethics of Literary Transnationalism**

Although scholars do not always agree about the year the Mexican Revolution ended since insurrectionary activity continued in punctuated outbursts until 1934, Carranza's death and Obregón's ascent in 1920 signaled the coming of its close. In the decade that followed, peace seemed tenuous. Newspaper articles diligently detailed any outbreak of violence and wondered if U.S. intervention was imminent. In this fragile state of affairs Katherine Anne Porter peruses post-revolutionary Mexico's faults and assesses the unintended, even unpredictable results of U.S. involvement in the conflict. Porter criticizes the narratives of imperial romance by which travelers discovered the dangerous beauty of Mexico.<sup>26</sup> Her contact-zone love stories turn to tales of sexualized penetration and violence. She interrogates the revolution's failed promises to liberate women and Indians and grapples with the potent images of guerillas that had risen to dominance during years of evocative war dispatches. "Flowering Judas," Porter's most famous Mexico story, registers American complicity in the corruption of the revolution, but expresses her fear that Mexico's dirty politics could taint well-meaning U.S. humanitarians.<sup>27</sup> I end with a reading of Porter's long story "Hacienda," in which her representations of indigenous characters and cultures expose Mexico's illegibility to the cosmopolitan writers, photographers, and film crews who hope to capture its picturesque post-revolutionary climate for their global audiences. In this story Porter denounces her own participation in the exploitative possibilities of such ethnographic literary and artistic representation.

*Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (1930) introduced most of Porter's U.S. readers to her vision of revolutionary Mexico. Porter added "Hacienda" to the collection's second printing in

1935. Before *Flowering Judas*, Americans experienced Porter's perspective on Mexico through her dispatches and stories for the *Christian Science Monitor* (1921-1922), *Survey Graphic* (1924), and even in Mena's one-time forum, *Century Magazine* (1922, 1924).<sup>28</sup> Porter also reviewed books on Mexico for the *New York Herald Tribune* (1924-1943). Like Mena before her, Porter is particularly attuned to the oppression of women in post-revolutionary Mexico, a problem that she relates to systemic inequalities across the hemisphere. War correspondence such as John Reed's focused primarily on masculine heroes; Reed mentions the *soldaderas*, rebel wives and mistresses only to remark on their sexual flexibility. In contrast, Porter rarely represents Mexican subjectivity through masculine characters. Instead, female aristocrats like the teenaged "Virgin Violeta" (1924) and campesinas such as the heroine of "María Concepción" (1922) illustrate the fractured spirit of revolutionary Mexico.<sup>29</sup> In Porter's first tale of Mexico, María Concepción loses her faith in love when her husband leaves her for a teen-aged beekeeper. The two run off to join the revolution while María Concepción bears a stillborn baby whose death leaves her hardened and aloof. When the couple comes back to the *pueblo* with their healthy newborn, María Concepción murders her husband's mistress and takes their baby as her own. The husband returns to María Concepción, whose punishment for wreaking vengeance is, in effect, to live the deterministic life she'd always planned (cooking for her indifferent husband and caring for his child). Her exercise of violent agency merely restores María Concepción to the strictures of working-class family life.<sup>30</sup> An archetypal rural *india*, María Concepción embodies Porter's early sense of the people left behind by the revolution's progressive ideals.<sup>31</sup>

Porter's fiction challenges many of the racializing images that prior writers used to signify Mexico, even as she shares some of their assumptions. Scholars have disagreed about Porter's relationship to Mexico. Jeraldine Kraver reads Porter's antagonistic relationship to

Diego Rivera as evidence that Porter was a cultural tourist who found disappointment in a Mexico that didn't reflect her vision of Leftist promise.<sup>32</sup> José E. Limón recuperates Porter by analyzing her intellectual relationship with Mexican anthropologist and advocate of *indigenismo* Manuel Gamio. I argue for attention to Porter's uneasy relationship to images of revolution and indigeneity, which suggest her skepticism about the radical interventionism that Reed and Turner advocated.

Porter's "Flowering Judas" won wide critical praise in the 1930s for its deft imagery and subtle religious symbolism. It has been the most frequently anthologized and analyzed of Porter's works, but this proliferation of readings emphasizes Porter's literary mastery to the detriment of the Mexican context to which she hoped to call attention. "Flowering Judas" examines the complicity of its sympathetic American activist in the Mexican crimes of a degenerate Left. Laura has migrated to Mexico City to participate in the Socialist revolution, only to find herself catering to the whims of a corrupt politico. "Uninvited she has promised herself to this place," and Laura's greatest act of benevolence becomes sneaking narcotics to imprisoned revolutionaries (145). Night after night, Laura must tolerate the attentions of the powerful Braggioni, who typifies the nefarious ex-revolutionaries who rose to power in post-revolutionary Mexico. Braggioni is also a *mestizo*; Porter derides his "kinky yellow hair" and "oily" cheeks, aligning Braggioni's *macho* sexual threat with the danger that Mexico poses for Laura's Anglo femininity (139, 143). Indeed, danger attends every action and reaction that Laura attempts. Unwanted Mexican suitors stalk her; her male *compañeros* imagine her legs and breasts beneath her clothing.

In "Flowering Judas" Porter participates in a subgenre of stories in which travel to Mexico threatens American bodies and ideals.<sup>33</sup> Revolutionaries like Eugenio and *indios* like the

children she teaches in Xochimilco are equally foreign to Laura: “She is not at home in the world. Every day she teaches children who remain strangers to her, though she loves their tender round hands and their charming opportunist savagery” (151). Porter dramatizes Laura’s helplessness alongside her disillusionment. The defeated Laura cannot fulfill her own radical purpose in this dissolute foreign space. Unlike Mena’s gringa heroines, who seem to find mobility in Mexico, Laura is powerless and paralyzed. Her participation in Mexican political and cultural decadence has relegated Laura to an abjection similar to that of Porter’s *india* María Concepción. Tainted by her affiliation with the Mexican Left, Laura no longer considers the U.S. home, but in Mexico she is no more than an exotic body, desired and pursued by the men around her despite her nun-like virtue and charitable ambition. In “Flowering Judas,” a post-revolutionary bureaucracy imprisons rebels, *indio* children, and American sympathizers alike; Porter implies that Mexico has forced innocent U.S. humanitarians like Laura to collude with its most powerful and corrupt agents.

By exposing Mexican corruption and American collusion in “Flowering Judas,” Porter critiques the intelligentsia for the uneven consequences of their idealism. By the 1920s and 1930s, writers and filmmakers felt sufficiently removed from the revolution to reflect on its heroes and villains, making new claims for the conflict’s historical significance. Film and narrative representations of the revolution tended to co-opt its objectives and romanticize its struggles. Sensational biographies of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata flooded bookshelves. Perhaps one of the most popular textual representations, Edgcomb Pinchon’s *Viva Villa!* was converted to a popular film in 1934. Porter herself accompanied Soviet filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein and Grigori Alexandrov as they shot *¡Qué Viva México!* (1932) on location. She would first record this experience as nonfictional “interpretive journalism” in a 1932 issue of the

*Virginia Quarterly Review*, later expanding it to the fictional narrative “Hacienda,” which I examine below.<sup>34</sup> Porter’s short fiction takes aim at the artistic and literary communities who she felt had made careers out of the revolution only to abandon its causes. “That Tree” (1934) records Porter’s frustration with U.S. journalists in Latin America; the story tells of a failed poet who succeeds as a journalist in Latin America by developing a shallow “expertise” on the region’s politics. “Hacienda” combines the themes of these tales to assess the shared responsibility of international journalists, filmmakers, and elites in perpetuating the revolution’s injury to Mexican culture.

The one-time poet of “That Tree” becomes a journalist to avenge himself on a Midwestern lover who disregarded his potential. For this stereotypical foreign correspondent, the Mexican Revolution offers a fresh start: “That was why he had come to Mexico in the first place. He had felt in his bones that it was the country for him. Long after he had become quite an important journalist, an authority on Latin-American revolutions and a best seller, he confessed to any friends and acquaintances who would listen to him—he enjoyed this confession, it gave him a chance to talk about the thing he believed he loved best, the idle free romantic life of a poet—that the day Miriam kicked him out was the luckiest day of his life” (95). Porter’s unnamed protagonist is as obsessed with failure as Porter herself—he ruminates on the failure of his love affair, the failure of art, and most importantly the failure of the U.S. in Mexico. Porter comments ironically: “If there was one brand of bum on earth he despised, it was a newspaper bum. Or anyhow the drunken illiterates the United Press and Associated Press seemed to think were good enough for Mexico and South America. They were always getting mixed up in affairs that were none of their business, and they spent their time trying to work up trouble somewhere

so they could get a story out of it” (101). The irony here is, of course, that Porter’s unreflexive journalist is part of the problem.

As the tale begins, he is lying in drunken disarray beneath a tree. For a price, he rises from his proclivity to indolence in order to feign concern for a culture of oppression: “Except for Miriam, he would have been a lousy failure, like those bums at Dinty Moore’s, still rolling under the tables, studying the native customs. He had gone in for a career in journalism and he had made a good thing of it. He was a recognized authority on revolutions in twenty-odd Latin-American countries, and his sympathies happened to fall in exactly right with the high-priced magazines of a liberal humanitarian slant which paid him well for telling the world about the oppressed peoples” (116). The journalist identifies himself as an expert composer of empty articles that “tell the world about” oppression but never incite action. Although Porter despised this brand of journalism—one that presumes to know revolution and to translate the tragedies of “oppressed peoples”—Porter’s fiction does not imagine an alternative. The central character of “That Tree” is replete with pat phraseology. He doesn’t care to look beyond himself to the world in which he gets “mixed up.” The story illustrates his crime but finds itself, despite the wry third person narration, unable to move beyond its antagonistic protagonist. Porter may distance herself from such irresponsible journalism, loading her depiction with disdain, but the story replicates the very problem it illustrates, asking how texts could promote action in response to the injustice and failure they report.

As a foreign correspondent, Porter found much to question in her own subject position and the worldview that her articles and stories promoted. This anxiety about literary collusion immobilizes Porter’s narrator in “Hacienda;” how should the well-meaning American intervene in the ideologically compromised Mexico? What did Mexico’s problems say about the presence

and dominance of the U.S.? Such questions led Porter to a multifarious study of the corruption of American democratic ideals in Mexico. In “Hacienda,” Porter critiques the political fictions bred by art, film, and journalism.<sup>35</sup> “Hacienda” builds on Porter’s prior Mexico stories by tackling the class and gender inequalities that dominated post-revolutionary Mexico. The Russian communist filmmaker Andreyev, a wealthy American investor named Kennerly, and the narrator (a nameless female journalist whose attributes and sympathies Porter identified as her own), collide on a *pulque* plantation in the Mexican desert. The still-working *hacienda* serves as scenic background for Andreyev’s film, but his still shots erase the exploitative conditions of the *hacienda*, the complex subjectivity of its *peons*, and the decadence of its owners.

“Hacienda” registers the disparity between foreign representations of *indios* and the lived truths that film and text fail to record. The camera misses the erotic relationship that evolves between Don Genaro’s wife and mistress behind the scenes. The *peons* who live and work on the *hacienda* are as inscrutable as Turner’s Yaqui and Maya. Andreyev’s film mimics their lives, as when he notes that the young hero murders his sister both off- and on-camera, but Porter explains that the technology of film, like the technology of print, can only partially capture the post-revolutionary scene:

The closed dark faces were full of instinctive suffering, without individual memory, or only the kind of memory animals may have, who when they feel the whip know they suffer but do not know why and cannot imagine a remedy.... Death in these pictures was a procession with lighted candles, love a matter of vague gravity.... Even the figure of the Indian in his ragged loose white clothing, weathered and molded to his flat-hipped, narrow-waisted body, leaning between the horns of the maguey, his mouth to the gourd, his burro with the casks on either

side waiting with hanging head for his load, had this formal traditional tragedy, beautiful and hollow. (236)

The narrator, like the filmmaker, hopes to expose the oppression of the *peons*. Porter's privileged narrative builds on the interpretive act of the photograph, intervening to make these scenes legible to readers, just as the camera converts moving subjects to "a landscape with figures." The responses that these scenes provoke in the narrator and the filmmaker tell us more about those subjects as observers, ideologues, and voyeurs than we learn about the "closed dark faces" that the text obscures. The narrator projects onto them the "instinctive suffering" of animals, an unfortunate analogy that likens racial difference to the incompatibility of species and negates the interiority of the photograph's subjects. Here Porter, like Reed before her, invokes "love" as a further marker of Indian specificity. Such beautiful tragedy exists only for the affective reaction it rouses in the artists who chronicle it and the audiences who consume it. Porter describes the images recorded for their scenic nuance by the Russian radical filmmaker: "Andreyev went on showing me pictures from that part of the film they were making at the pulque hacienda.... They had chosen it carefully, he said; it was really an old-fashioned feudal estate with the right kind of architecture, no modern improvements to speak of, and with the purest type of peons" (235). The narrator seems skeptical about Andreyev's motives, but she nevertheless finds herself analyzing and transmitting the images before her.

Porter's "Hacienda" dramatizes this representational failure to illustrate the impasse that every journalist confronts. Since no writer comes free of an agenda to report on the state of Mexico, none can represent the *peons*, *hacendados*, or even the landscape without loading them with explicit values and implicit assumptions. Even as the narrator decides that these figures suffer "under a doom imposed by the landscape," she falls prey to the fantasy of timelessness

that the photographs depict. The narrator equates human death with the dry season, but at the end her *peon* driver tells her to come back in ten days, that soon the barren scene will make way for a green and plentiful landscape. Porter's journalist confronts her own limits because she too may only report the scenes she witnesses. Her portraits inscribe those scenes in the collective memory of the United States, but "Hacienda" explains how ephemeral such images are. A week earlier and the narrator would have missed the accident in which Justino shoots his sister and alters his own fate. Two weeks later and the narrator might know nothing of the incident. Like María Concepción, who is silenced by the sexualized violence against her, in "Hacienda" Justino's sister is lost before she is found, as nameless as the narrator and more voiceless.

Andreyev's film project presents the range of powers that dictate public perception of Mexico's politics and people. The movie, still incomplete as the journalist leaves the *hacienda*, is controlled not only by its director's agendas and those of his entourage (such as Carlos, who writes patriotic theme music, and Kennerly, who issues bribes and handles the budget), but by the Mexican officials who oversee the portrait of Mexico that his film will produce: "The government officials still took no chance. They wanted to improve this opportunity to film a glorious history of Mexico, her wrongs and sufferings and her final triumph through the latest revolution; and the Russians found themselves surrounded and insulated from their material by the entire staff of professional propagandists, which had been put at their disposal for the duration of their visit" (242-3). "Hacienda" portrays artistic representation as a series of mirrors that refract and distort her narrator's vision. Just as the still shots prescribe the aesthetic of the film, so the filmmakers, the actors, and the inchoate powers behind them, reconstruct impenetrable Mexican culture as an accessible fantasy.

Porter intimates that literary fiction, like journalism and film, must grapple with the author's imbrication in this representational impasse. Her stories, like Mena's, interrogate the material, political, and ideological conditions in which transnational contact occurs, exposing the mistranslation and falsity that characterize intercultural exchange. In "Hacienda," Porter's reflexive narrator becomes part of the problem she aims to expose: she cannot access indigenous subjects or translate an authentic community; she can only reveal and interpret the scene that has already been set. Thus, the ethics of Porter's transnational political writing center on reflexivity, on representing the barriers to hemispheric coalition and commonality between privileged subjects and working peoples.

In charting the U.S. writers who engaged Mexico's revolution, I have focused on the indigenous and working people who these writers hoped to advocate. John Kenneth Turner and John Reed hoped to extend U.S. sympathy and identification with Mexico's working people to foster a hemispheric proletarian revolution. Yet Mena and Porter reject their humanitarian identification with indigenous campesinos. Mena and Porter refuse any knowledge of the Indian, arguing that indigenous Mexicans cannot be co-opted by the discourse of U.S. progressivism. Although their stories meant to subvert stereotypes about romantic revolutionaries, passive señoritas, and bloodthirsty rebels, Porter, Mena, Reed, and Turner must seem markedly unrevolutionary to later generations of readers, for whom Mexican men and women alike bear the stigma of guerilla fatigues.<sup>36</sup> Just as the U.S. alternately romanticized and vilified Mexican revolutionaries, so did the tropes and conventions of those narratives feed depictions of new insurgent groups like the Zapatistas, as well as the Mexican drug cartels so often cited by governmental and press advocates of the "War on Drugs."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the failure of the U.S. to suppress revolutions in neighboring nations like Mexico and Cuba inspired the development

of devastating covert counter-revolutionary strategies in Latin America. By examining the place of Mexico's revolution in U.S. political writing, scholars may discover the revolutionary possibilities that such racializing narratives and imperial policies foreclosed.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> That heritage begins with the colonization of the Americas by the competing empires of England and Spain in the sixteenth century. For an excellent history of the revolutionary Americas see Lester Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution (1750-1850)* (1996).

<sup>2</sup> My understanding of literary activism is informed by David Luis-Brown's study of "hemispheric citizenship" in *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States* (2008), but complicates his argument by exploring how Mexican indigeneity challenges would-be transnational citizens.

<sup>3</sup> This *indigenista* movement is often identified with revolutionary Mexican intellectuals José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio.

<sup>4</sup> Scholarly attention to U.S. imperialism often highlights how policy-makers and public rhetoricians use print media to justify military action and diplomatic manipulation. This chapter builds most specifically on the foundation laid by María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, who argues that revolutionary movements in the twentieth century rely on the same developmentalist discourse employed by liberal policymakers. See Saldaña-Portillo's *The Revolutionary Imagination of the Americas in the Age of Development* (2003).

<sup>5</sup> After innumerable uprisings by indigenous and Creole populations, Spanish colonies in Latin America began declaring independence between 1808 and 1829. However, the race and class legacies of empire fed political violence throughout Latin America for centuries to come. Spain

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and other European imperial powers continued to threaten the sovereignty of these decolonized nations; coups, riots, and civil wars erupted with some frequency.

<sup>6</sup> *Pearson's Magazine* circulated in Britain (1896-1939) and the U.S. (1899-1925). It featured political essays, often of a Leftist bent, and fiction by such notables as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, whose *The War of the Worlds* first appeared serially in the British version. Upton Sinclair contributed to the American version, and Woodrow Wilson mentions the magazine in his papers.

<sup>7</sup> Manuel Ceballos-Ramírez and Oscar J. Martínez suggest in “Conflict and Accommodation on the U.S.-Mexican Border, 1848-1911” that Root even endorsed Creelman’s article, offering his official statement to Creelman’s “paean” to reinforce and authorize the article’s admiration for Díaz (148).

<sup>8</sup> Creelman begins his article with an extensive description of Díaz’s physiognomy, meant both to suggest his masculine prowess as master/commander and his exotic mixture of Spanish and indigenous blood:

From the heights of Chapultepec Castle President Diaz looked down upon the venerable capital of his country ... and I, who had come nearly four thousand miles from New York to see the master and hero of modern Mexico—the inscrutable leader in whose veins is blended the blood of the primitive Mixtecs with that of the invading Spaniards—watched the slender, erect form, the strong, soldierly head and commanding, but sensitive, countenance with an interest beyond words to express.

A high, wide forehead that slopes up to crisp white hair and over hangs deep-set, dark brown eyes that search your soul, soften into inexpressible kindness

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and then dart quick side looks-terrible eyes, threatening eyes, loving, confiding, humorous eyes—a straight, powerful, broad and somewhat fleshy nose, whose curved nostrils lift and dilate with every emotion; huge, virile jaws that sweep from large, flat, fine ears, set close to the head, to the tremendous, square, fighting chin; a wide, firm mouth shaded by a white mustache; a full, short, muscular neck; wide shoulders, deep chest; a curiously tense and rigid carriage that gives great distinction to a personality suggestive of singular power and dignity—that is Porfirio Diaz in his seventy-eighth year, . . . where, forty years before, he stood with his besieging army surrounding the City of Mexico, and the young Emperor Maximilian being shot to death in Queretaro, beyond those blue mountains to the north—waiting grimly for the thrilling end of the last interference of European monarchy with the republics of America.

It is the intense, magnetic something in the wide-open, fearless, dark eyes and the sense of nervous challenge in the sensitive, spread nostrils, that seem to connect the man with the immensity of the landscape, as some elemental force.

(231-232)

<sup>9</sup> Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Civilización i Barbarie: Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga* (1845) may have been on Turner's mind when he chose his title. In his foundational Latin American history, Sarmiento dramatically illustrated the dangers of the barbarism to which he believed Latin America, and Argentina in particular, were drawn. He hoped that education and enlightenment would further the cause of European civilization in Latin America. More than sixty years later, Turner echoes his belief in the promise of enlightened Western interventionism.

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<sup>10</sup> All quoted passages come from the book version of *Barbarous Mexico* edited by Sinclair Snow (1969).

<sup>11</sup> See José Limón's "Stereotyping and Chicano Resistance: An Historical Dimension" (1992). Limón analyzes Turner's text alongside its reception. He finds articles in *La Crónica*, a Laredo newspaper, that denounce "the stereotypic thrust of Turner's writing. They felt that Anglo-Americans, particularly Anglo-Texans, would convert these descriptions into stereotypes of all Mexicans and use this skewed vision as a further justification for continuing a system of racial oppression... against Texas Chicanos" (6).

<sup>12</sup> See my reading of *New York Times* articles in the next section.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson invaded Mexico twice during the revolution. In 1914, U.S. marines occupied Vera Cruz and in 1915 Wilson sent troops across the border in pursuit of Pancho Villa. During and after the heyday of revolutionary activity Mexicans lived under the constant threat of U.S. invasion. In these years the U.S. also invaded Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti.

<sup>14</sup> Here I owe an obvious debt to Kirsten Silva Gruesz's *Ambassadors of Culture*. See p. 18 for her conception of cultural ambassadorship.

<sup>15</sup> See Walter Benn Michaels' account of this trope in *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (1995).

<sup>16</sup> As Christopher Wilson illustrates in "Plotting the Border" (1993), this "pacific loss of self in the landscape" gives way to a more cynical account of the war camps that Reed followed (351).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Lehman has used Reed's notebooks to argue for Reed's intermixture of reporting and fiction in *Insurgent Mexico*. See *John Reed and the Writing of Revolution* (2002).

<sup>18</sup> See Paredes, "The Evolution of Chicano Literature" (1982) and López, "María Cristina Mena: Turn-of-the-Century La Malinche, and Other Tales of Cultural (Re)Construction" (1994).

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<sup>19</sup> See Tiffany Ana López's "Maria Cristina Mena: Turn-of-the-Century La Malinche" (1994), Amy Doherty's introduction to *The Collected Stories of María Cristina Mena* (1997), and Charlotte Rich's *Transcending the New Woman: Multiethnic Narratives in the Progressive Era* (2009) for more detailed analyses of the periodicals in which Mena published her fiction.

*American Magazine*, *Century*, and *Cosmopolitan* were popular journals that each enjoyed a large circulation. Although we cannot know how many Americans read Mena's stories, I argue that her stories participated in a larger debate about revolutionary Mexico that found its way to the pages of these magazines, as well as to those of daily newspapers, nonfiction travelogues, and novels.

<sup>20</sup> Rich's *Transcending the New Woman* usefully situates Mena in the context of narrative portraits of the "New Woman." Rich argues that "Mena's works, categorized in their time as charming portraits of Mexican life for largely white, middle-class audiences, can be seen as complex, parodic commentaries about this Progressive ideal of American womanhood from an author who lived both within and outside of its paradigm" (139). Mena critiques that ideal through characters such as Alicia Cherry in "The Education of Popo" and Miss Young in "The Gold Vanity Set." For Rich, Mena's engagement with stereotypical Mexican women contests the power of such U.S. ideals in Mexico.

<sup>21</sup> See Kirsten Silva Gruesz's "The Mercurial Space of 'Central' America: New Orleans, Honduras, and the Writing of the Banana Republic," in *Hemispheric American Studies*. Her essay discusses how *Century* articles contributed to a hemispheric economic exchange, advertising and commentating such international industrial affairs as the 1884-5 World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition and the "North, Central, and South American

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Exposition, Promotive of the Commercial and Industrial Unity of the Three Americas” (144-145).

<sup>22</sup> Tiffany Ana López has contended that the villain Don Baltazar is as much a figure of American capital as he is of Porfiriato oppression. Reading Mena’s story in the context of *Century Magazine*’s racializing advertisements and xenophobic articles about Latin America, López argues that Baltazar’s use of hypnotism is “a metaphor for the way that capitalism works” (37). I am more inclined than López to read Baltazar as a fictional Díaz, and less disposed to read the story as the triumph of the trickster Carmelita.

<sup>23</sup> John Kucich read’s Mena’s use of magic here as liberating. He argues in *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2004) that Mena uses Mexican spiritualism to provide “a means of grafting her sustained analysis of race and gender onto her increasingly radical politics.... Mena used spiritualism in her local color fiction to critique metropolitan norms [and] to deconstruct Anglo-American categories of race, gender, science, and spirituality” (110). I agree with the spirit of Kucich’s argument, but amend his reading by pointing out how Mena ironizes Bisco as a liberating rebel. I would also point out that Carmelita’s power in the story is more circumscribed than Kucich suggests.

<sup>24</sup> See Doherty’s Introduction to *The Collected Stories* (xliv).

<sup>25</sup> Pancho Villa’s semi-fictional autobiography recalls that he learned to type in prison. See Christopher Wilson, “Plotting the Border,” 349.

<sup>26</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt’s influential account of the generic conventions of imperial travel literature, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992).

<sup>27</sup> “Flowering Judas” has benefited from dozens of apt critical readings. Robert Brinkmeyer’s *Katherine Anne Porter’s Artistic Development* (1993) provides helpful readings of all of her

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Mexico stories (and many others). Thomas Walsh offers rich context for the story in his many articles and books on Porter and Mexico. See in particular *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden* (1992). For a compelling recent reading of Porter's gender politics in "Flowering Judas" and elsewhere, see Mary Titus, *The Ambivalent Art of Katherine Anne Porter* (2005).

<sup>28</sup> See Rob Johnson's "A 'taste for the exotic': Revolutionary Mexico and the Short Stories of Katherine Anne Porter and María Cristina Mena," in *From Texas to the World and Back: Essays on the Journeys of Katherine Anne Porter* (2001). Johnson argues that Porter read Mena and revised many of Mena's characters and plotlines in her own Mexico tales.

<sup>29</sup> Both stories originally appeared in *Century Magazine*. Porter collected and reprinted her Mexico stories together in *Flowering Judas*.

<sup>30</sup> "María Concepción" has sparked some disagreement among critics. Rachel Adams sees the story as Porter's anxiety about the incursion of modernity on indigenous tradition. José Limón celebrates María Concepción's revenge as her assertion of feminist subjectivity and lauds the rural community that embraces her. My analysis builds on Adams' "cynical" take on the story, but suggests that Porter sees indigeneity as illegible to the transnational progressives who turn their nostalgic gaze on indio cultures.

<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, the story features as backdrop an American archeologist:

Nearly all of the men of the community worked for Givens, helping him to uncover the lost city of their ancestors. They worked all the year through and prospered, digging every day for those small clay heads and bits of pottery and fragments of painted walls for which there was no good use on earth, being all broken and encrusted with clay. They themselves could make better ones,

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perfectly stout and new, which they took to town and peddled to foreigners for real money. But the unearthly delight of the chief in finding these worn-out things was an endless puzzle. He would fairly roar for joy at times, waving a shattered pot or a human skull above his head, shouting for his photographer to come and make a picture of this! (6-7)

Here Porter pokes fun at the intellectuals and scholars who fetishize the artifacts of ancient Native peoples but neglect the poverty and racial inequality that their descendants continue to suffer.

<sup>32</sup> See Kraver, “Laughing Best: Competing Correlatives in the Art of Katherine Anne Porter and Diego Rivera” (1998) and “Troubled Innocent Abroad: Katherine Anne Porter’s Colonial Adventure” (2001).

<sup>33</sup> See Charles Flandrau’s “Wanderlust” for another example. His short story was originally printed in 1911.

<sup>34</sup> See Janice Stout, *Katherine Anne Porter: A Sense of the Times* (1995) for more on the relationship between nonfictional and fictional versions of “Hacienda.”

<sup>35</sup> Josefina Niggli and Américo Paredes also develop in their later texts, Paredes’ *George Washington Gomez* (1930s, 1990) and Niggli’s *Mexican Village* (1945).

<sup>36</sup> Richard Slotkin has suggested how thoroughly Hollywood co-opted the characters, scenes, and images of the Mexican Revolution that these writers first generated and has shown that by the 1950s such themes were a reliable staple of Hollywood portraits of Mexico. See Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992).

<sup>37</sup> See Curtis Marez’s *Drug Wars: The Political Economy of Narcotics* (2004) for a detailed analysis of the cultural legacy of the Mexican Revolution in U.S. culture and policy.

## Chapter 2

### Loving Castro: U.S. Print Culture and the Cuban Revolution

The 1959 Cuban Revolution quickly and irrevocably transformed the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. Before the revolt, Cuba offered the U.S. an offshore hub for commercial investment, tourism, and military might. After Castro's triumph, the two nations severed many of these ties, replacing them with mutual antagonism and suspicion. U.S. trade sanctions obliged Cubans to survive severe economic hardship and ongoing shortages in basic goods. In contrast, Cuban American communities (especially in Florida) swelled with expatriates and their children. As these upheavals transformed the two countries, political writers have imagined the Cuban Revolution as the dawn of a new age in the hemisphere. Although they disagree about what form this future will take, journalists, activists, public intellectuals, and novelists all suggest that Cuban sovereignty could restore the democratic promise of the U.S.

This chapter studies U.S. cultural production in the years surrounding the Cuban Revolution (roughly 1958-1968), analyzing the debate, dread, and optimism that accompany Castro's rise to power and his fall from the good graces of U.S. Cold Warriors. I focus on political writers for whom Castro's new regime undermines the corruption of Cuba's former leaders and the complicity of U.S. military and commercial powers. For them, the Cuban Revolution replaces that corrosive cosmopolitanism with an age of progressive collaboration between Leftists and Cuban nationalists in both countries. The first writers to portray Castro and his 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, foreign correspondents for major periodicals such as *The New York Times*, *Life*, and *Newsweek*, fixate on heroes of the revolution, especially the figure of Fidel Castro himself; journalists such as Herbert Matthews interrogate their characters and imagine their potential to save Cuba (and thereby the U.S.). In contrast, many State Department officials

and Cuban expatriates register anger over the leftist tenor of Castro's government and use political testimonies, brochures, and other texts to galvanize community efforts and broader U.S. support for counter-revolution.

Building on this tumultuous atmosphere of fear and hope, political intellectuals and novelists such as Waldo Frank, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Jose Yglesias use the revolution to reveal the hypocrisy of the U.S. government and to undermine its claims to stewardship over Cuba. Waldo Frank unites the peoples of the hemisphere, calling on Americans to support the people of "America Hispana" as they resist the domination and covert coercion of the U.S. government. John Kenneth Galbraith turns to the conventions of parody to ridicule the paranoia and inefficiency that govern U.S. foreign policy, crafting a fantasy in which a fictional Caribbean country frees itself from the U.S. by cannily manipulating shortsighted American bureaucrats. Finally, Jose Yglesias, a Cuban American writer, employs both journalism and fiction to imagine how the revolution reinvigorates and unifies both Cuban and Cuban American cultures. Rejecting the cult of personality that centered on Castro, Yglesias imagines the revolt and the new nation it initiates as the movement of a transnational Cuban people. He envisions how Cuban patriotism can reconnect Florida's Cuban diaspora with their lost island kin, creating a community that rejects the corruption and paranoia that characterize both the U.S. and the Batista governments during the early years of the Cold War.

Although these competing factions disagree about who should decide Cuba's future, all long for an autonomous Cuban democracy, which would in turn free the U.S. from the contradictions inherent in its foreign policy of democratic interventionism. Such arguments about Cuba's revolutionary future establish its stakes for the integrity of the United States' democratic ideals. I suggest how this debate, staged on the pages of periodicals and propaganda, deploys a

discourse of transnational ethics and models a principled engagement with Cuba. They do this by situating themselves as observers and interpreters of the revolution who can both model and explain how other Americans should participate in its ultimate cause: the liberation of the Cuban people from authoritarian tyranny (first Batista's and later, according to some, Castro's). Moreover, these writers triangulate Cuba as the site of a global struggle for democracy against faraway opponents such as the U.S.S.R. and nearby antagonists such as the Dominican Republic. Thus, while political writers—journalists, propagandists, public intellectuals, and novelists—craft comprehensible narratives of past and present, this chapter focuses on the future they imagine for the hemisphere. These writers translate the maneuverings of the state for the benefit of their reading publics and represent the role of everyday Americans in the destiny of nation-states.<sup>1</sup>

Current popular and scholarly representations of the revolution tend to assume two things: first, its socialist ideological basis and second, its failure to improve the lives of Cubans. Indeed, during Castro's long rule, poverty and inequality in Cuba have increased and families and communities have been divided by rampant refugee migration. Yet the figure of Fidel Castro and his nation's relationship to the U.S. once looked very different. Revolutionary Cuba offers many in the U.S. new hope for a hemispheric community in which U.S. imperial power dwindles and Cuban democracy burgeons. If Cuban democracy could proliferate without U.S. enforcement, then writers could imagine a politics beyond the anxieties, polemics, and oppressions of the Cold War. In other words, the era's writers suggest that success of democratic revolution in Cuba could restore America's own desire for hemispheric democracy. By comparing treatises on Castroism by exiled Cubans with popular journalism, political nonfiction, and speculative novels, I analyze how U.S. writers imagine the machinations of U.S. empire,

shedding light on the political history that grounds the current cultural relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. Perhaps most importantly, this chapter shows how U.S. writers grapple with the incongruous character of capitalist democracy, questioning how liberal ideals justify diplomatic and military intervention and using political writing to contest the ways their vision of democracy has been corrupted.

