

'The Real Road to Development?' The Americas between Reform, Revolution, and Reaction, 1955-65

John F. Kennedy himself had heralded the 1960s as a 'decade of development' and had thus provided one of the key concepts of the decade. But how, Latin Americans asked themselves, were they going to achieve this development? Consequently, a battle erupted on the 'real road to development', as Ernesto Che Guevara famously phrased in 1961, and whether reform, revolution or modernisation theory, as advocated by Washington, would provide the solution.

This research project examines these emerging ideas of progress, modernity, and development from 1955, the conference at Bandung paving the way to the Non-Aligned Movement, until 1964, when the Brazilian coup d'état virtually ended the Brazilian attempt to formulate a third way. During this period, Latin America not only grappled with social and political challenges, but also had to come to terms with their place in a new world order and the subsequent downgrading of their geostrategic importance to the United States.

The project pivots around two nation-states, Cuba and Brazil, and their subsequent interpretation of development narratives. In the early 1960s, both Cuba and Brazil illustrated the Latin American struggle on how to achieve social and economic progress, and the suitability of distinct economic developmental frameworks. Each espoused a distinctive model of development; each in consequence, was met with stiff US resistance. Furthermore, this project equally includes the English Caribbean and how narratives of social progress impacted on their first years of self-rule and national identity-construction. Lastly, it also enquires how Latin American visions were diffused and received in the wider context of the Third World, and particularly in the Non-Aligned Bloc, and how they interlinked with anti-colonial discourses.

By transcending traditional disciplinary barriers and bridging the academic division between North and South America, a distinct narrative evolves, one that allows us to see that Latin American decision-makers had agency within an asymmetrical framework. Next to official sources, such as documents from Foreign Ministries, and OAS documents, this project also includes non-official sources, such as magazines and newspapers to trace wider public debates. Through the use of sources in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, a multi-lingual perspective emerges that facilitates an inter-disciplinary, global vision on how these ideas emerged, diffused, and inform debates to this day.