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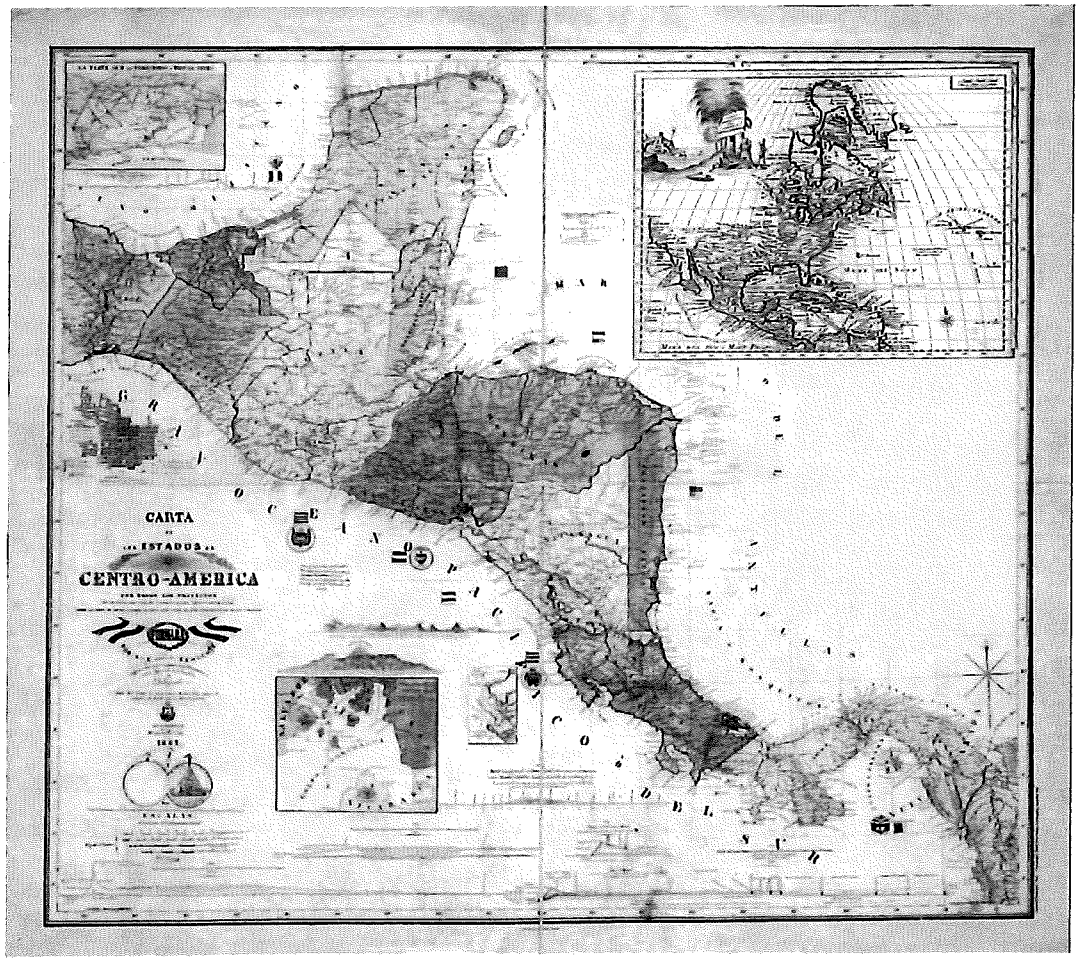
The Colonial Legacies of Central American Studies: Imaginary Approaches to Postcolonial Issues

Guest Editor: *Arturo Arias, University of California, Merced*



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Articles

Marking Space: Interpreting Central American-American Spaces in the U.S. Landscape

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In 1970, a historical commission in Nashville, Tennessee, erected a plaque to mark the former presence of William Walker, a monumental figure in the history of relations between the United States and Central America. In the 1840s, Walker worked in Nashville as a doctor, lawyer, and journalist, prior to his military invasion of Mexico in 1853 and his takeover of Nicaragua in 1855. A series of biographies pay homage to Walker's brash exploits, which finally came to an end with his execution in Honduras in 1860 (Greene; Rosengarten; Scroggs). This official marker dedicated to the "Grey-eyed Man of Destiny," tacitly expressed admiration for Walker's heroism and spirit of adventure. Easily bypassed, this landmark is amongst a handful of official sites that honor American pluck and obliquely commemorate U.S. intervention and empire in Central America.

