

1 Introduction: Toward a New Drug History 2 of Latin America: A Research Frontier 3 at the Center of Debates 4 5 6

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10 *Abstract* This introduction brings the issue of Latin American drug trades and cultures into conversation with
11 the region's historiography. Illicit drugs are now notoriously associated with Latin America and represent
12 untold billions in exports, generating over the last three decades tremendous violence, instability, and public
13 controversy. Yet historians are just starting to seriously research the topic. Psychoactive drugs, broadly
14 conceived, have been central in Latin American history from pre-Columbian times to the present; this piece
15 offers a long-term periodization of drugs to uncover and analyze their complex and often-surprising roles.
16 Rather than fetishize drugs, the essay maintains that they can be productively woven into the largest
17 contexts and problems of Latin American history. After analyzing three methodological concerns of drug
18 history—issues of transnationality and scale, the place of drugs in commodity studies, and the social
19 constructivist approach to drug meanings and effects—the special issue editors introduce three exemplary
20 new essays on the history of drugs in Latin America.

21 “**D**rugs,” at least the criminalized, menacing kind, are everywhere in twenty-
22 first-century dispatches about Latin America. The Andean region, despite
23 decades of US-sponsored drug war, still exports some 600 metric tons of illicit
24 cocaine a year. The yearly consumption value alone of drugs in the Western
25 Hemisphere is guesstimated at around 150 billion dollars. Trafficker violence that
26 not long ago blighted Colombia's cities has spread to Mexico, where tens of
27 thousands have horrifically perished in the country's worst social meltdown since
28 the Cristero revolt of the 1920s. Mexico remains a bustling cross-border supplier
29 of illegal cannabis, heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine to desirous con-
30 sumers in the United States, though much of that trade, and its “cartels,” is
31 shifting perilously to smaller Central American nations, notably Honduras and
32 Guatemala. Governments and police already notorious for old-style graft are
33 caught in a torrent of drug-induced corruption, including the billions in drug
34 profits laundered in Caribbean banks. And Latin America is taking drugs too:
35 Brazil, for example, is now the world's second-biggest consumer of Andean
36 cocaine after the United States, fueling fierce gang warfare in the favelas, while
37 the Argentine and Chilean middle classes smoke marijuana at rates similar to
38 those for disaffected European youth. Drug addiction, beyond problems with
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1 alcohol, is now recognized as a public health hazard across the region. Mean-
2 while, the prefix “narco” is attached to myriad cultural and political actors and has
3 gained its own commercial and popular currency. And, for the first time, a diverse
4 group of Latin American political elites are voicing fresh opinions about solving
5 hemispheric drug problems, sometimes against the strict international prohibi-
6 tionist system long advocated by Washington. Who has not heard of Bolivian
7 president Evo Morales’s passionate defense of the indigenous coca leaf, the
8 mounting calls from Colombian officials to debate new strategies in the drug war,
9 or Uruguay’s recent experiment as the hemisphere’s first pot-legal nation?¹

10 These issues are certainly topical, but we argue that drugs, broadly con-
11 ceived, have long pervaded the social, economic, and cultural history of the
12 Americas. In this special issue of *HAHR*, we, two archival historians who study
13 that drug past, want to introduce a new drug history for the Americas, though
14 admittedly, the old kind barely got a start.² We argue here that the fetishization
15 of drugs by prohibitionists and enthusiasts alike has been no accident. Whether
16 due to the resemblance between drug-induced and spiritually inspired ecstasy,
17 or the way that drugs can undermine the *razón* on which Western civilization
18 has supposedly hinged, or their life-and-death medicinal implications, these are
19 no ordinary goods. Thus drugs also possess, we believe, extraordinary potential
20 for expanding historical study. At the same time, drugs have been closely tied to
21 fundamental themes and developments throughout Latin American history.

22 Here we will introduce these ideas in three parts. First, we offer a long-term
23 periodization of drugs in Latin America that frames the big picture and pro-
24 blematizes present distinctions between licit and illicit drugs. Second, we
25 propose a brief set of explicit suggestions on the methodological possibilities of
26 drug history. Third, we present three new essays, focused specifically on the
27 tumultuous long 1960s in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico, that exemplify
28 how drugs can open new frontiers at the center of our field.

30 **Defining Drugs**

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32 Drugs, as anthropologist Sidney Mintz taught us with his penetrating idea of
33 “drug foods,” are far more than today’s multibillion-dollar, illicitly trafficked
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35 1. On the value of drugs produced in Latin America, see Organization of American
36 States, General Secretariat, *Drug Problem*. On generally inflated drug value statistics, see
37 the critique by Reuter, “Political Economy”; or, generally, Andreas and Greenhill, *Sex,*
38 *Drugs, and Body Counts*.

39 2. Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*; Campos, *Home Grown*. See note 7 below on the
broader historiography.

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1 cocaine, marijuana, and meth, and this wider scope helps to define their deeper
 2 place across the landscape of Latin American history.³ The modern interdis-
 3 ciplinary field of drug studies favors such a broad-tent definition. Drugs include
 4 legal and soft stimulants like coffee, *yerba mate*, cacao, tobacco, and even,
 5 arguably, sugarcane-derived sucrose itself. They also include scores of Native
 6 American ritual hallucinogenic plant drugs such as peyote, “magic mushrooms”
 7 (usually psilocybin), ololiuqui (Mexico’s sacred morning glory seed), *Salvia*
 8 *divinorum*, Amazonian ayahuasca vision vine (yajé), *yopo* snuff, San Pedro (a
 9 mescaline cactus of South America), and the countless datura and other alkaloid-
 10 rich *Solanaceae* species deftly employed by indigenous shamans in parts of
 11 Colombia and Ecuador. Drugs also properly include the many well-known
 12 alcoholic beverages that have arisen out of Latin American cultures and export
 13 zones: chicha, pulque, aguardiente, pisco, tequila, cachaça, Cuban, Puerto Rican,
 14 and Nicaraguan rums, Chilean wines, and the famously branded bottled products
 15 of the Mexican beer industry. The touristy margarita, for example, is a global
 16 signifier of good times *a la mexicana*. And in the very broadest definition, drugs
 17 also include the overlapping histories of myriad medical, herbal, and pharma-
 18 ceutical products of the region. Antimalarial cinchona (Peru Bark), for example,
 19 was a result of the purposeful bioprospecting expeditions of early European
 20 colonial powers; native hallucinogens (and of course cannabis) are still thought to
 21 have hidden therapeutic potential.⁴ Such botanic traditions have survived and
 22 been transformed over the centuries through internal colonization of national
 23 materia medica, in modernist developmental projects of the high-tech Mexican
 24 and Cuban pharmaceutical sectors, and today in New Age natural exports such as
 25 Andean *uña de gato*. The drug prospecting continues today with the patent mining
 26 of Central American rain forest knowledge by global pharmaceutical giants.⁵

27 Drugs, in short, are everywhere in Latin American history, but that
 28 ubiquity has nonetheless produced some distinct contours that can be sketched
 29 within a long-term, four-part periodization: pre-Columbian, colonial, a long
 30 nineteenth century of national drugs, and today’s globalized illicit drug circuits,
 31 which erupted in the mid-twentieth century.⁶ In offering this framework, we
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 34 3. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*; or Mintz’s suggestive “Forefathers of Crack.” For
 35 broader definitions of drugs, see, for example, Weil and Rosen, *From Chocolate to Morphine*;
 36 Goode, *Drugs*; or a more recent iteration, Kleinman, Caulkins, and Hawken, *Drugs and*
 37 *Drug Policy*, esp. chapter 1, “Why is ‘Drug’ the Name of a Problem?” (1–14).

38 4. Pierce and Toxqui, *Alcohol*. On the relation between intoxicating drugs and
 39 medicine, see Mann, *Murder*; Schiebinger and Swan, *Colonial Botany*. For an exemplary
 study of twentieth-century pharmaceuticals, see Soto Laveaga, *Jungle Laboratories*.

5. Hayden, “From Market”; Greene, “Indigenous People.”

6. This periodization is partly inspired by Bauer, *Goods, Power, History*.

1 hope to underscore how drugs provide a window for looking afresh at some of
2 the biggest questions in Latin American history: the workings of pre-Columbian
3 states, the imprint of colonialism, the rise of national identities and racialist
4 civilization discourses, the regulation of a normalized body and consciousness,
5 state formation, the rise of modernist biomedical sciences, and, most recently,
6 the impacts of Cold War developmentalism, agrarian change, social violence,
7 authoritarian regimes, and neoliberal globalization.

