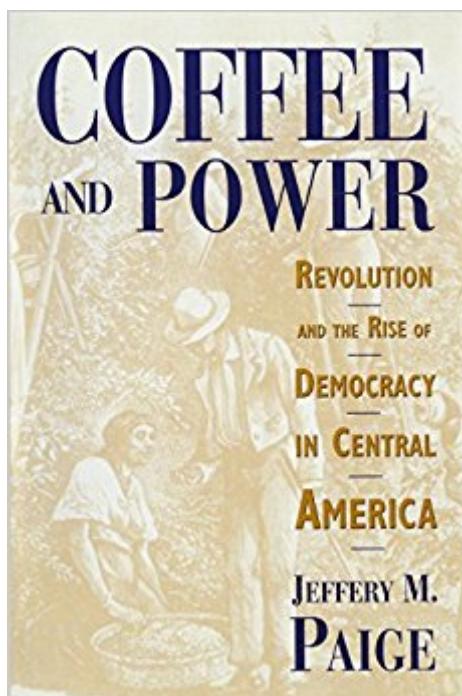


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Coffee And Power: Revolution And The Rise Of Democracy In Central America



Synopsis

In the revolutionary decade between 1979 and 1992, it would have been difficult to find three political systems as different as death-squad-dominated El Salvador, peaceful social-democratic Costa Rica, and revolutionary Sandinista Nicaragua. Yet when the fighting was finally ended by a peace plan initiated by Costa Rica's President Oscar Arias, all three had found a common destination in democracy and free markets. To explain this extraordinary turn of events is the task of this landmark book, which fuses political economy and cultural analysis. Both the divergent political histories and their convergent outcome were shaped by a single commodity that has dominated these export economies from the nineteenth century to the present--coffee. Jeffery Paige shows that the crises of the 1980s had their roots in the economic and political crises of the 1930s, when the revolutionary left challenged the ruling coffee elites of all three countries. He interweaves and compares the history, economics, and class structures of the three countries, thus clarifying the course of recent struggles. The heart of the book is his conversations with sixty-two leaders of fifty-eight elite dynasties, who for the first time tell their own stories of the experience of Central American revolution. Paige's analysis challenges not only Barrington Moore's influential theory of dictatorship and democracy but also contemporary approaches to "transitions to democracy." It also shows that a focus on either political economy or culture alone cannot account for the transformation of elite ideology, and that revolution in Central America is deeply rooted in the personal, familial, and class histories of the coffee elites.

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Customer Reviews

Over the past three decades, nearly every Central American nation has been at some stage of revolution, and understanding the numerous conflicts required a keen grasp of local politics. The facts were especially hard to discern because other countries, principally the United States, were throwing their weight around and muddying the political water. Now with a nascent peace shakily in place in Guatemala, the last conflict has come to an end, and Jeffrey M. Paige sheds some necessary light on the issues without lumping the entire region together. By focusing on the lucrative and influential business of coffee production and its connection to politics, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* looks at the shift toward democracy from the perspective of the elite class of coffee growers. Though the different nations share a common agricultural mainstay, the socioeconomic realities vary greatly, and Paige expertly negotiates the subtleties of each. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A sweeping historical analysis of the encouraging yet still fragile emergence of democracy in Central America...Through exhaustive historical research and enterprising interviews, [the author] penetrates the worlds of the most powerful families of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica...Paige has illuminated a path for comprehending countries whose histories have often been caricatured by polemicists and ignored by policy makers. (Thomas Carothers New York Times Book Review)A detailed, comprehensive work on the complex relationship between coffee and political and financial might in this region...Coffee is evidently not the sole influence propelling these nations along the democratic path, but this volume demonstrates how ideologies and crises are interrelated, an important factor for a region with such an uncertain political future. (British Bulletin of Publications on Latin America, the Caribbean, Portugal and Spain)The main lesson from this thoughtful, well-written book: if coffee is grown with less repression, with social welfare programs, with more owned by small-holders, then the poor are less likely to join revolutions...[Paige's conclusions] are reasonable and it is important to have them documented in this fair, well-researched book. This book will appeal to people interested in the history of Central America, to students of peace and war, to scholars of coffee economics and politics, and to political ecologists. (Jeffery W. Bentley Agriculture and Human Values)*Coffee and Power* makes an important contribution to the literature on transitions to democracy. Paige notes with irony that the establishment of parliamentary democracies may represent the most important achievement of the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan Left of the 1980s, as it was for the Costa Rican Left of the 1930s and 1940s. (Laurie Medina American Anthropologist)

Very good book. Had to read it for a Central America Course and the writing is very good. This is an academic work which uses interviews to demonstrate the relation between Power and Coffee in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The author interviews the coffee elite from each country. It offers the historical background of their rise, their thoughts beliefs and justification for action taking from 1930 to 1980 the 2 eras of great revolutionary crisis and how Costa Rica developed differently than the other 3 countries. The main idea is that Costa Rican Elite had a division between land owners and processors allowing for a more democratic flow of ideas, compromise and they avoid the suppression of the other countries. US involvement also played a critical role in the other 3 countries while leaving Costa Rica mostly untouched. Important read for anyone that wants to understand the development of Central America and why their governments are the way they are today. Or anyone wanting an in-depth analysis of the revolutionary periods in Central America in 1930's and the 1980's through the eyes of each countries elite.

Jeffrey Paige is an excellent sociologist who provides an in-depth look at three countries in Central America. Honduras, Costa Rica and El Salvador are all explored throughout this book. There are occasional references to Guatemala but overall the other three are considered because their development has similarities. While they are different in the way they developed economically and socially they came from similar backgrounds. Similar governments formed in all three according to Paige and the effects of this were to drive these countries into a relationship where elites hold power. The social elites of the coffee producers provide an interesting case study to follow. They provide the driving force for dictatorships and while the Depression of 1929 gives fuel to the communist fire the elites retain a wide range of control. El Salvador is shown to be both a civil war and a terrorist problem that must be dealt with by resolution of local politics. Nicaragua is shown through the Somoza regime which grew out of the US marine intervention, dollar diplomacy and our support of the conservatives in that country. The sociological study comes across as scattered at times but in the end provides a useful analysis when considering the disparity in incomes throughout Central America. This book is not for beginners and historians should use it carefully. For those in sociology it is a very useful study filled with many primary accounts.

very informative and historical

This book has it all! I loved it; it gave you a real understanding of coffee's power. A lot of liberals are kvetching about the exploitation of coffee countries in labor and land, but this book puts that myth in

historical perspective. Another book that discusses these issues, specifically in the country of Costa Rica, is Costa Rica: The Last Country the Gods Made, by Colesberry & McLean. The chapter, Coffee! Costa Rica's First Revolution, includes essays such as "Land Crazy and Labor Shy," "Coffee Politics," "Closing the Coffee Frontier" and "The Generation of '89," which touch on many of the subjects discussed in Paige's text.

Primarily for those who are pursuing advanced degrees in latin american studies, sociology, economics, etc. The chief meat of the book is the author's interviews with various coffee "elites" in the central american region, and their view on business and politics. Loses a star because it jumps around a bit, it is not exactly for someone just getting to know the region (like me), and it's a bit dry at times. So, approach this book with a bit of caution.

This study compares the political economy of elites and coffee production in central america and goes a long way to explain the political history of the region. This is extremely well thought out, very nicely written and the underlying intellectual rigor of the book makes it one of the "best reads" for both scholars and just, well, travelers. A really good book

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