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Author(s): Norman A. Bailey

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NORMAN A. BAILEY  
Department of Political Science  
Queens College of the City University of New York

## *LA VIOLENCIA* IN COLOMBIA\*

**F**OR THE PAST TWENTY YEARS the South American republic of Colombia has suffered from a social phenomenon of such magnitude that it has defied not only the contemporary jargon of sociologists and political scientists but even the time-honored terminology of insurrection, rebellion, riot and revolution. Perhaps because the only element of this phenomenon that all observers can agree upon is the fact that it is and has been eminently violent, it has come to be called simply "*la violencia*," or "The Violence."

The phenomenon known as *la violencia* never has been completely absent from Colombia since 1946, but it has had two periods of particular virulence, the first between 1948 and 1953 affecting the departments of Tolima, Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Antioquia, Valle, Caldas, Cauca, Santander del Sur, Arauca, Huila, Chocó, Caquetá, Meta, Casanare, Vichada and Bolívar, that is, the entire country with the exception of parts of the Atlantic coast and the southernmost department of Nariño. The second period of increased violence, between 1954 and 1958, was considerably more circumscribed, affecting only the departments of Caldas, Valle, Antioquia, Cundinamarca, Tolima, Huila and Cauca, and where the violence still continues it is found within these regions, which, it might be noted, represent the heartland of Colombia.

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\* This paper was delivered as the closing address of the Twelfth Annual Meetings of the Pacific Coast Council on Latin America, at San Fernando Valley State College, Northridge, California, October 20-22, 1966. The field research was done in Colombia during 1963, on a Social Science Research Council grant.

Any kind of exact statistical measurement of *la violencia* is impossible for the simple reason that in many areas records were not kept at all and in most others what records exist are very incomplete. There is a simple and good reason for this—much of *la violencia* was perpetrated by those who were supposed to be keeping the records, and much of the rest by those interested in destroying the record-keepers. Certain estimates can be made, however, and they lead to the astounding conclusion that some 200,000 Colombians have been brutally murdered over the past twenty years in what was not even an openly-declared rebellion or civil war. This number is greater than the total Western casualties, including South Korean, in the Korean War.<sup>1</sup> As to the number of injured, if we assume that the proportion of injured to dead was less than that common in organized warfare, and adopt the modest figure of three-to-one, we find some 600,000 injured, many among the hundreds of thousands of Colombians who fled their homes to seek safety in the cities and towns, in unaffected rural areas, or in Venezuela. In short, we can very modestly assume, if we include the populations of cities which experienced mass violence during the same period, that at least twenty per cent of the total Colombian population was directly affected by *la violencia* between 1946 and 1966.

The one department of Colombia where fairly complete statistics on *la violencia* were kept is Tolima, and in that relatively small region, between 1946 and 1958, 1,993 families left the department (perhaps 8,000 people), 34,730 farms were abandoned and 970,000,000 pesos worth of property was destroyed (about 400-500 million dollars).<sup>2</sup>

Yet all of this could have happened, and yet still not have been given the name of "The Violence," perhaps, had it not been for the almost incredible ferocity with which most of the killings, maimings and dismemberings were done. Certain techniques of death and torture became so common and widespread that they were given names, such as "*picar para tamal*", which consisted of cutting up the body of the living victim into small pieces, bit by bit. Or "*bocachiquiar*", a process which involved making hundreds of small body punctures from which the victim slowly bled to death. Ingenious forms of quartering and beheading were invented and given such names as the "*corte de mica*", "*corte*

<sup>1</sup> Mons. Germán Guzmán, Orlando Fals Borda and Eduardo Umaña Luna, *La violencia en Colombia*, 2 vols. (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1962 & 1964), vol. I, ch. XI and vol. II, Part III, chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Guzmán, *et. al.*, *La violencia*, I, 293-94. See also Departamento del Tolima, Secretaría de Agricultura, *La violencia en el Tolima* (Ibagué: Imprenta Departamental, 1958).

