

## REMEMBERING THE GUATEMALAN CIVIL WAR:

The Dis-consensus Presented by The *New York Times* and The *Washington Post*

Maria Gray

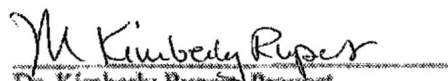
Spring 2016



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HIS490 Honor's Thesis

May 12, 2016

## Introduction

In Guatemala, the land of eternal spring, the topic of their thirty-six year Civil War (1961-1996) is almost taboo. It is certainly not discussed in the cafes, eco-attractions, and Mayan historical and archeological sites attracting thousands of tourists. Still, the track mark of the Civil War is easy to see if you know where to search. While living in Guatemala, my Spanish tutors tearfully shared with my fellow students and me the stories of the people they knew and family members they had lost. They are still scarred by the actions of the government-supported death squads. Despite the twenty years since the conclusion of the war, they are disgruntled by the lack of change that has come to Guatemalan society in that time. The poor are still poor and the government is still corrupt. When an army truck one day drove down the streets of Antigua, I witnessed the visibly automatic response of heightened apprehension and anxiety that still lingers.

In this thesis I will look at the thirty-six year period of the Guatemalan Civil War through the eyes of two United States' newspapers: *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The Civil War ran concurrent with the tenuous years of the Cold War. Therefore, it is to be expected that the context of the Cold War played an integral role in the interpretation and presentation of the Guatemalan war to the American public within these newspapers. Indeed, the nation of Guatemala (and Central America as a whole) was economically significant for the United States. Thus, with those interests in mind, a possible transition to communism was dangerous. Historian Walter LaFeber reveals the main goals presented by George Keenan in 1950 regarding Latin America: "the protection of our raw materials, the prevention of military exploitation of Latin America by the enemy, and the prevention of the psychological mobilization of Latin America against us"<sup>1</sup> These phrases loosely disguise the goal of preventing communism to protect United

States assets. Even ten years before the Civil War officially began, communism shaped the perspective of United States and Guatemalan interaction.

Ironically, the Guatemalan dictator in 1944 was dreadfully afraid of communists.<sup>11</sup> The two consecutive leaders following dictator Jorge Ubico leaned left. In the early 1950s they accepted communist ideas. An example is an agrarian reform law that will be discussed in detail later. Arne Odd Westad highlights that the reasoning behind the CIA PBSUCCESS mission that overturned the leftist administration of Juan Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 was “that communism had been ‘rooted out’ in Central America.”<sup>111</sup> After this coup interrupted what is commonly referred to as the 10 Years of Spring, Kennedy laid out the Alliance for Progress (AFP). Publicly, the AFP was a Latin American economic stimulus plan. In reality, according to LaFeber, its roots “could also be found in Castro’s rise to power, Khrushchev’s denial in 1960 that the Monroe Doctrine was still valid and the Soviet leader’s announcement in January 1961.. .that third-world revolutions were to be the wave of the future. From its inception, the Alliance focused at least as much on antirevolutionary as on developmental activity.”<sup>IV</sup>

Thus, the prevailing theories regarding the Guatemalan Civil War assure a heavy connection with the Cold War. From a United States perspective, the Cold War must be used as a lens through which Guatemala is viewed. Naturally, I expected different opinions to emerge among *New York Times* and *Washington Post* writers. I did not expect such polarizing views in multiple categories and a lack of Cold War rhetoric. Considering the historical context of the Cold War, it is noteworthy that the Civil War articles did not reflect this as a major theme. In this paper, I will argue that there is more dis-consensus than a common line of thinking among the articles.



Before I state in exactly which areas the dis-consensuses arise, readers should understand how the word “dis-consensus” will be used throughout the duration of the paper. When “dis-consensus” appears it is being used to communicate two or more oppositional methods of thinking about a specific topic. For instance, I will argue that the articles painted two vastly different portraits of Reagan: an economic savior for Guatemala versus a Carter-esque figure focused on improving human rights in Guatemala. Without context these two portraits are not necessarily mutually exclusive: Reagan could both be attempting to stimulate the economy while pushing for an improvement in human rights. However, within the context of the Guatemalan Civil War, I argue that these two portraits are mutually exclusive.

Therefore, throughout the paper I will attempt to show that articles from both newspapers do not present a unified front. Rather, they communicate a dis-consensus within four categories of analysis. First, there is no consensus regarding financial and military aid. This category is further subdivided into three subcategories: the Alliance for Progress, Reagan’s promise to renew aid to Guatemala after Carter’s presidency, and Guatemala’s view of the U.S.’ aid habits. The second category showing dis-consensus is the way the articles presented the guerrilla movement in Guatemala: as terrorists and communists, or a people needing to be understood. The third category is found within an analysis of the eight major Guatemalan presidential administrations individually. That is, the dis-consensus is not regarding the presidents as a whole. The last category that demonstrates dis-consensus is the question of democracy in Guatemala. The articles examined elections to see if they were representative of democracy or not. Ultimately, these four categories of dis-consensus will be juxtaposed against the expected unity among the newspaper authors concerning the U.S. leaders’ concern with communism during the Cold War. Therefore, it is significant that this line of thinking does not appear.

## Methodology

While living in Guatemala, information about the Civil War was at first slowly revealed; eventually, it my peers and I were saturated with information. The CIA connections were made known while on a venture into Guatemala City led by Spring Arbor University Professor Paul Nemecek. I encountered the civil war by watching a documentary highlighting a Mayan descendent and Guatemalan Nobel Peace laureate, Rigoberta Menchu. I learned of her battle for the rights of the indigenous Guatemalans, who make up almost half of Guatemala's population. There were discussions among Spanish tutors, pastors, and community developers "Shorty" (Erwin) and Tita who minister in the most populated neighborhood in Guatemala City, La Limonada (The Lemonade). I saw human remains at La Fundacion de Antropologia Forense de Guatemala or FAFG, (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation) as the scientists sought to identify remains from mass graves. I was shocked to have never heard of a war in which the United States played such an integral role. After my personal experience, I needed to dig deeper. I was especially interested in the role of the CIA.

Upon re-entry into the United States, I initially wanted to research this role in the 1954 coup. However, it was an unrealistic goal due to lack of resources. My advisor, Dr. Edwards, and I considered compiling interviews of people affected by the war whom I met in Guatemala over skype. We decided against that option for practicality's sake. Finally, Edwards suggested researching a United States media portrayal of the Guatemalan Civil War. This option was appealing because it still allowed for researching the role of the U.S.—the original motivation—as well as being practical.

Edwards recommended using the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, & *The National Review* as my research base. Obtaining *The New York Times* articles was least difficult; articles

post-1980 are available to the public and a subscription was available for archived articles.

Accessing the *Washington Post* was more difficult. With the assistance of librarian Kami Moyer, I obtained access to the articles whose titles seemed promising. I wasted more time and gained less fruit while researching 30 years' worth of *National Review* because it required searching through SAU's hardcopies.

Regarding the selection of the articles, I followed a different process for each journal. In retrospect, I wasted substantial time in learning the archive program for *The New York Times*. Ultimately, it was most efficient to search in one year chunks. I started in 1944 with the intent to analyze the "10 Years of Spring" before the war for a better perspective. Unfortunately, given my timeline, I abandoned this goal and began analyzing articles in 1960 for the *Washington Post* and *National Review*. I made it through the *Washington Post* articles fairly quickly because I did not read them until I received them from Ms. Moyer. As I looked into the *Review*, it quickly became evident that there were few applicable articles. Furthermore, once I reached the 1980s, the hard copies failed to have indexes resulting in a nearly impossible search. In August I decided to focus solely on the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

Reading and organizing was time consuming. I made the mistake of starting to read without a specific organizational strategy. I simply read an article, took notes describing the overall point in the margins, and soaked in information. To categorize the articles I marked all of them with tabs at the beginning of the school year by topic. As a visual learner, this organization was instrumental to see what the main areas of conversation had been during the thirty-six year period. The categories included a favorable guerrilla movement or negative Guatemalan government and vice versa, articles that discussed the majority Mayan descended population, articles that specifically targeted U.S.-Guatemalan relations, the Alliance for Progress, articles

specific to Reagan, as well as a few smaller categories. Following this organization, it was apparent that chronologic organization where the articles were still separated by journal presented a problem. I could not see all the articles within one category together because all the *New York Times* articles were still chronologically together as were the *Washington Post* articles. Thus, I took the brief descriptions I had written on the tabs and wrote them all out in a notebook. The process was nothing if not thorough. On the other hand, I certainly learned many lessons about poor research strategies and organization.

To create my outline I synthesized my notes from my background reading with the categories in which I had put the articles. I decided to look for dis-consensus among the articles. Once I pulled the best articles that demonstrated different areas of dis-consensus I further simplified the outline to a limited selection of conflicts. While it felt like a disservice to eliminate so many of the articles, I finally arrived at the point of writing.

### **Brief History: Guatemalan Civil War**

The significance of the dis-consensus shown within the articles is difficult to appreciate without an understanding of the events of the Civil War. The history of the Guatemalan Civil War or Armed Conflict (Conflicto Armado) can be divided into five sections: the 10 Years of Spring (Diez Años de Primavera) from 1944 to 1954 (which actually preceded the war but set the stage for a United States supported coup d'état in 1954); the 1960s and the Alliance for Progress; the 1970s when there was a lull in guerrilla activity; the late 1970s to 1980s with high intensity violence from both the army and the guerrillas and the supposed intervention of President Reagan; and, lastly, the early 1990s and the peace accords.

