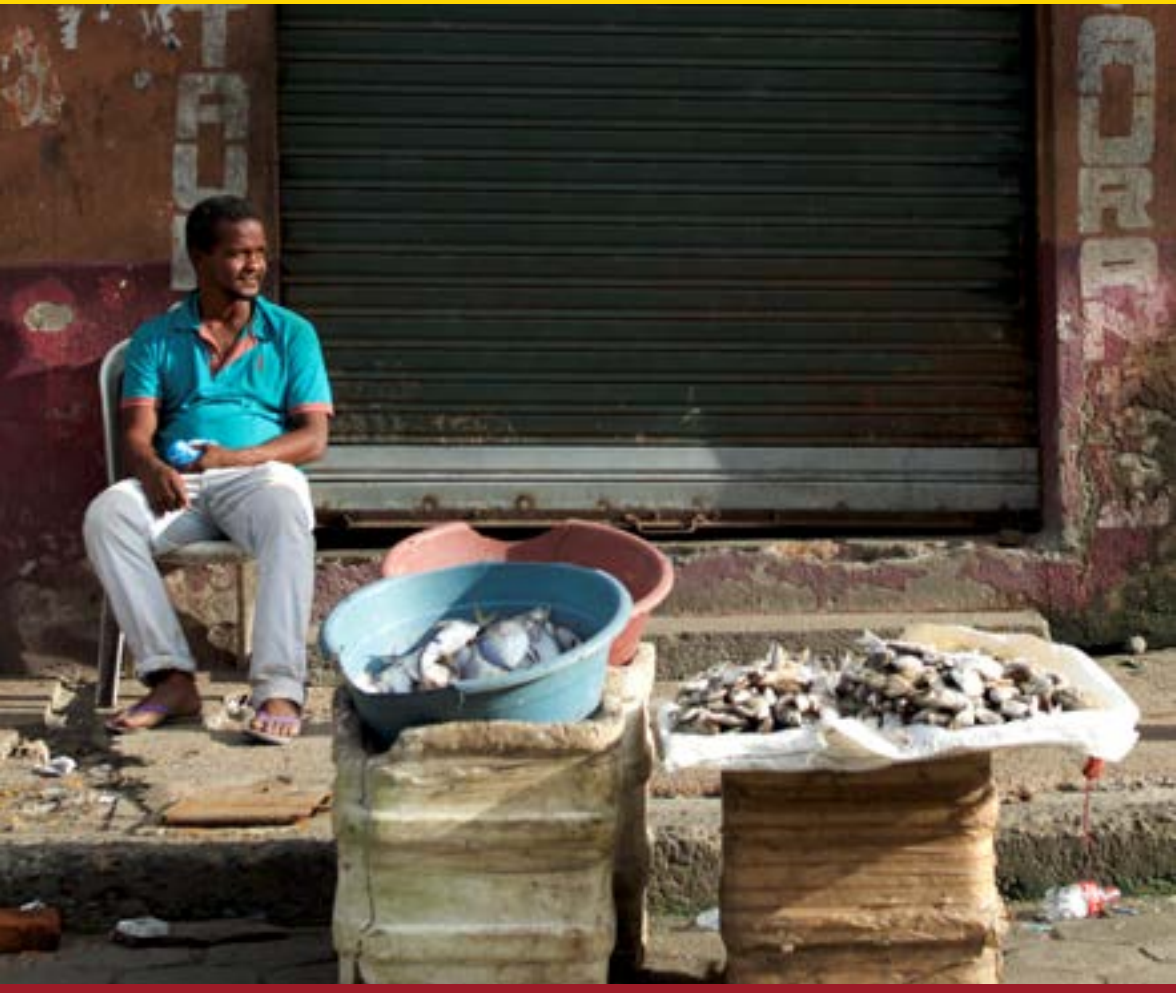
THE COLOMBIA READER

HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS



Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios, and Ana María Gómez López, editors

THE LATIN AMERICA READERS

Series edited by Robin Kirk and Orin Starn

THE ARGENTINA READER
Edited by Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo

THE BRAZIL READER
Edited by Robert M. Levine and John J. Crocitti

THE CHILE READER
Edited by Elizabeth Quay Hutchison, Thomas Miller Klubock, Nara Milanich, and Peter Winn

THE COLOMBIA READER
Edited by Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios, and Ana María Gómez López

THE COSTA RICA READER
Edited by Steven Palmer and Iván Molina

THE CUBA READER
Edited by Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC READER
Edited by Paul Roorda, Lauren Derby, and Raymundo González

THE ECUADOR READER
Edited by Carlos de la Torre and Steve Striffler

THE GUATEMALA READER
Edited by Greg Grandin, Deborah T. Levenson, and Elizabeth Oglesby

THE MEXICO READER
Edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson

THE PARAGUAY READER
Edited by Peter Lambert and Andrew Nickson

THE PERU READER, 2ND EDITION
Edited by Orin Starn, Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk

THE RIO DE JANEIRO READER
Edited by Daryle Williams, Amy Chazkel, and Paulo Knauss

THE WORLD READERS

Series edited by Robin Kirk and Orin Starn

THE ALASKA NATIVE READER
Edited by Maria *Shaa Tláa* Williams

THE BANGLADESH READER
Edited by Meghna Guhathakurta and Willem van Schendel

THE CZECH READER
Edited by Jan Bažant, Nina Bažantová, and Frances Starn

THE GHANA READER
Edited by Kwasi Konadu and Clifford Campbell

THE INDONESIA READER
Edited by Tineke Hellwig and Eric Tagliacozzo

THE RUSSIA READER
Edited by Adele Barker and Bruce Grant

THE SOUTH AFRICA READER
Edited by Clifton Crais and Thomas V. McClendon

THE SRI LANKA READER
Edited by John Clifford Holt

THE COLOMBIA READER

HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS

Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios,
and Ana María Gómez López, editors

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS *Durham and London* 2017

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Typeset in Monotype Dante by BW&A Books, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Farnsworth-Alvear, Ann, [date] editor. | Palacios, Marco, editor. |
Gómez López, Ana María, [date] editor.
Title: The Colombia reader : history, culture, politics / edited by
Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios, and Ana María Gómez López.
Other titles: Latin America readers.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2016. | Series: The Latin America
readers | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers:
LCCN 2016023569 (print)
LCCN 2016024534 (ebook)
ISBN 9780822362074 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN 9780822362289 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN 9780822373865 (e-book)
Subjects: LCSH: Colombia—History. | Colombia—Civilization. |
Colombia—Politics and government.
Classification: LCC F2258.C677 2016 (print) | LCC F2258 (ebook) |
DDC 986.1—dc 3
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016023569

Cover art: "Fish-seller." Tumaco, Colombia, May 2016.
Photograph by Carolina Navas.

Contents

Acknowledgments

Putting this anthology together has taken years, and it is by now impossible to accurately thank the many students, colleagues, friends, and family members who have helped us think about what to include or, more difficult, what to exclude. We owe debts beyond what we can enumerate here. Anonymous helpers lurking in translation chat-rooms, neighbors who happen to be bilingual, casual acquaintances, and sometimes passersby were all roped into the project in one way or another. More directly, the federal work-study program allowed several students at the University of Pennsylvania to be pressed into service. Special thanks go to Seth Amos, Tivan Amour, Bernardo Aparicio, Christa Avampato, Claudia Henriquez, Marco Herndon, Karla Molina, Camille Reyes, Mariantonia Rojas Cabal, Alexia Temme, and Brandi Waters. At the University of Pennsylvania, the Latin American and Latino Studies Program and the History Department provided critical support. Our greatest debt is to Valerie Millholland and Miriam Angress at Duke University Press. We also thank Heather Hensley, Isabel Rios-Torres, Silvia Serrano, Liz Smith, and Christi Stanforth, who worked to produce this volume.