Brief references to U.S. empire in Central America have surfaced in various historical sites across the country. For instance, at the University of Alabama, a 1910 plaque to Confederate General and U.S. Senator John Tyler Morgan (1824-1907), paid tribute to Morgan's nickname, "'Canal Morgan' for his strong support of a canal across Central America." On the West Coast, in Sacramento, California, the historical preservation of a ship anchor belonging to the U.S.S. Sacramento not only described how the 226-foot gunboat served in two world wars, but also became part of the "banana fleet" in Central America. And if one travels to the Southwest United States, signage for a preserved RC-12G airplane in Arizona explains how it was "deployed to Honduras in 1986 to support U. S. Southern Command and Task Force BRAVO in counterinsurgency and counterdrug operations for the next nine years" (Historical Marker Database). A variety of U.S. historical sites underscore the flexing of U.S. power in Central America as an everyday aspect of American life.

Official landmarks, however, almost never document the experiences of Central Americans living in the United States. There are more recent exceptions: In 2012, Los Angeles merchants launched a series of signs that marked the Pico-Union neighborhood just south of downtown as "The Salvadoran Community Corridor" (Staff and News Service). In 2005, the Cultural Tourism organization of Washington, D.C., launched the "Adams Morgan Heritage Trail" with signs incorporating the history of the Latino community. Ac-

cording to one of these simple markers, "in the 1950s, political turmoil and economic hardship brought Puerto Ricans and Cubans, followed later by South and Central Americans – particularly Salvadorans and Nicaraguans" (Historical Marker Database). A similar series of signs erected around the same time in the nearby Mount Pleasant neighborhood echoed this language. These signs explained migrations as a product of turmoil abroad, but avoided any reference to U.S. intervention as a major factor in these community formations. Yet, as sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut has argued, "Migration patterns are rooted in historical relationships established between the United States and the principal sending countries—that is, the size and source of new immigrant communities in the United States today is directly if variously related to the history of American military, political, economic, and cultural involvement and intervention in the sending countries..." (Rumbaut 588). Silences about the political origins of these migrations helps smooth over some of the less glorious elements of U.S. empire and exceptionalism.

In part, the lack of historic sites dedicated to Central Americans reflects the sparse number of Latino historic sites in the nation in general (National Park Service 2012, 2013). In recent decades, scholars working in public history have pushed to incorporate marginalized communities into landmarks, memorials, and public spaces in order to challenge top-down histories and leverage more equitable representation (Hayden; Loewen; National Park Service 2013). Demanding more historical markers is a way of challenging official absences, but this approach struggles against the inherent limitations of historical markers, which inevitably lack complexity and sanitize any form of violence. Even sites that commemorate dark events, such as war and slavery, do so, as Kenneth Foote observed, with an air of sanctification. As James Loewen wrote, "Americans like to remember only the positive things, and communities like to publicize the great things that happened in them" (Loewen 15). The histories that vanish from the landscape suffer what Foote called obliteration and what Lowen described as historical amnesia (Foote; Loewen). I examine how this purposeful amnesia has perpetuated the subaltern status of Central American histories in the public histories of the United States.

My objective is not to advocate for more landmarks, but to denaturalize the absence of official historical markers and to point out the ways that the invisibility of Central American lives is endemic and structural to the imperial United States. As Arturo Arias has argued, "the Central American population remains nearly invisible within the imaginary confines of what constitutes the multi-cultural landscape of the United States" (Arias 170). He cites multiple factors conferring this invisibility, including the greater visibility of other Latinos, the complex diversity of Central Americans, and the need to fit in and maintain safety. Arias and others have illustrated the postcolonial status of Central Americans living in the United States. My

work draws on these analyses and on scholarship in Public History, Cultural Geography, and American Studies. I focus on how Central Americans have made physical and cultural imprints on the United States, whether or not there is any demarcation of their presence. In unveiling these disappeared narratives in the built environment, I show the complexity of public interpretations of "Central American-American" histories in a nation invested in their invisibility.

To narrow my scope, I focus on spatial changes in the United States in the 1980s in tandem with increased migration from Central America. While I prefer not to monumentalize the 1980s at the expense of a longer trajectory of migration, the dramatic increase of Central American migrants during that decade had a material impact on the United States that merits visibility. My approach encompasses not just the physical structures of migrants, but the physical structures responsive to that migration. As Sarah Lynn Lopez pointed out, "it is difficult to research how migrants shape the built environment when many of them do not have the necessary means to build in American cities" (Lopez 11). Thus, in addition to acknowledging the importance of Central American migration patterns and neighborhoods, I also turn to the expansion of U.S. government institutions as emblematic of Central American experiences in the United States.

I analyze three particular changes in the U.S. landscape: First, the construction of covert spaces dedicated to managing Central American lives at home and abroad; second, the emergence of governmental spaces to enforce and control Central American migration; and third, the creation of activist and community spaces committed to humanitarianism, civil rights, and community solidarity. The sometimes purposeful invisibility of these spaces, the lack of permanence, and the presumptions of everydayness contribute to absences in the historical record.

