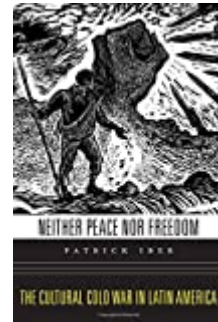


Patrick Iber. *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. 336 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-28604-7.



Reviewed by Renata Keller (Boston University)

Published on H-Diplo (February, 2016)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Patrick Iber's *Neither Peace nor Freedom* is at once a riveting and sobering analysis of the cultural front of the Cold War in Latin America. Iber examines why Latin American leftist artists and intellectuals failed in their varied attempts to create more just, democratic societies. He traces the evolution of their struggles across three continents and even more decades, deftly balancing a sweeping scope with fine-grained analysis. Ultimately, Iber concludes that the efforts to build social democracy (or humane socialism) in the region failed due to a combination of internal contradictions and foreign entanglements.

Iber defines the Cultural Cold War as one phase of an international civil war within the global Left to define the ideas and practices that would guide political change, a struggle between those who favored peace through cooperation in service of a greater cause and those who advocated for freedom as expressed in the ability to dissent (p. 22). He argues that the superpower competition between the United States and the Soviet Union that arose in the wake of World War II widened the pre-existing divisions in the global Left. Around the world, socially committed artists and intellectuals had to choose between peace and alignment with the Soviet Union, or freedom and alignment with the United States. But,

as Iber points out, in Latin America the Cultural Cold War would come to have three international players; after 1959, Cuba joined the United States and the Soviet Union in the contest for intellectual and ideological influence.

Iber also identifies two other unique characteristics of Latin America's Cultural Cold War. The first was the inescapable influence of the United States, the second, the tangible possibilities and consequences of social revolution. The long history of US imperialism in the region, and that fact that the United States led the international campaign against communism, forced anticommunist Latin American leftists into the untenable (and sometimes embarrassing) position of cooperating with the country that most threatened their national sovereignty. Furthermore, the Cultural Cold War had unusually high stakes in Latin America due to the region's historical experiences with social revolution and the subsequent expectation that artists and intellectuals would be responsible for building revolutionary societies.

Tying all of these threads together is quite a feat. In each chapter, Iber proceeds chronologically while grounding his history in the three major institutions that served as fronts for each of the Cold War's main inter-

national players: the Soviet World Peace Council (WPC), the US-sponsored Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), and the Cuban Casa de las Américas. But far from telling a top-down institutional story, Iber focuses on individual Latin American artists and intellectuals and the ways that they engaged with the three organizations. Iber includes so many people and events that the narrative thread can be a little difficult to follow at times, but that is likely a necessary price to pay to tell the story with the nuance it deserves.[1]

Chapter 1 opens by examining the left-wing European exile community in Mexico City in the 1930s and 1940s, providing the pre-history of the struggles within the international Left that would later escalate as the Cold War set in. By beginning his analysis in this place and time, Iber both joins other historians who have called attention to the porous temporal boundaries of the Cold War and incorporates underresearched theaters of battle like Mexico.[2] In this chapter, Iber examines the intersecting debates over the legacy of the Mexican Revolution, dissention from Stalinism, and the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 through the mostly independent efforts of artists and intellectuals such as Leon Trotsky, Julián Gorkin, Victor Serge, and Marceau Pivert.

Chapter 2 focuses on the World Peace Council, the first great front organization of the Cultural Cold War. The Soviet Union created the WPC to promote a consistent, state-approved message that the United States was the world's main threat to peace, and its collaborators in Latin America, including Pablo Neruda, Jorge Amado, Diego Rivera, and María Rosa Oliver, found themselves in the difficult position of trying to use the organization's resources to send a warning about US imperialism while still carving out space for artistic creativity. Iber argues that this was a nearly impossible goal that faced obstacles on both sides: "within the Soviet bloc, the WPC was an accessory to repression; in the zones allied with the United States, it became an excuse for the same" (p. 52).

