



The Assassination of Gaitán: Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia

Herbert Braun

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Drawn in part from personal interviews with participants and witnesses, Herbert Braun's analysis of the riot's roots, its patterns and consequences, provides a dramatic account of this historic turning point and an illuminating look at the making of modern Colombia.

Braun's narrative begins in the year 1930 in Bogotá, Colombia, when a generation of Liberals and Conservatives came to power convinced they could keep the peace by being distant, dispassionate, and rational. One of these politicians, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, was different. Seeking to bring about a society of merit, mass participation, and individualism, he exposed the private interests of the reigning politicians and engendered a passionate relationship with his followers. His assassination called forth urban crowds that sought to destroy every visible evidence of public authority of a society they felt no longer had the moral right to exist.

This is a book about behavior in public: how the actors—the political elite, Gaitán, and the crowds—explained and conducted themselves in public, what they said and felt, and what they sought to preserve or destroy, is the evidence on which Braun draws to explain the conflicts contained in Colombian history. The author demonstrates that the political culture that was emerging through these tensions offered the hope of a peaceful transition to a more open, participatory, and democratic society.

“Most Colombians regard Jorge Eliécer Gaitán as a pivotal figure in their nation's history, whose assassination on April 9, 1948 irrevocably changed the course of events in the twentieth century. . . . As biography, social history, and political analysis, Braun's book is a tour de force.”—Jane M. Rausch, *Hispanic American Historical Review*

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