

“REDEEMING” THE CANAL, CENTRALIZING THE NATION: OMAR TORRIJOS AND  
THE QUEST FOR PANAMANIAN SOVEREIGNTY.

By

Debora V. Winch

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Latin American Studies

Charlotte

2021

Approved by:

---

Dr. Jurgen Buchenau

---

Dr. Gregory Weeks

---

Dr. Carmen Soliz



## ABSTRACT

DEBORA V WINCH. "REDEEMING" THE CANAL, CENTRALIZING THE NATION:  
OMAR TORRIJOS AND THE QUEST FOR PANAMANIAN SOVEREIGNTY.

(Under the direction of Dr. Jurgen Buchenau).

From October 1968 to September 1977, the Panamanian government under the leadership of Omar Torrijos Herrera conducted negotiations with the United States regarding the Panama Canal, controlled and established by the United States. This thesis seeks to evaluate the role of Torrijos's authoritarian populist leadership in the assertion of Panamanian sovereignty and the fight for the Panama Canal. It will also analyze the influence of Torrijos's political style on diplomatic relations between the United States and Panama. The existing literature on Omar Torrijos and his populist leadership has neglected his role as an authoritative figure in the development of patriotism in Panamanian political culture in the years leading up to the Torrijos-Carter negotiations in 1977. This study examines primary sources from both Panama and the United States to analyze Torrijos' authoritarian and populist efforts to expand the political involvement of groups within Panamanian society in order to gain possession of the Panama Canal and successfully complete negotiations with the United States.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success and completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of Dr. Buchenau. Thank you for your patience and guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Weeks and Dr. Soliz for providing me with valuable advice and useful critiques of this research. Special thanks should be given to the Licenciada Ismerita Perez and Licenciada Griselda Valdes from la Biblioteca Nacional Ernesto J. Castellero for the assistance with primary sources. Thank you to my family for always believing in me and supporting through this process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	viii
HISTORIOGRAPHY	9
OMAR TORRIJOS HERRERA: THE POPULIST	12
CHAPTER 1: FROM CLIENT TO NATION	16
A COSTLY EXCHANGE: INDEPENDENCE FROM COLOMBIA (1903-1920)	18
THE BEGINNING OF THE ALLIANCE	23
THE RISE OF OPPOSITION: CREATING CONFLICT. (1920-1960)	28
LA MARCHA PATRIÓTICA: THE SHAPING OF A RESPONSE	40
LA GESTA DEL 9 DE ENERO: THE FLAG RIOTS	45
FIGURE 1 <i>Inside an Ugly Fight in Panama</i> by Stan Wayman, Life magazine	48
TORRIJOS TAKES CONTROL: THE MILITARY COUP OF 1968	48
FROM CLIENT TO NATION: THE RESHAPING OF AN IDENTITY	50
CHAPTER 2: OMAR ‘EL HOMBRE DEL PUEBLO’	51
DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN MILITARISM AND POPULISM	54
UNDERSTANDING TORRIJOS: ‘EL HOMBRE DEL PUEBLO’	57
TORRIJOS REGIME: MILITARISM OR POPULISM?	59
SOY UN SOLDADO DE LATINOAMÉRICA: TORRIJISMO	64

	vi
UNA REVOLUCIÓN DIFERENTE: A COMMON MINDSET	70
A COMMON ENEMY: THE UNITED STATES	83
UNITED NATIONS 1973: FIGHTING FOR SOVEREIGNTY	87
CHAPTER 3: THE NEGOTIATION OF THE TORRIJOS CARTER TREATY	92
FAILURE ATTEMPTS: NEGOTIATING WITH JOHNSON & NIXON	93
CHANGING THE RULES: RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION 1972	96
TACK - KISSINGER AGREEMENT: THE NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN	98
THE BACKUP PLAN: GAINING WORLDWIDE SUPPORT	100
GAINING SUPPORT FROM THE PEOPLE: PANAMA	103
SUPPORT ABROAD: WEST INDIANS IN THE UNITED STATES	106
JIMMY CARTER: TERMINATING IMPERIALISM	110
A HOPEFUL FUTURE: SIGNING AN END TO IMPERIALISM	119
CONCLUSION	123
BIBLIOGRAPHY	128

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: <i>Inside an Ugly Fight in Panama</i> by Stan Wayman, Life magazine.	48
FIGURE 2: <i>Los Viajes De Torrijos a Las Provincias En El Interior.</i> , Graciela Iturbide	82
FIGURE 3: <i>Dollar bill, Panama progresa. 1971.</i>	86
FIGURE 4: <i>Elecciones de 1999 y el retorno del Canal</i> , La Prensa.	122

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ICC: Isthmian Canal Commission

RTAA: Tariff Act of 1934

MAR: Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria

FEP: La Federación de Estudiantes Panameños

U.S: United States

U.N: United Nations

CONEP: Consejo Nacional de la Empresa Privada

CEPAS: Centro de Estudios, Promoción y Asistencia Social

ARENEP: Acción Reivindicadora del Negro Panameño

UNEP: Unión Nacional de panameños

NCOP: National Conference of Panamanians

UNDEP: Unión Nacional de Panameños



## INTRODUCTION:

On January 12th 2001, my family and I decided to move to Panama City, Panama. I remember the day like it was yesterday. Everything was new to me, unique culture, traditions, people—new flag. I remember crossing the border, holding my younger brother's hand, and looking at the big Panamanian flag waving above me. I had no idea what laid ahead, but as a Costa Rican immigrant, I did my best to fit in. To my interpretation, I realized how vital the *simbolos patrios*, the flag, the national anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance were to the people of Panama. The first month into school, I memorized everything, and proudly sang the national anthem during the *Acto Civico*, an assembly that took place every Monday morning before school began. Between the years of elementary school to High School graduation, I learned that November 3rd, 1903 was one of the most important events of Panamanian History. The day Panama became independent from Colombia. I also learned that the levels of patriotism and Panamanian Nationalism were incredibly high during this moment in time. Consequently, I began painting this picture of the heroism and devotion by those individuals who participated in the independence, Manuel Amador Guerrero, Josue Augustin Arango, Tomas Arias, Federico Boyd. These men were the heroes of Panama. After finishing High School, I moved to the United States, where I learned that there was more than one perspective of interpretation to this event in History. I learned new pieces of information concerning the narrative of the independence of Panama. This interpretation would drastically change the understanding of the role the United States played in shaping Panamanian Nationalism. The quest for knowledge concerning these perspectives became the source for this thesis.

The historical interpretation of Panama's independence has been a significant piece to the understanding of Panamanian nationalism. When referring to nationalism, we refer to the cultural symbols, imagined community that an individual is able to develop based on experiences and perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Patriotism on the other hand, becomes an aspect of nationalism. The consciousness of such is crucial, for the better understanding of historical and colonial influences. The case of Panama becomes a perfect example of the inter-relationship and the adaptation of ideology due to the shared space between the United States and Panama. The United States played a vital role in the development of national identity and economic development. As a result, the relationship of colonial power and colony becomes one that creates adaptations to the existence of both groups.

During the decade of the Second World War and culminating in the 1960s, a quest for national sovereignty drove anti-imperialist movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Latin America's populist leaders began to emerge in different parts of the continent, advocating individualism and economic independence from the United States. In Argentina, Juan Domingo Perón, desired to support and benefit the condition of the working class. Similar cases were seen in Peru with Juan Velasco Alvarado, and in Bolivia with Alfredo Ovando Candia. In Cuba, similar ideas were presented with the Cuban Revolution in 1953. Its leader Fidel Castro, opposing imperialism and advocating for Cuba's individualism and economic independence from the United States. Years later, Nicaraguans overthrew Anastasio Somoza using guerrilla warfare, and similar cases occurred in Guatemala, Colombia and Venezuela. All these new ideas

---

<sup>1</sup>Anthony D, Smith. "Nationalism : Theory, Ideology", *History* 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK ;: Polity, no. 2 (2010):5.

began a movement that changed Latin American politics.<sup>2</sup> Those nationalistic ideas became the narrative for sovereignty opposing imperialistic rule. Movements in Ghana, Central Africa, Kenya, and different parts of East Africa began to push for human rights, challenging the relationship between the colonizer and the colonies. “The rising political consciousness of the colonial subjects” began to change, influenced not only by the movements of nationalism but also by a new wave of ideas concerning imperialism and sovereignty.<sup>3</sup>

The case of the Panama Canal Zone featured popular movements for national sovereignty since the early 1920’s. Although it continuously failed to create significant change in United States-Panama relations, the constant conflict between the two countries became a source for growth of nationalism. The mobilization of the masses began to take shape by the 1960s, and one man took great advantage of the growth of nationalism and exploited it to create a drastic change to the politics of the country.

Panamanian historiography has explored nationalism growth through three main ideas: *la leyenda dorada*, *leyenda negra* and *la ecléctica*. The theory of the *leyenda dorada* has been one of the most used and well-known perspectives within Panamanian historians. The *leyenda* was established through the writings of Justo Arosemena, which presented Panama as a nation able to accomplish the inevitable, become independent from one of the largest territories of South America, Gran Colombia. In *El Estado Federal de Panamá*, the historical narrative presented by

---

<sup>2</sup> Marco Antonio Gandasegui, *El Impacto De La Revolución Cubana Sobre América Latina: solo Sabemos Que Lo Imposible Es Posible* (2019), 213.

<sup>3</sup> Cheikh Anta, Babou. "Decolonization or National Liberation: Debating the End of British Colonial Rule in Africa." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 632 (2010): 50.

Justo Arosemena introduced the main characters as sovereign and independent from any other external force that was crucial for the independence of the country. These individuals were presented as the *heroes* to the Panamanian people.<sup>4</sup> This became the foundation of other writers who hope to understand but also ‘educate’ the masses about the idea of nationalism. However, there is one significant aspect that the *leyenda dorada* ignores completely, and that is the active involvement of the United States in the independence of Panama. Therefore, a new perspective was introduced, acknowledging those ideas that had been ignored in the *leyenda dorada*. The *leyenda negra* took the involvement of the United States and replaced those aspects of heroism and nationalism with economic benefit and monetary success.

The *leyenda negra* takes the opposing view of la *leyenda dorada* by highlighting the direct involvement of the United States in the creation of Panama. In the book *How Wall Street Created a Nation*, Ovidio Diaz-Espino argues that the creation of Panama was the outcome of an imperialistic desire of the United States.<sup>5</sup> This theory transformed the nation and its people into an object, removing any growth of nationalism and arguing that the outcome of its creation was purely monopolistic. Similar ideas are argued in *Panama Made in the USA* by John Weeks & Phil Guson, by highlighting the role of the elite Panamanian class in giving away the Panama Canal to the United States. Consequently, this idea has become troublesome for some Panamanian historians as the Panamanian identity that is seen through some of Justo

---

<sup>4</sup> Justo Arosemena, *El Estado Federal De Panamá* (Panamá: Editora República, 1960), accessed March 30, 2019, Colección Biblioteca De La Nacionalidad.

<sup>5</sup> Ovidio Diaz-Espino, *How Wall Street Created a Nation: J.P. Morgan, Teddy Roosevelt and the Panama Canal* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003).

Arosemena's writings is completely ignored.<sup>6</sup> Those ideas are then reconstructed and reorganized with the *leyenda ecléctica*, as it recognizes both the growth of nationalism through Arosemena's writings and the involvement of the United States.

Olmedo Beluche, a Panamanian historian and supporter of *the leyenda ecléctica*, introduces the Panamanian people as independent and autonomous. He sees the Panamanian people as individuals who were responsible and active in the process of developing their identity. He does not present them as heroes, as the *leyenda dorada* does, but are actively involved in the development of Panamanian society, consequently influenced by some degree of Panamanian nationalism. However, Olmedo Beluche argues that this nationalism did not begin until after the independence of Panama from Colombia in 1903. According to Beluche this nationalism is created by the reflection of the past, this past creates a certain unity and consciousness about the present, which is also commonly found in other Latin American countries.<sup>7</sup> However true nationalism began with the evident imperialistic presence of the United States in Panama with the creation of the Panama Canal. Beluche criticizes those who have created a narrative that romanticized nationalistic ideas during the independence of Panama in 1903, completely ignoring the evident aide of the United States in the process. He states that this interpretation of history "produces flagrant contradictions, such as endowing a social class with a desire for independence that would have been satisfied if today, we were just another star on the Yankee

---

<sup>6</sup> John Weeks and Phil Gunson, *Panama, Made in the USA* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1991), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Olmedo Beluche. "La Verdadera Historia De La Separación De 1903 Reflexiones En Torno Al Centenario." 1st ser. (2003): 6.

flag”.<sup>8</sup> Beluche criticizes the elite Panamanians who depended on the modernization of the United States for the development of their own pleasure, ignoring the consequences, but at the same time sympathizes with their desire for establishing the country of Panama.

In *Narrativas sobre el origen colonial de Panamá* (2009), Ana Elena Porras also highlights aspects of the *leyenda dorada* that become contradicting to the historical events. She argues that the *leyenda dorada* does not fully examine the growth of nationalism taking into account all the events that occur with Panama in 1903.<sup>9</sup> The *leyenda* and characters presented ignore the existing groups before the colonization of Spain. “The historical characters of the colony, selected by the historiography are represented as heroes or villains by the legend. They are re-converted into metaphors and symbols by the narratives of national identity, in processes that include omission, synthesis, abstraction, repetition, analogy and historical inversion.”<sup>10</sup> The *leyenda dorada* also fails to present the existing separation amongst people groups, social classes, and racism found within the Panamanian society, as they ignore the significance and identity of indigenous groups, and instead create an impersonation of the elite Panamanians as the foundation of the *ideal men*. This existing social racism gets merged within their nationalism,

---

<sup>8</sup> Beluche, 119.

[produce contradicciones flagrantes, como dotar de una voluntad *independentista* a una clase social que se hubiera satisfecho si hoy fuéramos una estrella más de la bandera yanqui]

<sup>9</sup> Ana Elena Porras. "Narrativas Sobre El Origen Colonial De Panamá (2009)." In *Antología Del Pensamiento Crítico Panameño Contemporáneo*, edited by Gandásegui Marco A., Fernández Dídimo Castillo, and Hernández Azael Carrera, 191-220. Argentina: CLACSO, 2018. Accessed October 10, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvfjd163.12>.

<sup>10</sup> Porras, 193.

[Los personajes históricos de la colonia, seleccionados por la historiografía y representados como héroes o villanos por la leyenda, son re-convertidos en metáforas y símbolos por las narrativas de identidad nacional, en procesos que incluyen la omisión, La síntesis, la abstracción, la repetición, la analogía y la inversión histórica]

as a result “constructing a colonial indigenous identity, a metaphor of resistance to colonialism and neocolonialism, of sovereignty, dignity and national independence.”<sup>11</sup>

The analysis of historical facts should always be accompanied by multiple perspectives of a certain event. For the case of Panama, the usage of *the leyenda dorada* becomes an interesting piece in the analysis of the historical events that occurred not only at the beginning of its foundation as a country but also in the development of nationalism and the influence that this created to future generations and the interpretations of the events and relationships that occurred between the United States and Panama. The interpretation of history becomes one-sided, the heroism presented in this leyenda can be seen as a *better story* for the Panamanian people. It becomes easier to eliminate certain relationships and parts of the historical narrative within the establishment of the Panama Canal as a way of *clearing out* some of the negative effects and even individuals that became agents in the shaping of a nation.

The *leyenda dorada* has become one of the most published perspectives within history books in Panama. As a result, most individuals are not familiar with any other perspective which makes the interpretation of history one-sided, especially for those who have not yet been exposed to other ideas. To understand all three leyendas, becomes crucial for the interpretation of Panamanian history even during the establishment of the Panama Canal between the years 1903-1977. Not only because of the role the different actors played in the shaping of nationalism, but also to understand the influence the presence of the United States caused to Panamanian society.

---

<sup>11</sup> Porras, 215.

[construyen una identidad indígena colonial, metáfora de resistencia al colonialismo y neocolonialismo, de soberanía, dignidad e independencia nacional]

One of the most significant figures during the Panama Canal era, which became successful at developing ideas of nationality for the Panamanian people was Omar Torrijos Herrera.

Omar Torrijos became the unifying voice amongst the Panamanian people. He utilized a narrative of nationalism and anti-imperialism against the United States. Producing foundational change for the repossession of the Panama Canal and the development of Panama-United States relations. The guiding question for this thesis is the following: What role did Torrijos play in changing the narrative surrounding US-Panama relations and how did it influence the nationalism of the people and the symbolism of the Panama Canal? Taking into account the change in diplomatic relations between the United States and Panama between the independence of Panama from Colombia in 1903, Chapter 1 will be a contextual chapter, providing some of the background information for better understanding Panama-U.S relations. Since the majority of this study is dedicated to the analysis of Torrijos' approach, the following chapter will analyze Torrijos' populism. This section will focus on examining the aspects that made him a populist leader and the support he was able to gain for the military regime established in 1968. Looking closely at the relationship that was created between Torrijos and *his people*. When referring to *his people*, it is important to keep in mind that this did not include everyone, or all middle and lower class, but those who did not openly oppose his regime. The last chapter will focus on the Torrijos-Carter treaty. It will look at the events that took place in Panama during the treaty negotiations but also events that took place in the United States. It will seek to understand the contribution that was made between Torrijos and President Jimmy Carter for the negotiation of a new Canal treaty. In order to fully understand the significance of the relationship between the



United States and Panama, it becomes remarkable to explore the existing scholarship published and the approach that has been taken for the understanding of the topic.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historiography of United States and Panama relations has brought significant information to the understanding of the influence of both Americans and Panamanians. Not only to the social impact that was created due to the historical events that took place between both countries, but also to the diplomatic and political influence the presence of the United States had on Panamanian life. When referring to political aspects, we are referring to diplomacy and foreign relations that took place between the two countries. Most historians have used the Panama Canal Zone as their focal point, as either a cause of tension or of influence between the United States and Panama. This argument is seen in the book *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance*, Michael Conniff argues the unequal alliance was created between the two countries through the Hay Bunau Varilla Treaty.<sup>12</sup> A similar argument is found in the book *Black Labor on a White Canal: Panama 1904-1981*, in which Conniff also observes the social structure between the Panamanian and the American Zonians.<sup>13</sup> Conniff concludes that the division created became the by-product of the flag riots of 1964.<sup>14</sup>

Alan McPherson takes a different approach on the Panama-United States relations. In *From Punk to Geopoliticians* he seeks to understand the nationalism that emerged from the Flag riots of 1964. McPherson argues that the riots become the breaking point of the alliance between

---

<sup>12</sup> Michael L. Conniff. *Panama and the United States: The End of the Alliance*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 60.

<sup>13</sup> Frenkel, 540

<sup>14</sup> Frenkel, 550.

the United States and Panama.<sup>15</sup> Instead of focusing on only one group, he views both Americans and Panamanians, providing a deeper understanding of the broken relationship. The weakened relationship between the U.S and Panama did not become the only definitive factor of nationalism growth, the usage of populism during Omar Torrijos regime also became an influencer of such growth.

Populism in Latin America has been a significant topic for the understanding of the development of politics. Due to the influence, it has on politics, a series of perspectives have emerged concerning the interpretation of populism in relation to Latin America. Populism has been defined as the political culture that supports the popular masses. By popular masses, historians refer to those who are considered to be outside of the elite group within a given society.<sup>16</sup> Some of the scholars that tend to criticize populism do it on the basis of comparison to other countries. A very well-known figure that used populism within his politics and style was Juan Peron. Peron became the president of Argentina during two distinct terms. Just like Omar Torrijos, he truly made the Argentinian government the government of 'the people'.<sup>17</sup> Thomas McGann explains that these ideologies have been established with the premise of fear of intervention and speculations of communist activity, as a product of the pre-Cold War era. Whether or not these assumptions are made with credible data, or enough evidence to support the arguments, this thesis does not analyze populism as a 'default of democracy', but instead an

---

<sup>15</sup> Alan McPherson, "From 'Punks' to Geopoliticians: U. S. and Panamanian Teenagers and the 1964 Canal Zone Riots," *The Americas* 58, no. 3 (2002): 400.

<sup>16</sup> Conniff, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas F McGann, *The Ambassador and the Dictator: The Braden Mission to Argentina and its Significance for the United States Relations with Latin America*.(1962): 350.

aspect of Latin American politics.<sup>18</sup> It would be a mistake to compare the politics of Latin America with the politics of the United States, since both have completely different foundations, when studying this particular aspect of Latin American politics, one must see it as an individual aspect of Latin American politics.

Omar Torrijos represented both ideas of nationalism and populism. Robert S. Heaney defines this combination as postcolonial nationalism. He defines the term as “[the] responding to coloniality, promoting the theological agency of marginalized peoples, developing hybridized forms of theology, and resisting theological hegemony culminating in some form of decolonization.”<sup>19</sup> This term introduces a new concept, an idea that looks at the response to imperialism or colonialism within a particular people group, similar to a rebellion against that “higher power.” The development of nationalistic ideas, does not just end at the response. Still, it evolves by highlighting those “marginalized peoples”, this can be seen as the working class, or in many cases, indigenous groups, taking that idea and creating a new “hybridized form of theology.” The beauty of Heaney’s definition is that it leaves room for growth. It provides a detachment from the colonizer and opens a new door to a new identity which becomes the response to the existing oppression. Just like it was seen with Mexico, the nationalism that occurred during the Mexican Revolution was shaped and formed by the influence and presence of the United States. In the case of Panama, nationalism was not established or defined until the

---

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Gutiérrez Vera, "Ernesto Laclau: El populismo y sus Avatares." *FLACSO*, no.40 (2011):160.

<sup>19</sup> Robert S Heaney, and Christopher Rowland. "Post-Colonialism." *Historical to Critical Postcolonial Theology: The Contribution of John S. Mbiti and Jesse N.K. Mugambi*, Lutterworth Press, (2016).

mid-1950s. Although some scholars might argue otherwise, the lack of sovereignty becomes evident for the Panamanian people as they reshape their identity, and as a result, a sense of patriotism emerges. This postcolonial nationalism becomes the result of a powerful country dictating Panama since its establishment as an independent nation in 1903: the United States and the Panama Canal.

#### OMAR TORRIJOS HERRERA: THE POPULIST

The scholarship on Torrijos labels him as a populist leader that was in tune with the Panamanian people. In *Reflexiones Sobre el populismo en Panamá*, Ana Elena Porras provides a historical context of the populism in Panama since the beginning of its independence to the time of Omar Torrijos Herrera.<sup>20</sup> She gives a significant analysis of Omar Torrijos. She states that he was successful in restructuring the people's national identity, allowing the middle class to have a voice within the structure of politics. Torrijos was successful at doing this by creating a common enemy between him and his followers; this enemy became the United States and the upper class. In the book “Borderland of the Isthmus,” Michael Donoghue spends an entire chapter on analyzing crime in the border between the United States Panama Canal Zone and Panamanian towns of Chorrillo and Curundu.<sup>21</sup> Donoghue concludes that the crimes expressed by the Panamanian natives were simply a reaction from the anti-imperialist perspective that the Panamanian people shared throughout the image of Torrijos.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ana Maria Porras, “Reflexiones Sobre Populismo En Panamá,” *Canto Rodado* 8 (2013).

<sup>21</sup> Donoghue, Michael E. *Borderland on the Isthmus : Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone* Durham ;: Duke University Press, 2014.

On the other hand, Marco Gadasegui furthers the argument by looking at the authoritarian image of Torrijos. He analyzed the relationship between the oligarchy and the middle class before the time of the military dictatorship.<sup>22</sup> He argues that Torrijos was able to take that created foundation and fill in the gaps by gaining the support of the Panamanian people. Continuously, Miriam Elizabeth Villanueva highlights Torrijos' use of military force presented in *Populist Authoritarians: A Cultural Interpretation of Military Government in Cold-War Panama 1968-1989*. She recognized that there were several aspects of his dictatorship that brought some benefit to the people. He was able to establish a system that included multiple classes into the “national political life”.<sup>23</sup> By national political life, Villanueva explains, she refers to the political process of a country. In this case, the middle class was successful at gaining a voice within that process. According to the author, the military regime created a “plebeian state ideology.” She emphasizes the connection between the government and the people, which most previous pieces also recognize. Still, she furthers the argument by stating that he used this tactic of promoting a “cultural revolution” to keep his regime in power.

Similarly, Robert Harding focuses on using power as a form of abuse in order to gain economic independence. He used the growth of praetorians at the core of his argument through narratives and police reports to make that argument stronger.<sup>24</sup> Harding also follows that same argument presented by Villanueva but adds to the discussion by expanding the explanation of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Marco A. Gandasegui, “La Crisis De Una Alianza: La Coyuntura Panameña,” *Caribbean Studies* 21 (1988): pp. 237-247.

<sup>23</sup> Miriam Elizabeth Villanueva, “Populist Authoritarianism: a Cultural Interpretation of Military Government in Cold-War Panama, 1968-1989” (dissertation, 2017) 29.

<sup>24</sup> Robert C. Harding, “The Military Foundations of Panamanian Politics: from the National Police to the PRD and Beyond” (dissertation, R.C. Harding, 1998).

foundation of Panama's politics as a response to capitalism. He mainly focuses on the restriction against the opposition, including information about the suppression of freedom of the press, not mentioned in the preview's pieces.

Panama becomes a unique case in which the combination of the people, their leader, and their colonizer bring significant pieces to the structure for development. However, the existing historiography ignores the role the authoritarian regime played in the development of Panamanian politics. Instead of labeling Torrijos as a hero or tyrant, this thesis seeks to understand the interconnectedness of Torrijos and the Panamanian people and the contribution that the United States was able to make to the overall picture. This research would recognize that although Torrijos advocated for 'the people,' there were also those who were excluded influencing Torrijos' image, and the way historians interpret his role in Panamanian politics.

