In the 1960s and 1970s, El Salvador’s reigning military regime instituted a series of reforms that sought to modernize the country and undermine ideological radicalism. The most ambitious was a multifaceted education initiative whose most controversial component was the use of televisions in classrooms. Launched in 1968 and lasting until the eve of civil war in the late 1970s, the reform resulted in students receiving instruction through programs broadcast from the capital city of San Salvador. The Salvadoran teachers’ union opposed both the content and the method of the reform and launched two massive strikes. The military regime answered with repressive violence, further alienating educators and pushing many of them into guerrilla fronts.

In this thoughtful collaborative study, the authors examine the processes by which education reform became entwined in debates over theories of modernization and the politics of anti-communism. Further analysis examines how the movement pushed the country into the type of brutal infighting that was taking place throughout the third world as the U.S. and U.S.S.R. struggled to impose their political philosophies on developing countries.
MODERNIZING MINDS
IN EL SALVADOR
SERIES ADVISORY EDITOR:
Lyman L. Johnson,
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Modernizing Minds in El Salvador
Education Reform and the Cold War, 1960–1980

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Our decision to work together on the present project grew out of the positive experience we had on a prior one, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador*, also published by the University of New Mexico Press. When El Salvador’s Ministry of Education launched an education reform in the 1990s in conjunction with the World Bank, memories of and references to past reforms arose. Naturally, the highly impactful and deeply controversial reform of 1968 became a reference point. The 1968 reform is sometimes referred to in local settings as “the Béneke reform,” after its architect, Minister of Education Walter Béneke. For many years the 1968 reform was one of the most talked about projects in the country. Throughout the late 1960s and into the mid-1970s, it was in public discourse almost daily. One of its most heavily debated components was educational television, the plan to teach students with lectures broadcast from a central location to television sets in classrooms throughout the country. Béneke envisioned that eventually almost the entirety of the curriculum would be delivered to almost every student by television. But once the nation began descending into civil war in the late 1970s, the education reform, as so many other things in El Salvador, took a back seat in the public consciousness to more immediate, life-and-death issues. Indeed, key players in the education reform became actively involved in the conflict, and many of them lost their lives, including Béneke, who was assassinated by guerrillas in 1980. By the time the war was over, the education reform was rarely discussed outside of the confines of education circles.

Having been reminded of the 1968 reform, our curiosity as historians was piqued. What had happened to the reform? Had it achieved its goals? What was the legacy of such a dramatic manipulation of education practices, however short-lived it might have been? Seeking answers to these questions, we began mapping out a research agenda.
As with any study, our original agenda morphed and evolved in unexpected ways. We quickly learned that the 1968 reform was deeply enmeshed into El Salvador’s domestic environment as well as the international setting of the Cold War and developmental aid. In pursuing those interconnecting storylines, we ran into multiple historiographic traditions and a plethora of new questions and lines of research.

We have incurred many debts, personal and financial, during the completion of this study. Our respective institutions, Fordham University and Furman University, have supported us in countless ways but specifically in the form of leaves and financial support for research. This project would be much weaker without our interviews. The interviewees are too numerous to mention individually (please see the bibliography), so we would like to acknowledge their collective generosity and graciousness in granting us time and access to their personal stories. A few interviewees merit special mention. The late Gilberto Aguilar Avilés, one of the key players in the Ministry of Education during the Sánchez Hernández administration, was very generous with his time and gave the invaluable perspective of an insider. We remember him fondly. Julio César Portillo not only granted us a lengthy interview but also provided us with a copy of his unpublished memoir. Special mention also needs to be made of Wilmer Erroa, who in addition to granting us an interview arranged additional meetings for us. More often than not it was the willingness of one interviewee to put us in contact with an acquaintance that led us to our next interview, so our research became dependent upon them in more ways than one. Meeting with each of them was the most rewarding aspect of the experience of the project, and for each of us it whetted our appetite for researching El Salvador’s recent past.