### **The Rise of Castro in Yankee Print Culture**

Images and stories about Cuba achieved prolific circulation in U.S. print media between the 1895 Cuban War of Independence (appropriated by Americans as the 1898 Spanish-American War) and the 1959 revolution. Representations of Cuba respond to and build on the complex network of ties that bound the two nations. One of those was strategic; policymakers believed that Cuba's geographic position in the Caribbean made it vital to U.S. military control of Central and South America. The establishment of Guantanamo Naval Base on Cuba's southern shore in 1903 brought throngs of U.S. military men to the island.<sup>2</sup> Their influence was both military and commercial.

Indeed, economic ties reinforced Cuba's strategic importance to the U.S. After the defeat of the Spanish in 1898, Cuba quickly became a focus for investment in mining and agriculture, especially sugar. U.S. companies such as United Fruit imported American overseers to manage large numbers of Cuban workers; those Americans in turn brought families who lived in society with local elites. Cuba also became a hub for U.S. tourist and leisure industries such as hotels and casinos. Gambling became particularly fashionable in the country during Prohibition, making Cuba a popular destination for wealthy Americans.

Beyond these material concerns, affective connections bound the two nations. Questions of national purpose and conscience complicated U.S. attitudes toward Cuba. During the Spanish-

American War, policymakers such as Theodore Roosevelt and journalists such as Richard Harding Davis and Stephen Crane sold military intervention to the public as the duty of a democratic beacon to oust Old World empires.<sup>3</sup> Because the logic of interventionism was so deeply ingrained in American culture, the U.S.'s moral mission in Cuba lingered long after 1898. In the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, *Time* publishes anxious articles about how Cuba has provided a way station for Chinese immigrants on their way to the U.S., dispatches on Cuba's role in the international drug trade, portraits of the international Mafiosos who based their operations in Cuban casinos, and debates about whether Cuba's political climate was favorable or unfavorable to American investors and travelers.<sup>4</sup> Such depictions of Cuba as unstable and dangerous inspire famous authors such as Ernest Hemingway to set their novels of action and intrigue on the island or in the gulf stream. Hemingway's dark, deterministic thriller, *To Have and Have Not* (1937) begins in *medias res* as its "tough guy" protagonist, Harry Morgan, sits inside a Havana bar and listens to rebel gunfire on the street outside. Morgan is a poor man who survives the Great Depression and provides for his family by taking fishing parties from Key West into the gulf. Tempted by the chance to make his fortune, Morgan begins to use his boat to run liquor, then Chinese immigrants, and eventually gangsters and revolutionaries between Cuba and the U.S., a decision that ultimately results in his death.<sup>5</sup>

For decades after the war, journalists and writers continued to describe the relationship between the countries as a kinship—the tie of parents and children, sisters, or neighbors.<sup>6</sup> Following the series of dictators whose oppressions glossed the headlines of U.S. periodicals, news-reading Americans must have wondered about their civic duty to their beleaguered "neighbor." One 1933 *New York Times* article, for example, sketches the connections between U.S. military, economic, and ethical entanglement in the Gerardo Machado dictatorship (1925-

1933). Nicknamed the “Butcher of Las Villas,” Machado was among the most despotic of Cuba’s post-independence heads of state. The article, entitled “Revolt by Terror Going on in Cuba” (1933) traces the censorship, torture, and slaughter enacted by Machado, citing slain rebels and boatloads of refugees as the hemispheric casualties of his regime. The article’s author, Russell Porter, expresses some anxiety about the motives of underground rebels and student activists, but contends that Machado has earned such insurrection by citing the (perhaps deceptively unilateral) opinion of Cuba’s American population. Porter writes: “The best impartial and American evaluation of the student movement available in Havana is that it is partly pure idealism and partly extreme radicalism” (9). For expertise he turns to the “American business community,” who “formerly supported President Machado.” As Porter explains,

They believed Cuba’s political troubles were chiefly due to the widespread poverty and misery since the collapse in the world price of sugar; that he was doing the best he could in a very difficult situation; that he had reduced the budget and kept the country stable in hard times; that he was protecting foreign life and property and paying the foreign debt, and that any alternative Cuban Government would only make matters worse. They thought that Cuba needed to be ruled by a strong man in the economic emergency and that President Machado was just the man needed for the job.

Since the killings of prisoners began, however, the sentiment of the American community has been changing. (9)

Porter cites Americans in Havana who “favor intervention” and points to the necessary role of incumbent President Franklin Roosevelt in deciding whether Machado will continue to control Cuba. He feels “hopeful” that Cubans will wait for the U.S. president to guide them away from

“chaos and anarchy.” In this way *The New York Times* aligns diverse U.S. interests under the banner of the president, whose administration will determine the best future for both countries.

In 1933 Machado was overthrown and eventually replaced by Fulgencio Batista, an autocrat whose on-again, off-again reign oversaw a battery of oppressions.<sup>7</sup> Batista, even more than Machado, operated with the support of U.S. policymakers, who saw him as an ally against the Axis during World War II and against communism during the Cold War. On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro orchestrated his first act of insurrection against Batista, the attack of the Moncada Barracks. The attack was a disaster, but the martyrdom of his troops fueled support for Castro in Cuba. He returned to the country in 1956 and began again in earnest.

Castro and his 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, as it came to be called, struggled for headlines in the U.S. during the 1950s, a decade of intense focus on the Cold War. Although McCarthyism preoccupied most national news outlets and international articles focused on the Soviet Union or its “Red” allies in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, Cuba’s infamous casinos, nefarious dictatorial regimes, and upstart rebels provided a welcome diversion from the entrenched narratives of the Cold War. The Broadway musical *Guys and Dolls* (1950), for example, features Havana as the exotic setting that ignites love between the gangster Sky and the missionary Sarah.<sup>8</sup> Reporters and writers find Cuba familiar but foreign, a prime locale for sensational thrillers about spies and mobsters. Indeed, Cuba’s exoticism obfuscated the “socialist” tenor of Castro’s revolution. Slowly gathering support—military aid, recruits, and popular approbation—Castro launched a revolution that was as ideological as it was tactical. His platform of democracy and opportunity for working Cubans garnered acclaim in the U.S. as well as well as in Cuba.

The 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement gained much of its cultural momentum in 1957, following the publication of Herbert Matthews’ three-part series for *The New York Times* (February 24-26).

Matthews revealed that Castro and his revolution still lived and grew in the heart of the Sierra Maestra, and his sympathetic articles stirred American hearts. Matthews has even been credited with (and denounced for) participating in Castro's rise from obscure guerilla to "Cuban strongman."<sup>9</sup> His articles exalt Castro as the embodiment of the Cuban revolution and of the political future of the hemisphere.<sup>10</sup> Matthews sets this precedent in his first article for the series, which announces Castro as a "flaming symbol" for the "new deal for Cuba" ("Cuban Rebel is Visited in Hideout" 34). Matthews is among the very first to describe Castro's iconic physicality for U.S. readers:

[A] few minutes later Fidel himself strode in. Taking him, as one would at first, by physique and personality, this was quite a man—a powerful six-footer, olive-skinned, full-faced, with a straggly beard. He was dressed in an olive gray fatigue uniform and carried a rifle with a telescopic sight, of which he was very proud.... The personality of the man is overpowering. It was easy to see that his men adored him and also to see why he has caught the imagination of the youth of Cuba all over the island. Here was an educated, dedicated fanatic, a man of ideals, of courage and of remarkable qualities of leadership.... In honor of the occasion, Señor Castro broke open a box of good Havana cigars and for the next three hours we sat there while he talked. (34)

Castro's physical presence presages his ideological importance to Cuba, and thereby to the U.S. Descriptions of his cigars, his stature, his fatigues, and even his prominent rifle evoke a masculine image of Latin America's revolutionary heritage blended with the tools of modern warfare. Matthews extols Castro's eloquence with affective adjectives like "overpowering" and describes the adoring response that Castro stirs among Cubans. Furthermore, Matthews'

elaborate description of his trek through the Sierra Maestra to interview Castro conjures a scene of jungle asceticism. Castro's "dedicated" fanaticism, courage, and idealism suffuse Matthews' portrait, a precedent that would perpetuate in later journalists' accounts of the rebels' battles and their triumphs.

Like *The New York Times*, *Life* played a pivotal role in representing Castro as the incarnation of Cuba's revolution. With larger-than-life photographs of Cuban rebels and short, pointed descriptions of goings-on in the early stages of the rebellion, *Life* heightened the iconic status of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement and its stakes for Americans. It also contributed to the representation of Castro as hyper-masculine, the ultimate rebel man. A 1957 article on the revolution, entitled "In Man's War, U.S. Boys Quit," depicts a photo of two U.S. sailors shaking hands with Castro and Camilo Cienfuegos, one of his lieutenants. The article explains that "the realities of war proved too much for some spirited American youths who had joined the rebels," but also adds that the young men are leaving the revolution "in tears" for its ideals (43). This article highlights American participation in the rebellion, but focuses on Cuban prowess and agency.

Indeed, *Life* and most pre-triumph treatments of Castro emphasize the sovereignty of the rebels, who act without U.S. military backing against the overwhelming strength of Batista's forces. The article implies that U.S. popular participation in the conflict is intangible; journalists demonstrate their support through sympathetic portraits of the rebels rather than through overt action. Furthermore, they describe U.S. participation in the struggle as tangential, as when *Life* reports in "Captured, Cuba Bound" (1958): "At Port Isabel, Tex. 35 Spanish-speaking New Yorkers, their armbands marked '26 July' for Cuba's 1953 rebellion, were herded singing off to jail. Sailing for Cuba to join rebel Fidel Castro, they were caught by the U.S. Coast Guard" (26).

This brief account registers enthusiasm and support for the rebellion among “Spanish-speaking New Yorkers,” alluding to the revolt’s significance for U.S. Latina/os, but casts their efforts as merry zealotry with little consequence. Such articles suggest that the revolutionary movement, with Castro at its helm, may at last fulfill Cuba’s democratic promise without intervention from the U.S.

The success of his revolution left Americans uncertain about the leader. When Fidel Castro’s guerillas finally wrested power from Batista on January 1, 1959, the portrait of Cuba that emerged in periodicals and political nonfiction revised old debates about the place of U.S. power in the country. Early accounts see Castro as a populist leader in the style of George Washington. As the euphoria of revolution dissipates into the murkier climate of executions and repressions that followed, public arbiters wonder if Cuba will continue to mirror the darkest features of Americanness.

After Batista fled Cuba on January 1, 1959, U.S. speculation about the potential consequences of Castro’s new regime reached its boiling point. News outlets that had neglected the Castro stories (such as *Time*) rushed to account for the seemingly overnight triumph of the rebels. The news media flooded the country, and long articles, large photographs, and energetic newscasts quickly spread images and stories of Cuba in the U.S. In *Life*, for example, page after page of photographs feature somber portraits of Batista and his children next to shots of riots and cheering crowds in Santiago and Havana, portraits of idealistic young revolutionaries, and the requisite pictures of Castro, “Dynamic Boss,” with his mouth open as he “barks out an order” (Jan. 12, 1959, 11). The next week, Castro graced the cover of *Life*; the photo’s caption, “Castro in Triumphant Advance to Havana,” both contextualizes and interprets its dramatic portrait of Castro, who angrily yells into a microphone and raises his arms “in a passionate gesture” (2).

*Newsweek* calls Castro “a living legend” (“What Next for Cuba” 1959). As these images suggest, *Life* and other periodicals underscore the revolution’s uncertainty and volatility through descriptions of Castro. His displays of passion, his speeches, and his “soaring, vaguely leftist hopes for Cuba’s future” feed anxious conjecture about the shape that future could take (“Cuba: Democracy or Dictatorship?” 1959).

In the early months of the revolution, Castro enjoyed a great deal of popularity inside and beyond Cuba. Within months of his ascent he came to the U.S. (and Canada) on a publicity tour. *Time* pictures him petting a tiger at the Bronx Zoo (“Humanist Abroad” 1959). Castro also appeared before reporters (in English) on NBC’s *Meet the Press* and held a rally in Central Park attended by 20,000 “Spanish-speaking New Yorkers” (“Humanist Abroad”). He quickly handed the presidency to Manuel Urrutia, a moderate judge, but Latin America’s history of military dictatorship made many skeptical of Castro’s intentions. Nevertheless, pro-Castro accounts appeared despite (or perhaps because of) Cuba’s alliance with the Soviet Union and the increasing hostility of the U.S. State Department.

Leftist thinkers and writers from the U.S. and Europe traveled to Cuba to witness for themselves the first months of this latest proletarian revolution. Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre approves of Castro and his cause in *Sartre on Cuba* (1961). Jules Dubois and C. Wright Mills, both eminent sociologists, publish forceful tracts on revolutionary Cuba.<sup>11</sup> One of the most widely read U.S. specialists on Latin America, writer and historian Waldo Frank, was invited to travel to and write about Castro’s Cuba in 1959 because of his longstanding scholarly enthusiasm for Latin American revolutionary struggles. His popular political monograph, *Cuba: Prophetic Island* (1961), comments on the revolution’s triumphs and struggles in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs (April 1961). Frank bemoans the increasingly confrontational relationship between Cuba

and the U.S. State Department: “No one would have predicted *an invasion!* No one was ready to believe in the deterioration of continent and hemisphere relations that less than three years have wrought” (Foreword). He hopes that his book will enlist American moderates in the democratic cause of “America Hispana”:

Cuba stands for America Hispana.... The Hispanic *peoples* respond to our conduct in Cuba as if their own bodies were touched and offended. And soon or late, the *peoples* will be heard, even if this means the repudiation of their most consequential leaders.

Therefore it is extremely fortunate, not only for Cuba but for America Hispana *and the United States*, that our stupid and criminal attempt to invade Cuba was a fiasco.

There is still time for us Americans to learn that such an invasion of counter-revolution as the one we engineered is an attack on all our deepest values *at home, here*, in the United States. (Foreword)

In this passage, Frank aligns Cuba’s popular struggle with the democratic will of the U.S. He argues that Castro better represents the “values” of Americans than their “stupid and criminal” State Department. He goes on to compare Castro to George Washington and Simón Bolívar, international symbols of revolutionary resistance to imperial and dictatorial tyranny (14). For Frank, U.S. imperial ventures in Latin America (especially the 1901 Platt Amendment and the 1903 Guantanamo Naval Base) have undermined the ideals of the U.S: “Cuba had been betrayed by its rescuers and defenders. But *the people* of the United States had also been betrayed. Their emotion and will, voiced in the Congress, had unqualifiedly declared the Cubans’ right to unqualified freedom. This emotion and will had energized the American intervention, which then

had been exploited to cheat the popular will of both republics” (111). Furthermore, he bemoans that so many progressives have turned their backs on Castro so early in his experiment.

Frank, like most commentators, positions Castro physically and ideologically at the heart of the Cuban Revolution. He describes the Cuban response to Castro as unanimous: “a voice rose from them—FIDEL—and became a marching song: FIDEL! FIDEL! Castro heard it.... Castro was thus figuratively *carried* to Havana by the people” (131). He describes Castro’s relationship to Cuba as the “love” of a “good man” for his country. That affective connection between the heroic Castro and a revitalized Cuba enables Frank’s optimism that Cuba will be a “prophetic island.” He describes Cuba as a futurescape, the harbinger of a new political life for the Americas, even the world:

[T]he attitudes of the Cuban leaders toward the world and the attitudes of the world, the Hispano-American and the American world, toward Cuba will reveal much about the future we are creating for ourselves.... This is certain, now: the clock of Cuba’s life cannot be set back to what it was. Not to what it was under American possession, not to what it was under Spain. Such survivals of the American domination as the naval base at Guantanamo will disappear, a last vestige of the Platt Amendment. But Cuba’s destiny within America Hispana, within the Western Hemisphere, within the world now also rising in Africa, Asia and Europe, rests with the character of the Cubans as it will emerge, made articulate by its leaders. (144)

Frank’s figuration of Castro perfectly amplifies the voice of the people—a global body of subalterns who have been silenced by the repressive Batista regime and ignored by the U.S. He suggests that Cuba, now beyond the power of a corrupted U.S., will release the U.S. from its

attitude of domination. Frank speculates that the Cuban Revolution will restore democracy to the U.S. and to Latin America, thus fulfilling the mission on which the U.S. was founded. That is, if the State Department can leave Castro well enough alone. In this way Frank, like many progressive writers, appropriates the moral duty of the U.S. for the Cuban revolutionary cause.

### **Paradise Lost**

By 1961, when Frank's monograph was published, Castro's U.S. defenders were a vocal minority. Criticism of his regime appeared swiftly and dominated the U.S. print media for the rest of the century. In the early 1960s, accusations of communism and dictatorship seemed to anticipate Castro's increasingly authoritarian leadership and socialist praxis. Like Castro's supporters, his critics deliberated the moral duty of the U.S. in Cuba. Their focus on Castro's persona and policies reveal their general anxiety about the entwined futures of Cuba and the hemisphere. They revise accounts of Castro's charisma, asceticism, and dedication to focus on his "Latin" volatility, obsession, and lasciviousness. Like their pro-Castro counterparts, the U.S. opposition debates how the U.S. should participate in bringing democracy to Cuba.

Castro's charismatic public image was undermined early by one of his first mandates, the trial and execution of hundreds of former Batista allies over several months in 1959. The spectacle provided opportunity for thousands of photographs of middle-aged men falling before firing squads. The United Press, for example, issued a photographic series of the execution of Cornelio Rojas, Batista's Santa Clara police chief; the photos were syndicated in national news magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Time*.<sup>12</sup> Rojas received a death sentence for torturing political prisoners. In one of the photos, taken just as the bullets hit Rojas, his hat flies from his head—a gruesome detail in a gruesome series. News commentators quickly connect these executions to prior atrocities in Latin America, using old stereotypes to place Castro on a continuum of Latin

brutality. As *Time* deduces, “The spectacle of Cuban killing Cuban and calling it justice was nothing new to history” (“Cuba: The Vengeful Visionary” 41).<sup>13</sup>

By mid-1959, both the State Department and the mainstream media feared communist influence. Many continued to deny that Castro himself was a communist (a testament, perhaps, to his lingering popularity, or to his cagey explications of his political philosophy in the early days of the revolution), but his land reform program (May 17, 1959), his acceptance of Soviet aid and alliance, and his systematic ejection of “moderates” like Manuel Urrutia and Rufo López-Fresquet (in July of 1959 and March of 1960, respectively) seemed to demonstrate unequivocally his ties to Marxist ideas and ideals.<sup>14</sup> By mid-1960, Eisenhower had authorized U.S. counter-revolutionary covert initiatives in Cuba. Furthermore, those who denounce Castro point to Raúl Castro and Che Guevara. Raúl Castro had become notorious for his left-wing sentiments, enthusiasm for “militancy,” and anti-American antics.<sup>15</sup> Guevara was also well known for revolutionary activity; many Americans recalled his support for the leftist Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz, a figure frequently villainized in the U.S. press both before and after his overthrow by coup.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, news writers and policymakers worry that Castro’s populist, increasingly anti-American discourse reveals his loyalty to the U.S.S.R. Just two months after Castro’s takeover, a 1959 editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* argues that the U.S. must “tolerate” only those dictators “who can keep the Red penetrators under control” (“We Tolerate Democracies or Dictators” 10). A July editorial warns, “We Can’t Let the Caribbean Go Red by Default!” (10). Conservative reports in *The Wall Street Journal* argue that “Communist Cuba presents the most urgent problem for United States Diplomacy in the Western hemisphere since the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine. Clearly, the principle of that doctrine has been violated by a regime

openly in league with a foreign imperialism. Clearly, the Cuban Government threatens the peace and security of the entire hemisphere” (“A Test of Our Good Neighbors” 12). The threat that Cuba poses is so “clear” that the article never needs to explain the consequences of neglecting Castro. It cites Soviet imperialism as justification for U.S. intervention, taking Cuba back under the banner of U.S. stewardship. This article calls for military action to maintain “peace and security” to the “entire hemisphere” (as though the hemisphere has been safe and secure), uniting the interests of Latin American and U.S. peoples to reinforce the ethical duty of the state. Moreover, such articles position the Cuban Revolution within a global struggle, suggesting that the hemisphere must model the democratic unity that it hopes to spread in Eastern Europe and Asia.

To add to these editorials, witnesses to and refugees from the revolution published their stories in 1959 and 1960.<sup>17</sup> First-person reports from insiders appeared alongside correspondents’ dispatches in such distinguished publications as *The New York Times*, *Life*, and *Time*. A few Cuban exiles published their stories as monographs, usually through English-speaking ghostwriters.<sup>18</sup> For example, Rufo López-Fresquet, a Cuban economist and one-time Minister of the Treasury for Castro, denounces the regime in *My Fourteen Months with Castro* (1966). These witnesses to Castroism often came from the inner ranks of the prior or present governments, vying for their place alongside American observers. Former ambassadors (like Earl E. T. Smith) and journalists (like James Monahan) give unabashedly biased accounts. Monahan’s *The Great Deception: The Inside Story of How the Kremlin Took Over Cuba* (1963) blends his own reportorial voice with the first-person accounts of hundreds of Cuban exiles.

These Cuban exiles advanced their stories and arguments through diverse U.S. media. They published newspapers in English and Spanish that circulated among Cuban communities in

and beyond Florida and New York. One exiled university professor contributed his voice to Robert Carl Cohen's contentious television documentary *Three Cubans* (1965).<sup>19</sup> Social organizations such as the Truth About Cuba Committee and Agrupación Abdala collected donations to publish posters, pamphlets, and newsletters in opposition to Castro's regime. The Truth About Cuba Committee was a Christian anti-Castro organization spearheaded by expatriate Luis V. Manrara between 1961 and 1975. In one evocative exposé, the committee describes Castro as a communist sinner, a deviant whose politics have tempted others to stray from the moral righteousness of capitalist democracy:

No need of proof, when the sin is confessed. The movement led by Fidel Castro was communistic from the very first days when it was being organized. To get hold of power, he put on the cloak of a true democrat and a patriotic Cuban and proclaimed that his only goal was to oust the Batista tyranny and restore the reign of the law and the Constitution. Once in power, Fidel Castro shed his mask. Today he shows himself nakedly as he always truly was—a man saturated with Marxist ideas, whose main objective was and he has achieved it—to establish a communist regime in Cuba. (“Castro Admits Cuba is Communist,” 6)

The pamphlet alludes to Castro's charismatic personality and republican rhetoric as a “cloak” and a “mask” for the Marxist ideas that “saturate” his diabolical character. Showing himself “nakedly” as a communist, Castro has shed the costume of a Cuban patriot. This propaganda piece is pitched to English-speaking readers, calling upon its imagined audience to unburden themselves of any illusions about Castro's patriotism. In treatises such as “Don't Worry: The Enemy is Still 90 Miles Away” (1971), Committee President Manrara explains the group's mission “to divulge the truth.” He asserts that “Freedom, like God, is indivisible. The world

cannot subsist half free and half slave. Inevitably one side will prevail. Like Benjamin Franklin said: ‘Either we hang together or we will hang separately.’” Originally delivered as a speech to a local church, Manrara’s pamphlet invokes Franklin to unite a hemispheric community around the godly cause of “freedom.” “The Enemy” is simultaneously Castro, the U.S.S.R., and Satan. Manrara hopes that by calling on communities of Christians, anticommunist Americans, and exiled Cubans, the committee can stir a new revolution that protects the U.S. from communism and frees “slave” Cuba from the grip of its communist devil.

Although the appeals of Cuban expatriates such as Manrara seem to justify U.S. interventionism, Castro’s leftist government poses an ideological dilemma: would military incursion result in another Vietnam War or another Bay of Pigs? By the mid-1960s, even those who oppose Castro register uncertainty about the possible consequences of U.S. invasion or covert operations, which some commentators believe corrupt the ethics of U.S. foreign engagement. Castro’s enduring power in Cuba, and his resistance to U.S. attempts at coercion or assassination, serve as troubling reminders that U.S. action could backfire, embarrassing the U.S. and exposing its network of disreputable interests at work in Cuba.

One fascinating study of Castro’s dangerous persona examined him from the eyes of a U.S. mercenary. During the early months of Fidel Castro’s new Cuban regime (in April 1959), an American gunrunner and “pilot for hire” named Jack Youngblood met a young hotel executive and aspiring author, Robin Moore, by the pool at the Havana Hotel Nacional.<sup>20</sup> Youngblood complained of his recent falling out with Castro, his anger at the communist turn of the new Cuban government, and his lack of immediate mercenary prospects. Moore, on the hunt for an angle into “these crazy Latin revolutions,” offered to collaborate with Youngblood to sell the story of his high-flying, weapon-dealing/stealing adventures with the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement

to the U.S. public (314). Together the two authored a nonfiction thriller called *The Devil to Pay* (published by Coward McCann in 1961). Moore and Youngblood went to some trouble to publicize their text, making talk show appearances in New York and Chicago. In short, Youngblood makes every effort to secure his place in the burgeoning history of the Cuban Revolution. Youngblood (the narrator and protagonist of the thriller) describes himself as a twentieth-century soldier of fortune, a brave—if roguish—hired gun whose intervention helps bring down a notorious dictator and changes the course of Cuba.

Robin Moore would go on to achieve fame with his blend of eyewitness memoir and salacious fiction in the Vietnam novel *The Green Berets* (1965). Youngblood all but disappeared from the historical record.<sup>21</sup> What fascinates me about Youngblood and his tale is their almost total lack of consequence. How could such an amazing account go virtually unnoticed in 1961, a year when the eyes of the Cold War world were all trained on Castro's Cuba, a year that *Time* called the “Year of the Firing Squad”? The multifarious answer to this question suggests the ideological challenge that U.S. print culture posed during the Cuban Revolution; as Youngblood illustrates, many political writers have begun to doubt the ethical claims that justify U.S. interventionism.

According to Moore's narrative, Youngblood first wandered onto Fidel Castro's Mexican ranch in 1956. He was already well known in Latin America for his role in springing Carlos Castillo Armas from his Guatemalan prison cell. Youngblood's relationship to the politics of his moment becomes very clear in this early anecdote, for he recalls instinctively preferring the “aristocratic” Castillo to Jacobo Arbenz, a “tough, swarthy little man whom I immediately disliked and mistrusted” (27). Youngblood's racializing language is reactionary and troubling enough to suit any Cold War conservative. He calls himself “integrated” after sleeping with a

mixed race woman from Trinidad (102), recalls Batista by his “heavy Negroid features,” and generally loves to recount the cultural foibles of “Latins” (157, 97). Youngblood goes on to explain his pride in helping Castillo escape from prison: “Under his command, and with the blessing of the United States, the rebel force marched into Guatemala City, overthrew the first communist regime to be established in this hemisphere, and installed a government just about as democratic as Latins can manage” (30). For Youngblood, Arbenz’s Leftist bent is immediately and inexplicably damning, so much so that Youngblood can label his presidency a “communist regime” and refer to Castillo’s coup as *relatively* “democratic.” Youngblood’s endorsement of the coup, dripping with xenophobic disdain, reveals his belief that Latin America requires U.S. intervention—both the official support of the government and the unofficial action of mercenaries. He suggests that whatever regime Americans choose to install must be preferable to the inferior governance that these Guatemalan “Latins” might otherwise prefer.

This incident sets the tenor for the action-packed tale to come; Youngblood’s politics cater to the conservative Cold War readership that he and Moore envision for their book. Despite his obvious willingness to work for whoever is paying, Youngblood goes to great lengths to persuade readers that he would never knowingly aid a dictator or instate a communist. His Foreword explains: “I don’t regret anything I did to overthrow Batista. I only regret that I helped to replace him with a fanatic, a demagogue who wasn’t strong enough to be master in his own house. I hope that in the future, for pay or as a volunteer, I will be able to do something to help overthrow Fidel Castro” (7). In this passage, Youngblood alludes to the real “masters” of Castro’s house: Che Guevara and Raúl Castro. Here and throughout the narrative, they embody the encroachment of communist devilry on Castro’s populist movement. Guevara was working with Arbenz in Guatemala when Youngblood rescued Castillo. Their interactions thereafter are

loaded with suspicion: Guevara and Raúl Castro make no secret of their disdain for Youngblood's mercenary brand of capitalism. Youngblood hates all "commies" for reasons he never needs to explain.

Despite these tensions, Youngblood becomes extremely important to Castro's victory, his bodyguard, spy, and double agent. He goes on to detail how he helped Castro procure weapons and planes. He even double-crosses Batista for Castro, stealing his money, plane, and a vital arms shipment in the weeks before the Battle of Santa Clara (December 1958). Youngblood's account of these years as Castro's agent fuses spy thriller with political allegory. On the one hand, Youngblood recalls with relish the posh hotels, nights of drinking and gambling, and suitcases of cash spent haphazardly. Youngblood also brags incessantly about his conquests, running through women with ease and obvious enjoyment. Indeed, women and their bodies play a disturbing role in this text; they serve as the *lingua franca* and common currency of the rag-tag gang of multinational militants who join forces and betray one another in pursuit of control over Cuba. Youngblood ogles strippers with Batista's first general before visiting a whorehouse with one of Castro's confidants. Youngblood lusts after Vilma Espín despite her romantic relationship with Raúl.<sup>22</sup> He watches as Fidel and Che select the youngest prostitutes and sees a stream of beautiful Cuban women slinking out of Fidel's quarters in the weeks following the rebel victory. In its way, *The Devil to Pay* is a cosmopolitan novel in which military proficiency and a sort of international masculine code allow commerce and camaraderie between men.

On the other hand, the text's *raison d'être* is its exposé. Youngblood tunes out the speeches that Fidel Castro and his comandantes give throughout the story, expunging the principles, objectives, and ideals they assert. Instead, his evidence for siding with one party or another is anecdotal: he illustrates the callousness and bureaucratic inefficiency of Batista's SIM

(Military Intelligence Service). Fidel emerges as a blustering, bipolar Latin whose every decision reflects his canny self-interest, as well as his dependence on amphetamines and alcohol. At every turn Raúl Castro and Che Guevara attempt to steer Fidel toward communism and away from moderates like Manuel Urrutia, who Castro appointed briefly as president.<sup>23</sup> Youngblood himself turns from Castro in disgust after he refuses to pay over \$200,000 for mercenary services rendered. The tale ends just after Youngblood accepts a final commission from Castro, who hires him to kidnap Batista supporter Rolando Masferrer and bring him from Miami to Havana. Castro's people, Youngblood thinks, betray him to the Miami police, and Youngblood is arrested and briefly detained. He goes to Cuba, argues with Castro, and leaves Cuba alive only by the beneficence of his former employer, still short the money the regime owes him and convinced that communism has ruined Cuba for the foreseeable future.

Youngblood's account is difficult to verify, since the witnesses to his exploits were other gunrunners, mercenaries, Cuban rebels, or now-dead minions of Batista. Certainly much of the dialogue is recounted under Moore's authorial liberty. At least some of the story is probably true: Youngblood was a former Air Force "pilot for hire" and almost certainly worked for Castro. Two newspaper articles (in the *Miami Herald* and *The New York Times*) verify that Youngblood was arrested in April of 1959 for attempting to kidnap Masferrer. Youngblood's license to fly was revoked by the U.S. government in 1959. But the truth or falsehood of his story is less crucial for my purposes here than understanding why it failed to make waves. The book's reviewers never question its veracity; instead, they worry about the story of U.S. power that the novel relays to impressionable readers.

Perhaps because Youngblood's motives are difficult to parse from Moore's, the theme of *The Devil to Pay* is ambiguous. Youngblood (and perhaps Moore) hoped readers would praise

the tale as a dramatic account of U.S. political proficiency and revolutionary agency. For Youngblood is the equal of any and every Cuban he encounters; he exhibits perfect control of an array of planes and weapons even as he holds his own with agents, double agents, and world leaders. Sadly for Moore, Youngblood, and their publishers, this is not the lesson reviewers seem to learn. Although a few (most notably the *New York Herald Tribune*) admire Youngblood's swashbuckling adventure story, several rebuke his mercenary spirit. David Condon of the *Chicago Tribune* met Youngblood and Moore on their publicity trip to Chicago, but refuses to authorize a column in Youngblood's honor ("In the Wake of the News," 1). He writes, "We couldn't care less about meeting a soldier of fortune," and he admonishes Youngblood's publicist against pushing "books featuring scantily clad dolls, or the confession books" of seedy adventurers like Youngblood and Errol Flynn (whose own Cuban escapade gets a nod in *The Devil to Pay*). Condon hopes that the American Booksellers Association, like the *Chicago Tribune*, will promote "literature that would inspire our youngsters." His article suggests the radical cultural work that Youngblood's text does, despite its insistent anticommunism and reactionary race and gender politics. *The Devil to Pay* troubles Cold Warriors, however inadvertently, because of its unsettling account of American involvement in the revolution.