*de franela*", "corte de corbata", and so on. Crucifixions and hangings were commonplace, political "prisoners" were thrown from airplanes in flight, infants were bayoneted, schoolchildren, some as young as eight years old, were raped *en masse*, unborn infants were removed by crude Caesarian section and replaced by roosters, ears were cut off, scalps removed, and so on. The purpose of this recital is to indicate that we are dealing here with a phenomenon of unparalleled ferocity in modern times, insofar as movements at least to some extent spontaneous are concerned.

Perhaps the most curious fact about *la violencia*, however, is the almost total puzzlement, both inside and outside Colombia, as to why it occurred, why it developed as it did, and, particularly, why it became so utterly bestial. Explanations are not lacking, and later we will examine some that have been put forward, but the community of social investigators, never backward in proposing explanations for social dilemmas, has totally failed to come up with a convincing explanation for *la violencia* in Colombia.

Perhaps the extent of this puzzlement can be most graphically demonstrated by quoting two Colombian commentators. Msgr. Germán Guzmán, who along with Orlando Fals Borda and Eduardo Umaña Luna wrote the most complete and penetrating work on The Violence (*La violencia en Colombia*), after examining and rejecting several possible correlations, expressed it this way: "We have seen that the violence, as a social phenomenon, did not respect race or economic status, and that it took place in regions of minifundia and of latifundia, among the prosperous and the miserable, in desert and plain, in burning valley and Andean crags."<sup>3</sup> And Luis López de Mesa, an astute commentator, wrote in *El Tiempo* in 1962: ". . . all the nations of the earth have shown cruelty as horrible and destructive as ours . . . . But I find in our ethical situation an element and a refinement of horror unknown in the world, because the cruelty was applied, not to adversaries or possible rivals, but to brothers, equal in situation, or even more humble and innocent."<sup>4</sup>

In attempting a tentative explanation of *la violencia* it will be useful to review briefly Colombian history, especially since 1930, and then to characterize the various stages through which the violence passed, without falling into the error of thinking that by categorizing,

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<sup>3</sup> Guzmán, *et. al.*, *La violencia*, I, 139.

<sup>4</sup> Edition of September 30, 1962.

we have explained.<sup>5</sup>

It should perhaps first be noted that violence is nothing new, recent, or unusual in Colombian politics. When the rebellion of the "comuneros" against the reduction of the rights of the free towns was put down by the Spanish authorities in 1781, the heads and quartered bodies of the principal leaders of the rebellion were exposed on pikes along the highways until they rotted off. Continuous civil strife took place in the nineteenth century between the "ins," who tried to consolidate and perpetuate their position, often by physically eliminating the opposition, and the "outs," who almost uniformly refused to accept their position peacefully and work through constitutional norms. In 1876, for example, an especially bloody civil war raged for eleven months, with the Conservatives whipping up the religious fervor of the peasantry to create the atmosphere of a holy war against the Liberal government. It is not known exactly how many died in the civil war of 1876, but 20,000 is a reasonable figure, which, given the population of Colombia at that time, represents considerable carnage. The war of 1876 resembled *la violencia* in geographic extent and bloody cost of the fighting, but differed from it in being an organized civil war with specific objectives and elite leadership and with most of the casualties among the combatants.

Periodically, when the political situation became too anarchic, the two great contending political parties would join to form a government of "national unity." Soon the elements of both parties in the government, however, would be opposed, often violently, by elements of both parties out of the government, and the struggle would begin again. Colombia is currently in the latest of such periods of national unity, and this is only one of the many continuities of Colombian political history that we shall discover, along with certain unique aspects introduced by *la violencia*.

