

# Would the CIA Sell a Country for a Banana? It Sherwood:

Assessing the Contributions of  
Radio Propaganda to Intervention  
in Guatemala, 1954

by *Rocket Drew*

*“The United Fruit Company / reserved for itself the most juicy / piece, the central coast of my world / the delicate waist of America.” – Pablo Neruda<sup>1</sup>*

*“A modern revolutionary group heads for the television station, not the factory. It concentrates its energy on infiltrating and changing the image system.” – Abbie Hoffman<sup>2</sup>*

## I. Introduction

Radio waves carried Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s fireside chats condemning Germany’s Nazi regime to a global audience, including to the Guatemalan schoolteachers who rose up against Jorge Ubico’s dictatorship in 1944.<sup>3</sup> A testament to the resonance of Roosevelt’s anti-authoritarian words in Guatemala, the incoming president Juan José Arévalo “cited Roosevelt as his inspiration” during his inaugural address.<sup>4</sup> In March of 1951, Jacobo Árbenz assumed the presidency and inherited his predecessor’s admiration for Roosevelt. By the CIA’s own admission in a 1952 report, “Árbenz’ personal idol is FDR and his reforms are patterned after New Deal reforms.”<sup>5</sup>

Instead of feeling flattered by Árbenz’s imitation of its past president, the CIA responded by launching Operation SUCCESS, the agency’s most ambitious and expensive operation up to that point, to depose the Guatemalan president.<sup>6</sup> These developments reflect a pattern established in the aftermath of the First World War, when Woodrow Wilson’s odes to “self-determination” stoked anticolonial sentiment in European colonies.<sup>7,8</sup>

One key difference, however, between the Wilson and Roosevelt stories was the dawning of the Golden Age of Radio between their terms.<sup>9, 10, 11</sup> Radio

<sup>1</sup> Neruda, P. (1950). “United Fruit Co.” Pablo Neruda (1950). Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-14-the-united-states-and-latin-america/primary-documents-w-accompanying-discussion-questions/document-35-united-fruit-co-pablo-neruda-1950/>

<sup>2</sup> Abbie Hoffman Quote. (n.d.). Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/134302>

<sup>3</sup> May 27, 1941: Fireside Chat 17: On An Unlimited National Emergency. (2017, February 23). Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-27-1941-fireside-chat-17-unlimited-national-emergency>

<sup>4</sup> Kinzer, S. (2007). *Overthrow: America’s century of regime change from Hawaii to Iraq*. New York: Times Books/Henry Holt.

<sup>5</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 20). *Economic and Strategic Motives for Intervention; Coup in Guatemala*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>7</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 6). *Rise of Woodrow Wilson; World War I and Versailles Treaty; Punitive Expedition; Occupation of Veracruz; Retrenchment in the 1920s; Good Neighbor Policy*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>8</sup> Manela, E. (20). Imagining Woodrow Wilson in Asia: Dreams of East-West Harmony and the Revolt against Empire in 1919. *The SHAFR Guide Online*, 111(5). doi:10.1163/2468-1733\_shafir\_sim120120023

<sup>9</sup> The Fireside Chats: Roosevelt’s Radio Talks. (n.d.). Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/the-fireside-chats-roosevelts-radio-talks>

<sup>10</sup> Scott, C. (n.d.). The History of the Radio Industry in the United States to 1940. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-history-of-the-radio-industry-in-the-united-states-to-1940/>

<sup>11</sup> A Science Odyssey: People and Discoveries: KDKA begins to broadcast. (n.d.). Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/dt20ra.html>

amplified the incendiary speeches by Roosevelt that influenced Arévalo and Árbenz, and radio continued to play a dramatic role in US-Guatemalan relations in the years following the 1944 revolution, from the CIA's propaganda campaign to the live broadcast of Árbenz' resignation on June 27, 1954.

However, recent historical scholarship has inflated radio propaganda's contributions to SUCCESS. [Despite the CIA's investments in its broadcasting program, the intervention's ultimate triumph owed

far more to the threat of US military force than to the psychological war. Before evaluating the role of radio in the operation, this paper will explore the historiographic debate over the importance of corporate interests versus anti-communism as motivating factors in the intervention — a false distinction in my belief.. Finally, this paper will conclude with an assessment of the radio landscape in Guatemala in light of the intervention's long-term effects.

## II. Motivations: United Fruit vs Anti-Communism

The million-dollar question, or, rather, the six-plus-million-dollar question remains: Why did the US intervene in Guatemala in 1954?<sup>12</sup> A number of motivations have been explored in the historiography, including that the CIA's rapid and successful coup in Iran the previous year had given rise to a hunger for covert actions “on a grander scale, over a longer period, and for higher stakes than ever before.”<sup>13 14</sup> Another theory holds that Dwight Eisenhower, the President at the time, was eager to pilot covert actions in attempts to reduce the military budget, satisfying his “New Look” policy, which demanded, in the words of his Secretary of Defense, “more bang for the buck.”<sup>15 16</sup>

These motivations offer intrigue and color to analyses of the coup, but historians have placed far

more emphasis on the dual factors of protecting the United Fruit Company from land expropriation and preventing the spread of Soviet influence. Historian Nick Cullather summarizes, “Some accuse the Eisenhower administration and the Agency of acting at the behest of self-interested American investors, particularly the United Fruit Company. Others argue that anti-Communist paranoia and not economic interest dictated policy.”<sup>17</sup> A survey of the arguments underpinning these two perspectives reveals that the distinction between them is a false one, and historians would do well to disrupt this artificial dichotomy.