Fellow academics in El Salvador have been supportive of us not only in this project but also throughout our careers of working on Salvadoran history. We would single out Carlos Gregorio López Bernal at the University of El Salvador and also Knut Walter, who has been a colleague, collaborator, and sage on things Salvadoran for too many years to count. Also Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, “Santiago,” merits special mention. In addition to being a general supporter of our research, specifically he and his museum (the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen—MUPI) in San Salvador acquired the collection of Adolfo Flores Cienfuegos during the late stage of this project. He immediately sought us out and generously shared the contents of that
collection with us. Our research assistants in El Salvador, Alfredo Ramírez and Allan Martell, were invariably efficient, sending us copies and photographs of newspapers and magazines. In the United States our colleagues at conferences and on panels have stimulated our thoughts with incisive questions and apt suggestions. Michael Latham gave us useful suggestions for the section on modernization theory. John Hammond and Margaret Crahan commented on early versions of the project. The anonymous reviewers of the manuscript directed us to important scholarship.

For providing financial assistance to support research and/or writing, Lindo would like to thank specifically the deans of Fordham University who provided support in the form of a faculty fellowship sabbatical. Ching would like to thank specifically the Research and Professional Growth (RPG) Committee of Furman University, the Associated Colleges of the South and its Mellon Foundation–backed Faculty Renewal Program, and the Council of International Education Exchange’s (CIEE) Fulbright Program.

This is the second book we have done for the Diálogos series of the University of New Mexico Press, and thus it is the second time we have had the opportunity to work with series editor Lyman Johnson. In both instances he proved to be a meticulous and insightful reader of our work. His diligence and insights improved both manuscripts more than we can describe here. The editor-in-chief at UNM Press, Clark Whitehorn, has been a continual supporter, and we thank him. We would also like to thank the anonymous peer reviewer who provided us with an encouraging review and directed our attention to additional historiographic materials. Professor emerita of English at Furman University Judy Bainbridge gave our manuscript one of its first reads and thus steered us away from some of our most egregious errors. We thank her for her time and analysis. Last but not least, we would like to thank Joy Margheim for a diligent and detailed copyedit that improved the manuscript in many ways.

The personnel of the libraries at our respective institutions deserve separate mention. We are convinced that the world is a better place thanks to the system of interlibrary loan. American librarians are the unsung heroes of the academic enterprise. In El Salvador we owe special thanks to the personnel of the Biblioteca del Museo Nacional David J. Guzman and of the Biblioteca “P. Florentino Idoate, S.J.” at the Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas.” In Paris the personnel of the UNESCO Archive were extremely helpful, in particular Jens Boel, the archive director.
Finally, it goes without saying, but it must still be said, that we could never have done this without the support of friends and family. Ching would like to acknowledge the support of his spouse, Cathy Stevens, who bore many of the hidden costs that went into seeing this through to completion, especially after the arrival of Anders in 2008 and Halle in 2010.
Abbreviations