Some commentators date *la violencia* from 1930, the year the Liberals came to power by means of a free and honest election, after a period of Conservative dominance.<sup>6</sup> The Conservatives turned power over to the Liberals without protest or uprising, and in many parts of

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<sup>5</sup> For general background on the modern period, see Germán Arciniegas, *The State of Latin America* (1952); Vernon Lee Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions* (1957); John D. Martz, *Colombia* (1962); Luis López de Mesa, *Escrutinio sociológico de la historia colombiana* (1955), and Eduardo Santa, *Sociología política de Colombia* (1955).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Belisario Betancur, *Colombia cara a cara* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1961) and Laureano Gómez, *Comentarios a un régimen* (Bogotá: Editorial Minerva, 3rd ed., 1934).

the country were greeted, in turn, by the triumphant Liberals with massacre, assassination, destruction of property and burning of churches, especially in the two Santanderes and in Boyacá. The essentially moderate coalition government of Liberal Enrique Olaya Herrera did everything in its power to suppress the outbreaks and punish the perpetrators, but the episode left scars which were easily reopened in 1946. Despite similarities to the later *violencia*, however, that phenomenon cannot properly be dated from 1930, because the outbreaks then were largely confined to a single year and did not differ importantly from many similar outbursts of politico-religious hatred in previous Colombian history.

For sixteen years Colombia was governed by the Liberal party, through the two administrations of reformist Alfonso López and the moderate administrations of Olaya Herrera and Eduardo Santos. By 1946, however, the party was hopelessly split between its moderate and reformist wings, and presented two mutually-hostile candidates in the elections of that year, allowing the Conservative candidate, Mariano Ospina Pérez, to win with a minority of the votes cast. The pattern of 1930 was repeated, in reverse, and the triumphant Conservatives in many parts of Colombia paid back their Liberal neighbors with accrued interest, despite Ospina Pérez' vigorous efforts to prevent bloodshed. Unlike that of 1930, however, the violence did not die down after a few months but continued to grow, exceeding anything in previous Colombian history in scope, brutality and duration.

Mariano Ospina Pérez governed in an atmosphere of ever-increasing anarchy until 1950, giving way to Laureano Gómez, intransigent leader of the Conservative party, who won an uncontested election and proceeded to establish a civilian dictatorship along Falangist lines. Ceding the presidency to Roberto Urdaneta Arbeláez because of illness, Gómez later resumed it, only to be overthrown by a military coup led by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla in 1953. Initial hopes for a restoration of national sanity and a general amnesty led to a considerable diminution of *la violencia*, but Rojas soon proved himself an inept politician and a hopeless administrator. Aping Perón, he wasted Colombia's substance on showy projects and meaningless social welfare programs precisely at the time when high coffee prices should have allowed the country to spurt economically. Colombia is still trying to recover from his four years of mismanagement, as Argentina has not yet recovered from ten years of Perón.

In 1957 the leaders of liberalism and conservatism combined to

overthrow Rojas and restore party hegemony in Colombia in the latest of the periods of "national unity," the so-called "alternation" supposed to last sixteen years, with two Liberal and two Conservative Presidents and with all administrative posts equally divided between the two parties. Liberal Alberto Lleras Camargo was the first president under alternation, followed by Conservative Guillermo León Valencia and Liberal Carlos Lleras Restrepo. Through all these administrations, Liberal and Conservative, through constitutional government, civilian dictatorship, military dictatorship and alternation, *la violencia* has waxed and waned, but for twenty years never has entirely left Colombia.

For convenience of analysis the stages of development of *la violencia* can be divided into four periods: The Political Stage, 1946 to 1953; the Unstructured Stage, 1953-1955; the Economic Stage, 1955-1960, and the Ideological-Economic Stage, 1960 to the present. It must be strongly emphasized that these periods are not airtight. They overlap each other extensively, both in time and in character.

Both Liberals and Conservatives are to blame for the inception of *la violencia* in 1946. Not only did the victorious Conservatives indulge in attacks on Liberals, but in many areas the Liberals, who after sixteen years of power dominated the bureaucracy and the departmental and local governments, often refused to accept the legally elected although minority Conservative president and resorted to armed resistance to the Conservative assumption of power. In reply the Conservatives began to politicize the police and the armed forces, replacing Liberal officers and recruits wherever possible with Conservatives, and then using the forces of public order as partisan political instruments. In reply the Liberals began to form organized guerrilla bands to harass the authorities, increasingly Conservative-dominated, and the Conservatives in turn strengthened their hold on the police and the army and began the formation of counter-guerrilla bands made up of fanatical Conservative peasants, whipped to a religious frenzy.<sup>7</sup> Outnumbered in the countryside, the Liberals, through the former Presidential candidate of the radical wing, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, now sole leader of the party, began to act demagogically upon the urban masses, particularly in the Liberal strongholds of Bogotá and Cali. In April 1948 Gaitán was assassinated on a Bogotá street, and for two days Bogotá was in the hands of a looting, killing, raping, leaderless mob, which destroyed

