



# The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War

*Greg Grandin*

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After decades of bloody revolutions and political terror, many scholars and politicians lament the rise and brief influence of the left in Latin America; since the triumph of Castro they have accused the left there of rejecting democracy, embracing Communist totalitarianism, and prompting both revolutionary violence and a right-wing backlash. *The Last Colonial Massacre* challenges these views.

Using Guatemala as a case study, Greg Grandin argues that the Cold War in Latin America was a struggle not between American liberalism and Soviet Communism but between two visions of democracy. The main effect of United States intervention in Latin America, Grandin shows, was not the containment of Communism but the elimination of home-grown concepts of social democracy.

Through unprecedented archival research and gripping personal testimonies, Grandin uncovers the hidden history of the Latin American Cold War: of hidebound reactionaries intent on holding on to their own power and privilege; of Mayan Marxists, blending indigenous notions of justice with universal ideas of freedom and equality; and of a United States supporting new styles of state terror throughout the continent. Drawing from declassified U.S. documents, Grandin exposes Washington's involvement in the 1966 secret execution of more than thirty Guatemalan leftists, which, he argues, prefigured the later wave of disappearances in Chile and Argentina.

Impassioned but judicious, *The Last Colonial Massacre* is history of the highest order—a work that will dramatically recast our understanding of Latin American politics and the triumphal role of the United States in the Cold War and beyond.

## **The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War Details**

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### Eren Bu?lal?lar says

Guatemala 1980'lerde emperializmin Orta Amerika'da en çok kan döktü?ü yerlerden biriydi. Grandin bu yüzden "son sömürge katliam?" ad?n? vermi? ülkeyi anlatan kitab?na.

Özellikle giri? ve sonuç bölümleri Latin Amerika'daki emperialist politikalar?n çok güzel bir özeti. 1920'lerden 2000'lere uzanan tarihte amac?n yaln?zca halk direni?ini bast?rmak olmay?p, yeni ve kabullenmi? bir köleler toplumu yaratmak oldu?unu biraz da moral bozuklu?u içinde göstermi?.

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### Dani Rose says

This is an excellent book in many ways, and a great roadmap for Latin Americanists looking to write history from below. This book accurately depicts the punitive influence of the United States in the region, while showing how that influence affected grassroots indigenous Guatemalan activists and what they did about it. A great blend of the micro and macro with attention to detail around voices from below. I wish every American could read this book to come away with the idea that the Cold War was not solely fought by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and in Latin America it was definitely not a "cold" war.

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### Annie says

Grandin, Greg, The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin American in the Cold War. United States: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in Cold War by Greg Grandin, who is a professor of history at NYU with a specialization in Latin America and the Caribbean history, has written authoritative works concerning Latin American conflicts. The Guatemalan counterrevolution is used as a case study about how he views the conflict as two distinct visions of democracy shared by Guatemala and the United States in the 1950s. It is a view that differs from other historical works that often cite the conflict between two different ideologies. The tactics used by the American government has been a focal point of my senior thesis and Grandin's books offers some insights several of the techniques used by U.S. operatives. This book has provided information about the different tactics used to isolate Guatemala economically and diplomatically from its neighbors. Grandin introduces the idea of democracy used as a weapon can become deadly. The seven chapters cover the entire story of the conflict, from its inception to the bloody episodes that occurred in the 1980s. There is a bibliography, index, and glossary included in the text to document the citations. Some of the Guatemalan newspaper sources listed have provided some insight into the thought process of the people at that current time. The scholarly work seems to be aimed college students and experienced researchers. The format of the book could possibly make be difficult for some casual readers. Altogether, The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in Cold War is a relatively unbiased authoritative look at the U.S. involvement in Guatemala and the consequences of the actions taken by the government.

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### **David M says**

Venezuela this week got me thinking some heavy thoughts about the rivers of blood spilt by CIA-supported coups and US trained death squads in Latin America during the cold war. Are we headed back to those dark days? Might be a good time to read a book on Guatemala.

The two migrant children who died in the custody of border patrol this past December were both Guatemalan. Over twenty years since the peace accords that brought an end to the genocide, Guatemala still does not appear to be a livable place for its poor.

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### **Whitney says**

I found Grandin's prose very convoluted and full of grammatical errors. That aside, his interest in Guatemala as a representation of the damage Cold War ideology did to the ideals of democracy was interesting. So I thought his overarching arguments were effective while his organization and prose were lacking.