Youngblood's true-life tale demonstrated the profound collusion of the U.S. Hobnobbing with the worst types of American degenerate, he revealed the parasitic expatriates who seemed to flourish in the tropicalized revolutionary climate. Indeed, readers must have found Youngblood's agency unnerving, despite his assurance that he's learned the danger of working with commies. Youngblood murders SIM agents, fools Miami cops, and installs a Marxist autocracy in his rabid *laissez-faire* pursuit of capital. He exposes the channels by which U.S. weapons make their way into the hands of both fascist dictators and communist rebels. *The Devil to Pay* even points to the

network of dubious alliances vying for power in Latin America, including the U.S. government (which backed both Batista and Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo), and figures like Che Guevara, who seemed to wander from one Marxist cell to another.

Potential reviewers must have asked themselves about the moral message of *The Devil to Pay*. Is Youngblood a real-life flawed hero in the style of John Wayne or exactly the type of nefarious American who had ruined Cuba for upstanding commercial interests (like the United Fruit Company)? Ultimately, 1960s Americans were unwilling to crown him with democratic laurels. Brief notices of the book's publication appeared in *Publisher's Weekly* and *The New York Times*; the book was even translated into German, but Youngblood sank quickly into obscurity, his eyewitness account of Castro never making it into the annals of history.

Anti-Castro accounts disagree about the extent of communist influence in Cuba, about the benefits and danger of that influence, and about the relative power of the revolution's leaders (Castro, Guevara, Raúl Castro, etc.). Despite their rigorous debates, these political writers share several common concerns. First, all seem to agree that the future of the U.S. is intimately tied to the future of the Cuban Revolution. Second, all wonder about the vertiginous effects of U.S. influence in Cuba—had the State Department backed Castro? Would the CIA take him down? Moreover, Castro's resilience demonstrates that Cuba has slipped from the “democratic” influence of the U.S. These accounts register the helplessness of the U.S. in the face of its tangled past interventions and dangerous future prospects. Particularly after the Bay of Pigs, Castro's revolution moves forward despite American disapproval. Blustering officials try desperately to wrest back imperial agency, only to find themselves manipulated—kidnapped, denied interviews, and in other ways rendered helpless before this unprecedented display of Latin revolutionary autonomy.

## Conspiracy and Parody

As revolutionary Cuba established itself as a government that could outlive popular discontent and U.S. imperial hostility, an array of U.S. novelists used fiction to imagine how Castro's Cuba would affect the democratic U.S.<sup>24</sup> Many of these novels feature hardboiled American reporters exploring the (sometimes salacious, other times atrocious) conditions of 1960s Cuba. Other novels fantasize about insurrections that could oust Castro and replace his regime with a thriving capitalist democracy. Perhaps the most common mode for fictional treatments of U.S.-Cuban relations in the 1960s (and beyond) has been the conspiracy thriller. Political writers portrayed Cuba as the center of a clandestine and devious matrix of global interests. Building on the example of Graham Greene's famous *Our Man in Havana* (1958), the conspiracy parody became an especially popular mode for representing contemporaneous Cuba. Conspiracy parodies such as Greene's, Richard Powell's *Don Quixote, U.S.A.* (1966), and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Triumph* (1968) show that many cultural arbiters long to do right by Latin America—to end the era of “gunboat” diplomacy and to encourage hemispheric democracy and commercial cooperation. They hope that the example of Castro will spark a more autonomous future for the rest of Latin America, thereby restoring the U.S. to its imagined position as beacon on a hill rather than imperial meddler. *Our Man in Havana*, *Don Quixote, U.S.A.*, and *The Triumph* are absurdist political allegories about the covert role of first-world empires in the rise and fall of Caribbean dictatorships (such as the Batista and Trujillo regimes). These texts use the trope of revolution to expose the ethnocentrism and nationalist megalomania of the U.S. (and, in Greene's case, England), imagining how the hubris of bureaucrats will in turn enable democracy in Latin America.

British author Graham Greene was renowned in and beyond the 1950s for his thrilling political writing and his exemplary literary quality. Often compared with Ian Fleming, Greene's murder mysteries and spy "entertainments" sold widely and often served as the basis for major films such as *The End of the Affair* (1955) and *The Quiet American* (1958). *Our Man in Havana* explores the inefficiency, paranoia, and incompetence of the British secret service, who hire an obtuse vacuum cleaner salesman named Wormold to serve as an intelligence agent. Wormold accepts the position for the sake of his daughter; he plans to use the money to purchase the social trappings and status in Havana society that she craves. He also hopes to thwart the advances of Captain Segura, a torture artist who reminds readers of the atrocities that Batista's regime enacted just beyond the action of the novel.

Because he has no training in covert operations and no idea of where to look for "Possible Communist infiltration" or "Actual figures of coffee- and tobacco-production," Wormold begins contriving reports from obscure newspaper headlines (68). He selects names at random from a country club membership list to submit as informants and sub-agents. He even submits a drawing of vacuum cleaner parts in the guise of a new rebel weapon system. After a series of misadventures makes real his pretend spy games, Wormold must become the agent he has invented to thwart assassination plots and save his oblivious recruits.

Greene's novel parodies the conspiracy thriller genre; the conventions of parody allow *Our Man in Havana* to do two things. First, the parodic conspiracy novel exposes the complex web of covert imperial operations at work in the "third world," but it also reveals their bureaucratic inefficiencies and fundamental cultural misunderstandings. Wormold's supervisor Hawthorne, for example, selects and recruits Wormold out of laziness. He misrepresents Wormold's qualifications to his own superiors in London and elects not to expose Wormold's

vacuum cleaner drawing out of fear of the repercussions. Hawthorne and Wormold together suggest that much of the intrigue of the secret service obfuscates simple truths (like the obvious totalitarianism of the Batista regime), reinforcing the righteousness of the Cold War for agents and thereby policymakers.

Second, parody allows Greene to restore order at the novel's end (in a way that he could not do in more cynical, serious treatments of the subject matter such as *The Quiet American*). At the end of *Our Man in Havana*, Wormold finds himself safe from both exposure and poverty. The British secret service, fearing the censure and scorn of other covert agencies and from the British public, removes Wormold from his Cuban office and offers him a secure position at headquarters. Published as Castro's movement grew in force and prestige, Greene's novel also implies that the *real* Cuban rebellion is still alive and growing with little interference from the bungling British and American governments. The following year, *Our Man in Havana* was made into a film (1959); Castro allowed the filmmakers into Cuba and met with Greene personally. Impressed by the change wrought in Cuba by the revolution, Greene supported and defended Castro's experiment for some time to come. The irony with which Greene treats his Cuban setting and his clandestine characters also set the tone for the American treatments that followed—especially Richard Powell's *Don Quixote, U.S.A.* and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Triumph*.

Powell's novel, even more lighthearted than Greene's, follows a Peace Corps volunteer, Arthur Peabody Goodpasture, as his quest to introduce the Dwarf Cavendish banana in San Marcos (a fictional Cuba) takes him from the drawing room of a dictator to the camp of a band of barefoot revolutionaries. Overrun by his good intentions, the naïve humanitarian becomes key to the success of the revolution, eventually replacing El Gavilan (a fictional Castro), whose

mental health has crumbled under the pressure of leading a successful rebellion.<sup>25</sup> *Don Quixote, U.S.A.* serves as the basis for the play and later the film *Bananas* (1971), which features Woody Allen as a similarly green do-gooder who finds himself leading a populist revolution.

Like Greene's, Powell's parody represents the absurdities of American intervention in the Caribbean. Goodpasture is so fundamentally incapable of understanding the corruption of the island's dictator that he falls right into his trap—and right back out again. At every twist and turn of the novel's diluted plot, Goodpasture's good faith allows his child assistant Pepe to rob him of everything from his watch and camera to a large sum of pesos. But unlike newspaper portraits of Cuban revolutionary agency, Powell's vision ridicules all of the factions at conflict, from the tyrants in the San Marcos government to the barefooted rebels to the American humanitarians like Goodpasture and his girlfriend Sally, a *Life* photographer who turns out to be only a bit more savvy than Goodpasture himself. *Bananas* makes the connection between these characters even more explicit; the film begins with U.S. sportscasters reporting on the assassination of the president of San Marcos as though it were a soccer match—they even stoop to interview the fallen president after he is shot. For both Greene and Powell, the success of the Cuban Revolution comes despite the dramatic clash of this motley assortment of self-interested factions.

John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Triumph* focuses on how the bumbling State Department enables the conditions for socialist revolution. His novel builds on the longstanding parallels between Cuba and the Dominican Republic.<sup>26</sup> As Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo's authoritarianism came to light, many in the U.S. deplored his regime but argued that deposing Trujillo would leave room for the next Fidel Castro. In other words, Trujillo benefited from a failure of imagination. Neither policymakers nor public intellectuals supported his regime, but

neither could imagine a democratic alternative to the entrenched narrative of Latin instability and neighborly U.S. interventionism.

Adding to the conundrum was the obvious enmity between Castro and Trujillo. Each gathered the other's exiles and supplied them with arms and transport for revolt. As *Time* reports, "The Dominican dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo poses an unhappy dilemma for the U.S. and the responsible democracies of Latin America. Nobody wants to support Trujillo's tyranny ... but the anti-Trujillo bands that stormed the Dominican Republic last month were led by Communist-liners, offering the prospect of chaos rather than freedom" ("A Caribbean Dilemma"). This article implies that Americans had to choose between Castro and Trujillo. A 1960 *Wall Street Journal* article, "Myths and Mistakes," makes explicit the connection: "Just as we abandoned Batista, the U.S. recently severed its ties with Generalissimo Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. We are hopefully encouraging reputedly democratic elements bent on deposing the aging dictator. Now Trujillo, as it happens, is an anti-Communist, just as Batista was. Our misguided support of Castro's mythical 'democracy' merely fastened a more ruthless dictatorship on Cuba and a pro-Communist one at that. Is that to be the result in the Dominican Republic also?" (18). Conservative and moderate publications agree that deposing Trujillo might result in a leftist government for the D.R. Editorials and public commentaries register frustration with U.S. policy in the Caribbean, which seemed to avoid the problem by citing Good Neighbors-style nonintervention.<sup>27</sup>

Many commentators believed that sanctions against Dominican sugar and the withdrawal of diplomatic relations only antagonized the dictator, bringing ever closer a sort of hemispheric ultimatum. Instead, Rafael Trujillo was assassinated in May of 1961. In the years that followed, various factions competed for governance and the U.S. often imposed diplomatic manipulation

and military might in pursuit of “stability” for the D.R. By the late 1960s, the country’s brief time in the spotlight had (more or less) passed.<sup>28</sup> While Cuba continued to appear in the nightmares of Cold Warriors, the Vietnam War was underway.

*The Triumph* returns to the revolutionary contexts of Cuba and the D.R., combining them to imagine a fictional resolution to this political impasse. In this way, Galbraith both reveals the unprincipled self-interest and paranoia behind U.S. Cold War policy and offers his own text as an ethical alternative. Set during a fictional Caribbean Revolution, Galbraith’s “fable” moves from Puerto Santos to various seats of U.S. government in Washington D.C. The novel’s deposed dictator, Luis Miguel Martínez Obregón, closely resembles dictators like Trujillo and Batista, both in his personal habits and in his dictatorial strategies. Like both Cuba and the Dominican Republic, Puerto Santos is most important to the U.S. as a producer of sugar and a bastion against communism. For these reasons, the novel’s reactionary bureaucratic officials support Martínez, undermine the moderates who oust him, and help his son, Juan César Martínez, who ultimately gains control.

Galbraith was a Keynesian economist at Harvard, an enemy of Milton Friedman, a friend of famous public intellectual Arthur Schlesinger, and advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.<sup>29</sup> As the novel appeared on bookshelves, Galbraith was busy promoting his plan on “How to Get Out of Vietnam” on television, in public lectures, and in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Playboy*.<sup>30</sup> *The Triumph* garnered wide publicity, spent several weeks on the bestseller list, and even found its way to the Book-of-the-Month Club. Yet reviews of *The Triumph* in popular periodicals like *Time*, *Life*, and *The New York Times* were tepid; they admired Galbraith’s Washington experience and keen insight into bureaucratic politics, but criticized the novel’s heavy satire, thinly veiled references to contemporary contexts, and

generally unsurprising conclusions. As Kurt Vonnegut's review notes, Galbraith offers all the usual stereotypes of the Latin American autocracy—lush tropical vegetation, throngs of nameless poor, and a few military and civilian elites who decide the nation's future in smoke-filled rooms.<sup>31</sup> Galbraith provides an "Explanation" for the novel's didactic style:

This is a story I have tried to tell before in articles and lectures. But it has occurred to me that maybe there are truths that best emerge from fiction. I did hesitate to describe this small fable as a novel; there is, as the reader will discover, too much attempted instruction by the author.... None of the characters in this book is imaginary; all have been assembled in bits and pieces from people I have known in public life.... Nor would I wish it thought that I was using a fable to say things I would not otherwise put in print. As some will be aware, I have not, in recent years, been wholly reticent as a critic of our foreign policy. (xv)

For Galbraith, the war in Vietnam and the fictional tale in *The Triumph* are intimately connected. His Caribbean country serves as the dramatic site for a morality play in which a few ideologues derail the democratic mission of the U.S. In this passage Galbraith suggests that fiction navigates the gap between concerned citizens and the makers of foreign policy. As a public intellectual famous—and sometimes maligned—for writing popular treatises instead of academic volumes, Galbraith's authorial history suggests his hope that the American people could sway the fear-mongers who seemed to dominate Cold War policy.

As a result, his novel tells readers next to nothing about the country whose fate hangs in the balance. The easy humor with which Galbraith treats Puerto Santos conjures the lack of seriousness that most reports on the D.R. evinced. Puerto Santos "is not an important country. But it is the peculiar, and perhaps the unique, genius of American diplomacy that it regularly

brings great if somewhat temporary importance to highly unimportant lands. This it has done for Laos, the Dominican Republic, most notably for Vietnam, and for the Congo, Yemen, Thailand, and Panama” (5). Galbraith is less concerned with evoking the complexity of these third-world spaces than with exploring the consequences of that lack of seriousness. In this way he echoes the journalists and policymakers for whom Trujillo and the D.R. were most important as foils for the postmodern plight of U.S. ideals.

The novel lampoons the blindness of Cold War policymakers, demonstrating that no Latin administration can allay the taint of communism except that of an already-entrenched dictator. As Galbraith’s wise Puerto Santos economic advisor explains, “the Americans are a problem. They are defending freedom and resisting Communism, and it is a great tragedy when this takes place in a small country like ours with a dictator like Martínez” (44). Galbraith’s novel also suggests that for the powerful U.S., failure to act can be as forceful as military action. Like the first post-Trujillo Dominican administration (led by Joaquín Belaguer and Ramfis Trujillo), the Miró administration crumbles because the U.S. refuses to support it.

But perhaps most importantly, Galbraith blurs the boundaries between leftist dictatorship and rightist democracy in the novel’s final twist: the new Martínez draws on “American precedent and the knowledge that he had acquired while studying in the United States” to develop an economic plan based on collective farming, a foreign policy that acknowledges leftist governments in the U.S.S.R. and China, and compulsory public education (231). When the deposed dictator (assumed to be dead but living happily offshore) hears of his son’s triumph, Galbraith writes that he “is not unhappy. He was never as clear as some others on the difference between capitalism, free enterprise, socialism, and communism. It is sufficient that his son seems to be showing the same sanguinary qualities that he himself displayed thirty years ago” (238).

Galbraith's resolution deviates from its real-life models to imagine how Latin America can succeed despite its meddling northern neighbor. The young Martínez thrives because he cannily navigates existing conditions, using the logic of progressive development to diffuse the logic of intervention. In a period in which the U.S. was mired in conflict in both hemispheres, this fantasy resolution to the problem of Latin American dictatorship also smacks of wish fulfillment.<sup>32</sup>

Galbraith's stab at fiction offers a window into the U.S.'s struggle with interventionism during the Cold War; it attempts to incite public indignation, pleading for a moderate foreign policy. Galbraith invokes the power of the Latin American allegory to probe the limits of U.S. democratic ideals. The novel's "banana republic" feels familiar because it takes as inspiration two Caribbean countries that dominated U.S. headlines during the 1960s: Cuba and the Dominican Republic. The "strongmen" who controlled these countries quickly became stock for film and fiction because their stories were iconic and analogous. On the left, Castro stood for the communist threat just "90 Miles From Home."<sup>33</sup> On the right, Trujillo and Batista were bargains made with the devil, unpopular dictators whose anticommunism seemed to be their only good quality. Ultimately, *The Triumph* illustrates that anticommunist foreign policy was contested, both within and beyond the State Department.

### **Jose Yglesias and the Cuban American Revolution**

By 1963, more than 250,000 Cubans had migrated from revolutionary Cuba to the U.S. Exiled Cubans made immediate contributions to U.S. print culture through propaganda (especially diatribes against Castro) and community ephemera, but few Cubans or Cuban Americans published in major periodicals or with major presses before the Latino Boom of the 1980s. One key exception was Jose Yglesias. Yglesias was the U.S.-born son of a Spanish father and a Cuban mother. Born in 1919 and raised in Tampa, Florida, Yglesias grew up among a prior

community of Cuban nationalists comprised of expatriates (who fled the abuses of Spanish rule in the nineteenth century or the regimes of dictators such as Machado and Batista in the twentieth) and their descendants. Ybor City, Tampa, was among the largest and most vital of many Cuban communities that grew and flourished in Florida during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Already a bastion of working-class culture with thriving unions and workers' rights organizations, in the 1890s, Ybor City lured revolutionary leaders such as José Martí, who visited Tampa to gather support from Florida Cubans for his planned revolt against Spanish rule in Cuba. Martí himself delivered several speeches before Ybor City Cubans. Ybor City was also home to the revolutionary newspaper *Cuba*, and served as headquarters for the Cuban Revolutionary Party, which recruited soldiers and gathered arms to ship to Cuba between 1895 and 1898.<sup>34</sup>

Raised in this radical climate of transnational patriotism, Yglesias later moved to New York to write for progressive publications such as *The New Yorker* and *The Nation*. He also witnessed the revolution's drastic shift in U.S.-Cuban relations from the perspective of a Cuban American "Latin" (*Ybor City*, 6). He chronicles that upheaval in two books, the fictional *A Wake in Ybor City* (1963) and the nonfictional *In the Fist of the Revolution* (1967). This section compares these texts to examine Yglesias's thinking about the Cuban Revolution and his elaboration of the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. In contrast to Cuban expatriates who spoke out against the revolution at every turn, Yglesias resuscitates the revolution's political potential for both Cuba and the U.S. In so doing, he gives voice to Cuban Americans and situates them as active participants in a new U.S. national future.

When Yglesias published *A Wake in Ybor City* in 1963, the revolution was well underway. Castro had already executed hundreds of Batista officials, had removed Urrutia, and

had appointed himself as Prime Minister. Most Americans felt sure that Castro was indeed in cahoots with the Kremlin. Expatriate communities worked daily to oust him, citing the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis as watershed moments in the new future of the hemisphere. Yet Yglesias's novel returns to 1958, before the dramatic changes that Castro's government wrought in Cuba. Yglesias revisits the last days of Batista's reign to reconstruct the potential and possibility of the rebellion. Castro is an absent presence in the lives of this family. He exists only as an opportunity, the locus of a possible future that would change the power structures that tear Yglesias's fictional family apart.

Yglesias gives voice to Cuban Americans in Florida, a population that he identifies as underrepresented and unheard by U.S. commercial and national interests. He connects the revolution to the lives of U.S. subjects, not through the repression of the Cold War, but through the real concerns and ideals of Cubans and Americans alike. For Yglesias, Cuba and the U.S. are, for better or worse, inextricably entwined, as he suggests when Elena, a U.S.-born *Cubana*, brags about her position in Cuban society under Batista. Through characters such as these, Yglesias makes a case for the primacy of that relationship, argues that understanding it will be key to the success of democracy in the U.S. and popular sovereignty in Cuba. Furthermore, through that tie, Yglesias contends that the two countries will flourish or fail together.

*A Wake in Ybor City* features an extended (and extensive) Cuban family when they reconvene in 1958 during the rise of Castro's revolution. One of the novel's most central political messages is its insistence on the centrality of its U.S. Cuban protagonists and its rendering of their voices. Yglesias's texts evince his meticulous attention to the dialogue by which the members of this family understand themselves and interact with one another. Indeed, the carefully rendered conversations can baffle readers, who must follow the exclamations and

interruptions of the novel's three elderly sisters/matriarchs, Dolores, Mina, and Clemencia, as well as those of their many offspring. The novel centers on the reunion of these women and their grown-up sons and daughters in Ybor City. Elena, the wealthiest, has married an advisor and speechwriter for the Batista regime named Jaime. This marriage has given Elena property and social status in Cuba that far surpasses those of her U.S. family. She looks back with disdain at her working-class roots in Ybor City (her mother worked in a cigar factory). She also mourns her inability to have children to inherit her wealth. Her only hope rests with her sister, Clara, whose child Elena hopes to adopt. Clara and her son have been living in Cuba with Elena, but on her return to Ybor City, Clara reunites with her ex-husband, a gunrunner for Castro's movement named Esteban. Armando, Elena's brother, is the family's black sheep. Bodyguard to a local "gangster" named Wally Chase, who is murdered early in the novel, Armando is most notable for his malaise and his fondness for inappropriate sex (he uses an afternoon with hookers as an alibi during Chase's assassination, for example, and fantasizes about seducing his sister-in-law). In between these characters is their cousin, Robert, an ex-radical grocery-store-clerk who has a loving wife and two children, but feels he has achieved none of his artistic, commercial, or political dreams.

Through this cast of (mainly) sympathetic characters, Yglesias suggests that Cuba has much to teach the U.S. The family's racial tolerance, for example, stands in stark contrast to the disparity and enmity of the U.S. South in the 1960s. Elena whispers that Cuban culture—and especially Cuban men—find race mixture sexually attractive ("you like a drop of black coffee in your hot milk," 44), and the family embraces and cares for (however patronizingly) their uncle's former mistress, a black Cuban woman named Consuelo.<sup>35</sup> In one fraught comparison, Clara explains the racial disconnect between the U.S. and Cuba through the perils of transnational

travel: “Elena couldn’t bring a maid because they are all colored, and not one of them would come here or to Virginia. You can’t treat Negroes in Cuba the way they are treated here” (52). Although Yglesias’s racial politics are difficult to parse from his characters’, passages such as this register the complex race and class shifts that Cubans must undertake on U.S. soil. Elena explicitly compares her fortunes as a U.S. citizen and a Cuban subject when she flaunts her status to Walliché’s family: “I’m only sorry... that I could not think of a way to tell him that his bank would not give me a job when I finished business school many years ago” (88). Leaving nothing to interpretation, Yglesias interjects: “She did not have to explain to Robert that she did not get the job because she was Latin” (89). The family’s open discussion of these questions evinces their familiarity with this shift, and Yglesias’s allusions to the jobs denied them demonstrates the material consequences of their transnational subjectivities. Yet this passage also imagines a readership who is unfamiliar with race relations in Cuba or discrimination against Latina/os in the U.S., an audience who may know or care little about Cuban America.

In addition to championing Cuban American culture and community in Florida, Yglesias posits a dense network of economic and political interconnection between the U.S. and Cuba. Wally Chase, Armando’s murdered employer, is known around Ybor City as Walliché. He speaks fluent Spanish and has been at odds with Italian gangsters for working with Cubans like Armando. In contrast, Elena and her husband have come to the U.S. to do business and vacation with American elites. Elena says that “It never occurs to me any more that someone I meet may be thinking of me as a Cuban nigger, the name the Americans used to call us poor Latins. Instead, I can see them thinking that I’m someone it pays to be nice to because Jaime is in a position to bring their affairs to the attention of the President” (54). Yglesias contrasts the wealth and status of Elena, who lives in Cuba, with the discrimination and financial insecurity that her

U.S. relatives suffer, yet the sterility of Elena and Jaime illustrates the decadence of Batista's regime. Like most wealthy Cubans in the months before Batista's downfall, Elena and Jaime cannot know that their wealth and power will evaporate within months. Indeed, Elena comes to Ybor City to collect her wayward family; she wants her mother to live comfortably in Cuba and wants her brother Armando and her cousin Robert to help manage her assets. After Walliché's murder, Armando flees to Cuba to live under Elena's wing. Robert considers her offer, but finds another fate in store for him.

The internal struggles of this family parallel the paradoxical role of the U.S. in the Cuban Revolution. The U.S. government has supported Batista, and wealthy Cubans like Elena own land and develop powerful connections in the U.S. Yet the U.S. also shelters Cuban nationalists and rebels whose money and insurrectionary activity support Castro's movement. Ybor City's residents still remember the patriotic speeches of Martí, who visited the area in 1893. As Jaime says, Ybor City "is part of the history of Cuba.... *Cuba Libre*—that was his slogan, and Cubans everywhere responded" (44). Yglesias makes multiple references to strong support for Castro in Florida, as when a friend of Armando's tells him: "We're playing every possible combination of twenty-six [in the lottery] in honor of the rebels in the Sierra Maestra... We're great revolutionaries here in Ybor City" (26). Even more explicit is the revolutionary conduit, Clara's ex-husband Esteban: "Everyone in Ybor City knows they are running guns to the rebels in Cuba, and Esteban is right in the thick of it" (125).

Esteban articulates the American stake in the Cuban Revolution when he describes his efforts to collect guns from sympathizers in the U.S. to send to Castro: "Even my father had one I didn't know of. He had bought it when I was a kid, during the eleven-month strike of the cigar makers. In those days they used to bring the crackers from the backwoods to break up the

meetings at the Labor Temple, and the crackers came right into the place with rifles. My old man ... has given up hope of shooting down a KKK cracker. Now he hopes his gun got safely to the Sierra Maestra" (102). Esteban aligns three resistant communities in this passage: the cigar workers union, ethnic minorities terrorized by the KKK, and Cubans in revolt against Batista. He explains that for his father, the symbolic acts of owning and contributing the gun give him "hope" for a kind of justice that will transcend national borders. Ironically, the movement no longer needs these hand-me-down rifles; Esteban now procures them from corrupt army officials: "Sometimes I think the capitalists will someday sell us socialism, if they can do it at a profit" (102). Through the will of oppressed communities and the myopia of their enemies, Esteban hopes to reclaim both countries for working people. Yglesias's Castroites register optimism that the Cuban Revolution will galvanize this egalitarian future.

In 1958, the growing support for his cause catches even the skeptical Robert, the novel's most explicit protagonist, in its sway. When Esteban asks Robert to drive a truck loaded with guns from Tampa to Sarasota, Robert understands that he's being asked to assist the revolution. At first Robert accepts reluctantly, downplaying both the courage and the purpose that this act will require when he jokes that "The Red scare has frightened me.... They have cut off my balls" (127). This statement illustrates the transnational stakes of Robert's small act of insurrection, for Robert is the novel's most "Americanized" Cuban. Elena exclaims to him: "Listen to you! You speak English without a Spanish accent" (54). He has moved to New York, married a Jewish woman, and has seemingly left behind both his Cuban nationalist politics and his material ambitions. Thus, Robert's contribution to the cause of the revolution materially aids Castro, but it also symbolically bolsters his identity as a Cuban American and a member of the downtrodden progressive community in the Cold War U.S. Fighting the fear mongering that reinforces both

the Red Scare and the Batista regime, Robert fulfills his destiny as a hemispheric radical and, in return, achieves the peace and fulfillment that Yglesias denies characters like Elena.

Robert returns from his adventure in gunrunning no worse for the wear. He tells his wife that “Nothing extraordinary happened.... Except inside me. I felt all the time as though I were more wide awake than I had ever been in my life” (190). He feels his artistic ability and his humanity stirred by his small act of rebellion. Because he uses his boss’s grocery truck to deliver the weapons, even Robert’s mediocre job allows him to contribute to the revolution. He identifies revolutionary activity with human purpose: “I knew who I was and what I stood for, and there was someone else who saw it and recognized it. It must be wonderful to live like that always, with a strong sense of what you are and what you stand for” (192). Robert’s newfound perspective and energy seem all the richer in contrast to Elena, whose world crumbles when her sister’s son dies of appendicitis.

Elena blames her family, and even Ybor City, for Jimmy’s death. More than the love and care that the entire family lavished on Jimmy, Elena believes that money could have saved him: “I am sick of this talk of love. He could have used something more than love. He could have used the care that money can buy. Once and for all, I want you to get it into your heads that I have money, that you don’t have to live in this stupid, small-town slum” (195). Elena insists on taking Jimmy’s body to Cuba, refusing even to hold his wake in Ybor City. The violence with which she rejects her working-class past parallels the stark class differences that have segregated Cubans under Batista. The pursuit of money has divided the family, sending some to Cuba to earn it through graft and corruption while keeping others in daily struggle in Ybor City. Yet Jimmy’s death confirms that Elena’s ascent to power is only temporary. Elena and Jaime are barren, marked for death just like Batista’s regime. Clara’s naïveté is punished with the loss of

her son, and Armando disappears into obscurity. Only Robert, who by the end of the novel has accepted both his Cubanness and his Americanness, is revitalized by his small participation in the cause of the revolution. In turn, he shares his newfound vitality with his Jewish American wife and their children—the only couple that Yglesias allows to reproduce.

Yglesias still clung to his belief in the revolution in 1968, the year he published his nonfiction portrait of Castro's Cuba, *In the Fist of the Revolution: Life in a Cuban Country Town*. To write this analysis of the lives of rural Cubans, Yglesias spent several months in Mayarí, a small town at some remove from Cuba's metropolitan centers, Havana and Santiago. His goal was to understand the revolution through the lives of the people it affected everyday, the working class. Like *A Wake in Ybor City*, this text is comprised almost entirely of dialogue, evincing Yglesias's optimism that Cubans could speak for themselves about the success or failure of the revolution. Yglesias represents his own role in the narrative (since he is his own protagonist) as that of a humble reporter who will do anything necessary to paint an accurate portrait of Cuban life in 1968: "I took no tape recorder and no sociological disciplines with me, only a typewriter, four notebooks and three ball-point pens" (33). In this way, Yglesias borrows from the many anthropologists and journalists who recorded, translated, and promoted the *testimonios* of Cubans during the revolutionary era, even as he admits his ignorance of "sociological disciplines."<sup>36</sup>

*In the Fist of the Revolution* gets its credentials from Yglesias' familiarity with Cuban culture. He distinguishes himself from many other American reporters by telling everyone he meets: "I sympathize with your revolution and have come to see how it is" (9). Throughout the text, Yglesias occupies an odd position in Cuba. Although his features and his Spanish are Cuban, Yglesias is also, as the Cubans around him constantly exclaim, "an American!" (9). For

Yglesias, even his ability to travel to Cuba connotes this transnational tension: “The presence of an American in Cuba during 1967 *needs to be explained*; it is not, for my countrymen, in the natural order of things, as is the base at Guantánamo. (For Cubans both phenomena inspire much discussion...)” (31, emphasis added). Passages such as these mark Yglesias as both foreign and native; he refers to other Cubans as his “countrymen” but also references Guantánamo to evoke the imperial power behind his presence as “an American in Cuba during 1967”). Yglesias’ presence in Cuba, and the bonds he cultivates there, “need to be explained” because they depend on his privilege as a U.S. citizen, but Yglesias deploys that privilege on behalf of revolutionary Cuba.

As in *Ybor City*, Castro is almost completely absent from this narrative. Yglesias displaces Castro from the center of his tale of the revolution by removing himself physically from the nodes of party power in Cuba. As he notes in the beginning, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempts to route Yglesias through the familiar attractions frequented by foreign reporters—that is, to send him through officially organized channels to party headquarters and urban centers. Instead, Yglesias takes a bus to Mayarí, sitting for fourteen hours alongside workers and *campesinos*. He explains that he chooses Mayarí because it is “typical”—a good microcosm for Cuba:

First, it was a village in Oriente, the province furthest east in Cuba, known as the cradle of Cuban revolutions; but not in southern Oriente near the Sierra Maestra, for that would be begging the question about the people’s revolutionary morale, since it was from the Sierra Maestra that Castro began the uprising. Second, Mayarí was in the heart of the sugar country, still Cuba’s main asset. Third, the nearness to Nicaro, where the United States government had set up a mining and

nickel-processing operation during the Second World War, promised local knowledge of and contact with Americans, an element that makes Mayarí's story more typical of the Cuban historical experience. (32)

Yglesias suggests that everyday Cubans have little contact with Castro; instead they experience the revolution through its impact on sugar production and the presence (or absence) of U.S. commercial enterprise. A short biographical account sketches Castro's leadership in the revolutionary movement, but Yglesias focuses on the everyday Cubans whose lives bear evidence of Cuba's great experiment. As a result, the book is often a tedious read, replete with the daily goings on of hundreds of characters. Yglesias finds countless inconveniences in "red" Cuba—trouble with plumbing, the scarcity of coffee and cigarettes—but very little hardship.