Consequently, the primary sources used for this study were mainly government documents. In February 2020, a worldwide pandemic forced individuals to remain in complete lockdown to control and eliminate exposure to the Coronavirus. The situation forced this project to employ communication for primary sources outside of the United States through online communication. I was able to communicate with the Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá, one of the two archival databases located in Panama City, Panama. Although this phenomenon moved an adaptation to the methodology used in this research, the usage of government documents, such as the Foreign Relations of the United States database, became a crucial piece for the development of the thesis. Creating another significant contribution to the historiography of the Torrijos Regime and the Torrijos-Carter treaty negotiations, which was the bilateral approach of treaty

negotiations. Primary sources that were not available until 2010. Exposing the role, the Panama Canal played in both the United States and Panama between the years of 1969 to 1977.

The conflict that began to emerge between the United States and Panama forced Panamanians to question the purpose of the Canal and the reason for the presence of the United States in Panama. Consequently, the conflict also unified the country across socioeconomic backgrounds, creating a very similar narrative for sovereignty from those who desired to see change. Omar Torrijos Herrera became the figure to fulfill the possession of the Canal. Although the credit cannot be given to only Torrijos, the relationship between the United States and Panama also created an addition to the existing development that was occurring in Panama. This project will hope to comprehend how the narrative of nationalism grew over time, the influence the United States had within Panamanian politics, and the evolution of the relationship between the two countries. Most of the historiography has focused on the historical events, the economic growth of the country, or Panama's international relations with the United States. This project recognizes that all those three categories are significant for understanding this time period but hopes to highlight the influence of Torrijos towards the Panamanian people.

## CHAPTER 1: FROM CLIENT TO NATION

“The road is a cemetery ... For some, it is civilization and progress, but for me it is the sepulcher where the ravenous hunger of wildlife who descend from the mountains to confront modern civilization dies forever”.<sup>25</sup> These were the words from Joaquín Beleño, a Panamanian novelist during the years of 1930s-1970s. Beleño followed the theme of nationalism and pride in most of his books. An aspect that cultivated Panamanian nationalism even more was the portrayal of imperialistic power and the degradation of Panamanian life. Modernization has always been described as the evolution of a society, the success of an economy. However, many tend to neglect the price paid for such evolution, the price paid by the existing traditions and customs previously established by the former communities. The relationship established between the United States and Panama had grand plans to modernize the economy to the point of imagining the perfect structure of an interoceanic Canal. Panama was presented as a country that needed modernization, that needed the help of a superpower, it *needed* the United States. Panama was able to gain its independence from Spain in 1821 as part of Gran Colombia. In 1903, Panama became an independent nation, an opportunity that was offered by the United States in exchange for a territory. This piece of land would later be known as the Panama Canal.

Panamanian nationalism began to emerge, as early as 1849, and sentiments against the Colombian government began to grow among the Panamanian elite. *La Estrella de Panamá* and *Star Herald* published an ‘anti- Colombian’ segment that brought much attention and created controversy among Panamanians. Justo Arosemena, a statesman, Congressman, politician and

---

<sup>25</sup>C. Beleño Joaquín, *Gamboa Road Gang: Los Forzados De Gamboa* (Panamá: Librería Cultural Panameña, 1979).



writer who supported the *movimiento separatista* <sup>26</sup>, published his book *Estado Federal de Panamá* in 1855. The main goal was to prepare the political elite of Colombia for separation from Panama. Although Arosemena explained the need for Panama to become an independent country due to the differences of culture, disconnection with Colombia and financial and political neglect from Bogotá, he also communicated a solution to restore the political structure of Colombia, even without Panama.<sup>27</sup> The growth of nationalism even before the independence from Colombia is a common view supported by historians who agree with the *leyenda dorada*. Arosemena's publication became the cause of major division of ideology between Panamanians and Colombians.

Division between Panamanians also grew, as some supported an alliance with the United States to provide for their separation from Colombia, but others feared the repercussions. As a result, a civil war emerged between October 17th, 1899, to November 21st of 1902. *La Guerra de los Mil Días* was mainly a division of political ideology between the *Partido Liberal Colombiano* and the *Partido Nacional*, later known as the *Partido Conservador Colombiano*. The dispute was primarily due to the support of federalism and the desire to create a more centralized government. Some significant Panamanian figures, such as Belisario Porras Barahona, Victoriano Lorenzo, supported the *Partido Liberal Colombiano*, forcing some of them to live in exile as a result of the party in control of Colombia de *Partido Conservador Colombiano*. The perspective shared by Belisario Porras and others becomes the narrative that

---

<sup>26</sup> Movimiento separatista: a group of Panamanian elites who began to spread ideas of independence from Colombia due to the differences of political views between the Colombian Congress and those who had been given a title to represent panama in Congress.

<sup>27</sup> Justo Arosemena, *El Estado Federal De Panamá* (Editora República, 1960).

opposed the separation from Colombia. Porras went into exile in El Salvador due to his opposition to the treaty Herran-Hay, a treaty that authorized the United States to build a Canal through Panama. Porras also opposed the separation of Panama from Colombia in fear of giving too much power to the United States by establishing a treaty and creating a Canal. In 1904 Porras returned to Panama but was forced to renounce his Panamanian nationality due to his opposition to Panamanian independence.<sup>28</sup> Although most of the Panamanian historiography focuses on those who supported the separation from Colombia, it is essential to recognize that some feared the control given to the United States' through the creation of the Panama Canal.

After the separation between Colombia and Panama, The United States and Panama created an alliance. This chapter will focus on the partnership established between the United States and Panama and how different events weakened that partnership between the two countries. The chapter will also look at the different responses people groups had concerning the negotiations and presence of the United States in Panama, and how a narrative of sovereignty created an increase of conflict between the United States and Panama. This particular chapter will focus on the events that took place between the years 1903 to 1968.

#### A COSTLY EXCHANGE: INDEPENDENCE FROM COLOMBIA (1903-1920)

The independence of Panama from Colombia became possible due to the military assistance received from the United States. On November 3rd, 1903, an uprising took place in

---

<sup>28</sup>Ana Elena Porras, "Narrativas Sobre El Origen Colonial De Panamá (2009)," *Antología Del Pensamiento Crítico Panameño Contemporáneo*, January 2018, pp. 191-220, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfjd163.12>.

parts of the Isthmus and Colón city.<sup>29</sup> On November 4th, a mass meeting occurred in Panama, where a Cabinet of Panamanian representatives had publicly declared Panama's Independence.<sup>30</sup> These events became possible due to the military assistance the United States provided Panama against Colombia. Although Colombia had sent troops to protect the area of the isthmus from a revolution, the United States had already dispatched both army and navy from Nashville. The United States would defend the territory of Panama. The Secretary of State, John Hay, expressed the United States' intentions in intervening with the coalition between Colombia and Panama. In a telegram, he communicated that “this Government is responsible for maintaining peace.”<sup>31</sup> As a result of the support from the United States, the Colombian troops were forced to retaliate and leave the Panamanian territory.

Foreign policy for the United States has had intentions of economic growth and political control, increasing the presence of the United States abroad. The United States began to create a determined presence abroad in order to benefit the economic prosperity of the country. In order to make this a reality, the United States continuously provided for either military assistance or monetary compensation in exchange for the control of a territory. In 1853, after the Mexican-American War, the United States purchased from Mexico the Gila River territory in Arizona and a small strip along the area of New Mexico. The United States had been trying to carry on the

---

<sup>29</sup>Mr. Loomis to Mr. Ehrman, “Telegram to the Department of State from the U.S Consulate”*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1903 (Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1903/d231>

<sup>30</sup> Mr. Ehrman to Mr. Hay, “Telegram from Panama” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1903, (Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1903/d229>

<sup>31</sup> Mr. Ehrman to Mr. Hay “Telegram to the Department of State from the U.S Consulate”*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1903 (Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1903/d242>

construction of the South Pacific Railroad. The Gadsden Purchase would give the United States the opportunity to finalize the project.<sup>32</sup> Similarly to the Gadsden purchase, the Panama Canal was a significant monetary asset for the United States government. That drive became the foundation for U.S-Panama relations and the American control of the Panama Canal.

The purchase of the Panama Canal would give military control and an economic advantage to the United States. On November 3rd, 1903, Panama gained independence from Colombia; this day was also the day Panama sold its most precious jewel to the United States, the Panama Canal. There are currently three schools of thought that argue the influence of the United States on the country's independence. The *Leyenda Dorada*, *Leyenda Negra* and *Ecléctica*. The *Leyenda Dorada* contends that the United States did not influence Colombia and Panama's separation and that the separation was purely out of patriotism and nationalism.<sup>33</sup> The United States did purchase the Canal Zone's land, but that did not correlate with the country's independence. The *Leyenda Negra* argues the complete opposite and states that the Panamanian people did not have a sense of nationality yet; they did not know what it was to be an independent nation because they had never been one. According to this perspective, the United States *created* Panama by purchasing the Canal Zone and the Panama Canal transaction in exchange for their independence.<sup>34</sup> The *Leyenda Ecletica* suggests that the intervention of the

---

<sup>32</sup> Jeremy Black. *From The Oregon question to the Gadsden purchase 1844- 53*. In *Fighting for America*, (Indiana University Press, 2011) 260 .

<sup>33</sup> Ana Elena Porras, "Narrativas Sobre El Origen Colonial De Panamá (2009)," *Antología Del Pensamiento Crítico Panameño Contemporáneo*, January 2018, pp. 191-220, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfjd163.12>, 201.

<sup>34</sup> Ovidio Diaz-Espino, *How Wall Street Created a Nation: J.P. Morgan, Teddy Roosevelt and the Panama Canal* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003).

United States in the independence of Colombia did in fact influenced the growth of nationalism but at the same time the Panamanian elites had been motivated by ideas against the Colombian government. In other words the *ecletica* creates a balance between both the *negra* and the *dorada*. There is an aspect that the *leyenda dorada* completely neglects, and that is the treaty that was offered to Colombia on January 22nd, 1903. The Hay-Herran Treaty was not put into effect because Colombia rejected the treaty. Consequently, the United States saw the desire for separation of Panama from Colombia as an opportunity to not only grant their independence but also fulfill their agenda in Central America.

The negotiations for a treaty between the United States and Panama began soon after the independence from Colombia. On November 16th, 1903 Philippe Bunau Varilla was sent to Washington to negotiate the soon-to-be Canal Treaties with the United States Congress, however he was to wait until representatives from the Panamanian government arrived at Washington to finalize any negotiations. Despite the instructions given by the Panamanian government, the Frenchman assisted in the drafting of the treaty. Although his representation has been a debated topic due to his French nationality and not Panamanian, the Panamanian officials knew that Panama needed an agreement with the United States and wanted to move quickly with the negotiations. At the time the treaty was drafted by both Hay and Varilla, there had been nobody from the Panamanian government to represent or contribute to the writing of the treaty regulations. Once the treaty was signed and drafted by the American government it was sent to Panama to be reviewed. At first, the Panamanian government was not in agreement with the regulations established by the United States but were forced to comply. The United States would

remove their troops from Panama if the treaty was not signed by the Panamanian authorities.<sup>35</sup>

The Panamanian government knew its independence from Colombia was going to be costly. The exchange for independence would be a piece of land that will later become a topic of discontent, the Panama Canal Zone.

The reason for discontent can easily be seen through the regulations established by the American government with the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, which specified power Panama granted to the United States through the possession and construction of the Panama Canal. The treaty was signed on November 18th, 1903 and became the primary factor of discontent between the United States and Panama. The first article explained the assistance the United States provided to Panama in exchange for the "occupation and control of a zone." The treaty continued and defined the detailed explanation of rights this gave to the United States concerning the Panama Canal Zone: "[occupation of] underwater for the construction, maintenance, operation, sanitation, and protection of said Canal of the width of ten miles extending to the distance of five miles on each side of the central line of the route of the Canal to be constructed."<sup>36</sup> Once the United States claimed the piece of land, Panama granted all the rights to power and control of the construction and maintenance of the Canal. The treaty stated that the Panamanian people were not allowed to intervene with the construction or development of the Panama Canal Zone. "The

---

<sup>35</sup> Michael L, Conniff. *Panama and the United States: The End of the Alliance*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 70.

<sup>36</sup> "Hay-Bau Varilla Treaty", November 18, 1903, *Convention for the Construction of a Ship Canal*, art. 2.

rights of the United States shall be superior.”<sup>37</sup> As a result, the United States president would appoint two representatives to rule the Panama Canal Zone.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE ALLIANCE

At the beginning of the created alliance between the United States, the Panamanian government saw it profitable to comply with the agreements. Panama believed that the construction of the Canal would allow the country to reap full benefits economically, allowing for the prosperity of the country. The expectations the Panamanian government had were simply too high. In desperation for independence they had signed their sovereignty off to the United States. Both countries had very different expectations coming into this alliance. The United States desired to create profits out of the construction of the Canal, and political order in the Isthmus. The United States also expected the elite Panamanians to appear sophisticated in the eyes of the world, supporters of democracy and modernism. In the eyes of the United States they had *created* Panama and assisted their independence. On the contrary, Panama expected financial rewards, expected civility and dignity from those Americans now living in their land. However, the United States only had one goal in mind, and that was to build the Panama Canal.

The United States would have no respect or dignity for the existing civilization established near the territory of the Panama Canal. Another addition to the established treaty for the permission of building the Canal was the creation of the Panama Canal Zone, a ten-mile-wide area, approximately 1,432 square kilometers of land.<sup>38</sup> In the article, *A Canal without a Zone*

---

<sup>37</sup>“Hay-Bau Varilla Treaty”, November 18, 1903, *Convention for the Construction of a Ship Canal*, art. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Conniff, 63.

Marixa Lasso states that the Canal Zone forcibly separated the Panamanian people. She presents this information using three maps: a French Map from 1888 and two American maps from 1912. These sources show the United States' success in separating the Canal Zone by removing the established Panamanian towns in the Canal Zone territory before signing the Hay-Bunau Varilla treaty. Lasso is successful at showing the perspective of the United States from France and the different approaches followed by both countries.<sup>39</sup> The separation between Panamanians and Americans became another way of maintaining the upper hand in the United States alliance with Panama.

The creation of the Panama Canal Zone also became a divide between Panama and the United States, culturally, economically and socially. Lasso argues that the creation of the Panama Canal Zone was another infliction of imperialism over Panama. It was evident that the country that had control of the Zone had control of the Panama Canal. The Canal Zone and Panama were usually represented in different colors, indicating the space inside the Panama Canal Zone as territory of the United States, separating it culturally. *The Bird's eye view of the Panama Canal*, a map published by National Geographic in 1912 shows out-of-scale pictures between the Canal locks and the local towns, emphasizing the importance of the Canal engineering. The map also shows an empty green space surrounding the Canal, almost implying the Canal's lack of civilization and the fact that nobody was living in this area. This particular map also highlights the Gatun Lake's magnitude, which was the primary source of water surrounding the Canal.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Marixa Lasso, "A Canal without a Zone: Conflicting Representations of the Panama Canal," *Journal of Latin American Geography* 14, no. 3 (2015): pp. 157-174, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2015.0035>, 164.

<sup>40</sup> Lasso, 165.



The second map Lasso uses to emphasize her argument is the *Wuhrer and Muret*, a French map from 1888. It shows almost a different perspective on the building process of the Canal. There are no separations between an outside area and an inside area of the Canal, removing a Canal Zone idea. The Canal towns are represented in the map, showing no difference between the Canal towns and the Panama City towns. Most importantly, all of the railroad towns, ports, and even river towns appear on the map; the area is not an empty green space but a populated area. The unaltered demographics show that depopulating the villages surrounding the Panama Canal could have been an idea introduced by the United States once they gained the Panama Canal possession. The Hay-Bunau Varilla Treaty also gave permission for the creation of a small governing body within the Panama Canal Zone. Individuals who had been placed in leadership in the Panama Canal Zone would report to the United States government or receive and follow orders from the government. The treaty allowed the establishment of a governor, the Panama Canal Zone police, the Isthmian Canal Commission, and the Panama Canal Company, which was the largest group living in the zone, composed of all the Panama Canal workers. At the time the construction of the Panama Canal and the Panama Canal Zone the Isthmian Canal Commission became the body responsible for what took place inside the Canal Zone.

This governing body would make decisions concerning the Panama Canal Zone that would only benefit the growth and preference of the United States, not Panama. In 1911 the ICC met to discuss what they would do with the residents living in the town of “La Boca”. “La Boca” had been thriving and could flourish economically due to the port established near the Río Grande during the Canal construction conducted by the French. Balboa, a settlement near La Boca, had already been destined to be a “white settlement” in the eyes of the Panama Canal Zone

engineers. The decision of removing all Panamanians from the Zone had not been a final decision yet.<sup>41</sup> Instead, George W Goethals considered the possibility of keeping those inhabitants that had previously been living in the Zone even after the establishment and construction of the Panama Canal. He hoped to find a "convenient location to relocate" these individuals to continue with the Canal Construction. So he began relocating the inhabitants of the City of Gatun. In 1908 the ICC relocated the residents two miles away from their current location hindering the commerce of the inhabitants of this particular city due to the lack of access to the lake. Those who depended on access to the Gatun lake complained to the ICC. Consequently, the complaints did nothing to their current situation since the ultimate goal had been constructing the Panama Canal.<sup>42</sup>

Between the years of 1908 and 1911 drastic changes were made by the United States to the demographics of the original towns established in the Canal Zone. The complaints that had emerged from the current inhabitants of City of Gatun and later on La Boca had urged the ICC to make a final decision in order to terminate the problem. The ICC would remove all the towns located inside the Zone, in order to effectively conduct the necessary changes to the Panama Canal Zone and the Panama Canal. They did not see these particular groups of people capable of fitting into their imagined idea of an American urban civilization. In January 1911, Tom M Cooke sent a letter to various ICC committee members about "relocating or removing native towns." He received multiple responses on the issue. One particular response was more

---

<sup>41</sup> Marixa Lasso, *Erased: the Untold Story of the Panama Canal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 136.

<sup>42</sup> Lasso, 169.

concerned about the town's aesthetics, the possibility of building a mall, or the types of flowers that would decorate the streets. There was no concern for the outcome of the inhabitants of these existing towns. David D. Gaillard became one of the vital voices against the possibility of keeping the inhabitants inside the Zone. He said, "it was undesirable to have a native town anywhere near the docks: that such town would necessarily be a place for rum-selling, drunkenness, and disorders". The ICC supported Gaillard's opinion: *erasing* the towns in the Panama Canal Zone became the true definition of American modernity.<sup>43</sup>

The idea of depopulating the "Old Gatun" came truly as a surprise for its inhabitants. The economic success the commerce had brought to this area of Panama had truly been a significant aspect of "Old Gatun". Many had invested in those businesses, not knowing that the Panama Canal had eliminated their future. Mr. A Preciado, a business owner of the Gatun area, sent a letter to the ICC requesting to "kindly inform me as to the truth of certain reports contained in local dailies regarding the future of Old Gatun is bound to disappear sometime."<sup>44</sup> Preciado had purchased two buildings in the Old Gatun area and had invested money in the repairs of these buildings hoping to one day make it a lucrative business. Weeks later, the Canal authorities confirmed it, the depopulation of the Old Gatun would occur in the next few months. Although the first article in the Hay-Bunau Treaty stated that the United States had "occupation and control of the Zone land, and land underwater for the construction" of the Panama Canal, the treaty gave the power and authority to the United States through the ownership of this piece of

---

<sup>43</sup> Lasso, 141.

<sup>44</sup> Lasso, 192.

land.<sup>45</sup> It would allow the United States to gain complete control of the area and power to close the established businesses in Gatun as well as depopulate towns, relocating them outside, creating an American utopian culture inside the Zone. The only reaction from the Panamanian people was that of those who had been forced to relocate outside of the Zone. The Panamanian public began to believe the story that the United States newspapers began to publish to their public, where they explained the depopulation had taken place as a product of the flood from Lake Gatun. Years later, a Panamanian novelist published a novel called *The Lost Towns*. The plot explained the story of a family who was forced to move by the Zone police due to a flood. This became the narrative that the Panamanian public began to believe concerning the depopulation. The publishing of Lasso's research has provided a lot of information to the understanding of the Zone depopulation process the United States was successful at covering.<sup>46</sup>

#### THE RISE OF OPPOSITION: CREATING CONFLICT. (1920-1960)

During the 1920s, Latin America began to express feelings of resentment due to the continuous military intervention from the United States.<sup>47</sup> The Good Neighbor Policy established by President Franklin Roosevelt increased the military and political intervention of the U.S in Latin America. Therefore, compromising the sovereignty of those countries involved, in the process of meeting their political agenda. Countries like the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama became subjects of this tradition.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Lasso, 195.

<sup>46</sup> Lasso, 220.

<sup>47</sup> William D. Pederson, "The Good Neighbor Policy and the Americas," in *A Companion to Franklin D. Roosevelt* (West Sussex: John Wiley, 2011), 543.

<sup>48</sup> Pederson, 551.

Roosevelt truly believed it was the responsibility of his country to restore the political stability of Latin America. The Great Depression changed the method the U.S took within Latin American policy with the establishment of the Tariff Act of 1934 (RTAA), giving the president the power to dictate foreign trade with other countries, hoping to accelerate the pace of international trade globally. The national and economic security the Canal brought to the United States became the central component for involvement. Consequently, the American economy was reflected into the Canal, especially the Panama Canal Zone, creating feelings of unrest inside Panamanian society.

Between the years 1920 and 1960, the existence of the Panama Canal Zone created major conflict between the United States and Panama. Panama demanded the United States reconsider the profit given to Panama due to the revenue created from the Panama Canal commerce.<sup>49</sup> During the Hay Bunau Varilla Treaty's signing, President Theodore Roosevelt also made the *Taft Agreement*, which gave Panama the right to act as "sovereign." The United States never fulfilled this part of the agreement, and the conflict created by the first World War only pushed them to occupying more territory. Belisario Porras, the Panamanian president during the 1920s, became an advocate for anti-Americanism due to the actions done by both Congress and the ICC.<sup>50</sup> As a result, he openly opposed any decisions made by the United States. He successfully created a surprisingly high amount of national support from the people against the United States. On two occasions, the United States deployed troops to disperse protests that were taking place in front of the Canal Zone. On top of that, the United States kept making risky moves on Panamanian soil. The idea of eminent domain was a followed practice by the

---

<sup>49</sup> Conniff, 84.

<sup>50</sup> A. Arosemena G. Diógenes, *La Cuestión Canalera, De 1903 a 1936* (Panamá, 1975).

American government; one example became the Isla Taboga, an island that was depopulated and turned into a military zone due to its strategic location.

The population of Panama had been drastically changed with the institution of the Panama Canal. The workforce needed for its reconstruction increased the levels of migration to Panama, especially *Antillanos*. Furthermore, Panamanian society consisted of the elite, which was represented by landlords, merchants or anyone who economically benefited from the Canal. The working class included many foreigners, as three-quarters of the working class consisted of West Indians. These West Indians constantly tried to integrate Panamanian society, yet always remained as outsiders due to their origin. This increased of migration also began to create not only a rivalry between West Indians and Panamanians, but also began to create feelings of *hispanidad*.<sup>51</sup>

Subsequently, the existence of the Panama Canal Zone became a symbol of imperialism in the eyes of Panamanians. There were several aspects that contributed to the Zone's imperialism, the two main characteristics were segregation and subjection of the Panamanian symbols. The segregation between Panamanians and Americans became effective through a system of payroll. The Panama Canal Zone became a social mirror of whatever occurred in the United States, the Jim Crow laws were still present in American society between the 1920, as a result the Canal imposed those same ideas into their social structure in the Canal Zone. There were two systems of payroll, the gold and the silver payroll. The gold was for any American working for the Canal, which usually came with better housing, better benefits and a higher pay.

---

<sup>51</sup> J. A. Zumoff, "Black Caribbean Labor Radicalism in Panama, 1914-1921," *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 2 (January 2013): pp. 429-457, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/sht085>, 430.

Silver payroll was given to all non-Americans: Panamanians, West Indians, Spanish, etc.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the labor competition between Panamanians and West Indians, the first labor strike against the Canal's structure took place in 1914. This strike had support from both groups, West Indians and Panamanians. The strike lasted five days, and although it was dispersed by the Zonian authorities, it presented another layer to Panama social change, the collaboration of Hispanic-Antillano.<sup>53</sup> These responses become the first reaction presented against American imperialism by the working class.

The second aspect that transformed the Canal Zone as a form of imperialism was the subjection to recognize the national symbols of Panama from those living inside of the Zone. The separation created by the Zone between Americans and Panamanians became even stronger amongst the younger generation. The Panama Canal Zone had everything Zonians needed, leaving the Zone was not necessary for those living inside, separating them socially, culturally, and politically from those living outside of the Zone. The perception constructed by these teenage Zonians about the Panamanian Zonians was heavily influenced by the anti-Panamanian culture that was present in the Zone.<sup>54</sup> This culture was motivated through education, family circles, and even established policies within the Zone. The isolation between the two groups only

---

<sup>52</sup> Julie Greene, "Spaniards on the Silver Roll: Labor Troubles and Liminality in the Panama Canal Zone, 1904–1914," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 66 (2004): pp. 78-98, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0147547904000183>, 81.

<sup>53</sup> Zumoff, 437.

<sup>54</sup> Alan McPherson, "From 'Punks' to Geopoliticians: U.S. and Panamanian Teenagers and the 1964 Canal Zone Riots," *The Americas* 58, no. 3 (2002): pp. 395-418, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tam.2002.0012>, 402.

grew the opposition amongst Panamanians and Zonians.<sup>55</sup> The Panamanian teenagers felt a sense of entitlement from the American Zonians, not only for the prohibition into their *territory* but also for their careless attitude towards the Panamanian society.