Part one follows the presidencies of Jorge Ubico, Juan Jose Arevalo, Juan Jacobo Arbenz, and Carlos Castillo Armas. Arevalo was elected in 1944, after Ubico was overthrown. Arbenz

was elected in 1950 and overthrown in a coup d'état led by Armas in 1954. After the dictatorship of Ubico, Arevalo began a series of reforms aimed at revitalizing a broken political system and assisting the largely peasant population. LaFeber explains that as Arevalo instituted these reforms, he inadvertently moved to the left so much so that, even though the communist party was not behind the reforms, they were able to "take undeserved credit for correcting centuries of injustice". The rising popularity of the communist party in Guatemala under Arevalo's presidency only grew under that of President Arbenz, who legalized communism and began to threaten the United Fruit Company (UFC), an American run company with vast land holdings in Guatemala.<sup>1</sup> President Arbenz passed the Agrarian Reform Law in 1952. This law was the major red flag for the United States. This law intended to "break the country's dependence on the oligarchy" by redistributing unused UFC land to peasants. This land was to be compensated based on how much UFC claimed it was worth tax declarations. This tricky move caught the UFC in its own lie, since it had lied about the land's value.<sup>11</sup> LaFeber makes it clear that though the coup was understood to be in response to growing communism in Guatemala, in reality it was an intervention in response to endangered United States interests.<sup>111</sup> Thus, in 1954 the United States sponsored an almost destined-to-fail coup led by Carlos Castillo Armas. It was only false propaganda on the radio and United States aircraft flying above Guatemala City that convinced the Guatemalan public that Armas's band had successfully invaded.<sup>IX</sup>

Unfortunately for the United States, in the second period of the civil war, Guatemala did not prosper economically under Armas or the subsequent presidents. In fact, as Guatemala regressed politically into another dictatorship, the economy nosedived.<sup>x</sup> Knowing that the United States had at the very least played a role in the coup exacerbated anti-U.S. sentiment.<sup>XI</sup> Armas's successor, Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, did little to make the country prosperous. Although he

continued to be concerned and outspoken regarding the state of politics and his reputation after his presidency,<sup>xu</sup> LaFeber writes that “Ydigoras Fuentes astounded even the most cynical Guatemalans with his nepotism”.<sup>TM1</sup>

Eventually Ydigoras Fuentes was overthrown in 1963 due to his authoritarian stance which inspired increased left-wing activity.<sup>HV</sup> The final trigger was Ydigoras letting ex-president Arevalo back into Guatemala and allowing him to campaign for president. By the time he was replaced by Colonel Enrique Peralta in a coup, (thus beginning a long line of military-led governments), the Alliance for Progress, John F. Kennedy’s pet project, was in full swing in Latin America and Guatemala. Between 1950 and 1963, Guatemala received \$5.3 million dollars in military aid. Aid was increased and the country received \$10.9 million dollars from 1964 to 1967.<sup>TM</sup> The Alliance for Progress was aimed at increasing the development of Latin American nations and bringing them out of poverty. Covertly, the United States hoped that potential leftist revolutions in Latin America would be inhibited by the financial and military assistance.<sup>TM1</sup> LaFeber asserts that in Guatemala the Alliance for Progress was less than helpful. Rather than promoting any upward mobility among the poor and destitute, it further widened the gap between the wealthy elite and the majority peasant population. Overall, the monetary assistance from the United States only created more issues and did not solve the root of the problem that was due to AFP monies being directed towards the already large companies, with the stated purpose of economic stimulation.<sup>TM11</sup> Thomas Mann, a diplomat to Latin America, had predicted the failure of such assistance by pointing out “the competing demands of North American taxpayers, the inability of Latin America’s oligarchs and military dictators to carry out reforms, and the acid-like disillusionment that would soon eat away at the programs”.<sup>TM111</sup> In 1963, the year President Peralta replaced President Ydigoras, President Johnson took advantage of Mann’s

view and used him to relegate the Alliance for Progress to a lesser position by stopping economic, but not military aid.<sup>XIX</sup> However, this meant that military assistance could continue flowing, suggesting that the United States was still concerned about maintaining the status quo.

Peralta's term passed fairly quietly. His successor, Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro, was elected in 1966. Montenegro's "lofty" goal reveals the despair and helpless situation of the Guatemalan economic and political system. His goal did not relate to American influence, the state of the Mayan descendants, or the growing guerrilla murmurings. Rather, he hoped only to stay in office and complete his term. To his credit, he achieved his goal.<sup>TM</sup> Mendez Montenegro attempted small reforms similar to those of Ydigoras but even those were received so poorly by the upper classes that progress was all but nonexistent. Such reforms included a small tax program and opening the northern jungle filled province of Peten to farming.<sup>TM1</sup>

As indicated above, the guerrilla movements were growing after relative peace during Peralta's term. The two main guerrilla movements that emerged in the early 1960s were led by U. S.-trained lieutenants Marco Antonio Yon Sosa and Luis R. Turcios Lima. These movements were MR-13, El Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de noviembre (the Revolutionary Movement of November 13<sup>th</sup>), and "a more conservative coalition with the Guatemalan Communist party" respectively.<sup>TM11</sup> Under Méndez Montenegro, the left-wing groups rose in prominence, and President Méndez did not condemn their actions enough for the heavily right-wing military to be satisfied. This inaction led to "vigilante" groups stemming from the army which also happened to be trained by the United States.<sup>TM111</sup> Facing a growing guerrilla movement, and limited to implementing only small reforms, Méndez became a puppet president. The command center for decisions was firmly in the hands of the military.<sup>TMIV</sup>

Thus ended stage two. Stage three, or the “laying low” period, began after 1970.

President Carlos Manuel Arana Osario was elected in 1970, supported by the rich upper classes, and soon implemented a “counter-terrorist campaign” which killed hundreds. It did prove to be successful, however, in the sense that it quieted the guerrillas enough that they were not heard from in a resounding way until the 1980s.<sup>xxv</sup> The title is defined not by looking at the actions of President Arana and President Laugerud after him but by comparing their actions and the resulting deaths to what occurred in stage three. The brutal and heightened killings carried out by the military, the government, and right-wing groups in the 1980s reveal a stark contrast between the two decades. Before diving into this era, however, more context for the 1970s should be added. LaFeber reveals that at this time in the 1970s, under President Arana, U.S. citizens were far from aware, let alone concerned about the happenings in Guatemala. Many newspaper articles confirm this ignorance—the U.S. public was interested only when U.S. citizens were killed or demonstrated involvement in leftist and guerrilla groups.<sup>xxvi</sup> Perhaps if Guatemala had maintained a low profile, with the guerrilla movement squashed, and the military and upper class well rooted in their dominance, the United States would have stayed unconcerned. However, this was not the case as the United States experienced a recession in 1971. This recession indirectly helped cause an economic downturn in Guatemala. The economic issues combined with a greater percentage of people in poverty as a result of Nixon’s policies added to the potential for further revolution.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Under President Carter in the late 1970s, a new element to United States foreign policy and United States-Guatemala relations was introduced: the state of human rights as a condition for monetary aid. While this cause is certainly noble, worthwhile, and much needed in Guatemala, especially in the 1980s, LaFeber points out that this new policy backfired on the



United States as Guatemala began to develop and utilize relationships with other countries.<sup>XXVII</sup> Thus, they were able to reject aid from U.S., and viewed Carter's "deal" as an insult, concurrent with denying human rights issues in Guatemala. This attitude shift represented a significant change in the dependency (direct and indirect) on the United States that had existed for years. By the time Carter's term was nearing completion, Guatemala was ready for a new U. S. president who would focus on fighting the guerrillas and see past the reported human rights situation. President Arana was replaced by President Laugerud in 1974 in a clearly rigged election. Public opinion favored his main competitor, General Rios Montt, who would later become president.<sup>XXIX</sup> An earthquake in 1976 delayed any uprisings and revolutions from the poor lower class and those with guerrilla tendencies as it united the nation and transferred the focus to the decimation for a time. What first caused a distraction from the political atmosphere, turned into a catalyst for change. "In its rapacity, the government had thus not only opened up the Indian communities, but had also made them enemies" and after the earthquake they started to organize and "revolution threatened to become a mass uprising".<sup>xxx</sup>

Stage four of the Civil War began therefore with the transfer of power from President Laugerud to President Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia in 1978. Appointed president by the military in 1977, Garcia's presidency began a reign of terror as murders increased exponentially. 1978 saw a heavy increase in guerrilla activity and in response the military and right-wing groups attacked where such activity was reported.<sup>XXXI</sup> An Amnesty International report of human rights' issues in Guatemala summarized that under Presidents Lucas Garcia and his successor Rios Montt, the military's purpose transformed from depressing guerrilla movement to muting "perceived opposition to the government". As a result, the police, army, and death squads caused innumerable deaths.<sup>xxxn</sup> The following massacres were reported by Amnesty

International in 1981, the third year of President Lucas Garcia's regime. In February 1981, an estimated 170 people were killed by the army in multiple towns within the department of Chimaltenango.<sup>xxxI</sup> In April, 23 more were killed in Chuabajito.<sup>xxxIV</sup> These massacres occurred in villages where guerrilla activity had been *rumored*. Most of the dead were innocent, including women and children.

When Reagan became president in 1981, Guatemala rejoiced at the supposed change in attitude towards the human rights situation. But LaFeber explains that Reagan's ignorance in areas such as foreign policy and Latin American affairs prevented him from seeing past the easy explanation of "Communi[sm] and other outside influence."<sup>xxxv</sup> LaFeber reports that in 1981 Reagan reopened aid to Guatemala. As will be discussed in more detail, the view of Reagan and aid to Guatemala presented in the articles is indecisive. As Lucas Garcia's term was nearly over, a three-man junta formed in 1982, including Efraín Ríos Montt. Montt usurped power in completely on June 9<sup>th</sup>.

In the beginning of his term Ríos Montt announced some positive changes such as dismantling the death squads and investigating past disappearances. Violence appeared to settle immediately after the coup. In spite of this potential for change, between March and June of 1982 at least 2000 were reported to have been killed or abducted.<sup>xxxvi</sup> This significant increase of deaths reveals Montt's goal: eradicating opposition. In one of the most humane moves of his presidency, Montt offered the guerrillas 30 days of amnesty.<sup>xxxvii</sup> However, given the position of the poor, and the fact that the concerns of the guerrillas had not been addressed, it is unsurprising that they did not take his offer.

Between April 2<sup>nd</sup> and May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1982, villagers from the departments of El Quiché, Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, and Solola claimed that more than 800 people were killed in

army executed massacres.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The San Francisco massacre is one of the most famous of Rios Montt's tenure. On July 17, 1982, the army entered San Francisco with 500 soldiers, and after promising to protect the villagers from the guerrillas, killed 302 people, the majority of the town.<sup>xxxix</sup> These massacres are all examples of Rios Montt's plan to eradicate opposition: the army focused solely where guerrilla activity had been reported or suspected and used the killing of the innocent villagers to force their surrender. The assumption was that the guerrillas most likely had friends and family in these villages. Rios Montt's plan used the "destruction of hamlets, burning of forests, and extermination of the civilian population to stop the guerrillas" as well as a counter-information propaganda campaign.<sup>xl</sup> If his scorched earth policy was not enough, he created the *Tribunales de Fuerzo Especial* (Special Force Tribunals) which essentially made it legal to execute suspects without a constitutional legal process.<sup>xli</sup> Euckily, Rios Montt's reign only lasted two years.