In this article, I offer a sweeping counter-narrative to this obliteration, showing the ways that Central American histories are interwoven into the built environment of the United States. Yet, in taking on this charge, I acknowledge Geographer James D. Sidaway's observation that "any 'mapping' of the 'postcolonial' is a problematic or contradictory project," since the built environment is itself a reflection of U.S. empire (Sidaway 592). Turning to the built environment as a tool to document postcolonial subjects is a project laden with challenges. Thus, my work is not an easy corrective, but an illustration of these contradictions. My emphasis is not on what physically remains, but on the ways that interpreting these spaces presents difficult and unpopular lessons in U.S. history and perpetuates the invisibility of Central American-American lives in the United States.

The Landscape of Covert Operations

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 intensified U.S. covert operations in Central America. According to Reagan, "Central America, is simply too close, and the strategic stakes are too high, for us to ignore the danger of governments seizing power there with ideological and military ties to the Soviet Union" (Reagan 372). Reagan's commitment to enforcing U.S. authority in Latin America prompted open and covert support of political organizations that eschewed communism, regardless of whether they also engaged in abuses of human rights or attained power illegitimately. As Sociologist Douglas Porpora wrote, "It is true that the United States did not itself carry out the systematic murder in any of these countries. Yet it put the bullets and guns in the hands of the murderers, trained the murderers how to use them, and organized them for that end."[1] The Reagan administration's alliances not only spurred the growth of covert-oriented institutions that economically and militarily supported violent suppression in the region, but they also directly and indirectly facilitated the deaths of thousands.

In El Salvador, activists created the Monument to Truth and Memory to mourn and to mark the bloodshed into the nation's memory. Conceived of as a list of names in the vein of the U.S. Vietnam War Memorial, the list of 30,000 is not quite half the 75,000 plus deaths recorded by The United Nations Truth Commission. Ana Patricia Rodríguez has discussed how the Salvadoran government resisted this memorial and all other efforts to mourn the state-sanctioned violence of the 1970s and '80s (Rodríguez 2008 200; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 88). Nonetheless, the memorial garnered support and earned a space in the nation's capital, which marked the epicenter of the violence.

While the U.S. played a role in this violence, the absence of bloodshed on U.S. soil makes any similar memorial unlikely. The spatial distance from the violence isolated the U.S. landscape. The most relevant sites to commemorate this history also worked hardest to be invisible, or at the very least, inscrutable, and rarely welcomed public access. Sites of military planning and transnational governmental operations serve as key spaces to interpret the use of force at home and abroad, and yet the nature of these spaces is to veil such actions and curtail any critique. U.S. covert operations, by definition, seek not to be documented, contrary to interpretative practices in public history.

Nonetheless, Cold War covert activities propelled the need for governmental and clandestine spaces. Andrew Friedman has documented how U.S. foreign interests from the 1950s to the 1980s propelled massive infrastructure around the nation's capital in Virginia. The expansion of government agencies, including the Pentagon, the State Department, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), testify to this history. But Friedman has elaborated even further on how the built environs of Virginia reverberated from this cultural change, propelling the creation of edge-city suburban settlements, sundry

clandestine corporations, shell corporations, and anonymous meeting sites. In particular, Friedman showed how the Key Bridge and Crystal City Marriott Hotels became key spaces for plotting U.S. activities in Central America. According to Friedman, "the details of contra hotel stays and restaurant meetings in Northern Virginia read like a kind of counterinsurgency *Zagat's Guide*" (Friedman 242). These purposefully unmarked spaces in the United States became integral to the violence in Central America.

The White House, the Pentagon, the State Department, the National Security Council, the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) supported interventions in Central America, but their activities were so wide-reaching and actively hidden that they will never be predominantly interpreted for these actions. The strong presence of these national institutions in Washington, D.C., opens the possibility for a more complex interpretation of Central American migration to the Adams Morgan and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods, given that many of the city's politicos engineered the exile and deportation of these new migrants. As Anthropologist David Pedersen wrote, "While U.S. national security justified over $1 billion in aid to the Salvadoran military since the late 1970s, over the same time period thousands of people fled the civil war and surreptitiously traveled to the DC area, moving into the poorer areas of Mount Pleasant, Adams Mill and Columbia Heights" (Pedersen 418). The expanding defense and high-tech industries produced jobs, including a low-wage service economy, which helped support this migration (Pedersen 418). Rodriguez discussed the ways that this expanding Salvadoran community became an extension of El Salvador, or the metaphoric Departamento 15—a fifteenth state or province encompassing the global Salvadoran diaspora (Rodriguez 2009 167-194). Interpreting the material presence of this community in the nation's capital means confronting the complicity of U.S. foreign policy in the creation of these and other barrios.