As a result, sentiments of Panamanian nationalism and anti-Americanism began to show in the ideology of the younger Panamanian generation. This generation had experienced the presence of the United States since an early age, causing the opposition to be much stronger than any other generation. The mobilization of university students across Latin America began to also reach the ears of those in Panama. The decade of the 1930s was ideologically significant due to the establishment of the *Universidad de Panamá* and the *Escuela libre de Derecho*, which began to foster ideas of social justice and patriotism through education.<sup>56</sup>

Sentiments of patriotism and nationalism were strongly cultivated by the educators of these institutions, which foster the creation of student activist organizations. A group of students rose and would become the driving force for opposition against the United States in years to come. Among those were: La Federación de Estudiantes Panameños (1942), Frente Patriótico de juventud (1945), Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (1959) and others. The groups were mainly composed of high school or college students and had a primary role in advocating anti-imperialism and anti-aristocratic ideas. With mobilization, these groups attained an easy way of

---

<sup>55</sup> For more information concerning the political socialization of both Zonians and Panamanians please read "From "Punks" to Geopoliticians: U. S. and Panamanian Teenagers and the 1964 Canal Zone Riots." and "School Segregation on the Panama Canal Zone".

<sup>56</sup> J. Conte Porras, *La rebelión De Las Esfinges: (Historia Del Movimiento Estudiantil panameño)* (Panamá: Litho-Impresora, 1978), 13.



making their opinions known. Aside from the labor rebellions conducted by West Indians in the 1920s, the Panamanian students became one of the first groups to openly oppose the presence of the United States in Panama. These sentiments were commonly expressed through protest that opened the door for other groups among Panamanian society to oppose imperialism.

Further, U.S political and military interventions began to damage relations with Latin America. In 1942, only years before the Cold War era began, the U.S feared the socialist policies implemented in the Guatemalan government. Jacobo Árbenz, a military officer, became the president of Guatemala. Árbenz doubted the capacity and jurisdiction the U.S had over Latin America, specifically in Guatemala. Árbenz also believed Guatemala needed to become more economically independent from foreign trade. The U.S saw Árbenz agrarian reforms as “communist” and in fear of losing Guatemala to the Soviets, organized the Operation PBSuccess, deposing Árbenz and installing Carlos Castillo Armas.<sup>57</sup> Just like the Guatemalan intervention, Panama also experienced an increase of political presence of the U.S.

The rise of fear due to the Cold war increased the military presence in Panama. In 1948, a large group of Panamanians marched in Panama City demanding the removal of military bases outside of the Panama Canal Zone. President Truman was then forced to comply and removed any military bases located outside the Panama Canal Zone territory. The opposition did not come only from the people; at times, individuals in power also spread anti-American ideas. Roberto Chiari, the president of Panama during 1955, was very open about his contradiction of the United

---

<sup>57</sup>Bevan Sewell, “Strategic and Economic Interventions,” in *The US and Latin America: Eisenhower, Kennedy and Economic Diplomacy in the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 53.

States' presence in Panama and even organized and promoted propaganda that opposed those ideas to gain more public support from the Panamanian people.

Panama's political and economic stability was at its lowest between the years 1948 to 1952. The Panama Canal became a significant asset to the United States during World War II for defense and commerce during the war. The United States became concerned with the protection of the Canal, permitting the transit of only those ships that were not considered to be a threat to the safety of the Canal. The Panama Canal transit dropped tremendously between the years of 1940 to 1945, causing the revenue to also decrease.<sup>58</sup> That affected the Panamanian economy. The decrease in revenue caused more discontent from the Panamanian people, as they saw the lack of flourishing promised with the existence of the Panama Canal. More than the economical influences the United States brought to Panama through the involvement in the war, the U.S government cared deeply for the security of the Panama Canal. Due to the political instability of the 1940s, the U.S worried about the security of the territory. The combination of fears of the Cold War and the political instability of Panama deteriorated U.S-Panama relations even more. The new presidential elections of 1952 finally brought some peace to the anxiety of the superpower, as the new elected president brought political stability and was willing to cooperate with the U.S.

In 1952, José Antonio Remón came to power through a presidential election. As a nationalist, Remón sought opportunities with the U.S to benefit the condition of Panama. The United States saw Remón as their only guarantor for political stability and a key to the

---

<sup>58</sup>John Bratzel and Thomas M. Leonard, *Latin America during World War II* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

development and success of the Panama Canal; his anti-communist ideologies placed him in a very good place with the United States. The surfacing of the Cold War, planted fear in the U.S government for communist influences to reach Panama. The value of the Canal became even higher due to the crucial location it had in Central America. To keep Panama away from seeking assistance elsewhere, the U.S began to financially assist the policies Remón desired for Panama. One of them being the reconstruction of the Guardia Nacional.<sup>59</sup>

In 1955, knowing he was in a good place for negotiations, Remón inquired about a new Canal treaty. Remón did not see an equal distribution of profits beneficial to both countries and hoped to enlarge Panama's financial contributions. Remón and his negotiators ratified a list of demands presented in Washington. To increase the Panamanian people's support, he convened a rally in Panama City just moments before leaving for Washington. Some of the demands raised by Remón's team were: taxation for Panamanian employees, abolishment of contraband sales, equal sharing of profits emitted by the Canal, and more importantly, the recognition of Panamanian's sovereignty in the Panama Canal Zone, through the respect of Panamanians beloved symbol, the Panamanian flag.<sup>60</sup>

For the first time in many years, the Panamanian people began to imagine their country free from imperial rule. Since 1903, the Panamanian people had been living under the shadow of the United States. One cannot ignore the economic growth and success that the Panama Canal brought to the country as a whole, but to what cost? The Zone had become a divisive factor between the United States and Panama and Panamanians. The social and cultural separation that

---

<sup>59</sup> Conniff 106

<sup>60</sup> Conniff, 108.

the Zone had created between the haves and the have nots, distinctly separated the social classes even more. The Panamanian people saw the prosperity and economic growth of the Panama Canal Zone and felt resentment for the abuse of power and their own resources. The Panama Canal Zone had been closed to the middle and lower class, only those who worked for the Panama Canal Company were allowed to enter the Zone.

However, as it was mentioned previously, the United States had expectations for the elite to act civilized and properly in the eyes of the entire world. Consequently, the schools that had been established inside of the Panama Canal Zone had been accessible to some of the members of the elite families within Panamanian society. It is also significant to note that the elite ran Panamanian politics until the year 1968, which to some degree gave the United States tranquility to know that the children of their own *protégé* were being educated by their own schools. There is no doubt that this separation of opportunity between the upper and lower class became an aspect of discontent to the Panamanian middle class.<sup>61</sup> One thing becomes clear about the people of Panama, and that is the significance of civic education and civic duty. Despite the separation of classes the Canal Zone was creating, the nationalism and patriotism was still bestowed upon the hearts of the people. The symbol that the Panamanian flag meant to the people was significant. Clearly there was one aspect that really bothered the people concerning the U.S and the Zone, despite the opportunity, despite the separation, the flag was not raised in this territory. This concept became one of the most significant and debated topics during Eisenhower's administration.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> McPherson, 402.

<sup>62</sup> McPhearson, 417.

The Eisenhower administration followed the policies established by the Truman administration but believed more could have been done economically for Latin America. The U.S-Latin American relations worsened during the Eisenhower administration due to political change occurring in Latin America. During the decade of the 1950, the involvement of the U.S in Vietnam increased as well, and the emergence of a civil war in Cuba broke the control the U.S desired. As a result, Fulgencio Batista, a Cuban dictator that had maintained diplomatic and economic relationships with the U.S was overthrown by Fidel Castro. “Approximately 160,000 Cubans were employed by US-owned businesses, and 186,000 by Cuban government”.<sup>63</sup> The rise of Castro drastically changed U.S-Cuba relations, at the same time his ideology brought uneasiness to the American government and the anti-communist agenda. Hoping to solve the communist issue, the U.S began funding anti-Fidel guerrillas in Cuba, and continuously attempted to overthrow the revolutionary government. The U.S saw Cuba as a national security threat and a cancer to the rest of the Latin American countries. In the midst of Vietnam and Cuba, the U.S fixated most of their attention on concerns they believed to have a priority for the American government.

The main question during Eisenhower's administration was the following “Should the Panamanian flag fly along with the American flag in the Panama Canal Zone?”.<sup>64</sup> Looking closely at the flag's significance for the Panamanian people, it became the primary source and symbol of pure patriotism. Raising the Panamanian flag next to the American flag represented

---

<sup>63</sup> James DeFronzo, “The Cuban Revolution,” in *Revolutions and Revolutionary Moments* (Routledge, 2021), 164.

<sup>64</sup>“Editorial Note”. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*, (Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v05/d347>

equality in this partnership between the two countries. The idea of raising the flag was mentioned by Remón in one of his meetings to the White House. However, these were not the same ideals shared by President Eisenhower or the Panama Canal Zonians. In 1955, new treaty negotiations were created between the Eisenhower administration and Remón Cantera. The treaty favored Panama's request for economic benefit, as a solution to solve the nationalism issue the U.S chose to ignore their desire to raise the Panamanian flag inside the Panama Canal Zone.

On January 5th, Remón was assassinated, making Ernesto De la Guardia the new elected president. Like Remón, he also became persistent in changing the established agreement on the treaty signed in 1955. The main issue lay on interpreting the treaties between the two countries concerning the purpose and legitimacy of the Panama Canal Zone authority. The description given on a briefing paper addressed to the National Advisory Committee on Inter-American Affairs explained the political condition in Panama:

Panama's political figures play on easily aroused public opinion and use the United States presence in the Canal Zone to whip up this emotion. [...] A consideration that contributes to the present increase of Panamanian pressure on the United States is the current political campaign which will culminate in a presidential election in May 1960. Further public statements appealing to nationalist sentiment against the Canal Zone can be anticipated throughout the coming months. Critical observers of the scene have often held the view that Panamanian emotionalism towards the Canal Zone further aroused by the rather legalistic approach of our Panama Canal and Zone authorities, the quasi-colonialist attitude of many of its United States employees, and the rigid attitude of the military in

the Zone, but it is only fair to say that even if these factors did not exist, Panamanians would be challenging people to get along with.<sup>65</sup>

The report recognized that the rise of nationalism could have been a byproduct of the “legalistic approach of our Panama Canal Zone authorities”, referring to the raising of the flag or the continuous rejection Zonians were receiving from Panamanians. The report also mentioned the military presence in the Zone which caused unrest for the Panamanian people. The conclusion was to acknowledge the idea that Panamanian people were “challenging people to get along with”. Despite the backlash received by the Panamanian people, the U.S government believed that this nationalism issue would eventually dissipate. The U.S disregarded the issue, causing Panamanian discontent to grow even more.

The Panamanian people were concerned about the Panama Canal Zone. The existence of the Panama Canal Zone had broken the relationship between these two countries due to the abuse of power that repeatedly favored the United States' presence in Panama. As a result of the U.S. refusal to raise the Panamanian flag, a group of college students from the University of Panama planted 75 flags inside the Panama Canal Zone. This movement was known as *Operación Soberanía*. Although this particular event did not cause any conflict between the two nations, the resentment that the Panamanian people began to express against the United States began to grow. This event did not change President Eisenhower's decision on permitting the Panamanian flag inside the Canal Zone.

---

<sup>65</sup>Mr Ryvittin to Mr. Reinhardt . *Panama and the Canal Zone*,1959, (Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/foreign-policy/panama-canal/07-rubottom-memo.pdf>

## LA MARCHA PATRIÓTICA: THE SHAPING OF A RESPONSE

After the *Operacion Soberania*, President Eisenhower's decision did not change. On November 3rd, 1959, foreign minister Ernesto Castillero and deputy of the Asamblea Nacional Alquilino Boyd motivated the people to march for their country. Many individuals carried Panamanian flags as a symbol of celebration for Panama's independence and peacefully protested against the United States' presence. The *Madera Tribune*, an American newspaper, paints a different picture of the events. The journalist explains that the Panamanian "students [were] demanding the United States give up the Panama Canal Zone, injured three U.S policemen today in a wild, stone-throwing battle".<sup>66</sup> The writer explains that the Zone police arrested two of the students and established order in the Zone. The paper also blames the Zone attacks by Alquilino Boyd as he motivated the people to begin a "peaceful invasion" of the Zone. Boyd also gave a small speech while standing on the banks of the canal. "We sincerely believe that pretty soon we are going to have the Panamanian flag flying officially over this part of Panamanian territory." Panamanian newspapers saw the narrative of the events as a form of nationalism and highlighted the abuse of power by the Zone police.

*La Estrella de Panamá* reported the events from a different perspective. There was a first group that was allowed into the Zone. This group had Alquilino Boyd as their 'leader' as he walked and spoke about the need for obtaining sovereignty in the Zone. As a response to the broadcast delivered to the entire country, a group of university students tried joining the group. Robert J. Fleming, the Panama Canal Zone Governor, instructed the Zone police to restrain

---

<sup>66</sup> "Anti-U.S Riot Hits Canal Zone," *Madera Tribune*, November 3, 1959.



access to anyone else reaching the Zone's borders in order to "protect against *their* people."<sup>67</sup>

Fleming was afraid of the increased numbers of protesters in the Zone. Although the United States did not fear these nationalistic movements, the separation of the masses became their only way to stop them from spreading.

The Panamanian people wanted one thing, and that was fair representation. The desire for sovereignty and patriotism can be seen by Boyd's motivation about raising the Panamanian flag within the Zone's territory. But how could such symbols develop such a distinct reaction from the Panamanian people? Allan Knight presents some ideas concerning nationalism. He describes nationalism as three main aspects: "nationalistic mindset, nationalistic modes of expression and nationalist social actors."<sup>68</sup> In Panama's case, the United States' presence in their territory and the constantly failed negotiations for sovereignty had become the main incentive for a nationalistic response. Knight labels the nationalist mindset as symbols and attitudes directly connected with the nationalistic modes of expression. The idea of raising the Panamanian flag in the zone territory had become the solution to the issue of *sovereignty*. It was forcing the United States to recognize that there was an equal partnership between them and Panama. The nationalistic expression took the shape of political patriotism due to the constant rejection of an agreement since the beginning of the negotiations from 1945 to 1964.

Nationalism had also begun emerging in the United States, after many Cubans fled Castro's regime seeking asylum in the United States. The U.S did not ignore this anti-Castro

---

<sup>67</sup> "Sobria y Firme Protesta de Panamá por los Hechos acaecidos en la Z. del Canal" *La Estrella de Panamá*, November 3, 1959.

<sup>68</sup> Alan Knight, *U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940: an Interpretation* (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987), 3.

sentiment, nor did they oppose the nationalism expressed by these Cubans. On the contrary, utilize those feelings to fulfill the so desired agenda to depose Castro. Utilizing the same tactics used for Guatemala, the United States would invade Cuba and remove Castro, restoring the political balance the U.S had been hoping for. In 1959 a group of Cuban exiles along with the assistance of the American government launched an attack known as the Bay of Pigs. Although Kennedy was hesitant about the invasion, he was instructed the U.S would seem weak to other countries around the world. The attempt was unsuccessful, the U.S-Cuban relations worsened.<sup>69</sup>

The success of the Cuban Revolution reached many revolutionaries in Latin America. The Kennedy administration hoped to earn the support of those Latin American nations that had established diplomacy with the U.S. In order to increase their support, Kennedy established the Alliance for Progress, an economic project that would improve the life of many Latin American countries that supported and advocated for anticommunist movements. Consequently, the ruling of military dictatorships during the 1960's in Latin America only grew, Argentina, Peru, Chile and Uruguay overthrew their democratically elected president. Due to the low support for the Alliance for Progress, the program eventually failed. The conflict between the U.S-Latin America increased. The fear the U.S had concerning the impact the Cuban revolution would have in other countries in Latin American, reached Central America as well.

The Cuban Revolution motivated those student revolutionary groups, especially the Federación de Estudiantes Panameños and the Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria. The “Radio Rebelde” had reached the ears of many students in Panama who opposed the presence of

---

<sup>69</sup> DeFronzo, 175.

the United States and the control of the elites in Panamanian politics. Feelings of nationalism they saw with the Cuban Revolution began to also influence their perspective concerning the situation Panama was currently facing with the Canal. They began to see a role model in Fidel Castro and Che Guevara's words and actions. The Latin American youth began to take a significant role in the active political arena that surrounded them. Similar movements took place in Panama and other countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, and Venezuela. The role of the Latin American youth's response became key to the movement and spread of anti-Americanism and anti-oligarchical ideas. The younger generations had always been willing to sacrifice to defend the cause of independence and promote ideas against imperialism.<sup>70</sup>

However, the youth of Panama had two main enemies: the United States and the aristocracy. Several student groups originated from the late 1940s and were actively involved in the promotion of nationalistic ideas. The two main groups were the Federación Estudiantil Panameña (FEP) and the Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (MAR). The FEP and MAR supported nationalist, democratic, and pluralist ideas. Their main objective was the “improvement of the democratic life and the Republic of Panama”.<sup>71</sup> On April 3rd, 1959, a group of 20 students who were part of the Movimiento Acción Revolucionaria robbed a store in San Francisco Veraguas hoping to acquire rifles and munitions to join the *revolución*. The men fled to the mountains of Cerro Tute in the province of Veraguas. The Guardia Nacional quickly

---

<sup>70</sup> Marco Antonio Gandásegui, “El Impacto De La Revolución Cubana Sobre América Latina:” *Cuba En Revolución*, January 2019, pp. 201-226, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvt6rkqn.12>, 202.

<sup>71</sup> “Los Rebeldes del Tute” *Los Panameños*, April, 2015.

[Perfeccionamiento de la República y la vida democrática en Panamá]

intervened on Saturday, April 4th. The MAR's group had begun to send messages to the different student groups in the City of Panama. It had started to motivate them to join them against the "Lucha armada contra la Oligarquía"[Fight against the Oligarchy]. To their interpretation, the United States and the Oligarchy were part of the same group. Both had become enemies to their country. On Monday, April 6th, the Guardia Nacional made contact with the rebels. There were two deaths, and two injured officers, Rodrigo Pizon and Eduardo S. Blanco, were the two students who died that day. The officers wounded were Omar Torrijos Herrera and Jorge Andrade. The rebels, avoiding being captured, dispersed. It wasn't until Thursday, April 9th, when the Guardia Nacional found them. The Guardia Nacional failed to stop the spread of ideas as similar movements took place in Boquete, Chiriquí, and Salud, Colon; both campaigns were promoted by the same group of students, MAR. There were no casualties due to the quickness of the Guardia Nacional.<sup>72</sup> But the influence of these groups at the national level was surprisingly higher than the Guardia Nacional expected.

The MAR and the FEP had both hoped to cooperate with the idea of changing the Panamanian government. Augusto Fabrega, a former member of the MAR and former student who survived the Movimiento armado del Cerro Tute, explained the group's frustration. He expressed that they had become tired of being ignored by the elite; they were also tired of the injustices and corruption they saw in their country. The presence of the United States made everything even harder to comprehend. There was only one thing they desired, and that was their

---

<sup>72</sup>“Primera sangre derramada Torrijos Herido Contacto entre la Guardia y los civiles armados” El País, April 4, 1950.

land and their freedom.<sup>73</sup> Although the Movimiento armado del Cerro Tute had been a failed attempt to their cause, the actions of the MAR sent a message, and it successfully reached the ears of another group, the Federación de Estudiantes Panameños (FEP).

#### LA GESTA DEL 9 DE ENERO: THE FLAG RIOTS

The FEP desired to gain Panama's sovereignty over the Canal Zone. Their actions began with peaceful intentions as they followed the same idea that *La Marcha Patriótica* had in 1959. However, this particular riot started as an act of rebellion of the Balboa High School students. In 1960, President Eisenhower had permitted the Panamanian flag to be raised alongside the American flag in the zone.<sup>74</sup> The governor of the Panama Canal Zone, after experiencing the discontent of the American Zonians, decided to remove both flags from the Balboa High School campus. In an act of rebellion, the Balboa High School students raised the American flag only and stood in front of the flagpole in an act of protest.<sup>75</sup> On January 9th, 1964, a group of High School students from the Instituto Nacional wanted to join the Balboa High School students, and like President Eisenhower had determined, raise the Panamanian flag next to the American flag. The Instituto Nacional students decided to enter the Panama Canal Zone carrying the Panamanian flag. As they reached the Zone, the High school students began to sing the national anthem, surrounded by a large group of students and parents from Balboa High School. They were not able to finish singing, and the event quickly turned into chaos.

---

<sup>73</sup> “Entrevista a Augusto Fabrega” *Los Panameños*, April, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Editorial Note . *Foreing Relations of the United States*, 1958-1960, (Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v05/d347>

<sup>75</sup> Conniff, 120.

The Balboa students took the flag from the Panamanian students' hands and threw it to the ground. In the middle of all of the commotion, the Zone Police quickly showed up in the scene, and began to shoot at the Panamanian students. Others around the city soon got word of these events. A much larger group of students started to make their way to the Cuatro de Julio avenue, a street that separated the Panama Canal Zone from the Panama City border's outskirts. The students responded by throwing rocks at the Zone police. The Zone police responded by shooting at the students. As the confrontation climaxed, many Panamanians continued to arrive at the scene carrying flags.<sup>76</sup> The Panamanian police were instructed not to get involved in the conflict between the two groups. The confrontation continued throughout the night; by the morning of the next day, there had been ten dead and 300 injured. In response to the event, Panamanian president Roberto Chiari broke diplomatic relations with the United States.<sup>77</sup>

This event became a violent representation of the accumulated hatred of the Panamanians for the American Zonians. In the following days, the city also suffered from this riot as Panamanian citizens set fire to American-owned businesses, yet the Panamanian police did not intervene. The street's name was later changed from "Avenida Cuatro de Julio" to "Avenida de los Mártires."<sup>78</sup> These students' death became the power source that increased ideas of anti-colonial rule, as Panamanians expressed their desire for sovereignty. The event successfully gained President Johnson's attention, as he agreed to revise the 1903 Panama Canal treaty. It wasn't until September of that year that both presidents were able to reach an agreement.

---

<sup>76</sup> "Rebeldía desorientada" *La Prensa*, January 9, 1964.

<sup>77</sup> "Panamá Denuncia Tratado de 1903" *El Panama America*, January 14, 1964.

<sup>78</sup> William J. Jorden, *Panama Odyssey* (Univ Of Texas Press, 2014), 64.

Negotiations had overridden the treaty established in 1903, integrating the Canal Zone into Panamanian national life, equal benefits of wages for Panamanian employees. Some might argue that through the Hay-Bunau Varilla treaty negotiations, Panama was able to see improvements. However, it was the lost lives from the 1964 riots that brought change to the diplomatic relations between the United States and Panama. In light of the events, Life Magazine published an article called *Inside an Ugly Fight*, where it showed an image of the students of the Instituto Nacional, carrying the Panamanian flag, on their way to Balboa High School. The photo showed both students wearing their uniform and some teachers accompanying the students. Although the event ended up being one of the most violent encounters between the United States and Panama, the photograph became a vivid representation of the patriotism that was growing amongst the Panamanian students. At the same time, the only object that the picture showed was the Panamanian flag, a symbol that had become a direct representation of their desire for sovereignty.



<sup>79</sup> FIGURE 1 *Inside an Ugly Fight in Panama* by Stan Wayman, Life magazine

#### TORRIJOS TAKES CONTROL: THE MILITARY COUP OF 1968

Panamanian nationalism had risen due to the casualties of the 1964 riot, and anti-American sentiments had become increasingly evident since the ratification of the Hay Bunau Varilla treaty negotiations. On October 11th, 1968, the Guardia Nacional began to take control of the city, and this message traveled all through the country. A military coup organized by the Guardia Nacional, removed President Arnulfo Arias from power and replaced his position with José María Pinilla, who became a symbolic figure of authority. Although the people rejected the government's forced usurpation, the Guardia Nacional showed strong responses and began

---

<sup>79</sup> Stan Wayman, *Inside an Ugly Fight in Panama*, 1964 LIFE Magazine.



detaining anyone who tried to oppose the newly established power.<sup>80</sup> The night became a chaotic one, as the Guardia Nacional arrested many arnulfistas in Panama City and Ciudad de Colón.<sup>81</sup> Jose Humberto Ramos, Humberto Jimenez, and Col. Federico Boyd became responsible for the military coup.<sup>82</sup> This event marked the beginning of the military dictatorship of Panama.

Panamanians would support anyone that would oppose the United States. There had been rumors that Arias expected the United States to intervene and restore his power, so he remained in exile inside of the Canal Zone for ten days. President Nixon did not support the idea.<sup>83</sup> General Omar Torrijos Herrera, a member of the Guardia Nacional began to consolidate power by 1969. Alas, due to how the Guardia Nacional had eliminated their opposition, the Panamanian people were afraid of their methods; it was going to take great effort for the regime to gain the support of the people. Torrijos needed to find a common opinion between his goal and ideals to the people of Panama. Between the years 1969 and 1972, Torrijos toured the country, promoting a message that would capture the middle class's attention, students, teachers, and many others. Torrijos wanted the same thing that the Panamanian people had been fighting for since 1955; Torrijos wanted the Panama Canal.

---

<sup>80</sup> M.W Kendall, *Johnson Library, National Security File, Country*, 1968.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d449>

<sup>81</sup> Arnulfistas: the political party associated with the president Arnulfo Arias, who tried to dispose of the Guardia Nacional's leadership, including the exile of Omar Torrijos Herrera.

<sup>82</sup> "Derrocado Arnulfo por violar la constitucion y las leyes" *El Mundo*, October 12, 1968.

<sup>83</sup> "Arnulfo demanda la intervencion Americana, pero E.U la rechaza" *El Mundo*, October 14, 1968.

