



Beyond Bogotá: Diary of a Drug War Journalist in Colombia

Garry Leech

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Independent journalist Garry Leech has spent the last eight years working in the most remote and dangerous regions of Colombia, uncovering the unofficial stories of people living in conflict zones. *Beyond Bogotá* is framed around the eleven hours that Leech was held captive by the FARC, Colombia's largest leftist guerrilla group, in August of 2006. He recalls nearly thirty years of travel and work in Latin America while weaving in a historical context of the region and on-the-ground reporting with each passing hour of his detention.

More than \$5 billion in U.S. aid over the past seven years has failed to end Colombia's civil conflict or reduce cocaine production. Leech finds that ordinary Colombians, not drug lords, have suffered the most and that peasants and indigenous peoples have been caught in the crossfire between the armed groups. Meanwhile, more than thirty Colombian journalists have been murdered over the last three decades, making Colombia one of the most dangerous countries in which to practice journalism. Consequently, the majority of the Western media rarely leave Bogotá to find the real story. Leech, however, learns the truth about the conflict and the U.S. war on drugs directly from the source: poor coca farmers whose fields and food crops have been sprayed with toxic aerial fumigations, female FARC guerrillas who see armed struggle as their only option, union organizers whose lives are threatened because they defend workers' rights, indigenous peoples whose communities have been forcibly displaced by the violence, and many others.

Leech also investigates the presence of multinational oil and mining companies in Colombia by gaining access to army bases where U.S. soldiers train Colombian troops to fight the guerrillas in resource-rich regions and by visiting local villages to learn what the foreign presence has meant for the vast majority of the population.

Drawing on unprecedented access to soldiers, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and peasants in conflict zones and cocaine-producing areas, Leech's documentary memoir is an epic tale of a journalist's search for meaning in the midst of violence and poverty, as well as a humanizing firsthand account that supplies fresh insights into U.S. foreign policy, the role of the media, and the plight of everyday Colombians caught in the midst of a brutal war.

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