



Colombia: A Concise Contemporary History

By Michael J. LaRosa, Germán R. Mejía

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Written by two leading historians, this deeply informed and accessible book traces the history of Colombia thematically, covering the past two centuries. In ten interlinked chapters, Michael J. LaRosa and Germán R. Mejía depart from more standard approaches by presenting a history of political, social, and cultural accomplishments within the context of Colombia's specific geographic and economic realities. This updated paperback edition addresses the current peace negotiations in an epilogue titled "Chronicle of a Peace Forestalled?"

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Editorial Review

Review

Without engaging in whitewashing or leaving behind academic rigor and meticulous historical detail, the authors . . . have maintained an engaging balance between the more tragic aspects of Colombian history and its successes. . . . Their narrative is present-focused and organized thematically, rather than following a standard chronology. It explores in small, easily digestible sections subjects like demography, political culture, infrastructure development and, of course, conflict. . . . The book, written in English as a collaboration between two historians from the United States and Colombia, is intended for a foreign audience of non-experts. However, it manages to engage, and even surprise, readers that might be more familiar with Colombia. Those that have spent significant time in the country will recognize in the book's pages the quirky details of Colombian life that tell as much about the country as the goriest details of its civil war. . . . I applaud Mejía and LaRosa for abandoning the seductive lure of gore in Colombian history and making an honest and serious effort to tell a more complete and complex story. (*ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*)

LaRosa and Mejía iconoclastically focus on the factors that produced cohesion in Colombia between 1800 and 2011, rather than on the violence that has torn the country apart. Their topical chapters highlight the existence of long-lasting constitutions, two national political parties, a diverse but predominantly mestizo and urban population, recent improvements in transportation, a common language and religion, a healthy economy, and an appreciation for culture that has produced internationally prominent artists. They correctly note that Colombia was not uniquely violent in 19th-century Latin America. . . . Although keeping the focus on the resiliency of the people who have suffered through decades of tragedy, the authors do discuss enduring social problems like the highly unequal distribution of income. Their approach provides a good corrective to much current scholarship on Colombia. . . . Recommended. (*CHOICE*)

Perhaps due to the cooperation of its government with the U.S.' war on drugs, Colombia is probably America's closest ally in South America. This concise and easily digestible survey is a useful and timely introduction to a country little understood by most people north of the Rio Grande. LaRosa is professor of history at Rhodes College, and Mejía is professor of history at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá. They combine thematic and chronological approaches to offer a broad-based portrait of Colombia in an admirable effort to counteract many of the oversimplified impressions outsiders may have concerning the country. They don't avoid the seamier aspects of historical and contemporary Colombia, including political violence and the curse of the traffic in narcotics. But they also note the nation's considerable cultural achievements and its laudable efforts to build a stable democracy and play a positive role in hemispheric relations. (*Booklist*)

The book by Michael J. LaRosa and Germán R. Mejía is well written and covers effectively most of the important events of 'modern' Colombian history, defined by the authors as the years since 1800. . . . The authors aimed to have a new work of history that would be bold, energetic, and innovative, not focusing on the catastrophic vision of the country or theoretical constructs from the developed world. Rather, despite all the mayhem the country has experienced, they wanted to explore a central question: 'How is it that the nation stays together?' (*The Americas: A Quarterly Review of Latin American History*)

This sensitive and engagingly written historical introduction to Colombia moves beyond the nation's conflicts and failures to uncover what also holds its people together. Readers will be especially drawn to the

rich portrayal of Colombia's deep cultural traditions, expressed in art and literature and in people's daily lives. (Herbert Tico Braun, University of Virginia)

This imaginative, go-to analysis makes the intriguing and multi-faceted world of Colombia accessible to all readers. LaRosa and Mejía artfully break away from the classic approach to the writing of Colombian history and provide an insightful window into the country's political, social, and cultural past. Their thematic approach enhances a story born of a common love for sport and the arts, for drama and for political ideals. LaRosa and Mejía make ever present the rich heritage of this country and of a people who have fought passionately for liberty over the past two centuries. (Douglass Sullivan-González, dean of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, University of Mississippi)

A unique and refreshing assessment of the contemporary history of Colombia. Highlighting the lesser-known aspects of Colombia's history, LaRosa and Mejía have succeeded in producing a well-balanced narrative. Unlike most treatments of modern Colombia, which linger on its tragedies and failures, the authors focus on the creativity, resourcefulness, and resilience of its people and the myriad ways in which they have contributed to building their country. LaRosa and Mejía's reinterpretation of the contemporary history of Colombia is an important contribution to our understanding of a little-known and understood country. (Guiomar Dueñas-Vargas, University of Memphis)

About the Author

Michael J. LaRosa is associate professor of history at Rhodes College. **Germán R. Mejía** is professor of history at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá.

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