In the above quote, Cullather is careful to identify the UFC motivation with the unprecedented influence the company commanded in the White House. Indeed, the company was more represented in the

<sup>12</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>13</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2015). *The coup: 1953, the CIA, and the roots of modern U.S.-Iranian relations*. New York, NY: New Press.

<sup>15</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 20). *Economic and Strategic Motives for Intervention; Coup in Guatemala*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>16</sup> “Charles Erwin Wilson”. Encyclopedia of World Biography. Encyclopedia.com. 16 Oct. 2020. (2020, November 25). Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/us-history-biographies/charles-erwin-wilson>

<sup>17</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

Oval Office than any other company in US history up to that moment.<sup>18</sup> The legal careers of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA Director Allen Dulles had brought them in contact with UFC; the family of Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs John Moors Cabot owned UFC stock, and his brother had been UFC president. Further, UN Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge owned UFC stock; Eisenhower's secretary was married to UFC's public relations director; Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith was looking for a job with UFC; and the ambassador to Costa Rica had UFC ties through his previous work for a shipping company.<sup>19 20</sup> The camp of historians who assign primacy to the UFC motivation also notes that though the previous administration had expressed interest in Guatemala under Truman, then-Secretary of State Dean Acheson had intervened to prevent the execution of those plans. Once UFC enjoyed broad support in Eisenhower's administration, the argument goes, the Guatemala operation could be revived. Corporate influence explains why the US "paid such intense attention to the few Communists in Guatemala," despite the fact that "larger numbers [of Communists] had taken part in political activity on a greater scale during the postwar years in Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica."

The rival camp of historians argues that anti-communist paranoia played the more decisive role

in bringing about US intervention. "NSC 162/2," the document that formalized the New Look, called for "covert measures to counter any threat of a party or individuals directly or indirectly responsive to Soviet control"; according to NSC staff, Guatemala fit the bill by providing "a prototype area for testing means and methods of combating Communism."<sup>21 22</sup> These historians respond to accusations regarding conflicts of interest in Washington that favored UFC by pointing out that those implicated in the US government could not have individually or even collectively caused the coup. For example, the UN ambassador, the ambassador to Costa Rica, and Eisenhower's secretary lacked the political capital and proximity to the CIA's decision-making apparatus to wield significant influence, while those who did command influence, such as the Dulles brothers, are implicated only indirectly.<sup>23 24</sup> Moreover, merely holding stock is not a particularly good reason to overthrow a government; a more likely response from investors with government connections would involve leveraging insider political information to sell off UFC and IRCA shares before the market devalues them, pricing in the risk presented by Árbenz's land reform program. Cutting losses with UFC would have appeared especially reasonable in light of the "stagnation and decline" that plagued the company following WWII.<sup>25</sup>

Even the most effective intervention in Guatemala would not address the threats UFC faced, which

<sup>18</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 20). *Economic and Strategic Motives for Intervention; Coup in Guatemala*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>19</sup> Russell, S. (2015, October 27). A Country for a Company – The 1954 US Backed Guatemalan Coup To Support United Fruit Company. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/war-articles/country-company-1954-guatemalan-coup-support-united-fruit.html>

<sup>20</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>21</sup> Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary. (n.d.). Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d101>

<sup>22</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>23</sup> John Dulles worked for Sullivan and Cromwell, whose client, the Shroder Banking Corporation, advised the International Railways of Central America (IRCA) in its dealings with UFC. Allen Dulles served on Shroder's board of directors, and the bank held stock in IRCA, but it is not unusual for banks to invest in corporations in this way.

<sup>24</sup> Hartman, D. (2017, February 07). Can Banks Invest Money in Stock? Retrieved November 28, 2020, from <https://finance.zacks.com/can-banks-invest-money-stock-8324.html>

<sup>25</sup> Näden, R. (n.d.). United Fruit Company Abroad: A Study of the Change in Landholdings, Relationship to Labor Force, and the Transportation System in an Oli Perspective. Retrieved 2009, from <http://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/3345/56492295.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

ranged from: “the emergence of Ecuador as a large exporter of low-cost bananas,” diseases that ruined harvests (and required expensive and dangerous treatments), and rising unionization and labor unrest across the region. Moreover, UFC faced the prospective nationalization of sugar operations (the second-largest division of the company) in Cuba due to Castro’s Revolution, which began the year before SUCCESS.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Guatemalan land reform would have left untouched two-thirds of UFC’s total land holdings, including plantations in Costa Rica, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Honduras, and Colombia.<sup>27 28 29</sup> Indeed, UFC itself “decided not to take part in Project Success.”<sup>30</sup> The anti-communist lens holds that, though UFC asked the CIA to overthrow Árbenz through the lobbying of Thomas Corcoran, the company’s offer merely presented a convenient partnership for hard-liners in Washington.<sup>31</sup> Historians who subscribe to this view point out that the Eisenhower administration, perhaps bowing to public pressure, re-initiated the antitrust action against UFC that it had suspended in 1951, effectively discarding the government’s co-conspirators once they had outlived their usefulness.<sup>32</sup>

It is tempting to rebut the notion of anti-communist motivations by exposing the unfounded fears of a communist takeover under Árbenz, but even a shallow familiarity with Cold War history is sufficient to dismiss this line of reasoning. Proof of communism was not a necessary condition for anti-communist

intervention during this period as operations in Iran, Indonesia, Lebanon, and the Congo attest.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, both the views on anti-communist and pro-UFC motivations hold merit, but a closer examination of the figures predisposed and able to assist UFC from Washington reveals that the distinction in the literature between these two camps has grown too deep. From the list of UFC-affiliates in the Eisenhower administration, John Moors Cabot and Walter Bedell Smith distinguish themselves as the most suspicious figures in the Guatemala operation. Sensitivity to the influence that individuals can wield over the course of history invites a closer examination of these figures.<sup>34</sup> Cabot is absolved by an account that in the Fall of 1954 he suggested a CIA coup to Smith, who implied in response that such a coup was already in process.<sup>35</sup> While Cabot may have exhibited corrupt pro-UFC motives, his support for a coup did not provide the impetus for the operation.