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<sup>7</sup> See Guzmán, *et al.*, *La violencia*, II, Part I; Eduardo Franco Isaza, *Las guerrillas del llano* (Bogotá: Distribuidores Librería Mundial, 1959); Gustavo Sierra Ochoa, *Las guerrillas en los llanos orientales* (Manizales, 1954), and Testis Fidelis, *El basilisco en acción o los crímenes del bandolerismo* (Medellín: Tipografía Olympia, 2nd ed., 1953).

Conservative headquarters, Conservative newspapers and the homes of Conservative leaders.<sup>8</sup> In Cali a similar outbreak was better organized and the city was briefly in the hands of an insurrectionary directorate, but the rebellion eventually was put down by the army with considerable bloodshed in both cities, all the police having gone over to the insurgents. (As a result, the urban and rural police were reorganized entirely, making them almost totally Conservative.) In the light of the events of 1948, as well as less spectacular attacks before and since that year, it is difficult to understand how various commentators, among them Msgr. Guzmán, can say that *la violencia* was a completely rural phenomenon.

Responsibility for the death of Gaitán has not been determined, and Ospina Pérez is almost certainly not responsible. In the light of the later attempt on the part of the police to assassinate Gaitán's successor, Darío Echandía, it is quite conceivable that Conservative party officials, with or without the knowledge or urging of Laureano Gómez, convinced the fanatically religious half-wit who perpetrated the crime that Gaitán represented the anti-Christ and had to be exterminated.

Whatever the truth of the matter may be, the *bogotazo* signalled an intensification of *la violencia*, with the guerrilla bands growing in size and ferocity and the government strengthening repressive measures, gaining in brutality if not in effectiveness. *La violencia* spread throughout practically the entire country. The third phase of *la violencia* was foreshadowed in the first however, when the various contending bands, to finance their activities, began to resort to extortion, pillage, expropriation and the forced sale of crops.

When Rojas Pinilla came to power in 1953, he declared a general amnesty for all guerrillas who surrendered to government forces with their arms. Thousands of guerrillas did so, and between 1953 and 1955 *la violencia* gradually changed character, transforming itself largely from political to economic in motivation and from guerrilla to bandit in character. As a result of this transformation, the area of *la violencia* became circumscribed, as mentioned earlier, to precisely those regions where agrarian extortion and expropriation could be most easily and profitably practiced. Nevertheless, it was in this "unstructured" phase also, that the widely-known "soviet republics" were formed, most notably Sumapaz and Marquetalia, areas governed by the rebellious peasants

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<sup>8</sup> Gonzalo Canal Ramírez, *Nueve de abril 1948* (Bogotá: Editorial Cahur, 1948). See also Abraham T. Osorio, *¿Por qué mataron a Gaitán?* (Bogotá: Editorial Minerva, 2nd ed., 1949).



themselves, into which government forces and officials penetrated only at peril of their lives. Despite their name, the soviet republics were at their inception communistically oriented only in the primitive meaning of the term.<sup>9</sup>

