

CONTINUITY AMID PARADOX:  
Recent Writing on Colombia

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- THE ASSASSINATION OF GAITAN: PUBLIC LIFE AND URBAN VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA.* By HERBERT BRAUN. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. Pp. 282. \$32.50.)
- THE POLITICS OF COLOMBIA.* By ROBERT H. DIX. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986. Pp. 272. \$37.95.)
- LAS IDEAS DE LAUREANO GOMEZ.* By JAMES D. HENDERSON. (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1985. Pp. 279.)
- WHEN COLOMBIA BLED: A HISTORY OF THE VIOLENCIA IN TOLIMA.* By JAMES D. HENDERSON. (University: University of Alabama Press, 1985. Pp. 352. \$30.00.)
- COLOMBIA: PORTRAIT OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY.* By HARVEY F. KLINE. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983. Pp. 169. \$18.00.)
- FRONTIER EXPANSION AND PEASANT PROTEST IN COLOMBIA, 1830–1936.* By CATHERINE LEGRAND. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986. Pp. 302. \$27.50.)
- RAFAEL NUÑEZ AND THE POLITICS OF COLOMBIAN REGIONALISM, 1863–1886.* By JAMES WILLIAM PARK. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985. Pp. 304. \$35.00.)
- L'ORDRE ET LA VIOLENCE: EVOLUTION SOCIO-POLITIQUE DE LA COLOMBIE ENTRE 1930 ET 1953.* By DANIEL PECAUT. (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1987. Pp. 486.)
- THE AGRARIAN QUESTION AND THE PEASANT MOVEMENT IN COLOMBIA: STRUGGLES OF THE NATIONAL PEASANT ASSOCIATION, 1967–1981.* By LEON ZAMOSC. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. 285. \$42.50.)

Lamentations regarding neglect of Colombia by North American historians and social scientists have been frequent and well-justified. Robert Dix speculates on the reasons for this neglect in his survey of Colombian politics and concludes that Colombia "is a paradox, difficult to classify and generally lacking in the kind of political innovations that tend to attract the foreign or comparative scholar, or the foreign press" (p. 2). But the fact that Colombia stirs little academic interest relative to its size and population should not obscure the quality of the research

that is being done. The nine books under review here vary greatly in subject and interpretation and all have flaws; yet each is successful in helping to elucidate Colombia's paradoxes.

As a group, the books under review underscore several themes that have characterized Colombian history since the nineteenth century. Among these are the persistence and vitality of the elite-dominated two-party system and the state's comparative weakness and lack of autonomy. Other constants have been the strength of regional differences and loyalties and chronic political violence. Colombia has, of course, been touched by the same forces that have buffeted other Latin American nations in the twentieth century—industrialization, rapid urbanization, Marxism—but to date their impact has been felt largely within the boundaries of the traditional political structure. Elsewhere these forces have produced populism, corporatism, and seizures of power by the armed forces, but in Colombia these features of Latin American politics can be glimpsed only sporadically. Also missing from Colombian public life have been strong avowals of economic or cultural nationalism. Thus, as Dix points out, Colombia is both unique and quintessentially Latin American.

James Park emphasizes the strength of regionalism in his careful analysis of Colombian politics, *Rafael Núñez and the Politics of Colombian Regionalism, 1863–1936*. Regional loyalties explain the appeal of federalism for leaders of both parties, a trend culminating in the constitution of 1863. This document conferred sovereignty on the nine states into which Colombia was then divided while crippling the administrative and fiscal authority of the federal government. According to Park, the subsequent domination of the federal government by Liberals from the eastern mountain states at a time when federal revenues were expanding produced by the mid-1870s a reaction from less-favored regions on the periphery. This response took the form in 1874 of the openly regionalist presidential candidacy of Rafael Núñez, a Liberal from Cartagena. Despite his defeat, Núñez and his supporters rallied around his victorious Liberal rival, Aquileo Parra, when the Conservatives mounted an unsuccessful revolution against the regime in 1876–77. Park stresses the importance of this revolt in undermining Liberal hegemony and in unifying the Conservatives soon afterwards. Núñez finally reached the presidency in 1880, but instead of promoting the sectional interests of the regions he represented, he moved toward restoring centralism and a more powerful national government. These goals were attained by promulgating the still-functioning constitution of 1886. In short, by opposing "the debilitating forces of regionalism," Núñez "laid the institutional basis essential for his nation's political stability and economic development" (p. 1).