## FROM CLIENT TO NATION: THE RESHAPING OF AN IDENTITY

The Panama Canal created a unity between the United States and Panama. Although it began as an unequal unity with the establishment of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty, the constant oppression of the United States in Panama gave birth to sentiments of sovereignty that shaped the people of Panama. Despite the conflict and the division the Panama Canal and the Panama Canal Zone caused between the American Zonians and the Panamanian public, this territory became an incentive for nationalism, more specifically anti-colonial nationalism. Over time, many Panamanian presidents tried to benefit from the ratification of the Panama Canal treaties. Although some succeeded and others lost their lives through the process, these events only motivated Panamanian patriotism even more. The nation of Panama began as a client, a piece of the United States. However, the constant conflict only shaped the country into the Panama that many dreamed of experiencing. This dream would become a reality, as Omar Torrijos communicated a message to change not only the perspective of the military regime, but it was also going to change many lives, creating a Panama that the public had been dreaming of since 1903.

## CHAPTER 2: OMAR 'EL HOMBRE DEL PUEBLO'

Coclesito is a small town located in the province of Colon, in Panama. In August 1970, Coclesito was affected by a flood that devastated the property of Campesinos in the area. The loss of land influenced the production and productivity of the only source of income; these Campesinos had. Since the 1950's the Catholic church had been helping secluded villages outside of Panama City through education and welfare programs.<sup>84</sup> Members of the Catholic Church who participated in these programs often traveled across the country, assessing these villages' conditions. As a result, a priest who was going through the province of Colon, stopped in Coclesito after hearing about the devastation the flood had caused to the people of this village. After examining the damages, the priest informed the village leaders about the possibility of seeking help by sending a letter to General Omar Torrijos, reporting about the damages caused by the flood. After receiving the letter, Torrijos visited Coclesito on August 8th, 1970. This visit drastically changed the lives of the people residing in this location. In an interview about his visit, Virginia Lopez explained the condition of Concelesito before Torrijos' visit: "Life was unfortunate and challenging, lack of health, lack of housing, everything was lacking because it was a marginalized mountain."<sup>85</sup>

Like Coclesito, Torrijos also visited the town of Donoso and transported cattle to establish more jobs in the region. He arrived in 1972, asking if they were organized and if they

---

<sup>84</sup> Phillipps Collazos, Sharon. *Labor and Politics in Panama : the Torrijos Years* Boulder: Westview Press, 1991,166.

<sup>85</sup> Buscando al General, *Buscando Al General* (Panamá, Panamá: Telemetro Reporta, 2009).[La vida era muy triste y muy difícil, falta de salud, falta de vivienda, todo faltaba porque era una montaña marginada.]

wanted to work. “The people told him that they were not organized but they did want to work. From there he promised that he was going to do a livestock project”.<sup>86</sup> As promised, Torrijos was able to bring more jobs to both Donoso and Coclesito and provided better care to the families living in those marginalized communities. The establishment of employment, reconstruction of schools, and health care facilities created a connection between the Campesinos in the area and the Torrijos regime.

The desire to help marginalized groups became one of the most significant aspects of Torrijos's personality and regime. This desire began years before his role in the government; as a high school student, his interest to actively oppose the asentamiento de Campesinos in *Escuela Normal Juan Demóstenes Arosemena* influenced his nationalist development and growth as an individual. Years later, as the head of the Guardia Nacional, he communicated those same principles for those marginalized groups. “Lo que quiero para mis hijos, lo quiero para mi pueblo.”<sup>87</sup> Omar Torrijos Herrera was known as the man who supported the Panamanian people. He was a robust nationalistic leader who created a deep connection between the Panamanian people by caring for those who supported the regime. He focused on those marginalized groups, indigenous communities, Campesinos, and even women.

---

<sup>86</sup> Manuel de Jiménez Montero, Benito Ramírez Valverde, and Juan Pablo Martínez Dávila, “Construcción De Territorios En Donoso, Panamá. Período 1970-2008,” *Historia Crítica*, no. 48 (2012): pp. 111-136, <https://doi.org/10.7440/histcrit48.2012.06>, 121.

<sup>87</sup> Omar Torrijos and Juan Antonio Tack, *Nuestra revolución: Discursos Fundamentales Del General Omar Torrijos Herrera, Jefe De Gobierno De La República De Panamá* (Panamá: República de Panamá, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Departamento de Información, 1974), 36.

[Lo que quiero para mis hijos, lo quiero para mi pueblo]

Torrijos possessed an idealistic personality and strong nationalism for the Republic. The country as a whole had been developing sentiments of patriotism since the early 1920s' but had not been fully displayed until the 1960s. The death of the students of the 1964 flag riots had left the people of Panama with anger against an imperialistic power, the United States. Torrijos shaped Panamanian politics in such a way that he was successful to unify the country with a common ideology. Although his methods were distinctly different than any other individual in power, the faith he had for a better Panama had become his narrative. The usurpation of power by the Guardia Nacional and the removal of democratic principles became an unpopular aspect of the regime. As a result, Torrijos needed to work on gaining the support of his country.

Due to the lack of support for the military regime, Omar Torrijos communicated a message that hoped to unify the country and presented a new vision of *his* new government. His main goal through the series of visits to different parts of the country, between the years 1969-1974 was to connect with those who supported the regime and show his interest towards the indigenous groups and middle-class workers. These decisions of targeting those groups as his *allies* became one of his most significant characteristics as a politician who followed populist tendencies. This particular period in Torrijos's regime had a different purpose; Torrijos did not intend to establish an ideology. Instead, he hoped to alter the reality of the people, more specifically those who were either unsure of the regime or those who supported it, focusing on the country's social aspects and economic characteristics by highlighting the qualities that would allow Panama gain enough momentum to claim its sovereignty with the United States.<sup>88</sup> This

---

<sup>88</sup>Omar Torrijos and Juan Antonio Tack, *Nuestra revolución: Discursos Fundamentales Del General Omar Torrijos Herrera, Jefe De Gobierno De La República De Panamá* (Panamá:

chapter will analyze the approach Torrijos took in order to gain the public support of the people, his populist style in relationship to the militarist tendencies he at times followed with the Guardia Nacional. It is important to note that when referring to *the people*, this chapter is only referring to those who supported the regime, individuals who oppose Torrijos agenda were excluded from this group. This chapter will also seek to understand the vision for sovereignty and patriotism communicated by Torrijos to the people of Panama.

#### DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN MILITARISM AND POPULISM

Between the years of 1964 to 1976 Latin America's political culture radically changed. For the case of Brazil, Chile and Argentina, military coups seized power and modified the structure of politics. Although some countries had previously experienced a type of military government, this marked a new era for military dictatorships. These dictatorships began to use their power against civilian institutions. "These military dictatorships shared traits that placed them in a similar straitjacket. The armed forces were not organized to function as a national government or as the channel of political debate, yet they assumed both of these roles. What resulted were regimes that were inherently unstable and narrow-minded."<sup>89</sup> The individual who wore the military uniform became a symbol of that dictatorship, and the violation of the rights of the citizenships of that country became just another means of fulfilling the desire to have complete control.

---

República de Panamá, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Departamento de Información, 1974), 11.

<sup>89</sup> Dávila Jerry, *Dictatorship in South America* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 2.

The use of violence became the “new norm” for military dictatorships in Latin America. Although the assumption is to relate the violence experienced to the created policies of that regime, Jerry Davila argues otherwise. “To the contrary, the violence was integral to the dictatorships: they applied their goals of national transformation by deliberately torturing, jailing, and killing their foes. The regimes transacted their internal politics on the bodies of the opposition, whether alive, missing or dead. In this context, judging the regimes on the basis of the relative numbers of deaths they inflicted is misleading”.<sup>90</sup> The violence that was created by these regimes became a characteristic of their form of government. The regime would target an evident enemy and move on to the next once the last one was eliminated. Despite their tendencies, these regimes created different changes within their process of transforming their country. On one hand, Brazil's regime utilized its power to fulfill a goal through the support of the court system who prosecuted those who were considered to be “enemies” of the state. On the other hand, Argentina released those who had been convicted of crimes during the military dictatorship between the years 1966 to 1973 creating different social responses to these actions. Militarism continuously used the resources available to fulfill a specific goal. Those dictatorships contain similarities and differences to the case of Panama. The similarities are based on the militarism used during the regime, the authoritarian tendencies for eliminating opposition and establishing policies. The main difference within those dictatorships is the usage of populism.

---

<sup>90</sup> Dávila, 5

Populism had become an aspect of politics since the 1920s, making it a significant aspect of Latin America's political culture. Michael Conniff defines populism as the way leaders "inspire nationalism and cultural pride in their followers".<sup>91</sup> It becomes clear that this phenomenon has shaped the political arena, by mobilizing the middle and lower class in order to include them in the political process. Conniff states that most leaders that have followed this aspect of politics, by promising to change and reform the lives of their followers. However there are different perspectives when it comes to understanding the purpose and power of populism. Some scholars criticize this method and view populism as a defect of democracy.

Before looking at the case of Panama and Omar Torrijos, it is important to understand the use of populism. Maria Casullo, for example, focuses on the idea of how populism was employed by different styles of leadership. She compares and contrasts different 'myths' between the characteristics that define a hero and the characteristics that define a villain. However, what becomes significant about her essay is her argument, which states that populism is not necessarily used only by 'heroes' but it can also be followed by 'villains'.<sup>92</sup> According to Casullo, the leader's main goal when using populism stance as a way to take the people to "an exceptional higher condition", and also creating the connection between "us" [those in power] and "them" [the people]. Similar aspects were seen in Mexico with Plutarco Elias Calles.

Plutarco Elias Calles, was a Mexican president who like Torrijos used populism. Calles became president after Alvaro Obregón, creating an interesting connection to the idea of

---

<sup>91</sup> Michael L. Conniff, *Populism in Latin America* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University Alabama Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>92</sup> María Esperanza Casullo. "Líder, héroe y villano: Los protagonistas del mito populista." *Nueva Sociedad* 282 (2019): 58.



populism. Although Calles was considered to be a general, he constantly attempted to transfer power from the army to the central government. Populism in Mexico particularly experienced a shift when Calles came to power. Before Calles, former President Francisco I. Madero supported a democratic approach, hoping to expand the idea of representation within the masses. The difference seen with the populism promoted by Calles is the focus on economic nationalism, highlighting the significance of national economic development, advocating for the working class. Similarly to Torrijos, Calles understood the significance of representation through a centralized government, as a result, he sought to avoid the transferring of a significant amount of power to the Mexican army.<sup>93</sup> Although both reached a significant high military rank, obtaining a notably high position within the military, they did not exploit that military power against the people, instead portrayed a civilian image hoping to find a tangible connection to the people they were *serving*. This approach was influenced through Torrijos upbringing and humble beginnings, which influenced his populist style, always seeking to present himself as part of the *people*.<sup>94</sup>

#### UNDERSTANDING TORRIJOS: ‘EL HOMBRE DEL PUEBLO’

Omar Efrain Torrijos was born on February 13th, 1929, in Santiago Veraguas. Torrijos' parents were both elementary school teachers, his father Jose Maria Torrijos Rada was born in Colombia and his mother Joaquina Herrera was born in Panama. Educators within Panamanian society had always been known to cultivate patriotism, shaping Torrijos nationality at a very

---

<sup>93</sup> Jürgen Buchenau. “Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution” *Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield*, (2007): 4.

<sup>94</sup> Graciela Iturbide and Márquez García Gabriel, *Torrijos: El Hombre y El Mito* (New York: An Umbrage editions Book, 2007).

young age. Although he started his education locally in the *Escuela Normal Juan Demostenes Arosemana*, at the age of fifteen he was offered a scholarship to finish his High School career in the *Academia Militar in San Salvador*. After graduating, he returned to Panama at the age of twenty-three and joined the Guardia Nacional de Panamá. He excelled with the Guardia Nacional and was promoted to captain in 1955. By the year 1960, Torrijos was able to obtain the highest rank as Coronel and was relocated to the Headquarters of the Guardia Nacional in Panama City.

By 1968, Arnulfo Arias Madrid was elected president of Panama representing the *Panameñista* Party. Arias negotiated the relocation of Torrijos outside of Panama, along with changes to the leadership of the Guardia Nacional. As a result, on October 11th, 1968, the Guardia Nacional organized a military coup deposing Arias as president. At the beginning of the military regime, the leadership struggled to have a clear purpose. The leadership of the Guardia Nacional, desired different things for Panama. Some desired to involve the Panamanian elite even more, others desired to transfer the power of legislation to the National Guard. Torrijos differed from the others and was known to be more adaptable and knowledgeable about the lack of support the Guardia Nacional had received after the military coup. Torrijos wanted a regime supported by the people and for the people. He desired to reverse the faint support and shared his vision of his *new* government. He planned to do this by partnering with the group that had become the driving force for nationalism and patriotism within the Panamanian community, the groups of students. Despite Torrijos' strong nationalism, he was also aware of his necessary *allies* for obtaining Panama's sovereignty. He needed to regain the political stability of Panama in order to continue to receive support from the U.S government.

Torrijos was strategic about unifying the country of Panama and keeping diplomatic relations with the U.S in order to gain Panama's sovereignty. The United States feared the lack of political stability in Panama and the safety of the Panama Canal. Hence, they maintained the relationship with the Guardia Nacional through monetary support, in order to guarantee the protection of the Panama Canal, especially against those who strongly opposed the presence of the United States in Panama.<sup>95</sup> In 1969 Torrijos became the head of the Guardia Nacional. Between the years 1969 to 1973, Torrijos gained the trust of his followers, and reshaped the image of the U.S globally, gaining support for new treaty negotiations. He accomplished this through the creation of policies that would advocate ideas of anti-imperialism, institutionalized the regime with the ratification of the Constitution (1972), and shaped a nationalistic image for the regime, making the opposition easily characterized as *colonialist* or *imperialistic*.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, his approach was significantly different from previous presidents, and similar to some dictators in Latin America. He would present himself as populist yet remove and reshape his opposition.

#### TORRIJOS REGIME: MILITARISM OR POPULISM?

Torrijos' regime contained both militaristic and populist characteristics. On one hand, he presented the elite and American imperialism as the enemy of *el pueblo*. He advocated a government that was for the people, or those who supported the regime, government representation and workers' rights received a lot of his attention. These concepts will be

---

<sup>95</sup>Adair to the Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1968, (Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d448>

<sup>96</sup>George A. Priestley, "Military Government and Popular Participation in Panama: the Torrijos Regime, 1968-1975" (dissertation, n.d.).

discussed later on in this chapter. On the other hand, Torrijos also used some military tactics, through the usage of the Guardia Nacional, which became his army, and although it was impossible not to create a sense of fear, he romanticized them as the protectors of the country and the people. Despite the protection that had been promised to his followers, he eliminated and threatened his opposition and increased his number of supporters.

The populist approach taken by Torrijos can also be compared to the populist political culture followed by Fidel Castro. Despite Fidel's constant comparison to the Communist party, there are factors that show some of his nationalistic perspectives concerning the Cuban people. "This populist tradition approached the social question from the perspective of a nationalism that, in the spirit of Martí, aspired to have broad popular appeal among those lacking advantages and privileges rather than to develop a class-based point of departure."<sup>97</sup> Similar to Torrijos, Castro incentivized strong ideas of *Cubanidad*, creating a connectedness between that of his persona and the people of Cuba. As time progressed, Castro also began to promote ideas of anti-colonialism, especially after the deposition of Batista and his ties with the U.S government. These sentiments of nationalism were predominant during the Cuban Revolution. Unlike Castro, Torrijos did not directly affiliate with a political ideology, instead he made alliances seeking the benefit for Panama. Aspects that highlight his militaristic tendencies and at times portray him as an authoritarian dictator was the implementation of the Guardia Nacional through the political culture of Panama.

---

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Farber, *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (United States: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 43.

The National Guard played an important role in the military coup of 1968 and the Torrijos regime. The National Guard had always consisted of citizens of “humble origins”.<sup>98</sup> Torrijos had not been the first to assume power of the National Guard, former general José Antonio Remón Cantera was head of the National Guard between the years of 1931 to 1952, who also opposed the presence of the United States in Panama. The creation of the National Guard becomes a symbol of sovereignty against the United States. After the independence from Colombia in 1903, the Panamanian police was dissolved by the United States, and for a very long time those who were part of the group who vowed to protect Panama consisted mostly of middle-class workers who were overlooked by the upper class. This group was often seen as uncivilized, at times distinguished as *cholos*. From the years 1903 to 1936 the United States became the one to control any form of police in the country, and the one to dictate national affairs with the ratification of the treaty between the United States and Panama in 1936. In 1940, Harmodio Arias, elected president of Panama, gave General José Antonio Remón Cantera a significant task, to build a police force that would control and keep order within the country.

Consequently, with time, this police force gathered a significant amount of power. As a result it removed presidents as it saw fit, transferring power amongst groups of elites. The upper class saw this police force as a puppet that would fulfill the needs of the upper class. In order to strengthen this police force Jose Remón Cantera used the 1951 Mutual Security Act to build this police force. Although the United States did not permit Panama to have an army, since the military presence of the United States in Panama seemed enough protection for the Canal and the

---

<sup>98</sup> Sharon Phillipps Collazos, *Labor and Politics in Panama : the Torrijos Years* (Routledge, 2020), 33.

country, this became the closest opportunity for Remón to have a form of Panamanian police force not controlled by the United States. This police force was known later on, as the National Guard. The military coup of 1968 came as a surprise due to the perception that had been put in place from the elite towards the National Guard.<sup>99</sup>

The concept of maintaining a police force became popular also in Nicaragua. Although there are major differences concerning the Guardia Nacional of Panama the comparison provides a more substantial understanding of Latin American politics. In the book *Guardians of the Dynasty*, Richard Millett focuses on the power growth of the Somoza family and the usage of the Guardia Nacional to maintain power. The constant involvement of the U.S created great political instability in Nicaragua, but the support for the Somoza dictatorship became evident. Consequently, the U.S created a training force that would serve as a stabilizer of Nicaraguan politics. The Guardia Nacional of Nicaragua became the outcome of U.S intervention in Nicaragua. Years to come, the Guardia Nacional would be utilized by the Somoza family to remain in power. “Control of the Guardia remains the key to power”.<sup>100</sup> Millet recognizes that the creation of a non-political military force would always influence in some shape or form the social and economic structure of that nation. By non-political he refers to the direct relationship of a military force and its connection to the government, it is almost impossible to separate these two, creating it difficult to see a police force as autonomous from an established government. The main factor that distinguishes the Torrijos from Somoza was the nationalistic drive Torrijos’

---

<sup>99</sup>Steve C. Ropp, *Panamanian Politics: from Guarded Nation to National Guard* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 207.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Millett, *Guardianes De La Dinastía: La Historia De La Guardia Nacional De Nicaragua* (Managua Nicaragua: Lea Grupo Editorial, 2006) 207.

had for Panama. Most certainly, the usurpation of power with the military coup of 1968 abused any democratic principle, but with time the image of the National Guard of Panama developed, becoming a symbol of Torrijos populist regime.

Torrijos was successful in gaining control through his military rank within the National Guard and as a result utilized this asset to fulfill his agenda, which was to obtain Panama's sovereignty. The main argument that has been debated within the scholarship is the methods that were followed by Torrijos, and the juxtaposition that was created between populist tendencies and militarism. Some strongly believe that his ideals are congruent with populism. Although the intentions of leaders that follow populism tend to be good intentions for the people, corruption is brought into the equation to the point of deceiving the masses in order to gain support.<sup>101</sup> Padilla Cachanosky looks closely at the connection between populism and authoritarianism, particularly in Latin America. He explains that populism, just like it was stated by Conniff, creates a political campaign of “the people”, creating an idea of *victimhood* within the popular class. The *enemies of the people* can be a certain social class, usually the elite or the upper class or at times an imperialistic power.<sup>102</sup> Carlos de la Torre argues that there are two different approaches to populism, those that support and protect the democratic process, Peronismo as an example. At times some can turn that populism into authoritarianism as their only answer to recreate their ideal government structure.<sup>103</sup> The explanation given by Carlos de la Torre becomes very close to

---

<sup>101</sup>Conniff. 5.

<sup>102</sup>Cachanosky, Padilla. “Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century.” *The independent review* (Oakland, Calif.) 24, no. 2 (October 1, 2019): 210.

<sup>103</sup> Carlos de la Torre. "Los Legados De La Refundación Populista En Latinoamérica." *Cuadernos De Pensamiento Político*, no. 52 (2016):15

that which was used by Torrijos. After the military coup of 1968, Torrijos appointed a president, eliminating political parties, which also altered the voting process. Panamanians were not able to vote for a candidate, instead those candidates were appointed by Torrijos.<sup>104</sup> In order to lessen the abuse that was caused by the regime, Torrijos used populist tendencies with some militarist characteristics. Those tendencies were relating to the middle and lower class, advocating for indigenous groups, which had a correlation to his upbringing.

#### SOY UN SOLDADO DE LATINOAMÉRICA: TORRIJISMO

Torrijos was capable of implementing policies that were aligned with the benefit of the masses. One of the aspects that the scholarship has failed to explain when it comes to understanding Torrijos was his political alignment, as well as ideology. In 1979, Omar Torrijos was invited to as guest speaker of the *VI Cumbre de Países No Alineados*, a group of countries that during the Cold War era began to gather to discuss economic and social conflicts presented in their society. The 6th conference took place in La Habana Cuba, where Torrijos calls attention to the purpose and motivation of any Latin American Revolution.

First, any armed forces that represent a certain country should always be in tune with what would benefit the popular class. Torrijos had seen the power that the Panamanian elites had with the Guardia Nacional, and their benefit with the existence of the Panama Canal. Torrijos wanted to see a government supporting not only the elite but also those in the middle and lower classes as well, including them into the political culture of Panama. “To try to globally define the armed forces of Latin America as a group of incapable, repressive and impervious to the social

---

<sup>104</sup> Collazos, 28



change presented in the pages of history is as irresponsible as defining the liberation movements of Latin America as groups whose objective is to turn society into ruins”.<sup>105</sup> Those who called themselves *armed forces* should always protect the people, not utilize their power for oppression. He criticized totalitarianism, and defined it as ineffective, because in the middle of any political or social change the only ones that would be influenced by that change will always be the middle and lower class. Individuals, according to Torrijos, are usually categorized in two groups, *el civil* and *y el uniformado*. The civilian and the man of uniform are equally influenced by the decisions made by the armed forces, therefore the goal must always be to protect their rights and sovereignty. “This was the case, until very recently, in Nicaragua, which is not even a good example, because its armed forces were more like a personal guard in which the major of that great hacienda - the only country registered in the property registry - held the rank of general”.<sup>106</sup> Torrijos also criticized the existence of armed forces that are aligned with an imperialistic power. Putting into perspective the purpose and mission of the Guardia Nacional of Panama.

Second, he realized that the purpose of the Guardia Nacional needed to change, from serving the elite to the liberation of the people. There is no purpose in having a National Guard if

---

<sup>105</sup>Omar Torrijos, “VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados,” *VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados* (1979).

[Pretender definir globalmente a las fuerzas armadas de América Latina como un grupo de incapaces, represivos e impermeables a los cambios sociales que vive el calendario de la historia de las grandes transformaciones, es tan irresponsable como el definir a los movimientos de liberación de América Latina como grupos cuyo objetivo es convertir en ruinas a la sociedad, para levantar, sobre las piedras de esas ruinas, una sociedad totalitaria].

<sup>106</sup>Omar Torrijos, “VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados,” *VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados* (1979).

[Ese fue el caso, hasta hace bien poco, de Nicaragua, que ni siquiera como ejemplo es bueno, porque sus fuerzas armadas eran más bien una guardia personal en la cual los mayores de esa gran hacienda - único país inscrito en el registro de la propiedad ostentaba el rango de general].

politically the people are not actively involved in the political process. The revolutionaries of Latin American had been seen as *bandits* and *robbers*, whose irresponsibility hindered the social structure of the country due to their vagueness of purpose and mission. In fear of losing control they oppressed the public participation of the people, hindering the connection between the Guardia and the people. Torrijos explains that the desire for development of the political culture brought to light the “deep cancer within the structure” of governments.<sup>107</sup> A cancer that neglected the rights all people have to participate in politics, neglected the lack of education and sanitation in the most secluded areas of the country.

This desire of development caused a division between the armed forces and the aristocracy. Torrijos explained that after realizing the purpose of the elite, and the constant exclusion of the real problems of the people, he finally “[we] became aware that we were not part of a national army, but of an occupying armed forces that obeyed the interests of a ruling class that was completely impervious to any kind of change”.<sup>108</sup> Torrijos believed that there needed to be a divide from the elite, transferring the power of dominion and political control that in this case Panama had been possessing since the very beginning of the creation of the country to the present. He also began to question the creation of the Constitution, the validity of the

---

<sup>107</sup>Omar Torrijos, “VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados,” *VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados* (1979).

[El cáncer profundo de las estructuras].

<sup>108</sup>Omar Torrijos, “VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados,” *VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados* (1979).

[Llegamos así a tomar conciencia de que no formábamos parte de un ejército nacional, sino de unas fuerzas armadas de ocupación que obedecían a los intereses de una clase gobernante completamente impermeable a todo tipo de cambio].

document and who was benefiting from its creation? He strongly believed that the people needed to be involved not only in the political process, but the creation of laws and establishment of policies should always seek to benefit those who needed the most help.