In 1983, General Mejia overthrew Rios Montt and immediately abolished the secret tribunals, although he was ironically "directly responsible for the tribunals" under Rios Montt. Mejia may have stopped the scorched earth campaign strategy of Eucas Garcia and Montt, but his legacy was one of disappearances. Additionally, he continued the pattern of secret detention centers and torture.<sup>xln</sup>

With the democratic election of Vinicio Cerezo in 1986, the fifth stage of the civil war began. Cerezo formed the Human Rights Commission to look into the disappearances under the past presidents, but he made it known that he was not going to condemn or punish anyone responsible. The goal was to discover what happened to those who had gone missing.<sup>xlin</sup> To his credit, Cerezo disbanded *La Brigada de Operaciones Especiales* (The Special Operations Brigade, also known as DIT). The stated goal was to change the image of the police in

Guatemala, but these officers were not charged and infractions that were pursued were for lesser crimes, not human rights violations <sup>XLIV</sup> The war slowly began to conclude, with little advantage to either side. Negotiations began between the government and the guerrillas a few years before the peace accords were signed in 1996. President Cerezo transferred power to Jorge Serrano Elias, the first transition from one democratically elected president to another in Guatemala's history.<sup>XLV</sup> Serrano was followed by De Leon Carpio after Serrano abruptly dissolved congress and tried to assert dictatorial power. The peace accords were finally signed under President Álvaro Arzu, and the war officially ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1996. He served until 2000. The consensus today in the streets of Guatemala is that the peace accords failed to alter Guatemalan society in any substantial way.

As can be expected there were many topics and categories that naturally formed in the hundreds of articles I read that pertained to the Guatemalan Civil War, Guatemala in general, and United States-Guatemalan relations. Some of them revealed a consensus with LaFeber's history. Many other categories, however, were distinctly confusing and contradictory. Throughout the rest of this paper, I will reveal the inconsistencies and dis-consensuses that arose within articles from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, from 1961-1996. There is disagreement portrayed in the articles regarding the financial and military aid supplied by the United States. This dissonance is demonstrated through three distinct categories: the Alliance for Progress, Reagan's promise to renew aid, and Guatemala's view of the United States' aid habits. In addition to dis-consensus from a monetary perspective, the articles also present disparity regarding how the guerrillas are seen, the eight main presidents, and the uncertainty of democracy in Guatemala.

## **I. Financial & Military Aid**

From 1960 to 1996, many conversations occurred about U.S. aid to Guatemala in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. The majority of letters to the editor focused on U.S. aid. The dis-consensus concerned whether or not aid should be given and under what circumstances. When seen as a whole, it almost comes across as squabbling over the positive and negative outcomes of financial assistance in Guatemala. LaFeber reveals that American aid from even before the 10 Years of Spring created a culture of neo-dependency on the United States and prevented Guatemala as well as many other Latin American countries from thriving independently.<sup>XLVI</sup> During the Civil War, some authors opined that aid should be restricted or stopped, while others considered supporting Guatemala monetarily as a sign of American patriotism; it was simply what the United States *should do*.

Some of the reasons given for ending or preventing U.S. aid to Guatemala included historically poor results, inaction on the part of the Guatemalan government, or the abysmal human rights record. On January 24, 1982, just over four months before President Rios Montt would take office, the *Washington Post* published an article in which the author argued that based on the aid given to Montt's predecessor, Lucas Garcia, the United States should "keep hands off" in Guatemala. Citing Lucas Garcia's failure to take responsibility for his intense anti-guerrilla campaign that killed "2000 people," and the failure of another attempt at aid during Reagan's presidency, the author wholeheartedly argued not to send aid. She did that on the premise of failed aid expenditures in the past and the hope that by holding out on Guatemala, Lucas Garcia may "come to realize that his tactics render it out of the question for the United States to support him, [and will] change his tactics."<sup>XLVn</sup> Unfortunately, this strategy operated under the assumption that Guatemala believed it needed the United States; LaFeber demonstrates how it did not.<sup>XLVIU</sup>

Another article that implicitly suggested preventing or at least reevaluating U.S. assistance to Guatemala was written by Aryeh Neier, the Vice Chairman of Americas Watch New York, a human rights organization. Neier explained that the United States had indirectly been aiding the Guatemalan army's method of putting down the guerrilla movements by targeting the peasants and villages close to guerrilla action, instead of administering aid to the persecuted peasants. Neier wrote: "Providing the food that the Guatemalan Army has distributed and the building materials for model villages may not be exactly analogous to providing the military equipment with which the Indian peasants were terrorized. Even so, it would be a mistake to conclude that Guatemala compiled so horrendous a human rights record without material U.S. assistance."<sup>XLIX</sup> An article published three years before conveyed the same sentiment: the United States *was* assisting the military and, as a result, "113 out of every 1,000 children die before the age of 5."<sup>L</sup> In the *Washington Post* September 1989 edition, Joanne Heisel remarked in a letter to the editor that the amount of money, time, and energy the United States had invested in Guatemala should be the very reason propelling the United States to stay involved and concerned, but also the reason that support should stop going to the military. "[Guatemala] is among the top 10 recipients of U.S. foreign aid in the world. Much of our aid goes either directly or indirectly to the Guatemalan military, which continues to run the country with an iron fist."<sup>LI</sup> In January of 1989, a journalist argued that Guatemala should not receive assistance because recent acts were only ploys by the government to receive aid. In other words, aid should stop because Guatemala has the United States wrapped around its finger. Referencing a recent massacre in the town of Aguacate, she explained that it is questionable that after years of an abysmal human rights record, the government "decried" this one. The answer, she argued, lay in its hope for aid.<sup>LII</sup>

On the other hand, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* journalists also argued that an *improving* human rights situation was reason for assistance?<sup>111</sup> The United States was responsible for Guatemala because of its role in the 1954 coup and because, historically, America has provided aid to its neighbors in need. One of the articles was in direct response to the *New York Times* article written by Aryeh Neier mentioned above arguing against aid. Published on Valentine's Day in 1985, Elliott Abrams, then Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in D.C., highlighted Neier's faulty logic, explaining that in the same way "one could argue the United States is responsible for Ethiopia's horrendous human-rights abuses because we provide humanitarian assistance to that country."<sup>LIV</sup>

Just under two months later, the *New York Times* published another article that encouraged sending aid to the land of eternal spring. The logic used by author Georges Fauriol, first pointed out that a previous concern with sending aid was rooted in a misunderstanding of how much money was being proposed, which in reality was a modest \$300,000, not \$35 million dollars. Additionally, Fauriol painted a very clean picture of United States involvement in Guatemala, one that included "nurture[ing] a very fragile democratic environment."<sup>LV</sup> The fascinating conclusion that Fauriol used to encourage aid is a modern wording of the good neighbor policy: "to deny assistance would not only be tantamount to abandoning it to the extremism present throughout Central America, but also run contrary to the American tradition of helping those in need."<sup>LVI</sup>

Returning to 1982, published alongside the same piece that condemned U.S. assistance because it indirectly killed children, the then Guatemalan Ambassador to the U.S., Doroteo Monterroso, responded to the author who urged the U.S. to be "hands-off". Unsurprisingly, she asserted that it is a "baseless" accusation to claim that President Uucas Garcia oversees the death

squads.<sup>Lvin</sup> Lastly, in a 1992 article appearing in the *New York Times*, the author argued that cutting off aid to the country is equivalent to forgetting about Central America and therefore Guatemala.<sup>LIX</sup>

These articles paint two pictures about United States' aid to Guatemala. First, providing aid represents American patriotism and can assist in improving the human rights record. Second, providing aid is a decidedly poor choice because it had failed miserably in the past and Guatemala's awful human rights record makes her undeserving. This dis-consensus was also seen within articles concerning the Alliance for Progress, Reagan's assistance in the 1980s, and Guatemala's perspective of the U.S. based on aid.

#### Alliance for Progress

LaFeber has argued that the Alliance for Progress did more harm than good. As explained in the brief history, the Alliance for Progress funds served to widen the gap between the rich upper class and the growing lower class. Meant to stimulate the entire businesses sector, funds went only to those businesses which were already successful and which continually grew.<sup>LX</sup> At first glance, the articles regarding the Alliance for Progress (AFP) appear thoroughly negative and in agreement with LaFeber's history. These articles span 1961 and 1962. Surprisingly, a few years into the AFP, when a lack of progress and achievement of its goals would be visible, some authors presented a hopeful attitude or bluntly state that the AFP was producing positive results in Guatemala and Latin America as a whole.

An examination of the articles that revealed the pessimism regarding the AFP will come first. One striking example was an article that appeared in the *Washington Post* on July 30, 1961, in which the author argued that Guatemala is the perfect preview of the results of the Alliance for Progress. It went on to say that based on the state of Guatemala, the AFP will not be successful.



Lahey calls the Alliance for Progress the third phase in America's role as "financial savior of the world", in which "the American taxpayer becomes his brother's keeper to Latin America". After admitting a few improvements that *have* been made with connection to the United States' assistance, he then explains why the theory is "hollow." One of the reasons is that the hoped for tax reforms that would come out of the AFP did not work in Guatemala because "the deputies in Congress are lawyers, professional men and friends of the propertied classes. They are not about to start taxing themselves."<sup>LXI</sup>

Just under a year later, in May of 1962, an article from the *Washington Post* reported the Republican Party's declaration of the AFP a failure and laid the blame at the feet of the "constant threat of revolt" in Guatemala.<sup>LXII</sup> Again in December 1962, journalist Gerry Robinchaud judged the Alliance for Progress to be at a standstill throughout all Latin America. He painted a picture which agrees with Lahey, describing Guatemala as a failed preview of the AFP: "It is no secret that the Alliance is making haste slowly largely owing to the reluctance of the ruling feudal classes to [e]ffect the reforms required to bring their countries fully into the 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>LXIII</sup>

On the other hand, articles from 1963 still quoted President Kennedy stating the positive outcomes and potential of the Alliance for Progress, at one time even calling it the "New Deal."<sup>LXIV</sup> Adding another dimension to the U.S. public interpretation of the AFP is ex-President of Guatemala, Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, who wrote to the *Washington Post* in September 1964, claiming that the Alliance was in fact making progress in Guatemala. He aligned his short administration with the progress, and laid the blame for any current failure of the AFP at the feet of the 1963 coup that coincidentally ousted him from office. In March of 1965, the *Washington Post* painted the AFP as a success story. "Though the [AFP] falls short of the high hopes of 1961, the gains have been appreciable."<sup>LXV</sup> The article summarizes specific tax and land reforms

put in place. However, there is no reporting on any effectiveness of these programs and policies, only an explanation of their creation. The eight countries with “new public or private development banks” do not by simply existing demonstrate how the AFP had been successful in its goal to decrease the poverty gap and stimulate the economy. While the article does admit that in places like Guatemala, the program has not yet made headway due to “repressive political systems,” it still declares the AFP to thus far be a success at a time when others were declaring it a failure.