This story has been told before, but never with such documenta-

tion as that adduced by Park, who consulted numerous manuscript collections in Bogotá and Popayán. More novel is his concentration on regionalism as the primary cause of the Liberal division of 1874, but it is unfortunate that he did not explain more about Núñez's centralizing moves in 1880, which Park acknowledges surprised supporters and enemies alike. Also inadequately explored is the composition of Núñez's followers within the Liberal party, who became known as Independents. At the same time, Park has gone farther than any other student of the era in tracing the evolution of Conservative strategy after the debacle of 1876–77. The influence of the Conservative bastion of Antioquia declined, and the leaders who came to the fore, such as Carlos Holguín, successfully pressed a national, rather than a regionally oriented, strategy based on cooperation with Núñez and the Independents.

Park demonstrates how falling exports after 1875 and declining federal revenues affected the course of events on the national and state levels, but he disagrees with analysts like Charles Bergquist who view economic forces as the fundamental determinant of political cleavage in nineteenth-century Colombia.<sup>1</sup> At this point, it seems unlikely that significant additional insight into this period can be gleaned by continued concentration on national politics. What are needed now are regional and subregional studies that seek to relate the social class and economic interests of state and local leaders to their political orientation.

Park's *Rafael Núñez and the Politics of Colombian Regionalism*, with its emphasis on national politics and the maneuvers of party notables, follows a traditionalist vein eschewed by practitioners of Colombia's "new history," whose métier is socioeconomic analysis. A significant contribution to this genre is Catherine LeGrand's *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1830–1936*, which addresses an important subject in Colombian history and mines hitherto unused sources, such as the Public Land correspondence. In particular, LeGrand attempts to alter the myth of frontier expansion created by past emphasis on Antioqueño settlement, which she considers to have been less democratic than commonly believed and in any event atypical of national patterns.

LeGrand equates the frontier with the sparsely inhabited areas of public lands (*baldíos*) that engage her attention (no references to the Turner thesis here). In the 1870s and 1880s, federal legislation for the first time treated these lands as a means of stimulating rural production and awarded them to those who would put them to use by sowing crops or improved pasture. Law 48 of 1882 also set the maximum size of a single grant at five thousand hectares (it was reduced to twenty-five hundred hectares in 1912). LeGrand too sketchily divides those who occupied public lands into peasant settlers (known in Colombia as *colonos*) and entrepreneurs with money and political connections who en-

gaged in commercial agriculture or cattle ranching or who acquired land for speculative purposes. The two chapters she devotes to these antagonists provide insufficient detail about the origins of each group, the relative numbers in which they were attracted to the various frontier zones, and their activities once there. Maps and an appendix listing land grants for each municipality from 1827 to 1931 are helpful but do not fully compensate for the deficiencies of the text in this respect.

LeGrand asserts that neither *colono* nor entrepreneur fits the stereotype of the tradition-bound Latin American agriculturalist. In many areas, entrepreneurs appropriated public lands in defiance of the law at the expense of the *colonos*, who were to be converted into tenants. After 1874 *colonos* resisted encroachment by appealing to the authorities in Bogotá, as documented in the more than four hundred such petitions between 1874 and 1920 that LeGrand found in the Public Land archives. Although this section of the book lacks sufficient data to enable readers to understand when and where such conflicts were most intense and frequent, LeGrand makes it clear that despite the pro-settler intentions of the national government, execution of its directives depended entirely on local officials.