Yglesias goes on to tell the story of Batista's dictatorship and Castro's revolution through the anecdotes of Cubans he meets in Mayarí. Most have never met or even seen Castro, and when they speak his name, they invoke a vague ideal rather than a literal figurehead. The book's storytellers offer a sense of Fidel very different from that of U.S. newspapers. According to one Fidelista, even the politics of the revolution are inchoate: "If someone came to me and talked about [communism], I would say, I don't know anything about that—I am for what Fidel wants" (49). Indeed, Yglesias' interviewees seem to suggest that the ideological struggle between capitalism and communism is entirely beside the point. In one telling exchange, Yglesias writes: "I asked why their fear of communism had not kept them from supporting the Revolution as it became more and more socialist.... One old man volunteered: 'I had another fear—the fear that my son would be assaulted and my daughter would be found attractive by one of them. That was one fear. That my son would grow up without an education or a job and turn into a marijuana smoker and my daughter end up in a brothel. That was my important fear'" (136). This exchange

reveals the material inequalities that the Cold War obfuscates. In pitching the divide as an epic fight for the free market against nationalization, for capitalist democracy against Marxist authoritarianism, the dominant rhetoric of the Cold War erases the struggles of lower-class communities against social and economic policies that marginalize workers and perpetuate poverty. For the “old man,” the sexual violence and torture perpetrated by the Batista regime are connected to the lack of opportunities for education and employment. These are realities, as are the brothels that thrived in Cuba during the era of sexual tourism and rampant class inequality that Batista also endorsed. All of these realities are more frightening to him, and indeed to Yglesias, than the abstract fear of communism.

Thus, by retelling the stories of Cuban peoples for English-speaking audiences in the U.S., Yglesias replaces the typical Cold War narrative of Castro’s Cuba with the story of workers finding work, of a village growing in community and industry, and of a hemispheric exchange that is cultural and democratic rather than imperial and opportunistic. Yglesias posits himself as one exemplar of that exchange, but his books (especially *A Wake in Ybor City*) also suggest that the larger Cuban American community can participate in strengthening anti-colonial bonds between the nations. Although his vision of Castro’s Cuba succumbed to the ever-worsening relations between the U.S. and Cuba (which continue even today), Yglesias’s writing suggests that the relationship between these countries, because always imagined, can always be reimagined.

The cultural production about revolutionary Cuba that circulated in the U.S. illustrates the U.S.’s complex engagement with its Caribbean “neighbor.” The ethics of empire—its promise to free Cubans for democracy and development—appealed to the U.S. public precisely because of its investment in such principles. Yet giving up Cuba was also a fraught enterprise, since by the

late 1960s the vast majority of Americans no longer liked what Cuba had become. In this way these variegated stories of Cuba differ markedly from earlier accounts of Guatemala's Leftist leaders (in the 1950s) and later print representations of Nicaragua and El Salvador (in the 1980s). All of these countries confounded interested Americans, but Cuba first marked the outer limits of U.S. power. The 1961 Bay of Pigs debacle confirmed that Eisenhower's and Kennedy's grand rhetoric and the CIA's generously contributed arms and advisors had more firmly fixed Castro's position and Cuba's inaccessibility. Presidential administrations would spend the rest of the century trying to wrest power back from the Latin American Left, and the U.S. press would (more or less) unite in denouncing Castro's anti-democratic regime and confirming the republican mission of the U.S. Yet 1960s political writers such as Matthews, Galbraith, and Yglesias capture a period of possibility in which the Cuban Revolution could sever the imperial ties that bind the nations and restore the republican ideals of the U.S. They believe that an independent Cuba can build ties with the U.S. that strengthen human rights and popular sovereignty in both nations. In doing so, they have given scholars a network of hemispheric connection that resists the military, economic, and racial power relations that many tend to associate, even conflate, with the very idea of the Americas.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of Cuba and other Latin American countries, political texts alternately interrogate U.S. interventionism and reconcile U.S. imperial projects with its ostensibly democratic values. See my introduction for a detailed discussion of these different responses to the contradictions of U.S. empire.

<sup>2</sup> In 1901, the Platt Amendment stated the terms of U.S. military withdrawal from Cuba, which troops had occupied since the end of the Spanish-American War. The amendment stipulated that

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the U.S. could intervene to protect the “life, property, and individual liberties” of Cubans and Americans in Cuba, a telling modification of the Declaration of Independence’s promise of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

<sup>3</sup> As Louis Pérez has argued, this moral mission obscured the imperial objectives of statesmen and commercial magnates, but I would insist on the distinction between the abstract ethics of public intellectuals and writers and the realpolitik of those in power. For a more detailed discussion of Roosevelt, Davis, and Crane, see my introduction.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Time*’s “Immigration: Side Doors” (1923), “Cuba: Hoodlum on the Wing” (1947), and “National Affairs: Cuba” (1923) respectively.

<sup>5</sup> One 1937 *New York Times* book review illustrates the U.S.’s moral preoccupation with this story, and with its economic collusion in Cuba. The author of “Ernest Hemingway’s First Novel in Eight Years” laments that Hemingway’s novel is overly political: “Nor does Mr. Hemingway help his case by the introduction of his hand-picked specimens of the idle rich and their parasites, and of the morally rotten whom he shows us in brief close-ups, in their anchored yachts on the night that Harry Morgan died. They are people who, in one form or another, have existed in every age. They are not to be laid on the doorstep of economic royalism. This is adolescent thinking, though the writing is maturely skilled” (Adams 100).

<sup>6</sup> For more on these metaphors of connection, promixity, and dependence, see Louis Pérez’s *Cuba in the American Imagination*.

<sup>7</sup> He maintained some high level of official power from 1933-1959, but not always under the title of “president.”

<sup>8</sup> The film version, released in 1955, featured Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra, and Jean Simmons.

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<sup>9</sup> In 1961 Matthews built on his investigative work for the paper in a book entitled *The Cuban Story*. In this nonfiction exploration of Castro and his (as well as in many subsequent books), Matthews attempts to justify his own participation in Castro's rise to power.

<sup>10</sup> Castro's fellow revolutionary heroes, especially Raúl Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, occasionally diverted attention from "Fidel." Che became much more prominent as a spokesperson for Castro and a thwarted revolutionary leader in Bolivia in the years that followed the triumph, but Raúl garnered a great deal of notice before the revolution as the kidnapper of United Fruit executives. *Life's* "Exclusive Report: The Captives in Cuba" (1958) describes Raúl Castro's kidnapping exploit as "effrontery" and a "public relations gesture," but also depicts photographs of the captured Americans in which they seem contented, smiling and relaxing in scenes that resembled a summer camp rather than a prison camp (20).

<sup>11</sup> See Jules Dubois, *Fidel Castro: Rebel—Liberator or Dictator?* (1959) and C. Wright Mills, *Listen Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* (1960).

<sup>12</sup> See the full series in *Newsweek's* "What Next for Cuba and Its Hero?" (1959).

<sup>13</sup> The article pairs the violence of Spanish rule in the 1890s with Machado's 1933 massacre as evidence of the "Latin capacity for brooding revenge and blood purges."

<sup>14</sup> One *Newsweek* article, "Cuba: Another Guatemala?" (1959), argues that Communists are trying to take the "reins" in Cuba (65). It suggests that Raúl Castro and Guevara are not communists, and that "Castro's vision has a capitalist base," but worries that "Cuba could become 'another Guatemala,' that is, a country dominated by the Communists as Guatemala was under Jacobo Arbenz.... This is something for every American to worry about" because of Cuba's size, proximity, and its vital naval base (66). See also *Time's* "Red Setback," which claims that communists are "shoving Fidel Castro to the left" (1959).

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<sup>15</sup> Most notably, he spearheaded the 1958 kidnapping of dozens of United Fruit executives from their plantation at the base of the Sierra Maestra.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of Arbenz's ousting by CIA-backed Carlos Castillo Armas.

<sup>17</sup> John Beverley attributes the rise of *testimonios* in 1960s Cuba to the success of Che Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*. He discusses the "direct-participant testimonios by combatants in the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement and later in the campaigns against the counterrevolutionary bands in the Escambray mountains and at the Bay of Pigs," but expatriates who opposed Castro also used testimony as a vehicle to share their stories and views (32). See Beverley's *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (2004).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the account of former Fidelista and Cuban exile Nicholas Rivero's *Castro's Cuba: An American Dilemma* (1962), or Teresa Casuso's *Cuba and Castro* (1962). Casuso was Cuba's ambassador to the UN and Mexico, a post she resigned when Castro's regime became too autocratic.

<sup>19</sup> Originally titled *Three Faces of Cuba*, Cohen received authorization to produce the film from both the U.S. and Cuban governments. After it aired on public television stations across the country, the film garnered hostility among Cuban exiles and U.S. conservatives for its less-than-damning portrait of Castro's Cuba.

<sup>20</sup> Among Youngblood's credentials is his appearance in a 1960 *Time* article, "The Americas: Pilots for Hire." *Time* worries about mercenary pilots willing to aid any cause for the right price: "Typical is Arkansas-born Jack Youngblood, 29. He once flew for Castro, now claims that an anti-Castro group owes him \$16,000. Romantically fond of danger, girls and uncomplicated poetry, Youngblood says:

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“I have no loyalties. I just work for money.” Can the U.S. stop these mercenaries? The border patrol last week brought in 90 extra agents, and the Bureau of Customs offered \$5,000 rewards for usable tips telephoned to Franklin 7-1495 in Miami. The Federal Aviation Agency opened a Miami office to check on small-plane flight plans. But, says Youngblood: “Who can stop a private aircraft from taking a joyride? Those law-enforcement agencies are too jealous of each other.”

<sup>21</sup> One bizarre exception to the general forgetting of Youngblood is conspiracy theorist Richard Sprague, who named him as the true assassin of Martin Luther King (1976).

<sup>22</sup> An evocative example of Youngblood’s gender politics is his description of Espín: “She was far and away the best looking of the rebel girls. All she needed was a bath and a spanking once a week” (200).

<sup>23</sup> Urrutia “resigned” six months later and fled Cuba.

<sup>24</sup> Most these novels—full of sex, action, and intrigue—are set in fictional Caribbean revolutions that closely resemble Cuba’s. Often featuring U.S. military men or C.I.A. agents, they depict the clash between political factions as an occasion for heroism and glamour. See Paul Edmondson’s *The Little Revolution* (1959), Ward Hawkins’ *Kings Will Be Tyrants* (1959), Roy Doliner’s *The Orange Air* (1961), Warren Miller’s *Flush Times* (1962), Harvey Breit’s *A Narrow Action* (1964), Hugh Marlowe’s (pseud. Harry Patterson) *Passage by Night* (1964), Gavin Lyall’s *Shooting Script* (1966), Melanie Pflaum’s *The Maine Remembered* (1972) and Evelyn Hanlin Shaw’s *Desiderata* (1976). For novels about U.S. reporters in Castro’s Cuba, see Andrew Tully’s *A Race of Rebels* (1960), David Kraslow’s and Robert Boyd’s *A Certain Evil* (1965), and Tana de Gamez’s *The Yoke and the Star* (1966).

<sup>25</sup> I return to this trope of the naïve humanitarian in Chapter 3.

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<sup>26</sup> The U.S. military occupied the Dominican Republic between 1916 and 1924. The dictator Trujillo was trained by U.S. Marines and controlled the D.R. with U.S. complicity, if not support, from 1930 to 1961.

<sup>27</sup> Kennedy often cited Good Neighbors as inspiration and validation for his Alliance for Progress (see especially Kennedy's Hillsborough County Courthouse Speech, Tampa, FL October 18, 1960). Journalists couldn't know that both Eisenhower and Kennedy had authorized CIA support and weapons to assist anti-Trujillo assassins. Scholars generally agree that both Eisenhower and Kennedy supplied arms to dissidents through the CIA, but both were eager to avoid the appearance of collusion, and no one is certain that their covert aid led directly to Trujillo's assassination.

<sup>28</sup> The U.S. military had intervened in 1965, ostensibly to restore free elections, and Americans preferred to think that the Belaguer administration had kept its promise to liberalize the Dominican economy and to "restore" democracy to the republic.

<sup>29</sup> A friend and neighbor of Galbraith, Schlesinger told *Time* that Galbraith's novel "is entirely as good as its author thinks it is" ("Opinion: The Great Mogul" 1968).

<sup>30</sup> I haven't yet tracked down his work for *Playboy*. This particular tidbit comes from *Time*'s "Opinion: The Great Mogul."

<sup>31</sup> According to most of his reviewers, Galbraith's novel successfully disparages U.S. foreign policy at the expense of literary quality. As Kurt Vonnegut explains in *Life* (1968), "Only one character is well developed, the appalling Worth Campbell, who performs with a supporting cast of amusing cardboard. The banana republic is the same one every American novelist, when he needs one, takes from open stock.... Call it medium art" (12).

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<sup>32</sup> As the same sage Puerto Santos economist predicts, “I still believe your great country has one redeeming quality which will save us now.... Your untimeliness. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy was made tolerable by its inefficiency, you by your delays. Anything you do on behalf of Martínez will probably be too late” (20).

<sup>33</sup> This is the title of one book on Cuba by Warren Miller (1961). In the 1960s dozens of U.S. writers published popular nonfiction and political treatises that argued for or against Castro and his experiment. All cited the close geographical proximity of Cuba as a major cause for U.S. concern. For prominent pro-Castro treatments, see Jules Dubois, *Fidel Castro; Rebel, Liberator, or Dictator?* (1959), Ruby Hart Phillips, *Cuba, Island of Paradox* (1959), Charles Wright Mills, *Listen Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* (1960), Ray Brennan, *Castro, Cuba, and Justice* (1960), and Herbert Matthews, *The Cuban Story* (1961). For some influential anti-Castro treatments, see Nathaniel Weyl, *Red Star Over Cuba: The Russian Assault on the Western Hemisphere* (1960), Earl E. T. Smith, *The Fourth Floor: An Account of the Castro Communist Revolution* (1962), Nicholas Rivero, *Castro's Cuba: An American Dilemma* (1962), Teresa Casuso, *Cuba and Castro* (1962), Irving Peter Pflaum, *Tragic Island: How Communism Came to Cuba* (1962), James Monahan and Kenneth O. Gilmore, *The Great Deception: The Inside Story of How the Kremlin Took Over Cuba* (1963), John Martino and Nathaniel Weyl, *I Was Castro's Prisoner; An American Tells His Story* (1963), Manuel Urrutía Lleó, *Fidel Castro & Company, Inc: Communist Tyranny in Cuba* (1964), and Rufo López-Fresquet, *My 14 Months with Castro* (1966).

<sup>34</sup> For more on the revolutionary history of Ybor City, see A. M. de Quesada's *Ybor City* (1999).

<sup>35</sup> They also accept Robert's (sometimes called Roberto's) wife, Shirley, who feels alienated from dominant U.S. culture because of her Jewish heritage.

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Cuban anthropologists Lydia Cabrera's *El Monte* (1954) and Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966), and American author and activist Margaret Randall's *Cuban Women Now* (1974).

### Chapter 3

#### Hot Cold Wars: The Central American Crisis in U.S. Literature

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a series of revolts, coups, and civil wars in Central America compelled political writers and public thinkers in the U.S. to interrogate the vertiginous consequences of U.S. economic and military involvement in Latin America. This chapter examines how journalists and popular writers represent the period of intense political violence known as the “Central American Crisis.” During this era, Cold War ideologues portrayed U.S. global interventionism as the struggle of the Christian, liberal democratic West against the aggression of its political and cultural Others, but the Central American Crisis undermined this normative rhetoric of U.S. mastery over third-world space. I study writers who contest the ethics of military intervention through stories of atrocity in Central America. They invoke the unspeakable bloodshed wrought by militarized factions, portraits of destitute refugees, and the eyewitness accounts of U.S. journalists and human rights workers to dramatize the cost of intervention and to posit more just alternatives; they also reflexively grapple with their own participation in the international power dynamics that have caused war, genocide, and poverty in Central America.

Comparing exposés in news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* with political nonfiction and literature, I argue that these diverse cultural expressions view the crisis as evidence for the failure of the U.S. democratic mission. Foreign correspondents and news commentators employ shocking narratives of atrocity to galvanize public indignation. As the crisis worsens and casualties increase, journalists frequently focus on U.S. national collusion in the region, even counseling policymakers against military aid to rightist regimes. Yet these writers struggle to translate this complex underworld of covert operations, midnight disappearances, and

anonymous death squads for American readers. Thus, for news writers, atrocity in Latin America appears illegible. They fixate on iconic stories and aggressive terms that register unfathomable violence but obscure its human objects. Synonyms like *murder*, *killing*, *massacre*, and *assassination* erase both villain and victim. Implicit value judgments inhere in journalistic labels such as *death squad*, *leftist guerilla*, and *ultra-right-wing military dictator*. These are the ambiguous agents of Latin American politics, their victims an inarticulate array of “peasants” (a poor translation from the Spanish *campesinos*), unnamed masses suggested by questionable—but unquestioned—numbers.<sup>1</sup>

In response, popular political writers such as Robert Stone, Joan Didion, and Carolyn Forché present literary expression as a more ethical mode of engagement with Central America. Their texts depict the relationship between the U.S. and the isthmus as a tangled web of competing interests that ensnares Samaritans and bystanders alike, articulating the sense of “ineffability” that this clandestine network evokes for everyday Americans.<sup>2</sup> Stone and Didion implicate the interventions of both state and humanitarian agents in this climate of collusion. The cynical expatriates, cruel officials, and slain humanitarians who people their texts suggest how U.S. military incursion has degraded the moral fabric of the nation. Forché, in contrast, severs the progressive writer from the imbricated U.S. and resuscitates the witness as an instrument of hemispheric human rights. Forché portrays the pursuit of justice in Central America as incomplete, deferred, and even unattainable, but her depiction of the “witness” reinscribes the power of knowing and documenting violence, modeling transnational ethics and asking readers to participate in the act of witnessing.<sup>3</sup>

Among scholars of Hemispheric American Studies, few have tackled the unique and vital position of Central America in both Latin American and U.S. conceptions of the hemisphere.

Those who have explored this connection generally do so to uncover the ongoing effects of U.S. imperialism and its narrative justifications.<sup>4</sup> Literary critic Stephen Benz, for example, argues that North Americans depict Central America as “deadly, diseased, dangerous, disorderly, dissolute, decadent” (58). He finds that “In work after work, the image of the tropics that dominates the North American imagination can be reduced to a single formula: tropical lands are desirable, but tropical people are not (though there are exceptions, especially where females are involved). Such a perception encouraged neocolonial and imperial ambitions” (52). Other scholars trace how Central American migrants and writers respond to imperial power and state violence.<sup>5</sup> Of course, widely read writers such as Stone, Didion, and Forché have garnered diverse critical studies and analyses, but most of these highlight the literary prowess of the writers rather than the political conversation in which they intercede. My study, in contrast, focuses on the transnational literary project these popular writers share. Their articles, novels, and poetry endeavor to shape public opinion and change the political future of the hemisphere, modeling hemispheric belonging and challenging the authority of nation-states over transnational subjects. This chapter also suggests how these writers reflexively grapple with their own participation in the international power dynamics that have caused war, genocide, and poverty in Central America.

### **Central America in the U.S. News**

For political writers, the Central American Crisis ruptured established narratives of U.S. power. One of those narratives depicted a cohesive hemisphere that developed under the stewardship of its American benefactors, including interventionist politicians and industrialists. Another key narrative, which emerged forcefully during the Cold War, cast the U.S. as a bastion of capitalist democracy and charged liberty-loving Americans with the task of “containing” the

global communist movement. The mutual hostility that erupted between the U.S. and socialist states (in particular the U.S.S.R.) between the 1950s and 1980s altered the terms by which U.S. writers represented Central America and created the conditions in which the crisis surfaced.<sup>6</sup> Within these contexts, the Central American Crisis stimulates political writers to contest the U.S.'s self-proclaimed duty to promote free enterprise and development in Latin America. Indeed, many worry that heads of state would not or could not extricate the U.S. from the imbroglios in which its military and commercial interests have become mired.

Before the Central American Crisis, the public dialogue about Central America tended to follow the commercial interests of U.S. magnates and the political interests of the state. In 1850, the U.S. secured joint development rights to a proposed transoceanic canal in Nicaragua (later moved to Panama).<sup>7</sup> As the U.S. government planned and built the canal, the print media followed its progress and garnered public support.<sup>8</sup> The 1880s-1930s also saw the advent of the area's great "banana barons," who built plantations, operated fleets of refrigerated banana boats, and built railroads to transport and trade their produce. The banana magnates, along with other agricultural and mineral developers, created the keen economic investment that drove U.S. government and public interests in Central American politics.<sup>9</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the U.S. military occupied Nicaragua, Honduras, and Panama in a series of conflicts dubbed the "Banana Wars."<sup>10</sup> U.S. troops also invaded to quash unionists in Guatemala in 1920 and leftist insurgents in El Salvador in 1932. Because of the commercial implications of such conflicts, war and internal strife in Central America often captured the notice of American journalists, but that attention was usually short-lived. Between the 1890s and the 1940s, the occasional headline on Central America tended to focus on revolutionary activity or civil war, but the rare stories inspired by these clashes typically

promoted U.S. action uncritically. Newspapers such as *The New York Times* covered labor uprisings and coups; their articles usually worried about American business interests and hoped that U.S. soldiers could engender “stability” in the tropics. In fact, the adventures of U.S. military men in Central America inspired several bestselling sensational political fictions, the most famous of which were Richard Harding Davis’s *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897) and O. Henry’s *Cabbages and Kings* (1904).<sup>11</sup> Only a few print sources testify that Americans read or cared much about cultural, social, or otherwise nonviolent political subjects in the region. Readers interested in anthropology might turn to articles about Mayan ruins or peoples in *National Geographic* or later *Life*, but Central America was neither a tourist destination nor a popular news topic until a decade after World War II.

The Cold War galvanized writers and filmmakers to reexamine longstanding narratives about Central America. Before the 1955 Vietnam War and 1959 Cuban Revolution, most journalists and commentators felt that U.S. military, economic, and diplomatic assistance were necessary to the future of Central American democracies.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, at the height of the Central American Crisis in the 1970s and ‘80s, most cultural critics oppose intervention and project disastrous consequences for both Central America and the U.S. Charting this shift in the rhetoric of intervention through analyses of popular journalism, I contrast the pervasive anti-communist discourse that colors the first conflict of the Crisis, the 1954 ousting of democratically elected Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz, with the much more ambivalent depictions that follow the leftist coup in Nicaragua in 1979 and the Salvadoran Civil War (also in 1979).

This dramatic change suggests how the Central American Crisis thwarts the established rhetoric of U.S. democratic interventionism. Cultural critics, often convinced of the irreducible

difference of Central America, focus on its pervasive threat to the U.S. Conservative and moderate journalists alike worry that U.S. involvement cannot alter the chaotic course of Latin American politics. They argue that violence is endemic and communism unavoidable. Nicaragua and El Salvador appear as quagmires in which U.S. dollars and lives will be lost forever. More progressive writers suggest that intervention undermines American democratic ethics and makes Latin American democracy impossible. They consider alternative modes of intervention, embodied in the liberal individual, and their stories inform the still more radical perspectives of Stone, Didion, and Forché.

The first major Central American coup of the Cold War, the overthrow of Guatemalan President Arbenz by the U.S. military-backed Carlos Castillo Armas in 1954, caused speculation among American journalists about how the region could disrupt the volatile power struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Most major news outlets supported the coup. They called Arbenz “red” and hoped that Castillo would restore the free market to Guatemala, but such news accounts also demonstrate collective anxiety about the potential consequences of U.S. intervention.

Projecting breezy confidence, the *Time* article “Guatemala: Battle of the Backyard” (1954) attempts to explain Guatemalan politics in light of Castillo’s insurgency. Using the old geographic metaphor of the “backyard,” the author, Harvey Rosenhouse, makes a case for the urgency of Guatemala’s coup to U.S. readers. Guatemala, the article explains, is “a lush, green little country only 1,000 miles from the U.S.” Defined by its abundant flora and its alarming proximity, Guatemala inspires Rosenhouse to stretch familiar global Cold War geography to cover new territory: “Guatemala, in its special way, was a small-scale sequel to Korea and Indo-China. And the world knew it.... The way of the campaign's beginning was certainly unlike any

hot-war fighting of recent times. There were no tanks or artillery, and for that matter, no roads for such luxurious military equipment to move on. The army that gathered along the unpatrolled jungle border that first afternoon could have made no sense except against the background of Central America, where history has been made before by a handful of angry men with rusty Mausers and machetes.” He struggles to navigate the clichés of both Red Scare reporting and Latin American travel writing. Although the article cites Guatemala as a “sequel” to Korea and Indochina, its prose pauses over its unfamiliar, uncultivated jungle. The lack of “luxurious military equipment” conjures a scene of primitive warfare that predates the Cold War by hundreds of years. The “handful of angry men with rusty Mausers and machetes” evoke this history of conquistadors and rebels, reminding readers of centuries of sensational news reports and travelogues. Rosenhouse suggests that the Guatemalan coup adds the stakes of New World conquest to the ideology of containment.

“Guatemala: Battle of the Backyard” tempers the rampant anticommunism of the 1950s with notes about economic inequality in Guatemala and goes to some length to humanize Jacobo Arbenz. Still, the author cannot resist referring to him with the shorthand “red;” noting with heavy irony Arbenz’s reliance on Soviets and on “Communists” in his own government. The article even makes oblique reference to Arbenz’s primitive political mind, arguing that it has closed around Marxism because he lacks the worldliness to see beyond local injustice. Indeed, this author finds that shortsightedness is a primary threat both to democratic Guatemala and to the nearby U.S., writing: “A depressing number of Latin Americans (and North Americans), refusing to take Guatemalan Communism seriously, have long insisted that the State Department's alarm was only a pretext for some kind of intervention on behalf of the banana-growing United Fruit Co.” Although the author protests this argument heartily, its presence in the

article demonstrates its persistence. Now often cited as the catalyst of the 36-year Guatemalan Civil War, Castillo's presidency bore the taint of CIA-influence and United Fruit interest even in its early days.

But if *Time* affected certainty about the justice of the coup (in this article and others), the magazine also registered fear about its uncertain outcome. The magazine's cover portrays the bust of Jacobo Arbenz in his Western suit flanked by a pre-Colombian statue featuring the head of Stalin. Bananas over his left shoulder and a volcano above his right are iconic images of Central America that remind readers of the tropical volatility that Arbenz's urbane portrait cannot conceal.

Near the end of the article, the author describes the climate of unrest that follows insurrection: "Inside Guatemala, tension rose to the boil. Labor and peasants presented with farms of their own under the land-reform program pledged loyalty to Arbenz and the Communists; the remote Indians, as ever, were mute and apart." To this *Time* author, and to journalists, Latin Americans seem just as dangerously foreign as Soviets—perhaps more so. Guatemala's indigenous culture, like its jungle vegetation, mystifies public arbiters. For political writers and artists, Native peoples embody the radical alterity of Latin culture. These "remote Indians," "mute and apart," trouble *Time*'s assumptions about the prospect of spreading democracy and of containing communism in such a foreign space.

Mainstream news outlets struggle to reduce the divide between Arbenz and Castillo to the terms of the Cold War binary. In the era of McCarthy, anticommunism colored almost all cultural commentaries (*The Nation*, for example, denies that Arbenz is a communist but does not champion Marxism). Nevertheless, after the rise and fall of Castillo, political violence in Guatemala occupied hundreds of articles in *Time* alone. As one correspondent writes in

“Guatemala: The Bitten Hand,” “In the continuing process of learning the subtle difficulties involved in giving away money, the U.S. got a lesson last week from Guatemala” (1959).

Twenty years later, the rise of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua poses similar rhetorical problems.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Americans wondered if Nicaragua would be the next Cuba. Following the Sandinistas’ defeat of Somoza in 1979, Nicaragua emerged as a new testing ground for Marxian economics and another disturbing exception to U.S. control of the hemisphere. Although military casualties and human rights abuses accompanied this regime change, proponents of capitalist democracy felt still more threatened by the Sandinistas’ attempts to nationalize businesses and redistribute lands.<sup>13</sup> U.S. attitudes toward Nicaragua are usually conflated with those of Reagan, who famously cast the Sandinistas as the next threat to democracy and who undermined his own embargo against Iran to fund anti-Sandinista insurgents during the Iran-Contra Affair. The U.S. news media, like Reagan’s coterie, are generally unenthusiastic about the Sandinistas, but many also register skepticism about the Contras, whose ties to the former Somoza dictatorship and cache of Israeli automatic weapons portended disaster.

The Sandinistas’ unlikely popular success also indicated the declining power of the U.S. in the world. Following the failure of U.S. efforts in Vietnam and Cuba, journalists describe Nicaragua as a pivot point in a global network that has eluded U.S. control. In the months before the Sandinistas ousted Somoza, correspondents traced connections among Latin American nations and searched for clandestine alliances. As one 1979 *Newsweek* article reports:

The money comes from a bewildering number of sources. The Sandinistas raise some of it themselves; more than \$1 million has come from bank robberies and kidnappings in the past year. Business and individuals in Nicaragua have made

contributions. Marxist guerrillas in nearby El Salvador are said to have chipped in \$10 million from their own substantial kidnap revenues, and \$2 million more has come from contributors in Venezuela. There have even been fund raisers in the U.S., with showings of Sandinista films at \$5 a ticket. "Our efforts in the U.S. have been quite successful," says Father Ernesto Cardenal, a Nicaraguan guerrilla priest who has been living in Costa Rica since 1977. "Los Angeles, San Francisco—people in these and other cities have given us much money."

(Willenson 39)

The article worries less about Cuban aid than about contributions from insurgent groups in El Salvador and leftist governments like that of Panama. The authors seem even more shocked to find support for the Sandinistas within the U.S. Such minority support suggests either a naïve, poorly informed public or, worse, a public that cares little for capitalist democracy. The article ends on a fearful note: "The evidence suggests that, so far, the Cuban tie is no stronger than that. But if the Sandinistas win their war, both they and the Cubans may be less discreet about expressing their admiration and support for each other" (39). The writers fear that friendship between Cuba and Nicaragua, like military aid among Central American countries, could signal a hemispheric power shift with unpredictable repercussions for U.S. power. In the end, U.S. aid did little to unseat the Sandinistas. Instead, the party lost in its first free elections to Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro in 1990. But the Sandinistas' rise to power and resistance to U.S. mandates would determine U.S. policy in Central America in the decades to come. The debate spurred by the Sandinistas in the States illustrates that the Central American Crisis cannot be reduced to the partisan discord between an interventionist right and an anti-imperial Left.

Liberals on both sides conflate democracy with free markets, and El Salvador in particular has felt the terrible consequences of this confusion.

In 1979, the Salvadoran Civil War further unsettled the binary opposition between evil Left and righteous Right. Although El Salvador had few material resources and was scarcely a tourist destination, its political future became a cause célèbre.<sup>14</sup> Cited frequently alongside Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras as a hotbed of instability, El Salvador defies easy narrative more than any of these countries. *New York Magazine*, for example, describes El Salvador as a “steamy match-book sized backwater,” a forgettable country filled with inhabitants “expert” at “killing one another” (Kramer, “What the U.S. Should Do in El Salvador”). San Salvador’s hotels teemed with foreign journalists who generally portray the country as a tiny, overpopulated third-world jungle; its people as corrupt militants (on both sides) or ignorant victims led to slaughter.

In the context of murdered *desconocidos*, mysterious *desaparecidos*, and anonymous “death squads,” reporters find El Salvador inaccessible, information sources unreliable, and mass killing indescribable or “ineffable”—a word Joan Didion often uses to describe El Salvador. As a result, their texts tend to fixate on the vertigo of violence itself. Reporters use the terms of atrocity—murder, massacre, torture, assassination—to describe acts that evade description. They also use iconic figures such as notorious generals, guerilla leaders, and most notably the assassinated human rights leader Archbishop Oscar Romero to stand in for anonymous masses of nameless soldiers and faceless disappeared.

In *Time*’s “Terror, Right and Left,” for example, Thomas Sancton describes the “bloody struggle” that “rips Central America and endangers U.S. interests.” His witness, “a stout woman frying vegetables in a pan over a wood stove,” recalls how the military killed exactly 19 people.

Soldiers, on the hunt for left-wing insurgents, “came marching fast down the streets. They banged on doors, and they dragged people out. It is a litany that could also describe the raids of many right-wing death squads. In El Salvador, the vultures have learned to go where the guns are firing.”<sup>15</sup> Sancton blends stark numerical data with pointed descriptions of El Salvador’s tropical beauty, feudal peasant life, and atmosphere of terror. He cites the country’s high population density (593 per sq. mi.), low average income (\$670 a year), and collapsing economy: “The country's gross national product has dropped 19.5% since 1978.” The numbers serve to quantify Salvadoran abjection, while the knowing vultures hint at the pervasive death beyond the legible boundaries of the anecdote.