8 This, to be clear, is not an exhaustive historiography of the field, which
9 remains too sparse and scattered for useful synthesis.⁷ Noting the pioneering
10 contributions of older drug history, we can say that its strong roots in hemi-
11 spheric diplomatic history left certain starting biases: toward Anglophone
12 publication and state-centered archives and around the twentieth-century
13 dilemmas of US drug problems, policies, or trafficking, as well as a tacit
14 acceptance of drug war-era distinctions in which drugs were by definition illicit,
15 demonized substances and other intoxicants (alcohol, tobacco, coffee, etc.)
16 were not “drugs.” A longer-term periodization shows how such distinctions
17 were historically constructed while also demonstrating that not all drug history
18 originates in Washington. This conceptual turn is at the heart of the new drug
19 history and is, we believe, vital for historically problematizing the dramatic late
20 twentieth-century drug war era. It also provides a sense of how much work
21 remains to be done on drugs and how future work can inform key themes in
22 Latin American history.

23 24 **Latin American Drugs through Four Eras**

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26 As often noted by ethnobotanists, the pre-Columbian Americas hosted by far
27 the world’s richest and most diverse uses of mind-altering drugs: the so-called
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30 7. Until the 1990s, the sole dedicated historian of drugs in Latin America was the
31 intrepid US diplomatic historian William Walker III, whose drugs-related publications
32 include his foundational *Drug Control in the Americas* as well as *Drug Control Policy* and *Drugs*
33 *in the Western Hemisphere*. Around 1990, a number of new contributions began to appear,
34 some in the form of historically minded political science such as González and Tienda,
35 *Drug Connection*; and Toro, *Mexico’s “War.”* Other scholars, some of them historians, began
36 pioneering domestic drug histories as well, notably in Mexico, Colombia, and Peru. See, for
37 example, Astorga A., *El siglo*; Pérez Montfort, “El veneno ‘faradisiaco’”; Gutiérrez Ramos,
38 “La prohibición”; Pérez Gómez, *Historia de la drogadicción*; Pérez Gomez, *Sustancias*
39 *psicoactivas*; Gagliano, *Coca Prohibition*. Since then, as noted in the footnotes throughout this
essay, the literature has been slowly advancing, if still fragmented. For a summary of
existing historiography, yet still drawing heavily from literatures in politics, anthropology,
and investigative journalism, see Gootenberg, “Drug Trades.”

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1 “American drug complex,” with hot spots in Mesoamerica and western Ama-
 2 zonia. The hundreds of types of mind-altering intoxicants embraced by
 3 indigenous peoples have been tied to the filtering of ancient Asian shamanistic
 4 vision traditions across the Bering Strait and to the relatively rapid explosion of
 5 New World agriculture, which kept foragers toying with the tropics’ wildly
 6 diverse flora.⁸ Unlike in premodern Europe, however, in Latin America fer-
 7 mented beverages (although known) did not drown out other inebriants. The
 8 first era of Latin American drug history is thus pre-Latin. More study is needed
 9 to understand the concrete ways that sacred, ecstatic, or healing drug cultures
 10 became subsumed in or regulated by the more stratified societies and militant
 11 state systems that emerged after 500 CE in both Mesoamerica and the central
 12 Andes. What ways, for example, did hallucinogens—the “plants of the gods”
 13 such as *teonanácatl*—permeate and legitimate the religious, aesthetic, or state
 14 cosmologies of Mayans or Aztecs? How did officially sacred and regulated coca
 15 leaf tie the Incan state, Tawantinsuyu, with ordinary *ayllu* peasants?⁹

16 Whatever the answers, this first drugs era clearly ended with the Spanish
 17 and Portuguese conquest, an event that irrevocably changed the history of
 18 drugs worldwide. David T. Courtwright dubs this shift the “psychoactive
 19 revolution” of the early modern world, and a rising historical literature now
 20 explores both the intricate relations of European colonialism to novel drug
 21 commodities—such as cacao, tobacco, teas, and coffee—and the role of drugs
 22 in auspicious social and cultural revolutions among European consumers, even,
 23 some argue, the birth of the capitalist ethos.¹⁰ Portuguese mariners were vital
 24 agents of the new global medicinal and spice drugs trade connecting Asia,
 25 Africa, Europe, and the Indies, while Spain rigorously catalogued the medicinal
 26 plants of its conquered realms and promoted the construction of lucrative
 27 colonial goods out of cacao and tobacco, the one truly Pan-American precon-
 28 quest drug.¹¹ Latin America was, in short, at the epicenter of these global shifts.

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 32 8. La Barre, “Old and New World”; Schultes and Hofmann, *Plants of the Gods*; Furst,
 33 *Flesh of the Gods*. For the popularization of ethnobotanical currents, see Devereux, *Long*
 34 *Trip*. See also the special issue “Alucinógenos del México prehispánico.”

35 9. Guzmán, “Hallucinogenic, Medicinal”; Dobkin de Rios, “Plant Hallucinogens and
 36 the Religion”; Dobkin de Rios, “Plant Hallucinogens, Sexuality”; Stahl, “Hallucinatory
 37 Imagery.” Obviously, this is a truncated summary of the pre-Columbian drug literature.

38 10. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*, 9–30; Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*; Goodman,
 39 “Excitantia.”

11. Schiebinger and Swan, *Colonial Botany*; Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*; Varey,
 Chabráñ, and Weiner, *Searching for the Secrets*.

1 In broad strokes, American drugs moved in four directions under colo-
 2 nialism, though each category raises the historical question of why this drug
 3 over others. Some drugs, such as tobacco or cacao (both notable in pre-
 4 Columbian exchange), became widely creolized, commercialized, and even
 5 state-sponsored mercantilist goods by the late sixteenth century, though as
 6 Marcy Norton brilliantly shows in her recent study of Atlantic cultural net-
 7 works, this does not mean that Europeans stamped out these products'
 8 American indigenous roots and spiritual connotations.¹² Other drugs, like
 9 Andean coca leaf, *mate*, and indigenous brews, were for various reasons
 10 imperfectly or only locally commodified. For example, in the case of *mate*, the
 11 Jesuits created a largely closed circuit of southern South American production
 12 and trade. In coca's case, initially Spanish authorities feared its ingrained reli-
 13 gious, neo-Incan, or subversive nativist meanings and, after intense early
 14 ecclesiastical debates, sought to ban it. But, after 1570, it was officially tolerated
 15 in order to stimulate the global silver bonanza at Potosí, becoming a regional
 16 commodity circuit of the Andes—to cite another Courtwright concept—and,
 17 by the end of the colonial era, a cultural marker of Peru's degraded "Indian"
 18 caste.¹³ Coca was in fact among the first drugs critical to colonial labor regimes
 19 and to evolving colonial representations of natives.

20 A third diverse group of drugs, primarily comprised by what we classify
 21 today as hallucinogens (cacti, fungi, ololiuqui, even frog toxins), were deemed
 22 fully heretical and subject to extirpation by local authorities. It is indeed hard to
 23 imagine these drugs' sensory effects and ascribed divinatory powers as even
 24 potentially acceptable to Christian authorities. Their use either moved
 25 underground—in an early preview of today's prohibition and illicit drug cul-
 26 tures—or became associated with indigenous myth, madness, and mayhem,
 27 as in scattered trace New Spanish references to preconquest *tlápatl* or *tzitzin-*
 28 *tlápatl*. Indeed, so marginalized and secretive were some of these practices
 29 that up to the mid-twentieth century most experts regarded them as extinct or
 30 mythical—until rising postwar drug seekers encountered the coming out of
 31 mushroom shamans such as the now iconic Mazatec Indian María Sabina.¹⁴

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 34 12. Norton, *Sacred Gifts*. See also Goodman, *Tobacco in History*; Coe and Coe, *True*
 35 *History*; Foster and Cordell, *Chilies to Chocolate*; Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*, 31–66.

36 13. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*, 59–64.

37 14. For colonial traces of rituals, see Guzmán, "Hallucinogenic Mushrooms";
 38 Campos, *Home Grown*, 39–65; Gagliano, *Coca Prohibition*, 47–98. On *mate*, see Folch,
 39 "Stimulating Consumption"; Estrada, *Vida de María Sabina*; Feinberg, *Devil's Book*. On
 renewed interest in these plants after World War II, see Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 47–87;
 or among bohemians, see Burroughs and Ginsberg, *Yage Letters*.

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1 Most of these ritual psychedelics (to use a more recent term) survived along
2 tropical or other frontiers, as with, for example, the drugs used by the remote
3 and stateless clan groups in the Colombian Amazon.