By 1955, with the exception of the soviet republics, *la violencia* was entirely in the hands of a highly-organized, institutionalized consortium of rural bandits and urban gangsters, often in league with corrupt public officials and professionals. These gangster-bandits, or “*pájaros*”, assured official compliance, if not cooperation, through the threat of assassination, a threat often carried out. They sometimes operated through simple extortion of wealthy urban and rural elements under pain of death. More commonly they demanded a portion of the crops, or imposed their own men as overseers of estates, refusing access to the owners, selling the crops to urban accomplices and taking whatever portion of the proceeds they deemed appropriate. At that time *la violencia* began to demonstrate a seasonal pattern, rising in intensity at harvest time. Coffee was, of course, the crop most heavily affected, but sugar, cotton and cacao also were harvested and sold under duress. Sometimes owners were forced to sell their properties for ridiculous prices under threat of death. Msgr. Guzmán notes the forced sale of ten estates in Caldas with a tax valuation of 1,558,000 pesos, sold for 482,550 pesos.<sup>10</sup>

In 1960 a new phase of *la violencia* began. While economic banditry continued, Castro-influenced groups of Communists and Jacobin leftists began to infiltrate both the soviet republics and the bandit gangs, hoping to ideologize them and turn them into a “Liberation Army” for a Castro-style overthrow of the Colombian government.<sup>11</sup> The Communists were, of course, involved in *la violencia* from the beginning. A guerrilla training school had existed in Viotá, department of Cundinamarca, for some time, and in 1952 the Communists had called a “Conference of Boyacá” of the principal guerrilla chiefs. Communist participation in the *bogotazo* once it began has been firmly established. Until the 1960’s Communist attempts to control and direct *la violencia* were remarkably unsuccessful, however, perhaps because they were

9 Orlando Fals Borda, *Campesinos de los Andes* (Bogotá: Editorial Iqueima, 1961) and Euclides Jaramillo Arango, *Un campesino sin regreso* (Medellín: Editorial Bedout, 1959).

10 Guzmán, *et. al*, *La violencia I*, 276

11 Comité Central del Partido Comunista en Colombia, *Treinta años de lucha del partido comunista en Colombia* (Bogotá: Ediciones Paz y Socialismo, 1960). See also José María Nieto Rojas, *La batalla contra el comunismo en Colombia* (Bogotá: Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones, 1956).

directed by the old-line, colorless party hacks who had been in charge of Colombian communism from the beginning.

Following 1960, however, the various Communist and Jacobin groups succeeded in ideologizing the soviet republics and turning them into Castroite strongholds. The Communists had less success with the bandit groups, but some of the leaders were converted and imposed their new "religion" on their followers, without ceasing their economic depredations.

The gangster activities continue, complete with ambulances and rest homes for the bandits, who have discovered a new game, kidnapping for ransom. Some also claim to be making, on the side as it were, a Castro-Communist revolution. The scope of the activities of these bandits has been substantially reduced, but the complete eradication of well-entrenched bandit-criminals in a nation such as Colombia, where large segments of officialdom are both inefficient and venal, is very difficult. The soviet republics, however, have been destroyed by the Colombian military, trained in anti-guerrilla techniques by the United States at Fort Gulick in the Canal Zone.

We have reached the point where we can examine some of the explanations advanced for the phenomenon of *la violencia* in Colombia. We may reject rather quickly the partisan political explanations unfortunately still so common in Colombia.<sup>12</sup> Both the Liberal and the Conservative parties share the blame for the inception of *la violencia*, and once it began both parties escalated the conflict and eventually both agreed to try to end it. In the meantime most splinter groups were in one way or another trying to exacerbate, direct or take advantage of the conflict. There are many honorable individual exceptions to the foregoing statement, but in general, responsibility for *la violencia* rests with all major political groups.

The Marxists have had a terrible time with *la violencia*, not only practically, as we have seen, but also theoretically. Finally, by twisting the facts so they are barely recognizable, the Marxists have decided *la violencia* represents the rebellion of the downtrodden masses against the oligarchs—in other words, the class struggle.<sup>13</sup> But we have seen that one of the most startling aspects of *la violencia* is precisely that it was not undertaken nor did it continue on any basis of one social or

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<sup>12</sup> See Testis Fidelis, *El basilisco*, Belisario Betancur, *Colombia cara a cara* and others.