Numerous professionals gave unstintingly of their expertise. We are grateful for help offered by José Alvear Sanín, Juan Pablo Ardila, Tulio Aristizábal, SJ, Andrés Castro Samoya, Migdalia Carrasquillo, Andrea Cote Botero, May Summer Farnsworth, Nancy Farriss, Luz Mary Giraldo, Viviana Goelkel, Diana Marcela Gómez, Beatríz González, Nelson González, Joseph Holub, Lina Martínez Hernández, Ricardo López, Catalina Muñoz, Juan Guillermo Múnera, Diana Milena Murcia, Eric Perramond, Javier Revelo Rebolledo, Amanda Romero Medina, Guillermo Saldarriaga, Libia Tattay Bolaños, and Luis van Isschot. Mauricio Tovar at the Archivo General de la Nación provided valuable assistance throughout the course of the project. Alexander Montoya Prada advised us with respect to the inclusion of texts by Manuel Quintín Lame. José Roca gave early constructive suggestions regarding images of contemporary Colombian artists to be included, both as a Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia and as curator at the Banco de la República in Bogotá. We

extend our gratitude also to Adolfo Aristizábal Taylor and Maritza Jinete Manjarres for helping us include the stamp featuring Vanessa Mendoza Bustos. A special mention is due to Harry Mantilla Vivas and Mariana Vásquez Cortes for their assistance with "photocopy runs" to the Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango and the National University of Colombia in Bogotá. Cristina Espinel and Charlie Roberts were key touchstones for consultations regarding human rights in Colombia and translation inquiries alike.

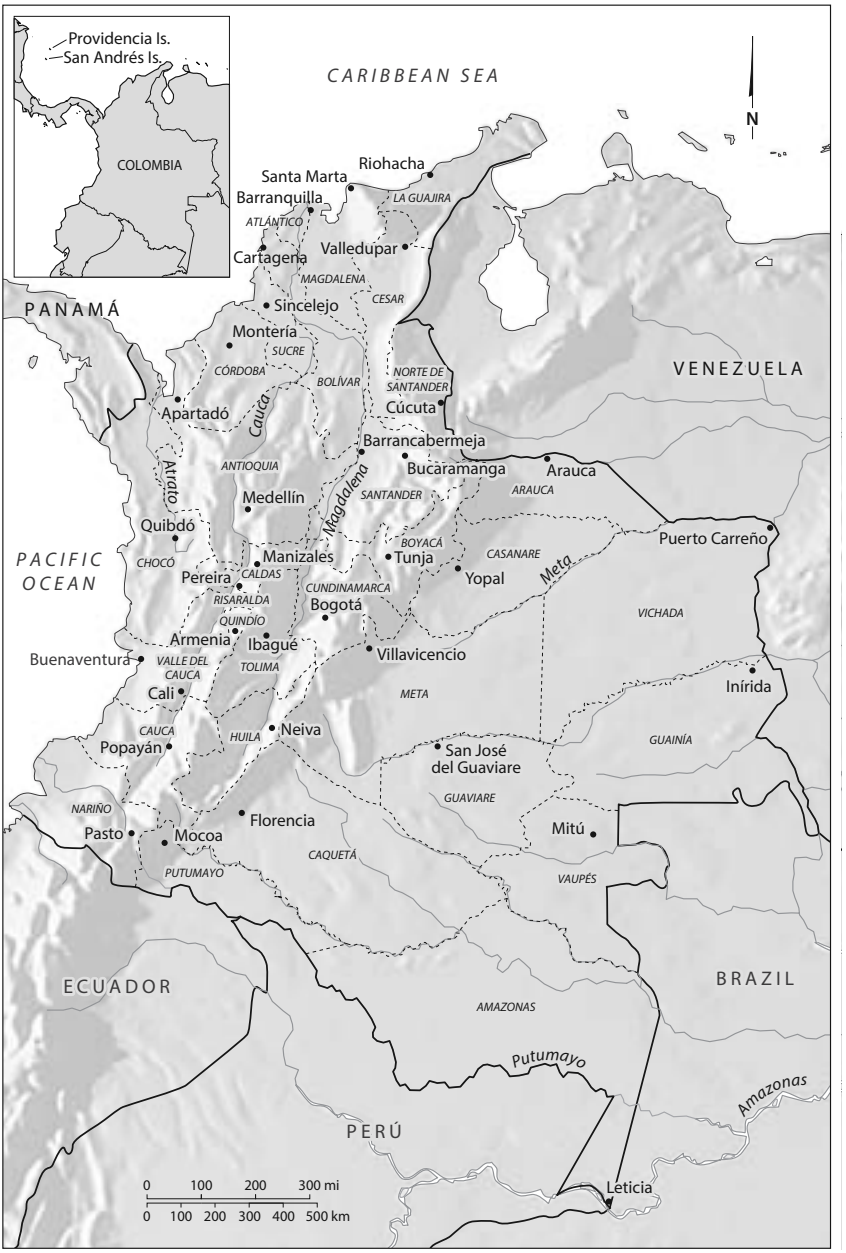
Ana María expresses her deepest gratitude to Angela and Phillip Berryman, whose warm home and enormous generosity made much of her work on this anthology possible. Ana María also thanks the entire Gómez López family, William, Dorys, and Mauricio, as well as Dorys Davidson Manning and Ruth Camacho de Gómez, for their continued help with odd translation inquiries, from outmoded cultural references to Colombian youth slang. Finally, Pamela Jordan remained an unflagging source of encouragement, patience, and humor, all of which proved vital throughout the duration of this project.

