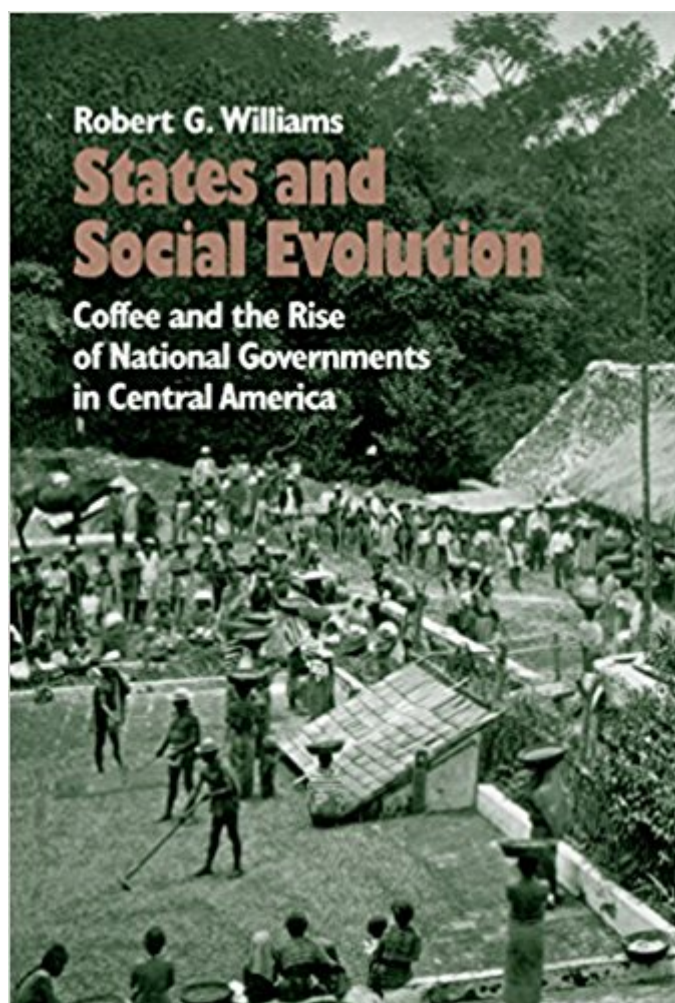


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States And Social Evolution: Coffee And The Rise Of National Governments In Central America



Synopsis

The national governments of Central America were constructed between 1840 and 1900, a time when coffee was transformed from a botanical curiosity to the region's most important export. In spite of their geographic proximity, the national governments that emerged were strikingly different, from Costa Rica's participatory democracy to Guatemala's military despotism. Robert Williams explores Central America's political diversity by following the story of coffee through the nation-building period. With a sensitivity to cultures and institutions before the advent of widespread coffee cultivation, he reveals the various ways that land, labor, and capital were harnessed as coffee advanced from one locale to the next, provoking cultural clashes and sometimes violent reactions as it altered landscapes, people's lives, and even governments. Through careful scrutiny of a tiny region and a single crop in a restless age, *States and Social Evolution* develops a theory of state formation relevant to other places and times as well.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Williams has written an ambitious comparative history."Choice""A work of exceptional quality.Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., Tulane University"A major contribution to the historiography of modern Central America."International Labor and Working Class History""A highly effective presentation of what we currently know about coffee, society, and politics in Central America.Lowell Gudmundson, Mount Holyoke College"A work of exceptional quality.Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., Tulane UniversityA highly effective presentation of what we currently know about coffee, society, and politics in Central

America. Lowell Gudmundson, Mount Holyoke College

A work of exceptional quality. It is the first serious work to provide a comprehensive study of coffee production in Central America and relate it to the social and political development of the region. It explains the complex relationships between the political, social, and economic structures of modern Central America better than any other work I know of.--Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., Tulane University Williams has written an ambitious comparative history of coffee cultivation and export in 19th-century Central America and of the diverse consequences that the development of coffee had for the formation of the five national governments.--Choice A major contribution to the historiography of modern Central America. It combines wide-ranging historical research while drawing on important theoretical traditions in an effort to explain the origins of the different political cultures, political systems, and modes of governance within Central America. . . . It will provoke discussion, debate, and more comparative research A must for scholars interested in exploring the different histories of the countries of Central America during the last two centuries.--International Labor and Working Class History The strength of this work lies in its ability to show the variability of social, labor, and land tenure patterns with coffee, not just between but within each of the Central American nations. . . . A highly effective presentation of what we currently know about coffee, society, and politics in Central America.--Lowell Gudmundson, Mount Holyoke College

Williams' book discusses the growth of coffee in Central America from the mid-1800s, with separate chapters devoted to the role of land, labor, and capital in the spread of coffee. Williams offers a wealth of data in comparing the rise of coffee across all five countries in the region and the significant variation within each country. Particularly interesting is his analysis of how large coffee plantations arose in some places while small and medium producers predominated in others, and the role of local governments in securing land titles and harvest labor before the consolidation of national states. The rise of centralized states is only really addressed in the book's later chapters, and the conclusion linking the twentieth century to earlier periods of coffee growth is disappointingly brief. The book's middle chapters are very detailed and at times dry, but overall the book is a worthwhile read. It's certainly a must-read for Central America history buffs, and although the book's title evokes Skocpol's *States and Social Revolution*, the book is more valuable as a history of coffee in Central America than it is as a study of state formation.

I have read dozens of books on the history of coffee and how it has shaped the lives of hundreds of

millions of people, but in some respects this is the very best. Note: it is can be scholarly in the depth of its investigation, but for me that was all for the best. And it never reads like an "academic" piece, but rather is compelling, at least if you're already concerned about this topic. This is one of the first books that I recommend to people who want to know why so many people who supply the world with coffee are so poor, and denied serious options to change their conditions. The reader should note that this book does not try to describe all coffee producing countries, rather just three, each of which has been profoundly shaped by coffee, but in ways distinct from one another. That demonstrates that there is nothing pre-ordained about societies that are economically dependent upon coffee production.

John Sheahan, chairperson of the Bryce Wood Award Committee said, "Robert Williams' book is an extraordinarily good example of systematic economic and historical analysis used to answer an intriguing question. The question is how to explain the striking differences among Central American countries in the dimensions of democracy, political repression, and social concern. Williams goes deeply into their different responses to the rise of the world coffee market in the late nineteenth century, and explains clearly the view that these experiences have marked the political and social evolutions of the countries ever since."

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