<sup>13</sup> See Comité Central del Partido Comunista, *Treinta años de lucha*, mentioned in note 11.

economic class against another, or even of certain economic groups against others on the basis of a common economic interest. Poor peasants killed poor peasants, the more prosperous killed their like, the urban workers killed each other indiscriminately and the rural bourgeoisie engaged in fratricide. Killing took place all up and down the social scale, from the élite to the most miserable, without economic discrimination between attacker and victim.

There are two interrelated psychological-sexual or Freudian theories that have been advanced to explain *la violencia*.<sup>14</sup> They are both based on the high incidence of sexual crime found in Colombia and connected directly or indirectly with other manifestations of *la violencia*. One is that generations of sexual frustration and guilt fostered by fanatical Catholic belief, especially in the rural areas, found a political excuse for outlet and ran amok. The other, based on the guerrilla-bandit principle of "*no dejar ni la semilla*," posits a death wish on the part of the entire Colombian population. These theories overlook the fact that sexual excess accompanies conditions of semi-anarchy wherever and whenever found. As to the "death-wish," an application of Occam's razor will indicate that simpler explanations can be found for wishing to exterminate not merely a political opponent raised to the status of a devil, but his entire family as well.

Msgr. Guzmán and his associates seem genuinely puzzled about why the violence developed as it did. In addition to making the curious assertion that *la violencia* was confined to rural areas while recounting many examples of urban violence (there was even a Conservative counter-*bogotazo* in 1952, with Liberal headquarters, Liberal newspapers and the homes of Liberal leaders destroyed), and then drawing various conclusions from this highly questionable premise, the authors of this otherwise admirable work can do no better than to conclude that *la violencia* was caused by an accumulation of dysfunctions in various social subsystems in Colombia, such as the political, bureaucratic, agrarian, judicial, religious, sexual, law-enforcement, and family.<sup>15</sup> But this is practically tautological, akin to saying that a person became ill because his body did not function properly.

To my mind the most provocative theory advanced to explain the phenomenon of *la violencia* is that of the distinguished Colombian commentator and Professor of Cultural and Economic History at the

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Horacio Gómez Aristizábal, *Teoría Gorgona* (Bogotá: Editorial Iqueima, 1962).

<sup>15</sup> Guzmán, *et. al*, *La violencia* I, ch. XIII.

National University, Fernando Guillén Martínez, in his brilliant volume *Raíz y futuro de la revolución*.<sup>16</sup> It is Guillén's thesis that *la violencia* was the culmination of the increasing frustration felt by all strata of Colombian society (except the party directors) at the progressive depluralization of the Colombian social system, beginning with the revolt of the *comuneros* in colonial times and continuing through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, impelled by an alliance of land-owners and bureaucrats, creating a closed system with only two channels wholly dependent upon the paternalistic favor of the party leaders. To quote Guillén: "This demon, that contemporary history knows as 'the violence,' is the last and most sinister flowering of the social deformations that arose more than two centuries ago in the Ibero-American soul in contact with the bureaucratic despotism engendered by Spanish society as a substitute for the freedom of the genuine *hidalgo* and of the free towns."<sup>17</sup>

My own analysis owes something to Guillén's formulation, which explains quite satisfactorily the diffusion in every respect of *la violencia* after its initial period. There is undoubtedly an element of truth in all the various theories. Both political parties are to blame for initiation of the violence. Elements of class hatred were certainly not absent in the *bogotazo* or in the formation and development of the soviet republics. The North American "liberal" theory, used to explain every upheaval in Latin America of whatever type, namely that of the democratically-inclined people straining to throw off the yoke of the grasping, horny-handed oligarchy, also may have an element of truth, especially in the areas of latifundia. There is undoubtedly great sexual tension in large areas of Colombian society and the assertion of "*machismo*" was certainly not absent in the psychological makeup of many bandits and guerrillas. *La violencia* undoubtedly was the result of a series of social dysfunctions and it is eminently true that many of the more peculiar manifestations of it, such as the "*boleteo*" and the leaving of a photograph of the bandit chief and his band on the bodies of their dead victims, indicate a pathological desire to assert the existence of the self in the face of an obliterating social system.

