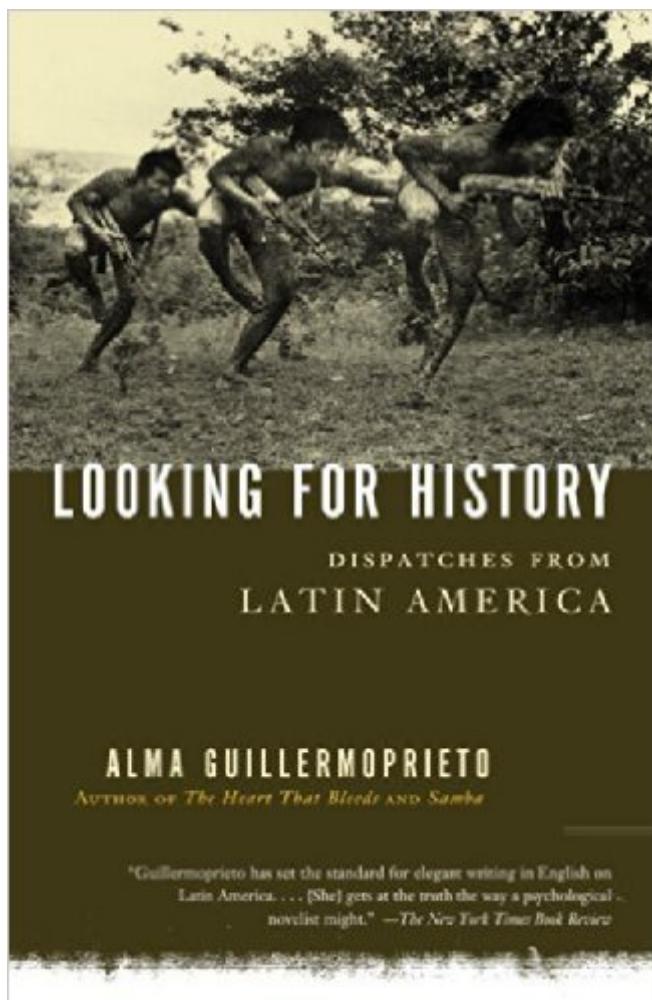


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Looking For History: Dispatches From Latin America



Synopsis

From the esteemed New Yorker correspondent comes an incisive volume of essays and reportage that vividly illuminates Latin America's recent history. Only Alma Guillermoprieto, the most highly regarded writer on the region, could unravel the complex threads of Colombia's cocaine wars or assess the combination of despotism, charm, and political jiu-jitsu that has kept Fidel Castro in power for more than 40 years. And no one else can write with such acumen and sympathy about statesmen and campesinos, leftist revolutionaries and right-wing militias, and political figures from Evita Peron to Mexico's irrepressible president, Vicente Fox. Whether she is following the historic papal visit to Havana or staying awake for a pre-dawn interview with an insomniac Subcomandante Marcos, Guillermoprieto displays both the passion and knowledge of an insider and the perspective of a seasoned analyst. Looking for History is journalism in the finest traditions of Joan Didion, V. S. Naipaul, and Ryszard Kapucinski: observant, empathetic, and beautifully written.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Looking for History" is an enjoyable, vivid collection of articles on Latin America. The piece on Eva Peron is especially fascinating and surreal. Here Guillermoprieto is at her best, writing a very balanced portrait of a near-mythic character. We learn that Eva and Juan Peron were both unlikely superstars and yet somehow, once united, became a political and media tag-team powerhouse. We also learn that the story of Eva's corpse is perhaps more interesting, and certainly more bizarre, than her real life. Stuffed by a taxidermist, her body traveled across the Atlantic several times -- at

one point collecting dust in an attic -- before being laid to rest in Buenos Aires decades after her death. Guillermoprieto does not report new facts here. Anyone who has read a good biography on Evita will already know the lurid details surrounding the corpse. But Guillermoprieto handles this material so well that it reads better than a Borges story. Indeed, she seems to know that any good telling of Latin America, whether factual or fictional, must include some dimension of absurdity. Some of the strongest articles in "Looking for History" are on Colombia's civil war. She details how the FARC, the country's largest guerilla group, went from a ragtag team of 200 Marxist fighters to a revolutionary army that now has some 17,000 troops. She also goes into the background of Colombia's rightwing death squads, particularly the AUC, and shows how these paramilitary units actually feed off of the rebels. She mentions, for example, that one-third of the AUC's members are actually fighters plucked from the guerilla groups. Many of these converts are former hostages of the AUC, who have even been viciously tortured and beaten by the paramilitaries.

In a collection of seventeen articles focusing on six Latin American countries (Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, and Cuba), New York Times journalist Ana Guillermoprieto serves up a highly literate and gracefully scripted collage of Latin America today. The limited selection of countries and issues should not detract from the value of this book in understanding the region as a whole, for each of the sets of articles offers some broader insight beyond just the personalities or countries described. The author artfully combines first-hand interviews and reportage from the region with research and masterfully chosen extracts from other important books on this region. Her concise piece on Eva Peron is illustrative of her incisiveness and left me better informed than other sources on this somewhat mystifying subject (see, for example, *Evita: An Intimate Portrait of Eva Peron*, which I have also reviewed on this website.). By ably reviewing the literature and carefully distinguishing between fact, hearsay, and speculation, the author unravels some mysteries surrounding this QUOTE bland and to all appearances untalented girl, born illegitimate and on a ranch...possessed of an unreconstructed working-class accent and an unfailing gauche manner..in a country where upper-class snobbery reaches extremes of refinement and viciousness UNQUOTEI also enjoyed an excellent piece on Peruvian writer turned presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa whose biographical sketch the author weaves into a broader portrait of Peruvian politics and society in the 1990s. The pieces on Colombia, Mexico, and Cuba may seem dated at first glance, but in fact provide penetrating insights into the Zapatistas, Colombia's civil strife, and Castro.

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