ABBREVIATIONS IN THE TEXT

AGEUS  Asociación General de Estudiantes Universitarios Salvadoreños (Association of University Students at the National University)
ANDES  Asociación Nacional de Educadores Salvadoreños (National Association of Salvadoran Educators)
ANEPE  Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada (National Association of Private Enterprise)
ANSESA  Agencia Nacional de Seguridad de El Salvador (National Security Agency)
APNES  Asociación de Profesores Normalistas de Secundaria (Association of Secondary School Teachers)
ARENA  Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Nationalist Republican Alliance)
ASÍ  Asociación Salvadoreña de Industriales (Salvadoran Industrial Association)
BPR  Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Revolutionary Popular Block)
CEL  Comisión Ejecutiva Hidroeléctrica del Río Lempa (Hydroelectric Executive Committee of the Lempa River)
CETO  Centre for Educational Television Overseas, UK
CGS  Confederación General Salvadoreña (General Confederation of Salvadoran Unions)
CGTS  Confederación General de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (General Confederation of Salvadoran Workers)
CIS  Center for International Studies, MIT
CONAPLAN  Consejo Nacional de Planificación (National Planning Council)
ECLA  UN Economic Commission for Latin America
ERP  Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army)
FAO  Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAPU  Frente de Acción Popular Unificada (Unified Popular Action Front)
FARO  Frente Agrario de la Región Oriental (Agrarian Front of the Eastern Region)
FECCAS Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants)
FESTIATCES Federación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos, Vestidos, y Similares de El Salvador (Federation of Workers in Food, Clothing, Textiles, and Related Industries)
FMLN Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front)
FMR Frente Magisterial Revolucionario (Teachers’ Revolutionary Front)
FMS Federación Magisterial Salvadoriana (Salvadoran Teachers’ Federation)
FPL Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí (Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces)
FUAR Frente Unido de Acción Revolucionaria (United Front for Revolutionary Action)
FUDI Frente Unido Democrático Independiente (Democratic Independent United Front)
FUSS Federación Unitaria Sindical de El Salvador (Unitary Federation of Salvadoran Unions)
ILO International Labor Organization
IMF International Monetary Fund
IMPRESS Instituto Magisterial de Prestaciones Sociales (Teachers’ Institute for Social Welfare)
INA Instituto Nacional Agrario, Honduras (National Agrarian Institute)
IRI Index of Rural Instability
MAP Military Assistance Program, United States
MNR Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Movement)
NHK Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (Japanese Broadcasting Corporation)
OAS Organization of American States
ODECA Organización de Estados Centroamericanos (Organization of Central American States)
ORDEN Organización Democrática Nacionalista (Nationalist Democratic Organization)
OWI Office of War Information, United States
PAR Partido de Acción Renovadora (Party of Renovating Action)
PCN Partido de Conciliación Nacional (National Conciliation Party)
PCS Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (Salvadoran Communist Party)
PDC Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party)
PPS Partido Popular Salvadoreño (Salvadoran Popular Party)
PRI Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Mexico (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
PRUD Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Democrática (Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification)
RN Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance)
ROCAP Regional Office for Central America and Panama, USAID
TVE Televisión Educativa (Educational Television)
UCA Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas” (Central American University)
UCS Unión Comunal Salvadoreña (Communal Union of El Salvador)
UES Universidad Nacional de El Salvador (National University of El Salvador)
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<tr>
<td>UMS</td>
<td>Unión Magisterial Salvadoreña (Salvadoran Teachers’ Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNO</td>
<td>Unión Nacional Opositora (National Opposition Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPI</td>
<td>United Press International</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>USIA</td>
<td>United States Information Agency</td>
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<td>USIS</td>
<td>United States Information Service</td>
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<td>USOM</td>
<td>United States Operations Mission</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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**Abbreviations in the Notes and Bibliography**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGN</td>
<td>Archivo General de la Nación, San Salvador, El Salvador</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOS-IAES</td>
<td>United States Department of State, Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of El Salvador</td>
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<tr>
<td>IHNCA</td>
<td>Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica (Institute of Nicaragua and Central American History), Managua, Nicaragua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG</td>
<td>Ministerio de Gobernación (Ministry of Interior)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUPI</td>
<td>Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen, San Salvador, El Salvador (Museum of Word and Image)</td>
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<tr>
<td>USNA</td>
<td>United States National Archives, Washington, D.C.</td>
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Introduction

In a small, densely populated country, poor in natural resources, there is no possibility for economic development except through intense and rational improvement of its human capital.

—President Fidel Sánchez Hernández, 1971*

The question is what to do about the matter.

—Former U.S. ambassador to El Salvador
Thorsten Kalijarvi, 1962**

† President Lyndon Johnson had a lot of bad days in 1968, but by all accounts July 7 was a welcome exception. He was on an official visit to El Salvador, where he had traveled to meet the presidents of the five member states of the Central American Common Market. On the morning of July 7, Johnson, together with Lady Bird and their daughter Luci Nugent, stepped into the presidential limousine and took off to the countryside. It was a pleasant, sunny Sunday. Johnson and his entourage visited a church, a market, and two schools. The approach of his long, black Lincoln Continental awed the locals, and by all accounts the U.S. president was greeted with enthusiasm. At lunchtime the first family picnicked with the Central American presidents at Los Chorros, a picturesque national park with lush vegetation, natural pools, and scenic waterfalls. Johnson spoke glowingly to the staff of the U.S. Embassy about the “smiles on the faces of the old women and the little boys and girls, the happiness and eagerness of expression on the faces” that greeted him along the way.¹

