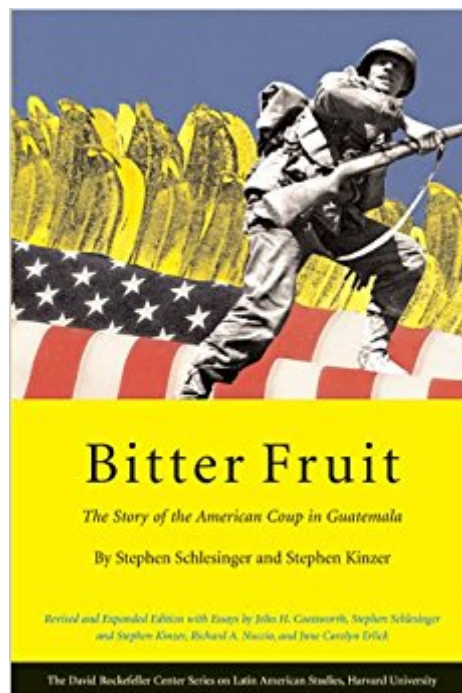


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Bitter Fruit: The Story Of The American Coup In Guatemala, Revised And Expanded (Series On Latin American Studies)



Synopsis

Bitter Fruit is a comprehensive and insightful account of the CIA operation to overthrow the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala in 1954. First published in 1982, this book has become a classic, a textbook case of the relationship between the United States and the Third World. The authors make extensive use of U.S. government documents and interviews with former CIA and other officials. It is a warning of what happens when the United States abuses its power.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Stephen Schlesinger is Director of the World Policy Institute. Stephen Kinzer is a visiting fellow at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. John H. Coatsworth is Dean of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and former Director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University.

I ordered this book because I had to give a conference in Guatemala and was confused about the beginning of the country's long armed conflict. I figured this was a good place to start, and it was. It helped me understand better not only the American role in Guatemala, but also a lot of the current attitudes and opinions in Latin America about work, big international companies and America. Unlike

some reviewers, I don't find it biased at all, in fact I read it without much knowledge of the conflict and understood clearly both sides of it. This isn't a story about good innocent guys suffering from the hands of bad gringos, it's a story about wrong incentives both among Guatemalans and owners of the United Fruit Company. I currently work in a Mexican company started by one of the 150,000 Guatemalan immigrants of the 80s. I had never given much thought on this before, but now I can even relate better to the history of my own job and the nature of some cultural traits I find both in Mexicans and Guatemalans.

Schlesinger and Kinzer did indeed write a classic. The book is well-written and very readable. While it is certainly an academic work and may be considered a textbook, it is not as dry as such the connotation suggests. On the contrary, the story at times feels like a best-selling espionage novel or a Hollywood conspiracy-theory movie, but much better in my opinion. More importantly, *Bitter Fruit* is supported by excellent sources - many Freedom of Information Act documents and also many memoirs and interviews of people involved in the events. This is comforting and assures that while the book is almost written in the style of a fictional thriller, the authors did not take any liberties of rewriting or embellishing history to make the book more fun to read. Schlesinger and Kinzer also do an excellent job of providing the background of the parties involved and the historical context in which the revolution and coup took place. They also wrap up the book well in their 'Aftermath' final chapter and provide much needed closure to the story, in which they discuss the fates of the major players since the coup. Highest recommendations.

I first heard of the book, *Bitter Fruit*, when I was traveling in Guatemala. Our half Mayan guide told some stories of his country's recent history, of massacres and bombings, and of the severe hardships his family endured while he was growing up. Although he mentioned that those horrors were executed by those who were financed, trained, and directed by the USA, I had no knowledge of the history of that part of the world or of my country's intervention. When I returned home, I ordered the book on for about half the price it sold for in Guatemala. I had thought it would be hard reading as an academic production. I was wrong. This carefully documented book gives in great detail the recent history of Guatemala, and America's role in that history. For me, it was extremely interesting. It read like a John Grisham novel; I couldn't put it down; I wanted to know what happened next. Tragically, it is a true horror story, with terrible consequences for Guatemala and thus for all of us. An estimated 200,000 Guatemalans died in a civil war begun by the clearly illegal and immoral actions of the USA CIA and army, with the knowledge and approval of US Presidents

starting with President Eisenhower. As a result, progress in such matters as land reform and justice for all in Guatemala has been compromised to this day. I hope that all Americans read and take to heart this very powerful book.

Whether you're a connoisseur with a PhD in international relations, a high-school dropout looking to enhance their missing education, or someone who just wants to read an engrossing book with a little intellectual flare to it, one can be both entertained and appalled by the story contained in "Bitter Fruit". Kinzer and Schlesinger's writing is impeccable, and somehow manages to stay apolitical. The authors do an excellent job of not flaunting the miscues of the American overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected government, but merely let the facts from all angles tell their own story. In addition, the writing is quite fast-paced in style but pays attentive detail to fact and exhaustively denotes the sources behind the writing. I purchased this for reading as part of a class assignment - and then cited it in two places in my senior essay! So instead of buying a FICTIONAL thriller or adventure or spy novel for your downtime reading, why not pick up a book where the plot . . . actually happened?! In addition, despite being originally published a quarter century ago, the book is amazingly relevant to issues in today's foreign policy (*cough* Iraq *cough*). Also, I HIGHLY recommend for history buffs like myself - but this book can be enjoyed by anyone. Well, "enjoyed" isn't really the word - after reading this book, I felt a sense of anger towards our government for their selfish actions 50 years ago, and a sense of pity toward the people of Guatemala, who had no idea what hit them. But the feelings weren't on the level as to wish that I had never read the book - on the contrary, it made me feel more enlightened both about the Cold War era as well as today's international climate.

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