LeGrand devotes three of her seven chapters to the period between 1920 and 1936. After 1920 rural economic growth intensified settler-entrepreneur conflicts over *baldíos*, but several new elements entered the picture. By the late 1920s, peasants were occupying land they claimed had been illegally appropriated in regions of recent frontier development. They were supported by new political allies, such as the Communist party of Colombia and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán's Unión Nacional Izquierdista Revolucionaria, and to a limited extent, by the national government. According to LeGrand, however, the Land Act of 1936 (Law 200) was not the socially progressive measure it is often held to be. Although it benefited squatters who had occupied land before 1935, it ratified past usurpations of *baldíos* by accepting thirty-year possession as proof of ownership. "Thus Law 200 of 1936 marked a shift in Colombian agrarian policy toward acceptance of a system of landholding based on large properties" (p. 151).

Like most other contemporary scholars, LeGrand sees the years after World War I as a period of fundamental socioeconomic change in Colombia, comparable to what occurred elsewhere in Latin America in the late nineteenth century. Not only did coffee cultivation expand significantly, with production now concentrated in western Colombia, but industrialization got underway. These years also witnessed sizable urban growth, along with the emergence of new middle and working classes. The decades after 1920 were years of urban strife and agrarian unrest as new groups arose to challenge the monopoly of the two traditional parties. In 1930 the Conservative party, dominant since the days

of Rafael Núñez, gave way to Liberalism, which undertook a program of constitutional and social reform during the first administration of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934–1938). The transition of 1930, which was superficially peaceful, also brought the first eruption of the violence that would engulf much of the countryside after 1946.

This turbulent era has attracted the interest of numerous Colombian and foreign scholars, including three whose works are under review here: Daniel Pécaut, James Henderson, and Herbert Braun. A French sociologist already well-known for his book on the Colombian labor movement, Pécaut has now written a provocative interpretation of the entire period between 1930 and 1953 based on extensive reading of periodicals, printed documents, and secondary sources.<sup>2</sup> *L'Ordre et la violence*, which is laced with Marxism and a *soupeçon* of postmodern critical theory, analyzes the linkages among the state, the agricultural-industrial bourgeoisie, and the urban masses after 1930. Pécaut argues that despite the López reforms, the state remained weak throughout the period and was dominated by the bourgeoisie, which after 1940 pursued what he calls a liberal model of development through their economic interest groups, or *gremios*. In an example of “liberal corporatism,” the *gremios*—the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros, the Asociación Nacional de Industriales, and the Federación Nacional de Comerciantes—accepted a modicum of state regulation of the economy (p. 204). But in contrast to what occurred in Brazil and Mexico, these groups, rather than the state, asserted the right to speak on behalf of the general welfare. In this situation, the masses, who were excluded from full citizenship and unable to look to the state as the guarantor of their interests and aspirations, were consigned to the traditional parties, especially because the Confederación de Trabajadores Colombianos (CTC) and the Communist party endorsed the liberal model of development.

Few will be convinced by all aspects of Pécaut’s analysis. For example, his definition of the urban masses remains unclear, although he apparently identifies them with the industrial work force. By his own account, however, the Colombian labor force of some three million in 1945 included only one hundred and thirty-five thousand manufacturing workers (p. 279).<sup>3</sup> Nor does Pécaut take sufficient account of the fact that 36 percent of these workers were women. The same criticism can be made of his treatment of the bourgeoisie, which he depicts as an unchanging, essentially monolithic bloc dominated by coffee growers and Antioqueño industrialists. Despite these reservations, however, *L'Ordre et la violence* is an important work that deserves to be widely read.

Pécaut devotes some attention to what he calls the Conservative “counterrevolution” against the secularization brought by the López

regime, especially changes in the constitutional status of the Catholic Church. He views Laureano Gómez, the major Conservative chieftain of the period, as an uncompromising champion of a Conservative fundamentalism based on an organic conception of society. In this Conservative fundamentalism, Pécaut finds many traits of Gaitanismo, such as anti-oligarchic rhetoric, distrust of individualistic democracy, and a commitment to restoring morality to politics.

