



Crucifixion by Power: Essays on Guatemalan National Social Structure, 1944-1966

Richard Newbold Adams

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"Quite the contrary of old generals, nations do not fade away; they have to be killed."

Richard Adams' view of the nation as a basic social unit is central to this pioneering study in social anthropology. The result of many years of research in Guatemala, this volume utilizes the author's fieldwork as well as that of his colleagues and students to construct a set of concepts explaining how Guatemala reached the difficult circumstances in which it found itself in the 1960s—and still finds itself today.

With the breakup of the great colonial empires after the Second World War, the curtain that had been drawn around Marx by Western social scientists fell away; countries once called "primitive" began to be seen as "underdeveloped," while those once thought to be stable and advanced began to appear predatory and conflict ridden. The theme of Mr. Adams' book is that, in the world as a whole, there is a structural escalation of power concentration.

The author believes that Guatemala, as a small nation within the general domain of the United States, is caught in the developmental hinterland of that powerful neighbor and that the United States, within its own capitalistic development pattern and in competition with other leading world powers, cannot allow the smaller nation to resolve its own political and social problems. Thus Guatemala, he declares, finds itself crucified by unyielding and uncontrollable power plays beyond its national borders.

As a background for the study of specific sectors in Guatemalan society, the author discusses the theoretical nature of complex societies. He shows the cohesive force of a nation to be its power structure and then examines mechanisms whereby this structure is kept intact in Guatemala. Special emphasis is given to the lack of access to power by the poor, the development of the military, the organization of power within the Catholic Church, and the expansion of upper-sector interest groups.

While there was important growth in the power of upper-sector Guatemalan society over the two decades of the study, there was no comparable increase in distribution; the position of the lower sectors within the power structure has therefore changed very slightly. "Development," then, in Guatemala was principally in terms of what was advantageous to the major powers.

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