



# Bandits, Peasants, and Politics : The Case of "La Violencia" in

*Gonzalo Sanchez, Donny Meertens, Alan Hynds, Sá*

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The years 1945-1965 saw heavy partisan conflict in the rural areas of Colombia, with at least 200,000 people killed. This virtual civil war began as a sectarian conflict between the Liberal and Conservative parties, with rural workers (campesinos) constituting the majority of combatants and casualties. Yet La Violencia resists classification as a social uprising, since calls for social reform were largely absent during this phase of the struggle. In fact, once the elite leadership settled on a power-sharing agreement in 1958, the conflict appeared to subside.

This book focuses on the second phase (1958-1965) of the struggle, in which the social dimensions of the conflict emerged in a uniquely Colombian form: the campesinos, shaped by the earlier violence, became social and political bandits, no longer acting exclusively for powerful men above them but more in defense of the peasantry. In comparing them with other regional expressions of *bandolerismo*, the authors weigh the limited prospects for the evolution of Colombian banditry into full-scale social revolution.

Published originally in 1983 as *Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos* and now updated with a new epilogue, this book makes a timely contribution to the discourse on social banditry and the Colombian *violencia*. Its importance rests in the insights it provides not only on the period in question but also on Colombia's present situation.

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