Walter Bedell Smith, on the other hand, played a larger role in bringing about SUCCESS: he attended the August 1953 meeting that officially approved the operation, communicated daily with Ambassador John Peurifoy, whom Smith had helped select, and successfully advocated for expanded US air support during the invasion. Smith had disclosed to Corcoran that he sought the UFC presidency, but Smith’s complex motives could not be reduced to purely professional ambitions. His admission to Corcoran only occurred after—and perhaps as a result of—

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Bucheli, M. (n.d.). Chronology. Retrieved November 28, 2020, from <http://www.unitedfruit.org/chron.htm>

<sup>29</sup> United Fruit Company. (2020, November 29). Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/united-fruit-company>

<sup>30</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>31</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>32</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>33</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 27). *Challenges in Africa; Suez Crisis; Overthrow of Lumumba*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>34</sup> Kinzer, Stephen. “Historical Roots of American Foreign Policy; Expansion Within North America; First Ventures Abroad; Barbary Wars.” History of American Intervention. 10 Sept. 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

joining the State Department in 1953, which he considered a stinging decline from his previous CIA position.<sup>36</sup> Smith's obsessive anti-communism preceded his unhappy under-secretaryship; in fact, "he once reportedly called Nelson Rockefeller a 'Red' for a lukewarm statement in favor of trade unions."<sup>37</sup> Under President Truman, Smith had led Operation FORTUNE, an earlier effort to overthrow Árbenz, before the State Department thwarted the undertaking, which indicates that his anti-communism likely rivaled his pro-UFCism during his second attempt in Operation SUCCESS.

Thus, an analysis of Walter Bedell Smith exposes the shortcomings of the anti-communist versus pro-UFC debate because both sides of the discourse can claim Smith as their evidence while Smith did not adhere exclusively to one camp or the other. Instead, at the time, the lines were blurred: "United Fruit executives regarded any trespass on the prerogatives they enjoyed under Ubico as an assault on free enterprise... 'Whenever you read 'United Fruit' in Communist propaganda,' United Fruit's public relations

director told audiences, 'you may readily substitute 'United States.'"<sup>38</sup> These conceptual leaps occurred seamlessly because Árbenz "was imposing a plan that was harmful to a giant American interest ... Why would he do that if he were not anti-American? And anti-Americanism at that time meant being a tool of the Soviet Union."<sup>39</sup> John Prados of the National Security Archive corroborates that the CIA acted on behalf of "democracy as defined by American foreign policy, which came to mean governments that assumed pro-American stances."<sup>40</sup> That is, a dichotomy between anti-communism and pro-UFCism does not comport with how Smith and other members of the Eisenhower administration tied to UFC saw themselves and their allegiances at the time.<sup>41</sup> More generally, UFC was a capitalist entity, so to defend it against the threat of nationalization was necessarily to uphold US capitalism, both in an immediate sense by protecting a capitalist organization and in a symbolic sense, supporting a corporation that epitomized free market globalization. Thus, ahistorical accounts that insist on a binary between these two US motivations obscure the intimate links between them.<sup>42</sup>

### III. Revolution Radio

While anti-communism and corporate interests were familiar aspects of US intervention by 1954, the more pronounced development in the Guatemala operation was radio technology. In 1921, a total of

five radio stations operated in the US, but the 1930s brought the dawn of the Golden Age of Radio; by 1937, "nearly ninety percent of the US population had access to a radio."<sup>43 44</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Walter Bedell Smith. (2020, October 01). Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walter-Bedell-Smith>

<sup>37</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>38</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>39</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 20). *Economic and Strategic Motives for Intervention; Coup in Guatemala*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>40</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>41</sup> Rockman, S. (2018, September 26). *Organizing Slaving Voyages*. Lecture presented at History of Capitalism.

<sup>42</sup> Haviland, J. B. (2003). *Gesture*. Retrieved from <https://pages.ucsd.edu/~jhaviland/Publications/HavilandGesture.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Scott, C. (n.d.). The History of the Radio Industry in the United States to 1940. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-history-of-the-radio-industry-in-the-united-states-to-1940/>

<sup>44</sup> The Fireside Chats: Roosevelt's Radio Talks. (n.d.). Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/the-fireside-chats-roosevelts-radio-talks>

Interestingly, the United Fruit Company had made early investments in the nascent technology to “keep in constant communication with its ships and plantations.”<sup>45</sup> In 1903, the company created a radio network; by 1907 it owned four stations in Central America; and in 1913 it formed the Tropical Radio and Telegraph Company.<sup>46</sup> When the monopolistic Radio Corporation of America formed in 1919 with support from the US Navy, United Fruit became one of its owners.<sup>47 48</sup> In 1953 the State Department assessed the threat of nationalization of US corporations by foreign countries. The Department bemoaned the prospect of “loss of United States control of the largest communications and transport network in the area, represented by the United Fruit Company’s . . . direct ownership of the Tropical Radio Company, the only commercial wireless communication service. These essential facilities, in friendly American hands, constitute a strategic interest in time of war.”<sup>49 50</sup> While the CIA deemed its radio program highly successful in the aftermath of the intervention, its contemporary analysis suggests that the contributions of the psychological war were secondary to the threat of US military force.