Despite his dark account, Sancton seems certain of the ardency of U.S. interest, in Reagan’s promise to boost the “moderate” Christian Democratic Party while providing military backing to keep the dangerous guerillas at bay.<sup>16</sup> Articles like Sancton’s demonstrate a persistent attitude cultivated by the print journalists, who cultivate belief in the resiliency of the capitalist democratic model. *New York Times* reporters Raymond Bonner and Tom Buckley, for example, object to the covert ops and other invasive maneuvers by which the U.S. sought to rig the contest in favor of right-wing stability, but progressives and reactionaries alike depend on the premise that right-minded Americans could enact change in Central America. This presumption offsets doubts about the imbrication of competing forces and assuages anxiety about the vertiginous number of casualties and human rights abuses, many of which went unreported and most of which remain unprosecuted.

Eager to render El Salvador comprehensible, and thus salvageable, journalists and political commentators focus on famous exemplars whose known histories and recorded acts serve as proxies for the *desconocidos* and *desaparecidos* whose names—like those of their

killers— usually went unidentified. Archbishop Oscar Romero offers embassy officials and foreign correspondents a comprehensible image for the untold numbers of priests and church workers who were threatened, tortured, or executed by “unknown” militants. Catholic sisters Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and lay worker Jean Donovan, raped and murdered in 1980, became the “four American churchwomen” whose deaths illustrate the stakes for Americans in this distant Civil War. In an editorial for the *Washington Post*, Colman McCarthy cites the churchwomen as reproaches to the U.S. government; their humanitarian efforts stand in stark contrast to the United States’ “Policy of Deceit and Illusion” (July 18, 1982). McCarthy points out that human rights organizations had widely discredited Reagan’s claims to improved efforts by El Salvador’s military junta: “No evidence supports the view that D’Aubuisson has gone from death squads to life squads, or that land reform programs are working, or that we are any closer to settling the murders of the four churchwomen.... As Archbishop Romero knew 28 months and 28,000 deaths ago, more military aid leads, logically and tragically, to a bigger war against a poorer people.” McCarthy reasons that “deceit” and “illusion” keep D’Aubuisson and the death squads in power. The five activists that McCarthy names signify and spur opposition to the murder of 28,000 that necessarily go unnamed. McCarthy hopes that the memory of the churchwomen and Archbishop Romero will spur an outraged public to write their congressmen and so halt further U.S. military aid to the junta. He implies that his editorial, the soon-to-be-released PBS documentary about the churchwomen, and other journalistic efforts can also spur activism. In other words, where the government fails, conscientious individual reporters and human rights workers will step in on the side of democracy for the Americas. This assumption motivates Robert Stone’s and Joan Didion’s critique of U.S. cultural interventionism in their Central American novels.

### **Gringos in the Tropics: Robert Stone's *A Flag for Sunrise***

Journalists often depict violence in Central America in two related ways: they deploy tropes of tropical difference alongside images of mass atrocity to emphasize the otherness of Latin American peoples and the danger of political violence in the region, and they cite statistics, key names, and dates, using concrete figures to stand in for the unquantifiable and unidentifiable disappearances and deaths that plagued the isthmus. In contrast, Robert Stone, Joan Didion, and Carolyn Forché adapt the terminology and conventions of war reportage to dramatize the stakes of the crisis for U.S. national identity. Journalists and literary intellectuals alike present an alternative mode of U.S. engagement that defends human rights in the face of the astounding violence of state militaries and private mercenaries. Stone, Didion, and Forché all traveled to Central America in the late 1970s. Each narrates the crisis from the perspective of a progressive American traveler who can witness and document atrocity. Stone and Didion, like the journalists and travel writers who precede them, offer little history and even less culture. In this vacuum, these authors craft a fictional Central America in which Latin American resistance and U.S. progressive incursion alike yield only more violence. Fiction offers them a forum to imagine and connect clandestine war crimes to their perpetrators, and to illustrate how U.S. efforts unwittingly aid torture, murder, and coercion. Stone focuses on the human casualties of insurrection in a fictional Nicaragua, in particular the murder of a saintly American nun, to reveal how the ideology of intervention debases the American people.

Robert Stone's 1981 political thriller, *A Flag for Sunrise*, arouses both lavish acclaim and fierce criticism from reviewers.<sup>17</sup> Some found his novel ambitious and powerful. Michael Wood of *The New York Times* wrote that the novel "has the pace and suspense of a first-class thriller, and it catches the shifting currents of contemporary Latin American politics" (BR1). Others, like

Jonathan Yardley of *The Washington Post*, complained: “he is a preacher masquerading in novelist's clothing, indulging himself in rhetoric right out of SDS or the IWW. It is the politics of his novels rather than the craft of them that seems ultimately to interest him the most; the problem is that there is nothing interesting about his politics” (Nov. 1, 1981).<sup>18</sup> Stone probes the cast of characters long associated with Latin American war correspondence: the brutal general, the inept guerilla, the virtuous white woman assaulted by foreign danger, and the masterful American military man. Critics are familiar with the tropes that Stone revises; his violent soldiers, guileless Catholics, sociopathic gunrunners, and nefarious covert agents also build on spy classics by Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene. Like Greene, Stone criticizes the established codes used by U.S. politicians and news media to describe Latin America, constructing in their place narratives of American impotence and liberal collusion, which highlight the failure of First-World empirical observation to account for the Central American Crisis. Yet, even as he does these things, Stone suggests the lasting power of such iconic narratives. For this reasons, my reading of *A Flag for Sunrise* differs from that of literary critic Stephen Benz, who argues that Stone’s American characters are corrupted by their contact with Central American space. Benz places Stone in a long history of writers whose characters must resist the taint of Latinness when they travel to Central America. He writes: “Writers in the later years of the twentieth century [like Robert Stone and Paul Theroux] have sensed the same need for resistance on the part of visiting North Americans. In their works, however, the success of this resistance is by no means assured. Very often, in fact, characters fail precisely because of the inadequacy of the Anglo ideals upon which their resistance is based” (61). Certainly such attitudes prevail in earlier accounts of the region (à la Richard Harding Davis), but this reading doesn’t fully account for how Stone revises such stock narratives. Stone’s characters travel to Tecan to work against the

ends of empire, but the failure of their efforts demonstrates the depth of U.S. collusion in the region.

The novel's plot is difficult to distill, but it revolves around three Americans: a jaded anthropologist, Frank Holliwell; a suicidally humanitarian nun, Sister Justin; a criminally insane speed freak and Coast Guard deserter-cum-gunrunner, Pablo Tabor; as well as the Canadian "whiskey priest" Father Egan. All of these characters find their fates sealed by the early days of a Central American revolution, based loosely on the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. Father Egan and Sister Justin have been keeping their mission open against orders in an effort to assist the revolutionary movement. The anthropologist Holliwell, also an alcoholic and a reluctant associate of the CIA, finds his life threatened by a politically unpopular talk he has delivered in nearby Compostela (a fictional Costa Rica) and escapes to Tecan from an impetuous blend of fear, convenience, and curiosity. Tabor, the last to come to Tecan, arrives with several (alcoholic) gunrunners, whom he kills and whose cache of arms he sells to Tecanecan revolutionaries.<sup>19</sup> To support this motley cast, Stone provides a secretive gaggle of covert operatives and multinational professionals who make their living provoking or steering war. For Stone, this explosive combination of U.S. nationals in Latin space adds to the chaos created by murderous military officials like Lieutenant Campos, who is bent on quashing both the incipient rebellion and, for tangentially related reasons, Sister Justin and the mission. The novel ends when Holliwell, under threat of torture by Campos, betrays Justin's alliance with the rebels, flees the country, and murders Tabor (in self defense, since Tabor has been planning to kill him).

Already an established cultural critic, Stone earned his street credentials with his gritty 1974 Vietnam novel, *Dog Soldiers*. In a 1981 interview with Charles Ruas of *The New York Times*, Stone explains the impetus for *A Flag for Sunrise* and its fictional Central American

nation, Tecan: “I was sensing the American presence in all its variety and aspects. The situation began to remind me of Vietnam. I was again seeing this irrational sense of mission which Americans are consumed with when they are about their business in the underdeveloped world—anthropologists, missionaries, contractors, gunrunners, deserters, crazies, druggies, various people” (34). Stone describes U.S. interventionism as a religious imperative, a mission to convert or transform Latin America, to remake it in the image of free market democracy. Stone argues, as does his protagonist Holliwell, that the U.S. has exported its worst aspects to subject nations in Latin America and Asia. The specter of Vietnam haunts U.S. portraits of the Central American Crisis (as it has since haunted U.S. confrontations with Iraq and Afghanistan). Stone’s Tecan, then, does not assess the specific conditions of Nicaragua, whose political circumstances it borrows. Instead, Stone filters Latin America through the perceptions of U.S. onlookers. The composite country that Stone constructs tells readers little about the nations that inspire it; instead Tecan exhibits the dissolution of American ideals.

Stone begins with an archetypal cast of Anglo characters, but the novel quickly subverts generic expectations. Father Egan, for example, is more than an inept drunkard. He preaches to drifters and honors the confessions of the vicious Guardia Lieutenant Campos—who, in the early pages of the novel, has murdered a young Canadian woman. Egan also goes to great lengths to save a delusional vagrant who has been murdering the area’s children. Sister Justin is more a devotee of revolution than of religion. She falls in love with a Tecanecan priest, has sex with Holliwell, and confesses her lack of faith in the dictates of the church. She demonstrates the stalwart passion of a nun only in service to the impending revolution, despite knowing very little about the rebels’ tactics and even less about what role she and her mission will play in helping them.

Just as Father Egan and Sister Justin are rogue Catholics, Holliwell is a sort of rogue anthropologist. Devotees of the political thriller might expect his character to translate the complex politics of Tecan for readers or to use his expertise to unravel the region's mysteries. Certainly Holliwell's anthropological expertise in Latin America has provided his various connections in Compostela, Tecan, and with the CIA, but Holliwell finds that his empirical knowledge fails to prepare him for Tecan. In Tecan he is ignorant and exposed. He meets U.S. diplomatic agents and black marketers who always seem to know more about him than he knows about them (which is usually almost nothing). His anthropological observations yield little information, and he fails to make the connections that might have saved Justin from torture and death at the hands of Lieutenant Campos. Some scholarly analyses of Stone's novel have suggested that Tecan frustrates Holliwell's ideals and corrupts Americans who are lured into its dissolute web.<sup>20</sup> I would argue that the presence of Americans like Holliwell only adds further trouble for the Tecanecan revolutionaries and for Sister Justin. Stone imagines Tecan as the product of centuries of antagonism among nefarious interests, with the U.S. nation-state and its bloodless entrepreneurs as principal agents in this clash. In other words, Tecan hasn't tainted or ruined Holliwell because he's been ruined all along.

Shaken by his mysterious prior involvement in Vietnam, Holliwell has lost his faith in intervention by the novel's start: "Let's let them work it out for themselves," he begs when asked by a CIA contact to investigate the Catholic mission in Tecan (23). Although bound to lecture in nearby Compostela, Holliwell initially refuses to cross into Tecan and also refuses to allow the CIA to exploit his anthropological expertise, but, as many critics have pointed out, Holliwell finds himself inevitably drawn to Tecan, as well as to Sister Justin. When Holliwell crosses the border, hitching a ride with a U.S. military attaché and a journalist on the hunt for conflict, he is

struck less by its tropical beauty than by its militarization. Holliwell notices the professional discipline and pristine equipment of the Tecanecan Guardia, evidence of U.S. military aid, and quickly observes their abuse of their power and equipment. They have detained several young tourists, and Holliwell notes that “The sergeant was repeatedly inspecting and commenting upon the hippie gringos. From time to time, he would seize hold of a boy’s long hair and pull him out of line, caress the hair while making kissing noises with his mouth, shout something at the youth and shove him back in line.... When he came to a girl who struck his fancy, he would pause contemplatively and feel her up. No one seemed to be protesting his behavior” (151). Nearby, several Tecanecan children are throwing stones at a cow. The attaché wields the authority of his position to stop the abuse of the cow, but can do nothing about the violently sexualized abuse of the American tourists.

If Stone rejects the typical spy thriller fantasies of First World expertise and Third World ineptitude, he unabashedly represents Central American military men as psychopathic and homicidal. Indeed, the politics of the novel can be challenging to parse, since its vision of Central America is replete with Latin aggression and American complicity. Lieutenant Campos is the novel’s most explicit antagonist. Backed by unflinching mercenaries such as the British counter-revolutionary Heath, Campos entraps Holliwell and forces him to inform on Justin, thereby securing the complicity of the novel’s dubious hero and the failure of its martyr.

Stone contends that only disillusionment, complicity, or death await Americans who attempt to disrupt the power dynamic of U.S. militarism and Central American turmoil. Holliwell betrays Sister Justin despite his intentions. Subsequently, Sister Justin suffers torture and murder at the hands of the rightist military. Holliwell tries to explain to Justin that “She had aroused an appetite in them [the Tecanecan military and the CIA] as she had in him. He called his hunger

love, what they called theirs he had no way of knowing” (381). Justin embodies the fantasy of liberal humanitarianism that “decadent” leftists like Holliwell desperately desire.<sup>21</sup> That same imperial altruism drives Lieutenant Campos to homicidal rage.

When the Guardia capture Justin, they violate her in every way imaginable. The guard that brings her to Campos molests her. The narrator lingers with his fingers under her skirt, asking readers to feel both her discomfort and his aggressive lust. In contrast, when Campos begins to torture her, his acts of violence become indistinct: “Though he beat her beyond fear, she kept trying. Until she was awash in all the shameful juices of living and she still kept on. Though she forgot in time who he was and what the pain was about she was able to think of the tears, the blood, and mucus and loose teeth in her mouth: these are not bad things, these are just me and I’m all right” (415). Campos’ assault on Justin allows readers to follow her inner dialogue and obscures each violent act. Campos rends Justin’s flesh, killing her agency as he kills her body, but, in a moment of supreme irony, Campos’ violence enables Justin’s martyrdom. Justin has become, for the first time, a soldier of Christ. Now narrating in the voice of Justin, Stone writes, “You old destiny. You of Jacob, you of Isaac, of Esau. Let it be you after all. Whose after all I am. For whom I was nailed. So she said to Campos: ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord’” (416).

Justin’s body serves as a site for the conflict between the U.S. and Central America, but even as that conflict taints both sides, Justin is purified by her death in this scene of battle. It is Justin who recites the Emily Dickinson poem from which the novel takes its title: “‘A Wife—at Daybreak I shall be—’ he heard her say. ‘Sunrise — Hast thou a Flag for me?’” (380). Justin references the blood she loses alongside her virginity, but Justin’s blood also becomes a symbol for Holliwell, Campos, and for the novel itself. *A Flag for Sunrise* portrays Central America’s

dramatic clash of competing interests as a harbinger of political and cultural doom, yet Sister Justin constitutes a key exception. Justin's purposes are thwarted. Her love for a Tecanecan priest and revolutionary goes unrequited. Her mission is taken over by the military, but her martyrdom allows the fantasy of American humanitarianism to continue. Stone wrote this novel well before the murder of the churchwomen in El Salvador, but he recognizes through Justin the power of such images to make headlines and turn heads in the U.S. Justin's death fulfills the objective of Campos, but rallies the insurgents, Holliwell, and possibly the novel's imagined American community.

*A Flag for Sunrise* exposes the blind spots that plague U.S. fantasies of hemispheric democracy. Stone's male protagonist is ruined by his collusion with a transnational system of oppression that tortures and murders both U.S. and Central American subjects who try to challenge it. Thus Stone undermines the logic of intervention by portraying its mutually destructive consequences in fiction. Similarly, Stone's contemporary Joan Didion turns to fiction to illustrate the horrific results of intervention in Central America. An author famous for both literary journalism and popular fiction, Didion bridges these two modes, employing both to interrogate the rhetorics by which progressive Americans justify their own incursion in the crisis.

### **Joan Didion and the American Crisis of Agency**

In the 1970s, U.S. policymakers and political writers viewed the Central American Crisis as a hemispheric paradox: a foreign conflict with immediate domestic implications. For heads of state like Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, the crisis demonstrates the alarming spread of communism to *our own backyard*. Journalists and popular authors, in contrast, see the Crisis as the catastrophic consequence of the Cold War climate of containment ideology and covert military operations. Where journalists express some hope that reporters and activists themselves

can use stories of atrocity to spur public outrage and change the course of U.S. foreign policy, Joan Didion indicts the rhetoric of progressivism and its consequences for Central America in her 1977 novel, *A Book of Common Prayer*, and in her 1983 travelogue, *Salvador*. Her texts examine and revise the narratives told by Americans about Central America to explain how those stories justify intervention and generate further violence in the region. *A Book of Common Prayer* embroils its American travelers in Latin American political drama. Like Stone, Didion fictionalizes U.S. presence in Central America through the tales of a jaded anthropologist and a murdered idealist. Didion's literary nonfiction was widely known in the late 1970s and early 1980s for its searing critique of contemporary U.S. culture.<sup>22</sup> *A Book of Common Prayer*, published four years before Stone's novel, also borrows from the escalating Central American Crisis as backdrop for its plot; both writers fictionalize their Central American nations to clarify their convoluted political factions and universalize their lessons, as well as to put names and faces to anonymous villains and victims.

Didion gathered material for Boca Grande during a stint in Columbia, but the novel distills the political climate that she felt characterized Panama, Honduras, and El Salvador. This fictional space offers a fascinating contrast to her more realistic depictions of U.S. locales. Boca Grande is a dreamscape, loaded with iconic tropical geographies, nightmarish characters, and allegorical conflicts. Didion's characters move from real-life New York, California, or Texas to the liminal, shadowy terrain of Central America, just as Stone's do in *A Flag for Sunrise*. Both novels feature white women heroines who find their values fatally compromised by their political dabbling in the region. Some critics have suggested that both novels are fatally compromised by xenophobia, since their portraits of their countries and peoples are so relentlessly deterministic, but despite their contradictions, the novels deploy such images to

undermine U.S. military intervention and imperial tourism. Fiction by Robert Stone and Joan Didion went beyond nonfiction and news to unsettle the rescue narrative that Richard Slotkin, Amy Kaplan, and Shelley Streeby have described. Stone's and Didion's Americans are not saved by their encounters with Latin America, nor do they do any saving themselves.

In Didion's novel, a former anthropologist from the U.S. befriends an errant traveler, a woman named Charlotte who is known in Boca Grande for her tendency to hang out in the airport and for her sexual promiscuity. The one-time anthropologist, Grace, has since married into one of Boca Grande's elite families. Her husband is now dead, but her brothers-in-law run the country, and Grace spends most of her time corralling her amoral in-laws. Like Stone's *Holliswell*, Grace is immobilized, a sharp observer whose perceptions are of little consequence. Despite her expertise as an anthropologist and her important political position, she is powerless to help Charlotte or her adopted country. She is cynical about Boca Grande's future: "The guerrilleros here spend their time theorizing in the interior, and are covertly encouraged to emerge from time to time as foils to the actual politics of the country. Our notoriously frequent revolutions are made not by the guerrilleros but entirely by people we know. This is a hard point for the outsider of romantic sensibility to grasp" (26). Charlotte, as Didion's readers come to understand, is the consummate romantic outsider. She embodies the flawed beauty of the liberal U.S. and its bumbling efforts in Central America. Charlotte travels to Boca Grande to escape her life; her daughter has become a terrorist. Her ex-husband is cruel, drunk, and sociopathic. Her current husband is a lawyer who, the novel implies, is involved in the international arms trade. In response to the tragedies of her history, the naïve Charlotte invents new stories, remembering her daughter as an innocent child, her ex-husband as an impotent lush, and her current husband as an

honorable and upright humanitarian. Like the reporters who render the Crisis as a morality play, Charlotte simplifies and distorts her own story to make it comprehensible.

Didion's Boca Grande, like Stone's Tecan, offers little history and even less culture. This vacuum allows these authors to divorce a "real" Central America from stories that are really about bad people in power. Americans and Central Americans alike cannot stop the CIA, the rightist military, and the corruption that attends development. The consequences of such efforts can only be more violence. Charlotte tends to wander aimlessly in her newfound country. Her efforts to engage in causes are thwarted. She imagines film festivals and boutique stores in Boca Grande, plans that come to nothing; she tries to inoculate campesinos, only to have her vaccines taken by the military. Her goals are absurd. Yet Charlotte, as Grace suggests, becomes invested in a fantasy that she can participate in building a better future for Boca Grande:

In at least two of the several impenetrably euphemistic 'Letters from Central America' which Charlotte wrote during her stay here and trying unsuccessfully to sell to *The New Yorker*, she characterized Boca Grande as a 'land of contrasts.'

Boca Grande is not a land of contrasts. On the contrary Boca Grande is relentlessly 'the same': the cathedral is not Spanish Colonial but corrugated aluminum. There is a local currency but the American dollar is legal tender. The politics of the country at first appear to offer contrast, involving as they do the 'colorful' Latin juxtaposition of *guerrilleros* and colonels, but when the tanks are put away and the airport reopens nothing has actually changed in Boca Grande.

(13)

Charlotte suggests to readers that Central America is no place for the well-meaning U.S. liberal. She, like Sister Justin, disappears in the midst of a revolutionary conflict, just one casualty of a revolution that does little to affect the course of the nation.

*A Book of Common Prayer*, then, is less a novel about revolution in Central America than a cautionary tale about the death of U.S. democratic ideals. In the text's first line, Grace issues a promise: "I will be her witness" (11). Grace asserts her intention to record and interpret Charlotte's life, including the events that lead to her death, but distortions and gaps separate her from Charlotte and trouble her testimony: "So you know the story. Of course the story had extenuating circumstances, weather, cracked sidewalks and paregorina, but only for the living" (11). The first few pages of the novel distinguish Grace from Charlotte—Grace is a prudent pessimist, Charlotte a deluded optimist. In the end, both suffer tragic ends, since Grace narrates the novel as she lies dying of cancer. The text's last line reads: "I have not been the witness I wanted to be." The novel's title likens Charlotte's blind faith in U.S. liberalism to the religious rituals of early Anglicans.<sup>23</sup> Charlotte, her husband Leonard, and even Grace fulfill the roles prescribed to them by the exceptionalist mission of the U.S. Grace offers her testimony in order to glean meaning from Charlotte's story, to rescue her memory from the insidious web in which she's entangled—but as a "witness" Grace only manages to implicate Charlotte in the larger political tragedy that swallows both of them.

Several years after the publication of *A Book of Common Prayer*, Didion returned to Central America. She traveled to El Salvador in 1982, just a few months after the hotly debated El Mozote Massacre and more than two years into the Civil War. Like most of the era's journalistic treatments, *Salvador* (1983), which began as a three-part series for the *New York Review of Books*, registers the junta's brutality and decries the fruit of Reagan's policies in the

region. Popular and timely, *Salvador* spent several weeks on the bestseller list, but Didion, in contrast to her contemporaries, refuses the empirical logic by which reporters and government officials attempted to quantify atrocity in El Salvador. Didion replaces that accounting with a carefully positioned unknowing that she calls the “ineffability” of El Salvador (61). For Didion, El Salvador defies the narrative strategies by which the U.S. embassy and press attempt to measure, classify, and report. Didion criticizes the established practices by which the U.S. media investigate and report the war, but she also suggests her own collusion in the “liberal” American positionality that accepts vertigo in place of justice, that turns away from the violence wrought by U.S. intervention and an array of competing interests in Southern space.<sup>24</sup> For Didion, El Salvador’s resistance to American empiricism results in an aporia. *Salvador* threatens the basic assumption that progressivism serves the best interests of both El Salvador and the U.S., and further repudiates the notion that the interests of these two nations were ever complimentary.

Throughout *Salvador*, Didion insists on the ineffability of war (and the Salvadoran war in particular). She responds to those journalists who dutifully recorded body counts, photographed body dumps, and extracted political players from vague intrigues. Oddly refracting the Reagan administration’s position about the meaninglessness of statistics in El Salvador, Didion refuses the usual accounting by which interested parties recorded and relegated political violence:

Actual information was hard to come by in El Salvador, perhaps because this is not a culture in which a high value is placed on the definite.... All numbers in El Salvador tended to materialize and vanish and rematerialize in a different form, as if numbers denoted only the ‘use’ of numbers, an intention, a wish, a recognition that someone, somewhere, for whatever reason, needed to hear the ineffable expressed as a number. At any given time in El Salvador a great deal of what goes

on is considered ineffable, and the use of numbers in this context tends to frustrate people who try to understand them literally, rather than as propositions to be floated, “heard,” “mentioned.” (61)

Didion suggests that El Salvador defies quantification, and thus requires a different sort of journalism. Her critics sometimes accused her of megalomania because *Salvador* is most basically a travel narrative, a recounting of Didion’s specific body in its very local position. I am inclined to deduce that Didion cannot see past that very body, cannot acknowledge that El Salvador is not so much “ineffable” as outside the normative episteme of U.S. capitalist-democratic narrative.<sup>25</sup> Still, Didion mounts her own critique, for her own identitarian specificity is the only vehicle by which she (as both writer and protagonist) can encounter El Salvador.

Critical responses to Didion’s text reveal much about its place among popular conceptions of Central America. Ungenerous readers (like John Pilger of the *New Statesman*) saw Joan Didion as the heroine of a Salvadoran drama of her own construction because she flounders for recognizable icons in a country that feels inaccessible to her as both privileged Anglo-American subject and credential-clad reporter. She remarks first on the failure of El Salvador’s tourist economy as the foremost feature that differentiates it from its more accessible counterparts: “In the general absence of tourists these hotels have since been abandoned, ghost resorts on the empty Pacific beaches, and to land at this airport built to service them is to plunge directly into a site in which no ground is solid, no depth of field reliable, no perception so definite that it might not dissolve into its reverse” (13). In a land plagued by earthquakes and coated in rainy-season fog, the instability of the ground and the unreliability of perception are both literal and analogical. Didion’s study promises to yield few conclusions; it offers a sort of “understanding” premised on her evocations of “the mechanism of terror” rather than on facts

and figures (21). Such an offering, in contrast to the gritty dispatches and sensational commentaries that flooded television and print news sources, seems refreshingly modest. Didion knows her place in *Salvador*, and finds that her place is all she can uncover.

Didion dwells upon her fear and explores how her terror shapes her experience.<sup>26</sup> As she transcribes that affective engagement with El Salvador, “I did not forget the sensation of having been in a single instant demoralized, undone, humiliated by fear, which is what I meant when I said that I came to understand in El Salvador the mechanism of terror” (26). Her fear makes her avoid eye contact with armed soldiers and turn her head when a young boy is shoved into a van. Didion reveals that her fear forces her to turn from terror in El Salvador, disables her search for “the truth” and leaves her with partial evidence, stories of waiting and fruitless investigating, encounters with bits of data that yield no real conclusions. Importantly, Didion’s failure to grasp “the impenetrable interior” of El Salvador implicates the reporters who travel to Morazán along with her (among them Christopher Dickey of *The Washington Post*, 49), who snap photos of body dumps but cannot brave further danger by staying to observe the nighttime murders that, for lack of witnesses, yield still more *desaparecidos* and *desconocidos*.

Didion’s contemporaries do not express frustration with her account; instead, they sympathize with her frustration and celebrate her narrative’s focus on the “impenetrability” of El Salvador and the relative powerlessness of reportage in the face of such opacity. Joanne Omang of the *Washington Post* writes that *Salvador* is “less about the bloody civil war than it is a meditation on the place as conqueror of all attempts at description. Hundreds of ‘straight’ reporters groping through El Salvador last year dimly felt the way she did, I am convinced from my own experience there, but we were unable to make it known, constrained by the conventions of our media, which demand conclusions, and by our own tied tongues. Didion does it for us.”<sup>27</sup>

Omang finds *Salvador* cathartic. Like Omang, most of Didion's reviewers are former Latin American correspondents who add their war stories to Didion's and laud her effort to undermine the numerical accounting of atrocity that their own popular periodicals (*Newsweek*, *Time*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*) used to quantify Salvadoran "instability."

Those who criticize Didion level two related complaints: a few notice that Didion's narrative seems to negate the specificity of Salvadoran history and cultural identity. Gene Lyons of *Newsweek* determines that the rebels' acts and ideologies have no place in *Salvador*, and concludes: "ghastliness and pointlessness are Didion's invariable themes wherever she goes. Most readers will not get very far in this very short book without wondering whether she visited that sad and tortured place less to report than to validate the Didion worldview.... Kill, kill, kill. Dead, dead, dead. Body, body, body. The repetition is incantatory, numbing and, unpleasant as it is to say so, not without a hint of smugness." For Lyons, Didion's text fails to uncover any meaningful data about El Salvador or its people. He finds her rendering of terror and brutality glib, asking for concrete reporting on "that sad and tortured place."

Like Lyons, many see Didion's El Salvador as a negation of truth, a web of violence, guilt, and collusion that conceals a cultural vacuum. Furthermore, even sympathetic reviewers worry that Didion's indictment offered no "answers" or "solutions" to the Salvadoran situation. As Warren Hoge of *The New York Times* wonders, "Could there finally be sense in the tabloid phrase 'senseless killing?' ... What's the solution? Or is there one? The Salvadoran dilemma seems even more impenetrable when as fine and insightful a writer as Joan Didion can go there and run up against the same disquieting conclusions, if they can properly be called that" (3). Like Didion herself, Hoge stumbles over his own verbiage, finding that words like "sense,"

“solution,” and “conclusion” poorly fit the Salvadoran context. Even more skeptical, Gene Lyons asks “Can we, or should we, do nothing but avert our eyes? There's no answer here.”<sup>28</sup>

Most critics credit Didion’s assertion that numbers can lie, that reporters rarely seem to do much good, and that U.S. influence has only worsened conditions for Salvadorans. Her contemporaries find Didion’s anxiety about the powerlessness of words in the face of such convoluted negotiations apt and accurate, but progressive commentators critique *Salvador* for leaving no room for action. Didion’s text dramatizes a prevalent anxiety that Latin America represents an impasse, a political and cultural no-fly zone. Such a tangled web of covert ops, subtle diplomatic exchanges, and general cultural clashes begs for simplification, for if journalists and human rights workers were as powerless to turn the tide as their under-informed readers, then perhaps El Salvador was best left to its own devices. But such reasoning undermines the dominant U.S. ethic of democratic agency and responsibility.

### **The Word and the Witness: Carolyn Forché’s *El Salvador***

By focusing on tales of profligate U.S. expatriates in the tropics, Didion and Stone undermine imperial narratives of rescue and illustrate the limits of U.S. power. Both *A Flag for Sunrise* and *A Book of Common Prayer* suggest that revolution and covert violence in Central America have escalated beyond either the control of the U.S. State Department or the influence of well-meaning humanitarians. Instead their novels urge Americans to refocus their reformist impulses to examine how they contribute to a global climate of oppression; in other words, Didion and Stone deploy Central American contexts to illuminate the dark side of U.S. American democratic values.

Forché agrees with such writers that both policymakers and the U.S. people contribute to atrocity in Central America. Often identified as the exemplary political poet of the era, Forché

also wrote journalism and essays, conducted interviews, and gave speeches, all in an effort to raise public awareness about El Salvador. Many literary scholars, like the broader U.S. public, have remembered Forché but forgotten El Salvador. Advocating literary transnationalism as a model of ethical engagement with Central America, Forché imagines the potential force of transnational writing through the rhetorical power of the witness. Unlike Didion, Forché positions herself—both literally and figuratively—as an observer who can translate and make legible systemic injustice.

Forché spent the better part of three years (1978-80) traveling to and from El Salvador, reporting for *The Nation*, *Ms.*, and *The Progressive*. After returning to the U.S. she famously championed her conception of the “poetry of witness” in an essay for the *American Poetry Review* (July/August, 1981). Her article, “El Salvador: An Aide Memoire” places poetry alongside prose, asking readers to remember “the Tom Thumb of the Americas” (5). She argues that “the twentieth century human condition demands a poetry of witness,” a principled engagement with political violence and oppressive social conditions in the U.S. and beyond (7).<sup>29</sup> The article promotes its “narratives of witness and confrontation” by exploring the struggles that attend common representations of El Salvador (7). Forché begins by explaining how she “first learned of El Salvador” from the traumatic memories of the exiled Salvadoran poet Claribel Alegría, and how she first came to the country. “A young writer, politically unaffiliated, ideologically vague, I was to be blessed with the rarity of a moral and political education—what at times would seem an unbearable immersion, what eventually would become a focused obsession” (3). Forché casts herself as a political blank slate, contrasting her own lack of affiliation with the prescribed angles of the embedded journalists and State Department officials whose stories of El Salvador were so readily available. Yet Forché is also unlike Alegría and

other Latin American activists whose oral and written *testimonios* defy the political power of military regimes by documenting the atrocities they perpetrated and the voices they suppressed. She describes herself as a bystander, a spectator whose testimony is detached from the horrors she observes.

