

Chapter 10: Speaking Truth to Power

We are confronted with several challenges in narrating the end of military rule and the broad return of electoral democracy in Latin America, which began during the 1980s. We might try to explain the fall of the dictatorships in a systematic way, but given the variety of circumstances associated with democratization, this is a vexing challenge. We might also try to explore the economic circumstances of the 1980s, which propelled larger political and economic developments, but this is also difficult to distill in a single narrative. We also have the presence of new social and political movements, sometimes called New Social Movements. Their role in the return to democracy and the new systems created in their aftermath is an exceptionally complicated but significant story.

The alternative we have chosen focuses our attention on the ways in which a return to democratic practices was characterized by a series of confluences: the growth of global Human Rights movements, growing criminal violence, and new communications technologies. These same transnational phenomena changed the nature of political struggles in this region by producing new mechanisms for politics, as well as new threats to civil society, the most pronounced coming in the form of the international trade in illicit drugs.

The documents in this chapter explore the importance of new and old media in the struggle for Human Rights since the 1970s. They include a video of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, a copy of the Revolutionary Women's law promulgated by the Zapatistas in 1994, a video of the 1995 Aguas Blancas Massacre in Mexico, two songs from Chile's 1988 "No" campaign, a brief video of recent student protests in Chile, and two written commentaries that address the recent spate of drug related violence in Mexico. Though seemingly an eclectic blend, these texts collectively speak to both new and old forms of politics, undertaken through new and old media.

Constraints on length make it impossible to spend much time in this chapter on the economic crisis that has led some observers to consider the 1980s a *lost decade*, or on the growing influence of radical free-market solutions (neo-liberalism) for the region's economic problems during these years. Some of these issues are dealt with in Chapter 11.

Questions to Consider when Reading the Documents

How does the form of expression in the following documents (documentary film, written manifesto, music video, etc.) affect the meaning and impact of the sentiments expressed in the document itself?

Can these documents be ranked in terms of their effectiveness? Why or Why not?

Do the differing aesthetic qualities of each document locate them in time as much as the content of the documents?

Collectively, what do these documents tell us about change in Latin America since the time when the first of them was created?