The highlight of the day was a visit to the leafy campus of a teachers’ training school, where Johnson inaugurated a U.S.-sponsored educational
television system. He told his audience, “Nothing we have discussed equals in importance—or in urgency—to the kind of work that you are doing here.” He hailed the Salvadoran initiative as a model to be imitated; “you have already made the beginning to being the first nation in all the world with a complete educational television system. And some day we hope the United States can catch up with you.” After Johnson returned to Washington, D.C., he reiterated those sentiments to his cabinet members. He told them the “trip was well worth the weekend. Never—not even on the last night of a campaign, surrounded by my closest friends—have I experienced such a warm spirit of affection and hospitality.” He went on to say that “the problems are many, and they are great . . . but there is no problem in Central America that money and resources cannot cure.” He expressed his solution in the form of hope that “AID [United States Agency for International Development, USAID] and USIA [United States Information Agency] and the other agencies will follow up this effort, and help these Central American countries as they have helped other countries.” But he concluded his summary of the trip with an ominous comment: “My most vivid impression is that there is so much to do—and so little time to do it.” Perhaps that explains why Johnson’s preparatory notes on the meeting include a proposal to put one of his highest-level foreign policy advisors on the task, the MIT economist and architect of modernization theory, W. W. Rostow.

If July 7, 1968, was a good day for President Johnson, then it was a great day for his Salvadoran counterpart, President Fidel Sánchez Hernández. Playing host to the president of the United States and his four Central American counterparts provided Sánchez Hernández, barely a year into his administration, with a significant political boost. He had the opportunity to serve as a statesman and to see his pet project, educational television (Televisión Educativa—TVE), receive accolades. It must have been music to his ears to hear Johnson say that El Salvador set an example for the United States. By praising educational television, Johnson also celebrated the broader education reform that Sánchez Hernández had launched a few months earlier. The reform was generating plenty of controversy in El Salvador. Sánchez Hernández had staked both his legacy and his nation’s future on it, so having the president of the United States come and focus on education was a public relations coup.

In this book we analyze modernization in El Salvador in the 1960s and 1970s with particular focus on the 1968 education reform and its core project, educational television. As Johnson’s enthusiasm suggests, both Salvadoran
and U.S. officials expected the reform and especially educational television to affect the nation well beyond the classroom. They intended for the newly designed education system to modernize the minds of Salvadoran youth and thereby propel the nation forward to industrialization and peaceful capitalist development. But as Johnson’s trepidation suggests, both U.S. and Salvadoran officials believed that time was short, meaning that they interpreted failure as opening the door to opportunistic communists. At a most basic level, we study the 1968 education reform because it was a key event in recent Salvadoran history, on par with other modernization schemes, like land reform, yet it has received far less academic scrutiny. A central task in our study of education is to understand more thoroughly the origin and impact of modernization in El Salvador.

The 1968 education reform epitomized the modernizing ethos of a series of military-led governments that ruled El Salvador between 1961 and 1979 under the auspices of a new political party—the National Conciliation Party (PCN). The modernizing zeal of the PCN had its origins in the preceding era of military rule that began with a coup d’état in December 1948, the so-called Revolution of 1948. That coup brought to power a junta of three officers and two civilians who replaced President (and General) Salvador Castaneda Castro (1945–1948). The new leaders believed that Castaneda Castro continued the policies of the previous regime, the dictatorship of Gen. Maximiliano Hernández Martínez (1931–1944), and that those two administrations together had hindered El Salvador’s march toward modern progress. In the words of the new leaders, Castaneda Castro’s administration “continued a series of governments that for many years betrayed the will of the Salvadoran people, and once the people realized that those governments did not represent their interests nor allow them to realize their aspirations, they rejected them.” The “revolutionaries” saw themselves as a force for renewal, and they highlighted the generational distance between themselves and their predecessors by referring to themselves as the “military youth” (juventud militar). In their enthusiasm they compared themselves to the heroes of independence and spoke about the reformation of El Salvador. The nation, they claimed, ought to rest “on completely new foundations.”

As nationalists, the revolutionaries touted El Salvador’s greatness and believed in its people’s potential. As social reformers, however, they worried about the country’s problems and looked to fix them. The main problem facing El Salvador, in their view, was that it was a small, densely populated nation with a monocrop economy built around coffee. Furthermore, they