Echoing Tropical Radio’s motto “the voice of the Americas” and the name of the government station

“La Voz de Guatemala,” the CIA launched its phony radio program La Voz de la Liberación (The Voice of Liberation) on May 1st 1954, a day when most channels fell quiet in observance of Labor Day.<sup>51 52</sup> Purportedly run by anti-Árbenz rebels but in fact run by agent David Atlee Phillips, the program continued its mendacious reports through the beginning of the invasion in mid-June, until going off the air on July 2.<sup>53 54 55</sup> Initially, Al Haney, field commander for SUCCESS, based the Guatemalan writers and announcers at the Opa Locka, Florida headquarters known as LINCOLN.<sup>56</sup> After the imported recordings began to raise eyebrows among customs officers, the radio program relocated to SHERWOOD, a dairy farm in Santa Fe, Honduras, across the Guatemalan border. CIA radio transmitters also appeared in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and in Guatemala itself.<sup>57 58</sup>

Historians continue to dispute the contribution of the Voice to the success of the intervention. Phillips himself became a staunch advocate for SHERWOOD. According to Prados, Phillips believed the “psywar report had been the engine of victory,” and Cullather notes that “in Phillips’s account of the operation, SHERWOOD was singularly responsible for the triumph of PBSUCCESS.”<sup>59 60</sup> However, Phillips’

<sup>45</sup> United Fruit Company. (2020, November 29). Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/united-fruit-company>

<sup>46</sup> Fraser, R. (1978). WBF - A Typical Ute. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <http://www.pateplumaradio.com/genbroad/utes/wbf.htm>

<sup>47</sup> RCA Corporation. (n.d.). Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/RCA-Corporation>

<sup>48</sup> Scott, C. (n.d.). The History of the Radio Industry in the United States to 1940. Retrieved November 25, 2020, from <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-history-of-the-radio-industry-in-the-united-states-to-1940/>

<sup>49</sup> Fritz, J. (2012, October 11). Waxed Fruit. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://tenwatts.blogspot.com/2012/10/waxed-fruit.html?m=1>

<sup>50</sup> National Security Council Planning Board. (n.d.). United States Department of State / Foreign relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Volume IV: The American republics (1952-1954). Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=turn>

<sup>51</sup> Fraser, R. (1978). WBF - A Typical Ute. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <http://www.pateplumaradio.com/genbroad/utes/wbf.htm>

<sup>52</sup> Phillips, D. A. (1982). *The Night Watch*. New York: Ballantine Books.

<sup>53</sup> Fritz, J. (2012, October 11). Waxed Fruit. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://tenwatts.blogspot.com/2012/10/waxed-fruit.html?m=1>

<sup>54</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>55</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>56</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

autobiography *Night Watch* reads more like a James Bond thriller than an academic work of history, and according to the book's account, Phillips reached his valorized assessment of SHERWOOD's contributions on the authority of an unnamed British diplomat who flattered him at a dinner party.<sup>61</sup> In a subtle indictment of Phillips' proclivity for exaggerating the Voice's impact in his telling, "Guatemala Station's weekly 'Psych Barometer Reports' were also at odds with Phillips's version, claiming that the initial sensation caused by the appearance of the clandestine radio quickly wore off."<sup>62</sup>

Some historians, free of vested interests in the radio program, have shared Phillips' assessment of its

Agency officers invested SHERWOOD with more effort and creativity than any other aspect of the Guatemala operation . . . [But] shortly after beginning my research I came across cables from the Guatemala City station complaining that SHERWOOD's signal was too weak to be heard in the capital. In this, and in many other instances, the elaborateness of the scheme seemed inversely related to its effectiveness.<sup>65</sup>

Prados perhaps shares some of Cullather's skepticism regarding the radio program, instead according the honor of "most successful endeavor" to the 32 Campaign, which "involved planting stickers or painting walls with this number, a reference to an article of the Guatemalan constitution prohibiting foreign political parties—thus an attack on the Guatemalan Communists."<sup>66</sup>

Struggling to surpass the influence of a juvenile

importance. In 1982, historians Stephen Kinzer and Stephen Schlesinger wrote that "the most successful covert enterprise of all was the CIA's clandestine radio campaign launched against Guatemala seven weeks before the invasion."<sup>63</sup> Fifteen years later, National Security Archive researchers responded to a release of previously classified documents by claiming that the CIA considered assassinating Árbenz until the day of his resignation, when the success of the Voice rendered assassination unnecessary.<sup>64</sup> Cullather, however, disagreed. While working at the CIA, where he enjoyed unprecedented access to confidential materials, he wrote:

graffiti campaign is a poor showing for the CIA's most effortful program, but this assessment is less surprising in light of the unfavorable conditions for such a radio program at the time. To understand the Guatemalan context, it is necessary to recognize that "most people in Guatemala today are descended from the Maya Indians; many don't speak Spanish," and Guatemalans speak over twenty indigenous languages.<sup>67 68 69</sup> Despite the country's linguistic diversity, scripts for the Voice were prepared only in

<sup>61</sup> Phillips, D. A. (1982). *The Night Watch*. New York: Ballantine Books.