4 The final form of colonial drugs inspired major global capitalist complexes
5 in which expanding metropolitan demand for intoxicants was fitted to the labor
6 and ecosystems opened by colonialism. One dramatic example is Caribbean
7 rum, which in imperial rivalries articulated the vanguard sugarcane plantation
8 industry to the African slave trade, New England merchant smugglers, Atlantic
9 sailors, and European imbibers of spirits. Another was coffee, an East African
10 plant cultivated extensively by the French in Saint-Domingue before making a
11 dramatic late colonial economic march across Portuguese Brazil.¹⁵

12 Here, in the transition from the colonial period to our next major drug era,
13 we see perhaps most clearly the close relationship between drugs, drug foods,
14 and empire. While the Spanish Bourbons used lucrative tobacco and alcohol
15 monopolies to try to preserve an overextended empire, the Haitian Revolution
16 propitiously brought a late eighteenth-century sugar boom to Cuba. A new
17 colonial compact built on sugar and slavery then helped preserve Spanish rule
18 there for another century. The same revolution helped spur coffee cultivation in
19 Brazil, where the move from one drug food—sugar—to another—coffee—
20 played a key role in prolonging the vitality of both slavery and empire. But by
21 the 1880s, ironically, by shifting the nation's political geography, coffee even-
22 tually helped to bring these same national institutions down.¹⁶

23 These developments were symptomatic of the larger trends that define our
24 third major historical era for Latin American drugs: a long nineteenth century,
25 stretching from roughly the time of Alexander von Humboldt's travels and
26 other Bourbon-era botanical expeditions down to World War II. The period
27 saw the emergence of global mass markets for a number of key drug com-
28 modities as well as the "rebranding" of others into invented national traditions.
29 For example, coffee, freed from the restraints of mercantilism, continued a
30 striking, globalizing path of exponential growth. Brazil's nineteenth-century
31 transformation into the global coffee superpower—with all its forward
32 developmental impact—was also closely tied, as Steven Topik shows, to the
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34 15. Smith, *Caribbean Rum*; Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*; Nater, "Colonial Tobacco."
35 The historiography on Latin American coffee is vast: start with Roseberry, Gudmundson,
36 and Samper Kutschbach, *Coffee, Society, and Power*. See also Clarence-Smith and Topik,
37 *Global Coffee Economy*.

38 16. For sugar in Cuba, see McGillivray, *Blazing Cane*; Scott, *Slave Emancipation*; or the
39 classic on two drugs, Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*. On coffee's political impact in Brazil, see
Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, 33–34.

1 birth of mass-market capitalism in the United States. In different ways, by 1900
 2 the states and fates of Colombia and virtually all the nations of Central America
 3 also became tied to the global taste for a single stimulant, caffeine, which in the
 4 eighteenth century became the drug of choice for Europe's "industrious rev-
 5 olution" and which is still the world's most widely used intoxicant.¹⁷ National
 6 drug cultures also consolidated in novel forms. For example, Southern Cone
 7 sociability and sensibilities became synonymous with taking stimulants in the
 8 form of regionally specific mate tea in gauchoesque fashion. In Mexico, one
 9 regionally specific form of mescal (distilled blue agave cactus) was elevated into
 10 tequila, along with a complex of Jaliscan customs (such as mariachis) that
 11 colored constructions of *lo mexicano*. Chilean elites became proud of their
 12 respectable viticulture—after all, Chilean reds are actually the sole survivors of
 13 grape blights that decimated classic European vineyards in the late nineteenth
 14 century. Imperial rum routes splintered into revered national spirits and
 15 cocktails, such as Cuban rum and mojitos. Each Latin American nation, usually
 16 thanks to German migrants, industrialized "national" beers, mostly pilsners.
 17 Even the lowly Andean coca leaf underwent a kind of nationalist resuscitation in
 18 the late nineteenth century, lifted by local Peruvian science, modern botany,
 19 and the German discovery of the miraculous cocaine alkaloid in the 1860s. A
 20 national modernizing cocaine industry (centered on central Andean Huánuco)
 21 dominated global production of the drug by 1900. Exuberance for coca even
 22 made it, through a new and sinuous overseas export route, into the secret (1886)
 23 formula of the soon emblematic North American soft drink Coca-Cola.¹⁸

24 These licit and often-celebrated drug happenings evolved concurrently
 25 with the less conspicuous consolidation of new regional or subaltern drug
 26 cultures and the stigmatizing, marginalizing, and sometimes even criminalizing
 27 response to them by civil society and authority. In Mexico, for example, the
 28 European import cannabis, after an obscure colonial history, was transformed
 29 into the supposedly indigenous *maribuana*, becoming synonymous with
 30 insanity, violence, and desperately oppressed groups such as Porfirian prisoners
 31 and soldiers. Hygienic anticannabis discourses and restrictions came into play,
 32 duly noted in the making of the reformist 1917 constitution, and began seeping
 33 into the United States, where they provided the foundation for 1930s "reefer
 34 madness" campaigns and marijuana's belated US prohibition (in 1937).
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36 17. See Topik and Samper Kutschbach, "Latin American Coffee"; Clarence-Smith
 37 and Topik, *Global Coffee Economy*; de Vries, *Industrious Revolution*.

38 18. Whigham, *La yerba mate*; Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*, 15–102; Valenzuela-
 39 Zapata and Nabhan, *Tequila!*; Pozo, *Historia del vino*; Smith, *Caribbean Rum*; Sánchez
 Santiró, *Cruda realidad*.

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1 Meanwhile, in the Caribbean a confluence of African slave and (East) Indian
 2 indentured laborers formed the “ganja complexes” of Jamaica and Trinidad,
 3 making cannabis into a rural workers’ salve and, eventually, a significant element
 4 in the protonationalist, Garveyesque Rastafarian religious movement of the
 5 1950s and beyond.¹⁹ Brazil’s massive, African-inflected *maconha* cannabis cul-
 6 ture, still largely unstudied, also emerged from the ashes of slavery, while
 7 Chinese migrants, shopkeepers, and laborers—“coolies”—in Peru, Cuba, and
 8 northern Mexico became synonymous with the use and sale of opium. Local
 9 cultivation of opium poppy, in part medicinal, emerged alongside this—
 10 sometimes, as in Peru, regulated as a state monopoly. Overall, as in the United
 11 States and Europe, by 1910 opiates had become infused with Orientalist, racist,
 12 degenerative, and gendered discourses that helped fuel later prohibitions.
 13 Though, to be clear, some bohemian elites sampled them (along with recrea-
 14 tional cocaine, cannabis, absinthe, and ether), while, at least in Mexico, ordinary
 15 folk demonstrated as much or more prejudice against these drugs and their
 16 users as the policymaking classes (“everyday” views of drug use in other parts of
 17 Latin America have yet to receive much scholarly attention).²⁰

18 There is no doubt, however, that eugenics and related strains of medical
 19 thought made drug use, especially alcoholism, a mark of lower-class decay from
 20 Chihuahua to Patagonia. In the Andes, for example, coca went from briefly heroic
 21 to an Indian “addiction.” We need to know more about these precursory
 22 regionalized drug cultures, for they would have surprisingly big futures. Fur-
 23 thermore, modernizing elite responses to them reveal much about the anxieties,
 24 prejudices, and intellectual influences of the day. Each case seems to have
 25 reworked neocolonial civilizational and puritanical discourses, with drugs
 26 becoming symbolically potent markers for a kind of inward-directed “Orient-
 27 alism.” Indeed, cannabis and opium, historically the two “Oriental” drugs par
 28 excellence, helped consummate the comparison between Latin America’s sup-
 29 posedly degenerate Indians and the teeming Asian masses of nineteenth-century
 30 Orientalist fantasy. Each kind of drug became laden with cultural and capitalist
 31 contradictions, too—for example, as to whether drug use stimulated or enervated
 32 the willingness of peasants or plantation laborers to work.²¹

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 34 19. Campos, *Home Grown*; Rubin, *Cannabis and Culture*; Angrosino, “Rum and
 35 Ganja.”

36 20. Hutchinson, “Patterns of Marihuana Use”; Astorga A., *El siglo*; Gutiérrez Ramos,
 37 “La prohibición”; Meagher, *Coolie Trade*; Campos, *Home Grown*, 123–54; Henman and
 38 Pessoa, *Diamba sarabamba*.

39 21. Gagliano, *Coca Debates*, 119–63; Fischer, “‘¿Culturas de coca?’”; Campos, *Home
 Grown*, 123–54; Jankowiak and Bradburd, *Drugs, Labor, and Colonial Expansion*.