Ann thanks Jimena Alviar, Josh Block, Julie Cristol, Evelyne Laurent Perrault, Jessi Roemer, and, in Colombia, Jairo Alviar Restrepo and family, Alejandro Múnera, Fabio Andrés Saldarriaga, Lucrecia Sanín Bernal, and José Fernando Velasquéz. María Helena Saldarriaga and María Ester Sanín Bernal deserve a special *mil gracias*. Huge gratitude is due also to Salvador, Lola, and María Cristina. That Ann was able to see the project through to the end was made possible by the love and support she receives from Rui DaSilva and from our much-loved children, Kiamesso, Jorge, and Matondo.

Introduction

Colombians struggle to describe their nation in ways that will be true to a kaleidoscopic reality. Multiple generations have despaired of fratricidal cycles of violence. Criminal impunity and corruption are endemic. Deep divisions persist. Yet the country is modern, with a well-functioning financial sector, a good urban infrastructure, and a sophisticated, if unequal, health system. Colombian jurists have a reputation for thoughtfulness and innovation. The nation's libraries and museums are beacons of culture and of optimism about the nation's future. Through recent decades marked by war, Colombian artists, musicians, and writers have produced enduring works and gained an international audience.

This emphasis on multiplicity and contradiction will be familiar to many who know Colombia. The country is very regionally distinct, and our aim in part I is to introduce readers to the mental map Colombians have in their minds when they project their own lives onto the canvas of nationhood. Just as educated New Yorkers imagine themselves as living within a nation that includes the history of New England's fisheries, Mark Twain's stories about the Mississippi River, and Wyoming's wide expanses, so residents of Bogotá look eastward and know that on the other side of the mountains lie broad plains, home to a tradition analogous to that of the Argentine pampa, or the ranching land of northern Mexico, and similarly described in song and story. Bogotanos also think themselves westward, across Andean peaks sometimes visible from the city itself, still snow-topped in the present but likely to lose their snow in coming generations. Their "West" extends first toward the ports of the Magdalena River, the country's transport artery and a symbol of layered cultural forms in music and dance, and second to the Cauca River Valley and the rainforest regions of the country's Pacific lowlands. Well-read city dwellers have in their minds images created by famous writers such as José Eustacio Rivera, Jorge Isaacs, and Candelario Obeso. Similarly, families in cities such as Medellín and Cali understand their nation as including Caribbean traditions that they might experience by taking a long bus trip northward, or perhaps by reading a novel by Gabriel García Márquez, as well as an Amazonian expanse that they are more likely to see