<sup>62</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>63</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>64</sup> Doyle, K., & Kornbluh, P. (n.d.). CIA and Assassinations: The Guatemala 1954 Documents. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB4/>

<sup>65</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>66</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>67</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 20). *Economic and Strategic Motives for Intervention; Coup in Guatemala*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>68</sup> Language data for Guatemala. (2020, February 10). Retrieved November 30, 2020, from <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/language-data-for-guatemala/>

<sup>69</sup> Sigel, N. (Director). (1983). *When the Mountains Tremble* [Video file]. New York, NY: New Yorker Films.

Spanish and English, and broadcasts occurred exclusively in Spanish.<sup>70 71</sup> Perhaps this outcome reflects the CIA's infamous inability to assess foreign contexts or betrays the CIA's inability to recruit indigenous speakers to their operation, but it more likely demonstrates the CIA's decision to target appeals to "the groups in Guatemala most likely to take action against the regime: the Army, conservative students, and landowners," who often belonged to the Spanish-speaking *Ladino* population.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to the country's linguistic diversity, radio appears unpromising in retrospect because only one-sixth of the country had access to a radio, and only one in fifty Guatemalans owned a radio receiver in 1954, though the Voice's target audience were more likely to possess a radio than the average Guatemalan.<sup>73 74</sup> The CIA had encountered a similar problem when it attempted to establish a radio propaganda program in China in 1951. While the CIA abandoned that earlier project upon learning that most Chinese radio owners were officials in the Communist party, a limited audience did not phase the CIA in Guatemala.<sup>75</sup> Because of their concentration in urban areas, the Voice's listeners may have shared radios with others, but public listening was probably less common for the Voice than for other programs due to its controversial content. Geography also conspired

against the Voice through tropical thunderstorms that disrupted broadcasts with static when the rainy season began in early May.<sup>76 77 78</sup>

Despite these unfavorable conditions for a radio program, the CIA remained bullish about the idea for several reasons. For one, radio, as opposed to written media, could reach the 75% of Guatemalans who were illiterate. Though illiteracy was most concentrated among Indians, a significant proportion of the Voice's target Ladino audience was illiterate as well.<sup>79</sup> A second reason for the CIA's radio mania was simply that radio propaganda had ostensibly played a critical role in its recent Iran operation, and the agency was eager to replicate that success.<sup>80</sup> Finally, the country's mountainous terrain made radio communication a more attractive option than media, which required land travel.

The debate over the Voice's significance remains partly inadjudicable due to the nature of the medium itself. The anonymity that attracted the CIA to radio propaganda was a double-edged machete: it precluded feedback on the extent of the Voice's listenership, such that the CIA "could not always measure progress, and it was difficult for even those close to PBSUCCESS to know what was happening, whether they were succeeding or failing, and why."<sup>81</sup>  
<sup>82</sup> However, the Voice was offered a glimpse of its

<sup>70</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>71</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> McIntosh, J. (1982). Radio and Revolution: The Importance of Broadcasting in Central America. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03064228208533430>

<sup>74</sup> CIA. (1954). Notes on Radio Broadcasting - Guatemala. Retrieved from [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000917063.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000917063.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>76</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>77</sup> Kinzer, Stephen. "Historical Roots of American Foreign Policy; Expansion Within North America; First Ventures Abroad; Barbary Wars." History of American Intervention. 10 Sept. 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Fraser, R. (1978). WBF - A Typical Ute. Retrieved November 29, 2020, from <http://www.pateplumaradio.com/genbroad/utes/wbf.htm>

<sup>79</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>80</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>81</sup> Arnold, L. (2018). *Language and Media*. Lecture presented at Sounds and Symbols: Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology.

<sup>82</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

listenership when the program responded to a government blackout in Guatemala City by beseeching residents to aid rebel pilots by putting out candles in tin cans. Phillips reported that “candles flickered in hundreds of courtyards”—a relatively unimpressive figure for a city of 180,000.<sup>83</sup> Over the next two days, both the government and the rebel forces respectively issued threats against those who lit candles and those who did not.

Following this exchange, “candles burned as never before in all parts of Guatemala City, including some in military camps,” indicating that the Voice’s programming did penetrate the capital.<sup>84</sup> The increase in candles is a particularly impressive testament to the rebels’ reputation in light of the free rider problem the candles presented: If you lit a candle on your patio, you exposed your household to the risk of government persecution. If, however, your neighbors had already set out candles of their own, you faced no incentive to do the same because their candles protected you against bombing as well. That residents of Guatemala City indulged the Voice’s requests, despite the risk of persecution and incentive to free ride, demonstrates the success the propaganda machine had found in reifying the rebellion in the minds of Guatemalans.

Al Haney impressed LINCOLN visitors with the elaborate flowcharts he had plastered across multiple walls at the headquarters, which categorized the operation’s activities into “political, paramilitary, psychological, logistics.” By the time the operation was set in motion, “final plans included three areas of action: propaganda, paramilitary, and political.”<sup>85 86</sup>

The distinctions between these categories were more fluid than what Haney’s diagrams perhaps suggested, and the Voice demonstrated their mutability. The primary difference between the propaganda initiative and the political “K Program” lay in their intended audiences. Early in the operation, propaganda efforts were premised on the notion that “the present state of things in the country is largely determined by intellectuals,” but George Tranger, Guatemala CIA Station Chief until April, eventually convinced his colleagues that propaganda “should be designed to (1) intensify anti-Communist, anti-government sedition and create a disposition to act; and (2) create dissonance, confusion, and FEAR in the enemy camp.”