1 These developments spurred Latin America's zigzag insertion into
 2 restrictive world drug-control regimes by the 1930s, a process that capped the
 3 region's long nineteenth century of drugs. Clearly the key process here is the
 4 twentieth-century construction of strong illicit drug categories in which the
 5 newly prohibited ultimately help to erase the memory of previous arrays of
 6 drugs, with many traditional intoxicants no longer categorized as drugs at all (as
 7 in the ubiquitous but redundant phrase "drug and alcohol"). Here also big
 8 questions remain: Were global drug prohibitions imperially pushed onto weak
 9 Latin American nations, or were there, as new research demonstrates for
 10 Mexico, also deeper local inspirations for antidrug crusades?²² Were there any
 11 alternative conceptions or practices about drugs, such as medicalization or
 12 regulated state sales and monopolies, that might have emerged instead of
 13 complete prohibition and criminalization?²³ There was, we submit, a surpris-
 14 ingly complex midcentury interplay of Latin American drug politics and US
 15 and global antidrug imperatives. For one thing, a number of countries had their
 16 own specific drug restrictions in place well before the United States got directly
 17 involved. There is plenty of work to do in Latin American archives on the
 18 usually quiet emergence of these policies around the region. The birthing
 19 process of drug prohibitions was rarely on the front page of contemporary
 20 newspapers, yet the consolidation of these policies by the 1950s laid the
 21 foundation for today's massive illicit drug export bonanza.

22 Which brings us to our fourth and final period in Latin American drug
 23 history—the development, starting roughly in the 1940s, of the highly prof-
 24 itable, commercially dynamic, and now spectacularly violent illicit drug export
 25 markets of the late twentieth century: the era of global illicit drugs. A plethora
 26 of often-lurid journalistic accounts aside—the *narco-libros* that clutter airport
 27 bookstores from Mexico to Colombia—we know little so far from archival
 28 research about recent drug history.²⁴ Did outside drug authorities move in to
 29 contain quietly spiraling midcentury smuggling trades, or, conversely, did the
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 32 22. Campos, *Home Grown*.

33 23. Walker, *Drug Control in the Americas*, chronicles this process and a few alternatives;
 34 see Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*, 143–88, on local control projects. On global prohibition
 35 regimes, see McAllister, *Drug Diplomacy*; or, for a more critical take, McCoy, "Stimulus of
 36 Prohibition." As a variety of US economic imperialism in Latin America, see Reiss,
 "Policing for Profit."

37 24. Some initial archival research includes Astorga A., *Drogas sin fronteras*; Astorga A.,
 38 *Mitología del "narcotraficante"*; Carey, "Selling"; Mottier, "Drug Gangs"; Gootenberg,
 39 "'Pre-Colombian'; Sáenz Rovner, *Cuban Connection*. Some journalistic accounts help; for
 example, see Osorno, *El cártel*; Grillo, *El Narco*.

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1 criminalization of once licit economic and recreational activities lead to the
2 intensification, expansion, and “cartel”-ization of the trade, as well as, even-
3 tually, escalating violence along these illicit routes? Do the social geographies of
4 illicit production and distribution zones—in the remote eastern Andes,
5 northwestern Mexico, and transit sites like Colombia, Paraguay, and many
6 more—truly map onto belts of political and social marginalization, as is often
7 asserted? Or did they sometimes represent, as in the cases of Havana and
8 Medellín, hotbeds of middle- and upper-class Latin entrepreneurialism? Is
9 there, as some assert, a rustic outlaw culture among drug-growing peasants or
10 trafficking groups that will impel us to classify them as social banditry or even as
11 social movements? Have illicit actors fostered social breakdown, resistance, or
12 community in their locales? How did Cold War politics and the waning of
13 earlier national social reforms, such as land redistribution, and the frustrating
14 politics of modernizing development—at their peak as drug trades took off—
15 lead into the era of drug capitalism? Does drug smuggling share social affinities
16 and practices with neoliberal free-trade mentalities? The looming question for
17 economic historians of a region long marked by cyclical export booms is why
18 the largest boom of the late twentieth century—with prohibition-inflated
19 revenues topping 100 billion dollars annually—developed in spheres of illicit
20 commerce.²⁵ Why—and here as well the process is problematically circular—
21 has the drug war, escalated with US policies after 1970, been utterly unable to
22 contain this quintessentially Latin-controlled business? How much can we
23 blame on the well-studied and oft-criticized contradictions of supply-side drug
24 war policy, and how much of this paradox is peculiar to the region’s history?

25 These are all questions that invite fine-grained historical analysis. His-
26 torians are beginning to flesh out some of these issues by carefully tracing the
27 genealogies and geographies of the illicit flows and networks of people
28 involved. One consistent hot spot is of course Mexico, which has long been a
29 purveyor of myriad illegal mind-altering substances along the borderlands with
30 the United States: patent medicines and vials of the first illegal drugs in the
31 1910s, booze during Prohibition, opiates during and after World War II,
32 marijuana by the sixties (when it was branded as *oaxaqueño* or Acapulco gold),
33 transshipments of high-margin cocaine during the neoliberal 1980s and 1990s,
34 and by 2000 amphetamines and counterfeit pharmaceuticals. Historians may
35

36 25. The United Nation’s annual *World Drug Report* is the general source for such
37 rough estimates; see also Organization of American States, General Secretariat, *Drug*
38 *Problem*. For a methodological critique of aggregate revenue numbers, see Reuter, “World
39 Drug Report.” For one of many devastating critiques of repressive policy, see Bertram
et al., *Drug War Politics*.

1 ponder if these border smuggling waves are episodic or are structurally tied to
 2 Mexican politics and the complex regional aftermaths of, say, the centralizing
 3 and agrarian policies of the Mexican Revolution. New research into the longer
 4 origins of the Sinaloa Cartel and its spread and fragmentation during the 1980s
 5 might answer such questions.²⁶ The reappearance from the shadows of Mexico's
 6 indigenous drug cornucopia (i.e., peyote- and mushroom-using peoples and
 7 villages) also relates to modern politics and has a complex cultural resonance with
 8 both the rights discourse of *indigenismo* and the impact of transnational social
 9 movements such as hippies and wealthier New Age niche cultures.

10 In the Andes, by contrast, the illicit flows have been dominated by cocaine,
 11 still the most lucrative and violence-enveloped drug export in the Americas. As
 12 new scholarship demonstrates, the nineteenth-century discovery of cocaine
 13 (first as a medical good) had much to do with reworking long-standing Andean
 14 coca traditions as well as the technical and business innovations of Peruvians
 15 themselves.²⁷ The same holds true when cocaine reemerged as a locally made
 16 illicit drug after 1947 and was first exported north mainly by Chilean and Cuban
 17 smuggling rings, though Bolivian “chemists” and peasants also proved critical
 18 to forging cocaine capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand,
 19 Colombia, while surely an avid nation of smugglers (much like the United
 20 States, as Peter Andreas reminds us), had little to do with drug trafficking save
 21 for cigarettes and nationally branded coffee until the 1970s.²⁸ Arising apart
 22 from a Caribbean-rim La Guajira marijuana boom (the iconic Colombian gold
 23 of the 1960s and 1970s), global cocaine traffic was utterly transformed in 1970s
 24 Colombia. Drugs also transformed Colombia, as a result of geopolitical shocks
 25 to the cocaine trade formed, since its early Cold War criminalization, in the
 26 eastern parts of Peru and Bolivia. We still lack a researched account of the rise
 27 of the misnamed, highly entrepreneurial Colombian “cartels,” but by the mid-
 28 1980s, Colombia swiftly adapted its own peasant coca capitalism to feed the
 29 expansive trade.²⁹ This was a key chapter in the agrarian transformation, via
 30

31 26. Astorga A., *Drogas sin fronteras*; Astorga A., “Mexico”; Recio, “Drugs and
 32 Alcohol”; Mottier, “Drug Gangs.” A nuanced rural sociology of drug zones is Maldonado
 33 Aranda, “Stories of Drug Trafficking.” A dissertation in progress by Froylán Enciso
 34 (History, Stony Brook University) explores Sinaloan origins.

35 27. Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*.

36 28. González-Plazas, *Pasado y presente*; Andreas, *Smuggler Nation*; Sáenz Rovner, “La
 37 ‘prehistoria.’” On trafficking routes and the early Cold War, see Gootenberg, “Pre-
 38 Colombian.”

39 29. There are, however, convincing biographies of figures such as Pablo Escobar,
 including Salazar J., *La parábola*; Mollison, *Memory*. See also the analysis of trafficking in
 Kenney, *From Pablo to Osama*.

1 intensive peasant migration, of the lowland tropical Andes, where coca emerged
 2 by the 1990s as this vast region's most strategic crop, with notable social,
 3 environmental, and political impacts from Colombia to Bolivia. Equally
 4 underdeveloped is the modern history of coca leaf in Bolivia and Bolivia's
 5 incubation, starting in the revolutionary 1950s, of illegal cocaine routes north.
 6 The indigenous, cultural, and international ethnographic revalorization (after
 7 1970) of national herbal coca leaf in Bolivia cries out for historical research,
 8 perhaps as the foil to globalizing illicit cocaine.

