

**Olmedo Gómez Trujillo, Luis Delio Cruz Álvarez,
and Esaúd Urrutia Noel**
La violencia en el centro del Valle del Cauca, 1948-1965
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La violencia en el centro del Valle del Cauca, 1948-1965, authored by Olmedo Gómez Trujillo, Luis Delio Cruz Álvarez, and Esaúd Urrutia Noel, is a two part study. The first part is a review of the political theory and historical details that inform the study. The second, is the heart of the book. Here the authors combine historical methods with interviews to review 120 homicide cases from the Tuluá circuit court between 1948 and 1965. Their review of these cases is intended to bring statistical texture to the understanding of *La violencia* in Valle del Cauca. A number of interesting points emerge from this statistical review: just over 10% of the cases are from 1962; 70% occurred in rural areas; the location of the crime was almost always on the street or in a bar; 95% of victims were men; and the weapon of choice was usually a gun. As the 120 cases were only a fraction of the deaths in the region during *La violencia* there are limitations on the conclusions that can be drawn from this data. For example, violence against women is probably underrepresented.

More interesting than these data is the author's examination of the legal process surrounding cases like these. For example, they examine the legal strategies of peasants fighting to reclaim their land. Those interviewed explained that in such cases, court costs were prohibitive and the threat of violence so endemic that it was better to settle out of court and receive some recompense. Predictably, the lack of justice in areas with a weak state presence contributed to the violence.

The authors place the blame for the cycle of violence squarely on the Colombian state and the inability of the courts to prosecute acts of violence. They conclude:

además de ser muy bajo el índice de procesos concluidos en los juzgados, bien con sentencia (condenatoria o absolutoria) o con sobreseimiento definitivo o temporal, resulta que la inmensa mayoría, un 90% del los casos investigados, acabaron con la prescripción de la acción penal. Es decir, con el reconocimiento oficial del Estado, de su incapacidad para investigarlos y producir un fallo en Derecho. (204)

The authors also argue that the economic and political reforms of the 1930s and 1940s, which opened markets to foreign investment, disrupted the modernization process in Colombia. In the environment of social instability political leaders, business interests, and even social movements took advantage of the poor and advanced their own interests. This last assertion could have benefited from more elaboration. The authors argue that Colombia has a "culture of violence," an approach that has been

criticized from outside observers who argue that there is nothing that distinguishes Colombian violence from other forms of political conflict.

The book reads as a collection of related essays rather than as a single work. This is particularly true of the first section, which includes discussions of state theory, modernization theory, globalization theory, and other abstract theoretical concepts. More useful are the discussions of theories of violence, including a survey of theories that deal with collective motivations. The authors seek to return to "structural theories that locate the origin of violence in the economic system or in state-society relations" (88; my trans.), a welcome contextualizing effort.

The book will be useful to scholars directly working with numbers on *La violencia* or for those seeking related literature. Overall, the diverse academic interests of these authors make for a unique approach to the topic.