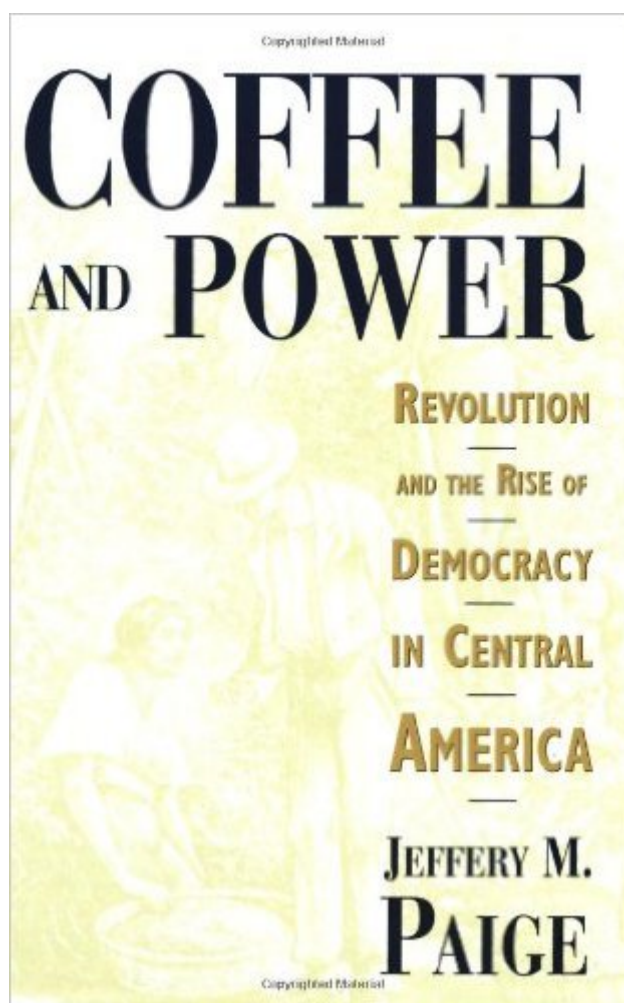


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# Coffee And Power: Revolution And The Rise Of Democracy In Central America



## Synopsis

In the revolutionary decade between 1979 and 1992, it would have been difficult to find three political systems as different as death-squad-dominated El Salvador, peaceful social-democratic Costa Rica, and revolutionary Sandinista Nicaragua. Yet when the fighting was finally ended by a peace plan initiated by Costa Rica's President Oscar Arias, all three had found a common destination in democracy and free markets. To explain this extraordinary turn of events is the task of this landmark book, which fuses political economy and cultural analysis. Both the divergent political histories and their convergent outcome were shaped by a single commodity that has dominated these export economies from the nineteenth century to the present--coffee. Jeffery Paige shows that the crises of the 1980s had their roots in the economic and political crises of the 1930s, when the revolutionary left challenged the ruling coffee elites of all three countries. He interweaves and compares the history, economics, and class structures of the three countries, thus clarifying the course of recent struggles. The heart of the book is his conversations with sixty-two leaders of fifty-eight elite dynasties, who for the first time tell their own stories of the experience of Central American revolution. Paige's analysis challenges not only Barrington Moore's influential theory of dictatorship and democracy but also contemporary approaches to "transitions to democracy." It also shows that a focus on either political economy or culture alone cannot account for the transformation of elite ideology, and that revolution in Central America is deeply rooted in the personal, familial, and class histories of the coffee elites.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Very good book. Had to read it for a Central America Course and the writing is very good. This is an academic work which uses interviews to demonstrate the relation between Power and Coffee in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The author interviews the coffee elite from each country. It offers the historical background of their rise, their thoughts, beliefs and justification for action taking from 1930 to 1980 the 2 eras of great revolutionary crisis and how Costa Rica developed differently than the other 3 countries. The main idea is that Costa Rican Elite had a division between land owners and processors allowing for a more democratic flow of ideas, compromise and they avoid the suppression of the other countries. US involvement also played a critical role in the other 3 countries while leaving Costa Rica mostly untouched. Important read for anyone that wants to understand the development of Central America and why their governments are the way they are today. Or anyone wanting an in-depth analysis of the revolutionary periods in Central America in 1930's and the 1980's through the eyes of each country's elite.

Jeffrey Paige is an excellent sociologist who provides an in-depth look at three countries in Central America. Honduras, Costa Rica and El Salvador are all explored throughout this book. There are occasional references to Guatemala but overall the other three are considered because their development has similarities. While they are different in the way they developed economically and socially they came from similar backgrounds. Similar governments formed in all three according to Paige and the effects of this were to drive these countries into a relationship where elites hold power. The social elites of the coffee producers provide an interesting case study to follow. They provide the driving force for dictatorships and while the Depression of 1929 gives fuel to the communist fire the elites retain a wide range of control. El Salvador is shown to be both a civil war and a terrorist problem that must be dealt with by resolution of local politics. Nicaragua is shown through the Somoza regime which grew out of the US marine intervention, dollar diplomacy and our support of the conservatives in that country. The sociological study comes across as scattered at times but in the end provides a useful analysis when considering the disparity in incomes throughout Central America. This book is not for beginners and historians should use it carefully. For those in sociology it is a very useful study filled with many primary accounts.

Primarily for those who are pursuing advanced degrees in Latin American studies, sociology, economics, etc. The chief meat of the book is the author's interviews with various coffee "elites" in the Central American region, and their view on business and politics. Loses a star because it jumps around a bit, it is not exactly for someone just getting to know the region (like me), and it's a bit dry

at times. So, approach this book with a bit of caution.

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