

Spring 2016 URCO Report: Grant Holyoak

The receipt of the Undergraduate Research or Creative Opportunity (URCO) grant has facilitated what I consider to be the highlight of my undergraduate research career. Using the funds provided by the grant, I was able to travel to Santiago, Chile from March 1st, 2016 through March 17th. While in Chile, I visited the country's National Archives 8 times in order to complete a historical analysis of the perceptions of the Salvador Allende administration (1970-1973) towards the United States. I will write much of this report with the assumption that this committee is already familiar with this project's background, given that it is the same organization that originally funded my proposal. As a quick reminder, my analysis centered on the "Orlando Letelier Catalog", named after the man who served as Allende's ambassador to the United States throughout his presidency. I was looking for clues within their inter-governmental communiques about their how Allende intended to manage US-Chilean relations in the midst of a heated discussion about copper nationalization, American imperialism, and debt negotiation during the height of the Cold War.

I felt like a "real researcher" while working in the National Archives. For eight hours a day I sat at the desk provided for me and leafed through yellowing documents with my latex gloves, my breath muffled by the protective mask that had been given to me. It was oddly exhilarating to be in that environment for me, like I was Indiana Jones or something panning for nuggets of gold within a sea of words. And I certainly found many nuggets to help me with my research project!

I was amazed to find new pieces of information as I slowly chewed my way through every document within the Orlando Letelier Catalog. Some highlights include the following:

- 1- Despite pressure from the Chilean Press and various factions within the National Congress, President Allende was determined to maintain positive relations with the United States in order to continue courting American money. His government had conducted analyses that unequivocally concluded that, even if the entire Socialist world (with the USSR at the center) fully supported the Chilean economy, the withdrawal of U.S. financial support would bring Chile to its knees.
- 2- Allende thus adopted what I call the “Little Offenses” strategy, in which he instructed his government to ignore discourtesies on the part of the U.S. in order to show goodwill and maintain positive relations. Allende certainly could have capitalized on international disgust when, for example, it was discovered that the International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT) company had provided the CIA with funds to oppose his election. He decided, however, to allow the situation to “blow over” in order to maintain positive dialogue with the U.S.
- 3- It quickly became clear to Allende’s government that they could not rely on support from the Socialist world on ideological grounds. One of the most interesting pieces of information I found was a communique sent to Allende from Letelier that described a visit that the Czechoslovakian Ambassador had made to the Chilean embassy in Washington. The Czech Ambassador had encouraged Letelier to “ease up” on the Americans in the nationalization negotiations, given that many other Socialist countries were also renegotiating their foreign debts with the U.S. at the time. (Recall that détente was at its peak from 1970-1972.) Most of these countries were using nationalization as a bargaining chip in order to gain favor with the United States. Chile quickly became one

of the last “holdouts” that continued to push for nationalization and thus found itself isolated from Socialist favor.

- 4- Despite Allende’s consistent efforts to maintain positive relations with the U.S., Nixon’s government launched what Letelier termed a “real economic war” with Chile by systematically removing financial aid from the country and encouraging other Western powers, including Germany and Great Britain, to do the same. The consistency and intensity of this “war” caused Allende, Letelier, and Chile’s Foreign Minister (Clodomiro Almeyda) to discuss alternative courses of Chilean action as early as March 1972. They referred to their secret discussions as Plan “B.” Essentially, the three men agreed that they needed to bend in negotiations with the United States in order to save the Chilean economy. They began to discuss various concessions including increased compensations for copper nationalizations, the creation of an appeals process for companies whose properties were expropriated, and the cooperation with U.S. officials to combat the drug trade in South America. They hoped that these actions would be sufficient to convince the U.S. that it should be more lenient in the ongoing debt negotiations.

We will, unfortunately, never know “what might have been” had Allende been allowed to complete his 6-year term as President. He was deposed through a military coup which took place on September 11th, 1973. While the U.S. did not directly plan nor support the coup, clandestine actions taken by the CIA in Chile throughout Allende’s Presidency had sufficiently destabilized the country so as to pave the way for a violent overthrow of the constitutional government.

My research in the National Archives has convinced me, however, that the threats generated through the “economic war” would have been sufficient to bring Allende’s Chile

“into line” with U.S. policy with or without covert action by the CIA. In other words, I think that economic pressure alone could have tipped the scale in the U.S.’ favor and not required us to dirty our hands with the Junta government, which took control from Allende and ruled Chile for 17 years while committing a series of repugnant human rights violations. As a future U.S. diplomat, this lesson about the effectiveness of employing economic resources will shape my paradigm in negotiating with belligerent nations.

The other major lesson that I learned in Santiago is that American imperialism is *real*. There seems to be a perception in the U.S. that smaller nations are simply “whining” when they complain that American influence is stifling their cultural or economic development. My analysis of Allende’s Chile, however, showed me just how real our imperialist influence is. Allende only found out how real it was when he tried to break away from it. I believe that this empathy will also serve me well as a U.S. diplomat. While I do not intend to apologize for U.S. influence abroad, I am committed to recognizing its reality and engaging in understanding dialogue with those who are under its yoke.

I presented these findings in a well-attended Oral Presentation Session at the 2016 Student Research Symposium, and I plan on writing my findings over the course of the summer while looking for an academic journal that will be interested in the story that I have to tell. I want to express my sincerest thanks to this committee for facilitating this remarkable opportunity—it truly has helped to shape the lens through which I will see the world for the rest of my life.