Although Pécaut describes Gómez as neither a theoretician nor an ideologue, James Henderson deems Gómez's ideas of sufficient weight and coherence to merit one volume of what is to be a two-volume biography. In *Las ideas de Laureano Gómez*, Henderson presents Gómez as a major, if neglected, figure among Latin American conservatives who can be understood only in reference to his ideas. According to Henderson, the basis of Gómez's philosophy was his unshakable conviction that Roman Catholicism demonstrates the only way to attain human perfection, in both personal and political spheres. He perceived Colombia and modern society as a whole as being in a state of crisis in the 1930s, the inevitable result of moral and political decay since the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. At the root of the crisis were liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism and absolute liberty, and three active conspirators against civilization: Masons, Jews, and Communists. But Henderson (like Pécaut) stresses that Gómez was never a fascist and warred against such tendencies within the Conservative party.

Henderson indicates that Gómez moved to the right after the Conservative return to power in 1946, when he attributed the violence of the epoch to the Liberals and to Communists, both foreign and domestic. His fears contributed to the authoritarian constitutional revision that he sponsored as president in 1953. Following his ouster by the military shortly afterward, Gómez concluded that Colombia's violence was not the fault of the Liberals and Communists after all but was instead the product of the country's long history of political sectarianism. This conviction led to his role in formulating the National Front, which he continued to support until his death in 1965.

Henderson has assiduously pored over Gómez's published speeches, editorials, and other writings to limn this intellectual portrait. He is generally successful in relating Gómez's ideas to the international context and contemporary conservative thought. The book is weakened, however, by its curious organization into two parts—"The Ideas of Laureano Gómez" and "The Sources of the Ideas of Laureano Gómez." The distinction between these two parts is never made clear, as is evidenced by the considerable overlap between them.<sup>4</sup> A less serious weakness is Henderson's failure to provide a detailed discussion of Gómez's attitude toward the Franco regime in Spain, which he reportedly

admired. Henderson merely indicates that Gómez characterized Republican Spain as a warning of what Colombia might become and that he rejoiced at the triumph of Franco's forces. Readers learn little from *Las ideas de Laureano Gómez* about the ways in which Gómez carried out his ideas as party chief and president, but Henderson insists that he will deal with this matter in the second volume.

While Laureano Gómez has stirred little scholarly interest, the same cannot be said of Jorge Gaitán, whose assassination on 9 April 1948 touched off the bloody rioting known as the Bogotazo. Pécaut devotes one chapter of his book to Gaitán and the movement he founded in the mid-1940s, finding uniformities between Gaitanismo and populist mobilizations in other Latin American countries. Pécaut identifies certain differences as well, such as Gaitán's limited reliance on nationalism, which was expressed mainly in his attacks against the "turco" origins of his Liberal rival for the presidency in 1946, Gabriel Turbay. In contrast to populist leaders elsewhere, Gaitán was not only hostile to the CTC and to organized labor as a whole, but he also failed to establish an organization of his own. Instead, his ties to the Liberal party were strengthened when he became party leader in 1947. In Pécaut's interpretation, Gaitanismo represented a social mobilization directed toward traditional partisan ends. Accordingly, during the Bogotazo the leaderless crowd turned against the only adversaries they knew: downtown stores owned by foreigners and public buildings and churches that symbolized Conservative power. Pécaut rejects Gonzalo Sánchez's contention that the juntas established by Gaitanistas outside of Bogotá as news of the assassination spread constituted a potentially revolutionary force.<sup>5</sup> In reality, their rhetoric echoed the nineteenth century when the word *revolution* referred to the struggle between Liberals and Conservatives. In short, readers of Pécaut's analysis of Gaitán and Gaitanismo are bound to conclude that neither advanced the incorporation of the urban masses into the body politic and may actually have retarded it.

Herbert Braun also describes Gaitán as a populist of sorts in *The Assassination of Gaitán: Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia*. But Braun seems to believe that the Colombian leader transcended the concept: "To regard him as a populist, however, is to make him appear uniquely Latin American, rather than the actor he was in a secular process that is part of the expansion of the market" (p. 8). Like Pécaut, Braun identifies Gaitán himself as a petit bourgeois "whose thinking was shaped by his own place in society and by his nation's subordinate place in the international capitalist order" (p. 9). Braun does not deal systematically with the class makeup of Gaitán's following at various stages in his career. He asserts, however, that Gaitán not only represented his own class in politics but also attempted to speak for other

groups, such as artisans and bus drivers, as well as workers and peasants “when possible” (p. 9). Later Braun observes, “The working class was not at the forefront of Gaitán’s struggle” (p. 115).