9 A final area for study in this most recent period of Latin American drug
 10 history is the myriad transit zones, which for political geography or entrepre-
 11 neurial verve became critical to drug exports. Such spaces (along with northern
 12 Mexico) are perhaps best seen as borderland territories in the larger story of
 13 imperial friction, overlap, and border making.³⁰ Panama, where the Canal Zone
 14 cut and demarcated new spheres of illicit and licit commerce, has long served as
 15 a smuggler's paradise for cross-border vice, including all sorts of drugs. Viewed
 16 in terms of US informal empire, it was comparable to "offshore" sin cities such
 17 as Tijuana, Mexicali, and Havana from the 1920s to the 1950s. George H. W.
 18 Bush's 1989 invasion to oust former US ally and drug kingpin President Manuel
 19 Noriega was a high point but not an end point to the isthmus as a hot spot of
 20 strategic transshipments and money laundering. Meanwhile, Cuba's prerevo-
 21 lutionary tourist- and mafia-fostered drug scene was nurturing a new Latin-
 22 inflected taste for cocaine throughout the Americas during the 1950s. As
 23 counterrevolutionary exiles swept across the hemisphere, including Miami, some
 24 of these same gangsters professionalized and internationalized the burgeoning
 25 cocaine trades of the 1960s and 1970s, keeping it a largely Latin American (rather
 26 than a global mafia) enterprise, as it still is today.³¹ Historians may note that Cold
 27 War conflicts, politics, and ideologies, in their broadest senses (including mod-
 28 ernization projects and transforming visions of indigenous cultures), had much to
 29 do with the shifting early routing of drugs—a politics that exploded by the 1980s
 30 in various accusations, against both Left and Right, of drug trafficking during the
 31 Reagan-era Central American civil wars and the purposeful (and persistent)
 32 labeling of local insurgencies as "narco-terrorist." Drugs as a factor in such 1980s
 33 struggles needs serious, nonconspiratorial evaluation: Were drugs genuine
 34

35 30. Adelman and Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders"; Bender, *Run for the Border*.
 36 This topic is ethnographically approached by Campbell, *Drug War Zone*; or through
 37 transnational lives in Carey, *Women Drug Traffickers*.

38 31. Gootenberg, "Pre-Colombian"; Sáenz Rovner, *Cuban Connection*; Cirules, *Mafia*
 39 *in Havana*; Scott and Marshall, *Cocaine Politics*; Marcy, *Politics of Cocaine*; Dinges, *Our Man*;
 Scalena, "Illicit Nation."

1 socially rooted “conflict goods” or mostly ideological ammunition inflaming a
 2 polarized region?³² Other transit sites include Caribbean drug-stopover and
 3 profit-cycling zones from Haiti and Jamaica (where a national drug culture in
 4 ganja drew outside fascination and even drug tourism) to the Bahamas and other
 5 Anglophone laundering centers. The scattering of drug trades under pressure is
 6 now entering a stage of wider dispersal across places such as the Dominican
 7 Republic, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador, and Venezuela as well as,
 8 with the rapid globalization of Latin American illicit, Europe and Asia through
 9 Brazil (via Africa) and now Argentina.³³ Historians will no doubt ask different
 10 questions than, say, criminologists and international police officials as to why
 11 certain routes rise rather than others and what determines their relative pro-
 12 pensity for violence and mayhem.

13 Modern trafficking flows surged in tandem with states, politics, and larger
 14 power relations and thus are the growing subject of concern for political and
 15 other social scientists. For example, some analyze the comparative place of
 16 narco-trafficking and social violence in the regional and state-building pro-
 17 cesses of Colombia and Mexico. State elites and organized crime appear as
 18 often in cahoots as in conflict, depending on the historical balance of forces, and
 19 these relationships (going beyond easy labels like “corruption”) have a lot to do
 20 with the ability to contain the violent underbellies of illicit trades.³⁴ For
 21 example, a common assumption about Mexico—just now being seriously
 22 plumbed in archives—is that informal pacts reigned among postrevolutionary
 23 elites and the army, especially in distant border areas, to regulate illicit activities
 24 such as drugs or to funnel them into the political system. In this scenario, the
 25 strong-state Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was able to control the
 26 havoc, as well as rustic Sinaloan peasants, until the late 1980s, when Mexican
 27 cartels proved ungovernable (or indeed captured parts of the state) as the
 28 exceptional power of the PRI waned. The horrific drug war violence of the
 29 twenty-first century is read against this unique political past. Historians are
 30

31 32. Paul Collier, “Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for
 32 Policy,” last modified Apr. 2006, accessed 19 Aug. 2013, [http://users.ox.ac.uk/~econpco/
 33 research/pdfs/EconomicCausesofCivilConflict-ImplicationsforPolicy.pdf](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~econpco/research/pdfs/EconomicCausesofCivilConflict-ImplicationsforPolicy.pdf); Cooper,
 34 “Conflict Goods.” On the “narco-terrorism” label, see Scott and Marshall, *Cocaine Politics*,
 23–50.

35 33. On latest routes, see Organization of American States, General Secretariat, *Drug*
 36 *Problem*.

37 34. For a peek at this exploding literature, see Snyder and Durán Martínez, “Drugs,
 38 Violence”; Bailey and Taylor, “Evade, Corrupt, or Confront?”; Aguilar Rivera, *Las bases*
 39 *sociales*. One of the first to stress such pacts was Lupsha, “Drug Lords.” Or see Astorga’s take
 in “Drug Trafficking.”

1 beginning to enter these debates by questioning how monolithic and all-
 2 encompassing the PRI's state-building power really was while looking back at
 3 ongoing historical sources of Mexican social violence and entropy.³⁵ In sharp
 4 contrast, Colombia is usually read as a case in which regional power and
 5 entrepreneurial autonomy prevailed against an unusually weak central state—
 6 until the civil war–scale violence of the 1980s (as traffickers like Pablo Escobar
 7 sought to break into politics) forced the country, heavily assisted by the United
 8 States, to build up its state, security apparatus, and services to tame its unruly
 9 illicit businesses, cities, and peasantry. Historians can bring their own longer
 10 lens to the big issues of power and politics in which drugs played a dynamic role.

11 In a different vein, there are also plenty of drugs to study in terms of
 12 domestic consumption, without making a strict dichotomy between export and
 13 national drug cultures. Most countries of Latin America lack national drug
 14 histories for the twentieth century.³⁶ We know that cocaine and opiates had
 15 become early recreational drugs in urban music scenes and in clubs (especially
 16 in Brazil and Argentina), brothels, and sailor hot spots in many parts of the
 17 Americas, evident by the 1910s.³⁷ At midcentury, foreigners ranging from
 18 Harvard ethnobotanists to bohemians such as William S. Burroughs often
 19 ventured to exotic locales of Latin America as precocious drug tourists and then
 20 published on what they found. During the long 1960s, urban middle-class
 21 youth in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, the Dominican Republic,
 22 and elsewhere joined the rebellious drug cultures associated with global rock
 23 music, cannabis smoking, and other youth movements. This must have sparked
 24 many peculiar transnational encounters in a region where Afro-descendants
 25 and Indians had rich stocks of accumulated drug knowledge. In a striking
 26 example, modern *jipis* (hippies) from Mexico City, along with foreign kin,
 27 decamped to places like Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca, for close encounters with
 28 the “authentic,” sometimes lionized psychedelic pioneers: shamans of local
 29 rural indigenous folk.³⁸ The history—and politics—of these encounters has
 30

31
 32 35. Smith, “Rise and Fall”; Knight, “Narco-Violence.” An early study is Sandos,
 33 “Northern Separatism.”

34 36. Exceptions include Campos, *Home Grown*; Sáenz Rovner, “La ‘prehistoria’”;
 35 Pérez Montfort, “El veneno ‘faradisiaco’”; Weissmann, *Toxicomanías*; Venâncio and
 36 Carneiro, *Alcool e drogas*; Pérez Gómez, *Sustancias psicoactivas*; Pérez Gómez, *Historia de la*
drogadicción; Fernández Labbé, *Drogas en Chile*.

37 37. Resende, *Cocaína*; Guy, *Sex and Danger*, 148–50; Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*; Scalena,
 38 “Illicit Nation.”

39 38. Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 106–11. On drug adventurers in Latin America, see note 13
 above; an ethnobotanist's account is Davis, *One River*.

1 yet to be fully written. That these drug scenes germinated under authoritarian
2 regimes, and along the edges of rising illicit drug corridors, may have lasting
3 implications, given the new sets of national norms and laws that drug use and
4 scares generated and the growing spillover, after 1980, of massive cocaine and
5 cannabis exports into urban shantytowns and outlying impoverished peasant
6 zones. For one thing, these Cold War political encounters may have something
7 to do with the long tendency (just now receding) of Latin American elites to
8 support the global drug war, despite its ineffectiveness and flagrant collateral
9 damage—skyrocketing violence, corruption, rights abuses—at home.