Across the country, the growth of refugee centers and solidarity networks provided much-needed assistance to displaced migrants. They also came under U.S. surveillance. Ross Gelbspan chronicled the Reagan administration's surveillance of the U.S.-based Central American sanctuary movement, citing extensive efforts by the FBI, the CIA, the State Department, and the National Security Council, to intimidate and discredit activists offering help to migrants. Gelbspan described the FBI's interrelationship with the National Guard of El Salvador and the ways their communications impacted Salvadoran refugees in the United States:

> While Salvadoran intelligence officials helped the Bureau target U.S. groups by providing falsified material to implicate them in illegal activities, the Bureau, in turn, entered into an intelligence-sharing relationship with Miami-based Salvadorans who had organized right-wing Salvadoran activists into a secret intelligence-gathering network inside

> the United States. That collaboration resulted in, among other things, the harassment and surveillance of left-wing Salvadorans who had fled to the United States. In return, FBI agents used their access to records of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to provide the Salvadoran security forces with the names and flight numbers of Salvadoran refugees who had entered the U.S. illegally only to be denied asylum and deported back to El Salvador. Although their numbers cannot be verified, it seems clear that many of those refugees were met, surveilled and, in a number of cases, assassinated on their return (Gelbspan 15).

As Gelbspan showed, not only did migrants struggle to gain legal status to be in the United States, but inevitably they realized that any critique could inspire retribution, especially in terms of immigration status. Activists who protested U.S. authority became agents of terrorism, regardless of how ethical or church-based their critique. Gelbspan provided multiple accounts of unsolved office break-ins and intimidation tactics, focusing especially on the Dallas FBI field office strategies to undermine the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). He also showed how contact lists for assistance agencies and church groups became vital information for FBI agents to track sympathizers and implement intimidation tactics (Gelbspan 60). Marking the CISPES and FBI offices in Dallas, and their counterpart offices across the nation, not only spotlights this risky activism, but also unveils questionable tactics of government surveillance.

Military bases also become important sites to consider U.S. policies. In the 1980s, the expansion of covert operations propelled the growth of military bases around the globe. The School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, was the most famous of a number of U.S. military schools with operations dedicated to training Latin American officers (Gill 9). Initially founded in Panama in 1946, the termination of Panama Canal treaties and evolving strategic interests prompted U.S. authorities to move the school to Georgia in 1984. Georgia's support for the School of the Americas set forth a physical tie that resonated with the state's Latino demographic growth. *The New York Times* reported on the school's relocation as part of its "basic purpose of which is to build ties between the United States and Latin America" and "to expose Latin American officers and their families to life in the United States, largely by introducing them to civilian families in the surrounding community" (Halloran). Official descriptions of the school echoed the language of study abroad programs and minimized its thrust as a base of operations for training Latin American military officials.

The suburban, almost rural location of the school contributed to its purposeful invisibility, though the school is otherwise an ideal site to examine the intersecting politics of the United States and Central America. Anthropologist

Lesley Gill reported on how the 1990s release of a list of 60,000 graduates from the School of Americas "revealed the names of some of the hemisphere's most notorious dictators, death squad operatives, and assassins ... For example, ten graduates participated in the massacre of nearly one thousand people in the Salvadoran village of El Mozote, and two others stood accused of the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero, after he pleaded with soldiers to stop killing their own people" (Gill 137). Protestors seized on this history and began to make annual pilgrimages to the school to illuminate U.S.-sponsored human rights violations. These protests undermined the intentional obscurity of the school and launched its closure. Now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, the institute seeks to remove any physical trace of this violent history, akin to other practices of historical obliteration.

Florida offers a variety of sites that illustrate the complexity of Central American-American history. While the majority of Central American migrants in the 1980s appeared in media accounts as poor and undocumented, the United States also served as an important base for displaced Central American elites. Various cities, but especially D.C. and Miami, became key spaces for an exiled elite. Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza Debayle, a graduate of West Point, returned to the land of his alma mater immediately upon his overthrow by the Sandinistas in 1979. As historian Javier Galván wrote, "he was the third Somoza serving as president in the family dictatorship, and he was by far the most violent and sinister of them all. The levels of social repression, targeted killings, overt censorship of the press, and the overall national violence reached unprecedented heights as he tried to hang on to political power, which provided the venue to continue with his insatiable appetite for personal wealth" (Galván 113). On July 17, 1979, no longer able to retain authority, Somoza fled, but not before exhuming his father's body from the family crypt in Managua. The two flew together to Miami, where the senior Somoza was reinterred in a new family crypt (Paige 174). Although the living Somoza carried out his last few years prior to his assassination in Paraguay, the presence of the Somoza Mausoleum in Miami expresses the U.S. support accorded to the family's lengthy reign of terror.