Braun thus depicts Gaitán as the spokesman for an amorphous *pueblo* and his adversaries as an equally amorphous group: the Liberal and Conservative leaders whom Braun calls *convivialistas* in reference to the politics of civility they espoused. Cultivated and urbane regardless of their socioeconomic origins, the *convivialistas* claimed public life as their exclusive preserve while expecting deference from the *pueblo*. Such men were revolted by Gaitán’s oratory and even his physical presence. They also feared his intimacy with his followers, whose incorporation into public life he envisioned.

If Braun’s analysis of Gaitán’s followers and foes is not always satisfying, his account of the assassination and the upheaval that followed is exemplary. Relying heavily on interviews with more than sixty participants and eyewitnesses, he vividly evokes the despair of Gaitanistas whose leader had been cut down. Braun is also successful in tracing the movements of the various actors on 9 April and the changes in the targets of the crowd. He indicates that the first protesters had partisan aims, as reflected in the burning of Laureano Gómez’s newspaper, *El Siglo*; lacking leadership, however, the crowd next vented its fury on symbols of the social order. “Soon they were bent on turning society upside down, on destroying everything that had once been reputable . . .” (p. 158).

Braun’s interpretation of Gaitán and his movement resembles Pécaut’s in some respects but differs in others. Perhaps most important is Braun’s overall assessment: in contrast to Pécaut, but like Richard Sharpless (Gaitán’s first English-language biographer), Braun perceives Gaitán as an admirable figure and Gaitanismo as basically progressive.<sup>6</sup> In his view, Gaitán was neither a socialist nor a revolutionary, but he was the first politician to speak directly to the Colombian *pueblo*. Thus a government under his leadership might have been the vehicle for drawing into the polity members of his own class as well as workers and peasants.

Braun therefore believes that the death of Gaitán deprived the *pueblo* of Bogotá of effective leadership. Pécaut argues instead that the urban popular classes had been disorganized since 1945, partly because of Gaitán’s influence, and were repressed even more vigorously after his death as the *gremios* gained greater ascendancy over the state. The center of political gravity now shifted to rural areas, and politics was emptied of all content save that of traditional partisanship. Pécaut’s analysis of these years runs counter to that of Paul Oquist, who found the origins of the period known as the *Violencia* in the partial collapse of the state, which had gained in autonomy and power after 1930.<sup>7</sup>



According to Oquist, intense partisan competition for control of the state and the expanded benefits it could confer led to the breakdown of national political institutions and the actual disappearance of the state in some places. Pécaut insists, in contrast, that the state had remained firmly under the control of private interests and was therefore unable to function as an actor above classes.

In his necessarily brief discussion of the *Violencia* itself, Pécaut questions the value of overarching explanations and points out that recent regional studies show that it embraced a multiplicity of protagonists and conflicts. Thus to speak of collective strategies among participants (except in the self-defense organizations) is misleading. He prefers to emphasize individual strategies, such as those employed by middling political chiefs to acquire political power or by coffee buyers who knew how to reap profits from the violence.

James Henderson begins his study, *When Colombia Bled: A History of the Violencia in Tolima*, by expressing similar doubts about the theoretical constructs that have been advanced by other students of the subject. He sees the *Violencia* as too diffuse a phenomenon to be captured by a single theory and adopts a forthrightly narrative approach in recounting its tortuous course in a single department. But despite his disclaimers, the attentive reader can discern, if not a theory of the *Violencia* in Tolima, certain generalizations that possess considerable explanatory power.

At the outset, Henderson divides the *Violencia* as a whole into four phases: the period of incipient violence (1946–1949); the period of most generalized sectarian violence (1949–1953); the most complex period, involving violence that was both economically and politically motivated (1953–1957); and a period of little sectarian violence in the traditional sense when the forces of order crushed criminal, psychopathic, and communist components (1957–1965). Tolima escaped the first phase but experienced severe violence throughout the 1950s. Even so, some locations in Tolima were little touched by violence at any time.