10 In sum, this overview has served to show the many ways that drugs, in their
11 broadest sense and well before the notorious narco-trafficking of the late
12 twentieth century, have been integral to many of the pivotal developments in
13 Latin American history. This long history, in turn, is a key to knowing how
14 illicit and licit drug cultures divided in the twentieth century and how massive
15 trafficking was born. Deeper research is just beginning. However, drugs also
16 offer a new prism for looking in fresh, surprising ways at the cultural, social, and
17 political history of the Americas. We will now turn to some new methodo-
18 logical possibilities offered by the new drug history.

20 **Thinking about Methods**

21 Beyond the historiographical questions just raised, many with contemporary
22 resonance, drugs present exciting methodological opportunities. Of course
23 there are considerable challenges in historical drug research: uncovering and
24 interpreting the often invisible, covert, charged, or ineffable worlds that sur-
25 round illicit or mind-altering goods, or, when thinking about drugs, the pitfalls
26 of received official discourse, biases, and categories. Each of these challenges
27 requires critical awareness and caution to transcend but are not, we believe,
28 qualitatively different problems from those surrounding other demanding
29 recent historical topic areas such as, for example, subaltern history. Drug his-
30 tory is beginning to thrive as a theme of research on many parts of the world—
31 notably in the history of opiates across Asia³⁹—but for Latin Americanists the
32 topical possibilities remain wide open, marked largely by empirical gaps. It is
33 true that drugs are sometimes exceedingly hard to find in the archive, save for
34 taxed legal exports like coffee, or in institutions, such as a few official opium
35 sales monopolies. But precisely for that reason, and for our skill at detectivesque
36

37
38
39 39. For example, Dikötter, Laamann, and Xun, *Narcotic Culture*; Brook and
Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes*; Kingsberg, *Moral Nation*.

Introduction

17

1 research that prizes, finds, and pieces together many types of scattered, frag-
2 mentary sources, historians have much to contribute in terms of new narratives
3 and interpretations.

4 Drug history can and is fruitfully combined with a laundry list of historical
5 subfields: social and cultural history; policy, diplomatic, and imperial history;
6 Atlantic and world history; commodity and business history; ethnohistory and
7 archaeology; the “deep history” of the brain and the senses; agrarian, subaltern,
8 gender, and race history; legal and criminological history; the history of science
9 and medicine; and environmental and ethnobotanical history.⁴⁰ Indeed,
10 because drugs themselves are by their nature defined in many biological, social,
11 cultural, and political dimensions, it is hard to conceive of drug history without
12 intrinsically cross-disciplinary content.

13 That said, many of the choices for drug historians reduce to a simple
14 interpretive divide: Does one stress the power and agency of individual drugs
15 themselves? Or does it make more sense to weave drugs into the fabric of eco-
16 nomic, cultural, political, and other histories—for example, looking at drugs
17 through shifting filters of modernity? Histories of particular drugs are fruitful,
18 though they also run the risk of what is variously termed the “pharmaco-
19 centric fallacy” or the “cult of pharmacology”—ascribing to particular drugs
20 (or to specific compounds within them such as morphine, THC, or cocaine) an
21 essential, irresistible chemical power to transform or overpower people and
22 whole societies.⁴¹ Modern (and highly contestable) medical discourses of
23 “addiction,” as well as most big conspiracy theories regarding the untold power
24 of “cartels” and other undergrounds (like those about the connection between
25 the Central Intelligence Agency and crack), suffer equally from this misleading
26 magical fetish about the powers of drugs.⁴² Drugs are mystified as the lead
27 culprit for many social ills imagined and real. As we think our own work
28 demonstrates, historians can usefully focus on a single drug commodity
29 through time. But we also believe it crucial to avoid the pharmaco-centric
30 fallacy, something made possible by integrating drug histories into larger
31 questions, contexts, and currents of historical practice. This contextualizing
32 strategy also helps, as elaborated below, to clarify some of the passions about
33 drugs and their potential for bodily or social harm.

34
35 40. Smith, *Sensing the Past*; Smail, *On Deep History*, 157–89.

36 41. DeGrandpre, *Cult of Pharmacology*; Morgan and Zimmer, “Social Pharmacology.”
37 For explicit discussions of methods in drug history, see Gootenberg, “Scholars on Drugs”;
38 Campos, *Home Grown*, 7–38; Sherratt, “Introduction.”

39 42. For a drug history critique of contemporary “‘disease’ model” theories of
addiction, see Hickman, “Target America.”

1 Indeed, for special reasons—for example, for being commodities that can
2 directly alter thought processes and the senses and thus excite public emo-
3 tions—drugs are an inviting site for cross-disciplinary analysis, in particular for
4 the mixing of materialist and cultural methods, or, put differently, approaches
5 that blend the realities and representations of drug worlds. Here, for fellow
6 Latin American historians, we will articulate three core interdisciplinary
7 methodological possibilities (though there are doubtless more): questions of
8 transnationalism and scale, the wide field of commodity studies, and the
9 sociocultural constructivism of drug experience.

11 Transnationalism and Scale

12
13 Most illicit drugs are concentrated substances, or are refined into such, that
14 easily enter into cross-regional or cross-border flows. This geographic mobility
15 marked even pre-Columbian cacao, tobacco, and the vast vertical ecological
16 exchange of Andean coca. Scales then broadened when colonialism turned
17 stimulants into pioneering items of globalizing imperial commerce. Seven-
18 teenth-century American tobacco, for example, was (along with silver and gold)
19 one of the first truly global commodities; reciprocally, the nineteenth-century
20 global demand for coffee helped solidify, and globalize, the fiscal, ideological,
21 and bureaucratic foundations of several Latin American states. International
22 legal regimes that began (for complex reasons) to regulate, restrict, and thus
23 sharply delineate drugs after 1909, as well as the imperious cultural and political
24 influences often behind them, are also formative transnational forces in the
25 world of drugs. Birthed by these legalistic distinction regimes, the criminalized
26 drugs of the latter twentieth century are among the most rapid-moving, pow-
27 erfully driven, and globally sensitive economic enterprises. Of course, they
28 ironically came into being precisely because of borders political, legal, spatial,
29 and cultural. By the 1990s, given their scale, these invisible criminal flows began
30 to be analyzed as the predictable or rational mirror image of licit commodity
31 traffic—the alleged dark side of contemporary neoliberal globalization.⁴³

32 Thus drugs present many of the same methodological challenges and
33 choices that epitomize other major themes in the history of Latin America—
34 historically a globalized, hybridized region—but more so. How to balance and
35

36 43. Schendel and Abraham, *Illicit Flows*; versus the more policy-oriented take in Stares,
37 *Global Habit*; and Gilman, Goldhammer, and Weber, *Deviant Globalization*. See related
38 discussion in Gootenberg, “Introduction,” 8–9. See Peter Andreas, “Gangster’s Paradise:
39 The Untold History of the United States and International Crime,” *Foreign Affairs* (New
York), Mar.–Apr. 2013, pp. 22–28, for a critique of exoticizing illicit trades.

1 integrate local, national, and global forces? The dynamic interplay between
 2 external power and local agency? Dependency versus autonomy? Traveling or
 3 transcultural meanings, discourses, and power? Cross-border identities and
 4 networks? And how can historians effectively connect in their narratives zones
 5 of production, commercial webs, and often-faraway sites and forms of con-
 6 sumption? Even amid the rage for transnational history, there is no one method
 7 to best address questions of scale. We believe, however, that drugs make an
 8 excellent topic to examine with what social scientists call relational and mul-
 9 tiscalar analyses—those that closely connect different levels and geographies of
 10 power.⁴⁴ In this way, new histories not only fill gaps in drug history but also
 11 inform and advance new approaches to thorny problems in the field as a whole.

12 13 Commodity Studies

14
15 Commodities are of course vital in Latin American history, a history that is
 16 often interpreted as one damn commodity after another.⁴⁵ From one per-
 17 spective, regarding drugs as essentially market goods makes perfect sense, since
 18 they are highly marketable, heavily traded, historically branded, and perhaps
 19 even addictive in their demand. Moreover, purposely reducing drugs to com-
 20 modity status is a commonly adopted research strategy to neutralize the
 21 political distortions, social attitudes, and labels (“good,” “bad,” “alien,” “soft,”
 22 “hard,” “dangerous,” “recreational”) that often surround drugs.

23 There are two (and perhaps more) major developments in commodity
 24 studies since the 1980s to highlight for historical research on drugs. The first is
 25 the growing interest, especially among anthropologists, in the so-called “social
 26 life of things” or “cultural biography” of goods. These perspectives critically
 27 interrogate the genesis of what we think of as commodities, their meanings and
 28 value, changeability, and cultural relativity across time, cultures, and borders.
 29 The consumption, phenomenology, semiotics, and power of goods are para-
 30 mount. This perspective, pioneered by Arjun Appadurai, was immediately
 31 applicable to drugs, which carry so much symbolic import and baggage,
 32 meanings that have changed radically over the centuries. For example, compare
 33 cocaine’s initial role as a heroic, modern miracle drug of the late nineteenth
 34 century to both its celebrity and menacing roles today. The scale of such
 35

36 44. Again, anthropology advances historical debates: i.e., Burawoy, “Introduction”;
 37 Escobar, *Territories of Difference*. See also geographers such as Smith, *Uneven Development*;
 38 or sociologists such as Kahn, *Framing the Global*.