Map of Colombia

on television or in the 2015 Oscar-nominated film by Ciro Guerra, *Embrace of the Serpent*, than to visit by flying to Colombia's southernmost region. Conversely, the geographic awareness that teachers communicate to schoolchildren in Buenaventura, a port city on the Pacific Coast, or Leticia, the regional capital of Amazonas department, is one that involves a view from the periphery toward the cities of the nation's interior—vastly different in their built environment than what people in faraway provinces or departments would find familiar.[1] Nevertheless, in the present a palpable sense of nation links Colombians to one another. Knit together by a thriving media industry and by mandated school curricula, people know that they live in a large and diverse nation.

Colombians also know that their country boasts stunning natural beauty and a system of national parks. The diversity of climates produced by the country's wide range of altitudes yields rich terrestrial, aquatic, and marine ecosystems: jungles, savannas, deserts, wetlands, and beaches, sometimes a few miles from each other, hold abundant natural resources and thousands of unique animal and plant species. Yet many of these areas have long been largely off-limits for Colombians—remote areas of the country have been sites of gruesome violence, where unmarked graves mark the extent of the country's bloodshed.

Generations of Colombians have lived with this sense that their country holds terrible dangers. For some, that has meant restrictions on their mobility; for others, it has meant that the direct threat of violence has made staying in their homes impossible. At present, more than 5.7 million Colombians—over 15 percent of the country—have been internally displaced by the country's long-standing violence, and almost four hundred thousand have been made refugees beyond the country's borders. The nation has perhaps only recently begun to recognize itself in talk of reparations for victims and for refugees, but conflict in Colombia extends far back into the country's shared memory. Like the United States and Mexico, Colombia experienced devastating mid-nineteenth-century wars, with political consequences that stretched into the twentieth century. Of these, the War of the Thousand Days (La Guerra de los Mil Días), fought between Liberals and Conservatives from 1899 to 1903, was by far the bloodiest. Twenty-five years later, a terrible labor massacre in 1928, in which soldiers sent from the interior opened fire on striking banana workers, generated long years of recriminations. The Masacre de las Bananeras serves as a symbolic historical milestone for many Colombians, and, as with the War of the Thousand Days, diverging interpretations of 1928 colored political life for decades afterward.

The 1940s and 1950s are known by the term "La Violencia," which is used

to describe what amounted to an undeclared war between Liberals and Conservatives. The human cost of La Violencia was enormous, with over 250,000 dead and scores of displaced families. Scholars tend to take the assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948, as the event that triggered twenty years of extreme bipartisan carnage. The two political parties were heterogeneous in their makeup: Conservatives included Catholics sympathetic to a Falangist view of the world as well as those closer to a nineteenth-century kind of aristocratic authoritarianism, while Liberals ranged from anticommunist anglophiles and admirers of the United States' New Deal to socialists of various stripes.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Colombian politics were thoroughly permeated by the divisions of the Cold War, although the country avoided the outright dictatorship seen in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Colombia remained formally democratic, with Liberals and Conservatives trading power in a famous pact called the National Front (el Frente Nacional). La Violencia did not so much end as transform itself. Large sectors of the Colombian population found themselves excluded from formal politics. For some historians, that exclusion is part of why the National Front years saw the formation of the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and the smaller ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), along with a set of still-smaller leftist armies, such as the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril) and the EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación), who together became what Colombians raised in the 1980s and 1990s simply called *la guerrilla*.

But by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the ideological divisions of earlier generations no longer provided much ground for understanding why so much blood was being spilled in Colombia. During the 1980s, it became clear that the violence Colombians lived with was about the drug trade as much as anything else. Paramilitary groups proliferated; later, a set of these right-wing groups joined to become the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia or Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). Financed by mafia leaders and often working in concert with the Colombian military, the *paras*, as they came to be known, declared war on guerrilla groups and their perceived supporters. By the end of the twentieth century, all sides were getting their war chests from the United States, whether as "dirty money" earned in the drug trade or as direct military and police aid, which added up to nearly $7 billion from the US government between 2000 and 2010. Reformists hailing from many different political positions often agreed with an idea expressed by García Márquez: "The Colombian drama is such that, to be exact, it is not possible to imagine that an end will be put to drug-trafficking, without consumption being legalized." Yet international politics

meant that decriminalizing drugs was not something the country could attempt on its own. Only after 2000 did a coalition of Latin American governments emerge to challenge the so-called war on drugs, with Colombian policy makers (and peace negotiators) taking a leading role.