Forché's eyewitness account of El Salvador associates her position with powerlessness and immobility: "I lay on my belly in the *campo* and was handed a pair of field glasses. The lens sharpened on a plastic tarp tacked to four maize stalks several hundred yards away, beneath which a woman sat on the ground. She was gazing through the plastic roof of her 'house' and hugging three naked, emaciated children" (3). Her binoculars amplify Forché's act of seeing, dramatizing the distance between her and the victims whose plight she witnesses. The woman and her family, about to be sprayed with pesticide by a duster plane, help Forché articulate the Salvadoran conflict as a war of wealth against poverty rather than one of communism against liberalism. Their emaciation, nakedness, and vulnerability in the face of the crop-duster illustrate the bodily consequences of systemic disenfranchisement. In the face of such circumstances, Forché (the narrator) is helpless. She cannot save the family; she can only transcribe their story.

Forché would use her own subjectivity and position to emphasize this material divide again and again. As she tells the story that inspired her famous poem "The Colonel,"

I was taken to the homes of landowners, with their pools set like aquamarines in the clipped grass, to the afternoon games of canasta over quaint local *pupusas* and tea, where parrots hung by their feet among the bougainvillea and nearly everything was imported, if only from Miami or New Orleans. One evening I dined with a military officer who toasted America, private enterprise, Las Vegas, and the "fatherland" until his wife excused herself and in a drape of cigar smoke

the events of “The Colonel” took place. Almost a *poème trouvé*, I had only to pare down the memory and render it whole, unlined and as precise as recollection would have it. (3)

Her article places this story of the poem alongside the text of the poem itself, and Forché’s description of “the colonel” expands on her poetic account. Both versions depict the grotesque military man as an eerie caricature of the American upper-middle class. Forché blends the familiar trappings of U.S. commercial influence—chlorinated pools, clipped grass, and canasta in the article, pet dogs and television shows in the poem—with the absurd brutality of the colonel and his sack full of ears. “Something for your poetry, no?” he asks, and Forché’s answer, unspoken in the poem but widely published thereafter, is *yes*.

Informed by such scenes of abject poverty and stomach-turning violence, Forché’s article comments on the place of the “writer” in the story of El Salvador: “As writers we could begin with its location on the Pacific south of Guatemala and west of Honduras and with Ariadne’s thread of statistics: 4.5 million people, 400 per square kilometer (a country without silence or privacy), a population growth rate of 3.5% (such a population would double in two decades). But what does ‘90% malnutrition’ mean? Or that ‘80% of the population has no running water, electricity or sanitary services?’” (5). Forché’s parentheses glean meaning from such inadequate statistical facts. She goes on to provide anecdotal evidence to support her numerical accounts: “I watched women push feces aside with a stick, lower their pails to the water and carry it home to wash their clothes, their spoons and plates, themselves, their infant children” (5). These stories incite horror and pathos, but they also demonstrate the human dimension that statistics can neglect. Forché indicates such representational slippage to call for alternatives to conventional journalism. She warns that powerful Salvadorans have been killing reporters or suppressing their

stories. She explains that Archbishop Oscar Romero himself warned her to leave the country shortly before his own death, with the exhortation to “tell the American people what is happening” (6).

For Forché this plea demands a narrative response, and her essay argues that writers should use every available forum to counteract official U.S. policy in El Salvador: “We backed one fraudulently elected military regime after another.... In return we expect them to guarantee stability, which means holding power by whatever means necessary for the promotion of a favorable investment climate, even if it means exterminating the population, as it has come to mean in Salvador” (6). Forché’s first person plural implicates the U.S. public in the crimes of the U.S. nation-state. Furthermore, she demonstrates how the pursuit of abstract economic “stability,” which both policymakers and populace desire, has made an ostensibly democratic nation complicit in genocide. By exposing the hidden agendas that underlie discourses of U.S. interventionism, Forché unsettles the discourses themselves. She suggests that journalism alone cannot offset the cultural weight of such narratives; she also refutes them with poetry.

On the heels of her article for the *American Poetry Review*, Forché published her second book of poetry, *A Country Between Us* (1981). Dedicated to Archbishop Romero, the collection begins with a series entitled “In Salvador, 1978-80.” Although not all of the poems feature El Salvador explicitly, the framing subtitle situates each poem in the context of the civil war, then the subject of heated debate among both policymakers and journalists. Furthermore, Forché promises to reveal details about her own experience “in Salvador,” an experience that her followers would have recalled from her prose accounts in *The Nation* and the *American Poetry Review*.

In seven of the eight poems, Forché writes in first person, from a voice and perspective that she identifies as her own, as she does when she writes: “We have come far south” or “I have the fatty eyelids of a Slavic factory girl” (9, 10). The “I,” ever-present, is obscured by its contact with El Salvador. The subjectivity—even the personality—of her autobiographical narrator are subsumed by the people she meets and the things she sees. Take, for example, her description of Claribel Alegría in “The Island”: “She wears a white cotton dress. Tiny mirrors have been stitched to it—when I look for myself in her, I see the same face over and over” (10). Forché’s self only appears in relation to that of her muse, Alegría. In contrast to Alegría, Forché defines herself in negative terms:

I have never heard  
it pounding. When I have seen  
an animal, I have never reached  
for a knife....  
But we are not unlike. (11)

Similar to the subject position that she adopts in “El Salvador: An Aide Memoire,” Forché depicts herself as an American everywoman in her poems, an Ishmael whose role in the poetry is to witness and transcribe. Her experience connects the poems, asking readers to move with her from California to Spain to Argentina to El Salvador. In “San Onofre, California,” Forché ties the U.S. to Latin America with their shared colonial heritage and current migrant populations. She examines the nature of the border: “while birds and warmer weather / are forever moving north, / the cries of those who vanish / might take years to get here” (9). Human bodies, like those of birds, have crossed these borders, traveling to and from “the very place where someone disappeared” (9). The permeable border cannot stop the travel of bodies anymore than it can stop

the weather, but it does disrupt “the cries of those who vanish.” Forché’s poem carries those voices north.

Her poems tell readers almost nothing about Salvadoran culture, nor do they parse the country’s panoply of political factions or their covert connections. Instead, Forché offers universalizing glimpses meant to redeem Salvadoran martyrs and galvanize sympathy among U.S. readers. In “The Visitor,” for example, Forché writes:

In Spanish he whispers there is no time left.  
It is the sound of scythes arcing in wheat,  
the ache of some field song in Salvador.  
The wind along the prison, cautious  
as Francisco’s hands on the inside, touching  
the walls as he walks, it is his wife’s breath  
slipping into his cell each night while he  
imagines his hand to be hers. It is a small country.

There is nothing one man will not do to another. (15)

Here the details of Salvadoran life and culture are vague—a wheat harvest, a prison, a small country. Forché translates the Spanish Francisco whispers to himself: “there is no time left,” and brings readers into his prison cell to imagine his longing for his lost wife.<sup>30</sup> Their mutual loss heightens the tragic affect of the torture inflicted on Francisco’s body and his imminent murder. When Forché writes that “There is nothing one man will not do to another,” she asks readers to see beyond El Salvador to what men do to one another in Argentina, Spain, and the U.S.

Alongside such human details, Forché gives visceral accounts of atrocity. She writes about a sack of human ears “like dried peach halves” in “The Colonel” and the “pits where men

and women are kept” in “Return” (16, 17). In “Because One is Always Forgotten,” Forché describes atrocity in action:

A boy soldier in the bone-hot sun works his knife  
to peel the face from a dead man  
and hang it from the branch of a tree  
flowering with such faces.” (23)

The “boy soldier,” both a victim and a perpetrator of violence, is creative in his brutality. Like his victims, he is nameless; his acts erase his subjectivity just as he has erased those of the dead. In this poem Forché explores the act of forgetting. Dedicated to José Rudolfo Viera, who Forché notes died in El Salvador in 1981, the poem positions the loss—and thereby the forgetting—of Viera alongside the severing of faces from bodies and their redistribution in a tree of anonymous dead.

In “Return,” Forché struggles with the consequences of such erasure. She wants to explain why “men and women of good will read / torture reports with fascination” (17). The poem argues that U.S. audiences “want” “the razor, the live wire, / dry ice and concrete, grey rats and above all / who fucked her, how many times and when” (18). Her poem eerily compares the hunger of spectators for images of atrocity with the hunger of torturers themselves. “Return” reflects its narrator’s anxiety that readers will remember acts of atrocity but forget El Salvador. Forché can only recount such tales of torture and death, can only “cry out until my voice is gone” and hope that she is heard (21).

To close her *APR* essay, Forché explains some of the problems that haunt “poetry of witness”: “There is the problem of poeticizing horror, resembling the problem of the photographic image which might render starvation visually appealing. There are problems of

reduction and over-simplification; of our need to see the world as complex beyond our comprehension, difficult beyond our capacities for solution” (7). In this passage, Forché notes the difficulty of representing war in El Salvador, recalling the problem of “ineffability” that preoccupies Didion. She references the troubled role of the witness; as observer, interpreter, and transcriber, Forché must precisely record what she has witnessed for an audience that she hopes will be more powerful than she. Her record can neither simplify nor exaggerate acts and images of incomprehensible suffering. Such poetry needs, then, to employ the perspective of the witness to bridge the narrative gap between U.S. readers and Salvadoran subjects. Didion implies that such a task is impossible, but Forché insists that “poetry [can be] enough” to enact public awareness and policy change (although, ironically, even she cannot confine herself to poetry).

In the end, Forché may have been right. Her unique combination of literary treatment and activism inspired other poets and writers: The May/June 1982 edition of the *American Poetry Review* contained a letter condemning U.S. complicity in Salvadoran violence signed by 146 well-known authors, including John Ashbery, Raymond Carver, Denise Levertov, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Alice Walker, Robert Penn Warren, and James Welch, as well as Forché herself.<sup>31</sup> As an outspoken advocate of literary transnationalism, especially in the context of the Central American Crisis, Forché translates foreign cultures, peoples, and politics for the U.S. public, who she hopes will oppose the repression of military regimes and speak out against U.S. official support for perpetrators of atrocity. She refuses to see discursive dilemmas as insurmountable barriers. In other words, she replaces ineffability with reflexive transnationality.

For all of the political writers I study in this chapter, the Central American Crisis exposes the limits of U.S. power. Journalists find the region (and its people) inaccessible; they represent its climate of conflict and turmoil as bewildering and irresolvable. Political nonfiction and

thrillers by Robert Stone and Joan Didion portray the crisis through an intricate web of competing interests that overpowers both American and Central American do-gooders. For many of these writers, the precarious future of human rights in Latin America reveals the failure of the “great experiment” of liberal democracy within the U.S. The troubled analogies and complicated narratives by which they describe the Crisis indicate their sense that Monroe Doctrine morality has only contributed to violence and chaos in Central America. Moreover, they suggest that the corruption of U.S. democratic values has bled back across the border, contaminating or killing guileless altruists who attempt to turn the tide of this transnational history. At the heart of this transnational discourse, however, is the question of how everyday Americans should proceed in light of such overwhelming imbrication. If, as Stone and Didion suggest, everyday Americans have been complicit in the crimes of nation-states, Forché posits resistance as the act of witnessing—knowing, writing, and reading together. Forché contends that the collective memory of violence extends beyond the boundaries of nations. Trauma, its legacies, and its records are transnational, and her poetry insists that preserving memory and disseminating its lessons must be a collective act.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The term *campesino* has no precise correlation in English, but the most exact translation of might be “person of the country.” Latin Americans describe *campesinos* as poor or working peoples who live in rural areas, usually indigenous agricultural workers. *Peasant* captures the lower-class status of *campesinos*, but equates them with feudal subjects of bygone ages.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Didion uses this descriptor several times to suggest the difficulty of articulating or expressing what she sees and feels in El Salvador.

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<sup>3</sup> Forché's conception of the "witness" builds on the conventions and ambitions of *literatura testimonio*, which by the 1970s and '80s had become a key mode of expression in Latin America and the Caribbean. Among the most famous *testimonios* is *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1981), translated in 1983 as *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Menchú's testimony positions her as a witness to the genocide of Guatemala's indigenous peoples. Following the displacement of her community from their village and the murder of many of her family members, Menchú told her story to French anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, who crafted it into a written narrative. Forché's poetry suggests that U.S. writers can also serve as witnesses to atrocity. Yet, as my reading of her poetry later in this chapter demonstrates, she distinguishes between the positionalities of witnesses who have been subject to violence (like her muse, Salvadoran poet Claribel Alegría), and transnational political writers who travel and write in order to serve as witnesses.

<sup>4</sup> Many critics have examined how print representations of Latin America consolidate U.S. American identity. According to Mary Louise Pratt, travel narratives mobilize imperial power and erase colonized subjects. Pratt suggests that after decolonization, travel narratives tend to disavow the violence of empire—blaming the victims, as it were, for the degradation of primal landscape and authentic culture. Gretchen Murphy, Amy Kaplan, and Shelley Streeby have pointed to the variety of generic vehicles for U.S. exceptionalism, suggesting how Latin America serves that agenda. Kaplan and Streeby have both argued that much rhetorical engagement with Cuba and Mexico takes the shape of the "rescue narrative," in which brave American men venture south to save threatened women and democracies alike. Richard Slotkin studies later filmic depictions of the third world, arguing that frontier Westerns migrate to Latin America to

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redeem their troubled protagonists. These characters establish their superiority over lawless Latin Americans in guerilla combat.

<sup>5</sup> Recent monographs by Arturo Arias and Ana Patricia Rodríguez posit Central America as a vital space for the convergence of multiple cultures and as a key route for travel, transport, and dialogue between North and South America, the Atlantic and the Pacific. See Arias, *Taking Their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America* (2007) and Rodríguez, *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures, and Cultures* (2009).

<sup>6</sup> During these decades, political violence plagued many countries in Central America, including Panama, Colombia, and Honduras. Others, like Costa Rica, keenly felt the effects of the conflicts among their neighbors. In this chapter I discuss Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador because they captured the most notice in the U.S., and because their struggles galvanized large-scale migration into the U.S.

<sup>7</sup> The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty granted equal proprietary rights to the U.S. and Great Britain.

<sup>8</sup> The many convoluted and conflicting plans to build the canal, as well as the mishaps surrounding its construction (especially the outbreaks of malaria and yellow fever that killed thousands of workers), inspired a special genre of travel literature. One fascinating example is George Washington Goethals' "The Panama Canal," *National Geographic Magazine* (1911). Colonel Goethals was the canal's chief engineer, and other historians of the project often consulted his authority upon the canal's completion.

<sup>9</sup> For more on this fascinating history, see Lester Langley's *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America* (1995) and Kirsten Silva Gruesz's "The Mercurial Space of 'Central' America: Honduras, New Orleans, and the Writing of the Banana

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Republic” in *Hemispheric American Studies*. Both demonstrate how Central America became vital to U.S. investors during this era.

<sup>10</sup> The U.S. occupied Nicaragua from 1912-1933, invaded Honduras several times between 1903 and 1925, and proclaimed sovereignty over the canal zone in Panama in 1903, intervening often thereafter in the interest of the canal. Furthermore, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, the U.S. military intervened, invaded, or occupied many Latin American and Caribbean nations, including Mexico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. Since that time they have also maintained territories in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

<sup>11</sup> Scholars disagree about the imperial message of O. Henry’s *Cabbages and Kings*. Stephen Benz argues that the novel exemplifies the danger of the “banana republic” to guileless Americans. In contrast, Kirsten Silva Gruesz argues that *Cabbages and Kings* mocks U.S. exceptionalism in Central America and portends its role in the violent future of the region.

<sup>12</sup> The endurance of the Viet Cong in the 1955 Vietnam War and of Castro’s regime after the 1959 Cuban Revolution quashed fantasies of U.S. military invincibility and exceptionalism. This chapter points to the Central American Crisis as another key conflict that motivates writers to rethink dominant narratives of the “Third World” and to challenge the global power of the U.S. nation-state.

<sup>13</sup> Among many public intellectuals who engaged the Central American Crisis, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky noted in their famous *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988) a dramatic difference in government attitudes—and therefore media representations—toward U.S.-backed regimes such as Guatemala and El Salvador and the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Their study contended that human rights abuses in Nicaragua received more and harsher attention than those in Guatemala and El

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Salvador. They also argued that the U.S. news media ignored evidence of election fraud in the latter two and ran with little or no evidence of election fraud in Nicaragua. I agree with the spirit of their critique, but disagree that the public perspective on the crisis can be encapsulated by such a quantitative analysis.

<sup>14</sup> Ed Asner was among the Hollywood stars who protested U.S. policy in El Salvador.

<sup>15</sup> Joan Didion's *Salvador* (1983) also picks up on vultures as emblems of El Salvador's Civil War.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Bonner explains in *Weakness and Deceit*: "Both the Carter and Reagan administrations insisted that they were supporting a moderate, centrist government caught between the extremes of the right and the left. This was the catechism—stated repeatedly by policymakers in El Salvador and Washington, accepted by editorial writers, and reported by most journalists, including me. There were indeed extremes on the right and left. But the Christian Democrat-military junta led by José Napoleón Duarte and later the elected government headed by Álvaro Magaña were not in the center" (14).

<sup>17</sup> Stone's title references the first two lines of Emily Dickinson's poem 461: "A Wife—at Daybreak I shall be—/Sunrise — Hast thou a Flag for me?"

<sup>18</sup> SDS refers to Students for a Democratic Society and IWW to Industrial Workers of the World, two leftist activist organizations whose principles and propaganda have prompted fierce criticism from the right.

<sup>19</sup> Alcoholism is rampant in both Stone's and Didion's treatments. Perhaps, for these authors, addiction suggests the compulsive consumption of Western culture, or maybe just the ineptitude of Americans abroad.

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<sup>20</sup> See Stephen Benz's "Through the Tropical Looking Glass: The Motif of Resistance in U.S. Literature on Central America" (1997) and Gregory Stephenson's *Understanding Robert Stone* (2002).

<sup>21</sup> Robert Fredrickson identifies "decadent leftists" as a trope in *Stone*, with Holliwell serving as a primary example (1996).

<sup>22</sup> See especially *Play It as It Lays* (1970) and *The White Album* (1979).

<sup>23</sup> The first *Book of Common Prayer*, published in 1549, established the ritual services and gospel readings for various services in the Church of England.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Louise Pratt makes a similar point on *Imperial Eyes*: "in contrast to Conrad, Didion in fact identifies her subject matter as inaccessible to her western and female self. Terror, based on the unseen, unsaid, unknown, becomes the source of a plenitude the visitor does not witness or create, one she cannot deploy in the density of description. While terror constructs the authoritative standpoint from which the whole panorama makes sense, readers are spared any effort to imagine or comprehend its workings" (226).

<sup>25</sup> Didion prefaces her narrative with a passage from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Jane Harred has argued that her reference to Conrad signals an ethnocentric encounter with El Salvador that reinforces "longstanding, negative, absolutist associations with the primitive, the tropical, and the alien—as well as, perhaps, the stereotype of the innocent American." Didion never states explicitly whether El Salvador is just "ineffable" to American observers or whether there is no "true" El Salvador to know, but I can say conclusively that Didion's reviewers inferred the latter. See Harred's 1998 article "The Heart of Darkness in Joan Didion's Salvador" (1-16).

<sup>26</sup> See Jane Harred for more on this point.

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<sup>27</sup> See Omang's "El Salvador and the Topography of Terror; Salvador" (1983).

<sup>28</sup> See Lyons' "Slouching Through Salvador" (1983).

<sup>29</sup> Forché's "poetry of witness" would eventually culminate in an edited collection called *Against Forgetting* (1993), a mammoth effort to anthologize the poetry produced by writers who lived through (but often didn't survive) most of the major wars, genocides, and human rights crises of the twentieth century.

<sup>30</sup> These separated lovers echo the Argentinean lovers in the prior poem, "The Memory of Elena."

<sup>31</sup> Some scholars of U.S. covert operations have argued that George H. W. Bush's retreat from Reagan's policies of covert military involvement in Central America was tied to the American public's hostile response.

## Chapter 4

### Hemispheric Politics in Latina/o Historical Fiction

During the 1980s and '90s, the Latin American diaspora grew and flourished in the U.S., with unprecedented numbers of immigrants—many of whom fled poverty or violence in Mexico, Cuba, and Central America—and birth rates that terrified cultural conservatives such as Pat Buchanan.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Latina/o writers have produced an expansive literary corpus. Comprised of novels, stories, poetry, memoirs, activist treatises, theoretical and philosophical tracts, and innovative texts that combine multiple genres, this “Latino Boom” has brought the literatures and cultures of Latina/os to the “mainstream.”<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the cultural and commercial exchanges that have bound the hemisphere ever more tightly, conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East have captured much more public attention and engagement than Latin America during this period. With the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990, Iraq and Kuwait seemed more vital to the future of global democracy than Mexico, Cuba, and Central America, whose political struggles slipped from the headlines.

Thus the arbiters of U.S. culture have forgotten, disavowed, or recast their incongruous military, economic, cultural, and humanitarian participation in Latin America.<sup>3</sup> Because many journalists and policymakers failed to connect U.S. interventionism with the waves of Latin American immigration that followed, the proliferation of Latina/o cultures has provoked hemispheric anxiety rather than engagement. As Kirsten Silva Gruesz argues, dominant culture denies the historical presence and importance of U.S. Latina/os, associating them instead with a fearsome future in which Spanish is the official language of the U.S. and “they” outnumber “us.”<sup>4</sup> She urges scholars of Latina/o Studies to think temporally as well as spatially, examining how Latina/os relate to histories of oppression. This call seems especially prescient since many

Latina/o writers have reconstructed hemispheric genealogies through the generic conventions of the historical novel and the family saga, both of which show how the circumstances of the past shape contemporary lives.

This chapter analyzes well-known and widely read Latina/o writers, among them Sandra Cisneros, Achy Obejas, and Francisco Goldman, who deploy the trope of kinship to explore how transnational histories of revolution, civil war, and U.S. interventionism structure the material and cultural conditions for Latin American diasporas in the U.S. Usually multi-generational and multinational, Latina/o family sagas allow readers to move forward and backward through time, to cross and recross borders, revealing how the children of migrants respond to and revise the legacies of their parents and grandparents. Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo* (2002) considers how the mythology of the Mexican Revolution resonates with the novel's contemporary Chicana protagonist. Celaya interrogates the fantastical history she's inherited from her grandparents, presenting these tense family bonds as an analogy for the contradictory race, class, and gender positions she navigates in the U.S. and in Mexico. By rewriting her history to expose contradictions and reveal hidden connections, especially to her indigenous half sister, Celaya resists the prescriptions of her forbears and establishes new criteria for national and familial belonging.

Cuban American writer Achy Obejas' *Days of Awe* (2001), in contrast, features a protagonist whose family legacy has been lost, replaced by euphemism and silence. Alejandra, like Celaya, goes to the country of her parents (in her case post-revolutionary Cuba) to uncover a family history filled with violence, but also with traditions of resistance and adaptation. When Alejandra discovers the centuries-long oppression suffered by her Jewish ancestors, first in Spain and then in pre-revolutionary Cuba, she better understands the secrecy of her parents and

connects their lives to hers through stories. To recover her family history, Alejandra also establishes ties to a new family in post-revolutionary Cuba, reconciling the competing national, political, and cultural identifications that she feels as the daughter of Cuban exiles. In these ways, *Days of Awe* repairs the broken kinship between Cuba and the U.S., representing them as coeval and mutually constitutive.

My chapter ends by exploring how the brutal legacy of political violence in Central America undermines the tradition of the family saga. Francisco Goldman's first novel, *The Long Night of White Chickens* (1992), follows a Guatemalan/Jewish American who returns to Guatemala to investigate his adopted sister's murder. In doing so, he uncovers the history of atrocity that still resonates in Central America, the U.S., and beyond. Goldman uses fiction to illustrate how state-sponsored violence in Central America destroys families and communities. Responding to a longstanding traumatic history of genocide and disappearance, Central American migrants construct new alliances that build on but revise family relationships, finding new ways of belonging that resist the coercive allegiances of nation-states. As Goldman suggests, trauma in Central America inspires new transnational coalitions dedicated to advancing human rights by documenting the suppressed histories of refugees and the people starved, tortured, and murdered in countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.

Scholarship in Latina/o Studies has tended to compare writers of common national origins, distinguishing Chicana/o from Cuban American, for example, and differentiating both from contemporaneous Anglo writers. As this study contends, to better position Latina/o texts in the literary history of the Americas, scholars must explore how these texts converse with one another and how they engage the interconnected literary, cultural, and political traditions of the U.S. and Latin America. Historical novels and family sagas have enabled Latina/o writers to link

disparate histories to an interdependent hemispheric community. Each of these novels centers on a character searching for a “usable past,” a history that goes beyond the traditions they’ve inherited. Scholars have identified a variety of reasons for the prominence of the past in Latina/o writing. Most notably, Lois Parkinson Zamora has argued that Latina/o fiction writers have followed Latin American novelists in crafting a “usable past,” reviving historical subjects and historiographic methods to undermine oppressive historical narratives and to find new precedents and traditions for agency in the present.<sup>5</sup>

Through historical fiction, Latina/o writers imagine potential futures in which national and cultural belonging coexists with resistance to rightist military regimes and U.S. imperialism in Central America. In general, the historical novel builds its fictional story by reconstructing or revising flashpoints from the past. Jerome De Groot’s new guide to the historical novel explains that the genre: “explores the dissonance and displacement between then and now, making the past recognisable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar.... The figures we meet in historical fiction are identifiable to us on the one hand due to the conceit of the novel form, in that they speak the same language, and their concerns are often similar to ours, but their situation and their surroundings are immensely different.... Historical novelists concentrate on the gaps between known factual history and that which is lived” (3). This definition helpfully situates the genre’s relationship to the present and to the past. Historical novelists connect the two, implicitly asking readers to draw new conclusions about their own moments and milieus in response to the historic insights and revelations of the novel.

Latina/o writers have been especially keen to employ this form because the dominant histories circulated in the U.S.—those taught in public schools, encased in museums, and recast in historical fiction, film, and television—have long omitted or marginalized key facets of

Latina/o history, from Spanish colonization in the New World to U.S. participation in the Central American Crisis.<sup>6</sup> In order to recover those repressed histories and to understand their effects on the lives of contemporary Latina/os, novelists often have focused on bloodlines (ancestry, kinship) as the literal markers of racial and cultural heritage.<sup>7</sup>

As descendants of migrants, the protagonists of family sagas question the U.S. and Latin American cultural traditions they've inherited, opting instead for unconventional models that they excavate from buried histories. In this way, Latina/o writers extend the transnational literary project begun by transnational political writers during the Mexican, Cuban, and Central American revolutions. Those writers deployed their positions as subjects of U.S. empire to contest interventionism and to pursue justice and democracy for the peoples of the hemisphere. Their texts built on hemispheric history to imagine a new future for the Americas in which communities were defined by shared political and cultural values rather than by imperial dominance and violent subjection. Similarly, historical novels by Cisneros, Obejas, and Goldman link the hemispheric past with present and future, using historiographic methods to explore the contradictions of transnational belonging and the long histories of collective trauma that connect their characters to multiple homelands. Their fictional texts posit transnational subjectivity as a model for the hemispheric future; their revisionary histories uncover opportunities for community and collaboration beyond borders.

### **Revolutionary Mexico in Chicana/o Literature**

The Mexican Revolution changed how the U.S. understood its role in Latin America. The official discourse of U.S. policy makers would resemble that of the Spanish-American War, but instead of intervening ostensibly on the side of revolutionists, in Mexico the U.S. intervened to quash rebellion and promote industrialization. The revolution inaugurated a new age of U.S.

foreign policy in which the industrial capitalist and liberal political factions that dominate U.S. governmentality have upheld dictatorships and suppressed resistance, only to laud the heroes of resistance once imperial order is restored. Thus Americans tend to recall this key movement, if at all, in terms of a few ambivalent heroes (like Villa, Zapata, and Carranza). The reduction of complexity and contingency in such historical narratives has coincided with a racial collapse in which, over the course of the twentieth century, Mexican, Cuban, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and other Latin American immigrants have been compressed into a single demographic entity, “Latinos.”<sup>8</sup>

In response to this willed forgetting, Chicana/o writers have crafted portraits of Mexican nationalism and revolution that restore its place in U.S. history. In the late twentieth century, Chicana/o writers take up the revolution for its political and cultural valences in the hemisphere and for its consequences for racial formations in the U.S. As nations and factions collided, the revolution spurred a crisis in Mexican cultural identity that also aggravated and underscored the internal fracture of the U.S. Many historical novels trace the aftermath of those collisions through the trope of the family.

Family structures, dynamics, and legacies are central to myriad Latina/o and Chicana/o novels. Famous for her key portrait of Chicana/o family life in *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Cisneros’ saga *Caramelo* connects Mexico’s revolutionary history to the contemporary experience of Chicana/os through the story of one family. *Caramelo* revives the constitutive role of the Mexican Revolution in Mexican American communities and identities. Using an appended chronology and footnotes to supplement story with history, Cisneros makes a bold claim for the intervention of Chicana/o writers as cultural historians who can use fiction to recover forgotten narratives and amend the partial, ethnocentric historical record of the U.S. Her novel builds on

the mythology of the revolution to reveal the exaggerations and erasures that define nationalist histories in both the U.S. and Mexico. As Cisneros' narrator, Celaya, tells the stories of her grandparents, parents, and of her indigenous half-sister, Candelaria, she ties the Mexican national nostalgia for the revolutionary era to the nostalgia of Mexican immigrants for fantasies of homeland. Furthermore, she reveals how such fantasies require the Reyes family to deny their working-class and indigenous roots, just as the U.S. denies its economic and cultural dependence on Mexico.

Cisneros builds on a long tradition of family stories and analogies in Chicana/o writing.<sup>9</sup> María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's 1885 novel, *The Squatter and the Don*, for example, tells the story of one California Mexican family to dramatize the injustices wreaked on Mexico's displaced population after the U.S. seized Mexico's northern territory in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). In the twentieth century, pioneering Chicana/o writers such as Américo Paredes in *George Washington Gómez* (written in the 1930s, published 1990) and Rudolfo Anaya in *Bless Me Ultima* (1972), as well as influential contemporary writers such as Arturo Islas in *Rain God* (1984) and Helena María Viramontes in *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1996) represent the cultural and political shifts that Mexican American and Chicana/o communities undergo by tracing a single, usually multi-generational family. These families embody the blood and cultural ties that bind the Mexican past to the Mexican American present. The temporal structure of the family saga allows these writers to chart the fluidity of cultures and the changeable parameters of hybrid *mestizo* identity.

In addition to the primacy of family in Chicana/o letters, the Mexican Revolution has long been vital to both Mexican and Chicana/o cultural production. As Chapter 1 suggests, the revolution has long been viewed in Mexico as the culmination of a century of struggle for

independence, first from Spanish rule and later from authoritarian control by Porfirio Díaz. Many Mexicans imagine the revolution as a period of optimism and the birthplace of republican sentiment. Indeed, icons of the revolution such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata have lived on in Mexican folklore, and out of their revolutionary ideologies grew the Mexican artistic and intellectual tradition of *indigenismo*.<sup>10</sup> The revolution has also inspired Mexican writers such as Carlos Fuentes, for whom it represents—even determines—Mexico’s national character.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the first writers to take up the revolution in U.S. public discourse (usually journalists such as John Turner and John Reed) used it to reassess Mexico’s political presence in the world. Later writers, among them María Cristina Mena, engaged the revolution to theorize how the collapse of power hierarchies could mobilize marginalized subjects like women and *indios*.

Among Chicana/o writers, the Mexican Revolution has signified both the origin of Chicana/o identity (since it galvanized the migration of thousands of working- and middle-class Mexicans) and of the romantic tradition of revolt that migrant communities may either preserve or forget. Writing just a few years after María Cristina Mena, Josefina Niggli, a Mexican American fiction writer and playwright, told stories of the revolution for U.S. audiences. Niggli looks at the revolution through the eyes of women (such as a troop of women warriors in the drama *Soldadera*, 1939 and an upper-class general’s wife in the play *The Ring of General Macías*, 1943), examines the character of Pancho Villa through his interactions with his inner circle in the play *This is Villa!* (1938), and glamorizes post-revolutionary Mexico in her novel *Mexican Village* (1945). Through these picturesque tales—so full of adventure, romance, and folklore—she promotes Mexican culture and helps preserve its history for Mexican Americans. Moreover, by representing the stories of revolutionary women alongside those of men, Niggli

establishes historical precedent for Mexican American women to participate in the political and rhetorical construction of Mexico.

In José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959), the death of Pancho Villa spurs Juan Rubio's migration to the U.S., where his son must navigate between the Mexican traditions of his family and his uncertain future as a Mexican American. Writers such as Niggli and Villarreal pull from a common stock of images, analogies, and narratives of the revolution to represent the shock of contact among classes, nations, genders, and races. Reassessing the role of the Mexican Revolution in hemispheric history, their texts register the waves of migration impelled by the revolution and the ensuing clamor of racial and cultural discord between white and Chicana/o Americans. Their novels propose that Chicana/os must learn from such traditions in addition to probing the limits of Mexican and American cultures.

