

humbly-born, charismatic, authoritarian leader, are all elements that configure a situation of “state-making” that by the 1920s and 1930s was that of fascist Europe. Nugent fails to see the coexistence of similar elements in Peru, and thus to delve into what is truly distinctive in its history.

In so comfortably dismissing European theories of “state-making” as unsuitable for Latin America, Nugent commits a major, though not the worst, error. The main problem with his whole approach, as I see it, is not the failure to read theory but to grasp history.

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*A Coffee Frontier: Land, Society, and Politics in Duaca, Venezuela, 1830–1936.*

By DOUG YARRINGTON. Pitt Latin American Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xiv, 267 pp. Cloth, \$45.00. Paper, \$19.95.

*A Coffee Frontier* begins as a familiar story of peasant exploitation during Latin America’s coffee century. Yet in Doug Yarrington’s capable hands, subtleties in class relations and land ownership are critically examined through notarial and judicial archives. The result is a nuanced interpretation of how the modest prosperity offered by coffee farming in the nineteenth century was undone in the twentieth as elites wrested away land from small producers. As the story of Duaca unfolds, it becomes clear that this little-known district in the state of Lara is an important case in the turbulent history of agricultural exports from Latin America.

That coffee transformed local and even national economies during this era is well documented. From Brazil to Colombia, Costa Rica to Guatemala, forests became coffee groves, and in the process national politics and patterns of regional trade were reworked. Class relations, however, were more resistant to change. And in many cases, the exploitation of the peasantry intensified with greater dependence upon coffee. Peasant farmers in Duaca initially benefited from divisions among elites and large expanses of unsettled lands. Taking a revisionist stance, Yarrington describes a frontier peasantry with greater bargaining power and economic choice than is normally portrayed. In fact, private land ownership was uncommon in nineteenth-century Duaca, even among elites. Instead, untitled public lands (*baldíos*) and corporately owned indigenous lands (*resguardos*) leased to non-Indians were cultivated without the benefit of formal ownership.

This changed abruptly in the 1910s and 1920s, when land was aggressively privatized. Through meticulous documentation, Yarrington traces how local elites took advantage of national trends for political centralization and secured land titles, often stripping peasants of properties they had farmed for decades. Individual court cases and widespread peasant protests followed, demonstrating campesino efforts to resist elite oppression. Yet the tightening political control by Duaca’s elites and the dire interna-

tional market for coffee combined to undermine the agrarian economy. By the 1940s the district was no longer a significant coffee producer and many peasants had left.

Conceptually, this book revises the idea of a “precipitate peasantry” (agriculturalists called up by market forces) put forward by William Roseberry. Yarrington argues for a “frontier peasantry” that shows greater agency and desire to be a part of capitalist markets than the passive notion of precipitate peasantry allows. In addition, the case is made for the workings of a “moral economy” on the frontier—a concept typically reserved for older settlements. Through cooperative strategies of labor sharing and extended family homesteading, community identity and systems of reciprocity evolved quickly on the frontier. Once land was no longer readily available, the characteristics of precipitate peasantries emerged.

To Yarrington’s credit he consciously links local politics and society to larger national currents, infusing the events in Duaca with greater meaning. Despite efforts by national politicians to erode the authority of local leaders, Duaca’s elites resourcefully worked the system to their short-term advantage. This emphasis on political control seems justified for Duaca, yet other forces were important. Demographic and environmental factors undermined the profitability of coffee on the frontier and require further examination. In particular, it seems that the environmental basis for coffee in Lara was marginal at best. The influence of the international coffee market is even less clear in this study. Production strategies changed dramatically as prices oscillated, and for places like Duaca the 1930s marked the end of coffee dependence.

That said, this book will be a standard for those interested in Venezuela’s political and agrarian history. Its originality will also appeal to students of export-led development and peasant studies. The concept of a frontier peasantry is especially noteworthy. Lastly, the author’s clear and graceful voice is a welcome departure from the jargon-filled tomes that now fill our shelves.

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*Guyana, Fragile Frontier: Loggers, Miners, and Forest Peoples.* By MARCUS COLCHESTER. London: Latin America Bureau; Gloucestershire: World Rainforest Movement; Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers. 1997. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xii, 172 pp. Paper, \$19.00.

Intoxicating *fabulae* of wealth have lured foreign venturers into northern South America ever since Columbus hailed the continent as an “Earthly Paradise” in 1498. In 1596 Guyana’s reputation was further embellished with the publication of Sir Walter Raleigh’s *Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*. The earliest Europeans into the region were Dutch and Spanish traders, whose export of forest products, including timber, depended upon the knowledge and labor of native Americans.

When plantations of cultivated crops replaced extraction as the basis of commodity export in the mid-seventeenth century, Guyanese commercial activity moved from