

Preface

This is a study of the political implications of the rise of the coffee export economy in Colombia during the period 1886-1910. It explores in a detailed way the local impact in Colombia of the powerful economic, political, and cultural currents generated by the economic development of the nations of the North Atlantic basin. The study offers an explanation of Colombian politics and an interpretation of a crucial transitional period in Colombian history based on a premise foreign to the bulk of the literature on nineteenth-century Spanish American politics. It argues that investigation of basic economic trends and analysis of elite ideological and economic interests provide the most fruitful point of departure for an understanding of Colombian political history at the turn of the century.

The study is divided into an introduction and three main parts. The Introduction discusses different explanations of Colombian politics and advances an interpretation of nineteenth-century political instability that is applied in detail in the following chapters. The main divisions of the study correspond to three distinct phases in the economic and political life of the nation during the period under investigation. Part One deals with the period 1886-1898 and traces the origins of Colombia's greatest nineteenth-century civil war (the War of the Thousand Days, 1899-1902) through an analysis of the political ramifications of the coffee boom which developed after 1886. Part Two covers the period of the war and relates both the outbreak of the fighting, and the nature and long duration of the war, to the political and social tensions engendered by depression in the coffee economy after 1898. Part Three deals with the postwar era (1904-1910), a period marked by limited, then rapid revival and expansion of the coffee economy and recounts the steps by which coffee interests spawned in the 1890's and defeated during the war managed to win the peace and consolidate a new order of political stability and export-oriented economic development in Colombia by 1910. The first and last chapters of the study, which deal respectively with the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, should be viewed as interpretive essays. Based primarily on secondary sources, these two chapters attempt to draw out the interpretive threads generated by the detailed analysis which forms the core of the book.

Although the study is primarily concerned with the interaction of

economic and political affairs, I have tried not to ignore the social dimensions of either. Special attention is focused on the sociology of political factions, and, as the argument proceeds, some consideration of the nature of land tenure patterns and labor systems, the influence of the Church on Colombian life, and the social aspects of political violence are integrated into the analysis. Most of the material illustrative of the way economic and political affairs affected the lives of common people is drawn from research focused on the politically important and in many ways representative department of Cundinamarca.

Knowledge of the history of Colombia in the century following 1850 is still at a rudimentary stage, and, thanks in part to the critics who have so generously commented on successive drafts of the manuscript, I am well aware of the many gaps and weaknesses of this study. While the interpretation advanced in the first and last chapters suffers most from the underdeveloped state of the field, the analysis presented in the core of the book also needs to be complemented by regional studies and more attention to the grass-roots dimensions of the economic, social, and political forces analyzed in the book. At the very least, I hope this study will help to stimulate that research.