Similar to Pécaut's emphasis on individual strategies is Henderson's belief that "the people of Tolima were individuals acting in their own self-interest," although he acknowledges that their perception of self-interest was conditioned by their culture and ideology (p. 25). In the late 1940s, the typical Tolimense was a landless *campesino* in a predominantly Liberal agricultural department that still lacked adequate means of transportation. Henderson indicates, however, that political sectarianism, on national as well as departmental levels, lay at the root of the *Violencia*, at least in its early stages. He skillfully demonstrates how events in Bogotá, such as the disarray of Liberal chiefs in 1949 and the subsequent breakdown of the norms governing the two-party system, reverberated in Tolima (a predictable outcome given the national

reach of the parties and the centralized form of government). Accordingly, when Conservatives in Bogotá denounced Liberal plotting in October and November of 1949, Conservative police terrorized Liberal campesinos in the Tolima municipality of Rovira. In other *municipios*, however, local conditions shaped the course of events, as in relatively prosperous Líbano, to which Henderson devotes a separate chapter. Here the responsible stance of local notables and the presence of regular army troops contained the violence until 1951, when the withdrawal of the troops "so weakened Líbano that the forces of order could no longer slow the rush into Violencia" (p. 174).

According to statistics on homicides given in an appendix, by 1952 Tolima had become the department of Colombia most racked by the Violencia. But it was to suffer even more severely during the Rojas Pinilla regime (1953–1957), when Liberal guerrillas, communists, bandits, and regular soldiers confronted one another, pinning down unarmed civilians in the cross fire. By the time the Violencia ended in Tolima in the mid-1960s, an estimated thirty-six thousand persons had been killed. Henderson acknowledges an economic dimension to the violence, especially after 1953, but he fails to address this issue systematically. Evidence abounds of the individual economic strategies suggested by Pécaut: cases of Liberals and Conservatives coveting Indian lands who paid *violentos* to prey on them, or of *cuadrillas* who preyed on the coffee and livestock of municipalities in central Tolima. Henderson discusses the economic and psychological impact of the Violencia in Líbano, where homicides reached the astounding figure of 252 per 100,000 population in 1959, but he skims over the effects on the rest of the department. Neglect of this topic is perhaps the most serious defect of the book, but it may be intrinsic to Henderson's conceptualization of the Violencia as resulting from a political breakdown rather than from class tensions. Once the political status quo had been restored, the violence ended, although Henderson believes that it also weakened party allegiances.

If Henderson appears to minimize the Violencia as a watershed in Colombian history or even in the history of Tolima, Pécaut holds a similar opinion. He ends his volume by arguing that the Violencia merely contributed to perpetuating the liberal model of development and continued ascendancy of the gremios. The political parties experienced a change in personnel at the intermediate level but bolstered the gremios, while the masses remained deprived of any identity except that conceded by the parties. As a result, the emergence of a strong, autonomous state remained blocked.

In an epilogue to *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia*, Catherine LeGrand suggests that areas of land disputes in the 1930s, such as southern Tolima, became foci of intense violence in the

1950s. She also remarks on the similarities between the tactics of agrarian agitation in the earlier period and those used in recent years. In some times and places, settlers have gotten what they wanted, in part because the government has not been rigid. "In its dealings both with peasants and with opposition political groups, the government has played a cooptive role" (p. 169).