39 45. Topik, Marichal, and Frank, *From Silver*. On commodities in Latin American
 economic history, see Bulmer-Thomas, *Economic History*.

1 shifting meanings has also expanded to what Appadurai later called global
2 “scapes.” Finally, new political ecology views commodities as key mediators
3 between landscapes and peoples, another potentially fruitful optic for studying
4 the social and political lives of plant drugs.⁴⁶

5 A second useful tool of commodity studies is the concept of global com-
6 modity chains, originally part of the grand political economy apparatus of
7 1970s Wallersteinian world-systems theory. The method (or perhaps meta-
8 phor) of the commodity chain—concertedly tracing the spatial, social, and
9 political pathways and networks of goods across the globe, from producers to
10 suppliers, distributors, and final consumers—is now familiar to Latin American
11 historians studying export economies. Like the “social life of things,” this idea
12 was quickly adopted by scholars to examine the border crossings of drugs, and it
13 relates to global-local scale and to critiques of global market analysis as
14 ungrounded, unpeopled, apolitical abstractions. Gootenberg uses this concept
15 to map together the vast “glocal” connections of cocaine since the 1850s.
16 However, in historical fashion, commodity chains expand from markets to
17 include the reciprocal and frictional flows of ideas, law, medicine, people, and
18 politics surrounding the drug. In the end, cocaine’s history demonstrates that
19 the licit commodity chain dynamics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth
20 centuries helped to determine the formation of illicit chains after World
21 War II.⁴⁷ Both these major approaches to commodity studies—the social life
22 of goods and commodity chains—are useful for insulating research from
23 the heated passions and labels that are so often attached to drugs, while at the
24 same time facilitating the reflexive study of those same meanings and passions
25 as they evolved over time.

26 Sociocultural Constructionism

27 One way to bring the passions and the experiential side of drugs fully into their
28 materiality and politics is through what sociologists call social constructionism,
29 a concept that enjoys a rich lineage in scientific drug studies.⁴⁸ Starting in the
30

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32
33
34 46. Appadurai, “Introduction”; Kopytoff, “Cultural Biography”; Appadurai,
35 *Modernity at Large*, 48–65; Robbins, *Political Ecology*.

36 47. Hopkins and Wallerstein, “Commodity Chains”; Bair, *Frontiers*; Topik, Marichal,
37 and Frank, *From Silver*, esp. Topik, Marichal, and Frank, “Introduction”; and Gootenberg,
38 “Cocaine in Chains.”

39 48. Sometimes called constructivism. A pioneering work was Becker, “History.” See
also Weil, “Adverse Reactions”; Zinberg, *Drug, Set, and Setting*. An early constructivism is
summarized in Goode, *Drugs*, 17–20.

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21

1 1930s, psychopharmacologists and sociologists studying drug-using popula-
2 tions discovered that many of the supposed effects of drugs were to a large
3 degree learned, imagined, or constructed by the expectations of the user. This
4 finding, known as “set and setting,” suggests that drug experiences or even drug
5 addiction become malleable according to the social contexts of users, an idea
6 counter to standard biomedical determinism and medical “addiction” para-
7 digms. Kindred perspectives have come out of the anthropology of shamanistic
8 drug use, which highlights the active role played by group expectation; pow-
9 erful hallucinogens are safely used in such guided or constructed contexts. On a
10 societal scale, pharmacologist Richard DeGrandpre has coined the term “pla-
11 cebo texts” for this phenomenon: drugs are, and do, what our internalized social
12 or political expectations narrate.⁴⁹ Historians can add a crucial temporal
13 dimension to this dynamic. Tracing the way drug narratives shift over time may
14 be key to understanding the largest set and setting of all: historical context. A
15 dramatic example is cannabis. In nineteenth-century Mexico, medical elites
16 perceived “marihuana” use not only as a deviant, subaltern practice but also as
17 one, following both local and external Orientalist discourses, that literally
18 caused “madness” and outbreaks of random violence among its users. For more
19 obscure reasons, ordinary Mexicans maintained similar views of the drug and its
20 effects. The power of this narrative, according to Campos, probably sparked
21 actual mad outbursts and violence (later referred to as “reefer madness” in the
22 United States), thus reinforcing the prohibitionist discourses that originally
23 fueled the provocative behavior.⁵⁰ Here one sees how the “placebo text” might
24 produce self-fulfilling prophecies on the ground (the “junkie,” the “crackhead,”
25 the “*marihuano*”). Certainly marijuana’s apparent effects in Mexico a century
26 ago were quite different than the mellow and recreational hue of the drug
27 championed by countercultural American youth during and after the 1960s or
28 the rising discourse and politics of medical marijuana as tonic today.

29 Change over time is the area in which our expertise as historians creatively
30 informs larger understandings of drugs. This perspective also contributes to
31 getting at how some drugs become socially integrated as “soft drugs” with a
32 minimum of social harms while other drugs are constructed into “hard drugs”
33 that (market and political forces aside) are often socially uncontained and thus
34 do in fact wreak much social havoc and harm. All this—drugs, “placebo texts,”
35 and related self-fulfilling prophecies—might also help explain why prohibi-
36 tionist policies have long been so attractive, even addictive, for drug-fighting
37

38 49. DeGrandpre, *Cult of Pharmacology*, 103–37. See also Harner, *Hallucinogens*.

39 50. Campos, *Home Grown*.

1 bureaucrats. Thus, historical constructivism may help in the task of forging
2 alternative understandings and responses to our punitive prohibitionist
3 regimes, which are now both failing and losing political credibility throughout
4 the Americas. The downside, however, is a penchant for concept abuse: the idea
5 that everything, everywhere, is socially constructed is one of the academic
6 clichés of our time.⁵¹

7 Constructivism also brings us back to historical concerns with agency and,
8 indirectly, the normative, present-tense politics surrounding hemispheric
9 drugs. If historians contest the idea that drugs per se possess chemical or
10 demonic agency, this returns the question to historical contexts and to the ways
11 in which people and peopled power structures (such as movements, nations, or
12 states) have shaped drugs. In the global politics of drugs, blame prevails: on
13 Colombian cartels or Mexican drug culture or, alternatively from the Left or
14 Latin American critics, imperialist US drug policies or an insatiable American
15 demand for pleasure drugs. Constructivism may help restore a balanced sense
16 of historical agency and interaction instead of one-sided blame. Clearly it has
17 been the interaction of specific conditions throughout the Americas that has
18 spurred the growth and persistence of both drug trafficking and consumption.
19 This vast and largely unexamined past may reveal negotiated outcomes, lost
20 alternatives, or opportunities for change. As historical knowledge, these may
21 inform the present conjuncture, in which governments around the hemi-
22 sphere—Bolivia, Uruguay, Colombia, Colorado—are constructing new and
23 perhaps decisive forms of global drug reform.

24 25 **The Essays**

26
27 The three essays that follow here exemplify a few of the main historiographical
28 and methodological trends of the new drug history. They are offered in that
29 invitational spirit, rather than being fully representative of the wide variety of
30 drugs, historical eras, or forms of drug history possible for Latin America.
31 Indeed, these three essays come together in their focus on modern drug scenes
32 and drug politics rather than the longer-term panorama just seen of drugs in the
33 Americas.

34 As in the United States, and elsewhere, the long 1960s represent a pivotal
35 moment in the configuration of Latin American drug use, trafficking, and
36 politics. Within the larger field of Latin American history, the period has also
37 become the focus of exciting cultural and political historical research, with the
38

39 ⁵¹. Hacking, *Social Construction*.

Introduction

23

1 transnational Cold War at its core, along with the era's spiraling political and
2 cultural conflicts.⁵² Drugs, however, remain conspicuously absent in this his-
3 toriography. Yet this was exactly the period when Latin American actors (from
4 the eastern Andes to northern Mexico) first joined en masse in the trafficking of
5 illicit drugs to meet the rising demands of users to the north. These develop-
6 ments were hardly incidental to the marginalized rural poor or the disaffected
7 regional entrepreneurs swept aside by 1960s US-led "modernization" drives,
8 nor were they unaffected by Cold War realignments and ideological strife about
9 internal subversion, modern lifestyles, and national values.