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### **Thomas says**

very very boring

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### **Christina says**

Grandin uses Guatemala as a case study for the Cold War terror inflicted by the United States on Latin American countries. I appreciated Grandin's focus on indigenous and peasant communities, giving a voice to those usually without international visibility. However, some of Grandin's message is lost in his hyper-bias against neoliberalism and what he refers to as the "brutal effects of capitalism." A worthy read, but with an eye to the author's bias.

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### **Draco3seven Crawdaddy says**

I recommend this book

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### **AskHistorians says**

In his critically acclaimed work, Grandin uses Guatemala as a case study for the (often American-backed)

repression of the Cold War in Latin America.

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### **Lisa Jahn says**

This book discusses the unrest that took place in Guatemala with the support of the CIA. Before this book I had no idea there was a cold war in Latin America. It is a great read to begin understanding how people develop personal and social consciousness.

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### **David Krohn says**

This book is a brutal read. It really gives a different perspective than the history textbooks on Reagan and US foreign policy in Latin America during the Cold War.

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### **Marie says**

The first major criticism I have with this book is the title. While it touches on events in Latin America in the introduction and the conclusion..the rest of the book is a detailed study of the events in Guatemala. That is okay, I found it very interesting, but the title misrepresents. I saw some of the reviewers on the back of the book mentioned he used Guatemala as a case study on the Cold war events in Latin America, but I don't think that is possible. While history may have played out similarly in the hand full of countries that compromise Latin America, they are still very individual and diverse in their culture and the way foreign powers influenced them during the Cold War, and the way their population's responded. The title did not play well with me. That said, the book was well researched and interesting. His writing was a bit disorganized, at times he would add statements that needed clarification, but wouldn't be there. A sign that the writer was very close to the project and very knowledgeable of what he wrote.. I would guess. It was a tough read, but it was only 200 pages so you could get through it. I would not attempt it unless you are really interested in Latin American history..it does not have the style to entertain other genre readers..

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### **Claudette Yoowitaya says**

had to read this for an assignment in college and found it very intriguing. I admire the well written work finding more about this dark history of Guatemala and the war.

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### **Ed says**

The Cold War wasn't fought only between the United States and the Soviet Union; Latin America was a battleground from the 1950s to the 1980s and not only in Chile, Cuba and Nicaragua. Guatemala, the unfortunate locus of a thirty-years long civil war characterized by the slaughter of entire villages, including the machine-gunning of peasants gathered to petition the government and the pioneering use of untraceable death squads for the extrajudicial murder of political activists was a theater of the Cold War in which

Communism was defeated by the genocidal massacre of unarmed civilians. Since most of the dead were Mayan Indians, Guatemala today has the only military in Latin America accused of genocide by a U.N. sponsored truth commission. It is almost impossible for any United Nations organization to come to a definitive and damning conclusion we can be sure that the evidence of genocide was stark, shocking and impossible to miss. Which it was.

Guatemala's coffee elite prospered by using workers tied to the land through debt peonage that was little different than the serfdom of Tsarist Russia in the nineteenth century. State power backed the economic control by the planters--it was illegal for a peasant to run away from the job to which he and his family were bound and was a criminal offense to organize opposition to compulsory labor.

Inspired by the anti-fascist campaigns of World War II and the Popular Front Jacobo Arbenz was elected President in 1950. He was overthrown in 1954: his program of educating the peasantry was as dangerous to the plantation owners as was his ideas of land reform. According to Grandin, an author I have come to respect and trust, a combination of land owners, Catholic bishops, the military and the U.S. trained central political intelligence service made sure that the experiments of the early 1950s wouldn't be repeated.

The last colonial massacre referred to in "The Last Colonial Massacre" took place in 1978. It harkened back to the original Spanish conquest of the isthmus but was also as modern as today's headlines. Indians gathered in a town square to petition the mayor against the most ruthless feudal rules of the plantation owners; many were shot down by the army, the rest dispersed in what seemed to be a repeat of hundreds of military responses to political demands. In this case, though, they were led by left-wing organizers and coordinated their activities with unions in the cities, attempting to bring their grievances to a national constituency.

Grandin suggests that the greatest defeat of the Cold War in Latin America was of the United States and our belief in the principals of liberal civility, tolerance and pluralism. It is hard to disagree with him particularly after reading this meticulously researched and well written book.

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### **Katie Brennan says**

i wanted to love this more -- the intro and conclusion were amazing, but the history was a bit hard to follow if you weren't already an expert on guatemala in the 20th century.

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