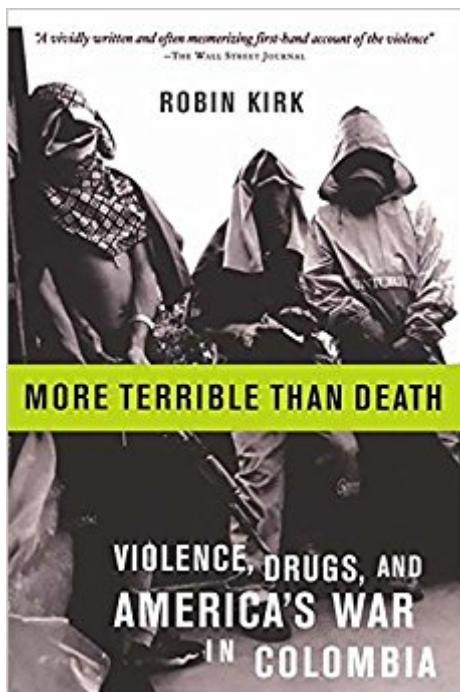


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More Terrible Than Death: Drugs, Violence, And America's War In Colombia



Synopsis

More Terrible Than Death is a gripping work that maps the dramatic new relationship between the United States and Colombia in human terms, using portraits of the Colombians and Americans involved, the author's experiences in Colombia as a writer and human rights investigator and an insider's analysis of the political realities that shape the expanding war on drugs and the growing U.S. military presence there. Looking at the war from the ground up, interviewing and profiling human rights activists, guerrillas, and paramilitaries to explain how it has changed their lives, Robin Kirk gives depth and meaning to the headlines that leave unexplained the intimate dimension of the U.S./Colombian relationship.

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: PublicAffairs; Third Printing edition (April 28, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1586482076

ISBN-13: 978-1586482077

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 22 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #851,459 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #82 in Books > History > Americas > South America > Colombia #833 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America #877 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Caribbean & Latin American

Customer Reviews

Mapping the destructive effects of Colombia's drug war from the ground up, Human Rights Watch researcher Kirk (The Monkey's Paw: New Chronicles from Peru) personalizes the devastation created by the violence among the paramilitary, the guerrillas and the drug cartels. The result is a very readable and heart-wrenching narrative blending interviews, personal experiences and observations about the violence that has defined and destroyed Colombia for decades.

Unfortunately, the book's insider perspective is both its greatest asset and its greatest failing, as the account centers more on an individual American's experience than on America's war in Colombia. Although Kirk is adept at explaining complicated internal problems within Colombia and detailing the general misery and bloodshed there, her personal anecdotes and tenuously related observations do

little to advance the book and too often get in the way of the powerful accounts she is trying to present. The key to the drug war-the connection between the United States and Colombia- gets less than its due, as the majority of the narrative details internal problems in Colombia having little to do with the U.S or, at times, with drugs. Given Kirk's experience in the region and obvious investigative talent, it is disappointing that she doesn't provide an in-depth analysis of the role the U.S. has played in the region, why Colombia's plight should matter to Americans, and prospects for the country in the future. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Kirk's book features dramatic, often funny, and sometimes terrifying tales of her travels as a human rights researcher in Colombia.. She does a remarkable job of synthesizing Colombian history for a U.S. audience... Well-written and wide-ranging, [MTTD] offer[s] something to novice readers and Latin American experts alike."

I have given this book 5 stars because it gave me exactly what I was looking for -- a basic understanding of Colombia's modern history. It was also enjoyable to read and I couldn't put it down. I agree with other commentators that it lacked a lot of detail regarding US involvement in Colombia's history and problems, but then again I didn't think there was much more to say. I only wish that it covered the last 8 years so I could be more up to date. But all in all, if you're looking for the same thing I was, then I would highly recommend this book.

More than anything else I've read on the subject, Robin Kirk's "More Terrible Than Death" brings a degree of clarity and focus to the complicated, multi-layered hornet's nest of terrorism, endemic violence, drugs and corruption that are the scourge of the proud nation of Colombia. It's interesting to note that in spite of documenting a wide range of horrific events, Kirk focuses on a glimmer of hope. The book's title is perversely positive. It comes from one of her Colombian human rights associates, who says to her (as she questions whether her efforts may be doing more harm than good) "Don't doubt. To give up is more terrible than death." The story within the story is Kirk's exemplary bravery in compiling the tales that make up this story. This is no armchair analysis.

I purchased the book to learn more about Colombia, and that I did. The author does a great job of providing a great historical account of life in Colombia throughout the turning points in its history. Although I was partially drawn to the book because of the drug connections, I learned that Colombia

has a lot more internal strife and problems than just their well known drug problem. The author is a well connected human rights worker, and as a result, she gets face to face with some of the most powerful people in Colombia. She likes to put a lot of blame for Colombia's problem on the United States (it was difficult for me to get over at times). It was obvious from her great story telling that Colombia's problems/struggles are more complicated than solely the US's War on Drugs. But -- the author's political views aside -- she does provide a great read. I don't read many books, and this one I finished from beginning to end.

The most balanced thorough review of the roots of Colombia's conflict in a very interesting and readable work. Its a few years old but still extremely relevant.

What Robin Kirk learned in her twelve years of covering Colombia for HUMAN Rights Watch, is delivered to us here. She does not give us an easy solution to drug or military issues. She gives us her experiences onsite.

I work with nonprofits in Colombia and share this book with people traveling with me to help them better understand the culture, personality, and history of the country. Like some of the other reviews I will say this book isn't perfect. No, it doesn't give balanced coverage to the excessive violence that has been perpetrated by all sides, and no it isn't a complete assessment of the conflict and violence in the country. It is great though for what it is: a readable introduction to the violence in Colombia that isn't bogged down with acronyms, dates, and nuance. This makes it a great starting point for a conversation on Colombia as it gives readers a basic summary of the major events of the last 50 years, and some explanations that help readers understand some of the motivations and causes of the prolonged fighting. The only reason this book is receiving 4 stars instead of 5 is that it has become somewhat dated as the situation continues to quickly progress and change.

This book attempts to contextualize and catalog Colombia's violent society that has existed for many decades. Within the pages are incredible stories of commoners horrifically murdered, monstrous leaders fueled by drugs and futile U.S. policies. Kirk does an excellent job of giving ordinary priests, butchers and townsfolk a human face and when some of them are killed, you feel the pain and frustration. The historical context that Kirk provides is extremely informative and her analysis of the Gaitan assassination and subsequent U.S. response sets the stage for the rest of the book. Also powerful are Kirk's descriptions of the guerilla and paramilitary leaders,

especially Castano. While their actions are unspeakably monstrous, their arguments in support of their actions are terrifyingly cogent. While you will not condone their actions, you may find yourself nodding in agreement only to realize that he is talking about murdering innocent people. There were some drawbacks to the book. While Ms. Kirk states at the end of the book that this was not meant to be comprehensive, her omission of significant facts does limit the effectiveness of her message. For example, from another book, I learned that Colombian drug lords feared extradition to the United States more than just about anything else. I do not recall anywhere in this book where this fact is clearly stated. Simply stating this would have been invaluable since one huge reason that Escobar and others intensified violence was as a response to the Colombian government's reinstatement of extradition. The book could have used some better transitions and tighter editing but the nightmarish stories of the common person is more than enough to overlook those minor points.

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