The last aspect followed by Torrijos ideology presented in this speech is the imperialistic influence in Latin American politics. Although he was not labeled as a left- or right-wing politician, he did oppose the imposition of ideology from the United States to Panama. He gave the examples of McCarthyism, and how the ideology began to “dye in *red* anyone who wanted to break the status quo. This McCarthyism, which among us was an exotic theory imported from abroad, created a wave of repression and panic in which each member of the armed forces became the watchdog of the others. This was the philosophical thinking of many of those who led us”.<sup>109</sup> Torrijos’ purpose was nationally driven to benefit those who had not been part of the political culture of Panama. He also believed that the United States had imposed its doctrine for far too long, and that the Panamanian elite had been running the show, ignoring the most obvious social and economic issues that Panama faced at the time. Therefore, his government would seek to solve those problems. He would establish policies that would increase the levels of education, he would support workers’ rights to the point of ratifying the Panamanian constitution, so that those marginalized groups would finally be included within the political process. This was what *Torrijismo* was founded upon, a government for *the people*.

---

<sup>109</sup>Omar Torrijos, “VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados,” *VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados* (1979).

[tiñendo de rojo a todo aquél que quería romper el status quo. Este macartismo, que entre nosotros era una teoría exótica importada del extranjero, creó una ola de represión y de pánico en la que cada miembro de las fuerzas armadas se constituía en vigilante de los demás. Ese fue el pensamiento filosófico de muchos de los que nos dirigían]

Guillermo O'Donnell seeks to understand the connection between social change and the politics of Latin America. He explains that regimes like Torrijos are usually followed by a rapid process of modernization that tends to benefit the public sector more than any other group. O'Donnell concludes that these systems do not tend to last long because of their inconsistent agenda and lack of idealism.<sup>110</sup> According to Sharon Philipps Collazos, Torrijos' regime only weakened Panamanian politics. She explains that he had become so focused on his ideals and dreams hoping to institute a revolutionary process that as a result he diminished Panama's progress.<sup>111</sup>

Panamanian politics before Torrijos relied heavily on the upper class. The consistency of small political parties organized by the elite dictated policy making which mostly benefited those who were in charge. Arnulfo Arias, the president before Torrijos had similar ideologies in terms of supporting the middle class and evoking the control of the elite. Torrijos on the other hand, hoped to benefit the common people and used the establishment supported by the Guardia Nacional supporting his authoritarian tendencies. There were two main aspects that define and differentiate Torrijos from Arias: Torrijos "desire to provide social services to the middle and lower classes, and to upgrade the life of the common people".<sup>112</sup> The Torrijos regime can be divided into two main periods before the acquisition of the Panama Canal from the United States. The possession of power between the years 1968-1971 through the military coup and the re-

---

<sup>110</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell, "Accountability Horizontal.," *Estudios Políticos*, no. 19 (May 1998), <https://doi.org/10.22201/fcpys.24484903e.1998.19.37205>, 293.

<sup>111</sup> Sharon Philipps Collazos, *Labor And Politics In Panama: The Torrijos Years* (Routledge, 2019), 30.

<sup>112</sup> Philipps, 32.

establishment of the Panamanian government and unification of the masses through policy making and the spread of anti-imperialist sentiments between the years 1972-1976.

The *Junta Pueblo y Gobierno* becomes a significant aspect of Torrijos' time, creating a connecting link between the people and the regime. That connectedness took the shape of different organizations that were mainly conducted by the Guardia Nacional in order to assist the needs of the public sector. An example of one of the organizations was the DIGIDECOM or General Directorate for Community Development, which had the goal of overseeing the community programs that had been established by the regime in different parts of the country.<sup>113</sup> Besides the structural development that Torrijos gave Panama, establishment of roads, constructions of schools, Torrijos was also successful at giving the people “el espíritu del pueblo” (the spirit of the people) in other words, their identity and patriotism. This chapter will focus on the ideology inculcated by Torrijos, looking closely at the speeches that were given in different locations of the country between the years 1968 to 1974. Years later Omar Torrijos established *Torrijismo*, a political party that at its core had deep concerns for the benefit of the people and the sovereignty of Panama. *Torrijismo* became “a version of national security ideology, wrapped in populism and nationalism”.<sup>114</sup> The most common aspect presented to argue that Torrijos used populism to fuel Panamanian nationalism was the group of people he chose to focus on, the middle class, indigenous groups, educators and even students.<sup>115</sup> It has become

---

<sup>113</sup> Priestley, 41.

<sup>114</sup> Ricardo Arias Calderón, “Panama: Disaster or Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 2 (1987): p. 328, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20043376>.

<sup>115</sup> John Weeks, “Panama: The Roots of Current Political Instability,” *Third World Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1987): pp. 763-787, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436598708420000>.

clear that his agenda was fueled by a nationalistic approach taken against the United States, and many wonder if his methods were a byproduct of his upbringing. The fascinating aspect of the regime, was that although he utilized that anti-imperialist sentiment against the United States, he also negotiated with the United States for new Canal treaties, by working closely with some of the American figures, and succeeding at negotiating with them, Torrijos was still able to motivate the Panamanian people of those anti-colonial ideas. This aspect became the oneness that he created between the regime and the Panamanian people.

#### UNA REVOLUCIÓN DIFERENTE: A COMMON MINDSET

Torrijos created a similar common mindset within Panamanian culture, he began calling this movement *Una revolución diferente*, he chose the idea of a revolution because of the policy implementation, and political adaptations he later established during the regime. On one of his many trips to the United States, Torrijos stood in the Primer Congreso Internacional de Engresados del Centro InterAmericano from Loyola University, having received an invitation, he spoke about the responsibility of revolutionary leaders in Latin America. He explained to his audience that the power resided in the community. If the leader was successful at creating a connection between the people and the government, then that spirit and ideals would be reflected and expanded to all communities.<sup>116</sup> The community and the people became Torrijos' drive for gaining possession of the Panama Canal, but it was going to take time and a tremendous amount of effort to allow the public opinion of the people to understand how dangerous the presence of

---

<sup>116</sup>Torrijos, 47.

the United States in Panama had become. He began to create a narrative that would highlight the ideas of sovereignty and patriotism that the people had been fighting for since the 1920s.

Due to the lack of support that Torrijos received from the Panamanian people at the beginning of 1968, he changed his approach and as a result conducted a series of trips throughout the country hoping to earn the attention and support of the people. He began in the province of Veraguas, Santiago. The first group he spoke to was the educators around the country. He believed there was a significant connection between the public education of the masses and the nationalism of the individual.

The first speech addressed a community of teachers and students in the city of Santiago. It emphasized the importance of teachers in the development of national identity by arguing that his was a ‘different’ type of revolution because it sought to listen to the opinion of the popular groups: “this is a different government, because this government seeks to listen to the public opinion of the masses, to trust them with information and to demonstrate openly that we are working for the common good of the country”.<sup>117</sup> He believed that the only way of ‘changing those problems that previous generations had failed to solve was by working on the development of a ‘better education’ which made the role of teachers a key aspect in the creation of nationalism. He also mentioned that the “Guardia Nacional” supported the needs of the people.<sup>118</sup> He presented two projects that would ‘expand the alphabet’ (in other words the education of the people). He presented a project about a printing press, and television broadcast. He congratulated

---

<sup>117</sup> Torrijos, 41.

[es un gobierno diferente porque este gobierno se traslada hacia los grupos de opinión a consultar con ellos ya manifestar abierta y categóricamente que estamos trabajando en provecho del país.]

<sup>118</sup> Torrijos, 42.

the female students for wanting to spread ideas of nationalism to the most remote parts of the country. He finished his speech announcing that the government would be reducing the cost of electricity to that community from 30% or 50% from what they had currently been paying.<sup>119</sup>

Torrijos saw the power of patriotism in education. He knew that the high school students who had participated in the flag riots of 1964 had been cultivating that feeling of anti-imperialism from the classroom setting. Therefore, he placed significant importance on the role of teachers in the cultivation of nationalism. Torrijos also placed close attention to the marginalized groups, knowing they had been neglected politically in the past, he sought not only their approval but also their involvement in Panamanian politics. It is interesting he mentioned that previous generations had not been as successful as the one he was talking to, but his objective of “creating a new common mind” in this new idea for the country that would benefit future generations.

Torrijos also sought to unify the country. He traveled to the province of Los Santos, in the *Consejo Nacional del Estado*. Torrijos spoke to a group of campesinos, and in this particular speech, he was able to connect with the feelings, social and economical situation of his listeners. He recognized that the campesino had always worked for the benefit of the community not their own interest, he communicated that the *new* government wanted to benefit the entire country not only one social class. Torrijos then mentioned a “junta,” a symbolic connection between the people and the regime, was the yoke that connected two animals by balancing the weight that

---

<sup>119</sup>Torrijos, 43.



was being pulled equally. Torrijos used the phrase “Junta pueblo y gobierno,” which placed an emphasis on the role that he believed each Panamanian should play in the politics of the country. Because in his eyes, the government without its people was meaningless. He then blamed previous generations for allowing others to control their levels of patriotism. This becomes a key component of his speech, as he could be referring to the diplomatic relations that the country had created with previous countries, either Colombia or the United States that restrained the patriotism and identity of the people. “It is the damn bureaucracy that forces the state worker to assume an ideology of superiority”.<sup>120</sup> Torrijos blames the bureaucracy for becoming the reason for their current situation, as they carried a sense of entitlement that not only separated the social classes, but also harmed the development of the country. Torrijos created a narrative that although was conflicting with the upper class, because it included the middle and lower classes, utilized an idea of victimhood to connect to the middle and lower classes. He succeeded at separating the “us” him included in the group of the people, from “them”, making the campesinos believed that they have been in fact the victims in their own society of the constant abuse of the upper class.

In order to gain support from the working class, Torrijos became an advocate for workers’ rights. “You are one of the groups that brings the most important contribution to the national economy, which you have evidently demonstrated. One of the regions that has not been able to receive the appropriate care that you deserve. One of the worst customs followed by the

---

<sup>120</sup> Torrijos, 54.

[Es la maldita burocracia que hace al funcionario público asumir una aureola de superioridad]

sons of this country is the mistreatment of the people of the Provincia de Los Santos”.<sup>121</sup> He argued for economic independence from the United States with reference to Panama Boston Company, a foreign company that owned large pieces of land in Santiago, Veraguas and Coclé. He accomplished the redistribution of land among national buyers within the community, hoping to transfer that ownership locally. Torrijos did not hope to simply become independent from the United States at the expense of those workers, instead he modernized the country without the help of foreign powers and fully dependent on the development of Panama as a nation. “La Patria es primero” becomes his closing statement, placing a heavy emphasis on the significance of the representation of the lawmaking process among provinces.<sup>122</sup>

During the year 1969, the regime became responsible for creating a plan that would cause economic changes supporting the labor class. This plan was known as *Estrategia para el Desarrollo Nacional*, which hoped to establish Panama's economic independence. A plan that originated from Torrijos' visits to secluded villages like Donoso and Coclesito. This strategy had a simple goal and that was to inform the general public about the possibilities that were available in Panama to simply improve the quality of life and strengthen the political and economic independence of Panama. This plan as a result would generate economic growth not only in the most populated areas, but also in the remote areas of the country. The plan also sought to assist those who had not been able to generate any type of economic growth. Torrijos knew the

---

<sup>121</sup> Torrijos, 56.

[Una de las poblaciones que más contribuye a la economía nacional tal como ustedes la han demostrado. Una de las regiones que no ha recibido todo el cariño que se merece. Una de las peor tratadas por los malos hijos de este país, es la provincia de Los Santos]

<sup>122</sup> This information will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

economic dependence that Panama had created due to the commerce produced by the Panama Canal, however he also believed it would become beneficial to create a type of economic independence in order to modernize the country without the dependence of the U.S, establishing a national unity through economic growth as well.<sup>123</sup>

Torrijos also romanticized anti-imperialistic ideas of the past. In one of the speeches presented in one of his trips, he mentioned the heroic actions of Dr. Belisario Porras, one of the founding fathers of the republic before the separation of Colombia in 1900.<sup>124</sup> Belisario Porras had opposed the separation from Colombia when the ideas of Justo Arosemena began to gain support amongst the Panamanian elites. The main reason why Porras did not agree with the separation was due to the immense amount of power he believed was given to the U.S through the Hay Bunau Varilla treaty, his biggest fear was that Panama would become the puppet of the United States.<sup>125</sup> Torrijos praised Porras' courage for going against the Panamanian elite, he also praised the faith he had in Panama at the time of independence and his *wisdom* for predicting the abusive relationship Panama would experience with the United States. The main point he hoped to convey was the example of patriotism that had been represented through Dr. Porras' actions, opposing the traditional rule of the United States in Panama.

---

<sup>123</sup> Julio Manduley, "La Política Económica de Omar Torrijos. De La Plataforma De Servicios Transnacionales Al Estado Delincuencial," *Centro De Estudios LatinoAmericanos "Justo Arosemena"*, no. 146 (January 2014), 100

<sup>124</sup> For a brief summary of Dr. Porras please see Chapter 1

<sup>125</sup> Ana Elena Porras, "Narrativas Sobre El Origen Colonial De Panamá (2009)," *Antología Del Pensamiento Crítico Panameño Contemporáneo*, January 2018, pp. 191-220, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfjd163.12>, 202.

Torrijos knew the dynamics of Panamanian society and the influence and role of women. In “La mujer Panameña y la revolución” Torrijos explains the role of Panamanian women in the process of the revolution. Women became a crucial part of the Panamanian political life from before the age of 18 due to their representation within society. “Panamanian women, deeply emotional, deeply convinced, I’ve attended this assembly in which the Panamanian women has chosen to mobilize and ratify its incorporation towards the Movimiento Nuevo Panama. I say this with deep emotion, because I am a true believer, I am fully convinced of the mystic power of the organization that the Panamanian women are capable of”.<sup>126</sup> Torrijos repeatedly showed value and significance to those who he was speaking to. In this case, he placed value in the organization and role that the Panamanian women played in this revolution. By revolution he means the change that he hoped to see Panama experienced, from an economic and social standpoint. The Movimiento Nuevo Panama is mentioned in this event, which also signified his emphasis on the younger generation and the responsibility they would carry for expanding ideas of patriotism. Bringing attention to his populist characteristics. The historiography has not sought to investigate the development of groups of women and the role that they played during the regime, this information would greatly be useful for the contextual analysis and understanding of the impact of women during the regime and the importance placed by Torrijos.

---

<sup>126</sup> Torrijos, 68.

[Mujer panameña, profundamente emocionada, profundamente convencida, he asistido a este acto en el cual la mujer panameña se moviliza y ratifica su incorporación hacia el Movimiento Nuevo Panamá. Y lo digo profundamente emocionado, porque yo soy un gran creyente, yo soy un gran convencido en el poder místico en poder de convencimiento en el poder de organización que la mujer panameña tiene]

Torrijos communicated respect towards this group of women, giving them a part in this revolution. He continues saying: “I understand your struggle because I’ve lived it. I understand the struggle due to that sacred respect that I felt towards my mother. [...] I understand your struggle because you never take anything for granted; you have always given total devotion [...] I give *a kiss* to the Panamanian women and I bow down in reverence to your dedication”.<sup>127</sup> The role of women in Latin American revolution has been significant. What makes this particular event different from others is the value that the speaker is placing in the lives of these women. Scholars have argued about the discrimination and at times oppression that women, in the case of Latin America, have experienced by being placed at a much lower level of value in comparison to men. However, women have a connection that men do not possess, and that is the relationship created not only within their households but also inside of their communities. However, their role within the dynamics of a revolution becomes an influential piece to the minds of those communities. This became a reality during the revolution in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. For women, it becomes easier to go against the current thought, simply because they have always felt out of place or less valued by those in charge.<sup>128</sup> These aspects provide a much stronger motivation to become part of the change.

---

<sup>127</sup> Torrijos, 70.

[Siento la lucha de ustedes porque la vivo. Siento la lucha de ustedes por ese sagrado respeto que siento ante mi madre. [...] Y siento la lucha de ustedes porque nunca toman nada a medias; la entrega de ustedes es total [...] Le doy un beso a la mujer panameña ante la cual me inclino en actitud de reverencia]

<sup>128</sup>Alaíde Foppa, “El Feminismo y La Izquierda,” *Antología Del Pensamiento Crítico Guatemalteco Contemporáneo*, January 2019, pp. 609-616, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvtxw2km.30>, 610.

Panamanian politics was hoping to develop under Torrijos, the opportunity to bring social change and to include individuals who had been neglected in the past became a populist rhetoric Torrijos valued. During Arias' term, the former president before Torrijos, there had been neglect against West Indians and indigenous groups in Panama.<sup>129</sup> Working as a doctor Arias published his ideas of “mejorar la raza” in the *Boletín Sanitario*. Later on, while in power he created the law 6a. which prohibited the migration of “Chinese, Japanese, Syrians, Turks, Oriental Indians, Dravidians and Blacks from the Guayanas and Antilles, who did not have Spanish as their primary language, will not be admitted to the territory of the Republic of Panama”.<sup>130</sup> The argument for the establishment of this law was the desire to *clean* the regions from the damage caused by these particular groups in order to see the complete industrial and agricultural progress of the country.

Torrijos had knowledge about the establishment of these ideas amongst the Panamanian society. His desire for unifying the country became key to his success of creating one mindedness in Panamanian society. In the speech “Ahora todos somos panameños”, Torrijos emphasizes the separation created under Arias presidency. “The state never remembered the indigenous groups or campesinos, the poor, the ones that were hungry, the ones that walked bent over[...] The state never tried to understand the problem of the Indian”.<sup>131</sup> He argues that the Panamanian government before the military coup chose to ignore the needs of the indigenous

---

<sup>129</sup> Julian, Pitt-Rivers,. "Race, Color, and Class in Central America and the Andes." *Daedalus* 96, no. 2 (1967): 547.

<sup>130</sup> Arnulfo Arias, “Boletin Sanitario” (Ley 6a. Panama, 1934), 4,5.

<sup>131</sup> Torrijos, 99.

[El estado nunca había recordado al indio o al campesino, el pobre, el que tiene hambre, el que anda agachado [...]] El estado nunca llegó a intentar a entender el problema del indio]

groups, because their interest only lied on the aristocracy. Instead they took advantage of them by ignoring their needs and taking possession of their lands. Torrijos promises them that there will no longer be *Chuies or Cholos* <sup>132</sup>, because in this new revolution everybody was Panamanian. He continues to promote this union among tribes, the people in Kuna Yala (San Blas), the Chocoos (Darien), will unify with one common goal, and that is to provide the appropriate needs for the people, by giving them back their lands, and creating unions that will defend their rights against the upper class.

The support of the implementation of women and the inclusion of workers' rights become a similar narrative during the Cuban Revolution. The structure of Cuban society had been a predominantly patriarchal structure, creating a social structure that kept women inside of the home. Although the participation of women during the Cuban revolution was somewhat limited, it does not downplay the role they played during the revolution. From fighting as combatants, to members of the guerrilla, Castro wanted to send a message of “overcoming both gender and race discrimination”.<sup>133</sup> A very similar message was presented in Torrijos' speech. The same was true for advocating for workers' rights during the Cuban Revolution, which also had become a priority for Torrijos.

Torrijos' support for the rights of the working class became one of the most successful connections to the people. He created a new work code, which was last written in 1947. This new work code sought to protect the rights of the worker, creating better benefits for the individual

---

<sup>132</sup> This was a term used for those who were either of darker skin or with indogenous origin.

<sup>133</sup> Judy Maloof, “Voices of Resistance Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women,” in *Voices of Resistance Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 27.

and even creating the same standard across provinces. This meant that the benefits provided for workers in Panama City would be the same benefits given to the campesino who live in the most secluded parts of the country. It also created accountability between the worker and the employer, requesting an equal amount of effort from both parties. The inconsistency of payment for workers who had employers in the city had become a common practice, forcing those workers to travel to the city in order to claim their salary. This workers code not only protected the workers from similar situations, it also forced a level of accountability from the companies hiring those workers, initiating guarantees for labor unions.<sup>134</sup>

The Código de Trabajo of 1972 became one of the most significant contributions to labor rights in Panama during Torrijos regime. Before the establishment of this policy, labor groups had created a bad reputation, individuals of bad temper, easily agitated, with little to no education, as a result their recognition from those who were supposed to represent them in their government turned a blind eye to the common issues that presented in these groups.<sup>135</sup> This already established stigma secluded these groups from the involvement of politics, simply because they felt foreign to participation and even proper representation. The division of labor groups was also another aspect that divided the middle class. The labor class consisted mostly of native groups that “shared both a racial and cultural heritage”<sup>136</sup>, and the other half consisted of immigrants that had been imported to work on the Panama Canal. Most of these immigrants were from the West Indies, so they did not share a common culture or even ethnic background with

---

<sup>134</sup> Torrijos, 133.

<sup>135</sup> Phillipps, 50.

<sup>136</sup> Phillips, 52.



the first group mentioned. Torrijos saw the separation of these groups, saw their working conditions and workers' rights and as a result responded with a new work code by 1972. This work code was published in the *Gaceta Oficial* that year and presented a lot of changes to the working class. As a result, Torrijos turned this large group of workers into supporters of the regime.<sup>137</sup> On one of many trips to the province of Veraguas, Graciela Iturbide captured a small gathering of Torrijos, wearing his military uniform, gathered around a group of *campesinos*. The photograph shows the simplicity of the people he is gathered around. The men on the left side of the photograph were wearing their *cutarras*, along with their *sombrero pintado*. On the right side of the photograph there was a group of children, some of them barefoot, some of them wearing their schools' uniform, all surrounding Torrijos. This photograph is a visual representation of the group of people Torrijos desired to represent. It also shows his simplistic approach when communicating with the Panamanian people, he did not consider himself to be more important than the rest of them, but part of their social circle.

---

<sup>137</sup> Jorge W Prosperis, "La Gaceta Oficial," *Codigo De Trabajo*, February 0, 1972, 1740 edition, pp. 1-11.



<sup>138</sup> FIGURE 2: *Fotografía Tomada Durante Los Viajes De Torrijos a Las Provincias En El Interior.*, Graciela Iturbide .

---

<sup>138</sup> *Fotografía Tomada Durante Los Viajes De Torrijos a Las Provincias En El Interior.*, Biblioteca Nacional De Panama (Biblioteca Nacional de Panama, n.d.), [http://www.binal.ac.pa/binal/pindex.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=100&catid=78&Itemid=55](http://www.binal.ac.pa/binal/pindex.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=100&catid=78&Itemid=55).

## A COMMON ENEMY: THE UNITED STATES

“Cemeteries are filled with students, they are filled with workers, they are filled with Panamanians who believe in the dignity of our country”.<sup>139</sup> Torrijos was only steps away from accomplishing his goal. He had created a significant connection between his government and the people. He had motivated ideas of nationalism, romanticizing the days when the United States was not part of the picture. So he began painting a mental picture in the minds of the people. A picture without the United States, a picture that would favor and benefit the Panama Canal profits to only Panama. A picture where the Panamanian flag would be the only flag raised inside of the Panama Canal Zone. He defined the problem of the Canal Zone as a sentimental issue, an embarrassment that other countries saw, a foreign flag imposed in their own soil. “Their ruin has become our ruin. Of a canal that has forced their enemies to become our enemies. Of a Canal that has deprived Panama of making the list of its own enemies, because we are not enemies of any country. [...] Panama does not go out with an umbrella when it is raining in Moscow. That is a lie. Panamanians are looking for a solution, they are looking for a new republic to come and here we are finding it today and men who love their homeland.”<sup>140</sup> The United States had taken

---

<sup>139</sup> Torrijos, 149.

[Muchos cementerios están llenos de estudiantes, están llenos de obreros, están llenos de panameños que creen en la dignidad de la patria]

<sup>140</sup> Omar Torrijos, “Tienen Que Llevarse Sus Toldas Colonialistas (1971),” *Antología Del Pensamiento Crítico Panameño Contemporáneo*, January 2018, pp. 137-145, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfjd163.9>, 139.

[Hasta donde llega la ruinidad de ellos. De un canal que ha obligado a convertir en enemigos nuestros a los enemigos de ellos. De un Canal que ha privado a Panamá de hacer la lista de sus

advantage not only of the location but also the increasing numbers of soldiers that had been deployed to the Canal Zone during the second World War. Torrijos saw that this was not a fight that benefited or influenced Panama, they were not interested in the situations occurring in Moscow, the United States had begun to impose their enemies unto them, when Panama became a puppet who merely served the United States. In the process of fighting for sovereignty, Torrijos alludes to the martyrs of the Flag riots of 1964, a total of 18 people lost their lives fighting for sovereignty. He appealed to the sentiments that the loss of those lives had caused to the Panamanian people.

The federal government then celebrated the *semana anti-imperialista*, which was scheduled to be the first week of November of 1971. The anti-imperialist sentiments against the United States with a combination of strong ideas of patriotism, and the possession of the Panama Canal became the common mind between the people and Torrijos' government. "Because if we are not able to find a satisfactory agreement for our nation and for our people, the inevitable will happen. It will come as a spontaneous combustion, an explosion from the hearts of the Panamanian people. The Guardia Nacional has two options. Omar Torrijos has two options in front of this Guardia Nacional: To abolish the patriotic rebellion of the people or to lead it. I am not going to abolish it"<sup>141</sup> Torrijos had succeeded, he had been able to connect ideas of

---

propios enemigos, porque nosotros no somos enemigos de ningún país. [...] El panamá no sale con un paraguas cuando está lloviendo en Moscú. Eso es mentira. El panameño está buscando una solución, está buscando que venga una nueva república y aquí la estamos encontrando hoy y hombres que quieren a su patria].

<sup>141</sup>Omar Torrijos, *La Batalla De Panamá* (Panamá: M.V. Pub. Co., 1981) 106.

