



Colombia's Cold War: The Pursuit of Economic Development and the Emergence of Drug Trafficking, 1958-1979

Oliver Horn

AP Photo/William Fernando Martinez

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9 • 2:00 PM • Register to attend at: <https://bit.ly/2IDAvVi>

This talk will examine the causes and consequences of Colombia's sudden and unprecedented emergence as a global epicenter of illicit drug production and export during the height of the Cold War in Latin America. This transformation of Colombia's political economy unfolded under the guidance of the United States. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Colombia was among the largest recipients of U.S. economic assistance both within Latin America and worldwide. Whereas U.S. aid in other parts of Latin America was designed to promote anticommunism, in Colombia the United States sought to transform the country into a model of economic development through the embrace of free-market reforms and export diversification. This strategy worked, but illicit drugs became the new forms of production. By the early 1970s, marijuana and cocaine surpassed coffee as Colombia's leading exports and ushered in the largest economic boom for the country in the twentieth century. These dynamics dramatically refashioned both conditions within Colombia as well as the country's relationship with the United States. Colombia experienced a surge of inequality, crime, and insurgency. The U.S. government, in turn, became hostile to the same economic developments it had initially promoted, leading to a new era of U.S. intervention through the War on Drugs.

Oliver Horn received his doctorate from Georgetown University in 2018. His research focuses on U.S.-Colombian relations, economic development, and drug trafficking during the Cold War. His dissertation, "From Model to Menace: U.S. Foreign Aid, Development, and Drugs in Cold War Colombia, 1956-1978," challenges the existing narrative that drugs and violence were endemic to Colombia and instead illustrates that these dynamics arose in response to the projection of U.S. influence within the country during the Cold War. Drawing on sources from twelve archives in Colombia and the United States, his research traces how U.S. efforts to promote free-market reforms and economic diversification within Colombia also fomented deepening inequality, widespread drug trafficking, and renewed insurgency. These issues subsequently became the fulcrum of U.S.-Colombian relations and, more broadly, a hallmark of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century globalization. He is currently working on a book manuscript based on his dissertation. He has won support for his research from a number of organizations, including the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations, the Latin American Studies Association, and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation. Prior to his affiliation at the LAll, he taught Latin American history and international relations at Western Carolina University. He is the co-founder and principal of Sunmount Consulting, a historical consulting company.



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