A last example demonstrates that as the AFP diminished and its failures began to be accepted, some were stubbornly praising its successes. Writer Herbert Matthews described the growing guerrilla presence in Latin America in the late 1960s. His form of paying tribute to the AFP does not come through its successes, but in a platonic praising of its ideal form. He proposes that if the Alliance had been implemented in the way it should have been, “if the goals of the Alliance for Progress were sought with vigor and sincerity, [the] guerrillas would never again succeed in Latin America.”<sup>LXVI</sup>

#### Reagan & Assistance in the 1980s

After President Carter’s stout resolution of international aid to Guatemala based on an improved human rights record, Reagan arrived on the scene wanting to go in a different direction entirely. This change is clearly articulated throughout the articles. The way Reagan was presented differs from the view that he supported aid (and in light of Rios Montt’s bloody regime, encouraged doing so in spite of obvious human rights issues) to a Carter-esque image, copying his catchphrase: as soon as the human rights record increases in Guatemala, aid will be available.

Guatemala leadership rejoiced when Reagan was elected. Although Guatemalan officials who spurned Carter's ultimatum of aid dependent on improved human rights were able to seek assistance elsewhere, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* portrayed the Guatemalan government as frightfully excited for Reagan to replace Carter, hoping that he would resume military aid.<sup>LXVn</sup> Riding quoted Reagan's outlook which "stressed that he did not think 'you can turn away from some country because here and there they do not totally agree with our concept of human rights.'"<sup>LXVin</sup> Just over a year later, a *Washington Post* article from December 1981 described a different picture. In light of the quickly growing death count and violence associated with President Lucas Garcia, Congress was uncertain about providing aid, even though Reagan was not. Author Jack Anderson explains how the Reagan administration intended to stealthily assist Guatemala with helicopter parts that amounted to less than the number required to be approved by Congress. Thus, the administration maintained the letter of the law and avoided being impeded by Congress.<sup>LXIX</sup>

The articles continued the pattern of portraying Reagan's desire to assist the "chapines" in their fight against the guerrillas. Anderson prophetically predicted that then newly inaugurated President Rios Montt would "embarrass" Reagan, who had supported Montt almost immediately as they bonded over being Christians and anti-communist. Reagan cozied up to the president with the bloodiest record in Guatemala. Anderson argued that Reagan's judgement of Rios Montt was clouded, citing how Montt restricted certain freedoms and expanded the rights of the military. He also mentioned Reagan's "fact sheet that claims Rios Montt has improved the human-rights situation in Guatemala...Rios Montt's record is better than his predecessors."<sup>LXX</sup> It appears that Reagan was originally more concerned with fighting the communist guerrillas and

thereby preserving U.S. interests than the human rights situation, —a move LaFeber considers U.S. tradition in Latin America.

Later, as Montt's regime became increasingly bloody, articles arose which revealed altered language from Reagan. On January 1, 1983, a *Washington Post* article cited improved human rights as a reason *for* a \$6.36 million dollar sale of "military spare parts" to Guatemala?<sup>TM</sup> Based on the language presented in this article, Reagan's priorities flipped. On August 3, 1983, *New York Times* writer John B. Oakes accused Reagan of leading the United States to war as he continued to support Rios Montt despite the growing evidence against Montt of the awful state of human rights affairs in his country. Again making the connection between the self-professed Christian leaders, Oakes wrote with an apparent bitter tone, "because President Efraín Ríos Montt talks to God and not to Marx, the Reagan administration can think of nothing better to do with American power and money than to resume the military support that was cut off several years ago because of Guatemala's abominable human rights record."<sup>LXXn</sup> Only a few months later, after President Montt was ousted in a coup by General Mejía, an article was published in November which described President Reagan's frustration with the coup which made it difficult to provide aid. This frustration indicates that the human rights situation had either risen in importance to him in a span of three months, or that it had been more important to him all along, including under President Ríos Montt's regime. Further adding to the dis-consensus regarding Reagan's position on aid to the United States, the same article claimed that the U.S. had not provided Guatemala with military aid since 1977 under Carter's ultimatum?<sup>TM11</sup> This claim goes against the reported \$2 million dollars' worth of helicopter parts delivered under Reagan's administration in the December 22, 1981 article by Jack Anderson?<sup>XXIV</sup>

### How Guatemala Viewed the U.S. & its Aid

Guatemala's view of the United States according to the articles is connected to Reagan's portrayal in light of U.S. aid. Guatemala's view is not addressed often in the articles, but when it is the outlook wavers between being grateful for American aid, spitefully rejecting the aid, and asking for it. Guatemala's view of the U.S. turns on a dime based on aid and fosters the disconsensus described above. The consensus that does emerge is that Guatemala's opinion of the United States according to the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* is dependent on the level of support it receives from the U.S. to help fight the guerrillas.

One of the very first articles published in 1961 on this topic presented the view that Guatemala sees the United States as a leader and a country worth imitating. This view is set-up in a very small announcement where Guatemala was affirmed in their decision to cut off relations with Cuba after the United States followed suit. Instead of being encouraged that a respected country followed in their footsteps, Guatemala viewed the U.S. action as an affirmation of its actions, indicating that the authority and power lay with the United States.

On the other hand, journalist Goshko explained that Guatemala developed an anti-American sentiment. Goshko presents the attitude of the "students and intellectuals" who were finally realizing the role that the U.S. played in keeping the oligarchy in power and the majority of the population in a near feudal system. LaFeber confirms this attitude. Goshko reported on Father Bonpane, a Maryknoll Catholic priest in Guatemala, who was disgusted with the way the U.S. repressed Guatemala. Goshko explains, "Another point made by Father Bonpane is that idealistic young Guatemalans have good reason to dislike the United States. Leaving aside the pros and cons of present U.S. policy, there is no question that past U.S. actions played a big role in bringing Guatemala to its present troubled state."<sup>LXXV</sup> He also explains that this anti-

Americanism, while revealed for the first time in the articles, is not a new sentiment in Guatemala, especially by author and Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias. An article published in 1980 continued the negative view of United States intervention. This article coincided with the ultimatum offered by President Carter for Guatemala to receive aid. The *New York Times* published an article which revealed Guatemala's reaction: mind your own business!<sup>LXXVI</sup>

After Reagan's election, Guatemala's view of the U.S. changed drastically. In December 16, 1981, the *New York Times* published an article detailing Guatemala's frustration and anger towards Reagan's refusal of aid. This was at the height of the anti-guerrilla campaign, shortly after Reagan had been in office, and just before the coup that left Guatemala with Rios Montt. Writer Raymond Bonner reveals Guatemala's confusion since El Salvador received about \$250 million dollars and Guatemala less than \$6 million (these were the expected amounts for 1982). "This confuses and angers Guatemalans, who believe that the guerrillas here are being helped by Cuba and present as great a threat to the stability of their country as do those in El Salvador."<sup>LXXVU</sup> Guatemala was not happy with the U.S. or Reagan. Multiple articles echoed this sentiment. However, when one fast forwards to 1984, *The New York Times* published an article which portrayed an about-face on their stance. Guatemala no longer scorned the United States but was now trying to improve its ties with the U.S. Author James LeMoyne wrote that Guatemala "want[ed] to regain the full support of the U.S. after 7 years of often frosty relations because of institutionalized political killings by government security forces."<sup>LXXVUI</sup> At this point Guatemala was willing to admit that their human rights record had been at least less than stellar because of its need for assistance.

Thus, there were many reports that did not follow a straight line regarding financial and military aid to Guatemala. There were dissonant opinions regarding supporting Guatemala with

aid from the United States, views that saw the Alliance for Progress as the “New Deal” for Latin America and others who predicted it to fail abysmally. There was also confusion regarding how Reagan was portrayed and his desires for assisting Guatemala as well as the varied opinions Guatemala had towards the U.S.

## **II. Guerrilla Dis-consensus**

Guerrillas are understood to be those who fight for what they believe when they have not achieved success via traditional and institutionalized political power. The Guatemalan guerrillas were associated with communism very early on. These guerrillas in Guatemala had two periods of strength and power. The first arose after the U.S. assisted an overthrow of President Arbenz which replaced him with Castillo Armas in the 1960s. This decade was followed by a period in the 1970s of relative inactivity prior to a second period of strength in the late 1970s and 1980s. Throughout both periods, the articles interpret the guerrillas in two discordant ways. Firstly, guerrillas are painted as communists or even terrorists. Second, some journalists take time to investigate their grievances and communicate those to the public. These articles are more favorable, presenting the guerrillas as people without representation; empathy ensues.

### **Guerrillas as Terrorists & Communists**

In their first stage of power, heavy movement, and greater recognition in the 1960s and early 1970s, many reports identified the guerrillas as terrorists and communists because of kidnappings, sabotage, and other attempts to force the government to see reason. In 1963, a few months before Ex-President Arevalo was to enter the country and act as the catalyst that spurred his own ousting, President Ydigoras identified broken telephone connections between Puerto Barrios and Guatemala City as “acts of terrorism and sabotage.”<sup>LXXIX</sup> Shortly thereafter, in July, a journalist reported on deaths resulting from a clash between the army and a band of guerrillas

after the guerrillas had been “terrorizing the northern province of Izabal.”<sup>LXXX</sup> No details were given as to what the terrorizing actions had been or why the army had felt the need to intervene or if the guerrillas attacked the army. A *New York Times* article published the same day used the identical language in describing the event. Other articles that described the guerrillas as terrorists included a *Post* article from 1966 after guerrillas kidnapped the President of the Supreme Court. In the same time period the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* repeatedly referred to the guerrillas as communists, using phrases such as “Castroite guerrillas” threatening an election and identifying Cuba as supporting and supplying the guerrillas.<sup>LXXXI</sup> Furthermore, both newspapers used the analogy of Guatemala being on the edge of a knife, poised for another communist terrorist attack.<sup>LXXXU</sup> All of these articles portray the guerrillas as people to be feared because of their communist connections and terrorist activities.

#### Defense of the Guerrillas

The following articles contradict the examples mentioned above. While not going so far as to justify their actions, these authors went to great lengths to meet with the guerrillas and seek to understand how they saw their predicament. They told the other side of the story and in doing so revealed to the American public that the guerrillas were at least justified in their complaints. Among these articles, the views spanned a spectrum from admitting how the government and president failed to address the needs of and inequality among the poor to encouraging outright support for the guerrillas and their goals. These authors encouraged readers to be sympathetic toward the guerrillas and their plight. Published January 21, 1966, the *New York Times* attributed the rise of guerrillas to the leadership’s inability to “tackle any of the basic social and economic problems from which the nation has always suffered.”<sup>LXXXin</sup> These problems can all be traced to the cycle of keeping Guatemala in an essentially feudal state where a select few comprise the



“ruling” class and the mestizos and Mayan descendants comprise the very poor throughout the entire country. An article published only five months later dove into these problems. Author Alan Howard was able to attend a meeting among the guerrillas where exploitation was discussed. He explained that Guatemala was in reality two different countries: the capital Guatemala City and everywhere else. “Everywhere else” consisted of subsistence farming, a severe lack of education, and a high mortality rate. Howard described it as “a land of the forgotten and the futureless, inhabited by men like the one who spoke at the guerrilla meeting. It is a country pregnant with revolution.”<sup>LXXXIV</sup> In that last sentence, Howard justified the guerrilla claims of mistreatment and neglect. Additionally, Howard presented the clear cut goals of both major guerrilla groups at the time (M-13 and FAR): “a Socialist Guatemala.” Moreover, Howard quoted the FAR leader Turcios, explaining their rejection of assistance from Castro in the following way: “We depend on nobody—not for arms, not for anything. We have done it all ourselves.”<sup>LXXXV</sup> Howard also explained that Turcios’s statement was most likely true as “there has been no evidence of funds passed to the rebels from foreign sources.” Howard’s article definitely cut into the hardcore communists-intent-to-take-over-Guatemala view of the guerrillas that the Guatemalan government and some U.S. articles had been promoting. They wanted their government to address their needs and believed that a socialist Guatemala would better serve that goal. Additionally, these articles demonstrated that they were simply people with a resurgent self-respect and determination to be treated fairly.