[Porque de no haber un arreglo satisfactorio para nuestra nación y para nuestro pueblo va a pasar algo inevitable. Vendrá por combustión espontánea una explosión del pueblo panameño. A la Guardia Nacional le quedan dos caminos. A Omar Torrijos le quedan dos caminos al frente de

sovereignty with patriotism, placing the United States at the core of all of Panama's problems. During his regime, even the money that was printed had details of these ideas. On the front of the dollar bill, there was an image of *El Cholo Omar*, wearing his uniform, along with his two main slogans "Panama Progresista" and "Panama Soberana". The "Panama Progress" signified his support for developing the economy of the country without the dependency of the United States, and the "Panama Soberana" had strong ties with the idea of gaining sovereignty and control of the Panama Canal. In the background there were two circles, which symbolized the differences he was able to make in this new government. The organization of representation among districts, included not only those in Panama City but even in the secluded areas of the country, provinces of the *interior*<sup>142</sup> and indigenous territories. The second circle highlighted his effort for the creation of policies that benefited the rights of the worker. The choice of colors and images for the background showed a plentiful number of resources, not only agricultural but also a Canal owned by Panama. In the back of the bill, there was a picture of a modern Panama. On the left the Ciudad de Colón, which showed a new infrastructure, and in the middle, the City of Panama.

---

esa Guardia Nacional: Aplastar esta rebelión patriótica del pueblo o conducirla. Yo no la voy a aplastar.]

<sup>142</sup> Interior: a term used in Panama to refer to the countryside, or areas away from the City.



FIGURE 3: *Dollar bill, Panamá progresista. 1971*

All of these images were placed under the sun, which signified the hope and success that the Panamanian people were now able to find under this new government.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Manuel E. Rivera, telephone interview done by author, December 27th 2020.

## UNITED NATIONS 1973: FIGHTING FOR SOVEREIGNTY

On March 15th, 1973 Omar Torrijos presented the case of Panama to the United Nations. The time had come to expose the United States to the rest of the world. *The New York Times* published an article that same day “U.N. Panel Sits in Panama Today”, Torrijos stated the following: “I want the moral backing of the world,” he said, “and especially, I want the people of the United States to know how we feel about the canal. The Americans are very decent people and when they realize what is happening here, they will feel a sense of shame, just as they did during the Vietnam war. [...] That war wasn't stopped because of a lack of bombs,” he continued, “but because the American people did not want it. I think they can stop the neocolonialism in the Panama Canal Zone in the same way.”<sup>144</sup> The United Nations Security Council met for the first time in Panama City. The main argument presented by Torrijos during this meeting was to show the United States that they had abused their power on Panamanian soil, and that the entire world was behind Panama on this issue. The United Nations hoped to advocate for the protection of those countries who had not been able to protect themselves from colonial rule. The main goal was not only to protect or advocate for the protection of the country but also of the rights of the individual.<sup>145</sup>

Torrijos began his speech with these ideas in mind, and these aspects of protection of the individual became his main argument against American imperialism. He began by explaining that the existence of the Panama Canal had been forced on Panamanian soil. He stated that

---

<sup>144</sup> Richard Severo, “U.N. Panel Sits in Panama Today,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 1973.

<sup>145</sup> Heraldo Muñoz, “Las Naciones Unidas En Tiempos De Cambio,” *Estudios Internacionales* 39, no. 155 (August 2011), <https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-3769.2006.14357>, 162.

Panama could relate to other countries who had experienced the humiliation created by imperial rule. To be forced to live underneath the shadow of a colonial power that has usurped their stay in the country. “Because the oligarchy has no knowledge of nationalism”<sup>146</sup>. He proclaimed the United States never had the intentions of understanding Panamanian culture, and in fact they could never truly understand nationalism as a colonial power. He defined the actions of the United States as neocolonialism. The use of the Panama Canal became the source of control of the political, social and economic life, which was used against the Panamanian government. It not only restrained the development of the country, but it also had no respect for the rights of the individual. Torrijos continues: “Our own way of living should not be negated”. The international relations that Panama had been able to establish with other countries, had been strictly dictated by the preference of the United States. Ciudad Romero becomes a perfect example of the dynamics created based on the presence of the United States in Panama. Ciudad Romero was a land reform project that welcomed a large group of Salvadoran refugees into Panama during the time of the Sandinistas. This project had been created and established by the regime. However, the support the United States had been giving to the Contras against the Sandinistas government contradicted Torrijos actions. Torrijos' agenda was clearly anti-American.<sup>147</sup> Despite the information that has been published concerning Torrijos alignment between either capitalism and communism, it appears that the decisions that were made and the alliances that were created globally during his regime did not have a specific pattern, meaning he was not considered to be

---

<sup>146</sup> Torrijos, 117 .

<sup>147</sup> Rachael De La Cruz, “Ciudad Romero: The Salvadoran Refugee Family and Panamanian Statecraft under the Torrijos Regime,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 251.



completely capitalist or communist, making it difficult for historians to label his agenda as either communist or capitalist. All of his decisions were based on his nationalism and seeking what would benefit his country. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why he became such a unique individual during Latin American history during the 1970s.

Torrijos knew that his case against the United States was strong, he knew that Panama had not been the first country to separate from imperialist rule. He mentioned the movements that took place in countries located in the African continent, and urged his audience that Latin America had begun to awaken, and that such process should not be constricted by anyone, especially another power: “The awakening of Latin America should not be disrupted, but supported, in order to find peace”.<sup>148</sup> He believed that Latin America had begun to create a new mentality of possibilities, of pride for what made them Latin-American. The only way of keeping the peace was to allow that sentiment of *latinidad* to run its course. The United Nations needed to stop being an observer on the events that were occurring between the United States and Panama, and instead stand for the rights of the people. Torrijos questioned the integrity of the United States, as they themselves were once colonies, and fought for what they believed were the “natural rights” of the people, an idea presented by John Locke and then rewritten by Thomas Jefferson in the own Declaration of Independence. Yet, they were constricting those same rights and using their economic power to restrain the flourishing of a country Torrijos believed needed

---

<sup>148</sup> Torrijos, 120.

[El despertar de América latina no debe ser obstaculizado, sino apoyado para poder propiciar la paz]

to gain its sovereignty. He finished his speech assuring the United Nations panel that they had no desire to add another star to the American flag.

#### A NEW ERA: THE TORRIJOS-CARTER TREATY

Omar Torrijos Herrera was known for his populist approach to politics. He emphasized drastic changes on policies that would benefit the working conditions of the middle class. He would focus on promoting inclusion of marginalized groups within the political process, and unifying the people of Panama by looking at the United States as an enemy. He advocated a way of politics that had not been seen before in Panama, he included the middle class and did not allow the aristocracy to dictate what took place within Panamanian politics. He was successful at changing the structure and purpose of the Guardia Nacional, and was able to utilize this tool for his goal. His approach of utilizing the Guardia Nacional was different from Debayle's approach, he wanted to give Panama his sovereignty; his goal was not to utilize the Guardia Nacional to remain in power.

The aspect of remaining in power becomes one of the most controversial aspects of the regime, due to the usurpation of power through the military coup, and the extension of his rule. Although he had promised the restoration of democratic rule by 1984 with the establishment of the *Partido Revolucionario Democrático*. If he would have been able to live through the elections of 1984, there could have been a chance of the complete restoration of democratic rule in Panama. Torrijos did not seek to promote his figure but instead promoted his ideals which were heavily influenced by anti-Americanism and supported goals of economic independence. His success was the outcome of the existence of the Guardia Nacional, but also due to his

connections with the people of Panama. Although he still followed a militaristic approach which some saw as intimidating and authoritarian, his actions paved the way for a new treaty that would change the social, economic and political situation of Panama. Since 1903, Panama had desired to be an independent country, without carrying the burden of a foreign power roaming their lands. Torrijos made that dream possible, providing a new beginning for Panamanian's history. The negotiation of the Torrijos-Carter treaty.

## CHAPTER 3: THE NEGOTIATION OF THE TORRIJOS CARTER TREATY

“I don’t want to enter history, I want to enter the Zone”.<sup>149</sup> These were the words expressed by General Omar Torrijos Herrera during a press conference only months from the signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaty, which took place on September 7th, 1977. The Torrijos Carter treaty became a significant addition to the development of Panama and the United States relations. Even before taking control of the Panamanian government in 1968, Torrijos wanted one thing, and that was to give the Canal back to Panama. He invested years, convincing and unifying the public to gain Panama’s sovereignty over the Panama Canal. His populist methods had become successful at gaining the support he needed to begin promoting a new treaty to the United States. The support of the people became his tool in order to gain more global support. It was going to take time, and the continuous effort of both figures from Panama with Omar Torrijos and from the United States with President Jimmy Carter in order to make the Canal treaties a reality. This chapter will analyze Torrijos’s different tactics, ultimately successful in gaining control of the Panama Canal. It will also seek to comprehend the role the United States in negotiating a new treaty concerning the Panama Canal. It will analyze the support that was obtained both in Panama and even in the United States concerning the treaty negotiations, this will shed light into understanding the voice behind this narrative of sovereignty.

For the purpose of comprehending both sides fully, this chapter will observe both the Panamanian and U.S. perspective of the treaty negotiations. Following a bilateral approach,

---

<sup>149</sup> “Fin Del Enclave: Panama Soberana,” *Panama*, September 11, 1977.  
[No quiero entrar en la historia, quiero entrar en la zona!]

examining the events that took place within Panamanian politics in terms of the Canal negotiations and at the same time events that took place in the United States along with actions followed by President Jimmy Carter. This approach will hope to understand: What role did both governments play? Providing a complete comprehension of the treaty negotiations looking at both sides of the process. How did the events that took place within the United States politics influenced the Canal treaty negotiations? What was the interaction between both parties? What made them successful?

#### FAILURE ATTEMPTS: NEGOTIATING WITH JOHNSON & NIXON

In 1967, the United States and Panamanian signed three treaties concerning the Panama Canal. The military coup put negotiations about the Canal on hold due to the political instability of the country. Omar Torrijos showed the United States that he was serious about negotiating the status of the Canal. In a meeting, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger expressed the following: “If these [Canal] negotiations fail, we will be beaten to death in every international forum, and there will be riots all over Latin America.”<sup>150</sup> Kissinger’s words reflect the foreign relations status of the United States and Latin America during the 1960s.

The United States valued its relationship with Latin America. In the past, however this had not been the case. During the period of World War II and the time leading to the Cold War, Latin America found itself constantly being influenced by the decisions of the United States, not only in the aspects of foreign relations but also politically and economically. The United States had become the dictator of whatever happened in Latin America, or at least those who had

---

<sup>150</sup>“U.S. Department of State,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed April 15, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/panama-canal>.

agreed to begin an alliance with the superpower. The enemies of the United States would eventually become the enemies of Latin America, restricting the opportunity for Latin America to develop not only globally but independently as well.<sup>151</sup> As a result, historians elaborated theories to understand the relationship that had been established between the United States and Latin America: the dependency theory, post structural theory, both creating a tremendous amount of interdependence between the two countries, and more reliance on the United States.

The Cuban Revolution marks a time that changed the perspective of the United States towards Latin America. In fear of losing the global upper hand against the Soviet Union and its relationship to Latin America, the relationship was now a need versus a want. The shift in the approach of foreign relations with Latin America changed from keeping political stability within Latin America to keeping communism out of Latin America.<sup>152</sup> Once the Cold War era began it was in the best interest of the United States to maintain alliances with Latin America. The United States knew its relationships with Panama would influence their foreign relations with any other Latin American country, which forced it to find a middle ground concerning the Canal's status. In the past, the United States had failed to fully consider Panama's request for treaty negotiations. At the time Nixon became the president of the United States, treaty negotiations with Panama were not a priority, instead his fixation had been placed in Cuba. Nixon saw Cuba as an immediate threat to the national security of the United States and his anti-communist

---

<sup>151</sup> Darlene, Rivas,. "United States–Latin American Relations, 1942–1960." In *A Companion to American Foreign Relations*, 230–254. Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, (2006): 230.

<sup>152</sup> Schoultz, Lars. "Communism." In *National Security and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, 1987, pp. 106-140, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400858491.106>.: 110.

agenda.<sup>153</sup> Putting aside any possibility for a treaty negotiation and choosing to ignore Panama's requests.

On January 25th, 1969, Benjamin H. Read wrote to the State Department about Panama's current situation. Read showed no concern for the political situation occurring in Panama. He described the Guardia Nacional as “inexperienced military governments” who were only seeking to establish policies and reforms for the Panamanian people. Read describes these men as “young, nationalistic, and reform-minded military officers” who had not been part of the inner circle of politicians that had been controlling the country in the past. The group that Read was referring to was Omar Torrijos and Boris Martinez, who along the Guardia Nacional had seized the Panamanian government, but to the eyes of the United States and Nixon's administration, were not a threat to the United States.<sup>154</sup> The United States did care about one thing, and that was to keep the Panama Canal safe, so maintaining an alliance with the regime was key for the protection of the Canal. Torrijos knew the situation he had at hand. He needed to not only maintain a diplomatic relation with the United States in order to begin treaty negotiations, but he also needed to motivate the people that Panama needed the Canal. Consequently he would need to gain a much higher public support for the military regime and a new treaty negotiation for the Canal. Torrijos would try anything in his power to make the negotiations happen. He saw no other way than to bend the rules in his favor, which led to the ratification of the Constitution of Panama in 1972.

---

<sup>153</sup>Conniff, 118.

<sup>154</sup> Benjamin H. Read to Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969, y(Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d518>

## CHANGING THE RULES: RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION 1972

In 1939, Panama authorized the intervention of the United States within national affairs. This was legalized throughout the ratification of the Hull-Alfaro treaty. The Constitution of Panama had been amended several times, from its creation in 1904 to 1941, 1946 and 1972. The constitution of 1941 added two more years to the presidential term. The constitution of 1946 created new regulations for citizenship against non-Spanish speakers from the Black community, and non-Hispanic minorities.<sup>155</sup> The ratification of 1972 had a very different goal, representation and power for negotiation. This new constitution would implement two main aspects to Torrijos' regime, it would increase the political participation of the people, increasing the support of the regime and it would also allow Torrijos to hand pick those individuals that would possess a significant position in the government. More specifically those who would be conducting the Canal treaties.<sup>156</sup>

Torrijos fulfilled new canal treaty negotiations through the ratification of the Panamanian Constitution in 1972. Two additions were made to the existing constitution: La Asamblea Nacional de Representantes and Torrijos as Head of State. The addition of the legislative body that was represented by the people was the strategy used to gain more public support towards the military regime. "The legislative body would consist of a Legislative Assembly whose members would be elected by the popular vote, as this constitution has established".<sup>157</sup> Torrijos was

---

<sup>155</sup>Reymundo, Guardian Guerra. "Entre Luces y Sombras: La Enseñanza de la Historia de Panamá y la historiografía republicana" *Revista De Historia De América*, no. 143 (2010): 152.

<sup>156</sup> Priestley, 76.

<sup>157</sup>"Constitución Política de la República de Panamá (repealed 1972)."



creating an equal representation of provinces within the legislative process of the country. Each member would be voted into power through popular vote, providing representatives from each region. A significant addition to this new Constitution recognized the "Comarca de San Blas," a mainly indigenous province now added to the representation of the electoral process. The term for these representatives would be five years, and their period would begin once a new president is elected. These additions to the Constitution become a significant aspect of Torrijos's populist method; five hundred and five new members were added to the legislative body, allowing the entire country to experience a form of representation within their government. This tactic would benefit Torrijos to gain public support towards the regime, showing his concern for all Panamanians, allowing them also to participate in the political process.

The ratification also gave the power to negotiate foreign treaties to Omar Torrijos, the head of the Guardia Nacional. Article 305 declares the Guardia Nacional as the public safety, linked to the executive body.<sup>158</sup> The constitution also provides absolute power to the military regime and recognizes Omar Torrijos as the "Líder máximo de la revolución Panameña". This gives Torrijos the control of foreign diplomatic relations, and the enactment of foreign treaties. The next addition has to do with treaties concerning the Panama Canal, found in Article 274. Treaties and additions that have relation to the Panama Canal must be approved by both the Head of State, Omar Torrijos, and the Asamblea Nacional de Representates. Since the Constitution recognizes Omar Torrijos as "Jefe de Gobierno," this also grants him the power to be the head of

---

[El Órgano Legislativo estará constituido por una corporación denominada Asamblea Legislativa cuyos miembros serán elegidos mediante postulación partidista y votación popular directa, conforme esta constitución lo establece]

<sup>158</sup> "Constitución Política de la República de Panamá (repealed 1972)."

the executive and legislative branch. Therefore he becomes a key piece in the negotiations of a new Canal treaty. It is significant to highlight that his role of Lider Maximo did in fact give him the power to override the executive and legislative branch, which became one of his authoritarian traits. A year after the ratification Torrijos begins to communicate with the United States about his intentions of making new treaty negotiations. The treaty negotiations that began in 1973 were also known as the Tack-Kissinger agreement.

#### TACK - KISSINGER AGREEMENT: THE NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN

On February 23rd, 1973 Secretary of State Henry Kissinger traveled to Panama. The purpose of the visit was to begin new treaty negotiations concerning the Panama Canal. He met with Torrijos and discussed some vital information concerning the Canal and concerning a "new chapter," as Torrijos described it, of Panama-United States relations. For the first time, since the military coup in 1968, the United States and Panama sat down to discuss the future of the Panama Canal.

Torrijos knew that the negotiations would take time, and that he needed to be patient with the process. Torrijos expressed to Kissinger that he knew the negotiations for a new Canal treaty would not occur in the distant future. Still, some straightforward "big questions" needed to be discussed with the United States officials. Some aspects involved the Canal jurisdiction if the United States and Panama had established a new treaty and the duration of such. Torrijos also mentions a list of issues that divided the United States and Panama. He expressed his belief in being able to work on those issues to "keep rein on those from whom he gets the most pressure

for drastic action--the students, the intellectuals and the "left-wingers" in his government."<sup>159</sup>

Torrijos also assured Kissinger that he would try to tone down the Panamanian anti-American ideas published through the media. All these negotiations and meetings began the communication between Henry Kissinger and Juan Antonio Tack, Panamanian foreign minister, which lead the way to the Torrijos-Carter treaty negotiations. The image of Torrijos made President Nixon uneasy due to his perception of Castro and Cuba.<sup>160</sup>

In 1973, the United States had Nixon as president. He had shown continuous concern about Cuba and the communist ideas Cubans were spreading throughout Latin America.<sup>161</sup> Since Torrijos used militarism, it was difficult for Nixon to view Torrijos differently than Castro. The United States was concerned about the protection of the Canal, and any drastic action that Torrijos could take that would influence the security of the Canal. The strategic location of the Canal also gave the United States access into Latin America, losing that connection would have left the United States blind to any possible connection coming from that geographical location.<sup>162</sup>

Kissinger saw it was important for Torrijos to understand the fear the United States had of his military. During a conversation between Kissinger and Torrijos, Kissinger explained to Torrijos the problem that Nixon had with his methodology, thinking that it was too close to that

---

<sup>159</sup>From William J. Joden of the National Security Council to president's Assistant for National Security, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1973, (Washington: GPO, 2010). <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v22/d3>

<sup>160</sup> Barbara Keys. "Congress, Kissinger, and the Origins of Human Rights Diplomacy." *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 5 (2010): 842.

<sup>161</sup>Joseph, Smith. "End of the Twentieth Century (1974–2000)." In *The United States and Latin America*, 149–178. Routledge, 2005, 141.

<sup>162</sup> Mark Atwood, Lawrence,. "Latin America and the Quest for Stability." In *A Companion to Richard M. Nixon*, 460–477. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 467.

of Fidel Castro. Although Torrijos had become an admirer of Castro's accomplishments in Cuba, he tried to distance himself from the leftist ideologies and relied heavily on his populist approach. He knew that in order to make any treaty negotiations a possibility he would need to be on the United States' good side, as staying close to Cuba at this point would not be beneficial for the treaty negotiations. In addition, Torrijos and Castro had broken diplomatic relations due to a promise Castro had failed to keep concerning the security of a ship that had traveled to Cuba. In fear of being "labeled" as a communist by the United States, Torrijos saw the Panamanian image was significant to keep and he knew that the United States had been observing every single one of his moves. He had seen how difficult it had been for previous president to come to terms with changes for a new Canal treaty, and he knew that keeping the relationship alive was going to be vital for any type of negotiations.<sup>163</sup>

#### THE BACKUP PLAN: GAINING WORLDWIDE SUPPORT

Although the treaty negotiations were put on hold, Torrijos knew that time was valuable, so he continued to move forward. Torrijos and his team devised a backup plan to speed up the negotiation process, forcing the United States to agree to a new treaty. This time he would use the United Nations to speed up the process. In March 1973, Torrijos attended the United Nations Security Council. He had arranged the meeting to take place in Panama, and hoped to use the opportunity to communicate a message that would reach the entire world. In this message he

---

<sup>163</sup> Memorandum from William J. Jorden to the National Security Council, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1973, (Washington: GPO, 2010).  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v22/d4>

would showcase the face of imperialism the United States had created amongst Latin American countries.

Torrijos knew that the message would force a speedy process to the Canal negotiations. As a very skillful public speaker Torrijos presented the United States as an abuser of power. “Panama understands very well the struggle of the people who suffer the humiliation of colonialism; of the people who equalize us in restrictions and servitude; of the people who refuse to accept the empire of the strong over the weak as a rule of coexistence; of the men who do not accept the exercise of political power by a foreign government over the territory where they were born; of the natives who do not admit to be seen as inferior or as animals”.<sup>164</sup> Torrijos needed to show the damage the United States dominion was causing to the Panamanian society. His message was a message of justice, but at the same time expressed ideas of dignity and patriotism. The United States had stolen Panama 's dignity, and they had no protection against the United States even in their own territory.<sup>165</sup>

The message of anti-imperialism that Torrijos was communicating was very clear. During the meeting Torrijos presented a series of convincing arguments and was successful in gaining the support he needed from the Security Council. As expected, the only country that opposed the

---

<sup>164</sup> Omar Torrijos, *La Batalla De Panamá* (Panamá: M.V. Pub. Co., 1981) 125.

[Panamá entiende muy bien la lucha de los pueblos que sufren la humillación del colonialismo; de lo pueblo que nos igualan en restricciones y servidumbre; de los pueblos que se resisten a aceptar el imperio del fuerte sobre el débil con norma de convivencia; sobre los hombres que no aceptan el ejercicio del poder político de un gobierno extranjero sobre el territorio que los vio nacer; de los nativos que no admiten ser vistos como inferiores o como animales.]

<sup>165</sup> Tom Long. “Putting the Canal on the Map: Panamanian Agenda-Setting and the 1973 Security Council Meetings.” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 445.

resolution presented by Torrijos was the United States.<sup>166</sup> Kissinger was familiar with Torrijos' methods, and recognized that the actions presented in that meeting would gain the Security Council support for Panama and against the United States. Kissinger also knew Torrijos had played the right cards and knew that the United States' image had been tinted at that meeting. "The United States has vetoed Panama, but the world has vetoed the United States!"<sup>167</sup> The message presented by Torrijos that day had been a tremendous success. As a result, the United States was forced to reconsider the negotiations of a Canal treaty.

The following day, Kissinger sent a report to the White House. In the report Kissinger explained the events that had taken place at the UN meeting: "my guess is that this particular unfortunate gathering of the UN will rather quickly be forgotten—except in Panama—and be relegated to the footnotes of history. That is where it belongs. We can only hope that the UN itself has learned a lesson and will not involve itself in future when one or another member wants to use it to win support for its purely selfish purposes".<sup>168</sup> The meeting with the UN became a key piece in Torrijos orchestration to accelerate treaty negotiations for the Panama Canal. To salvage the image of the United States, President Nixon drafted a letter to Congress, days after the meeting, communicating that the United States would begin new negotiations for the Panama Canal Treaty.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> From William J. Jorden to Assistant for National Security Affairs "Security Council Meeting in Panama" *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1973(Washington: GPO, 2010) <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v22/d7>

<sup>167</sup> Romulo Escobar Bethancourt, *Torrijos; ¡Colonia Americana no!* (Bogotá, 1981), 207.

<sup>168</sup> From William J. Jorden to Assistant for National Security Affairs "Security Council Meeting in Panama" *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1973(Washington: GPO, 2010) <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v22/d7>

<sup>169</sup> Conniff, 130.

Torrijos had been working on gaining the support of the Panamanian people. Although he still had much work to do, there had been fears of scarcity presented amongst the people of Panama. They had seen the economic support the presence of the United States was to the economy of Panama. Although they had been fighting for their sovereignty, there was doubt about success in independence from such wealth that the United States had been providing since the time they had set foot in Panamanian soil. Despite the collected support, Torrijos did receive a certain degree of opposition. There had been some groups amongst the general public that openly opposed the military dictatorship and Torrijos. This was due to their allegiance to the *Partido Panameñista* and Arnulfo Arias, the president deposed during the military coup of 1968. This group had a direct connection to the beating heart of patriotism, and the Panamanian public opinion. This group was no other than the group of students who had been motivating nationalism since the mid 1950s.<sup>170</sup>

#### GAINING SUPPORT FROM THE PEOPLE: PANAMA

There had been mixed emotions about the treaty negotiations. In Panama there were three main groups who supported the Torrijos-Carter treaty, these were the university students, the Catholic church, and the Panamanian business groups. The activist student groups had become the primary force of mobilization within Panamanian society even before the Flag Riots of 1964. They had become responsible for most of the protests against the Canal Zone that had taken place between the years 1950s and 1960s. However, the power that guided these protests did not

---

<sup>170</sup> Collazos, 166.

have a political foundation; it simply sought ideas of sovereignty concerning the Panama Canal Zone.

After the military coup of 1968, Torrijos was successful at including most Panamanian political groups. The groups had been shouting ideas of "sovereignty" which were directly connected to the campaign against the United States. However, not all groups within Panamanian society supported the military coup.<sup>171</sup> The former president, Arnulfo Arias, removed in 1968, had many supporters of the known *Partido Panamanian*. A particular group of students who did not support the Torrijos Regime was the Federación de Estudiantes Panameños.