Not unlike Miami's militant Cuba Lobby, conservative Salvadoran and Nicaraguan networks developed various spaces in Miami to support counter-insurgency actions (Erlich). Specifically, some Miami Salvadorans organized against the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) in El Salvador, while some Nicaraguan exiles funded counterrevolutionary mercenaries, more famously known as the Contras, to overthrow the Sandinistas. U.S. officials either ignored or supported these activities. Much of the initial Contra funding may have stemmed from the vacuuming of Nicaragua's finances in the wake of the Sandinista revolution. According to Holly Sklar, "More than $500 million disappeared in capital flight to the Caymans, Miami and other money sanctuaries. To top it off, the Somozas loot-

ed the national treasury and left behind a foreign debt of $1.6 billion. A classified U.S. intelligence report put the Somoza family wealth at $900 million, more than half the national debt" (Sklar 36). While the nation of Nicaragua struggled to get out of debt, the Nicaraguan exile community helped fund Contra training camps, with one camp just a short hop away from the Miami airport (Sklar 75). This camp site provides a meaningful counter-narrative to the training camps for Sandinista soldiers in the San Francisco Bay Area; it also foreshadows the illicit U.S. support that precipitated the Iran-Contragate scandal (Sklar 75; Cordova 2010).

Covert activities abroad inspired covert activities at home. The growth of the military-industrial complex, the creation of strategic schools for foreign officers, the cultivation and subsequent fundraising from elite migrant communities, and the silencing of any opposition reflected the strategic priorities of the Reagan administration. These histories are interwoven into the built environment of the United States, whether or not they are interpreted as such. Recognizing the force of U.S. interests abroad is relevant to understanding the domestic politics of Central American-American lives. Nowhere was this more evident than in the questionable and even unlawful immigration process enacted by U.S. authorities over the course of the 1980s.

The Landscape of Immigration

Violence and economic instability inspired many Central Americans to emigrate, but the quest to access legal status in the United States was not just overtly difficult, but covertly determined by political biases. Robert Kahn explained how the U.S. "encouraged Nicaraguans to settle here, regardless of the weakness of their claims to political asylum. These same officials directed that Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees with solid claims for asylum be imprisoned, denied asylum, and deported" (Kahn 1). In other words, Nicaraguans gained entry because they were fleeing communism, while Salvadorans and Guatemalans were blocked as communist revolutionaries fleeing U.S. supported regimes. Legal entry was so unlikely for Salvadorans and Guatemalans that illegal entry became the safest option. In 1986, the Miami INS declared an end to all deportations of Nicaraguans, while the national imperative to limit immigration spurred the arrest of thousands of undocumented Salvadorans and Guatemalans throughout the country (Kahn 19).

The 1980 Refugee Act offered one pivotal exception for hopeful migrants in its declaration that anyone who could document "a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" could seek the coveted status of political asylum. However, documenting this status proved challenging. The 1980 Refugee Act protected anyone seeking freedom from political persecution, no matter the belief, but immigration agents consistently denied

entry to migrants whose views were presumed discordant with U.S. policies abroad. Documented instead as "economic migrants," authorities inevitably denied entry.[2]

Immigration activities in Texas spotlight these inequitable immigration policies. In South Texas, the 1980 Refugee Act exemption proved impossible. For instance, the law offices of Proyecto Libertad "represented more than 6,000 asylum applicants from 1982 to 1986 without winning a single case" (Kahn 20). Most of these applicants awaited denials in prisons because a 1981 ruling required detaining all undocumented migrants seeking amnesty until the courts resolved their case. Recollecting his experiences as an immigration lawyer in South Texas, Kahn wrote:

> It was impossible for a Salvadoran in a U.S. immigration prison to win political asylum in the United States until the Iran-Contra scandal broke. ... All an immigration attorney could do was delay deportation or try to get clients out of jail. So the immigration prisons filled up with Salvadorans and Guatemalans who were willing to stay in jail in the United States – anything to avoid being deported. With no place to put newly arrested refugees, the Border Patrol and INS began systematically denying Salvadorans the right to legal counsel—by threats, lies, beatings, sexual abuse, drugs, and occasionally by torture—anything to get a refugee to sign INS form I-274, which waives the right to seek asylum and requests 'voluntary repatriation' to Central America (Kahn 16).

Despite the abuses of power, immigration policy propelled demand for more prisons (Kahn 16-20). Immigration law offices appeared across the country, most with good intentions, though some took advantage of their vulnerable clients. The necessary number of law offices, immigration prisons, and government offices produced material changes in the built environment, though these space never gained landmark status.