Following the same line of thought was an article written as a series in a guerrilla expose by Georgie Anne Geyer. She asked why almost half of the population, the poor Mayans, supported the guerrillas and learned that it is for “humanitarian love. They are the first ones who ever cared about us.”<sup>LXXXVI</sup> She was able to meet with Cesar Montes, the leader who replaced

Turcios atop the FAR totem pole after his death. Indicative of an ideological difference among guerrilla leaders, Montes did express a direct connection with Castro, and Geyer describes him as “a convinced Marxist who knows exactly where he is going.. [he is going to] socialism.”<sup>LXXXVII</sup>

The defense of the guerrilla movement was taken a step deeper and awakened the American readership when a *Washington Post* 1968 article revealed an American priest supporting a violent revolt in light of a government that “perpetrates ‘mass murder’ through preserving the malnutrition, ignorance, sickness, and hunger of the vast majority of the Guatemalan population.”<sup>LXXXViii</sup> The Maryknoll priest went further by defending not only the right of the guerrillas to be angry, but the right to revolt as an “obligation to take up arms and defend their God-given rights to be men.” In other words, they had the right to defend their humanity and to demand to be treated as humans.

Perhaps adding insult to injury was an article that was published in 1982, in the second stretch of guerrilla strength. Author Jack Anderson described the thoughts of the U.S. state department regarding the increased power of the guerrilla movement. After originally seeing the guerrillas as terrorists and communists, Anderson revealed that the U.S. government believed that the “leftists rebels fighting in Guatemala are not the ragtag terrorists they were once believed to be... [but are] a sophisticated guerrilla movement, a force to be reckoned with.”<sup>LXXXIX</sup> While the article did describe a change in the attitude of how the U.S. viewed the guerrillas, it added insult to injury because the government did not view their concerns as important until they were considered a threat. It was not the legitimacy of what they were fighting for that caught the United States’ attention, but the danger of altering the balance of power. The guerrillas had to resort to intense, strategic offensives against the Guatemalan government for the cries of the peasants and the desire for recognition as humans to be legitimized.

Therefore, the articles addressing the role of the guerrillas in Guatemala swing from condemning them to explaining their views. The articles showed them to be terrorists with a connection to Castro. On the other side of the argument, were the journalists who intended to tell the other side of the story. They revealed the root of the complaints.

### **III. Military Led Administrations & Presidents**

Throughout the course of the Guatemalan Civil War there were twelve presidents from 1960 to 1996. The majority of the articles regarding Guatemala in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* related to these leaders and their failures or successes. The pattern that arose was yet again of dis-consensus regarding how each individual president was portrayed by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. While the articles demonstrated a unique dis-consensus for different presidential administrations, it is interesting to note that for most of the Guatemalan Presidents as a whole, the articles actually began positively, hopeful for reforms and changes. The perspectives ended cynically, expressing distrust in the government and loss of faith that Guatemala would ever change.

#### **President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes and President Peralta**

Initially supported by the U.S., President Ydigoras was reported as a strong leader who consistently crushed revolt plots. However, by the end of his presidency, in which he was ousted in a military coup as he was letting former leftist President Arevalo return, a dis-consensus is revealed as he is described as being an “ineffective leader.” One of the first references to Ydigoras’s administration appeared in May 1961. Jerry Robichaud claimed he was “leading from strength rather than weakness” in his decision to let two well-known leftists back in the country, explaining that he could keep a closer eye on them at home than in exile elsewhere.<sup>xc</sup> Unfortunately, it was a similar action, allowing former President Arevalo into Guatemala in

order to appease leftists and convince his country that he was promoting open democratic elections, which caused the military to sweep in and take over in a coup. In December 1961, a *New York Times* article wrote that Ydigoras “smashed a revolutionary plot,” praising him for his actions.<sup>XCII</sup> A year later Ydigoras was once again praised for his military leadership as a Castro-inspired air force revolt was “crushed” with Ydigoras himself leading the forces. However, an article also published by the *Washington Post* the next day started to turn on Ydigoras, seeing the multiple coup and revolt attempts as a sign that his power was waning and his administration ineffective. The article suggested that even though he survived the latest coup effort, the future of Guatemala did not look promising. He was consistently criticized in Guatemala for corruption and “for his failure to provide effective leadership.”<sup>XCIII</sup> Another article published by the *New York Times* in 1963 revealed that in the list of Guatemalan Presidents and dictators, Ydigoras has been called the “most corrupt in history” by some.<sup>XCIV</sup> As stated in the brief history, LaFeber confirms Ydigoras’s nepotism and failure to lead well.<sup>XCV</sup>

The dis-consensus regarding Ydigoras’s presidency is clearer when the disagreements regarding his successor Peralta are examined. The views expressed in articles during his 1963-1966 term alternated between viewing Peralta’s policies and actions as a regression from Ydigoras and expressing support for the progress that Peralta was making through his leadership. The former indicates that Ydigoras was more capable than some gave him credit for, which was certainly opposite the favoritism and corruption expressed in many articles. Only six months after an article claimed that Ydigoras was the “most corrupt in history [of Guatemalan Presidents]”, the U.S. expressed concern over the coup led by President Peralta as a “blow to democracy.”<sup>XCVI</sup> Considering Ydigoras’s reputation for poor leadership and the fact that he was not officially elected, but took over after Castillo Armas was assassinated, this is a generous title

for his administration <sup>XCVI</sup> In the instance of Peralta's coup, the pull of anti-communism was stronger than the desire to facilitate and encourage democracy for Guatemala. The United States eventually took this stance as well, recognizing the new administration of Peralta in mid-April. There were two articles, both from the *Washington Post*, which in agreement with Szulc expressed concern about the coup and weighing democracy against anti-communism. Meyer wrote about the "embarrassing question of how to deal with another military dictatorship in this hemisphere at a time when the United States is trying hard to push political and economic democracy through its Alliance for Progress."<sup>XCVII</sup> The *Washington Post* then later quoted a statement released by the State Department about their decision to recognize Peralta's government: "this action has been taken.. .after having ascertained that the new government in Guatemala is in full control of the country and has pledged itself to respect Guatemala's international obligations."<sup>XCVIU</sup> These articles presented an uncertainty regarding Peralta's coup and implied that maybe Ydigoras had been making some progress. However, LaFeber reveals that "evidence later surfaced that U.S. officials had encouraged the *golpe* [coup] to keep Arevalo out of power."<sup>XCIX</sup>

In December, the *Washington Post* published an article that directly compared the two Presidents explaining that Peralta had promoted a more honest and efficient—and therefore reputable—economy than Ydigoras. There was still corruption, but not blatant extortion.<sup>0</sup> An obvious dis-consensus about Peralta appears in two articles, both from the *Washington Post*, one written in February 1965 and the other in March 1966. The former communicated trust at best and indifference at worst towards the state of siege enacted under Peralta. Kurzman quoted one U.S. official who said, "Perhaps this action was necessary to permit the government to wipe out Communist terrorism."<sup>01</sup> The latter expressed that the Peralta administration had failed. Kurzman

wrote that “a new president will be starting from almost zero.” He cited housing shortages, lack of education improvements, and an “important if limited comeback” by the communists as problems for which the new administration would hopefully have solutions, implying that President Peralta had not done enough to improve the country. Three days later, the *New York Times* focused on and praised Peralta’s hosting of a seemingly “fair and honest election and promising to abide by it.”<sup>C11</sup> U.S. articles in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* vacillated over whether Peralta’s coup would be turned into a triumph for the country. At the least it was admitted that he allowed for a democratic transfer of power to a new leader, in spite of the lack of progress in most areas of the country.

#### President Méndez Montenegro

President Méndez followed the same general pattern of dis-consensus revealed through the articles about President Peralta: a hope that he could jumpstart Guatemalan growth versus apathy and disappointment. There were two sets of articles that demonstrated the change in view. In April 1966 the exiled former President of Guatemala’s Congress, J. L. Zelaya Coronado, praised Kurzman’s interpretation of the necessity to have a strong new president. Additionally he put his support behind newly elected President Méndez, predicting, “Guatemalans can look forward to a government that will implement social justice and that will respect fundamental freedoms and human rights.”<sup>0111</sup> In opposition to this ideal was the idea of a “well-meaning government that is moving, perhaps too slowly, to improve the lot of the people.”<sup>CIV</sup> Geyer had been interviewing and investigating the reasoning behind the guerrillas’ foundation to understand their urgency for action. She admittedly attributed a new “progressive, development-minded regime” to President Méndez but explained to the American public that the Guatemalan people were not buying into this concept and suspect that the administration would not last. Remember

that Méndez's goal was only to complete his term in office; it is not surprising that the public was skeptical about his chance for success.

A next set of four articles revealed further discord regarding his administration. In November 1967, Méndez's Vice President accused him of falling through on his campaign promises such as agrarian reform. This accusation is noteworthy given that he was elected as a reformist. The author Salazar allowed the Vice President to express his frustrations, but also went to great lengths to explain why there had been lack of progress. For instance his counter guerrilla campaign gave birth to right-wing vigilante groups with whom the president was focused on appeasing.<sup>cv</sup> Around three months later, *The Washington Post* also released an article explaining that U.S. policy accepted the slow pace in Guatemala despite all of the aid that had been funneled through the Alliance for Progress and military assistance. The blame was once again laid at the feet of trying to appease certain groups. "Mendez's objective is to mend that split [between the right and left wing] and hence he pushes reform only as fast as he feels is possible without provoking another coup from the right."<sup>CVI</sup> These articles demonstrated an abrupt switch from a hopeful attitude towards Méndez to lowering expectations because of the reality of the political climate in Guatemala. However, a month after Mendez daringly dismissed the army and took full control of the government an article was published in *The New York Times* identifying life in Guatemala as one of survival instead of thriving. Journalist Giniger laid out two results of Méndez's administration: "reducing] the Communist threat and staying] in office. The price has been high."<sup>cvu</sup> While Giniger described the problems Mendez faced, he presented a view that even in spite of trying to juggle right wing demands, military demands, and the needs of the people, there was no excuse to have not in some way taken care of Guatemala's people.