The Federación de Estudiantes Panameños, better known as the FEP, became one of the first student unions in Panamanian society. Out of this group there were several sister organizations who originated from this movement, some are the Frente Patriótico de la Juventud created in 1945, Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (M.A.R). Floyd Britton became the creator and leader of this organization. Britton was one of the students who also participated in the *Siembra de Banderas* against the Panama Canal Zone in 1959 and the Flag Riots of 1964. Although the majority of members from the MAR and FEP did not support the treaty negotiations at first due to the usurpation of power from Torrijos, these student groups wanted Panamanian sovereignty more than anything. Torrijos was able to find one small connection with this particular group and that was how badly they wanted the United States out of Panama. This became one of the groups who gave Torrijos the majority amount of opposition in the process of treaty negotiations, but with time they were able to understand that in order to obtain that

---

<sup>171</sup> Marco A. Gandásegui, "Una Historia Política De Panamá: Movimientos Populares y Militarismo En Panamá," *Revista Conjeturas Sociológicas* No.4 (May 2016).



sovereignty, they would need to side with Torrijos.<sup>172</sup> As a result, by 1973 both groups became actively involved in the promotion of the Torrijos-Carter negotiations.

The second most significant advocate for the treaty negotiations were the Panamanian business groups. The members of these groups consisted of the representatives of the private sector. The predominant group was the Consejo Nacional de la Empresa Privada (CONEP), established in 1964 and composed by the Asociación Nacional Bancaria, Corporativa de Desarrollo Nacional and the Chamber of Commerce. Although most of the members of these particular groups were the elite class, they had been conscious of the benefit the Canal possession was giving to the United States, desiring that economic growth to be given to Panama.<sup>173</sup> The focus was placed on the importation of goods coming from the United States, and the lack of goods that were being exported to the United States benefiting Panama. Therefore, advocating support through newspaper publications became their way of supporting the cause, also hoping to share with the general public that transferring the Canal to Panama would not only benefit the private sector but the country as a whole.<sup>174</sup>

The Catholic Church also became an advocate for the Canal treaties. The Catholic Church had become an indirect representative of the working class, as they continually tried to integrate the masses through the creation of education programs, welfare programs, etc. The creation of the Centro de Estudios, Promoción y Asistencia Social (CEPAS) was created in 1964

---

<sup>172</sup> Informe No. 68/15 Petición 8882-03 Informe de admisibilidad de víctimas de la dictadura militar de Panamá.

<sup>173</sup> Pauline A. Dow, "Panamanian Nationalism and the Panama Canal Dispute, 1975 to 1977" (dissertation, n.d.), 23.

<sup>174</sup> Muñoz Germán, "Panamanian Political Reality: the Torrijos Years" (dissertation, 1981), 125.

in one of the poorest provinces of Panama, Santa Fe Veraguas. In 1968 CEPAS introduced the Plan de Veraguas which hoped to elevate the socioeconomic status of secluded areas of Panama. In June 9th 1971, Father Hector Gallegos, a Colombian priest working in the Veraguas province was assassinated, causing a large division between the church and the government.<sup>175</sup> The division was caused due to the neglect of prosecuting the murder and Torrijos' passive stand on finding the individual responsible. This created a continuous confrontation between the organization that worked and supported the church and the government. It wasn't until October 1971 when Archbishop McGrath and General Torrijos came to an agreement to work together to benefit the Panamanian people.<sup>176</sup> Similar to the MAR and the FEP Torrijos had been successful at turning the support of the Catholic Church around, one of the most influential forms within Panamanian society. Sad to say, the support did not have the same momentum in the United States, and many opposed the idea of giving up the Panama Canal. Nevertheless, the West Indians would influence the perspective of not only Panamanians but also Latin Americans in the United States.

#### SUPPORT ABROAD: WEST INDIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

The complete opposite took place with the West Indians that resided both in Panama and abroad. Previously to the Torrijos regime, West Indians had been completely excluded from political involvement. This was due to the belief Arias had concerning purifying the Panamanian race from individuals who had migrated to Panama. Torrijos provided an opportunity for West Indians to exercise their citizenship and become part of the political process of gaining the Canal.

---

<sup>175</sup>Dow, 21.

<sup>176</sup>Munoz, 128.

This took place in two ways, those that were at home in Panama and those who were abroad in Washington. As a result, activist groups were created in order to advocate for the support of the treaty negotiations. The group that emerged in Panama were: Acción Reivindicadora del Negro Panameño (ARENEP), Unión Nacional de Panameños (UNEP), Los Doce, Panameñisma Reina Negra, Congreso del Negro Panameño.<sup>177</sup> For the very first time in Panamanian history, groups were beginning to mobilize based on ethnicity and race, with the goal of integrating, advocating for a group that had been politically segregated in Panama politics prior to the regime.

Although the political racism forced many West Indians to migrate to the United States, their relocation would become a significant asset for Torrijos and the treaty negotiations. In the cities of Brooklyn and New York the mobilization of immigrants from Panama of West Indian descent also escalated. The two main groups that assisted with the promotion of Canal negotiations in the United States were the National Conference of Panamanians (NCOP), the Union Nacional de Panameños (UNDEP/NAPP) who later updated their name to Nueva Alternativa Popular Panameña. The main location both groups target was Brooklyn New York due to the high percentage of Antillean-Panamanians that had migrated since the 1950s.<sup>178</sup>

The migration of Panamanians to the United States could be a significant asset to the treaty negotiations. Before the treaty negotiations the migration took place in two different waves, between the years of 1960 to 1964, and 1965 to 1969. The 1990 census shows that about 11 percent had received a college degree, 3.5 percent possessed a master's degree and some form

---

<sup>177</sup> George Priestley, "Antillean-Panamanians or Afro-Panamanians?: Political Participation and the Politics of Identity During the Carter-Torrijos Treaty Negotiations," *Transforming Anthropology* 12, no. 1-2 (2004): pp. 50-67, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tran.2004.12.1-2.50>, 62.

<sup>178</sup> Priestley 55.

of professional title. The level of education of these migrants allowed them to earn a higher number of income, ranging between \$25,000 to \$75,000 annually.<sup>179</sup> Having knowledge of how to effectively spread support for the treaty negotiations, these groups reached out to the Black Congressional Caucus to request more time for the treaty negotiations. They also created partnerships with existing liberal organizations and even communicated their message to different churches in the area. The goal was to promote the new treaty negotiations to those Panamanians who had migrated to these areas, and also to the U.S. population. The publications of newsletters became the most efficient way to communicate to the public the process of the treaty negotiations and the significance of the treaty. The impact on these movements was measured through the increased participation and support for the treaties.

Despite the opposition received at home, there had been enough support to push the treaty negotiations forward. Torrijos had been communicating with the United States and hoped to make changes to the existing treaty for the Panama Canal. The presidential election of 1976 changed the game for Panama and the future of the Canal. Although the stubbornness of treaty negotiations that had been received from Ford, Nixon and Johnson were still present within the Senate, the new elected president will become of great importance to the negotiations.

The battle in the Senate increased greatly during President Ford's administration. The debate about the Canal treaty became influenced by foreign policy. The argument was between the neoconservatives and those who supported the treaties of the liberal internationalists. The

---

<sup>179</sup>U.S Census Bureau. New York, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.  
<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1960/population-and-housing-phc-1/41953654v7ch01.pdf> (accessed April 2 2021).

opposition saw the influence of Soviet Union and Nixon's détente between the U.S and the Soviets, along with the treaty, as a form of weakness.<sup>180</sup> As a result the *Snyder Amendment* was signed by President Ford. The Panamanian people opposed the amendment. A Panamanian newspapers criticized the division between the Republicans and Democrats, arguing that the American government partisanship division had become more important than the needs for the American people. The Snyder Amendment meant that the United States would retract the idea of negotiating for a new treaty. To show their discontent Panamanian students protested in front of the U.S Embassy, hoping that the demonstration of nationalism would change the Senate's minds.<sup>181</sup>

Torrijos saw the disappointment in the public response of the Panamanian people. Hoping to change the situation concerning the negotiations, Torrijos called an urgent meeting on July 7th 1975. Amongst the individuals who attended that meeting, U.S ambassador Nicolas Gonzalez Revilla was urged to attend. Torrijos also extended the invitation to some of the student leaders from different groups. The purpose of this meeting was to inform the U.S that Panama would no longer be conducting "secret negotiations", as a result of the violation to the established accord with President Nixon. Although the Snyder amendment slowed the new Canal treaty negotiations, it also marked a significant moment in Panamanian politics, in which the people would be actively involved in the negotiations with the U.S. Panamanians would have to wait between the years 1975 to 1977 in order to see any negotiations taking place. It wasn't until

---

<sup>180</sup> Linda L Fowler, "Institutional Change and Senate Committee Hearings." In *Watchdogs on the Hill: The Decline of Congressional Oversight of U.S. Foreign Relations*, 71-97. (PRINCETON; OXFORD: Princeton University Press, 2015),72.

<sup>181</sup> Dow, 35.

President Jimmy Carter was elected that Panamanians were able to expect updates to treaty negotiations. Carter took such a different approach concerning his perception of imperialism and his value for sovereignty, setting the stage for the treaty that would change Panama's future, the Torrijos-Carter treaty. How much was it Carter ? How much was it Torrijos? In order for the treaty negotiations to happen the support needed to take place on both sides, despite the lack of support from the American people, Carter would need to change the American narrative of imperialism and Torrijos would need to continue to reflect the need for sovereignty to the American public.

#### JIMMY CARTER: TERMINATING IMPERIALISM

On January 11th 1977 a different kind of president came to power in the United States. President Jimmy Carter changed the game for the Panamanian government. Carter truly desired to separate his legacy from that of his predecessors.<sup>182</sup> Carter communicated to the Vice President and the Secretary of State and Defense his desire to promptly revise the Panama Canal treaties and “bring change that would benefit both sides”.<sup>183</sup> It became clear that Carter had very different objectives in mind concerning the United States relationship with Panama. Although many in the White House, previously, and even the House and the Senate had seen Panama as an opportunity for the United States, Carter saw the need for a change in order to benefit both

---

<sup>182</sup> Betty Glad, “An Outsider in the White House Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy,” in *An Outsider in the White House Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>183</sup> To the Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense from The United States Representative to the United Nations, “Presidential Review Memorandum” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977 (Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d2>.

countries equally. Carter also saw the continuous rise of nationalism that was taking place not only in Panama but also in Latin American countries, so taking care of this situation was going to be crucial. In a meeting with Kissinger, Carter was informed of the significance of the relationship between Panama and Latin America. Kissinger explained that most Latin American countries supported Panama, after the 1973 UN Security Council meeting the United States support had decreased, as many of these Latin American countries supported the idea of Panama gaining their sovereignty over the Panama Canal.<sup>184</sup>

Despite all of Carter's intentions, opposition at home would be much higher than what him and his staff expected. One of the biggest obstacles to Carter's advocacy for a new treaty for the Panama Canal was the United States Senate. Article II of the United States Constitution delegates the power of Foreign Treaty negotiations to the United States Senate, before the President can act upon any desired changes, he must have the Senate's approval. More specifically Carter would experience opposition from the Republican party. Senators that had gained an incredible amount of support from the years in office.

The biggest challenge with the negotiations for the treaty was going to find a workable agreement for the United States considering the demands presented by Torrijos. Panama was demanding involvement of the Panamanian sovereignty in the zone, ownerships of the Panama Canal, and the termination of American intervention. The Panama Canal would continue to function; however it would run under Panamanian jurisdiction. These were very high stakes to attempt to accomplish, especially since the American people viewed the Panama Canal as a

---

<sup>184</sup> Glad, 88.

symbol of “nationality” and “patriotism”. Americans believed that after the failure in Vietnam, giving the Canal back to Panama would only highlight the weaknesses of the United States.<sup>185</sup>

This narrative was coming not only from the United States Senate but from the American people as well.

The message of keeping the canal under the United States was continuously sent to the American people, the idea was not presented as imperialistic but protective, favoring Latin America. On a radio broadcast Alistair Cooke explains: “Many Americans, on the other hand, feel that the canal is a symbol if not of American power, of America's role as a watchdog of trouble affecting her interests in Latin America. The administration tries, in private, to point out that so long as the canal seems like an imperial symbol, it could goad and bait the restless countries to the south into arms. The administration points out that the day of imperial symbols is over and that nothing, but goodwill will flow from yielding the name and the appearance of sovereignty now”.<sup>186</sup> Cooke tries to paint a picture of concern for the national interest of not only the United States but for Panama as well. He communicated that the United States Senate had Panama’s best interest at heart; in fact, the idea of keeping the Canal was not to maintain control of Latin America but instead to benefit those countries in the South. He continues and explains: “If the new treaty is signed, the world will think America is checking out of her responsibilities, that our allies will wonder about our will and our capacity to defend ourselves, that the formal American retreat will leave a power vacuum in the Caribbean which Fidel Castro and his patron,

---

<sup>185</sup> Natasha Zaretsky. “Restraint or Retreat? The Debate over the Panama Canal Treaties and U.S. Nationalism after Vietnam.” *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 542.

<sup>186</sup>“Letter from America by Alistair Cooke,” 9AD.



the Soviet Union, will seek to exploit. It is not enough to point out that the canal will not even take the American aircraft carriers of today, that supplies in any new war would go by air, that the canal is considered as a fortress, an anachronism". For the American public, it was difficult to separate the figure of Torrijos, with his military uniform, than that of Castro. Due to the previous Cold War fear being a reality for American perception of other forms of Government, it became difficult for the average American to differentiate Cuba from Panama. Just like Cuba had been a threat, Panama needed to be controlled, and what better way than to keep the Canal under United States control.<sup>187</sup>

Carter would have to balance two different negotiations, the negotiations with the United States Senate and Torrijos. He needed to get the American people on his side in order to also gain the approval of the Senate. As a result, he decided to utilize the media in order to convince the people about the Canal. In February 1978, President Carter appeared on national television urging the people that creating a new Canal Treaty will only be "in the best interest of the nation."<sup>188</sup> Treaty Negotiations began between the two countries in Contadora Island, Panama, on February 15th of 1977. It was not going to be an easy road ahead; getting the Senate on board meant showing that the Treaty's ratification kept the "interest of the United States" as well.<sup>189</sup> To

---

<sup>187</sup> From Senator Cannon to President Carter "Presidential Telephone Calls to Senators", *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1978, (Washington: GPO 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d142>.

<sup>188</sup> "Carter in TV Talk, Asks Canal Backing: President Says 'Panama Treaties Are in Highest National Interest' Carter, In Fireside Chat, Asks Public's Support on Canal Treaties LI Requirements Met Increase in Influence Seen," *New York Times*, Feb 02.

<sup>189</sup> From Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to President Carter, "Memorandum of Conversation" *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977(Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d15>

come to terms with both Panamanians and Americans' well-being was not the most challenging part of the negotiations. Still, the presentation of such would either win over the Senate or completely ruin the attempt for a change.

The *Washington Post* released an article titled “Behind the Passions of the Canal Debate”, in which the author shows the influence of information to the public opinion of the people about the Panama Canal Treaties. William Schneider, a government professor at Harvard University, presents the date of numerous polls taken between October and January of 1977. The way the questions are framed could have been a way of manipulating the public opinion of the American people. Although the writer of this article does not conclude to that but emphasizes the idea of lack of information and an uninformed public, the framing of the survey questions becomes truly fascinating.

The first part of the article focuses on polls that were conducted emphasizing the idea of “losing control”. The first poll was conducted by Opinion Research Corp in Princeton NJ. The questions posted were the following: “Do you favor the United States continuing its ownership and control of the Panama Canal, or do you favor turning ownership and control of the Panama Canal over to the Republic of Panama?”. The results showed significant support against the “turning ownership and control” of the Panama Canal to Panama. There is no mention of the treaties, no mention of the effective date in which the Hay Bunau Varilla would be terminated, painting an image of defeat in the eyes of the American public. NBC News and Associated press realized a very similar poll with some adaptations. The survey question mentioned the existence of not one but two treaties, also providing a specific effective date for the termination of the

existing treaty with Panama (2000). Yet, the language of “turn over the canal to Panama” was still utilized, creating a negative response towards the negotiations and the treaty itself.<sup>190</sup>

Different polls were also conducted by CBS and The New York Times, adding to the awareness of treaties and rights of military intervention for the Panama Canal. The results were significantly different to those conducted by NBC and Opinion Research Corp, increasing the numbers of supporters for the treaties. The reason for opposition for the treaties was also surveyed in October 1977 by Gallup, providing the rationale behind the opposition and evident desire to “control” the Canal. The issues of national security, the lack of trust to the Panamanian government were predominant in the responses. In January 1977, another survey was conducted by Roper Poll with a list of arguments, the participants had to choose the top three most convincing arguments for opposing the treaties. The first most selected answer was: “We not only paid for the Canal originally, but we have also paid a yearly fee to Panama for U.S rights in the Canal Zone,” the second most selected “When we made the Panama Canal treaty, it was supposed to last forever”. These responses highlighted not only the uninformed public Carter had to work with but also the two main aspects that grew opposition for the treaties, possession of the Panama Canal and sovereignty.<sup>191</sup>

The key was to devise a plan of presentation so that Congress would hear what they wanted to hear. Between Alquilino Edgardo Boyd, Ellsworth Bunker, Clifford Case P, Henry Kissinger, and Sol M Linowitz, the men decided to divide the treaty into two parts. The first part will focus on the idea of *Neutrality*. It would present ideas of keeping the Canal secure from

---

<sup>190</sup> William Schneider, “Behind the Passions of the Canal Debate,” February 12, 1978.

<sup>191</sup> William Schneider, “Behind the Passions of the Canal Debate,” February 12, 1978.

foreign influence, precisely military force, which had been the concern expressed by both Nixon and Johnson.<sup>192</sup> The United States would still have the power to intervene if any other foreign power chose to “attack” the Panama Canal. The second part of the presentation would deal with the *Panama Canal Treaty*, which was the devolution of the Canal territory to Panama, including the Panama Canal Zone. By May, the “neutrality” treaty was presented to the United States Senate and approved by a vote of 68 to 32.<sup>193</sup>

On May 18th, 1977, Torrijos sent President Carter a message, expressing his desire to make the Treaty final by 1977 instead of 1980 like they had previously established in Contadora Island back in February.<sup>194</sup> Between May until August, when Carter's staff presented the second part of the treaty to Congress, the negotiations between Panama and the United States became harder to handle. Torrijos became very particular about the information presented in the second part of the treaty, which had to do with the *Panama Canal Treaty*. On August 25th, the meeting with the Senate took place concerning the second part of the treaty. Governor Reagan presented his concern about allowing "enemy ships" to use the Canal. He specifically stated his concern for allowing German and Japanese ships to travel through the Canal. Similar to the statement presented in the broadcast by Alistair Cooke, Governor Regan said: "if we give in to Panama on

---

<sup>192</sup> “Memorandum From the Panama Canal Treaty CO-Negotiator to Ambassador at Large” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977 (Washington: GPO, 2010) <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d36>

<sup>193</sup> “Memorandum From Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense Brown”, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977 (Washington: GPO, 2010) <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d40>

<sup>194</sup> From Ambassador Gabriel Lewis Galindo to Secretary of State “Memorandum of Conversation” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977 (Washington: GPO, 2010) <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d39>

the sovereignty issue, every little country in the world will get the idea that it can get its way of tweaking our nose." <sup>195</sup> Ambassador Linowitz explained to the Governor that it would benefit the United States to support the treaty and it would only benefit their foreign relations with other Latin American countries. Regan could not understand why the United States would agree to give up such a sizable significant infrastructure and continued arguing that a person like Torrijos would not abide by a treaty and suspected Communist influence behind the idea of giving up the Canal.

The second part of the treaty negotiations was going to be the most difficult. On one side Carter was going to try to supplement the desires of sovereignty expressed by Torrijos, but at the same time satisfying legitimate American interest for keeping the Canal open. The other aspect that was challenging for Carter was convincing the United States to remove the military presence in Panama.<sup>196</sup> The second part of the treaty, *The Panama Canal Treaty*, took much longer to approve by the Senate than the first part. It took several months and several meetings to get enough Senators to vote in favor of *The Panama Canal Treaty*.

Carter and his team synthesized the agenda, knowing that the second round of negotiations would be the key factor for approving the treaty by the Senate. The first action they took was to lobby for time. Both Carter and his team requested the senators not to decide until they had been presented with all of the information concerning the Canal. Hamilton Jordan, the

---

<sup>195</sup> From Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to Secretary of State "Memorandum of Conversation" *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977(Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d87>

<sup>196</sup> Robert A Strong, . "Jimmy Carter and the Panama Canal Treaties." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1991): 272.

political strategist who ran Carter's presidential campaign suggested targeting the senators who were uncertain of their vote, and could be swayed in favor of the treaty. Jordan organized an educational campaign in order to inform the public. In the upcoming months many were invited to the White House to be informed about the new treaty negotiations. Carter continued to make public appearances to address the treaty, and before the last round of negotiations almost half the Senate had been able to travel to the Canal in the company of Omar Torrijos.<sup>197</sup> The cooperation between both Torrijos and Carter became crucial for gaining the support of both the general American public and the United States Senate.

It was not until September 2nd that the Senate ratified the terms of *The Panama Canal Treaty*, which changed the established treaty of 1948:

1. Termination of any previous treaties established between the two countries.
2. Panama will gain full control of the Panama Canal on December 31st 1999.
3. The Management and operation of the canal would be given fully to the Republic of Panama.
4. Both countries commit to defend the Panama Canal in case of any foreign attacks.  
The United States will still have the primary responsibility to defend the Canal.
5. Those individuals who were employed by the Panama Canal Commission will have to abide by the laws established by the Republic of Panama.
6. The territory of the Republic of Panama "shall be under the flag of the Republic of Panama, consequently such flag shall always occupy the position of honor".

---

<sup>197</sup> Strong, 276.

7. The Republic of Panama will take full financial responsibility for the management and operation of the Canal.
8. The complete removal of American military bases and the complete termination of the Panama Canal Zone.<sup>198</sup>

Although the public support in the United States for the Canal did not change much between those months of negotiations, all Carter needed was just enough numbers in the Senate, and that was exactly what he had been able to obtain.

#### A HOPEFUL FUTURE: SIGNING AN END TO IMPERIALISM

Torrijos and the Panamanian people wanted one thing: their sovereignty. The interview with Adolfo Ahumada can shed light on understanding the perspective of those who did support the signing of a new Canal Treaty. Ahumada was a former student of the University of Panama, an individual who lived the Flag riots of 1964 and participated in the Siembra de Banderas of 1958. Ahumada became president of the Union de Estudiantes Universitarios, a group of students who began meeting, since 1962, in the basement of the University of Panama and through many discussions “began creating a nationalistic conscience, where they realized that the coexistence with the United States was going to be impossible.” There were three specific objectives that the people of Panama hoped the Torrijos Carter would achieve: the complete removal of the Panama Canal Zone, the military bases, and the possession of the Panama Canal under the jurisdiction of the Panamanian Government.<sup>199</sup> This generation of students who lived the Siembra de Banderas and Flag riots was known as the *Generación del 58*. What becomes

---

<sup>198</sup> Conniff, 134.

<sup>199</sup> (Panama: SerTV Noticias, September 8, 2020).

significant about this generation is that they had seen and lived the progression of military occupation of the United States in Panama. Just like the FEP, they wanted the United States out of their country. “This generation knew that they had the same objective as Torrijos: How to convince all the social groups of Panama that they needed the possession of the Panama Canal?”. Explains Ahumanda. The testimony of Ahumanda becomes very similar to Campesinos and working professionals who lived the restriction to the Panama Canal Zone and all those who believed that gaining the Panama Canal was the best thing that could happen to Panama as a Republic.

In Panama, the newspapers reported every negotiation step, hoping to paint a clear panorama for the Panamanian people. Only a day before the signing of the Torrijos Carter, the newspaper *La Critica* reported the support the Panamanian people had concerning the signing of the Torrijos-Carter treaty. On September 6th, a group of Campesinos, students, workers, and professionals would gather on the Plaza 5 de Mayo as they hoped to march, showing their support for Omar. The newspaper explains “la prueba de que nuestro pueblo está con Panamá y Omar [...] como lo dijo José Martí, que “la patria es ara, no pedestal”.<sup>200</sup> *El Panama América* reported another article titled "El Nuevo Tratado debe servir de ejemplo para el resto de América". It informed the public about the meeting between the United States and Panama in Washington, as they discussed how this particular negotiation would serve as an example to the other Latin American countries.<sup>201</sup> On September 16th, 35,000 people gathered in la Avenida 5

---

<sup>200</sup> “Espero 7 meses,”*Diario la Crítica*, September 9, 1977.

<sup>201</sup> “El Nuevo Tratado debe servir de ejemplo al resto de América,”*El Panamá América*, September 7, 1977.



de Mayo, showing their support for signing the Torrijos-Carter treaty to their “leader” Omar Torrijos Herrera. *La Critica* reported that the minister Nestor Tomas Guerra, who coordinated the event, said another group traveling from Chiriquí, a province located seven hours away from the City, to Panama City to show their support. The people hoped to welcome the man who made it possible to show their gratitude for protecting la Patria.<sup>202</sup>

Torrijos's success in bringing the Panama Canal under Panamanian rule became one of his most significant contributions to Panamanian society. Although he was also known for his populist rhetoric, many could relate to his vision of gaining Panama's sovereignty of the Canal. It would be foolish to ignore the tremendous contribution that Jimmy Carter's presidency brought to the relationship between the United States and Panama as the very first president to fully comprehend the significance of sovereignty for a Latin American nation. The United Nations' implementation to gain international support for Panama's cause also influenced the Canal treaty negotiations, placing the United States in an uncomfortable position and forcing them to reconsider some of the previous agreements. Shortly after the signing of the Torrijos-Carter treaty, Torrijos stepped down as “Jefe de Gobierno” and reinstituted democratic elections in 1979. The torrijistas become the *Partido Revolucionario Democrático*, a political party competing in the elections of that year. In 1981, Torrijos scheduled one last flight, a trajectory that would only take 10 minutes, from the city of Penonome to Coclecito. On July 31st Torrijos died in a mysterious plane crash. The official version cited a malfunction that caused the plane to crash against a mountain near Penonome.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup> “Una Patria, un pueblo,” *Diario la Crítica*, September 16, 1977.