Chapter 3 turns to the US response to the Soviet World Peace Council: the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom. Iber examines how the differing and sometimes conflicting agendas of the group's bankrollers in the United States, the independent anticommunist entrepreneurs like Gorkin who built up the CCF in Latin America, and the intellectuals like Mario Monteforte Toledo who participated in its programs made the organization simultaneously an instrument of US hegemony and a vehicle to attack US-backed dictators.

Chapter 4 examines how the Cuban Revolution further divided Latin America's Left, shifting the terrain of the Cultural Cold War away from the East-West conflict and toward a referendum on Cuba. Iber argues that while initially the Cuban Revolution and its ouster of the dictatorial Fulgencio Batista was the Congress for Cultural Freedom's greatest victory, it soon became the CCF's most crushing defeat when Fidel Castro aligned his country with the Soviet Union and turned his back on his former anticommunist allies and local CCF collaborators like Jorge Mañach, Mario Llerena, and Aureliano Sánchez Arango.

Chapter 5 looks at how the Cuban Revolution briefly revived leftist politics in the neighboring country of Mexico, focusing on Mexico's National Liberation Movement (MLN) and its leaders and members. This movement drew inspiration from multiple domestic and international sources, including Mexico's own revolutionary history, the World Peace Council, and the Cuban Revolution. Iber argues that the rise and decline of the MLN reveals three important ironies of Mexican history and that of the Cultural Cold War: the irony of how the movement's founder, Lázaro Cárdenas, was defeated at the hands of the state that he himself had helped construct, the irony of how Mexican leftists uncritically embraced a new Cuban government that was even less democratic than their own, and the irony of how a group that opposed anticommunism and US imperialism could find itself advocating for the sort of democratic reforms that closely resembled the United States's anticommunist program.

Chapter 6 traces transformations within the Congress for Cultural Freedom over the course of the 1960s as the organization responded to the Cuban Revolution and other more general shifts in Latin America's cultural landscape. Iber argues that a new generation of CCF leaders including John Hunt, Luis Mercier Vega, Keith Botsford, and Emir Rodríguez Monegal became more open to Latin America's moderate Left as they tried to simultaneously encourage and take advantage of two major trends: the rise of internationally famous Latin American writer-intellectuals and the increasing value accorded to specific expertise in the social sciences. Ultimately, however, the CCF's efforts to reach out Latin America's moderate, anticommunist leftists failed when revelations of the group's affiliation with the CIA undermined its entire project and made the CCF a potent symbol of US cultural imperialism.

The last of the seven body chapters examines the

end of Latin America's Cultural Cold War. Iber argues that over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, Latin American intellectuals and artists became disenchanted with the Cold War's opposing utopian visions and the states and organizations that had inspired them. At the same time, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba gradually lost interest in those intellectuals and stopped seeing them as powerful or valuable. This process of mutual disenchantment and disengagement led to the decline of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the World Peace Council and the retrenchment of the Casa de las Américas; as Iber puts it, by the early 1970s "all the major Latin American cultural projects representing Cold War interests had been shattered" (p. 227). The episodes of Latin America's Cold War included in this chapter—Salvador Allende's attempt to establish a peaceful road to socialism in Chile, and the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua—receive less attention than earlier events, but perhaps that is because the three cultural institutions that Iber focuses on played a lesser role in Latin American politics by that point.

On the whole, *Neither Peace nor Freedom* is an extraordinary book that deserves wide readership and acclaim. It offers fresh insight into familiar events of Latin America's Cold War like the Cuban Revolution, while

also breaking new ground on less-researched topics like cultural institutions and their collaborators. What is more, Iber is a gifted writer whose prose contains a great deal of evocative imagery, such as when he describes how "Cold War politics grew like strangling vines through the world's existing political vegetation" (p. 11). Historians of Latin America, the Cold War, and cultural politics have much to gain in reading Patrick Iber's excellent book.

Notes

[1]. That said, Iber's narrative is significantly easier to follow than that of another excellent analysis of the Cultural Cold War in Latin America that covers some of the same ground, Jean Franco's *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[2]. On reconsidering the timeline of the Cold War, see Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, eds., *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). On the need to incorporate Mexico into the field of Cold War history, see Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

Citation: Renata Keller. Review of Iber, Patrick, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. February, 2016.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=45456>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.