As a critical space to halt immigration, the U.S. Mexico-Border became home to an ever-expanding and frequently outsourced immigration prison system. Contracted by the U.S. Justice Department, Corrections Corporation of America opened the Laredo, Texas, immigration prison in 1985. The new prison had the questionable distinction of being "the first U.S. immigration prison built to imprison infants and children." Louisiana opened its Oakdale prison in 1986 to great local enthusiasm because it meant jobs and promised "a recession-proof industry," according to Oakdale's mayor. The Port Isabel Service and Processing Center near Brownsville, Texas, grew from a capacity of 236 in 1977 to 10,000 by 1988. Part of a dark twist in the site's history was that it also had served as an "International Police Academy" to train foreign officers, including Salvadoran death squad leader Roberto D'Aubuisson (Kahn 15, 53-54). Another prison in Florence, Arizona, used a space origi-

nally created for Japanese internment. These spaces, both governmental and privatized, became holding cells for the processing and denial of migrants.

In the late 1980s, when prison space and funds were depleted, the INS opted to release migrants to a cordoned area of the lower Rio Grande Valley, leaving them to fend for their own food and shelter. As one watchdog group reported, "Hundreds were staying in makeshift camps in fields, occupying abandoned buildings, and overwhelming church shelters. Their living conditions became increasingly cramped, uncomfortable, and unsanitary" (U.S. Committee 3). In Brownsville, migrants sought shelter at the nonprofit Casa Romero, the abandoned Amber Motel, and on the streets (Kahn 192). Marking these spaces provides a generative, if disillusioning, narrative in the history of U.S. immigration.

Many U.S. citizens fought these policies and participated in the larger sanctuary movement across the country. In 1985, church activists in Tucson, Arizona, protested their arrest for sheltering undocumented refugees by issuing a lawsuit against the U.S. Attorney General. Church leaders argued for the rights of churches to serve as safe havens for refugees. Though they did not win the case (American Baptist Church v. Thornburgh), "The ABC Settlement" remains an indictment of the INS's treatment of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees. The outcome not only required the INS to reconsider more than 250,000 asylum cases, but also granted temporary protected status for all Salvadorans and Guatemalans who entered the country prior to October 1, 1990, and required their release from immigration prisons (Coutin 2007 51-60). While a landmark case in U.S. history, it is not well marked upon the American landscape, perhaps because it unveils such inequity.

The efforts of Tucson activists contributed to an international sanctuary movement. The draconian immigration policies of federal officials combined with the drastic human rights violations abroad spurred widespread activism. Just as the structures of immigration mobilized the growth of prisons and law offices, the mobilization of activists and the needs of migrants also changed the built environment.

The Landscape of Solidarity and Community

The number of U.S. organizations responding to political turmoil in Central America and the United States expanded dramatically in the 1980s (Pérez 191). Some groups grew nationally, such as the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) and CISPES, while others remained focused on local priorities. From New York, to Milwaukee, to Oakland, the American landscape transformed.[3] Militant political groups to foment change in Central America existed simultaneously, and even collaboratively, with immigrant rights organizations, and humanitarian church-based sanctuary organizations. Geographer Rosamaría Segura noted how "The FMLN presence in Los

Angeles has been palpable in the area surrounding MacArthur Park, where supporters often meet for celebrations, rallies, fund-raising events, or general information meetings" (Segura 44). Insurgent groups like El Salvador's FMLN blended into the landscape of solidarity and community. Local, national, and transnational activist groups became key voices to protest federal actions and build community.

More support for bypassing federal authority prompted the creation of an "underground railroad" to aid the crossing of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees into the United States. As Susan Bibler Coutin described, "Sanctuary workers argued that, as people of faith, they were both religiously and legally required to bring Central Americans into the United States regardless of the sanctions – including stiff fines and imprisonment – that they might face" (Coutin 1993 46). Membership in the Sanctuary movement expanded dramatically following the 1980 assassination of Archbishop Romero and the later rape and murders of three American nuns and a lay missioner (Maryknoll sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, Ursuline sister Dorothy Kazel, and Cleveland Diocese lay missioner Jean Donovan) (Swedish and Dennis 55-60). The violence leveled at the faithful sparked a global sanctuary movement.

Various U.S. cities adopted the term, "Sanctuary City," to express a policy of non-involvement with immigration enforcement, opting not to use local resources to round up undocumented immigrants. According to Jennifer Ridgely, "from 1984-1987, more than 20 cities and two states (New York and New Mexico) adopted resolutions declaring themselves as sanctuaries for Central American refugees, many issuing statements of noncooperation with INS." Sanctuary Cities appeared in California, Massachusetts, Illinois, Wisconsin, Washington, Minnesota, and Maryland (Ridgely 61). The emergence of Sanctuary Cities helps illuminate the strong national resistance to U.S. immigration policy at the time.