Building on such groundwork, Sandra Cisneros reexamines the legacy of the Mexican Revolution, as well as the intertwined histories of Mexico and the U.S. By following the Reyes family across generations and borders (and back again), Cisneros revises official narratives of the Mexican Revolution and traces its legacies for Mexican Americans and women in particular. *Caramelo* interweaves the family history of Celaya (named after the 1915 battle) with the tangled history of Mexico and the U.S. Celaya's grandfather Narciso, like Juan Rubio in Villarreal's *Pocho*, alters the course of generations when he leaves war-torn Mexico during the revolution. Cisneros' *Caramelo* returns to revolutionary Mexico to revise the racialized narratives by which the U.S. made that conflict legible. Gone are the voiceless *peons* and the militant *indios*, the fearless soldiers, the bullet-festooned rebels, the stodgy generals, the corrupt dictators, and the opulent *hacendados*. Instead, Cisneros views the Mexican middle and working classes as the progenitors of contemporary Mexican American culture. Her novel explores

subjects who are poor but not abject, soldiers who fear to fight, and women who defy relegation to swooning aristocracy or mercenary prostitution. Furthermore, Cisneros highlights the role that U.S. interventionism played in and after the revolution. For Cisneros, Woodrow Wilson serves as the U.S. counterpart to Porfirio Díaz. Her novel reveals that Mexican and U.S. histories are neither insular nor deterministic, but transcendent and entangled.

*Caramelo*'s genealogy ties the racial discourses of revolution to the cultural specificity of Chicana/os. The novel's protagonist and narrator, Celaya, employs the history of her family to understand both her childhood and her adult identity. She concludes the novel by noting: "I don't know how it is with anyone else, but for me these things, that song, that time, that place, are all bound together in a country I am homesick for, that doesn't exist anymore. That never existed. A country I invented. Like all emigrants caught between here and there" (434). In this passage, Cisneros blends her voice with that of her narrator. Both are writers; both have intermingled fact and fiction to collect the tangled plots and characters that make up *Caramelo*. Perhaps more importantly, Cisneros suggests here that all migrants invent a homeland, something to be "homesick for." For both Cisneros and Celaya, the Mexican Revolution presents a moment of rupture, a traumatic event that galvanizes migration and erases old histories, making room for new ones. The novel, which Cisneros has described as an homage to the father, turns to the revolution as the impetus for its many intertwined plots. The revolution drives Celaya's grandfather to the States, where his sons eventually make their home. Cisneros also reverses the usual discourse of equality and land rights, pointing out that the revolution was often blamed for the loss of family money rather than its gain:

The Mexican revolution had tossed and tumulted everything, including everyone's memories. It was as if the revolution gave everyone from the most

beggarly and poor an excuse to say, —Before the revolution when we were moneyed, and thus, to excuse their humble present. It was better to have a gallant past, because it made one's present circumstance seem all the more wretched and allowed one the liberty of looking down condescendingly on one's neighbors. Or, if there was no recent wealth, one could — always resort to the distant past, — Remember our great-great-great-great-great-grandfather Nezahualcóyotl, the poet king? No such thing, but it sounded *bonito*. (198-9)

In this way, the revolution upends class distinctions, creating a large working class with nostalgic claims to pre-revolutionary prestige. Cisneros' satire undercuts these patrician claims. She insists that instead of debunking a system of capital that entrenched class inequalities among Indian, *mestizo*, and “*adinerado*,” the revolution actually bankrupts the nation.

The confusion of the revolution enables new myths and fictions for families like the Reyes', even as it perpetuates old systems of inequality. Although the family remembers him as a war hero, Celaya's grandfather Narciso is no revolutionary. He joins the Constitutionals and is injured, but not in battle. During the famous Ten Tragic Days, Narciso loses a rib when his lung collapses from fear. Through Narciso, Cisneros reminds readers that the majority of the Mexican population did not engage in insurrection. Although the revolution is vital to Narciso's story, he is no more a gun-slinging rebel than were the hundreds of thousands of civilians who witnessed or fled from the battles, or the many Mexicans who migrated to the U.S. during and after the revolution. Narciso, his wife, and his mother, all have a part to play in the series of events that leads, eventually, to the story of the Chicana teen Celaya. For *Caramelo* is also a story of women—campesinas who marry into wealthy families, mothers who survive the revolution by any means necessary, illegitimate and legitimate daughters, and finally a young

woman whose history is both Mexican and American. Celaya builds the story from the partial facts and pure *cuento* she has gathered from her elders, and she finds herself an actor in the national, cultural, and gendered drama she creates.

Celaya believes that she will be the success story built on so many struggles. Standing at a balcony on a hotel in the Zócalo, Celaya compares herself to women who would throw themselves from the bell towers, unable to imagine their alternatives as Mexican women. She feels free from their legacy:

—Man, Lala, just think! Everything happened in this square. The Ten Tragic Days, the Night of Sorrows, the hangings, shootings, the pyramids and temples, the stones taken apart to build the mansions of the *conquistadores*. It all happened right here. In this Zócalo. And here we are.

But I'm thinking of the women, the ones who had no choice but to jump from these bell towers not so long ago, so many they had to stop letting visitors go up there. Maybe they'd run off or been run off. Who knows? Women whose lives were so lousy, jumping from a tower sounded good. And here I am leaning on an iron balustrade at the holy center of the universe, a boy with his hands under my skirt, and me with no intention of leaping for nothing or nobody. (383)

In the Zócalo, a monumental square and the heart of the nation built on the ruins of violent cultural memories, Celaya's sense of liberation is yet another fantasy. She has consummated her teenage lust with her boyfriend, a devout Catholic who will soon leave her for the comfort of blithe repentance. Celaya believes that she has broken a cycle, but her relative freedom is unstable, predicated on the interdependent history of multiple nations, cultures, and empires. Her family's migration between countries has not secured them racial equality or gender equity. In

Mexico, her family is respectable but penniless. In the U.S., the family makes money enough, but is marked by their dependence on the upholstery trade (leftover furnishings even fill their house). Their home itself is a motley structure, built in pieces for a family that is perpetually spilling out.

*Caramelo* insists on the entwined relationship among literature, history, and identity, situating the Mexican Revolution as a key point of origin for the current material and cultural position of Chicana/os in the U.S. The novel is replete with references to race and color. Cisneros draws on U.S. accounts of the Mexican Indian, using Spanish-inflected English to underscore the mingling of U.S. and Mexican racial traditions.<sup>12</sup> Readers familiar with the Spanish language would recognize the loaded translation—Indian for *indio*. Cisneros writes into a tradition of U.S. narratives aligning the Mexican *indio* with the U.S. Indian. Some of those writers are Native; Leslie Marmon Silko's novels, for example, establish commonality and conversation between indigenous peoples on both sides of the border. Yet many writers (like John Kenneth Turner), coming from outside of the cultures they describe, mis-translate the connections between American and Mexican indigeneities, eliding their differences and erasing mutually constitutive power dynamics. Cisneros plays with such rhetorical slippage through Celaya's descriptions of Candelaria, the illegitimate daughter of Celaya's father Inocencio, to suggest how both Mexican and U.S. cultures deny their kinship with and dependence on indigenous and poor subjects.

Candelaria is the dark sister, beautiful but inscrutable in the racial hierarchy that Celaya has inherited: "Where I am looking is the rooftop laundry room where the girl Candelaria is feeding clothes through a wringer washer. Her mother, the washerwoman Amparo, comes every week on Monday, a woman like a knot of twisted laundry, hard and dry and squeezed of all

water. At first I think Amparo is her grandmother, not her mama. —But how could a girl with skin like a *caramelo* have such a dusty old mother?” (34). To Celaya, Candelaria *is* beauty. The American in Celaya longs to consume such beauty—she continually compares her half-sister to food—but Celaya cannot forget that she and her family have abandoned Candelaria. Inocencio refuses to recognize her because she embodies his physical transgression with a working-class indigenous woman, a family servant. The Awful Grandmother sends her back to the capital on a bus, her address pinned to her dress. Cisneros implicates both the U.S. and Mexico in the gulf that separates two girls connected by blood. Both nation-states have co-opted the heritage of indigeneity, only to ignore Native peoples. The Reyes’ disavowal of Candelaria harms both the legitimate and the illegitimate daughter.

Celaya thinks of Candelaria when she stumbles into a drunken man on the streets of Mexico City. When Celaya sees the exposed penis of the *borracho*, she is reminded of the vulnerability that Indians, women, and migrants share. Here, as when Celaya learns that her grandmother’s Indian maid is her half-sister, Celaya is forced to glimpse something that she cannot understand, but such shocking revelations nonetheless shape her identity. Forced into race, class, and gender norms that fit her poorly, Celaya learns from her mother and father how to mold, manipulate, and resist the traditions they’ve inherited from their own parents. Both parents seem to do everything they’re supposed to, but they defy the prescriptions that come with their national, cultural, and class histories. Inocencio Reyes is an artist, temperamental but loving. Celaya’s mother is tough, a survivor and the head of the family despite her nods to patriarchy.

For Cisneros, the family saga reveals how Mexican history shapes Mexican Americans in the present and future. Her usable past restores the indigenous and working-class forebears from

whom Celaya learns to navigate both the racial marginalization she faces in the U.S. and the gender confines she confronts in Mexico. Furthermore, the history she invents helps Celaya connect with her living relatives—her mother, brothers, and especially her father. The family bonds that connect the Reyes clan bridge their collective past with their distinct lives in the present and bolster them as they build new futures.

By focusing on the conflicts characterizing racial and national contact between the U.S. and Mexico, Cisneros reveals how U.S. foreign and immigration policies influence the lives of everyday Mexican and Mexican American families. U.S. intervention in revolutionary movements has created both the material conditions for and antagonistic reception of Mexican migrants. John Nichols' *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1974), Helena Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), and T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* (1996) are just a few of the novels that describe the brutality of this reception. While nationalist rhetoricians frequently position the U.S. as the democratic haven of immigrants and refugees, these texts work to recover opposition and to remind readers of how Mexican Americans use (imagined and actual) community belonging to flourish amidst international and intercultural antagonism.

### **Cuban American Writers and the Politics of Revolution**

For Sandra Cisneros, the family saga links the historical and the contemporary. Similarly, Cuban American writers such as Cristina García and Achy Obejas deploy families to explain the contradictory relationship of the Cuban diaspora with *la patria* in the decades that follow the 1959 revolution. I choose García and Obejas to illustrate this trend because they are among the most widely read Cuban American writers and because their novels feature multi-generational histories, but many Cuban American writers similarly focus on family connections in the aftermath of revolution. Another great example is Ana Menéndez, whose *Loving Che* (2003)

depicts a female heroine who investigates her relationship to revolutionary Cuba through her family history.<sup>13</sup> Responding to the ideology of anticommunism that prevailed during the early Cold War, U.S. policymakers condemned Castro and passed trade sanctions and travel restrictions that have drastically affected the everyday lives of Cubans who stayed on the island. Oddly, the U.S. also responded to the rise of Castro by welcoming refugees from his “Red” regime, culminating in the 1980 Mariel Boatlift.<sup>14</sup> Especially during the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, the U.S. greeted Cuban refugees much more warmly than it has the Mexican and Central American diasporas.<sup>15</sup> After 1959, Cuban exiles have congregated in U.S. cities, especially Miami, where many have spoken out against Castro in periodicals and propaganda. These exiles have registered their relationship to Cuba as one of loss—families and communities torn apart by the revolution.

Yet the children of exiles experience a very different relationship with Cuba: one of kinship, desire, and curiosity in addition to loss. The family saga allows Cuban American writers to examine the relationship of Cuban migrants with a homeland and a people to which they cannot readily return. Furthermore, the genre offers these writers the occasion to explore how the children of expatriates respond to the displacement of their parents and to imagine the blood ties that still feel tangible. Writers like García and Obejas portray daughters of exile who long for reconciliation, but criticize the disappointments of the Castro regime’s delusions and hostility toward nonnormative subjects. Furthermore, these writers represent the revolutionary present as concomitant with the post-Cold War triumph of capitalism in the U.S.<sup>16</sup>

García’s first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), initiated a new era in Cuban American literature. Both widely read and influential, *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters* (1997) follow the lives of families who are split (geographically and politically) by the revolution.

García employs family bonds to represent the connected national and cultural subjectivities of protagonists in the U.S. and Cuba. For her, and for most Cuban American writers, the Cuban Revolution ruptures national identifications and shapes Cuban American experience. Blood, however, transcends that rupture. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, three generations of Cuban women feel the pull of kinship across time and space. The youngest of these women, Pilar del Pino, dreams of her grandmother in Cuba and longs to reunite with her. Such a reunion also promises to reconnect Pilar with revolutionary Cuba, from which her mother has taken her. When Pilar asserts that “The family is hostile to the individual,” she registers the tension of dynasties, which come laden with attitudes toward Cuban nationalism, cultural traditions, and the private traumas that shape each of the del Pinos (134). Pilar’s mother Lourdes, for example, feels the presence of her father after his death. She is similarly haunted by her memories of the Cuban Revolution, during which she was raped by a group of Castro’s guerillas. In Havana, Miami, or New York, mothers and daughters, sisters, fathers, and sons feel the ongoing effects of the historic clash between Cuba and the U.S.

In *The Agüero Sisters*, national and personal acts of violence physically scar the bodies of the novel’s eponymous sisters, Reina and Constancia. Reina remains in Cuba after the revolution and works tirelessly to advance its cause. As the country’s preeminent electrician, Reina does difficult and dangerous technical work. When she is badly electrocuted, members of her family (and her longtime lover) donate pieces of their own skin to replace Reina’s burned flesh. The result is a sort of patchwork; Reina’s body becomes the material evidence of the pain she undergoes, of her triumph over death, and of the personal ties that structure her life.

Constancia, in contrast, flees those connections. After the murder of her mother and the suicide of her father, she moves first to New York and later to Miami, where she builds a

cosmetics empire. Over the course of her new life in the U.S., she also marries two brothers (the first leaves her), each of whom participates in futile counterrevolutionary movements against Castro. One morning, however, Constanica awakens to find her face mysteriously transformed into her estranged mother's.<sup>17</sup> Condemned to live with the visage of her mother, Constanica must reconcile herself with the traumatic memories she's crossed national, cultural, and linguistic borders to escape. She must also confront her genetic bonds to that past, as Reina notes when she "wonders whether Mami's face is only a superficial membrane, like her own patches of borrowed skin, or whether it penetrates further to the bone, to some basic molecular level" (158). García portrays Cubanness as a collective fantasy that citizens and expatriates experience viscerally. In both of her sagas, García imagines families full of discord, separated by time and space but united by the very struggles they seem determined to deny.

Like García, Achy Obejas explores the lives of Cuban exiles and their descendants in the U.S. Her short stories, poems, and novels often focus on her characters' sense of alienation from normative national, cultural, and gender identities.<sup>18</sup> She illustrates the displacement and loss that affect Cubans on and off the island. Refusing to relegate Cuba to the spatial or temporal margins, Obejas reconstructs the long history of competing national and cultural identifications that structure the lives of the contemporary U.S. Cuban diaspora. In her short story "We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?" and in her historical novel *Days of Awe*, Obejas interrogates the secret fears and desires that structure family relationships, using those tense bonds to connect her Cuban American protagonists to Cuba past and present.

In the title story from her first collection, "We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?" (1994), Obejas rethinks the history of the Cuban Revolution through the unanswered questions of one child refugee: "Is life destiny or determination?" (115). As a

Cuban American lesbian, the daughter of exiled parents, a social justice activist, and a traveler, Obejas' nameless narrator explores the events that have shaped her life, the moments that have determined "who I am" (125). She connects these scenes with a few stark images: the green sweater she wears during her voyage from Cuba to the U.S. and a blonde doll she receives from an immigration officer. Her rhetorical questions signal the narrator's resistance to the teleology imposed on her story by U.S. officials, even by her parents. She rejects their legacy of solutions and conclusions and protects the problems, contradictions, and questions at the heart of her Cuban counter-history.

The tale defies the logic of chronology; the narrator mixes the story of her first day in the U.S. with reflections on lovers, lingering over revealing scenes with her parents. Obejas narrates the past in present tense: "As I speak, my parents are being interrogated by an official from the office of Immigration and Naturalization Services. It's all a formality because this is 1963, and no Cuban claiming political asylum actually gets turned away. We're evidence that the revolution has failed the middle class and that communism is bad. My parents—my father's an accountant and my mother's a social worker—are living, breathing examples of the suffering Cubans have endured under the tyranny of Fidel Castro" (113). This passage evokes the contrast between undesirable immigrants—Mexican "wetbacks" and Central American refugees from civil war and genocide—and Cubans, whose "suffering" under the "tyranny" of Castro makes them powerful symbols worthy of material consideration. The narrator notes that even as her parents have symbolic value for the U.S. government, she has symbolic value for her parents: "We came for her, so she could have a future" (114). Her parents' dream of the money she will make and the family she will have, but both their daughter and their new country disappoint. The narrator remembers (in future tense) how she defied her parents by deviating from their

normative ideals with her hippy clothing, lesbianism, and leftist politics. When her father asks the central question of the story, “We came all the way from Cuba so you could dress like this?” she rejects their dreams by replying: “Look, you didn’t come for me, you came for you; you came because all your rich clients were leaving, and you were going to wind up a cashier in your father’s hardware store if you didn’t leave, okay? ... It’s a free country, I can do anything I want, remember?” (121). To stave off that disappointment, her parents grasp for resolutions, nostalgic fantasies of return, but all the narrator finds are more unanswered questions. She does not know what would happen if her parents never left Cuba or if Castro never came to power, but she does know that these events have shaped her character, inspiring her departure from the customs and norms of her parents.

Obejas’ *Days of Awe* also focuses on these unanswered questions to emphasize the contemporary impact of the past, but unlike her earlier protagonist, *Days of Awe*’s Alejandra San José pursues answers to her questions, hoping to reclaim the family legacy that revolution and exile have taken from her.<sup>19</sup> In this novel, Obejas suggests how centuries of violent national, political, and cultural clash have structured the relationships, practices, and identities of one Cuban American family. She insists on both the specificity and the relevance of that history, moving backward and forward through time from the Spanish Inquisition to and beyond the Bay of Pigs. As witnesses to, victims of, and participants in this long history, Obejas’ fictional family gives voice to stories that have often gone both unwritten and unspoken, and yet have tangible effects on the present.

Born on January 1, 1959, the day of Castro’s triumphant march into Santiago, Alejandra identifies the revolution as the formative event of her life. Although her parents flee revolutionary Cuba in its early years, Ale distinguishes them from the dominant portrait of

refugees: “What fueled those who were leaving was less fear of communism, which Fidel had only hinted at that point, or shortages of any kind, because the U.S. embargo was still a distant concern, but the persistent rumors of invasions and imminent combat that were sweeping Havana. From the countryside came reports that cane fields were being torched, the flames like red waves. What were thought to be American planes constantly buzzed the city” (6). Ale’s parents flee the climate of fear that pervades Cuba as the U.S. grows increasingly hostile to Castro. This distinction becomes important to Ale’s own relationship to Cuba, since her parents’ fear and ambivalence motivate their silence and inspire her own pursuit of the history they have repressed.

The adult Ale, who narrates the novel, intercedes in her own memories and in those of her parents, adding information that they could not know and perspective that they did not yet possess. When, for example, the family sees Cuban planes headed for Havana, they do not realize that those planes have actually been disguised and deployed by the CIA (29-30). When Ale describes their last moments in Cuba, she differentiates between what her parents know and what she can understand:

I know there was a panic swirling in the streets that I will never be able to fully comprehend. But that act of departure—tucking into pockets birth certificates, a handful of American dollars, a particularly poignant letter from a loving friend; deciding to bring along a delicate plaster goddess, as plain as any; and never knowing whether they’d ever be able to return—all that still escapes me. I can’t imagine standing before the mirror with that knowledge, freezing that terrible image of myself at that moment.... I would have wanted time to consider how

many darkening butterfly lilies, how many revolutionary triumphs and drowned balseros it would take to fill the gap. (49)

This passage illustrates the inevitable fracture of both revolution and migration, listing the material objects that only partially evoke the fundamental change that Ale's family undergoes. In looking backward, Ale can better see and assess the revolution's "triumphs," can remember the names and stories of a few of the many Cubans who drowned as they tried to cross the gulf. Yet the "gap" that separates her from her parents structures her sense of this moment, and of the history they lived. That history is only partially accessible, vital but always inflected by her own needs and desires.

To bridge this gap, Ale repeatedly returns to post-revolutionary Cuba, discovering in the process a personal history that stretches over centuries and continents. Working as a translator allows her to move back and forth between an increasingly desolate Havana and an ever more indifferent U.S. Like García's Pilar, Ale must learn about her family history in and through Cuba, bypassing her secretive parents.<sup>20</sup> To do so, she befriends an old friend of her father's named Moisés Menach, who reveals Ale's Jewish ancestry and tells her stories of her parents and grandparents that her father could not share. Ale comes to realize that she is the descendant of Cuban crypto-Jews; she uncovers blood connections to the first Spanish Jews who migrated with and after Columbus following the Inquisition: "no power of divination would have scared off Columbus's marranos: exile and diaspora are like genetic markers for Jews, as normal as hair or teeth. They would have accepted their destiny no matter how clearly any tragedy may have appeared to them" (34-5). She also begins to understand how the torture and forced conversion they suffered have informed her own family's attitudes toward their culture: "My father's a Jew, a real Jew, but it's complicated. It's a long story, technically a little more than five hundred years

old. It is, in many ways, a select history, even though its effects are global, its traditions of mystery and concealment a painful legacy” (32). In short, Obejas’ family saga illustrates the “deep time” of diaspora, recovering cultural continuities and recurring traumas that connect ancient forebears to their living daughter of exile.<sup>21</sup>

As she resuscitates her family history, Ale begins to *feel* Cuban. Early in the novel, when an airport official asks Ale if this is her first visit to Cuba, she immediately feels her difference: “‘Sí,’ I said weakly, wondering if I sounded like a foreigner to him. I have no accent when I speak in Spanish; I’m never perceived to be anything but a native speaker. But I knew even then my rhythm was different from his: more neutral, yes, but also more reserved. I knew that simple *sí* had already betrayed me” (52). Ale’s Spanish distinguishes her from monolingual Americans, even provides her with a career and an occasion to travel to Cuba, but it does not identify her particular heritage or identity. Instead, Ale sees her Spanish as anonymous, a tool rather than a voice: “I’d define the rules of my job: That I was invisible, that I had no opinion or judgment, that I was there simply to convert one language into another and that they should never address me as an individual but always focus their pronouncements on the other person. ‘These are not my words,’ I explained. ‘I have no words of my own here’” (76). She begins to identify with Cuba, both linguistically and culturally, when she becomes close to the Menach family, learning as she does the story of her own family.

Even when Ale first meets Moisés, sitting across the street from the building where she lived as a baby, he serves as a repository of her family history. He remembers when buildings were constructed and who lived in them. He also holds the key to Ale’s secret family history: “On my return to Cuba a decade later, I ask Moisés about the wrinkled envelope,” which contained a letter from her father. “‘Moisés, the letter reads, ‘this daughter of mine, Alejandra, is

precious to me. She is my darling child. When the time comes, tell her everything.’ It’s signed: ‘Your brother, Enrique’” (73). Enrique authorizes Moisés, to whom he feels connected by their shared Sephardic Jewish ancestry and by their childhood together in Oriente, to tell Alejandra “everything” that he has been unable to communicate. In this passage, the cultural and historical experiences that bind the two men enable Ale to access her own ancestry, and thereby her own connections both to Judaism and to Cuba.

Ale seems to identify most with Ytzak, her great grandfather—once named Antonio—who rejected the secrecy of his family to live openly as a Jew. Obejas describes how national allegiances, replete with denial and erasure, are passed from one generation to another:

If Enrique [Ale’s father] ever questioned anything that seemed to separate his family from the natives around him, Luis and Sima [his parents] assured him with what would eventually become his own refrain: “We are Spanish, descended from nobility, that is all,” they’d say in their own unconvincing open-mouthed Cuban way. Not even they believed it.

Ytzak would roll his eyes and mutter under his breath: “We are Cubans—that is why we had a war of independence from Spain—and we are Jews.” He refused to link up to the mother country, refused to claim any blood but that of Abraham and what he’d spilled on the island. (141)

Luis and Sima, who throw their family bibles into the river in dramatic denial of their Jewish religious heritage, also deny their Cubanness, passing that legacy to their son. Yet Ytzak’s dissent, perhaps erased even from her father’s (Enrique’s) memory, inspires and informs Ale’s burgeoning identity as a Cuban Jew. It is Ytzak who imagines that it is possible to occupy simultaneously an array of allegiances, identities, and desires. Ale connects his dream to her

own: “As a child, I held Havana out to myself like a secret hiding place, a trump card, the Zion where I’d be welcomed after all my endless, unplanned travels in the diaspora. At the time, I had no idea my rapturous imaginings about the city were a family tradition, that Ytzak had been in love with an imaginary metropolis, and that my father’s obsessions with Spain gushed from the same fountain” (55). Ale underscores the unfulfilled desire that seems inevitable to diasporic peoples. She shares that desire with both her father and her grandfather.<sup>22</sup>

Alongside such affirming connections, Ale recovers traumatic memories that have also affected the course of her family history. She learns that Ytzak abandoned his wife, her great grandmother, for her crypto-Judaism. Ostracized by her neighbors (among them a man who may have been her lover) when they hear rumors about her unfamiliar rituals, Ale’s grandmother throws herself into the same river that drowned the family bibles. Ale also learns about the abuse that Ytzak and Enrique suffer at the hands of the Nazis. The Nazis beat him almost to death, and the fear he feels after the attack drives Enrique to salute Hitler during a Nazi parade in Havana. These stories, so long hidden from Ale by her protective parents, structure their lives in ways that Ale only comes to understand after the death of her father. The fear that follows exiles, the persecution that forces Jews to hide their faith, influences her parents’ migration during the revolution and motivates their silence. Although Ale can never perfectly understand them or uncover all the family secrets they have buried, the act of telling inherent in the novel reconnects her to their Jewish and Cuban histories.

By returning to present-day Cuba voluntarily as an adult and by finding a proxy Cuban family, Ale bridges the gap that separates diaspora from their histories. Yet she also experiences and offers readers a vision of contemporary Cuba that coexists with the U.S. Obejas lingers over the details of Havana in and beyond 1987, describing everything from the political climate to the

expressions on individual faces, from old and new buildings to the refuse in the gutters. She also explores how the U.S. and Cuba continue to shape each other, despite the general forgetfulness of the U.S. public after the collapse of the Soviet Union leaves Cuba unsubsidized. Obejas insists on the ongoing participation of U.S. power in the story of contemporary Cuba. U.S. money, tourists, and aid workers flow into Cuba as Cuban expatriates build new communities and cultures in the U.S. Their interdependence affects Cubans in both countries, inflecting Obejas' vision of the current U.S.

Perhaps most importantly, Obejas exposes the contingency of their shared history—its dependence on the tellers who promote, distort, or erase parts of the irrecoverable whole. In one pivotal passage, Obejas contemplates the image of Fidel as Cubans construct, revise, and co-opt his character:

For most Cubans, there is only one answer: Fidel is the devil. This is said both in hatred and love, in derision and admiration.

In Miami and other exile communities, he is called by his first name as if he were family: Fidel, the black sheep; Fidel, the bad seed; Fidel, that son of a bitch. In Miami, everybody wants to break his fingers.

In Havana and the rest of the island, he has no name. People indicate him by pulling at invisible beards or tapping make-believe epaulets.... Fidel makes a joke out of the CIA and its poisonous shoe polish and explosive scuba gear.... Fidel, like the devil himself, is an invention of necessity. He is the mirror onto which Cubans project their heroism and betrayals, their sense of righteousness and valor. Without Fidel, there would have been no golden age, no paradisiacal past, no lives in the subjunctive. (127-129)

Obejas invokes the power of Fidel as an icon of the Cuban Revolution and its global impact, but she demonstrates how diverse interests appropriate that icon to reinforce competing agendas. If those interests have shaped the history we have now, transnational subjects like Alejandra are ideally situated to parse those competing representations and to construct a new story that revels in continuity and reconciles rupture to create new modes of belonging across time and space.

The historical project of writers like Obejas and García is multifarious: their historical novels restore the Cuban present from its relegation to the days of yore, a relic of the bygone Cold War. They also reconstruct the Cuban American past. By insisting on the entwined histories of Cuba and the U.S. and connecting them with the lives of Cuban American women in the contemporary era, these authors restore the often neglected position of the U.S. in the hemisphere and underscore the pivotal place of Cuba in the U.S.

### **Central America and Hemispheric *Latinidad***

Cisneros and Obejas, like many Latina/o writers, imagine how family histories can repair the rift between migrants and their nations, cultures, and communities of origin. But if family bonds offer this sense of community, what happens when civil war and dictatorship, disappearance and torture shatter families and force refugees to leave even their names behind? As increasing numbers of Central Americans have emigrated to escape poverty and state violence during the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, more writers of Central American origin have portrayed the region's conflicts, as well as U.S. involvement, in fiction for U.S. audiences. Furthermore, Latina/o writers of other national identifications, including Cristina García and Chicana writer Demetria Martínez, have entered the conversation about Central America. Central America has thus become a site for imagining how *Latinidad* crosses borders. Historical fiction about Central America tends to rethink transnational identity by deconstructing the rubric of the

family saga, envisioning widows and orphans of war who seek either vengeance or reconciliation following the loss of family connections. Central American novelists, especially Francisco Goldman (who I study below), imagine how activists, refugees, and their descendants posit alternative models of community that recover their relationship to lost homelands and promote justice for Central American peoples who still endure poverty, genocide, and political violence. Transnational in scope and bridging race, class, and gender differences, such coalitions undercut the rigid boundaries of national allegiance and ethnic exclusion that justify state-sponsored oppression.

Among U.S. writers of Central American origin, two of the most prominent are Sandra Benítez and Héctor Tobar. Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998) is a revenge story in which a refugee in Los Angeles recognizes and tracks a member of the death squad who killed his wife and son in Guatemala. As a journalist, Tobar wrote about L.A.'s emerging immigrant communities, especially Salvadorans and Guatemalans. His novel bears witness to the climate of xenophobia that forces refugees to enter illegally; such a system—in which Central Americans are all equally undesirable—allows both victim and villain to cross borders, reenacting the struggles that begin in Central America. Moreover, Tobar revives U.S. complicity in Guatemala's war against its indigenous peoples, tracing the aftermath of that war in the contemporary U.S. Because Antonio, the novel's protagonist, has lost his family, his nationality, and his livelihood, he survives through an unorthodox network composed of members of L.A.'s homeless community, in particular an undocumented Mexican immigrant named José Juan. Antonio's participation in this community distinguishes him from the isolated killer, Longoria, and enables the healing that follows his act of vengeance and reparation.

Similarly, Sandra Benítez's *The Weight of All Things* (2000) begins with the rupture of family. Nicolás, a nine-year-old Salvadoran, witnesses his mother's murder by sniper during the funeral of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Uncertain about what has happened to his mother, Nicolás searches for her, and later for his grandfather, alternately helped and hindered by the competing factions that characterize the Salvadoran Civil War. Guerillas use his grandfather's home as a base, resulting in its destruction; soldiers kidnap and attempt to enlist him. Although the plot of Benítez's novel never finds its way to the U.S., it reconstructs El Salvador's civil war as a historical event that changes the shape of the Americas and asks U.S. audiences to engage and identify with Central American characters, enlisting them in the cause of justice for El Salvador.

Latina/o novelists such as Tobar and Benítez participate in a narrative tradition that Dominick LaCapra calls "posttraumatic narrative" or "traumatic realism" (14).<sup>23</sup> Inspired by the critical *testimonio* genre, these fictions enable their authors to imaginatively reconstruct the silenced voices of tortured and murdered Central Americans.<sup>24</sup> Like earlier novels by Robert Stone and Joan Didion, these texts also bring to light the clandestine networks that connect U.S. state power to Central American regimes.

Like Tobar and Benítez, Francisco Goldman's diverse texts insist on the vital relationship between fact and fiction. Each of his novels, *The Long Night of White Chickens* (1992), *The Ordinary Seaman* (1997), *The Divine Husband* (2004), and *Say Her Name* (2011), elaborate on real events, especially in Guatemala, and his nonfiction thriller *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?* (2007) is an extended work of investigative journalism with all the rhetorical flourish of a novel. In *The Long Night of White Chickens*, on which I focus here, Goldman begins with the conventions of the family saga, which, as I have argued, create imagined communities through which second generation expatriates can reflect upon their connections and

disconnections to Latin America. But for Goldman, and for many writers who turn to Central American contexts, the nuclear family cannot contain the network of relationships that result from a political climate of civil war, military terrorism, genocide, and forced refugee migration. In *The Ordinary Seaman*, Goldman examines a group of men who have been separated from both family and country, men whose only recourse is the bonds they've formed within the ship that imprisons them.<sup>25</sup> *The Long Night of White Chickens*, however, uses the contradictions and fractures of family to evoke the relationship between the Guatemalan diaspora and the homeland that “*no existe*.”<sup>26</sup>

The novel follows its hapless Guatemalan/Jewish American protagonist, Roger Graetz, after the murder of his adopted sister Flor, who began her life with the Graetz family in Nauset, Massachusetts as their imported maid. Roger's mother Mirabel comes from the Guatemalan elite and feels constant frustration with her lower middle-class husband, Ira. Indeed, constant disappointment besets the family; Ira's and Roger's lack of ambition disappoint Mirabel; her marriage, and later her attempt to leave Ira, cause a rift with her traditional Guatemalan family. Before her murder, Flor seems to be the family's only great success. Despite her small-town, indigenous roots and the early death of her parents, Flor finds her way from a convent orphanage to a home in New England. Taken in by the Graetz family, she exceeds all their expectations; she begins her education in elementary school at the age of thirteen, but completes multiple grades each year, finally earning a degree at Wellesley. After a number of illustrious internships, Flor decides to return to Guatemala, where she takes over an orphanage, seemingly reconnecting with her own past as she secures brighter futures for the children orphaned by Guatemala's 36-year civil war.

