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A Century of Violence in a Red City: Popular Struggle, Counterinsurgency, and Human Rights in Colombia

By Lesley Gill



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In *A Century of Violence in a Red City* Lesley Gill provides insights into broad trends of global capitalist development, class disenfranchisement and dispossession, and the decline of progressive politics. Gill traces the rise and fall of the strong labor unions, neighborhood organizations, and working class of Barrancabermeja, Colombia, from their origins in the 1920s to their effective activism for agrarian reforms, labor rights, and social programs in the 1960s and 1970s. Like much of Colombia, Barrancabermeja came to be dominated by alliances of right-wing politicians, drug traffickers, foreign corporations, and paramilitary groups. These alliances reshaped the geography of power and gave rise to a pernicious form of armed neoliberalism. Their violent incursion into Barrancabermeja's civil society beginning in the 1980s decimated the city's social networks, destabilized life for its residents, and destroyed its working-class organizations. As a result, community leaders are now left clinging to the toothless discourse of human rights, which cannot effectively challenge the status quo. In this stark book, Gill captures the grim reality and precarious future of Barrancabermeja and other places ravaged by neoliberalism and violence.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Lesley Gill's *A Century of Violence in a Red City* reads like a nonfiction version of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Compelling in analysis, empathetic in interpretation, Gill's sweeping narrative of political struggle, social solidarity, and public-private repression in the Colombian city of Barrancabermeja is required reading for anyone hoping to understand Latin America's twentieth- and early twenty-first-century history."

(Greg Grandin, author of *Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman*)

"Lesley Gill's extraordinarily original scholarship and use of interviews and firsthand accounts gives a vivid view of Colombia's contemporary scene. Beautifully written, this book makes a very important contribution to the literature on Colombia and on class and social movements throughout Latin America. There is virtually nothing like *A Century of Violence in a Red City*."

(Aviva Chomsky, author of *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class*)

"Gill weaves together the historical development of the city's power struggles and the devastation and suffering of the city, and boldly looks into the future. She presents a hauntingly honest assessment of past struggles and future opportunities. An invaluable addition to understanding Colombia and its social, political, and class struggles, as well as those of the region and the larger world. . . . Essential. All public and academic levels/libraries."

(A. E. Leykam *Choice* 2016-10-01)

"Gill's book will be a fundamental text for anyone interested in violence, politics, and the state in contemporary Latin America and for those seeking a model for doing and writing historical anthropology at its very finest."

(Daniel M. Goldstein *American Ethnologist* 2016-12-01)

"Lesley Gill never loses sight of her focus on class as her principal analytical category. This is the book's greatest contribution....She stresses the agency and resistance of trade unionists, activists, and city councilors despite relentless and violent political persecution."

(María Clemencia Ramírez *American Anthropologist* 2016-12-01)

About the Author

Lesley Gill is Professor of Anthropology at Vanderbilt University and the author of *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas*, also published by Duke University Press.

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