Today, Colombians from different political backgrounds tend to agree that the high profits generated by illegal drugs made the violence of the last three decades exponentially worse. The flow of cocaine northward was met by a flow of arms southward, including pistols and assault rifles made in the United States and smuggled illegally into Colombia. Through the worst years, homicides averaged nine per day, giving Colombia the highest per capita murder rate in the world, in a context where murders were underreported. As evidence has emerged of clandestine cemeteries, especially in rural areas, the scale of such atrocities has become clearer. In Colombia, killings that occurred within the frame of guerrilla and counterinsurgency warfare have included scores of civilians, murdered by military, paramilitary, and guerrilla forces alike. In one egregious set of scandals, signaled by the phrase "false positives," hundreds of young men were killed and their corpses presented by military commanders as evidence that guerrillas had been killed in combat. Yet many deaths continue to be linked in some way to the ongoing competition among drug trafficking organizations—all of them with ties to criminal networks in the cocaine-importing economies of the United States, Europe, and Brazil.

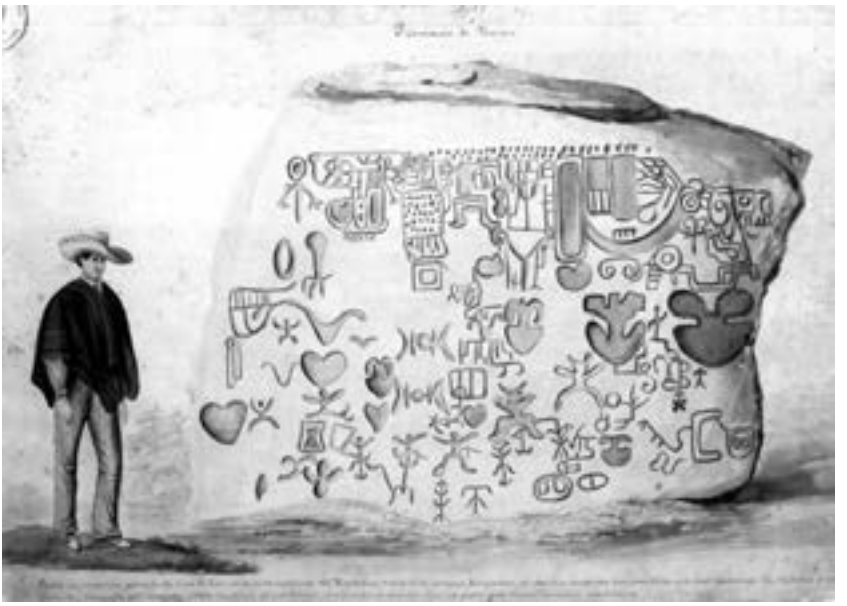
As was true in the nineteenth century and through the 1960s, the conflicts of recent memory have hit the rural poor hardest. Most displaced Colombians are poor, as are most of those conscripted into military service—and the national army depends very heavily on conscription. Paramilitary and guerrilla organizations, too, have long depended on forced recruitment, often of minors. Families in the countryside have been torn apart by paramilitary, military, and guerrilla violence. They have supplied a disproportionate share of the rank-and-file soldiers on all sides of the war—there are few educational opportunities and few jobs in the Colombian countryside. Nor was going to the cities an option that would necessarily benefit campesinos: those who fled to urban areas often lost effective title to their land in the process—decades of war have meant decades of dispossession. And hidden within the statistics on dispossession and displacement are estimates of destruction wrought by land mines: close to ten thousand wounded and two thousand killed over the past twenty-five years. Colombian smallholders who plant and harvest still exist, and wage labor remains a possibility on large ranches and farms that produce food (as well as coffee and flowers) both for the domestic market and for export. But rural earnings are low.