### President Arana

Throughout Méndez's administration, the articles established that there was a substantial left wing and right wing population and that the line in between them needed to be straddled appropriately to avoid violence. The articles about President Arana addressed this developed and complex issue. Under Arana they had a greater negative connotation and created discord regarding his success in straddling that line. Elected in 1970, he promised to lower the violence between the two groups. In December 1970 de Onis criticized Arana for failing to follow through on his campaign promises. He detailed arrests, kidnappings, and the existence of death squads as evidence that Arana's promise had gone unfulfilled. The following March *The Washington Post* gave Arana credit for his hard work, mentioning many policies Arana had planned for jumpstarting the agriculturally based economy in addition to education and health care policies. However, author Shaw pointed out many of the deaths that had happened on government watch and under their nose<sup>CVIU</sup> Five days later, in a piece submitted by former President Ydigoras, he responded to Shaw's prognosis for President Arana. Ydigoras felt that Arana did not deserve the blame for the "many assassinations that are plaguing my country today". Ydigoras was intent on putting the blame for failings of the government on the failings of the previous administration under Méndez.<sup>CIX</sup> In view of the corrupt label that Ydigoras carried and the elevation of his friends to high positions it is not surprising that he would support and fall in the same political spectrum as President Arana, whom LaFeber described as the "new hero of the oligarchs."<sup>CX</sup> These views on Arana bounced like a ping-pong ball from supportive to disdainful regarding his actions between the left and right wing groups.



### President Lucas Garcia

President Arana was succeeded by President Laugerud but due to a lack of articles, it is more relevant to talk about President Lucas Garcia. He is remembered for his violent, intense, and successful anti-guerrilla campaigns that surged into civilian areas and which began the practice of using the innocent civilians as sacrifices to attempt to draw out the guerrillas. Although it was his successor, President Rios Montt with the worst human rights record, there were far more articles pertaining to the regime of President Lucas Garcia, due to his longer stay in office. Under Lucas Garcia's regime, authors published reports by Amnesty International that for the first time attributed the killings directly to the President, instead of attributing deaths to the army and then connecting the dots to the government.

The dis-consensus lies within the articles that presented confusion from the U.S. regarding how to proceed in light of the growing violence. In April 1980, *The Washington Post* revealed that the U.S. was having a difficult time making a decision regarding the situation in Guatemala. A navy destroyer ship made a visit to Guatemala. It was revealed however, that the American ambassador to Guatemala had approved that visit without checking with his superiors at the State Department. The result was that the State Department had no knowledge of the presence of the ship in Guatemala. Guatemala used this occurrence to at least promote the idea that the U.S. did not believe the human rights violations accusations directed at President Lucas Garcia.<sup>CXI</sup> However, officials within the article stated that had they been notified, this was not a course of action that would have been approved. An official explained, "The indication is that we don't seem to have a clear strategy. We turn down a lot of military sales to Guatemala, and then we send a ship there."<sup>CXII</sup> Under a year later, *The Washington Post* released an announcement from Amnesty International accusing President Lucas Garcia of "personally directing] a

systematic program of murder and torture that killed 3,000 people last year.”<sup>CXIII</sup> The article also did not accept the excuse that the right-wing death squads were outside of government control or influence. The same day *The New York Times* also affirmed this accusation, but gave a wider view of his sins citing 5,000 cases where people had been “seized without warrant and killed.”<sup>CXIV</sup> Additionally, de Onis writes of the prison camps and torture methods outlined by Amnesty International.<sup>CXV</sup> The two articles that laid the blame for the violence at the feet of Lucas Garcia were representative of many others published during his regime. During this time some of the articles followed the same pattern described during Mendez’ and Arana’s administrations, except that instead of the Guatemalan presidents struggling to appease the right and the left, it was the U.S. administration that appeared to be lost. A *New York Times* article from May 3, 1981 echoed the article describing the navy ship confusion and the revelation of a greater confusion on Guatemalan policy. Author Warren Hoge wrote of Reagan hoping to better ties between the two nations in spite of the terror campaign being executed under Lucas Garcia. He discussed the clash between U.S. laws that prohibited assistance to those with abysmal human rights and the expectations of the Guatemalan people for resumed aid, as well as the official report that “Guatemalan leaders want nothing more than to be left alone by the United States.”<sup>CXVI</sup> The articles in-and-of themselves presented a lack of agreement among the United States leaders. This can be seen as a reversal of roles. When the United States was intent on protecting their resources and holdings in Guatemala they made many decisions that reflected this reversal, inevitably meaning keeping dictators in power<sup>CXVII</sup> However, as soon as Guatemalan leaders began to take intentional and decisive actions to protect their administrations, the United States was thrown into a whirlpool of trying to balance too many

priorities. In this case, President Reagan was trying to balance the value of Guatemalan lives with the order of democracy and foreign relations.

#### President Efraín Ríos Montt

During the short but altogether far too long regime of Montt, the articles' positions were surprisingly and horrifyingly positive at times. Overall, the attitudes ranged from apprehensive about his regime, to doubtful and skeptical of his claims in light of his actions immediately upon taking office. They condemned him for the atrocities on his watch but also forgave his sins due to his "eccentric" personality.

President Ríos Montt did not win the presidency in an election. Instead, with Lucas García's term nearly over, in 1982 a three-man junta formed including Efraín Ríos Montt that ousted Lucas García. After providing a period of time of amnesty for the guerrillas, Ríos Montt did force his two counter-parts out in a dictator-like manner leaving him the sole leader and dictator on June 9<sup>th</sup>. There were a series of articles from the first few months of the junta and Montt's administration where the authors were already showing a dis-consensus as to Montt's ability as a leader and the implications for Guatemala. The junta expelled President Lucas García on March 25, 1982. On that same day *The Washington Post* published an article that expressed positive sentiments concerning Montt's advent. In light of the horrific reputation of Lucas García, this feeling demonstrated that most assumed and prayed that Montt could not be worse. Little did they know that Montt's reputation would be deservedly far worse. To be fair, the article did not express completely rejoicing when Montt takes over. It did articulate concern about the public's ignorance as to the junta's beliefs and loyalties.<sup>cxviii</sup> This article followed an overall pattern that was also seen during the shift of President Méndez to Arana: hope that Arana would do far better than Méndez. Of course, the resulting articles would be far less hopeful.

Three days later the first glimpses of the reality of Rios Montt's administration began to show when the *New York Times* declared that the junta's coup was not helping Guatemala's situation. Rather it "began to look like just another remake of the old classic" military coup. The article cited actions such as suspending the constitution as evidence that contradicted Montt's promise of "guaranteeing human rights."<sup>CXIX</sup> There was further skepticism towards Montt since he believed God appointed him president and publically vocalized this belief. However, an article from *The Washington Post* one day later took an opposite position regarding his actions. Author Emmett Tyrell Jr. praises Montt for "getting his country going again" because in his view a coup was better than a revolution. Why? It results in less bloodshed. But Tyrell failed to take into consideration the coup's execution and the level of violence innate within a revolution. A further dis-consensus regarding the good of Montt's coup was seen in September 1982. By this point, the San Francisco massacre<sup>CXX</sup> in addition to many other village massacres had already occurred in attempts to draw the guerrillas out. It is interesting to note that Anderson claimed that Montt "might" (emphasis added) "embarrass Reagan" after many of these massacres have already taken place. In spite of the bond over their professed Christianity, Anderson was quick to point out the menacing signs of democratic elements disappearing in the regime as well as greater power given to the military and the overall reduction of human rights.<sup>CXXI</sup>

In late 1982 another two articles highlighted the clash between disavowing Montt's presidency and a horrific acceptance and even praise of his administration from none other than President Reagan himself. *The New York Times* published a report of the San Francisco massacre on July 17. The article attributed it to Montt who tried to excuse it by saying, "The problem of war is not just a question of who is shooting. For each one who is shooting there are 10 working behind him."<sup>CXXII</sup> For Montt, all was indeed fair in love and war. Euckily, the rest of the world

did not agree, except, it would seem, President Reagan. On December 5, Lou Cannon published an article whose title was “Reagan Praises Guatemalan Military Leader-Indicates He Will Support Resuming U.S. Arms Aid”. Instead of condemning or even criticizing President Rios Montt, the article presented a reason to believe that Montt and his administration were worthy of military aid. Cannon quoted Reagan saying that Montt “was getting a ‘bum rap’ and ‘is totally dedicated to democracy in Guatemala.’”<sup>CXXI</sup> These articles published within three months of each other demonstrated a depressing dis-consensus of the views of Rios Montt that appear in *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*. There was another view of Montt portrayed in the articles, highlighted on August 9, 1983: eccentric. “I wouldn’t say he’s a military dictator.. .but he sure is eccentric.”<sup>CXXIV</sup> There were certainly multiple perspectives as to the validity of Montt’s actions and the reasoning behind them.

#### President Mejia Victores

Ironically, General Mejia Victores was the head of defense and leader of the secret tribunals used to find and accuse suspected communists and guerrilla supporters under Rios Montt. He overthrew his former president in August 1983.<sup>CXXV</sup> The articles from both *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* actually tended to follow a similar trend throughout his presidency rather than presenting a dis-consensus. The articles at the forefront of the regime demonstrated skepticism and accusations of continuing horrors of Rios Montt’s administration. This perspective transitioned into hope for the promise of democracy under Mejia, who seemingly did not want to stay in office. Rather, his goal was to conduct a true democratic election. Because it is an agreement rather than a dis-consensus this progression will be explained briefly.

After Mejia's ascension in August, *The Washington Post* published an article in September that expressed concern over his ability to lead the country back from a place of divided citizens and from the horrifying reality of the anti-guerrilla campaign. Jenkins cited the lack of decisions and the division of the military as reason to worry that although Mejia had professed to be only a "transitional" President, Guatemala needed a decisive leader<sup>CXXVI</sup> An article that further represented the initial view of Mejia's failures discussed political "reindoctrination" camps where Mayan descendants from the countryside were sometimes forced to live and listen to "political lectures". Regardless of the injustice of these forced camps, the article asserted that they will not succeed in obtaining peasant support because "the Indians have always been distrustful of outsiders from either the left or the Government."<sup>CXXVII</sup>

Two articles were published in 1984 that revealed the shift from skepticism to hope within Mejia's presidency. Based on Mejia successfully carrying out the election of a constitutional assembly and beginning to allow candidates to run for future elections, people were beginning to believe that Mejia was serious about having "no political ambitions."<sup>CXXVIII</sup> Furthermore, when said elections were nearing, Stephen Kinzer wrote about President Mejia's promise to allow a former socialist exile to return to Guatemala and run for election, even though Mr. Solorzano had no illusions about his slim chance of winning.<sup>CXXIX</sup> The articles viewed Mejia as an inept leader who was not strong enough to make the hard decisions that Guatemala needed but this view eventually transitioned into a successful leader who was able to usher in at least a taste of democracy. While this may be true, Amnesty International revealed that it was not the whole truth. While General Mejia abolished the secret tribunals that he helped to create and run and passed decree 74-84 which pardoned those considered guilty under the secret tribunals, his

regime still had a reputation for disappearances and Mejia continued the practice of secret detention centers and torture <sup>CXXX</sup>.

