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Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its
Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954 (review)

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Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954. By Nick Cullather; with a new introduction by the author and an afterword by Piero Gleijeses. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. Pp. xv, 142, xl. Appendices. Photographs. Maps. Bibliography. Index. \$39.50 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

In 1992, with the Cold War over, the Central Intelligence Agency announced a more open policy regarding the records of its covert activities. In fact, the CIA's obsession with secrecy kept most of its documents classified. Nevertheless, among the declassified materials released during the 1990s was Nicholas Cullather's 1994 *Operation PBSUCCESS: The United States and Guatemala, 1952-1954*, a secret report on CIA involvement in the 1954 overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz. The author was a specialist on U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. His 1992 dissertation, *Illusions of Influence: The Political Economy of United States-Philippine Relations, 1942-1966* (Stanford University Press, 1994), appeared the same year as his secret CIA report. This new edition of the CIA account includes a new introduction by the author and an enlightening "Afterword" by Piero Gleijeses.

The declassification of this report reveals some new information on the Guatemalan episode, but it adds relatively little to what we already knew from earlier works on the subject, including but not limited to Ronald Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*; Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*; Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*; and several articles by Jim Handy. The large-scale censoring in the volume, however, has excised much detail from Cullather's original report. A passage in the first chapter offers an example of how annoying this can be: "Agency records, however, do not document the conduct of operation, the [] how agency operatives construct the problem, what methods and objectives they pursued, and what aspects of the operations they believed led to success. They permit speculation on [] whether misconceptions about PBSUCCESS led overconfident operatives to plan the Bay of Pigs" (p. 8). Throughout the report specific names, places, and other details are missing. In at least one place the overzealous CIA censors even blanked out portions of a quotation from a published scholarly article: "The language, arguments, and techniques of the Arbenz episode were used in Cuba in the early 1960s, [in Brazil in 1964,] in the Dominican Republic in 1965, and in [Chile in 1973]" (pp. 110-11). The quotation is from Marlise Simmons, "Guatemala: The Coming Danger," *Foreign Policy* 43 (Summer 1981), p. 94. Brackets indicate the portions excised in the Cullather report.

Cullather is now an associate professor at the University of Indiana. His year with the CIA produced an informative and competent report. Although it is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, and in places reveals a shallow understanding of Guatemalan history, it is valuable for its revelations regarding the planning of the operation and the interaction between various U.S. governmental agencies during the Eisenhower years. It exposes many of the problems associated with the project and the fact that it was not as smooth an operation as some accounts have suggested. It also includes what Cullather calls a "do-it-yourself guide to political murder,"

entitled "CIA and Guatemalan Assassination Proposals, 1952-1954," written by CIA historian Gerald Haines in 1995, along with a memo referring to a six-page list of Communists targeted "for disposal" by the Junta following the overthrow of Arbenz (pp. 137-42).

Gleijeses's "Afterword," refreshingly free of the censors' excisions, relates the 1954 intervention to Guatemala's sordid and bloody history since that date, during which "fear and hatred, not a sense of common purpose, unite the ten million Guatemalans" (p. xix). The 1954 episode gave birth to thirty years of brutal military rule which the U.S. compounded with its support of a counterinsurgency effort that left hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans dead, maimed, or homeless. The return of civilian government and serious investigation into the atrocities committed by the Guatemalan military were hopeful signs in the 1990s, but in Gleijeses' words, the army, "has evolved into drug-trafficking, kidnapping, and smuggling. . . . Guatemala is still paying for the American 'success'" (p. xxxii).

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