These generalizations are amply confirmed by Leon Zamosc's *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia*. A sociologist trained at the University of Manchester, Zamosc has written a dense and painstaking analysis of the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (ANUC), established in 1967 by the Lleras Restrepo administration as a semiofficial peasant organization. The administration's intention was to encourage peasant participation in agrarian reform and in managing agricultural services but to channel it according to government directives. The organization grew rapidly, numbering more than nine hundred thousand members and seven thousand trained leaders by November 1970. This massive mobilization of the peasantry and their increasing militance alarmed landowners and members of the Pastrana Borrero administration (1970–1974). As a result, in a move endorsed by members of both parties (although not by Lleras Restrepo), the government drastically curtailed its commitment to agrarian reform in 1972. At the same time, ANUC split into two groups: the radicalized ANUC Sincelejo (after the Atlantic Coast city where its leaders held a congress in July 1972) and the smaller, government-dominated ANUC Armenia (after the city where it held a congress in November 1972). Zamosc recounts the vicissitudes experienced by ANUC Sincelejo until its "surrender" to the government and "clientistic reunification" with the Armenia line in 1981. He concludes that "the *usuarios'* episode represented the accumulation of strength, the confrontation, and the defeat of the peasant movement in its attempt to obtain a democratic and nonmonopolistic form of agrarian evolution under Colombian capitalism" (p. 208).

Zamosc goes far beyond merely tracing the evolution of ANUC as an organization. What gives *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia* distinction is the richly textured background against which he has placed ANUC. Zamosc identifies four agrarian structures in Colombia in the 1960s: areas of peasant economy in the Andean departments; colonization areas beyond the economic frontier; areas of traditional *latifundia*, located mainly on the plains of the Atlantic Coast and the Eastern Llanos; and areas of agrarian capitalism, notably in the plains of Valle, Tolima, and Huila, and to a lesser extent on the Atlantic Coast. Peasants in each of these areas had differing and sometimes contradictory goals. Zamosc's focus is the role of ANUC in leading struggles over land, such as the invasions of 1971, which

helped to precipitate the government's reaction the following year. Zamosc points out that "most of the land struggles during 1971 and the decade as a whole occurred in the areas of cattle *latifundia* and in places where these estates were combined with the emergence of agrarian capitalism" (p. 74). In 1971 Huila and the Atlantic Coast departments of Magdalena, Córdoba, Sucre, and Bolívar accounted for more than half of the land invasions. As in the past eras of agrarian unrest described by LeGrand, the struggles of the 1970s brought gains in the number of families owning land on the Atlantic Coast as a result of stepped-up activity by the Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria (INCORA), the agrarian reform agency. This change and others may have defused land pressures in that region but did not impede (and may have encouraged) the development of agrarian capitalism there. The López Michelsen administration (1974–1978) offered important concessions to stable and well-to-do peasants in the Andean departments but took a hard line toward ANUC Sincelejo and peasant protesters on the Atlantic Coast.

Although obviously sympathetic to Marxist formulations, Zamosc mercilessly exposes the divisions within ANUC Sincelejo that helped to undermine the organization. It came under the influence of various left-wing groups, especially Maoists associated with the Marxist-Leninist League (Liga ML). Active in the Atlantic Coast region, the Maoists believed that conditions in Colombia were ripe for successful armed revolution as had occurred in China, and they opposed "bourgeois" tendencies among the peasants that might sap their revolutionary potential. The national leadership of ANUC Sincelejo opposed this extreme leftism but, according to Zamosc, also proved dogmatic, ignoring "the real consciousness and perceived aspirations of the peasants" (p. 175).

Zamosc concludes with recommendations for additional research, including analysis of ANUC's activities in areas other than land struggles, his main concern. It is to be hoped that future studies will avoid one major weakness of Zamosc's book (an inevitable one given his conceptual framework)—the absence of the peasants themselves. In the foreword, Teodor Shanin of the University of Manchester places this volume among "a slowly growing core of good books by those who have elevated peasants from a footnote to the text" (p. xii). It is therefore ironic that although many interviews with peasant leaders and rank-and-file ANUC members are cited, not a single one of them is quoted or mentioned by name in the text. They and their words have been relegated to the notes.

Most of the issues addressed in the specialized works reviewed thus far are touched upon in the more general volumes by Harvey Kline and Robert H. Dix, two political scientists who have written ex-

tensively on Colombia. Kline's *Colombia: Portrait of Unity and Diversity* covers more ground than Dix's *The Politics of Colombia*, although it is the shorter of the two. Both works concentrate on politics, government, and public policy, discussing developments through the early 1980s, including the impact of the drug trade. While Colombian specialists will find fault with some aspect of these two books, such as the perfunctory treatment of women and the superficial historical background, each one can be recommended to those seeking an authoritative introduction to the country.