Then Flor's throat is slit as she sleeps at Los Quetzalitos, the orphanage whose cause has become her life. Her murder motivates Roger's return to Guatemala, where the dire stakes of Guatemala's real-life civil war saturate the narrative. Roger learns that Flor has been implicated in an illegal adoption ring. Rumor, which in Guatemala seems to take on a life and weight of its own, has tarnished Flor's good name by blaming her death on her participation in one of the most mercenary crimes of Guatemala's civil war: the theft of indigenous children to sell (for adoption or, many speculate, for organ farming). To clear Flor's name, and to find resolution after her mysterious death, Roger joins forces with an estranged childhood friend named Moya, who has since become a journalist (and Flor's lover) and who offers to help him search for the true circumstances of her life and her death.

The novel advances networks and bonds that stretch the normative definition of family and sometimes undermine its utility. In a political climate characterized by the disappearance of loved ones and the appearance of anonymous corpses, traditional family and community structures are under constant assault. Furthermore, as Goldman's novel illustrates, traditional family units can often encompass a variety of extrafamilial attachments; the elderly housekeeper Chayito, for example, shows grandmotherly concern for Roger when he receives a death threat at the family home. Flor, whose position in the household slowly evolves, nurtures the child Roger as a friend, sister, and even mother (in addition to providing the household labor of a maid). As Roger explains, because of Flor "we became almost a happy family": "Before Flor knew it she'd become something like our idiot savant matriarch, our young foundling mother, daughter too. It's true, my parents, all of us, eventually found ourselves outwardly behaving as if living up to Flor's expectations of what we should be. Her personality was somehow stronger, soft-handedly molding us, showing us the way with none of Abuelita's stridence or mania for order. If Flor had

never come to live with us, if my father hadn't put her in school and then everything else, would there ever have been a normal conversation at our dinner table?" (379). Flor becomes more than a servant or even a daughter and sister, motivating a performance of family that mediates Roger's experiences with and attitudes toward his parents. Indeed, Roger's relationship to Flor is an uncomfortable mix of brotherly devotion and barely suppressed romantic affection. Roger's childhood admiration for Flor borders on obsession; in his adulthood he longs to consummate sexually the love that has determined his entire life. He recalls all of his childhood memories through their connection to Flor. She even constitutes the imagined audience for Roger's narrative, since he often (but not always) recounts these memories, and his actions and experiences after her death, *to* Flor: "The first time I ever saw You: My father must have left early from work for the airport, and it wasn't until much later, on an afternoon the dimming color of gray slush and a new snow falling through it like millions of fuzzy little light bulbs, that he came home with you, Flor" (43).

In addition to this complicated array of feelings, Flor also embodies Roger's fraught connection to Guatemala. Roger says that "even during happy times, never mind the cataclysmic, origins such as mine—Catholic, Jewish, Guatemala, USA—can't always exist comfortably inside just one person" (185). Although Roger and his father adore Flor, she provokes ambivalence in Roger's mother and animosity among his Guatemalan relatives. Her indigeneity, which in Guatemala signals her subaltern status, stirs race and class anxiety among the family, who feel threatened by the proximity of a figure who defies their rigid hierarchies.<sup>27</sup> Both Flor and Roger are transnational subjects whose cultural hybridity renders them illegible in the race and class systems of both the U.S. and Guatemala. As a child, Roger feels bullied and rejected by other children in both his Massachusetts neighborhood and his Guatemalan private school.

Always several years older than other students, Flor is even more out of place in the U.S. In Guatemala she is an anomaly: a “*gringa chapina*,” an “*india rica*” (a Guatemalan gringa, a rich Indian).

Roger describes the feeling of this multiple array of identifications as having “been born into a kind of labyrinth, you have to pick and choose your way through it and there’s no getting back to the beginning because there isn’t any one true point of origin. Flor used to tell me to think of it as a great opportunity” (185). Flor’s return to the country inspires Roger to read about Guatemalan politics and to visit her there. These experiences constitute another entry point into his “personal labyrinth” because they add confusion instead of clarification (186). For Roger, the split is irrevocable: “I went on living in New York, tending bar, neither happy nor unhappy with this way of life... [w]hile a separate part of me went on living in Guatemala with Flor and the ghosts of centuries” (187). His connection to Flor helps Roger access his tangled history, but that access makes him feel the “ghosts of centuries” of political violence with enduring consequences.

Flor’s murder, however, connects Roger to the Guatemalan present as well as the past. Searching for insight into her death, he becomes mired in the miasma in which military regimes and U.S. interventionist policies foster violence and perpetrate crimes. Goldman’s novel is replete with references to silences, shadows, echoes, and rumors, sounds and images evoking absence and uncertainty. Flor’s unsolved murder reminds Roger of the hundreds of thousands of murders and disappearances being committed anonymously around him. When he visits the U.S. embassy to ask the consul for news of Flor, Roger realizes that bureaucrats behind these doors are as keen to erase Flor from public memory as the Guatemalan government:

It surprised me and made me feel incredibly apprehensive, the rarefied laboratory silence in that corridor, that atmosphere of trained meditations and calculations.... So that it was as if I suddenly understood, or if I couldn't really understand then suspected or felt, that here in the embassy Flor's case was already being quietly and inexorably dissolved into a larger design that was all about rendering such shocks, any and all shocks, survivable by never forcing them or even allowing them to come to a definitive end—by processing them into 'riddles.' Right from the start, it felt like a horrible place to have to come to for a revelation about a person you loved. (54)

The facts of Flor's "case," obscured or erased by corrupt officials, illustrate the legacy of Guatemala's civil war (in which the U.S. is also implicated): the absences and unanswered questions that accompany its destroyed communities, orphaned children, disappeared family members, and nameless casualties. In an atmosphere of silences, calculations, and riddles, Roger cannot access the "shocks" of wartime atrocity; he can only feel horror for others who, like him, must interpret those silences for revelations about lost loved ones.

Although most of Roger's time in Guatemala is spent in this atmosphere of riddles, he sometimes stumbles upon (or even collides with) the violence that such erasure intends to obscure. Through Flor Roger reconnects with Moya, a figure who shows him how terror structures everyday experience in Guatemala. Moya embodies the tense relationship between past and present. His newspaper articles, although veiled and evasive, record a history of atrocity that threatens the future of the military regime. Moya pays a price for his role as a witness; Roger and Moya find themselves pursued by a death squad after Moya issues a report about mail fraud. Death threats force Moya to emigrate twice. After years of constant fear, Moya exhibits the

bodily effects of terror: “he frequently had a fluttery tic in his otherwise healthy right cheek, and a weighty, perpetual storm in his gut, and sudden, unprovoked urges to whimper, which he always successfully defied. His hair was turning white” (148). Moya’s white hair and stomach trouble evince the state of permanent fear in which he lives, as do his limited emotional bonds. He cannot, for example, date Guatemalan women because he worries that they will look like conspirators to whoever watches him, and such a mistake might be deadly. Instead, Moya carefully cultivates relationships with foreign women—university professors and international human rights advocates who may expedite his requests for asylum, or may save his life just by knowing him. Thus the emotional bonds that motivate Moya also exceed the boundaries of family relationships. His friends and lovers advocate for Guatemala throughout the world. Even his friendship with Roger takes on a brotherly quality, although ongoing distrust and jealousy over Flor complicate their bond.

Moya’s constant unease helps Roger understand a political climate that has become cultural. After years of anxious discretion, Moya now describes himself as a shadow, and his relationship with the now-dead Flor as a kind of haunting: “he found her shadow tugging on his all over Boston and Cambridge, asking ‘*Why am I a shadow? ...*’ Two forlorn, sadly empty, that is, not full enough, shadows...” (310). The force that has taken Flor’s life has also taken something from Moya—he has become a shade, a vestige of a self that he feels unable to access.

*The Long Night of White Chickens* demonstrates how the militarized state affects the daily lives of Guatemalans. Although replete with personal and political connections, the novel resists teleological resolution or conclusion. Like Obejas, Goldman moves forward and backward in time as his narrators struggle to reconcile past and present. By the end of the novel, Roger has developed three central suspects—three possible narratives that result in Flor’s

murder—but he has no proof. Moreover, he cannot clear Flor’s name, since he cannot prove that she did *not* participate in the illegal baby trade. Roger describes the information he gathers in terms of absence: “almost everything I’d been able to learn or deduce about your fate I’d found in what had come to seem the only worthwhile place to search: the ever-spreading silence and invisibility underneath everything here” (373). Making deductions from silence and invisibility, Roger must reconcile himself with all that he cannot know about Flor’s life and death.

Ultimately, the novel’s optimism centers on uncertainty, on the future that has yet to be determined. Through the figure of the orphan, Goldman illustrates the transnational network that has contributed to the crisis in Guatemala, but that also enables resistance to its system of oppression. The novel’s central orphan, Flor, finds a tangible, if imperfect, home among the Graetz family in Massachusetts. Goldman refuses to weigh what she loses in the U.S. against what she gains. Both the losses and the gains help comprise Flor’s distinctive histories and her unfathomable possibilities. As Roger explains:

... artificiality was essential to what we had, and lay like silence near the heart of everything, and made everything seem possible—made even lies seem not very different from nonlies.... The love was real. But maybe you had no other way of expressing the life that had been given to you, or of really knowing it, except by pushing on the boundaries of that artificiality, trying to find where it began and where it ended.

But it was as if there was another life too, the one that would have happened if you’d never come to live with us. I had the sense of a true history developing, our true and invisible fate, always happening, unseen, alongside this other one, our

silent companion, like the light I had seen over the market. And I wondered if maybe you had always or finally heard it calling you back. (367)

By coming to live with the Graetz family, Flor sheds the fantasy of authenticity that Western subjects project onto indigeneity. Her bond with Roger's family is both "real" and "artificial," a shared pretense that helps determine the person she becomes. Yet her connection to Guatemala is also both real and fantasy, a "silent companion" that calls her back. These national and cultural identifications compete, pull Flor to and from each country, but finally Flor's "true and invisible fate" lies outside of Roger's view, exceeding the boundaries of the novel.

Although Flor dies in Guatemala, joining thousands of Guatemalan (and other Central American) activists whose midnight murders remain unsolved, Roger contends that Flor's orphans inherit her legacy of resistance, defying the hegemony of the military state just by surviving and remembering. These orphans embody both the cultural legacy and the historical trauma of Guatemala; the very persistence of their indigenous blood defies the genocidal military regime. Their memories of that genocide can also undermine the militarized state. Thus the children, so scarred by the atrocities they have witnessed that they scream and cry at the sight of soldiers, nevertheless may grow up to avenge Flor and others like her, if only by living to tell their own stories:

And though it wasn't righteous destruction and it wasn't social change, it was preservation—of little victimized lives. But preserving them for what? An inhuman question, only a demagogue would ask it, but there are plenty of those, and, anyway, a lot of these kids carried very important memories, memories that if well sheltered might even grow strong and hot enough to melt the fake movie snow of politicians, might even grow strong and audacious enough to lead a

highly spiritual and vanquishing army down from the volcanoes. It was something to do, it could even be made to fit the big picture: the nuns turned endangered children over to you, you traveled right into the heart of the war zones to receive them sometimes, you involved foreign embassies in your health care abroad program and thus involved entire nations in the plight of little survivors. You did some adoptions but were fastidious about it, looking for the most healing and fertile soil for haunted and potentially powerful memories... (376-7)

The legacy that Flor leaves her orphans is multifarious: she uses their stories (and her own) to persuade a transnational network of “foreign embassies” and “entire nations” to help the children survive by giving them money, medical care, and “healing and fertile soil” in which to grow their “potentially powerful memories.” By giving the orphans this future, Flor and Roger also hope that the orphans’ voices will join theirs; the children can grow up to record and convey their *testimonios*, to indict the Guatemalan military, and to enlist support and solidarity in and beyond the U.S. Through Flor and the orphans she cares for, Goldman imagines a transnational community dedicated to the future of Guatemala. Like Flor, other orphans must cope with trauma and loss; separated from their cultures, communities, and nations of origin, adopted children grow up in Massachusetts or Paris, cultivating new identifications and experiences that will never fit neatly with their Guatemalan histories. Yet these children, like Flor, carry with them the radical potential of transnationalism. Perhaps the “highly spiritual and vanquishing army” is a fantasy, but their bodies and the memories they carry are powerful, filled with future promise.

Goldman illustrates the political importance of historical memory and explores how Guatemala’s conflict crosses borders, affecting and engaging communities, families, and

individuals in and beyond the U.S. Goldman envisions how narratives of transnational collaboration and community can undermine the interests of military nation-states and the foreign policies of the U.S. Like Cisneros and Obejas, he uses fictional family sagas to restore a historical record that traditional U.S. histories have erased. All three of these writers describe the act of writing (whether history, fiction, or fantasy) as witnessing lost stories and recovering silenced subjects. Cisneros and Obejas rescue lost family members and cultural traditions; Goldman provides a fictional testament to hidden acts of atrocity and disappeared men and women who resist those acts.

Goldman's "real" depiction of the Guatemalan Civil War becomes coextensive with the imaginary space of Central America, in which many writers and activists imagine possibilities for transnational and transcultural coalition. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, two prominent Chicana writers and activists, have used their considerable influence to promote aid and justice for Central America. Latina/o novelists have also represented pan-Latina/o solidarity with Central America in fiction. In Demetria Martínez's *Mother Tongue* (1994), for example, a Salvadoran refugee helps a Chicana connect with her own radical potential. Literary scholar Ana Patricia Rodríguez has criticized Latina/o writers like Martínez for "fictions of solidarity" that position Central American refugees as helpless objects of Latina/o sympathy and support (153). She argues: "Central Americans have been read by many Chicana/os, Latinas/os, and others as part of a larger hemispheric 'familia' and as 'relatives' in need of a helping hand" (book, 154). Although I agree with Rodríguez that such representations of Central American victimization can elide the subjectivity and agency of Central American survivors, these novels of solidarity can also suggest how Central American migrants and activists have motivated and utilized discourses of alliance among concerned supporters and sympathetic government agents.

Cristina García's newest novel, *The Lady Matador's Hotel* (2010), follows a multinational cast of characters who alternately connect, clash, and cooperate with one another in a hotel in a fictional Central American country. Entwining the stories of a Japanese/Mexican American woman matador, a German attorney with a powerful and lucrative adoption business, a Korean businessman with a Central American lover, a Cuban expatriate poet, and a slew of American couples who travel to the country to adopt babies, García portrays their disparate lives as tied to and dependent on each other, although these myopic characters rarely see beyond their immediate plans and problems. Moreover, one of her central protagonists is a covert guerilla who uses her cover as a maid to assassinate the colonel who killed her brother. The guerilla, Aura, works with several other secret guerillas whose political objectives are concealed by working-class disguises—cooks, gardeners, waiters, and bellmen may all be insurgents, assassins, or spies. Through these entangled communities, García marks both the problems and the possibilities of that mobility and interdependence; the hotel houses a convention of rightist military leaders bent on suppressing resistance, but it also contains the guerillas who resist them. Like Goldman, García illustrates the extrafamilial alliances and allegiances that attend an age of economic and geographic mobility and international political turmoil. Her Central America is the object of global fantasies (commercial, familial, and sexual), but she also depicts the region's connections to and concurrence with the postmodern world.<sup>28</sup>

Historical fictions and family sagas by Sandra Cisneros, Achy Obejas, Cristina García, and Francisco Goldman, among many others, imagine how revolution and international conflict continue to resonate in the lives of the Latin American diaspora. Latina/o writers have returned again and again to this genealogy to upset its entrenched assumptions and to explore the ramifications of that history for Latina/o identities and communities. Latina/o writers recover the

historical presence of Latin American cultures and peoples and their importance to the contemporary U.S. They explore how histories of empire have created entrenched racial and class inequalities that haunt the hemisphere today. Furthermore, they remind readers of the contemporary consequences of forgotten histories. Finally, by exploring and exploding the role of the family in Latina/o culture, these novelists reveal the collective fantasies that underpin both nationalism and transnationalism, suggesting that new histories and new fantasies can change the relationships that shape the U.S. and Latin America.

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<sup>1</sup> Studies by immigration scholars such as María Cristina García have traced how hemispheric politics structure migration patterns. See García's *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, The United States, and Canada* (2006) for one excellent example. For a taste of Buchanan's fearful rhetoric, see *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization* (2002).

<sup>2</sup> In his preface to the new *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* (2010), Ilan Stavans identifies the 1980s as the decade in which Latina/o literature becomes "mainstream" (Ivi). In the past three decades, Latina/o artists and musicians have also contributed significantly to U.S. cultural production.

<sup>3</sup> I invoke Ali Behdad here to suggest that U.S. foreign and immigration policies are convergent, and therefore that historical amnesia about these policies serves related ends. As Behdad explains in *A Forgetful Nation* (2005), "The myth of immigrant America, I argue, not only obscures the ideological underpinning of national formation and the political economy of immigration but also disavows the importance of xenophobia in the founding of the United States" (xv). I would

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add that the image of the U.S. as both a nation of immigrants and a beacon of democracy has justified antidemocratic and exclusionary policies toward Latin American nations and emigrants.

<sup>4</sup> Gruesz argues in “The Once and Future Latino” (2007): “Latinos are so overpoweringly identified with the conditions of the present and the promise/threat of the future that we are denied a *past*. Or, more precisely, we are denied *the common occupation of past time with other U.S. Americans*” (121). She suggests “that if ‘Latino’ is to have any long-term conceptual staying power, it must grapple with the construction of a usable past that would be, if not *common* to all Latinos (what historical stories are?), intelligible and meaningful to that constituency” (116-117).

<sup>5</sup> See *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas* (1997), in which Zamora explores writers in the Americas who employ historical events and historiographic rhetorical strategies in order to rethink the making of history itself. She argues that the “anxiety of origins” “impels American writers to search for precursors (in the name of community) rather than escape from them (in the name of individuation), to connect to traditions and histories (in the name of a usable past) rather than dissociate from them (in the name of originality)” (5).

<sup>6</sup> See Anna Brickhouse’s work, especially “Scholarship and the State: Robert Greenhow and Transnational American Studies 1848/2008” (2008), for an example of the historical erasure of Spanish presence in North America. Perhaps the most dramatic recent example of the erasure of the Central American Crisis comes from the Texas State Board of Education, which elected in 2010 to omit the name of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, an outspoken leader of resistance during the Salvadoran Civil War, from its list of important historical figures.

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<sup>7</sup> Some Latina/o historical novels tend to focus on iconic figures rather than on family trees, but a remarkable number of those nevertheless situate their icons as part of a larger family. See, for example, Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000).

<sup>8</sup> As I note above, many of these immigrants have been driven to the States by dictatorships, insurrections, and civil wars in which the U.S. had a hand.

<sup>9</sup> Richard T. Rodríguez has focused on the dominance of images and ideologies of heteronormative family in Latina/o cultural production, demonstrating how the family has served as an organizing analogy for Chicano nationalism, often to the detriment of women and queer subjects. See *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* (2009).

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 1 for more on *indigenismo*.

<sup>11</sup> See especially Fuentes' *El muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) and *El gringo viejo* (1985).

<sup>12</sup> Bill Johnson González argues that *Caramelo* employs translation to interrogate Mexican traditions and American hegemony in the lives of Chicana/os. He argues that

Celaya often finds herself overwhelmed by difference, perceiving things around her through the refractions of a second language and culture. She grasps for the right phrases, experiences a loss for words ... and compares Spanish and English to discover resonances between the two languages. By representing elements of her family's speech to herself (and to the reader) in a language that is foreign to the original, and by moving back and forth between languages in different contexts, Celaya is able to notice subtle differences and slippages of meaning between Spanish and English that give her a heightened awareness of the contingency of meaning in both tongues, as well as their different modes of signifying. (4)

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<sup>13</sup> Raised by a grandfather who tells her almost nothing about her mother, the heroine's only real clue to her past comes after his death. A woman claiming to be her mother sends the protagonist a box filled with letters and photographs in which she reveals an affair (probably imagined) with the famous revolutionary Che Guevara and claims that the protagonist is the child of that affair. Following the clues in the box back to Cuba, the heroine comes to recognize her personal connections to the history of Cuba and to the myths and ideals that structure national and cultural identity.

<sup>14</sup> Cuban American writers have focused on the cultural aftermath of the animosity between the U.S. and Castro. Few scholars have explored the place of the Cold War in Latina/o literary expression, yet the Cold War has structured U.S. political and cultural relations with Latin America since the CIA overthrew left-leaning Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954.

<sup>15</sup> Tighter migration restrictions in the '90s, especially the 1995 Cuban Migration Agreement, made migration and travel even more difficult for Cubans, although the Obama administration has relaxed some of those policies.

<sup>16</sup> Johannes Fabian suggests in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983) that Western anthropology denies coevalness to the peoples it studies. Kirsten Silva Gruesz picks up this idea in "The Once and Future Latino" (2007), arguing that Latina/o Studies needs to consider "the overall conception of *temporality* that shapes our work" (117).

<sup>17</sup> Constancia's mother abandoned her and her father, only returning years later visibly pregnant with Reina.

<sup>18</sup> She has also translated Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) into Spanish.

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<sup>19</sup> In fact, Obejas' narrator reflects on exactly the same questions, finding such "what if's" inherent to Spanish and thereby to contemporary Cuban identity. When she meets her father's childhood friend Moisés, from whom she learns her family history, she says:

When I met him, I was curious, of course, about Moisés himself, about his survival in Cuba, how it might have intersected with what our lives would have been if we'd stayed. This is one of the inescapable things about being born in Cuba: the life that was somehow denied by revolution and exile, our lives in the subjunctive—contingent, emotionally conjured lives of doubt and passion. Everything is measured by what might have been, everything is wishful—if Fidel hadn't triumphed, if the exiles had won at Bay of Pigs, if we hadn't left. I have never questioned why the subjunctive exists in Spanish, with its cultures of yearning, but neither have I had reservations about its absence in English, with its cool confidence. (76)

<sup>20</sup> This story of return is prevalent in Latina/o fiction. To name just two examples, Ana Menéndez's nameless narrator in *Loving Che* returns to Cuba in search of her mother and Junot Díaz's Oscar Wao also finds his destiny by returning to the Dominican Republic.

<sup>21</sup> See Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (2007), which argues that American literature is in fact a global literature, building on international religious, cultural, and literary movements over centuries.

<sup>22</sup> See *Cultural Erotics in Cuban America* (2007), in which Ricardo Ortíz focuses on representations of gender and sexuality in literature by Cuban exiles, developing a "full-bodied account of the socio- and psychodynamics fueling the larger exile-related thematics of nostalgia, and the often simultaneous desire for, and skepticism about, return. Both that desire, and that

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skepticism, have led, in turn, to an increasingly fertile and productive emphasis on the perseverance of something meaningfully and powerfully Cuban across an increasingly and complexly diasporic geography” (xvii-xviii). Desire for both physical geographies and for historical continuities propel Ale, her father, and her grandfather.

<sup>23</sup> See Dominick LaCapra’s *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001).

<sup>24</sup> John Beverley explains how the *testimonio* articulates “a story that *needs* to be told—involving a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, exploitation, or simply survival that is implicated in the act of narration itself” (73). See “The Margin at the Center,” 1989, quoted here from Ana Patricia Rodríguez (117).

<sup>25</sup> For provocative analyses of this novel, see Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s “Central Americans in the City: Goldman, Tobar, and the Question of Panethnicity” (July 2009) and Kirsten Silva Gruesz’s “Utopía Latina: *The Ordinary Seaman* In Extraordinary Times,” *Modern Fiction Studies* (2003).

<sup>26</sup> One of the novel’s central characters, Moya, repeats the line “Guatemala no existe.” The refrain inspires the protagonist Roger’s understanding of Guatemala as a fiction with violently real consequences.

<sup>27</sup> Flor, like Cisneros’ Candelaria, embodies the uneasy familial connection between Latin America’s indigenous population and the *mestizo* (in Guatemala often called *Ladino*) peoples who often disavow them.

<sup>28</sup> Ann Patchett’s *Bel Canto* (2001) anticipates García’s vision of Latin America as a site of global community. Perhaps the most famous novel about Latin American political violence to appear recently, Patchett’s was a PEN/Faulkner winner and *New York Times* bestseller. *Bel Canto* imagines a fictional Latin American coup as the occasion for transnational human

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connection. Its characters, hostages and hostage-takers trapped together in the vice-presidential mansion, discover new commonalities and develop bonds of friendship and love through their shared appreciation for opera.

## Conclusion

In recent years, transnationalism has provided an exciting frame for new academic research and revised university curricula. Scholars of American Studies have turned more frequently to transatlantic, transpacific, cosmopolitan, and hemispheric networks to undermine the assumptions and prescriptions of nationalism and interrogate their consequences. Critics of U.S. imperialism focus on the oppressive force of U.S. military and commercial operations in the global South. Scholars of immigration and diaspora examine how migrants disrupt the normative and exclusionary borders of national community. My study of the discourse of hemispheric ethics advances such projects by establishing transnationalism as a vital, longstanding feature of U.S. nationalism. During the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions and the Central American Crisis, journalists, literary writers, and public intellectuals criticize U.S. state collusion in political violence and atrocity in Latin America. They portray themselves as humanitarian activists who can model hemispheric cooperation and promote the ideals of democracy in both the U.S. and Latin America.

I describe these texts as *humanitarian* because they call for compassion toward Latin America's indigenous and laboring peoples. Political writers describe themselves or their protagonists as interpreters who translate foreign subjects; such writers champion the humanity of Latin American peoples through descriptions of their cultural traditions and evocative examples of their wisdom, morality, and spirituality. They represent the struggles of war-torn Latin America as indictments of U.S. democracy, calling on their readers to fight for these values at home and abroad.

The more just world they imagine is usually vague and inchoate, its ethics as lofty and abstract as those of the U.S. itself. The writers I examine often call for broad public support for

moderate civilian leadership, economic aid, or an end to military invasion. They tend to point to free elections, a free press, education and employment opportunities for poor and working families, and industrial development as the goals to which transnational political writers should aspire. This rhetoric of international responsibility presumes that attaining such objectives in Latin America can salvage the democratic mission of the U.S. from the corrupt government and commercial powers that threaten it. At stake for transnational writers, then, are the security, prosperity, and ideological unity of the U.S., as well as the political future of Latin American nations. They view the failure of these ethics in Latin America as evidence of the vulnerability of the U.S.'s democratic vision.

Yet even when their visions are concrete, hemispheric political texts are fraught with discord because they disagree about how (or even whether) to intercede in the imperial schemes of U.S. powers and the repressive machinations of Latin American regimes. For this reason, my focus on political conflicts in Mexico, Cuba, and Central America highlights empirical questions about how U.S. writers should represent Latin American subjects or translate their struggles into the terms of U.S. political consciousness. By tracing the common discourse employed by political writers on the right and left, I demonstrate their shared investment in Latin America and the aporia they each confront.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, revolutions in Cuba and Mexico provoke U.S. writers to publish journalism and fiction in support of poor and working-class peoples in Latin America. Widely read and acclaimed writers such as Richard Harding Davis, Stephen Crane, John Reed, and Katherine Anne Porter embark on a humanitarian mission, calling for U.S. national and public support for insurrectionary struggles. In the mid-twentieth century, Cuba's nationalist revolution galvanizes debate about U.S. economic and cultural

investment in Cuba. Writers such as John Kenneth Galbraith worry that the U.S. has exported the worst of its reactionary policies and blind anxieties to Latin America. Yet, during the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions, María Cristina Mena and Jose Yglesias reveal how writers of Latin American descent turn to revolution and political conflict to imagine how diasporic populations can participate in the politics of their countries of origin, even as their texts confirm their investment in the future of the U.S.

Following the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly, the language of U.S. international ethics begins to center on human rights. Emerging first in response to harsh measures imposed by Castro and to the atrocities of the Dominican Republic's *Trujillato*, human rights discourse is vital to political debates about Latin America. During the 1970s and '80s, Democrats such as Jimmy Carter and progressive publications such as *Mother Jones* turn the rhetoric of human rights to different ends. Carter hoped, for example, that accusations of torture and disappearance could shame the Salvadoran government into curbing its death squads and torture artists. Journalists in major publications, along with popular writers such as Joan Didion, Carolyn Forché, and Robert Stone, posit texts as a means to galvanize public concern for Central American peoples and to motivate popular condemnation of U.S. military aid for rightist regimes. Against the neoliberal interests of investors or the Cold War obsessions of the right, political writers focus on the figures of U.S. journalists, activists, and other travelers whose encounters with *campesinos*, refugees, and insurgents model the ethics of broader national engagement with Latin America.

Inspired by the writers I study, I have endeavored in this dissertation to examine how popular print culture complicates the very empire in which it emerges. U.S. power in Latin America has long been a subject of fierce debate. Political writers from John Reed and Katherine

Anne Porter to Joan Didion and Cristina García turn to journalism, fiction, allegory, and poetry to register their opposition to oppression and violence, positing instead new relationships of cooperation and progressive development. By recovering and constellating their voices, I reconnect these celebrated authors with the broader literary and cultural dialogue in which they emerge. Moreover, I combat a trend in American Literary Studies that conflates transnationalism with diasporic peoples, relegating it to the purview of Ethnic Studies and neglecting the consistent international focus of mainstream journalism and literature. By reconstituting the common conversation about hemispherism to which popular, under-read, white, and minority authors have all contributed, I realign Latina/o Studies with broader trends in contemporary U.S. scholarship, suggesting how these fields can utilize and enhance one another.

The final chapter of this dissertation, which treats contemporary Latina/o writers, gestures toward the theoretical future I envision for this project. Current Latina/o writers turn increasingly to historiographic novels as vehicles for exploring and promoting hemispheric human rights. I believe that a compelling avenue for this research is a more focused study of the advent of human rights as a lexicon by which U.S. writers understand their ethical connections with and responsibilities to Latin America. The many Latin American *testimonios* translated and read by U.S. audiences suggest a widespread public interest in human rights in the region. Furthermore, the ongoing humanitarian studies of U.S.-Latin American relations by famous international intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and journalists such as Naomi Klein demonstrate that Latin America offers a testing ground for U.S. social values, even as the government tests free market politics and covert military operations in the region.

This project will deploy theories of biopolitics to analyze how an array of writers, artists, and filmmakers articulate theories of hemispheric human rights to redefine national subjectivity

and belonging. Biopolitical theorists such as Foucault and Arendt have demonstrated that human rights depend on excluding inhuman “bare life” from human subjects, usually by turning to race or citizenship. Contemporary theorists such as Judith Butler, James Dawes, and Joseph Slaughter have furthered this work by examining how visual and cultural production participate in articulating atrocity and representing the humanness (or lack thereof) of victims. In my study, the shared humanness of Latin American and U.S. subjects under the auspices of human rights law offers political writers the opportunity to rend humanity from citizenship. Contemporary journalists and writers such as Francisco Goldman contest state violence by positioning the humanness of their subjects and characters beyond the boundaries of state power. In contrast to earlier humanitarian writers, who endeavor to use U.S. national power on behalf of Latin American subjects, human rights literature questions the power structures that enable political violence, including nationalism and international diplomacy.

In the twentieth century, millions of Latin Americans have migrated to the U.S. to escape poverty and political violence in their countries of origin, especially Mexico, Cuba, and Central America. Excluded from the rights of citizens in multiple nations, migrants and activist communities have used texts to contest their “illegal” status and to claim human rights for Latin American peoples both within and outside of the U.S. They also challenge the exclusion, fear, and exceptionalism that characterize U.S. foreign and immigration policies. My project suggests how Mexican, Cuban, and Central American peoples use texts and images to construct transnational identities and communities in dialogue with each other, employing the ethnographic category of *Latinidad* for its political promise.

My research examines the international political and cultural exchange that shape U.S. culture, international political relations, and the lives of diasporic subjects in the twenty-first

century. I illustrate how these cultural expressions create hemispheric communities and support human rights. While I build on recent scholarship in History, Latina/o Studies, Ethnic Studies, Latin American Studies, and English, I advance that work by investigating the shared political and cultural contexts that connect writers and artists from the Mexican-American, Cuban-American, and Central American diasporas.

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