The K Program, on the other hand, “aimed to undermine the Army’s loyalty to Árbenz and bring it over, whole or in part, to the side of the rebellion.”<sup>87</sup> The Voice bridged the gap between propaganda and politics, appealing to both civilians and military members. Like the air campaign, SHERWOOD also “linked the paramilitary and propaganda sides of the operation, enabling the rebels to strike directly at the government in full view of the entire city.” More directly, the Voice supported the paramilitary initiative by encouraging defections to Carlos Castillo Armas’ rebel forces, which in turn “served a psychological rather than a military function” to “intimidate Árbenz and incite an Army revolt.”<sup>88</sup>

The propaganda aspect of the Voice deserves further examination because this effort dramatically exposed the CIA’s hubris. On April 24, Deputy Director of Plans Frank Wisner predicted that “somewhere between six thousand and nineteen thousand”

<sup>83</sup> 51. Memorandum for the Record. (1953, September 11). Retrieved November 30, 2020, from <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d51>

<sup>84</sup> Phillips, D. A. (1982). *The Night Watch*. New York: Ballantine Books.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>87</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Guatemalans would respond to the propaganda effort by joining Armas. As it turned out, “in reality no Guatemalans would rebel.”<sup>89</sup> Despite this errant outcome, the Voice did manage to score one high-profile defection from the Guatemalan military. On June 5, Rodolfo Mendoza Azurdia, who had previously served as the Air Force’s Chief of Staff, fled to El Salvador in a Cessna, and the SHERWOOD team promptly tricked him into exhorting his Guatemalan colleagues to defect, which the SHERWOOD team recorded and broadcasted.<sup>90</sup> Though none took Mendoza up on his offer, Phillips celebrated Árbenz’s subsequent grounding of the Air Force as the achievement of a “major goal” for the Voice.<sup>91</sup> However, Kinzer and Schlesinger expose this ostensible windfall for Phillips as one of his convenient confabulations: Though Mendoza’s defection may have had a significant psychological effect on Árbenz, the Guatemalan president effectively “had no functioning Air Force” to begin with, so the Voice’s victory rang hollow.

A more nuanced argument in favor of SHERWOOD’s contributions suggests that holding the Guatemalan government’s actions fixed, the Voice’s record would seem unimpressive, but the government’s clumsy response amplified—so to speak—SHERWOOD’s impact. The government’s first error began two weeks after the Voice’s debut when the government initiated the three-week undertaking of replacing its own radio antenna. The Voice responded by strengthening

its own signal before May 22nd. How it managed to outpace the government’s infrastructure upgrade remains unclear but perhaps owes in part to the breadth of the Voice’s network of radio transmitters.

Historians have depicted the government’s effective concession of a media monopoly to the Voice as an “accident of timing,” but this narrative mischaracterizes the events: The Voice did not actually secure a monopoly in those weeks; the government station, TGW, returned to the air weeks before D-Day. Thus, the “accident” analysis erases the agency and foresight of the Árbenz administration. Though the government station was the most prominent in Guatemala at the time, during its hiatus the Voice still had to contend with twenty-seven other active stations, two of which were government-owned. Additionally, TGW was known to pressure other stations to censor content critical of the administration, which would have remained a possibility during its antenna upgrade.<sup>92</sup> While it may simply have neglected the threat that the Voice posed to its power, the government had already begun a crackdown on dissidents before the Voice went on the air, and by Phillips’ account, by the time TGW began its upgrade, “unrest became anxiety and, in some sectors, panic.”<sup>93</sup> <sup>94</sup> Rather than a glaring omission by the government in the midst of its frantic effort to suppress the resistance, TGW’s hiatus more likely represented a strategic attempt to compete with the Voice and an overconfident assessment of the Voice’s

<sup>83</sup> 51. Memorandum for the Record. (1953, September 11). Retrieved November 30, 2020, from <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54Guat/d51>

<sup>84</sup> Phillips, D. A. (1982). *The Night Watch*. New York: Ballantine Books.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>87</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Prados, J. (2009). *Safe for democracy: The secret wars of the CIA*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

<sup>90</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>91</sup> Phillips, D. A. (1982). *The Night Watch*. New York: Ballantine Books.

<sup>92</sup> CIA. (1954). Notes on Radio Broadcasting - Guatemala. Retrieved from [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000917063.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000917063.pdf)

<sup>93</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>94</sup> Phillips, D. A. (1982). *The Night Watch*. New York: Ballantine Books.

ability to grow its audience.