The Sanctuary Movement's history is part of the nation's history. Because it is also part of a continuing debate about immigration, its memory is volatile. A contemporary anti-sanctuary movement is working to dismantle sanctuary resolutions as inhibitors of federal authority with Colorado the first state to label itself an anti-sanctuary state in 2006 (Bazar). While many official landmarks mark the spaces of the antebellum Underground Railroad, there is little impetus to mark the Sanctuary Movement's Underground Railroad. The possibilities remain limited, as participants prefer avoiding disclosure of ethical but illegal actions, as well as wish to avoid retribution aimed at tenuous immigration statuses. Moreover, participants intended to keep these sites hidden, often in personal homes.

In Los Angeles, the Pico-Union neighborhood became one of the most welcoming spaces for undocumented Central Americans, though it also struggled with the neighborhood's lack of social and cultural capital. L.A.'s Central American population more than tripled in the 1970s and again in the

1980s, moving from 43,400 in 1970 to over half a million in 1990, with about eighty percent identifying as Salvadoran and Guatemalan (Chinchilla and Hamilton 8). These demographic changes propelled cultural and physical changes.

The opening of El Rescate, a legal and social services organization, in 1981, and the Clinica Monseñor Oscar A. Romero in 1983, both created by Central American migrants to respond to the needs of other migrants, hinted at the neighborhood's pending transformation from a predominantly Mexican American space to "Little Central America" (Pérez 192). As Lopez argued, U.S. migrant casas "create a spatial center, a place of solidarity and visibility, a migrant place that had not existed before where new migrant identities take shape. It is an environment in which organizing and common purpose build solidarity and identification with a migrant public that transcends affiliations based on hometowns and familial networks" (Lopez, 223). As the neighborhood transformed into a Central American-American space, it also facilitated community organizing and shared voices of social protest. Community-based demonstrations against U.S. intervention policies focused on key governmental spaces, such as the Federal Building and the Immigration and Naturalization Services. Gradually, the northwestern corner of McArthur Park in the Pico-Union neighborhood served as "an epicenter for Central Americans' rallies" (Segura 32; Hamilton and Chinchilla 152).

A petition initiated in 2007 to make Pico-Union's "Little Central America" title official has not yet succeeded. As one reporter observed, "critics argue that the name change would take away from other cultural groups who once inhabited the area, such as the Jewish community" (Bermudez; Watanabe). Nonetheless, local residents have sought various ways of announcing the Central American presence and history in the landscape. In 1993, residents commemorated MacArthur Park's history by burying a one-hundred year time capsule of immigrant letters and photographs in the park, just beneath a sculpture by Salvadoran artist Dagoberto Reyes (Segura 56). In 2013, the Salvadoran American Leadership and Educational Fund created a memorial plaza in the park, anchored by a statue of Oscar Romero by Salvadoran artist Joaquin Serrano. Romero's words are engraved on the ring of benches, and set amongst volcanic rocks that pay homage to El Salvador's volcanoes (Berestein Rojas). Not far away, the Los Angeles City Council passed a resolution in 2012 to rename the corner of South Vermont Avenue and west Pico Boulevard as Monseñor Oscar A. Romero Square (Bermudez). The local commemorations are heavily Salvadoran in orientation, though reputedly Central American in scope. The relative invisibility of Guatemalans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, and others is indicative of the ways that even officially marking Central American spaces in the United States can simultaneously undercut the presence of those populations.

The visual and linguistic emphasis on Archbishop Romero as a symbol of Central Americans is pervasive. Since his 1980 assassination, a proliferation of murals, street names, and events to mark the anniversary of his death have appeared across the country. The iconographic expressions of Romero manage to express devotion and protest, without entering into a dialogue about U.S. and Salvadoran military histories. As Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier discuss, "the narrative of the memory of Archbishop Romero firmly grounds a spiritual ideology of resistance" (Rodriguez and Fortier 83). Representations of Romero have become a safe form of expressing not just a Central American presence in the landscape, but a surreptitious voice of protest.

Few landscapes offer as vocal a critique of U.S. policy in Central America as Balmy Alley in San Francisco, California. Like Los Angeles, the Central American population in San Francisco experienced a rapid increase, especially owing to a long history of Central American migrations and social networks (Cordova 2005; Godfrey). In 1984, a group of over thirty artists gathered to paint the walls of Balmy Alley, a one-block alley in the predominantly Latino Mission District. Calling themselves PLACA, meaning "to make a mark, to leave a sign, to speak out, to have an image call for a response," the artists demanded peace in Central America and an end to U.S. intervention.[4] According to their artists' statement: "PLACA members do not ally themselves with this Administration's policy that has created death and war and despair, and that threatens more lives daily. We aim to demonstrate in visual/environmental terms, our solidarity, our respect, for the people of Central America" (PLACA). The political messaging of the murals is audible in some of the titles: "United in the Struggle"; "Guerra, Incorporated"; "Tribute to Archbishop Oscar Romero"; and "We Hear You Guatemala" (PLACA map). Approximately twenty-six murals visually condemned U.S. intervention and dreamed of peace in Central America.