### President Vinicio Cerezo

As the first democratically elected president in Guatemala since the 10 Years of Spring, President Cerezo had a challenging task to accomplish: uniting Guatemala and transforming its reputation of massive human rights violation. *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* portrayed Cerezo's administration from the viewpoint of his relationship with the army. There was a dis-consensus regarding who was in reality "in charge". The authors often pointed out the gymnastic ability of Cerezo as he walked a "tightrope" between the needs of the country and the fears and power of the military. Some argued that he was failing to decrease human rights violations and others argued that he was making commendable progress. The authors also demonstrated dis-consensus regarding Cerezo's ability to handle the increasing petty crime and continued deaths. On this front, some argue that he was doing the best job that he could contrary to those with higher standards.

One of the first actions taken by Cerezo was to disband the secret police, also known as el Departamento de Investigaciones Técnicas (DIT). *The Washington Post's* announcement on February 6, 1986, presents this action as a positive development for Cerezo's administration without taking an intentional stance. Cerezo's disbanding of the secret police was an attempt to create a "more professional unit". However, Amnesty International revealed that the officers were not charged with wrongdoings while involved in the DIT and the punishments that were distributed were for petty crimes.<sup>CXXXI</sup> Another article from *The Washington Post* on February 23<sup>rd</sup> described Cerezo walking a tightrope where one side was the army and the other side those demanding to know the whereabouts of their family members who had disappeared in the past

regimes. He was painted in a positive light as someone who realized the difficult predicament and was honestly trying to improve his country <sup>CXXXII</sup>. However, around five months later, *The Washington Post* published an article contradicting the above statement: instead of making progress journalist Cody writes that Cerezo has been a “disappointment” in spite of the “number of political assassinations and disappearances [that have] dropped substantially.”<sup>CXXXIII</sup> Cerezo might have wanted more practice on the tightrope. In November *The New York Times* revealed a different picture. Sticking with the theme of the tightrope, Kinzer, author of *Bitter Fruit*, a book that reveals the involvement of the U.S. in the 1954 coup, opined that Cerezo, while still moving slowly, “is probably best equipped to transform his backward, terrorized country into a healthy productive society - a task that is either overwhelmingly difficult or absolutely impossible, depending on who one asks.”<sup>CXXXIV</sup> This prediction was made in light of Cerezo’s move to tackle the staggering problem of land inequality in much the same way that President Arbenz did with the Agrarian Reform Law before the U.S. sponsored coup in 1954. An article early in 1988 once again showed the dis-consensus regarding Cerezo’s success in lowering the violence. Titled “Even with a civilian in charge Guatemala still can’t fully rein in the brutality”, Kinzer revealed a death list from Santiago Atitlan, quoted an ever-present fear of violence, and tells of peasants who have fled their homes for fear of being targeted. “The savagery for which this country has become infamous still dominates public and private life.”<sup>CXXXV</sup> This quote encapsulates the feeling that was almost a resigned despair for Guatemala’s future. Kinzer’s articles continued to frame Cerezo in a positive light with the description of Cerezo’s relationship with the military as one where he successfully walked the tightrope and was able to earn their support. “Mr. Cerezo has given the military a free hand in setting security policies, and top army officers, in return, appear resolute in their determination to protect his civilian Government.”<sup>CXXXVI</sup> The phrase



“free hand in setting security policies” is suspect because one of Cerezo’s goals and expectations as president was to decrease the violence done by the military. A reader picked up on this curiosity and responded to this article opining that Kinzer was too optimistic. The military and president working hand in hand did not equate to a speedy return to democracy. The author believed that the state of the relationship between the military and president implied that Cerezo “face[d] a serious threat from the alliance of the Guatemalan oligarchy and military”. Another opinion was that “setting security policies” was a way to hide continuing to kill “innocent civilians.”<sup>CXXXVII</sup> An article published in April aligned with the above thoughts. Farah wrote, “three years after leading the return to civilian rule, President Cerezo remains shackled by a powerful military, as human rights abuses increase and economic expectations are unfulfilled.”<sup>CXXXVIII</sup> The articles that described the later years of his presidency also followed the pattern of confusion over his relationship with the military and his ability to control the violence. In March 1990, *The New York Times* reported that America’s Watch human rights group laid failure to counteract the military at the feet of Cerezo’s administration.<sup>CXXXIX</sup> *The Washington Post* essentially claimed the same thing a month later when it declared that the reality of human rights in Guatemala was in fact worse than when Cerezo began his term. Ring did not lay all of the blame at Cerezo’s feet, but contends that “the United States, other governments and human rights groups charge that he has done little to stop those human rights abuses or bring those responsible for past crimes to justice.”<sup>CXL</sup> In fact at the beginning of his term, Cerezo announced that he was forming a commission to investigate the complaints of many families that claimed their family members had been “disappeared” but that under Decree 08-86 he would not accuse those who committed such acts.<sup>CXLI</sup> The perception of Cerezo improved by the end of 1990, but people were beginning to wonder if there would be a civilian-elected to civilian-elected

presidential turnover.<sup>CXLI</sup> This wonder and hope was however in distinct contradiction with a *New York Times* article published the next day where, in describing the possible civilian to civilian presidential exchange, Gruson wrote that “polls now show a small majority in the country would prefer a military regime over democratic government” because “democracy increasingly is equated with anarchy.”<sup>CXLII</sup> Cerezo made some progress and completed his term without a successful coup, but as this article pointed out, it did not carry much weight for the civilians who had seen deaths tolls increase.

#### Presidents Leading to the Peace Accords

Jorge Serrano Elias succeeded Cerezo but there were few enough articles concerning his administration that his successor is more relevant: President Ramiro de Leon Carpio. What was written about Serrano reveals the “flicker of hope” that had arisen due to initiated peace talks.<sup>CXLIII</sup> Unfortunately, after abruptly dissolving Congress and taking power, Serrano was ousted in another military coup in 1993. De Leon was the human rights ombudsman during Cerezo’s administration and the few articles regarding his short stay in office (he was only completing Serrano’s term), describe how necessary it was that Serrano was ousted but how difficult it would be for De Leon. This is the theme that was seen over and over again for the Guatemalan leaders throughout the Civil War. Even as the articles presented a dis-consensus on the individual leaders, they agreed that improving Guatemala’s human rights record, economy, and livelihood of its people was a daunting task. De Leon’s presidential role did not occur immediately after the coup. Rather there was confusion among the military and the Vice President as to who was fit to be president. The Vice President was appointed president but never sworn in. Shortly thereafter, his resignation was announced.<sup>CXLIV</sup> Eventually, the ombudsman, De León was sworn in. *New York Times* author, Golden, explained the Guatemalan people’s

bewilderment at this turn of events, since De Leon had been trying to escape when Serrano was attempting his seizure of power. Golden called De Leon a “crusading human rights ombudsman” and “frequent critic of the military”. While he was chosen by Congress, Golden expressed concern that De León could get the job done, citing demands for his resignation from union members and students, as well as his lack of support and faith from Congress, demonstrated by the less than required two third majority in Congress to elect him.<sup>CXLVI</sup>

De León’s successor Álvaro Arzu commenced his term in 1996. Since the peace accords were signed and became official in late December, articles from his first year in office will be discussed. A group of four articles demonstrated a dis-consensus regarding the Peace Accords. Generally, journalists expressed positivity towards President Arzu, noting the success he had working to achieve peace and achieve more than his predecessors. While the articles favored the facts and reality of peace, the amnesty law included in the peace accords, which prevented anyone involved with the army, government, or guerrillas to be brought to court, goes hand in hand with controversy and dis-consensus. John Ward Anderson first demonstrated this dis-consensus. He painted Arzu in a highly positive light. After years of Presidents trying to earn let alone exert their authority while not angering the military, Arzu’s administration was applauded for its efforts to relegate the military’s role to “carry[ing] out the special mission of protecting its sovereignty and the integrity of its territory”, not focusing on “internal security operations.”<sup>CXLVII</sup> He also cited the firing of officials accused on human rights abuses.<sup>CXLVIII</sup> The next two articles took issue with the amnesty law included in the peace accords. Larry Rohter explains that while the Amnesty Law was formally known as the “law of National Reconciliation”, it “extinguishes criminal responsibility for offenses deemed to be political.”<sup>CXLIX</sup> While understandable that the country might agree to disagree in order to “move on” from the Civil War, the law had many

civil rights groups and families of the disappeared and massacred fuming. An article published the same day titled the law a “momentous mistake”. The author contradicted the proposed reasoning of national reconciliation by expressing that the fact that military, right-wing groups, and guerrillas have forgiven each other and have agreed to “move on” does not bring justice for the families of innocent victims lost in the conflict. The author concluded that “unless a reasonable degree of accountability for these deeds can be provided, Guatemala’s long-sought peace will be unsteady, and a promised return to the rule of law will go unfulfilled.”<sup>01</sup> Noting that in present day Guatemala the ex-President and Vice President were forced to resign in late 2015 because of corruption charges it would not be a leap to surmise that Guatemala’s problems have been simmering under the surface. Another *New York Times* article was published on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, expressing further discontent with the Amnesty Law. Author Francisco Goldman explained that Guatemala was not completely disregarding the need for families to know what happened to their loved ones because Guatemala would be establishing a “truth Commission” so that citizens could find out what happened to the victims. In spite of the Truth Commission, Goldman called the amnesty “essentially a political act sealed by a few individuals concerned with their own reputations and perquisites, not to mention their possible legal vulnerability”. In twenty-three words Goldman reduced an agreement that was pivotal to ending a thirty-six year civil war to a method of saving face.<sup>CL1</sup> Finally, an article published on the 30<sup>th</sup> demonstrates that although many were displeased with the amnesty deal, Arzu’s administration had been successful thus far. Economic revival could be possible. Rohter explained that “if the [peace document] is fully carried out, it will transform nearly every aspect of Guatemalan society”. This is said even with the statistic that only 38% of a poll taken by the newspaper *Prensa Libre* (Free Press) had faith in the peace accords to come to fruition.<sup>0011</sup>

These last three Presidents during the Civil War represent an important time for Guatemala in which decisions were made to bring the conflict to a close. Within their presidencies but specifically that of Arzu the articles presented a dis-consensus about what the peace accords represented and whether or not justice was being served within the Amnesty Law.