The government's second error lay in its unwise public reaction to the Voice, which inadvertently lent ethos to the radio program. Most notably, the Voice staged a government raid during a live broadcast, which duped an Árbenz commentator into confirming the veracity of the program's reports, which endowed the program with credibility.<sup>95</sup> Eager to replicate the success the CIA's radio program had found in Iran, the Voice benefited from the same missteps the Iranian government had committed in that previous operation by "unwittingly legitimizing the coup-plotter's propaganda."<sup>96</sup>

The government also failed to directly combat the Voice with the same temerity that the Voice exhibited in its targeted attacks on the Árbenz administration's legitimacy. The first CIA station broadcasted on the same wavelength as TGW, directly competing for listenership.<sup>97</sup> Multiple CIA stations were equipped with technology to jam government broadcasts, which they used to disrupt Árbenz' efforts to calm the nation during the invasion as well as his resignation speech. The Voice also leveraged its technology to record and replay sampled audio from TGW broadcasts and "snuggled" up to TGW's frequency, dissembling to listeners who had intended to tune in to the government program. Eventually, one thousand farmers took to the mountains to seek out the rebel transmitter, but they found nothing because many of the stations were located beyond Guatemala's borders, and one of the Guatemala transmitters

was located in the US Embassy.<sup>98</sup>

Though the Guatemalan government mishandled its radio battle against the Voice, the CIA radio program failed to live up to Phillips' glowing assessments. Phillips saw SHERWOOD as something of a flashlight, projecting the fearsome shadow of Armas' meager force across Guatemala. When Árbenz capitulated, Phillips attributed success to his efforts, but "in fact, Árbenz was deposed in a military coup, and neither the radio nor the air attacks had much to do with it."<sup>99</sup> The officers who replaced Árbenz were not scared of Armas' forces or even the shadowy myth of those forces the CIA had concocted; rather, they were responding to their fear of the real monster: the United States. Phillips and his CIA ilk failed to appreciate the motivations of the Guatemalan officers, preferring events that "seemed curious and magical."<sup>100</sup> An inability to learn from its mistakes has plagued the CIA since its inception when it neglected to institute a mechanism for reviewing its past operations.<sup>101</sup> On the occasions when the CIA has attempted to learn from the past, it has relied on the work of historians who reproduced the agency's own propaganda, rather than searching for classified documents it may have already destroyed indiscriminately.<sup>102</sup>

In light of these deficiencies, it is not surprising that a similar pattern, in which the US attributed its success in an operation to precisely the wrong factors, played out less than a decade later in the Cuban Missile Crisis. In this later operation, the US government came

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Roberts, M. (2012). Analysis of Radio Propaganda in the 1953 Iran Coup. Retrieved November 30, 2020, from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00210862.2012.726848>

<sup>97</sup> Schlesinger, S. C., & Kinzer, S. (1990). *Bitter fruit: The untold story of the American coup in Guatemala*. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>98</sup> Phillips, D. A. (1982). *The Night Watch*. New York: Ballantine Books.

<sup>99</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Shryock, R. W. (2005). The Intelligence Community Post-Mortem Program, 1973-1975. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/1977-09-01.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

to believe that the unflinching military threats had won the day, when in fact President Kennedy's back-room diplomacy deserved the credit for success.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Phillips, unaware of the developments in the Guatemalan military in the days before

Árbenz's resignation, happily bought into the "Agency legend" that radio propaganda bore responsibility for the victory, but contemporary analysis exposes SHERWOOD's underwhelming contribution.<sup>104</sup>

#### IV. Long-Term Effect of Intervention

In November 2020, protests continued to convulse Guatemala City in an uproar over government corruption that began last week in response to the latest government budget.<sup>105</sup> It is not difficult to establish a through-line from the coup that toppled Árbenz to the present unrest. Following Árbenz' deposition, an assortment of rulers rapidly cycled through power before Armas assumed the presidency. His ascendance was short lived, however, and his assassination in 1957 created a power vacuum, which the Guatemalan military readily filled.<sup>106</sup> In 1960, a failed coup marked the beginning of a genocidal civil war, which claimed 200,000 lives before its conclusion in 1996, though its legacy of repression and corruption persists, as evidenced by recent assassinations of indigenous leaders and the ongoing unrest in the capital.<sup>107 108</sup>

In 1954, Guatemala possessed significantly fewer radio receivers per capita than Cuba, Mexico, and

Costa Rica, but by the late 1960s, ninety private radio stations operated in Guatemala, and by the late 1980s, Guatemala boasted one of the most developed radio broadcasting systems in Central America.<sup>109</sup> Radio played an important role throughout the Guatemalan Civil War as military dictators transmitted their messages over the airwaves and Campesinos organized educational radio programs to promote literacy. On multiple occasions, guerillas took over large commercial stations to broadcast to a national audience. The military responded to the rebels' radio presence with violence, including "raids, equipment seizures, interrogations, threats, kidnappings, disappearances, and murders."<sup>110 111</sup> Ríos Montt, the notorious dictator who ruled Guatemala in the early 80s, was himself the host of a weekly Evangelical radio show. The prominence of radio media and the military's repression of community programs during the conflict attest to SHERWOOD's enduring influence.

<sup>103</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 9). *Transition from Eisenhower to Kennedy; Rise of Cuba; Bay of Pigs Invasion; Cuban Missile Crisis*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Abbott, J. (2020, November 28). 'We are fed up': Guatemalans continue anti-government protests. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/28/guatemalans-return-to-protest-as-anger-at-government-persists>

<sup>106</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

<sup>107</sup> PBS. (2011, March 07). Timeline: Guatemala's Brutal Civil War. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from [https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/lat-in\\_america-jan-june11-timeline\\_03-07](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/lat-in_america-jan-june11-timeline_03-07)

<sup>108</sup> Abbott, J. (2018, July 22). The Assassinations of Indigenous Leaders in Guatemala Trigger Fear as Political Cycle Begins. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://truthout.org/articles/assassinations-of-indigenous-leaders-in-guatemala-trigger-fear/>

