

## *Preface to the Paperback Edition*

Publication of this paperback English-language edition of *Coffee and Conflict* provides a welcome opportunity to try to situate the study within the context of the evolving field of modern Latin American history and to take stock of some of the criticism generated by the book.

Since I began research for the study in the late 1960s, and conceptualized the doctoral dissertation (completed in 1973) that became the core of the book in 1978, the field has undergone fundamental change. The new ideas and concepts percolating through Latin American studies in the late 1960s coalesced in the decade of the 1970s in a new analytical paradigm, which, for better or worse, came to be known as “dependency analysis.”

This is not the place to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the so-called “dependency” paradigm. Suffice it to say here that to many of us working in and around it, the new approach seemed to represent, both in analytical and political terms, an undeniable and progressive step forward. It rejected the liberal cultural assumptions that cast modern world history in a light so favorable to the material interests and the ideological hegemony of dominant classes in a world social system. It argued instead that modern history was better understood in terms of the structural economic and social logic of an evolving world capitalist order. Stubborn cultural and institutional inadequacies were not the root cause of the failure of Latin American societies to recapitulate the process of economic development and democratic political evolution of European nations. Nor did the simple diffusion of liberal values and institutions represent the path out of the material and cultural problems of underdeveloped societies. Rather, development would come through realization that the very institutional and cultural obstacles to progress identified in liberal scholarship were themselves historical products of the ways Latin American societies were integrated into a world economy after 1500. Armed with this historical knowledge, subaltern societies and classes could reclaim their cultural integrity and struggle to eliminate the structural barriers to material development and to economic, political, and cultural democratization.

With hindsight much of the work within the new paradigm seems embarrassingly overwrought and imbued with a moralistic fervor and

self-importance characteristic of recent ideological conversion. Fortunately, neither the pioneering studies in the new paradigm by Latin American structural economists like Celso Furtado and Osvaldo Sunkel, nor the now classic surveys of the general history of Latin America by the historian Tulio Halperín Donghi and the sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso allowed the radical implications of the new assumptions to overwhelm their respect for the complexity of historical reality. Such was not the case, however, within the exalted neo-Marxist variant of “dependency analysis”; and it was this work, a simplified, grossly distorted version of the basic paradigm, that exercised the greatest influence on the perceptions of the new approach by many liberal scholars, particularly those in the English-speaking world. Moreover, because much of the “dependency” literature was uninformed by historical scholarship and exhibited a seemingly congenital aversion to primary research it violated the disciplinary sensibilities of most professional historians.

In spite of all this, however, the influence of the new analytical framework proved extraordinary, and over the course of the last decade and a half “dependency” ideas have been appropriated, digested, modified, and transcended by most Latin American scholars. Moreover, “dependency” concepts have deeply influenced parallel work on other Third World areas, particularly Africa, and they have informed general studies of the history of the modern world as a whole. Still, the aversion to “dependency analysis” among liberal scholars, especially historians of Latin America in the United States, lingers, and it is in this context that *Coffee and Conflict* can now be evaluated.

Based on extensive primary research, the book developed an interpretation of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Colombian political economy, particularly the causes and outcome of the greatest and most destructive of Latin America’s nineteenth-century civil wars, that was akin to the basic assumptions and leading ideas of what has come to be called “dependency analysis.” Happily, given the misleading connotations of that term, and the subsequent distortion of the original paradigm, the phrase itself did not find its way into the pages of the book.

The book was generally received by Colombian scholars as an important contribution to the study of a pivotal period in the nation’s history and was quickly published in Spanish. The book’s relationship, as a case study, to the broader issue of the nineteenth-century historical evolution of Latin America was also acknowledged by many reviewers. To the extent that it revealed the structural forces behind the most salient and destructive of the civil and political commotions that wracked most of the former Spanish colonies in the Americas

following independence, it seemed to illustrate more general patterns in the nineteenth-century historical evolution of the region as a whole.

It is only recently, however, that the book has begun to be seen explicitly in the context of the struggle over alternative interpretive paradigms in the field of modern Latin American history. Most pertinent in this regard is David Bushnell's evaluation of the book in a review of the last quarter-century of scholarship by U.S. historians on South America delivered at the centennial meeting of the American Historical Association in 1984. Bushnell noted that the book is as persuasive as it is because it is one of the very few studies within the so-called "dependency" paradigm to take the canons of professional historical scholarship seriously.