In attempting our own formulation of the causes and development of *la violencia* in Colombia, it should be kept in mind that a unitary early phase developed into two quite divergent lines, and that the early

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<sup>16</sup> Fernando Guillén Martínez, *Raíz y futuro de la revolución* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1963).

<sup>17</sup> Guillén Martínez, *Raíz y futuro*, p. 185.

phase and one of the later developments are quite easy to explain without indulging in exotic theorizing.

The Colombian peasantry, which for most of the life of the country has made up the vast majority of the population, has, unlike many other Latin American nations, always been involved in the political process, both of violent and of peaceful political change. The involvement of the peasantry in elections, for instance, was not the mere herding to the polls of mindless serfs found elsewhere in Latin America, but a meaningful participation, because of the incidence of minifundism and of moderate-size farms in Colombia. As a result, both political parties attempted to instill in this peasant mass a fanatic loyalty to the party, so its votes could be counted upon in elections and its bodies in times of civil strife. In this contest the Conservatives also made use of their ties to the Catholic Church to create in their rural followers a confusion between party and religion, leading to a messianistic-millenarian element in their activities. This politicized peasant mass then found its only security in fanatical adherence to a political party and its leaders. To quote Guillén again: "The civil wars of the nineteenth century contributed, more than anything else, to the dysfunction of peasant life, to the destruction of the social, moral and economic importance of the smaller urban centers and to the conversion of the majority of the population into fanatic bands, whose only hope of survival consisted in vanquishing the enemy on the national scale, imposing the domination of one 'party' over the other."<sup>18</sup>

*La violencia* began in 1946, then, as a typical effort of the new "outs" to get back in by force, coupled with an equally violent effort of the "ins" to consolidate their newly-won positions, so unexpectedly gained. The party directorates on both sides ". . . took advantage of the sensation of alienation and defenselessness of all Colombians (especially peasants) when they do not second, irrationally and fanatically, all the directives imparted in rigorous order from the national level down through local bosses to estate overseers."<sup>19</sup> The conflict begun in 1946 was particularly convulsive because of the conviction on the part of the Liberals that they had been cheated of the spoils of office that were rightfully theirs, coupled with the almost pathological terror of the Conservatives at the changes taking place in Colombian society and which they feared might place them in a permanent minority position unless they could do something about it, even including physical

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<sup>18</sup> Guillén Martínez, *Raíz y futuro*, pp. 179-180.

<sup>19</sup> Guillén Martínez, *Raíz y futuro*, p. 187.

extermination of part of the opposition, if necessary.

Because of modern means of material and ideological communication, and because of its exceptional bitterness, this typical Colombian conflict situation got out of hand and beyond the control of the political manipulators, developing, in the post-1955 period, into economic gangsterism on the one hand, and into genuine peasant protest movements on the other, no longer tied to any particular party. Again I think that economic gangsterism requires no particularly complex explanation. Greed and the willingness to expropriate the fruit of another's property or labor are common enough elements of human nature.

It is in the peasant rebellion, once it became divorced from partisan politics, that the social investigator finds interest in *la violencia* in Colombia. Paradoxically, the very democratic forms trumpeted abroad by the Colombians themselves and various gullible foreign commentators contributed to *la violencia*—the peasant mass had, over a century and a half, been drawn into a political struggle, with which they identified strongly and even viciously, but which was in fact completely irrelevant as far as their interests as a group were concerned.

As the party directorates became more centralized, and the governmental machinery increasingly bureaucratized, local institutions and associational groups became increasingly drained of meaningful content and function in the social structure. Thus the individual peasant (and his first cousin, the industrial worker, drawn, usually quite recently, from the rural mass) became increasingly the object, but not the subject, of political manipulation from the center, effecting violent and peaceful political change almost as an automaton or puppet. When traditional political violence broke its normal bounds, he asserted his individuality by first slaughtering his brothers and then, when the frenzy wore off and the political tie was broken, by reverting to a simpler social structure whose forms he could understand and control. Unfortunately he still, apparently, felt the need for a justification of his acts from the "*doctores*", and the Fidelistas got to him before anyone else, leading to the armed destruction of these exceedingly interesting social phenomena.