Even the minority of Colombian farmers who have planted coca have failed to find a path out of poverty. Producers of leaf garner none of the high profits that smugglers of the finished product can expect from cocaine.

Like people in the countryside, those in city neighborhoods have suffered from the long decades of violence. Apart from the criminal use of "false positives," people in city neighborhoods have long been familiar with gang violence and the horrible Orwellian language of "social cleansing," used to describe death squads' attacks on homeless individuals, drug users, homosexuals, and prostitutes living in marginal neighborhoods. Colombian cities have also been the site of mafia-led violence: car bombs, explosions, and assassinations of public figures in broad daylight during the 1980s and 1990s have left memories that linger for those who live in Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. Wealthy people and middling landowners living in these and smaller cities have also lived with the risk of kidnapping: for the better part of the last few decades, the country's kidnapping rates have remained the highest in the world.

Colombia has seen multiple attempts at peace talks and judicial mechanisms for amnesty that have generally yielded disappointing results. In 1999–2002, Colombian president Andrés Pastrana Arango attempted formal negotiations with the FARC. The failure of that process created a high level of disillusion, which helped give Pastrana's successor, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, an electoral mandate for the hardline approach that became his trademark. Praising the sacrifices made by military personnel and their families, Uribe convinced a majority of voters that an uncompromising approach toward defeating the FARC would improve their lives. The army went on the offensive, and several FARC leaders were killed in military raids that severely weakened the guerrillas. Parallel to that military push, and embracing slogans such as "Colombia Es Pasión" (Colombia Is Passion), Uribe and his government worked to increase domestic vacationing, international tourism, and foreign investment. Winning the war was conceived as a package that included state services, productivity, and leisure. Uribe's supporters praise his passion and his emphasis on security, and they credit him with "retaking" large swaths of the country.

Uribe remained popular even as evidence mounted that the Colombian Army was colluding with death squads and that he had authorized illegal surveillance and wiretapping by Colombia's DAS, or Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (then Colombia's counterpart to the FBI). Scandals involving politicians from his administration and from political parties that supported Uribe pointed to paramilitary influence in local, regional, and national political offices. Because Uribe's opponents alleged that the presi-



Manuel María Paz, *Piedra del Aipe*, 1857. Watercolor. In the 1850s, Colombia's first geographic commission, the Comisión Corográfica, was charged with describing the nation's natural history, geography, and regional culture. Led initially by Italian cartographer Agustín Codazzi (see part VI), this group of military officers, engineers, scientists, artists, and researchers covered twelve thousand kilometers of difficult terrain, largely aided by anonymous assistants and local guides. Manuel María Paz produced this sketch of petroglyphs in southwestern Colombia, near the headwaters of the Magdalena River. These watercolors represent some of the first efforts to document pre-Columbian petroglyphs. Many such petroglyphs are visible in the present; others have been defaced or are severely deteriorated. In Agustín Codazzi, *Obras completas de la Comisión Corográfica,* vol. 2 (COAMA-Unión Europea, 2005), 218.

dent and those close to him benefited from tight links to paramilitary commanders, the way his administration managed what Colombians called the Law of Justice and Peace (Ley de Justicia y Paz)—a demobilization process that disbanded paramilitary units and allowed their "reinsertion" into Colombian society—was deeply divisive. A legal struggle ensued over whether or not paramilitary actors who had participated in massacres and crimes against humanity would face prosecution in Colombian courts.

Uribe's successor, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, who had been Uribe's defense minister, took attempts at peace in a new direction. Breaking with his former boss, Santos put political capital into negotiating with the FARC and thus pushed Colombia toward the path traced by those countries that

have produced truth commissions, official human rights reports, and systems by which those victimized by all armed groups receive reparations. One important by-product of the negotiations undertaken by the Santos administration was that Colombians as a whole were reminded of the human cost produced by generations of war. Victims' families gained a platform from which to address perpetrators of violence, although what they have come forward to say still tends to fall along the political fault lines that separate Colombians from one another. There is more recognition extended and more participation by victims in public debates, yet assassinations, forced displacement, and death threats against activists pushing for social change remain frequent.