<sup>203</sup> Carlos, Quintanilla,. "Panamá: Recordando a Torrijos." *La Opinión*, Aug 17, 1998.

Although some of the methods that were followed by the Guardia Nacional, in terms of eliminating the opposition, were deemed unacceptable, Torrijos was able to accomplish the unity of the nation and rewrite the history of Panama as an independent and prosperous country. The Panama Canal was transferred to Panamanian jurisdiction on December 31st, 1999, a day that many cherish as one of the biggest celebrations in Panamanian history.



<sup>204</sup> FIGURE 4: *Elecciones de 1999 y el retorno del Canal*, La Prensa.

---

<sup>204</sup> “Elecciones de 1999 y el retorno del Canal,” *La Prensa*, October 22, 2000.

## CONCLUSION

“We reached victory at last. In the happy field of union; With fiery gleams of glory. The new nation is illumined”.<sup>205</sup> These were the words written by Jeromino de la Ossa in 1904, which became the first stanza of the National Anthem of Panama. Every Monday morning, both public and private schools across the country, attend the *Acto Cívico*, a small ceremony done at the beginning of the day before school starts, where the national anthem is sung, and the pledge of allegiance is recited. Once the assembly culminates, students are then directed to their respective classrooms, as they prepare to begin their day. This act is meant to foster feelings of patriotism and respect towards the Panamanian flag and remember those who *fought* to gain Panama’s independence. Consequently, the narrative that students in Panama receive concerning the independence of Panama is one of grand events, and strong national pride. The narrative presented in schools across the country places heavy emphasis on the role the elite Panamanian class had in the separation of the country. Therefore, the presentation of historical information at times can be very one sided.

The research presented in this essay hoped to focus on the change that took place in Panamanian politics between the years of 1903 to 1977. As a result of the relationship created between the U.S and Panama with the establishment of the Hay Bunau Varilla, most of the historical evidence presented in this essay supports the existence of the *leyenda eclectica*. Recognizing that the role the United States played in the shaping of nationalism not only in the creation of the country of Panama but also throughout the years and existence of the Panama

---

<sup>205</sup> Jeronimo de la Ossa, “*Himno Nacional de la Republica de Panama*” *Panama City, Panama 1904*.

Canal, became an active force to the development of such. That development was costly to both the Panamanian people and the Panamanian government, the cost was Panama's sovereignty.

Omar Torrijos Herrera became the voice that changed Panamanian politics. He utilized that growth of nationalism to build up the existing narrative against imperialism and implemented strategies that created a connectivity between Panamanian social groups. The significance of his authoritarian role within politics made it possible to obtain the sovereignty of the Panama Canal for the Panamanian people. His role in the shaping of nationalism within Panama, influenced the treaty negotiations during 1977. Torrijos wanted the political culture of Latin America to change, not through chaos, like he presented in some of his speeches, but by encouraging the governments of Latin America to pay close attention to the needs of their people. At the same time the different approach taken by Carter at the beginning of his presidency allowed for the two countries to establish a series of negotiations that gave Panama its sovereignty. The effort that both leaders gave, changed the lives of many Panamanians around the country.

Although the growth of nationalism begins to take shape in the early years of Panama, that nationalism is only seen through the writings of some notorious elites: Manuel Amador Guerrero, Ricardo Miro, Dr. Belisario Porras, and even Justo Arosemena. Consequently, Panamanian politics is guided and dictated by the Panamanian elite. The alliance established with the United States only highlights the amount of control and power the Panamanian elite had in the realm of politics. It is not until the 1920's that other groups such as educators, students, and the labor union, who conformed to the Panama Canal workforce, began to question the established alliance with the United States. Looking back at the three leyendas, the *Negra*,

*Dorada* and *Ecletica*, Panamanian nationalism should be seen as an ever-changing force.

Although the *leyenda Dorada* romanticized the nationalism that according to scholars existed during the 1903, the role the United States played in the establishment of Panama is too significant in order to fully accept the legitimacy of the *leyenda Dorada*. Placing the *Negra* at a significant disadvantage, focusing only on the role the United States played in Panamanian political culture and completely ignoring the influences that this shared spaces created to the people of Panama. Furthermore, the *leyenda ecléctica*, becomes the more structural piece in relationship to the existing scholarship and analysis of U.S-Panama relations.

The growth of American involvement in Latin American becomes a very important aspect that helped shape the nationalism of Panama. Despite the disadvantage the country faced against the U.S, it was because of that presence that the Panamanian people began to create their own voice, and began to question what it really meant to be Panamanian. Although individuals such as Arnulfo Arias tainted and separated the Panamanian society between those who were Panamanian born and those who were not, the nationalism did not stop growing. By the decade of the 1960's the younger Panamanian generation played such a significant role in the shaping of the nationality of the people that ideas of sovereignty became even more common amongst not only the elite of Panama, like it had been in the beginning but also the middle and lower classes. It would be interesting for the scholarship to dedicate more study to those migrant groups who constantly tried to integrate Panamanian society, but due to either the racial segregation, language barrier, or competitive workforce were kept outside of the sphere of nationalism. The scholarship has already dedicated significant study to the West Indians (Priestly) and Spaniards (Greene) who worked for the Panama Canal, yet desired to identify more with Panama than the

United States. The Canal also brought significant large groups of Chinese, creating another sphere within Panamanian society that could be significant for understanding not only Panamanian culture during the years of the Panama Canal Zone, but also the influences it created in today's society.

In conclusion the main focus of this paper was to focus on Torrijos' influence and understand the role he played in changing Panama's political culture. This was done by observing the development of the U.S-Panama relations between the years 1903 to 1968, in order to understand how the presence of the U.S in Panama influenced the people. Continuously, the focus on populism, used by Torrijos changed the involvement of the Panamanian people within politics, placing close attention to those groups who had been neglected in the past and focusing on aspects that would only allow the country to develop and grow for the future. Lastly, the Torrijos-Carter negotiations, which changed the U.S-Panama relationship and shaped Panamanian nationalism at a much higher level.

As mobilization grew within different people groups during the years of 1960's so did the nationalism and anti-Americanism of the people. Omar Torrijos Herrera did not become part of the Panamanian narrative until the late 1960s. However, the growth of anti-Americanism that began to accumulate between the 1920s and 1960s surely brought a crucial aspect to the impact of the regime. Torrijos and his nationalistic persona was able to unify those groups that previous presidents had chosen to separate. Torrijos was also able to include and influence the growth of political participation within the Panamanian people. Although he followed militaristic and authoritarian tendencies in some of his methods of governing, his influence on the country left an everlasting impact that Panamanians would remember in generations to come. There is one

aspect that the scholarship could develop and that would be his opposition during the regime.

How different was the ideology of Torrijos to that of the opposition? Specifically those student activist groups that openly oppose the regime at the beginning of the 1970s. The historiography has placed a great amount of study to the flag riots of 1964. There is no scholarship on the different activist groups, mostly groups confirmed by women who played a role in the shaping of the identity of the country during the Torrijos regime. Another aspect that the scholarship could choose to focus on could be the generational influence of those who experienced the era of the Panama Canal Zone and those who witnessed the invasion of the United States and the dictatorship of Manuel Antonio Noriega, also placed in power by the United States. If something has become clear, is that the United States left a cultural footprint within the region of Panama, how much did the United States culture influence Panama's, and if the political establishment of the Panama Canal Zone disappeared with the Torrijos-Carter treaty, was there any social divide left? The outcome of that cultural imperialism the U.S utilized in Panama would have to be the next step to this study.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## PRIMARY SOURCES:

Adair to the Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1968, (Washington:

GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d448>

Arnulfo Arias, “Boletín Sanitario” (Ley 6a. Panama, 1934), 4,5.

“Arnulfo demanda la intervención Americana, pero E.U la rechaza” *El Mundo*, October 14, 1968.

Arosemena, Justo. *El Estado Federal De Panamá*. Editora República, 1960.

“Anti-U.S Riot Hits Canal Zone,” *Madera Tribune*, November 3, 1959.

De la Ossa, Jeronimo “*Himno Nacional de la Republica de Panama*” *Panama City, Panama* 1904.

“Derrocado Arnulfo por violar la constitución y las leyes” *El Mundo*, October 12, 1968.

Benjamin H. Read to Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969, (Washington: GPO, 2010), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d518>

Cooke, Allistair. “Letter from America by Allistair Cooke.” Episode, n.d.

"Constitución Política de la República de Panamá (repealed 1972)."

Ehrman to Mr. Hay, “Telegram from Panama” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1903. Washington: GPO, 2010.

Ehrman to Mr. Hay “Telegram to the Department of State from the U.S Consulate” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1903. Washington: GPO, 2010.

“El Nuevo Tratado debe servir de ejemplo al resto de América,” *El Panamá América*, September 7, 1977.

“Elecciones de 1999 y el retorno del Canal,” *La Prensa*, October 22, 2000.

“Espero 7 meses,” *Diario la Crítica*, September 9, 1977.

“Entrevista a Augusto Fabrega” *Los Panameños*, April, 2016.



“Fin Del Enclave: Panama Soberana,” *Panama*, September 11, 1977.

From Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to President Carter, “Memorandum of Conversation”  
*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977(Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d15>

From Ambassador Gabriel lewis Galindo to Secretary of State “Memorandum of Conversation”  
*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977(Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d39>

From Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to Secretary of State “Memorandum of Conversation”  
*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977(Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d87>

From Senator Cannon to President Carter “Presidential Telephone Calls to Senators”,*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1978, (Washington: GPO 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d142>.

From William J. Jorden to Assistant for National Security Affairs “Security Council Meeting in Panama” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1973(Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v22/d7>

From William J. Jorden of the National Security Council to president’s Assistant for National Security,*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1973,(Washington: GPO, 2010).<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v22/d3>

*Foreign Relations of the United States*,1967, (Washington: GPO, 2010),  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d436>

Loomis to Mr. Ehrman, “Telegram to the Department of State from the U.S Consulate”*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1903. Washington: GPO, 2010.

“Memorandum from William J. Jorden to the National Security Council”, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1973,(Washington: GPO, 2010).  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v22/d4>

“Memorandum From the Panama Canal Treaty CO-Negotiator to Ambassador at Large”*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977 (Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d36>

Mr. Ryvittin to Mr. Reinhardt . *Panama and the Canal Zone*,1959. Washington: GPO, 2010.

Muñoz Germán. "Panamanian Political Reality: the Torrijos Years," 1981.

M.W Kendall, *Johnson Library, National Security File, Country*, 1968.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v31/d449>

"Panamá Denuncia Tratado de 1903" *El Panama America*, January 14, 1964.

"Primera sangre derramada Torrijos Herido Contacto entre la Guardia y los civiles armados" *El País*, April 4, 1950.

Quintanilla, Carlos. "Panamá: Recordando a Torrijos." *La Opinión*, Aug 17, 1998.

"Rebeldía desorientada" *La Prensa*, January 9, 1964.

Richard Severo, "U.N. Panel Sits in Panama Today," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1973.

Romulo Escobar Bethancourt, *Torrijos; ¡Colonia Americana no!* (Bogotá, 1981).

Schneider, William. "Behind the Passions of the Canal Debate," February 12, 1978.

Smith, Terrance. "Carter in TV Talk, Asks Canal Backing: President Says 'Panama Treaties Are in Highest National Interest' Carter, In Fireside Chat, Asks Public's Support on Canal Treaties LI Requirements Met Increase in Influence Seen." Broadcast. *New York Times*.

"Sobria y Firme Protesta de Panamá por los Hechos acaecidos en la Z. del Canal" *La Estrella de Panamá*, November 3, 1959

To the Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense from The United States Representative to the United Nations, "Presidential Review Memorandum" *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1977 (Washington: GPO, 2010)  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v29/d2>.

Torrijos, Omar, and Juan Antonio Tack. *Nuestra revolución: Discursos Fundamentales Del*

*General Omar Torrijos Herrera, Jefe De Gobierno De La República De Panamá.*

Panamá: República de Panamá, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Departamento de Información, 1974.

Torrijos, Omar *La Batalla De Panamá* (Panamá: M.V. Pub. Co., 1981).

Torrijos, Omar. "Soy Un Soldado De América Latina." *VI Cumbre De Países No Alineados*.

Speech presented at the VI Cumbre de Países No Alineados, 1979.

Torrijos, Omar. "Tienen Que Llevarse Sus Toldas Colonialistas (1971)." *Antología del pensamiento crítico panameño contemporáneo*, 2018, 137–45.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfjd163.9>.

United States. "Hay-Bau Varilla Treaty", November 18, 1903, *Convention for the Construction of a Ship Canal*, art. 2.

United States. "Hay-Bau Varilla Treaty", November 18, 1903, *Convention for the Construction of a Ship Canal*, art. 7.

U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State. Accessed April 15, 2021.

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/panama-canal>.

U.S Census Bureau. New York, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.  
<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1960/population-and-housing-phc-1/41953654v7ch01.pdf> (accessed April 2 2021).

"Una Patria, un pueblo," *Diario la Crítica*, September 16, 1977.

Wayman, Stan. *Inside an Ugly Fight in Panama*. 1964. *LIFE Magazine*.

## SECONDARY SOURCES:

A. Arosemena G. Diógenes. *La Cuestión Canalera, De 1903 a 1936*. Panamá, 1975.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities*. United Kingdom: Verso, 2006.

Babou, Cheikh Anta. "Decolonization or National Liberation: Debating the End of British

- Colonial Rule in Africa." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 632 (2010): 41-54. Accessed April 17, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27895947>.
- Beluche, Olmedo. "La Verdadera Historia De La Separación De 1903 Reflexiones En Torno Al Centenario." 1st ser. (2003): 5-12. 2003.
- Black, Jeremy. *Fighting for America: The Struggle for Mastery in North America, 1519-1871*. Indiana University Press, 2011. Accessed April 22, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gzf47>.
- Bratzel, John, and Thomas M. Leonard. *Latin America during World War II*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007.
- Buchenau, Jürgen. "Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution" *Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield*, (2007).
- Buscando al General Omar Torrijos. Other. *Buscando Al General*. Panamá, Panamá: Telemetro Reporta, 2009.
- Calderón, Ricardo Arias. "Panama: Disaster or Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 2 (1987): 328. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20043376>.
- Castañeda, Jorge G *Utopia Unarmed: the Latin American Left after the Cold War*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Casullo, María Esperanza. "Líder, héroe y villano: Los protagonistas del mito populista." *Nueva Sociedad* 282 (2019).
- Chávez, Daniel. "The Lion in Tropical Winter: The Last Phase of Dictatorship and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Utopia." In *Nicaragua and the Politics of Utopia*, 126-. Vanderbilt University Press, 2015.
- Christian, Shirley. "Nicaragua and the United States." *World Affairs* 149, no. 4 (1987): 177-82. Accessed April 7, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20672110>.
- Conniff, Michael L. *Panama and the United States: The End of the Alliance*. Third Edition ed., Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001.
- Conniff, Michael L. *Populism in Latin America*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University Alabama Press, 2012.

Collazos, Sharon Phillipps. *Labor And Politics In Panama: The Torrijos Years*. Routledge, 2019.

C. Beleño Joaquín. *Gamboa Road Gang: Los Forzados De Gamboa*. Panamá: Librería Cultural Panameña, 1979.

Darlene, Rivas,. “United States–Latin American Relations, 1942–1960.” In *A Companion to American Foreign Relations*, 230–254. Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, (2006): 230.

Dávila Jerry. *Dictatorship in South America*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

DeFronozo, James. “The Cuban Revolution.” Essay. In *Revolutions and Revolutionary Moments*. Routledge, 2021.

De La Cruz, Rachael. “Ciudad Romero: The Salvadoran Refugee Family and Panamanian Statecraft under the Torrijos Regime.” *Journal of Caribbean History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 245–62. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jch.2019.0013>.

De la Torre, Carlos. "Los Legados De La Refundación Populista En Latinoamérica." *Cuadernos De Pensamiento Político*, no. 52 (2016).

Díaz-Espino, Ovidio. *How Wall Street Created a Nation: J.P. Morgan, Teddy Roosevelt and the Panama Canal*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003.

Donoghue, Michael E. Essay. In *Borderland on the Isthmus Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Dow, Pauline A. “Panamanian Nationalism and the Panama Canal Dispute, 1975 to 1977,” n.d.

Farber, Samuel. *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered*. United States: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Feldman, David Lewis. “The United States Role in the Malvinas Crisis, 1982: Misguidance and Misperception in Argentina's Decision to Go to War.” *Journal of InterAmerican Studies and World Affairs* 27, no. 2 (1985): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/165715>.

Frenkel, Stephen. “Cultural Imperialism and the Development of the Panama Canal Zone, 1912-1960” .Ph.D diss., Syracuse University, 1992.

- Fowler, Linda L. "Institutional Change and Senate Committee Hearings." In *Watchdogs on the Hill: The Decline of Congressional Oversight of U.S. Foreign Relations*, 71-97. PRINCETON; OXFORD: Princeton University Press, 2015. Accessed April 21, 2021, 72.
- Gandásegui, Marco Antonio "El Impacto De La Revolución Cubana Sobre América Latina: “solo Sabemos Que Lo Imposible Es Posible”." In *Cuba En Revolución: Miradas En Torno a Su Sesenta Aniversario*, edited by Salazar Luis Suárez, by Gandásegui Marco Antonio, Salazar Luis Suárez, Nordelo Gerardo Hernández, González Georgina Alfonso, Rodríguez José Luis, Madruga Ramón Pichs, Karam Isabel Allende, Domínguez María Isabel, Gambina Julio, Rodríguez Pedro Pablo, Del Carmen Ariet María, and Morales Josefina, 201-26. Argentina: CLACSO, 2019. Accessed October 24, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctvt6rkqn.12.
- Gandásegui, Marco A. “Una Historia Política De Panamá: Movimientos Populares y Militarismo En Panamá,” *Revista Conjeturas Sociológicas* No.4 (May 2016).
- Gandásegui, Marco A. “La Crisis De Una Alianza: La Coyuntura Panameña.” *Caribbean Studies* 21 (1988): 237–47.
- Glad, Betty. Essay. In *An Outsider in the White House Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Gobat, Michel. *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Greene, Julie. “Spaniards on the Silver Roll: Labor Troubles and Liminality in the Panama Canal Zone, 1904–1914.” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 66 (2004): 78–98. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0147547904000183>.
- Guardian Guerra, Reymundo. "Entre Luces y Sombras: La Enseñanza de la Historia de Panamá y la historiografía republicana" *Revista De Historia De América*, no. 143 (2010): 147-212. Accessed April 9, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41430021>.
- Gutierrez Vera, Daniel. “Ernesto Laclau: el populismo y sus avatares.” *Iconos : publicación de FLACSO-Ecuador*, no. 40 (2011): 151–168.

- Harding, Robert C. "The Military Foundations of Panamanian Politics: from the National Police to the PRD and Beyond." Dissertation, R.C. Harding, 1998.
- Heaney Robert S , and Rowland Christopher . "Post-Colonialism." *Historical to Critical Postcolonial Theology: The Contribution of John S. Mbiti and Jesse N.K. Mugambi*, Lutterworth Press, 2016.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1995. "Nationalism and national identity in Latin America" in Bouda Etemad, Jean Baton and Thomas David (eds.). *Pour une histoire économique et sociale internationale: mélanges offerts à Paul Bairoch*. Genève : Editions Passé Présent. 313-23.
- Informe No. 68/15 Petición 8882-03 Informe de admisibilidad de víctimas de la dictadura militar de Panamá.
- Iturbide, Graciela, and Márquez García Gabriel. *Torrijos: El Hombre y El Mito*. New York: An Umbrage editions Book, 2007.
- Jiménez Montero, Manuel de Benito Ramírez Valverde, and Juan Pablo Martínez Dávila. "Construcción De Territorios En Donoso, Panamá. Período 1970-2008." *Historia Crítica*, no. 48 (2012): 111–36. <https://doi.org/10.7440/historicrit48.2012.06>.
- Jorden, William J. *Panama Odyssey*. Univ Of Texas Press, 2014.
- Keys Barbara. "Congress, Kissinger, and the Origins of Human Rights Diplomacy." *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 5 (2010).
- Lasso, Marixa. "A Canal without a Zone: Conflicting Representations of the Panama Canal." *Journal of Latin American Geography* 14, no. 3 (2015): 157–74. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2015.0035>.
- Lasso, Marixa. *Erased: the Untold Story of the Panama Canal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Lawrence, Mark Atwood. "Latin America and the Quest for Stability." In *A Companion to Richard M. Nixon*, 460–477. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Long Tom. "Putting the Canal on the Map: Panamanian Agenda-Setting and the 1973 Security

- Council Meetings.” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014).
- “Los Rebeldes del Tute” *Los Panameños*, April, 2015.
- Knight, Alan *U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940: an Interpretation*, La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987.
- Maloof, Judy. Essay. In *Voices of Resistance Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women*.  
Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015.
- Manduley, Julio “La Política Económica de Omar Torrijos. De La Plataforma De Servicios Transnacionales Al Estado Delincuencial,” *Centro De Estudios LatinoAmericanos "Justo Arosemena"*, no. 146 (January 2014).
- Manuel E. Rivera, telephone interview done by author, December 27th 2020.
- McPherson, Alan. "From "Punks" to Geopoliticians: U. S. and Panamanian Teenagers and the 1964 Canal Zone Riots." *The Americas* 58, no. 3 (2002): 395-418. Accessed April 17, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1007860>.
- Millett, Richard. *Guardianes De La Dinastia: La Historia De La Guardia Nacional De Nicaragua*. Managua Nicaragua: Lea Grupo Editorial, 2006.
- Muñoz, Heraldo. “Las Naciones Unidas En Tiempos De Cambio.” *Estudios Internacionales* 39, no. 155 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-3769.2006.14357>.
- Padilla Cachanosky, . “Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century.” *The independent review* 24, no. 2 (2019).
- Pakkasvirta, Jussi “¿Un Continente, Una Nación? Intelectuales LatinoAmericanos, Comunidad Política y Las Revistas Culturales En Costa Rica y El Perú (1919-1930)” (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2005).
- Panama: SerTV Noticias, September 8, 2020.
- Pederson, William D. “The Good Neighbor Policy and the Americas.” Essay. In *A Companion to Franklin D. Roosevelt*. West Sussex: John Wiley, 2011.
- Phillipps Collazos, Sharon. *Labor and Politics in Panama : the Torrijos Years* Boulder: Westview Press, 1991.



- Pitt-Rivers, Julian. "Race, Color, and Class in Central America and the Andes." *Daedalus* 96, no. 2 (1967): 542-59. Accessed January 30, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027052>.
- Porras, Ana Maria. "Reflexiones Sobre Populismo En Panamá." *Canto Rodado* 8 (2013).
- Porras, Ana Elena. "Narrativas Sobre El Origen Colonial De Panamá (2009)." *Antología del pensamiento crítico panameño contemporáneo*, 2018, 191–220. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfjd163.12>.
- Porras, J. Conte. *La rebelión De Las Esfinges: (Historia Del Movimiento Estudiantil panameño)*. Panamá: Litho-Impresora, 1978.
- Priestley, George. "Antillean-Panamanians or Afro-Panamanians?: Political Participation and the Politics of Identity During the Carter-Torrijos Treaty Negotiations." *Transforming Anthropology* 12, no. 1-2 (2004): 50–67. <https://doi.org/10.1525/tran.2004.12.1-2.50>.
- Priestley, George A. "Military Government and Popular Participation in Panama: the Torrijos Regime, 1968-1975," n.d.
- Ropp, Steve C. *Panamanian Politics: from Guarded Nation to National Guard*. New York: Praeger, 1982.
- Robert P, Hager,., and Robert S. Snyder. "The United States and Nicaragua: Understanding the Breakdown in Relations." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17, no. 2 (2015): 3-35. Accessed February 7, 2021. doi:10.2307/26926190.
- Schoultz, Lars. "Communism." In *National Security and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, 106-40. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987. Accessed April 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zvwx0.11>,
- Sewell, Bevan. "Strategic and Economic Interventions." Essay. In *The US and Latin America: Eisenhower, Kennedy and Economic Diplomacy in the Cold War*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.
- Smith, Anthony D. "Nationalism : Theory, Ideology", *History* 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK :: Polity, 2010.
- Smith, Joseph. "End of the Twentieth Century (1974–2000)." In *The United States and Latin America*, 149–178. Routledge, 2005.

- Strong, Robert A. "Jimmy Carter and the Panama Canal Treaties." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1991): 269-86. Accessed April 12, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27550717>.
- McGann, Thomas F " The Ambassador and the Dictator: The Braden Mission to Argentina and its Significance for the United States Relations with Latin America". " *The Centennial Review* 6, no. 3 (1962): 343-57. Accessed May 7, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/23737881](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23737881).
- Nationalism after Vietnam." *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 535–562.
- Villanueva, Miriam Elizabeth. "Populist Authoritarianism: a Cultural Interpretation of Military Government in Cold-War Panama, 1968-1989," 2017.
- Weeks, John, and Phil Gunson. *Panama, Made in the USA*. London: Latin American Bureau, 1991.
- Weeks, John. "Panama: The Roots of Current Political Instability." *Third World Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1987): 763–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436598708420000>.
- Zaretsky, Natasha. "Restraint or Retreat? The Debate over the Panama Canal Treaties and U.S.