In many respects, Kline and Dix share similar views. For example, both find it difficult to categorize the Colombian political system. Dix considers several concepts, such as "quasi democracy" and "elitist pluralism," but adopts none of them. Kline merely asserts that it is easier to determine what the Colombian model is not: "neither democratic nor dictatorial in political terms nor capitalist, state capitalist, or socialist in economic ones" (p. 140). Although Kline includes a chapter on "The International Dimension," he concedes that international issues have rarely played a major role in Colombian domestic politics. Dix also notes "the general weakness of nationalistic attitudes in Colombia" (p. 82). Both attribute this characteristic to the fact that multinational enterprises have never dominated the economy as they have in other Latin American countries and to the convergence of interests between the United States and Colombian elites. Both authors call attention to the increasing role of the armed forces in internal security yet agree that the low esteem accorded the military and its weak sense of corporate identity make a coup unlikely. Indeed, Dix finds it remarkable that the military has not assumed power, given the high level of contemporary challenges to internal security. Each volume ends with a discussion of Colombia's prospects, assessing the possibility of leftist radicalization or a bureaucratic-authoritarian scenario like those associated with the Southern Cone. Both Dix and Kline conclude that the most likely prospect is continuation of the present system with accommodation of limited change, a process that they describe as "muddling through."

In sum, these two volumes indicate that continuity is to be expected in the future. Several of the other books reviewed here suggest a high degree of continuity in the past, even amid significant socioeconomic change and tumultuous events like the *Violencia*. The theme of continuity has also been raised by other contemporary scholars, explicitly or implicitly. In a recent analysis, Gonzalo Sánchez held that "Colombia has been a country of permanent and endemic [guerrilla] warfare," in which the *Violencia* of the 1940s was but a stage.<sup>8</sup> Studying the coffee-growing municipio of Monteverde from an anthropological perspective, Jaime Arocha found politically motivated homicides to be an

extension of random homicides, which increased at times of heightened social and economic tensions and seemed to be as much a part of life in Monteverde as coffee.<sup>9</sup>

Perceptions of continuity in Colombian public life often stem from scholars' convictions regarding the tenacious grip of the country's elites on the levers of economic and political power. Yet while Gaitán and the Violencia have attracted many researchers, neither the "oligarchy" nor other social groups have been studied to the same extent. The observation of historian Keith Christie is pertinent here: "Discussions of social structure and social mobility in Colombia tend to be stabs in the dark, predicated on shrewd guessing at best or on ignorance at worst."<sup>10</sup> Research in areas where patterns of continuity are perceived would surely have the effect of identifying and isolating the changes that have occurred and would contribute, like the excellent books reviewed here, to demystifying this paradoxical nation.

#### NOTES

1. Charles W. Bergquist, *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, 1886–1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1978).
2. Daniel Pécaut, *Política y sindicalismo en Colombia* (Bogotá: La Carreta, 1973).
3. See also Miguel Urrutia, *The Development of the Colombian Labor Movement* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1969), 183–84.
4. A revised English version of this book, published by Ohio University in 1988 as *Conservative Thought in Twentieth-Century Latin America: The Ideas of Laureano Gómez*, offers a more strictly chronological analysis of the evolution of Gómez's thought. It also provides a more extended discussion of conservative thinkers in other Latin American countries than does the Spanish edition.
5. Gonzalo Sánchez V., *Los días de la revolución: Gaitanismo y el 9 de abril en provincia* (Bogotá: Centro Cultural Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, 1983).
6. Richard E. Sharpless, *Gaitán of Colombia: A Political Biography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978).
7. Paul Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press, 1980).
8. Gonzalo Sánchez, "La Violencia in Colombia: New Research, New Questions," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 65, no. 4 (1985):789–807.
9. Jaime Arocha, *La violencia en el Quindío: determinantes ecológicos y económicos del homicidio en un municipio caficultor* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1979).
10. Keith H. Christie, "Antioqueño Colonization in Western Colombia: A Reappraisal," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 58, no. 2 (1978):282.