Just how deep the political divide remains was clear in 2016. On September 26, in the port city of Cartagena, the Santos administration and the FARC signed a peace accord, rooted in the 2012 text excerpted in part VII. It had taken six years to negotiate, and the final text was almost three hundred pages long. To go forward, the 2016 accord had to be approved by Colombia's 34 million voters in a historic plebiscite. On October 2 the "yes" option lost by a very slim margin, with former president Uribe positioning himself as a leader for the "no" option. Nevertheless, President Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize only days afterward. What remained unclear after the vote, however, was what the 63 percent of voters who simply did not cast ballots thought about the peace process, the accords, or the plebiscite.

But the Colombian story is not only one of war or of failed attempts at peace. As in past generations, Colombians often insist on this and demand that outsiders focus on the good. Nineteenth-century travelers who wrote about trips to Colombia emphasized the country's backwardness and its supposed lack of entrepreneurial spirit. They bemoaned the discomforts of the river steamers and mule trains that connected Colombian cities. Nevertheless, their writings also demonstrate that local people took them to see colorful markets, beautiful waterfalls, town plazas, and valuable colonial paintings. At the turn of the twentieth century, local boosters were taking better-off travelers to see carefully designed villas, new coffee plantings, perhaps a recently built electrical plant. "Don't show only the bad" became an injunction that would result in a visiting scientist, student, investor, or family member being escorted to view the good. By the 1950s, a well-connected guest might be taken to a fully outfitted country club or an efficient new factory employing thousands of neatly clad workers. In the present, local landscapes of modernity—experienced in terms of "the good"—include gleaming new supermarkets and malls, as well as city-specific markers. Medellín's centrally located Barefoot Park, for example,

served by the city's above-ground Metro, symbolizes the city's comeback, allowing a wide cross-section of rich and poor to splash together in carefully policed abandon. When rich families host travelers, they have recourse to the pricey, landscaped *fincas* that ring Colombia's biggest cities. Those with less money may take visitors along on bus trips to water-based family theme parks or to provincial music festivals. Across the lines that divide them (lines of class, rural vs. urban experience, or whether or not recent violence has resulted in family tragedy), Colombians cherish whatever opportunities they have to enjoy the country's beauty and their own capacity for wholesome fun—both unequivocally components of "the good."

Thus Colombians recognize themselves in images of violence and narratives of victimization, but they also recognize themselves in the modern, consumer-centered world of the nation's cities—a world of art galleries, entertainment events, and well-stocked department stores. Representing Colombia effectively means pushing past the drug-fueled conflicts that have dominated international media reports in recent decades. In assembling a volume that traces five centuries, we have attempted to offer both breadth and depth. Each thematic part includes texts that provide a glimpse of the social structures that shaped the colonial period and the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Readers have the opportunity to hear voices from different generations describe culture and politics in the spaces they recognized as Colombia. These include the mule paths of the Andean highlands, the platinum-rich tributaries of the San Juan, the lowlands of the Pacific Coast, the rubber-producing Amazon, and soccer stadiums all over the world. We have included conquistadors, friars, and ex-slaves who freed themselves by running away—and who revealed little about themselves when recaptured—as well as politicians, entrepreneurs, trade unionists, soldiers, poets, and activists for indigenous rights. Throughout, we have tried to pay tribute to the creativity with which Colombians have endeavored to describe what they see before them in the layered human world of a beautiful country.

Note

1. What were at different times called "provinces" and sometimes "states" in Colombia are now departments. Designations such as "territories," "intendancies," or *comisarías* have also been used at different times for subregions that did not have the political level of departments. Additionally, the city now known as Bogotá was originally called Santa Fe, then Santafé. Because this anthology includes texts from across the centuries, readers can expect to see a variety of terms.