To sum up this analysis we may say, paradoxical though the terminology may seem, that a segment of the Colombian peasantry, after a period of dysfunctional bloody political strife, proceeded to make a dysfunctional revolution, dysfunctional because misdirected and divorced from the reality of Colombia in the twentieth century.

We may conclude with a series of observations that have come to mind as a result of a study of *la violencia* in Colombia. The first is that

it is a local phenomenon, with local causes and local effects. In support of this statement it may be noted that there was no spill-over into Venezuela, despite violence in border areas and the actual movement of refugees, and the fact that certain isolated areas of Colombia itself were not affected. Colombia, over the decades of its history, sowed a fertile field of *hidalguía*, intolerance, economic and social rigidity, religious strife, bureaucratic preference and privilege, mercantilism, the Mediterranean ethic and the "new feudalism" of paternalistic industrialization, and it reaped *la violencia*.

The second observation concerns the vulnerability of a semi-closed, semi-mercantilist, highly bureaucratized society such as that of Colombia to organized, institutionalized gangsterism. This form of *la violencia* still continues and its elimination is not in sight.

There are lessons also in the effectiveness of anti-guerrilla training for government forces. The experience in Colombia, coupled with that in Peru, Argentina, Venezuela and elsewhere, would seem to indicate that where such training is imparted to a relatively large, well-equipped, and technocratic professional army it can prove to be quite effective in combatting guerrilla movements. In small, poorly-trained and venal armed bodies, however, such as those of Guatemala and the Dominican Republic, the value of such training probably will be minimal. Thus it is unlikely, for example, that any amount of training at Fort Gulick would have made the pre-Castro Cuban army an effective anti-guerrilla force.

Another observation inspired by *la violencia* in Colombia that has universal application is that when the peasantry is politicized, the results are difficult to predict and likely to be violent. This is true whether the cause is traditionalist, as with the *Jacquerie* in fourteenth century France, Pugachev and his followers in eighteenth century Russia, the Spanish Peninsular War, or Yemen today; economic, as with the peasant uprisings in Germany in the Middle Ages; millenarian, as with the Taiping rebellion in nineteenth century Manchu China; religious-ethnic, as in Cyprus today; or tribal-ethnic, as in Nigeria, the Congo and elsewhere. The elite in a traditional society that awakens its peasantry to political consciousness is opening a Pandora's Box. Even when the politicization is carried out peacefully and has only peaceful manifestations, it may be that it is so only because certain steps which would lead to bloody rebellion have been precluded from political consideration. Adnan Menderes awakened the Turkish peasants to political life by buying their votes through governmental subsidies, and now no government can eliminate those subsidies, no matter how economically damaging, except

at the risk of civil war.

Latin America provides certain examples of the phenomenon of the politicization of the peasantry, and the results have been instructive. In Colombia, unchanneled and ineffectively quashed, it led to *la violencia*. In Mexico and Cuba “revolutionary” regimes, having used the peasants in gaining power, have killed their leaders and now make special efforts to keep the peasantry apolitical. This may to some extent explain their relative stability. In Venezuela the peasantry of the western portion of the country (bordering Colombia) has traditionally been involved in the political process, but has always, through the military or otherwise, had access to political power, and more recently has adhered to the successful Acción Democrática party. In Bolivia the peasantry was politicized and armed after 1952, has organized and institutionalized its power, and is recognized as a powerful pressure group and given respect as such.

*La violencia* has had many effects on Colombian life—social, economic, and political. For decades class warfare was avoided in Colombia and replaced by partisan political warfare. But *la violencia* weakened party ties, in the masses and among the élite, and awakened class consciousness. What new alignment will emerge is difficult to predict, partially because the lid has been precariously clamped on again by the traditional party hierarchs. But *la violencia* has brought new groups into the political process such as the business community, and has transformed the political involvement of the peasantry. If *la violencia* in Colombia has done nothing else, it has assured that Colombia’s political future will not be a repetition of Colombia’s political past.