On the other hand, the thesis of the book itself, the argument 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," continues to be received with some caution, especially among liberal historians in the United States. Bushnell, whose kind introductory remarks to the Spanish-language edition and to this paperback English-language edition of the book are indicative of the sympathy and support he has extended the study over the years, states this position most judiciously. Given the relatively limited integration of Colombia into the world economy in the nineteenth century, he argues, how could external influences on Colombian politics have been as decisive as I contend?

The answer to that question, which should have been made more explicit in the book, is that it is precisely *because* Colombia failed to become more fully integrated into the world system in the nineteenth century that the issue of that failure assumed such capital importance in the life of the nation as the century drew to a close. The failure of Colombian liberalism, the fact that after 1885 Colombia found itself governed by a regime whose ideological tendencies and economic policies set it swimming against the tide of Western and Latin American history, made that issue of such desperate importance to philosophical liberals of both the Colombian political parties. The anomalous course of Colombian politics occurred at a time when other major Latin American countries consolidated the liberal political economy that made them recipients of massive foreign investment, assured the rapid development of their export economies, cemented ruling class consensus and ideological hegemony, and fostered the growth of powerful state structures. The fear, belief, certainty that the failure of liberalism under Colombia's Regeneration governments after 1885 would preclude all these developments, doom the nation's march to-

ward “civilization,” and lead to its dismemberment and dissolution is what gives systematic meaning to the politics of the era. It lies behind the words and platforms of the bipartisan critics of the regime in the 1890s, their actions during the War, and the nature of their reforms, following the loss of Panama, in the first years of the twentieth century.

The pervasive issue of liberal political economy also subsumes the question of the economic impact of the Regeneration monetary regime that has preoccupied the authors of the two books that have treated late nineteenth-century Colombian politics since *Coffee and Conflict* was published in 1978—Marco Palacios’s *Coffee in Colombia, 1850–1970* (Cambridge, England, 1980; first published in Spanish in 1979) and Helen Delpar’s *Red Against Blue* (University, Alabama, 1981). In chapter 7 of his important and wide-ranging book Palacios takes the thesis of *Coffee and Conflict* as his own and provides a wealth of new information and analysis to support it. Delpar, in contrast, dismisses the thesis and criticizes it primarily because it fails to deal adequately with the argument advanced by the Colombian economist Darío Bustamante that the paper money regime favored development of the coffee economy. There are many problems with Delpar’s position, not least of which is her failure to deal with the contrary arguments of Palacios. Palacios bases his case on a different reading and analysis of the same limited material used by Bustamante, and argues that the effect of paper money and the inflation it caused did not on balance favor coffee producers.

Be that as it may, and much additional research will have to be done to clarify the issue more fully, the argument advanced in *Coffee and Conflict* does not turn on this narrow, economic question. It pivots instead on the much broader and more important issue, paramount in the minds, words, and actions of contemporaries, of the relationship of liberal political economy to the future of the nation. For contemporary critics of the Regeneration, the effect of inflation on real wages in coffee production was not a primary issue. (In any case, the evidence we have is that the economic interests of opponents of the Regeneration were affected in manifold and contradictory ways by the paper money regime.) Their overwhelming concerns revolved instead around the question of credit and productive investment, both domestic and foreign. The availability of credit and the extent of investment in export agriculture and modern systems of transport would decide Colombia’s future as a viable coffee producer in a world division of labor based on liberal economic theory and capitalist institutions.

It is ultimately this issue of liberal political economy—a question

that is moral and philosophical as well as political and economic—that subsumes and interrelates the personal, regional, and clientelist dimensions of politics that have preoccupied other students of modern Colombian history. And it is around this issue that, to my mind, *Coffee and Conflict* makes its most important contribution. For, as the late Carl Solberg argued in a posthumously published review last year, the book demonstrates the “grim logic” of a social process that is generally dismissed, distorted, or simplified in the bulk of the scholarship, traditional or contemporary, on nineteenth-century Latin American politics. It shows how a class of men at least as rational and high-minded as the leaders of any other American or European society of the era—men motivated by ideas that transcended questions of their own immediate personal gain—carried the nation toward its greatest nineteenth-century tragedy. It shows that this dynamic was not peculiar to Colombia, nor to the Latin American nations in general. It shows that it was part and parcel of the wrenching global social process that led in the last century to the consolidation of a liberal capitalist world order.

What *Coffee and Conflict* lacks is analysis of the laboring classes comparable to its attention to the social elite. When that is done, the thesis of the book will undoubtedly need serious revision.