#### **IV. The Reality of Democracy**

The rise of democracy as an ideal in the media was also one of dis-consensus. Democracy's portrayal in the newspapers throughout the course of the Civil War began firmly negative, as though there was no hope for democracy to flourish in Guatemala. However, once the Civil War became the reality of the Guatemalan people, the argument straddled two opposing views. On one side, there were signs of democracy starting to show their faces. On the other side, democracy was viewed as an impossible goal. The articles saw democracy in Guatemala only based on the fairness of elections, not as honoring the rule of the people and plans of officials installed by the people acting according to the constitution.

Firstly, two articles from 1963 present the danger of coups to democracy in Central and Latin America. As a reminder President Miguel Fuentes Ydigoras was ousted from office and replaced by President Peralta in 1963. *The New York Times* article explains that this military coup represented "the sort of reaction by the extreme Right that all authorities on Latin America have been fearing" as well as an opportunity for proponents of communism to gain support. The article concluded by declaring the coup "a blow to democracy in Latin America."<sup>CLin</sup> *The Washington Post* confirmed this view talking about coups in Latin American in general. In fact Kurzman went so far as to say that "democracy in Latin America is in danger of being snuffed out!"<sup>CLIV</sup> The significant negative view of democracy in Guatemala was continued in May 1981. *The New York Times* wrote that the electoral process was meaningless since "those in the middle

who might have played a role in leading the country politically out of its no-win standoff have been systematically assassinated or forced into exile”. This was a reference to the Lucas Garcia systematic anti-guerrilla campaign.<sup>CLV</sup> At the end of Lucas Garcia’s regime when Guatemala was preparing for an election that was ultimately ignored and replaced by the Rios Montt led three person junta, Schlessinger and Kinzer<sup>CLVI</sup> threw the blame for the lack of democracy in Guatemala directly at the feet of the U.S. The authors were also confident the election would be fraudulent.<sup>CLVn</sup>

Thus far, the pattern had been one of lack of democracy in Guatemala. Where then lays the dis-consensus? It was found in the positivity seen towards elections that were actually carried out. In the election that saw the transfer of the presidency from General Mejia to Cerezo, Kinzer described the election as a sign of burgeoning democracy. Kinzer quoted then-candidate Cerezo as being confident in the reliability and “triumph” of the elections.<sup>CLVin</sup> *The Washington Post* echoed that sentiment, based on the fact that the elections had more attendance than expected and also “seemed to most observers fair.”<sup>CLIX</sup> Another sign that was used to point to increasing democracy in the country was the failure of a 1985 attempted coup after the introduction of a new tax program under President Mejia.<sup>CLX</sup> Elections were further cited as evidence of democracy’s progress in late 1985. In the election that would result in Cerezo’s inauguration, Kirkpatrick wrote that the runoff election in which Congress elected the President did not matter because a President would be *elected*. Citing the recently elected Congress, Kirkpatrick argued that hope for democracy in Guatemala still existed.<sup>CLXI</sup>

There was a distinct dis-consensus regarding the election of President Cerezo. Some failed to view his election as representative of democracy. On December 5, Nancy Lorence expressed her belief that the celebrated democracy was not representative and was not worthy of

being celebrated while the military are still in power <sup>CLXn</sup>. A Washington Post article followed the sentiment that democracy had not arrived to Guatemala but that such claims are “at best premature.” <sup>CLXUI</sup> Both authors, while expressing varying levels of hope, stated that elections do not a democracy make. Further polarizing those who view elections as promising was an article from June 1990. Gruson dug into the components of democracy and reminded readers that elections were not a reason to celebrate democracy. Interestingly enough, it was a man from El Salvador who was quoted critiquing the United States for its “reliance on voting as the barometer of democracy”. Once again, it was the military which was blamed for the impediment to spreading democracy past the election stage to real change. <sup>CLXIV</sup>

However, even amidst the disagreement over elections, they were referred to as a “watershed” when it meant transferring the presidency from one elected president to another, in lieu of the more common coup or military appointment that was a defining part of the war. Gruson continued to provide U.S. readers with reasons to believe that the elections are simultaneously noteworthy and unworthy. This contradiction only added to the disconsensus. <sup>CLXV</sup> Lastly, in 1993, a former Guatemalan ambassador to the United Nations expressed how democracy was more established than surface level elections. Leon writes, “It was precisely constitutional democracy around which civil society rallied in the recent crisis. It was outrage at Serrano’s breaking of the democratic rules that sent labor and human rights activists into the streets—followed by thousands of ordinary citizens.” <sup>CLXVI</sup> According to Leon, Serrano’s inability to stay in power represented “what at first appeared to be another setback for democracy in Latin America into perhaps the region’s most stunning democratic victory yet.” <sup>CLXVn</sup> Even the language of “setback” implied that Guatemala was and will continually be aiming for true democracy.

## Conclusion

Synthesizing the Guatemalan Civil War through newspaper articles was messy, disorganized, and confusing. However once the articles were organized by topic, it became clear that they appeared confusing because they were presenting two opposing fronts regarding four major categories: monetary aid, the image of the guerrillas, the eight major presidential administrations, and the prospect for democracy in Guatemala from 1960 to 1996. The article authors argued both for and against the Alliance for Progress and military aid funneled directly through the U.S. There were also opposing views for Reagan's role in funding the Guatemalan military: Some saw him as determined to support Guatemala in spite of human rights outcries while others painted him as more cognizant and concerned with human rights. Furthermore, the articles as a whole disagreed as to how the Guatemalan people view United States financial and military assistance. There were also two differing perspectives regarding the guerrillas: a more expected anti-guerrilla stance, and one where the authors take the time to explain their predicament, become familiar with their complaints, and seek to provide at least a balanced account of the lives of the poor majority. Throughout the analysis of the major eight presidential administrations, there was a common dis-consensus<sup>CLXVUI</sup> of the article authors expressing hope and excitement for the changes of a new administration for the people of Guatemala and ending in despair or cynicism. Lastly, the reality of democracy in Guatemala is challenged throughout the articles. Some writers celebrated the advent of democracy in Guatemala, while others shrugged off rigged elections and non-military presidents as only a small sign of a possible democracy.

While the articles presented the information about the civil war as a dis-consensus, they actually reflected the complications of the Guatemalan Civil War: There were parallels to the



continuous renewal of leaders, to fear towards these same leaders and those who are supposed to protect Guatemala's citizens, and to the fact that there are far deeper and complex roots of the Guatemalan Civil War that reach back past the onset of communism and 10 Years of Spring from 1944-1954. The lack of consensus presented in the articles reflected a similar lack of agreement among the people and leaders of Guatemala, one possible reason for the Civil War. But they more directly showed that not all Americans argued about how to conduct the Cold War as it pertains to Guatemala. The Cold War was a motivation for the United States activity in Central America, a motivation that the articles did not reflect.

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- <sup>I</sup> Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* (New York: W W Norton & Company, 1983), 107.
- <sup>II</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 76.
- <sup>III</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 148.
- <sup>IV</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 148.
- <sup>V</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 113.
- <sup>VI</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 115.
- <sup>VII</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 116.
- <sup>VIII</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 117.
- <sup>IX</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 123-124.
- <sup>X</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 134.
- <sup>XI</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 148.
- <sup>xn</sup> This is obvious when one reads his multiple submissions to *The New York Times* countering what he thought were false representations of Guatemala.
- <sup>xiii</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 135.
- <sup>xiv</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 135, 164.
- <sup>xv</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 151.
- <sup>xvi</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 149.
- <sup>xvii</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 167.
- <sup>xviii</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 142.
- <sup>xix</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 156.
- <sup>xx</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 166.
- <sup>xxi</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 166-167.
- <sup>xxii</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 168.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 168-9.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 170.
- <sup>xxv</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 171, 197.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 170-171.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 205-206.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 210-211.
- <sup>xxix</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 256.
- <sup>xxx</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 258.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 260.
- <sup>xxxiu</sup> Amnesty International, *Guatemala The Human Rights Record* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1987), 6-7.
- <sup>xxxiu</sup> Guatemalan departments are the equivalent of provinces or states.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 27-28.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 270.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 53.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 55-56.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 56.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 62.
- <sup>XL</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 65-66. Montt blatantly denounced this scorched earth campaign during a trip to Washington D.C.
- <sup>XLI</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 102.
- <sup>XLII</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 114, 126.
- <sup>XLiii</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 11.
- <sup>XLIV</sup> Amnesty, *Guatemala The Human Rights*, 12-13.
- <sup>XLV</sup> Lindsey Gruson, "Guatemalans Face a Divisive Runoff Election," *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 1990.
- <sup>XLVI</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 17.
- <sup>XLVn</sup> "Hands Off Guatemala," *Washington Post*, Jan. 24, 1982.
- <sup>XLVui</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 210.
- <sup>XLIX</sup> Aryeh Neier, "Guatemala Repression With U.S. Assistance," *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1985.
- <sup>L</sup> Joseph C. Moran, "Hands Off Guatemala," *Washington Post*, Feb. 5, 1982.
- <sup>LI</sup> Joanne Heisel, "An Iron Fist in Guatemala," *Washington Post*, Sept. 21, 1989.
- <sup>Ln</sup> Jean-Marie Simon, "Again, Guatemala Is Cynical on Human Rights," *New York Times*, Jan. 4, 1989.

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- <sup>Lm</sup> This reasoning of course directly contradicts with the argument for preventing aid.
- <sup>LIV</sup> Elliott Abrams, "'Blame America First' Mentality on Guatemala", *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1985.
- <sup>LV</sup> It was at fragile. Whether or not it was democratic will be debated in the last section of the paper.
- <sup>LVI</sup> Georges Fauriol, "After Turbulent Years, Guatemala Undergoes a Political Opening", *New York Times*, Apr. 6, 1985.
- <sup>LVII</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 81, 110. This is actually quite ironic considering that the Good Neighbor policy on the surface supposedly gave central and south America more independence. In reality, the United States was able to use their economic dominance to maintain their interests. Eventually, for this to continue they had to condone dictatorships.
- <sup>LVUI</sup> Doroteo Monterroso, "Hands Off Guatemala", *New York Times*, Feb. 5, 1982.
- <sup>LK</sup> "Forgotten Central America", *New York Times*, May 26, 1982.
- <sup>LX</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 167.
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- CLXVn Leon, "Guatemala Saves Itself", Jun. 21, 1993.
- CLXvni This is an entertaining oxymoronic statement. While within each individual administration the articles presented a dis-consensus, the fact that generally speaking the eight administrations share this dis-consensus is actually a consensus and may work against my thesis that the articles contradict each other and set up opposing viewpoints. Regardless, I believe that the common theme of a dis-consensus is more important from the contradictory perspective.

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