<sup>109</sup> CIA. (1954). Notes on Radio Broadcasting - Guatemala. Retrieved from [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000917063.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000917063.pdf)

<sup>110</sup> Moore, D. (1989). The Sociolinguistics of Guatemalan Indian Languages and the Effect on Radio Broadcasting - Part Two. Retrieved November 30, 2020, from <http://www.pateplumaradio.com/central/guatemala/guatlg2.html>

<sup>111</sup> Lauer, P. W. (2017). Community Radio in Guatemala: A Half-Century of Resistance in the Face of Repression. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2094&context=honorstheses>

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

When the civil war concluded in 1996, military repression of community radio seamlessly gave way to government criminalization with the passage of a Telecommunications Law that auctioned off radio frequencies to the highest bidder and imposed astronomical fines on stations that continued to operate without a license. In 2008, Government raids on unlicensed stations which were legalized in an extension of the repression of the civil war.<sup>113</sup> The initial broadcasting law, passed the year after Árbenz left office, mandated that all radio programming occur in Spanish, so by the late 1980s only a single commercial station used an indigenous language in its broadcasts, and TGW broadcasted exclusively in Spanish. Meanwhile, government stations offered programming in indigenous languages in Peru and Bolivia, both countries with sizable Indian populations, indicating the unique relationship between government repression and radio media that had developed in Guatemala. Today, Spanish-speaking stations continue to dominate the commercial radio landscape by pricing-out community stations that cannot afford to bid for a license.<sup>114</sup> In a reminder of the United States' ongoing imperialist influence in Latin America, the Telecommunications Law and its consequent denial of the cultural media rights found in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People are modeled after the neoliberal auction policies that the US Federal Communications Commission pioneered in 1994.<sup>115 116</sup>

While the most dramatic long-term effects of Operation SUCCESS pertain to Guatemala, in the shorter term, the intervention left an enduring impression on the CIA as well. Following its valorization of SHERWOOD, in 1960, the CIA continued to incorporate radio propaganda in its covert actions. In Indonesia in 1958, the CIA financed a radio station which rebels used to broadcast their declaration of a revolutionary government.<sup>117</sup> Eager to employ the creative approaches that had characterized SHERWOOD, the Technical Services Division even went so far as to produce "Happy Days," a pornographic film featuring an actor who resembled Indonesian President Sukarno.<sup>118</sup> The CIA retired from the pornography industry after Sukarno publicly requested hundreds of copies to screen in Indonesian theatres, but the CIA maintained its emphasis on radio in subsequent interventions. In 1960, the agency issued "'black' broadcasts from a radio station in nearby Brazzaville, across the border in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to encourage a revolt against [Patrice] Lumumba."<sup>119</sup> Similarly, "as originally conceived," the Cuban Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 "would contain a radio propaganda operation like SHERWOOD," though this operation resulted in disaster, which underscored the lesson that the CIA should have learned in Guatemala: A radio station does not a coup make.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Lauer, P. W. (2017). Community Radio in Guatemala: A Half-Century of Resistance in the Face of Repression. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2094&context=honorstheses>

<sup>114</sup> Olson, J. (2019). In Guatemala, Finding a Voice in Indigenous Community Radio. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://nacla.org/news/2019/07/11/guatemala-finding-voice-indigenous-community-radio>

<sup>115</sup> Auctions. (n.d.). Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://www.fcc.gov/auctions>

<sup>116</sup> Lauer, P. W. (2017). Community Radio in Guatemala: A Half-Century of Resistance in the Face of Repression. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2094&context=honorstheses>

<sup>117</sup> Weiner, T. (2011). Legacy of ashes: The history of the CIA. Retrieved December 01, 2020, from <https://www.amazon.com/Legacy-Ashes-History-Tim-Weiner/dp/0307389006>

<sup>118</sup> Kinzer, S. (2020, October 22). *Emergence of Neutralism; Bandung Conference; Fomenting Civil War in Indonesia*. Lecture presented at History of American Intervention.

<sup>119</sup> Robarge, D. (2014). CIA's Covert Operations in the Congo, 1960–1968: Insights from Newly Declassified Documents. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol-58-no-3/pdfs-vol-58-no-3/Robarge-FRUS%20and%20the%20US%20in%20Congo-1960-68-12Sep2014.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> Cullather, N., & Gleijeses, P. (2014). *Secret History The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

## V. Conclusion

The history of the CIA intervention in Guatemala in 1954 cannot be divorced from the context of US imperialism in Latin America and Cold War paranoia in which it occurred. A legacy of colonial ambitions dating back to Thomas Jefferson's designs on Cuban annexation manifested in Guatemala in the form of the United Fruit Company. Blinded by the lens of Cold War polarization, decision-makers in the US government pronounced Árbenz a communist threat for a land reform policy that the US administration had inspired less than twenty years prior. These factors dovetailed in an intervention that destabilized Guatemala and continues to haunt the country today. The US began radio transmission to Latin America

in 1941, the same year that Robert Sherwood became the first director of the Foreign Information Service. The following year heralded the debut of Sherwood's international radio news program Voice of America, which had become a mouthpiece of Cold War propaganda by 1954. In this context, the CIA took for granted the strategic value of radio propaganda for covert actions, just as it assumed the communist politics of the Árbenz administration. Failing to accurately assess SHERWOOD's contributions in Guatemala, the CIA then exported its model of radio propaganda to interventions in subsequent countries.

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