The fruition of PLACA owed much to San Francisco's strong Central American kinship networks, its many community-minded mural artists, and the history of Balmy Alley as a painted space. Around 1978, Casa Nicaragua, also known as Casa Sandino, set up its headquarters on the corner of Balmy Alley and 24th Street. The space served as an important gathering place to help Nicaraguan migrants and to support the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, in direct opposition to U.S. foreign policy (Cordova 2010). While both San Francisco and Miami shared a sizable Nicaraguan exile population, their activities could not have been more different; While San Francisco Nicaraguans established a Sandinista headquarters, Miami networks funded the Contras. This distinction exemplified the diversity of the Central American diaspora.

Part of PLACA's success was predicated on the decision to seek private funding and to circumvent "approval battles over political content of the imagery."[5] By painting on private walls that only required landlord support, the artists were able to speak their politics without having to undergo the

critical gaze of city authorities. The fact that a few of the original murals still exist to this day (with upkeep) shows how the predominantly Latino neighborhood supported the content. City authorities continue to praise and market Balmy Alley as a tourist destination. As other spaces go unmarked, the visual spectacularity of the murals and the political affinities of residents contributed to Balmy Alley's ability to survive and persist in its criticism of U.S. policy in Central America.

Cracks in the Foundation

Whether the United States offers any official acknowledgment, the nation changed dramatically in the context of its covert wars in Central America and its immigration policies at home. The landscape of cities and states across the country reflect the profundity of these changes, whether or not they ever receive official demarcation. The absence of Central American lives from the larger national landscape is not simply an issue of cultural marginalization, but part of an endemic, institutionalized form of nation building.

Landmarks become expressions of social power. The absence of landmarks reflects cultural silencing. That marginalization is not simply about what remains, or identity politics, but also the product of ideological, institutionalized expressions of power. As Michel Rolph Trouillot wrote, "Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources)*; the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)." His point was not simply to argue for the ways history and power operate simultaneously, but to emphasize the ways that "not all silences are equal" and to understand "why they cannot be addressed—or redressed in the same manner" (Trouillot 26, 27).

Placing Central Americans in the history and built environment of the United States can amplify and complicate the narrative of Central American migration in the 1980s. The physical presence of hundreds of Central American activist organizations across the country becomes more meaningful when examined against the construction of immigration prisons along the U.S.-Mexico border. Similarly, the presence of a family mausoleum dedicated to the Somoza family in Miami, versus the creation of Balmy Alley's anti-interventionist protest murals in San Francisco, complicates the homogenizing narratives of Central Americans in the United States. And any acknowledgment of the landscape's participation in covert activities abroad and at home becomes a vital way of highlighting tacit and perpetual domestic and global violence.

Simple waysides, such as the markers in Washington, D.C., announcing the migration of a group of Salvadorans and Nicaraguans, without further

historical context, ultimately teach little about the ways that Central American migrants have struggled against, and even covertly for, U.S. Empire. As time passes, perhaps the complex narratives of U.S. and Central American history will appear more visible in the U.S. landscape. However, the contemporary repetition of some of this history remains part of the longer narrative. Immigration prisons of South Texas have again become the home of Central American migrants, especially young children and teens seeking a safe haven from violence in their homeland. And again, most of the reports are divorced from any U.S. involvement in their exile.

Notes

1. Porpora wrote, "Between 1979 and 1987, the United States armed, trained, and financially backed the military forces of the government of El Salvador, which over the same period carried out a policy of ongoing, systematic murder against the Salvadoran population. ... I am speaking of the systematic murder of over seventy thousand men, women, and children who were noncombatants – journalists, priests, nuns, teachers, labor organizers, students, political figures, and others. ... Also as a direct result of United States actions, another seventy thousand civilians were similarly murdered during the same period by the military government of Guatemala. Finally, and again during the same period, the United States created a force of counterrevolutionaries (the 'contras') to overthrow the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua" (Porpora 7-8).
2. Drawing on Ann Crittenden's work, Jennifer Ridgley wrote: "only 626 of the more than 10,000 Salvadorans in the United States who applied for asylum had their applications approved, and from the middle of 1983 to September of 1986, 2.6% of Salvadorans and 0.9% of Guatemalans who applied were granted asylum, compared to 60.4% of Iranians, 37.7% of Afghans, and 34 % of Poles" (Ridgley 66; Crittenden).
3. For instance, the Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America in New York, the Ecumenical Refugee Council in Milwaukee, and the Guatemala News and Information Center in Oakland all emerged at this time.
4. PLACA was part of an international "Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America." (PLACA; Goldman 34-36).
5. Ralph Maradiaga's requests for funding avoided any description of the political orientation of the project (Maradiaga; Also see Bell, Drescher, Emanuel, and Rossman).

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