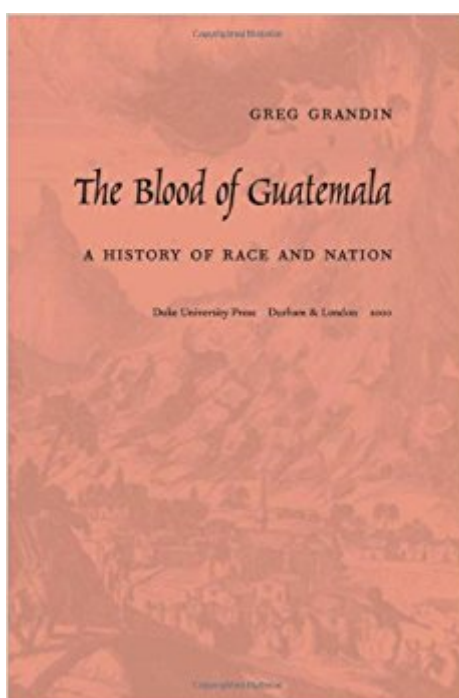


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The Blood Of Guatemala: A History Of Race And Nation (Latin America Otherwise)



Synopsis

Over the latter half of the twentieth century, the Guatemalan state slaughtered more than two hundred thousand of its citizens. In the wake of this violence, a vibrant pan-Mayan movement has emerged, one that is challenging Ladino (non-indigenous) notions of citizenship and national identity. In *The Blood of Guatemala* Greg Grandin locates the origins of this ethnic resurgence within the social processes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century state formation rather than in the ruins of the national project of recent decades. Focusing on Mayan elites in the community of Quetzaltenango, Grandin shows how their efforts to maintain authority over the indigenous population and secure political power in relation to non-Indians played a crucial role in the formation of the Guatemalan nation. To explore the close connection between nationalism, state power, ethnic identity, and political violence, Grandin draws on sources as diverse as photographs, public rituals, oral testimony, literature, and a collection of previously untapped documents written during the nineteenth century. He explains how the cultural anxiety brought about by Guatemala's transition to coffee capitalism during this period led Mayan patriarchs to develop understandings of race and nation that were contrary to Ladino notions of assimilation and progress. This alternative national vision, however, could not take hold in a country plagued by class and ethnic divisions. In the years prior to the 1954 coup, class conflict became impossible to contain as the elites violently opposed land claims made by indigenous peasants. This "history of power" reconsiders the way scholars understand the history of Guatemala and will be relevant to those studying nation building and indigenous communities across Latin America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Anyone interested in Latin American history will enjoy this myth-and-stereotype-shattering study of Mayan cultural and national identity as it has evolved over centuries in one region of Guatemala, ‘Los Altos.’ Thick with novelistic detail and anecdote, brilliantly and imaginatively researched, totally engrossing in its melding of convincing analysis and strong narrative sweep, Grandin takes us to a ‘high place’ and guides us back over the tangled, treacherous paths that led there.”—Francisco Goldman

“Bold, fascinating, and important, *The Blood of Guatemala* is a model of careful, yet highly innovative and original scholarship. Grandin has gone well beyond fine research to create a powerful narrative of two important centuries’ worth of Guatemalan history. Its many different dimensions—political, economic, social, demographic—form a history totale.”—John Demos, Yale University

“Brilliant, bold, and beautifully written from the first page to the last, *The Blood of Guatemala* convincingly challenges previous interpretations of the histories of ethnicity, community, state, nation, and nationalism in Guatemala. Greg Grandin has skillfully united the disciplines of history and anthropology; he is part of a new generation of committed, sophisticated, and clearheaded intellectuals.”—Deborah Levenson, Boston College

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Interesting book focusing on K'iche and Spanish conquerors relations on Guatemala history. Does not really cover in deep the earlier history and United Fruit Company involvement on Guatemala. However is very well written and documented.

Essential for understanding how racism was part of the mix - genocide, politics, etc., of the Cold War era in Guatemala.

How the CIA and several American presidents interfered in this small Central American country and caused the death of 200,000 Indians. Required reading!

I appreciated this book for the insights it was able to give me on a city that I will soon visit, but I found the writing style dry and overburdened with unnecessary details. Several times, I fell asleep trying to make it through the reading. Other times, I would lower the book in exasperation and say to myself, "Is this Grandin's dissertation?" The book is very informative, but it is not an accessible read for the layperson.

A reworking of Grandin's dissertation, "The Blood of Guatemala" refers to the both the national/ethnic/racial identities that defined Guatemala throughout its history and also the literal blood that flowed during the 30 year civil war in which the most repressive state in the hemisphere slaughtered two hundred thousand of its citizens. The narrative centers on Mayan elites of the town of Quetzaltenango (a place name that will probably give trouble to any English-based spell checking program) in the western highlands of Guatemala. It tells the history of the indigenous people, the Spanish conquerors and the Ladino bourgeoisie through the centuries by highlighting several key events: a demonstration in 1784 against state monopoly of liquor production that gave three Spaniards control of much of the economic life and police power in the area, a demonstration that became a riot that almost turned into an insurrection; the 1837 cholera epidemic, part of the world-wide spread of that disease, and the way it was handled and mishandled by national government; and the rise of coffee capitalism and the creation of an export economy based on

plantations in the lowlands. Grandin does an excellent job with a complicated set of subjects that include caste, class and national identity and a changing array of ethnic classifications depending on who was in power (who was doing the classifying and who it benefited) at various times. Recommended for those with some knowledge of the history of Guatemala. An understanding of how historians and ethnographers work and some familiarity with academic prose generally would be helpful but not essential to profit from this book

Grandin's research on the Quiche Mayans of Quetzaltenango is exhaustive and well presented. In particular, his central thesis that the Quiches were a social body already divided by the time of the 1954 US-backed coup helps break schismatic thinking regarding the history of the 36 year civil war there that defines the Indians as merely the victims of a violent and complex historical legacy. That said, however, I often found myself asking if the ladinos in the city were similarly divided. Grandin does make some suggestive remarks in this area, but his focus on the Indians of Xela reveals, perhaps, a bias he holds in their favor. Moreover, the book attempts to use the city of Quetzaltenango as a microcosm of the national situation, which for the most part does not follow since the Indians of other highland townships are very different from those of Xela (and even from one another). Finally, I have to mention that Grandin subscribes to currently fashionable theoretical terms (which comes into relief when he talks about the Mayan "body" in his chapter on the cholera epidemic) that may or may not do justice to the social and cultural dynamic he encounters. Overall I would say this is a book worthy of reading despite lacunae in his otherwise critical approach.

If you're looking for a history of Guatemala, this isn't the right book to read. It's a highly detailed analysis of culture, ideology, national consciousness and other such highfalutin intangibles. Some of its passages are overly abstract and burdened by jargon. I get the feeling that it would be a great read for anyone already familiar with the history, but for a beginner like me, the book was impenetrable and boring. Grandin's more historical stuff (like *Empire's Workshop*) is top notch though.

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