10 The major landmarks of postwar Latin American drug history are already
11 visible: we know that Mexican drug cultures helped fuel the psychedelic turn of
12 the sixties; we know that the Cuban Revolution and the Chilean coup helped to
13 scatter drug traffickers to other parts of Latin America; we know that the
14 postwar baby boom in the United States combined with a repressive Cold War
15 atmosphere to spawn a drug-celebrating counterculture and, more generally, a
16 spike in recreational drug use; and we know that the subsequent Nixon-era drug
17 war crackdown and new agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration
18 (1973) ended up fueling the growth of new illicit supply chains of unprece-
19 dented scale and profitability. But there is much left to be clarified. For example,
20 how did the particular rural, political, and developmental histories of forgotten
21 zones like Peru's Huallaga Valley or Mexico's Sierra Madre feed into intensified
22 trafficking? What distinctive imprint did the predominantly white, middle-
23 class, recreational, and permissive youth culture of cannabis smoking (fash-
24 ioned in the United States and Western Europe) mean for the politics of poorer
25 but mobilized urban youth in such distinct and socially conservative places as
26 Mexico, the Dominican Republic, or Argentina? Did Latin American author-
27 ities take advantage of the alien symbolism of drugs (as representative of
28 "Indians" or "the Orient" or even gringo hippies) to justify broader crackdowns
29 on dissent? How did the United States use the newly escalated drug war to
30 redeploy or camouflage its counterinsurgency politics in the aftermath of the
31 Cuban Revolution? And, on the other side of the coin, how did Latin American
32 leaders exploit controversies about drugs to justify their embrace of US
33 political and diplomatic incursions? In all the current passion for the memory
34 and cultural politics of this era, the roles of drug politics and drug experience
35 are still largely forgotten.

36
37 52. The best new overview of this work is Zolov, "Latin America." For recent
38 examples, see Manzano, *Age of Youth*; Dunn, *Brutality Garden*; Langland, *Speaking of*
39 *Flowers*; Franco, *Decline and Fall*; Sorensen, *Turbulent Decade*. See also Joseph and Spenser,
In from the Cold; Grandin and Joseph, *Century of Revolution*.

1 Valeria Manzano's "The Creation of a Social Problem: Youth Culture,
 2 Drugs, and Politics in Cold War Argentina" begins to fill some of these
 3 empirical gaps. Here she explores how authoritarian Cold War military politics
 4 helped to construct a drug problem in modern Argentina. In contrast to Mexico
 5 or Colombia, the country did not significantly produce or transship interna-
 6 tionally defined illegal drugs. As a result, more political controversy surrounded
 7 urban culture and the politics of emerging forms of drug consumption. During
 8 the 1960s, youth in rising counterculture movements began to use marijuana
 9 and amphetamines, which previously had barely raised the alarm of medical and
 10 judicial authorities. In 1970, Buenos Aires also became the first South American
 11 capital to host an office of the US Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs,
 12 and soon thereafter the Argentine Federal Police, the media, and politicians
 13 across the ideological spectrum began to talk of an emerging problem. As
 14 Manzano's essay shows, it was a problem that they were in fact actively helping
 15 to manufacture, entwined with the larger construction of the infamous Cold
 16 War subversive enemy within. Promoted by a motley array of new experts—
 17 doctors, psychiatrists, judges, police chiefs, military intelligence services, and
 18 journalists—that campaign helped forge a connection between youth, devi-
 19 ance, and subversion, leading Argentina to enact newly punitive drug laws that
 20 allowed the Argentine Federal Police to monitor broad areas of youth soci-
 21 ability such as schools, social clubs, and public plazas. One paradox—like the
 22 tension between Mexican jipis, shamans, and authorities seen below—is that
 23 most of Argentina's actual militant or armed groups abhorred what they saw as
 24 decadent, casual middle-class drug use. This drug-related repression reached its
 25 peak (but not end) during the 1976–1981 Videla dictatorship. Manzano shows
 26 the political as much as social or symbolic processes of building a drug regime
 27 and uncovers their authoritarian origins and fallout in places like Argentina.⁵³

28 Lina Britto's "Hurricane Winds: *Vallenato* Music and Marijuana Traffic in
 29 Colombia's First Illegal Drugs Boom" emerges from her work on the Greater
 30 Magdalena *marimberos*, the shadowy pioneers of Colombian drug trafficking
 31 pre-Escobar. The potential of drug history is exemplified in how Britto's essay
 32 contributes to the history of *vallenato* and its adoption into the modern
 33 Colombian nationalist imaginary, while demonstrating the tangible
 34

35 53. In August 2009, the Supreme Court of Argentina voided most drug possession laws
 36 from the dictatorship as unconstitutional. Transnational Institute, "Argentina's Supreme
 37 Court 'Arriola' Ruling on the Possession of Drugs for Personal Consumption," *Drugs and*
 38 *Democracy* (blog), 1 Sept. 2009, [http://www.tni.org/article/argentinas-supreme-court-](http://www.tni.org/article/argentinas-supreme-court-arriola-ruling-possession-drugs-personal-consumption)
 39 [arriola-ruling-possession-drugs-personal-consumption](http://www.tni.org/article/argentinas-supreme-court-arriola-ruling-possession-drugs-personal-consumption). On the depenalization movement
 rapidly unfolding across the region, see Youngers, "Drug Policy Reform," esp. 6–7.

1 sociocultural impacts of traffickers. Marimberos sprang from the most mar-
2 ginalized and excluded rural and urban sectors of the northern Santa Marta
3 region. When drug war crackdowns in Mexico spiked demand for marijuana in
4 the United States, these upstarts took advantage of their region's long coastline,
5 many navigable ports, and proximity to the market. Their humble backgrounds
6 made them eager to advertise their suddenly heightened economic status at a
7 moment when the area's traditional cotton-growing elites were simultaneously
8 attempting to win the region a more prominent place on the national stage. In
9 the middle of this was the regional music, vallenato, which had long been
10 disdained by local and national elites as the coarse accordion music of dark-
11 skinned country bumpkins. Cotton growers took advantage of the moment to
12 rebrand the region in part through an annual vallenato music festival, while the
13 previously humble marimberos, with a defined taste for vallenato, began using
14 the same music to advertise their wild exploits and sudden wealth. As these
15 processes overlapped, drug money began financing vallenato, and musicians
16 returned the favor with increasingly narco-related subject matter and thinly
17 veiled trafficker panegyrics. All this fueled the music's meteoric rise to national
18 prominence. These outlaw origins of now celebrated vallenato are largely
19 laundered from the national consciousness, but Britto's deeper history of Santa
20 Marta golden helps recover them.

21 Finally, Alexander Dawson's essay "Salvador Roquet, María Sabina, and the
22 Trouble with *Jipis*" sheds light on the complex, sometimes ironic intersections
23 of indigeneity, drugs, Western medicine, and law in late twentieth-century
24 Mexico. Unlike in Argentina or even Colombia, the presence of strong indig-
25 enous traditions in Mexico had a mirror effect on the emergence of drug cul-
26 tures during the 1960s. Drugs connected, sometimes paradoxically, uneven
27 layers of modernizing Mexico's cultures and raise tricky questions about forms
28 of cultural appropriation. In the late 1960s, Salvador Roquet, a highly respected
29 doctor with the Mexican Ministry of Health, began treating psychiatric
30 problems (notably addiction) by tapping into the burgeoning counterculture.
31 Psychedelics, particularly peyote and psilocybin mushrooms, seemed to offer an
32 alternative, fast-acting therapy. The well-connected Roquet, who collaborated
33 with the state against countercultural leftist youth in 1968, opened a clinic in
34 the tony neighborhood of La Condesa, where he eventually treated more than
35 1,000 (mostly wealthy) patients, many of them counterculture refugees. Iro-
36 nically, Roquet saw indigenous drugs, and the therapies that he developed after
37 observing Mazatec *curanderos* at work, as an ideal means of getting the "Indian"
38 out of the *jipis*. Meanwhile, the press and the mainstream psychiatric com-
39 munity condemned the *jipis* as developmentally stunted, drug-addicted failures

1 of Mexico's materialist middle class. As the line blurred between jipi dropouts
 2 and student movement revolutionaries, Roquet mostly agreed with this
 3 assessment, as did his now famous collaborator, the Mazatec shaman María
 4 Sabina. Rather than an externally driven drug conflict in Mexico, indigenous
 5 drugs, symbolically and pharmacologically potent, reveal the rawest contra-
 6 dictions of Mexican society and revolutionary nationalism.

7 We hope that *HAHR* readers, after taking in these essays, will fully appre-
 8 ciate the ways in which drug history can open a new lens on many of the central
 9 questions and themes of Latin American history. For better or worse, drugs
 10 permeate the Latin American present and in some cases dominate inter-American
 11 relations. The drug past of the Americas needs to be brought into the story, not
 12 only for intellectual clarification but also because stronger historical work around
 13 it can help guide us as we seek ways to better live with these drugs in the future.
 14

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Introduction

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