

Internal Assessment

Towards Wholeness in our Students

Research Question: "What led the FARC to shift their ideals from fighting for the rights of the poor to running a large drug trafficking empire?"

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"On my honor, I swear that the work I have submitted is my own. I have not cheated plagiarized, or received unauthorized assistance in order to complete this work."

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“What led the FARC to shift their ideals from fighting for the rights of the poor to running a large drug trafficking empire?”

Identification and Evaluation of Sources

Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia also known as the “FARC” are a well know leftist rebel group in Colombia that have been around since 1964. The original objective for this guerilla group was to bring attention to Colombian peasants and to fight for their rights. This paper will argue that the aim of the FARC shifted from protecting the voice of the oppressed to getting lost in its motives and transforming into a large drug trade. Left and Right wings of government played an impactful role in the formation of the FARC because of the disagreements occurring between both groups. The FARC was in need of money and turned to drug production in order to collect money and buy weapons. The significance of this investigation is to examine the events that led the FARC to alter their ideals and for whom and what they were defending. Through such pure intentions the FARC turned a positive protest into a negative one dealing with the use of illegal narcotics and forgetting about their original goal.

Source 1: Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and its Implications for Regional Stability.

This source was written by Rabasa Angel and Chalk Peter in 2001 and published in Santa Monica, CA by Rand. Rabasa is a Senior Political Scientist and Chalk has a PhD in Political Science, both at Rand. The information is not only the authors insight but also statistical evidence that removes any source of bias, personal or emotional encounters.

This book is limiting because the author, Rabasas' previous work is mainly centered around Islam and terrorists as opposed to this book on Colombia's drug problem. This is a completely different direction in terms of geography. The same goes for the work of Chalk Peter, whose work is mostly dominant in the Muslim and defense area. This book may be missing information that could be vital to research.

The origin of the book is of great value because it explains the situations that have occurred in Colombia surrounding the guerilla group that has taken over in the 1960s. The book goes in depth about the FARC and gives specific reports about the influence of drug trade in not only Colombia but also in the United States. This book collects information that enables other historians to use in order to further research on occurring events and compare present to past events.

The purpose of the book is to bring attention on the catastrophe that occurred in Colombia because of the left wing rebels. The book outlines the effect the FARC had on the United States' economy mainly due to drug trade. It is valuable because it shares and focus on an event that occurred in a different country that also had an impactful response from the people of the United States, like contributing to drug smuggling. The people of the U.S. were desperate for the drugs; they joined with the FARC, influenced the Colombian economy and income.

Source 2: Long March to Freedom: the true story of a Colombian kidnapping

This diary written by Thomas R. Hargrove, published by College Station: Texas A&M University Press in 2007 is his experience while taken hostage by the Colombian FARC in 1994. Hargrove is an American journalist that was centered in Cali because of his job for Tropical Agriculture. The diary is Hargrove's personal feelings and

experiences and works as a primary source for historians. This is valuable because it gives a firsthand encounter and anecdotal with the FARC. Hargrove was able to experience the day to day life of the peasants, culture, violence, and motivations of the peasants. A historian collecting all this information is not the same as having a source who actually experienced what it was like to be in the hands of the peasants who run the self defense group themselves. He organized information that historians cannot gain on their own and it is more than just summarizing and giving statistical evidence of events that unfolded.

The purpose of the diary is to express to the public his feelings while in hostage and to describe the personalities of those peasants around him and what the environment was actually like. Hargrove wrote this diary to help himself get through captivity in foreign land.

Although, the diary is a valuable source of information it can also be seen as limited because it is a one sided account. No one can contradict him since it is his account of what he experienced. The work is biased because his emotions play a role in his decision making and his judgment of the people and his treatment. Hargrove could have also purposefully left out information in order to persuade the readers to feel a certain way from either strong dislike for the group or sympathy for those stuck fighting for the FARC.

Investigation

The assassination of the presidential candidate and liberal party leader of Colombia, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, caused a disturbance by the peasants known as *La Violencia*. His main objective was to stand up for the poor and help them gain

opportunity. This riot was broken down into four phases and was the cause of “200,000 to 400,000” (Global Security) casualties. The first stage in 1946 was the liberal party splitting the left and right-wing districts. The second stage was the bloodiest of them all and consisted of the left and right wing forming self defense groups in 1953. The third riot was the government introducing an “amnesty program” (Global Security) in an attempt to control the violence that was taking place in Colombia in 1953. The fourth and final stage in 1958 includes the “first Two National Front governments”. (Global Security) From *La Violencia*, various guerillas were created like the ELN, EPL, and most importantly the one discussed throughout this paper, FARC consisting of left wing liberals.

The FARC is a peasant self defense group that was led by Manuel Marulanda who had a role in the Colombia’s communist party (cfr). He was born a peasant and his ideals were to represent the voice of the poor who were a vast majority, more than “80 percent” of the people of Colombia belonged to the lower level of economic classes (Lownethal & Mejia). Marulanda acting as the speaker for the poor displays his understanding of their position and is able to relate to the poor on a level that other leaders cannot. Although many saw no positive impacts of the FARC there are others who say otherwise, “his and life and work... embodied the struggle of the Colombian people” (fightbacknews). The peasants were important figures in the FARC because they were the inspiration for the guerilla group. The FARC’s original goal was to “promote... peasants and to bring down the country’s elite” (Barreto). The FARC started off with Marxian and socialist views and thought that production and trade should be

done as a whole until the findings of drugs shifted their ideology. The FARC was responsible for the death of 220,000 civilians (Jamal).

Money is not only a concern but it is also a motivation. Before the FARC, Colombia's economy was made up of 60 percent coffee exports since that is what Colombia is richest in (Rabasa & Chalk). Coffee has a specific growing season and requires extensive preparation before export unlike cocaine which grows in various different climates which the FARC found was the easiest and an effective way to get money. Colombia became the world's "principal producer and distributor of refined cocaine... exported to the U.S. market" (Rabasa & Chalk). It's argued that the FARC doesn't get most of their money from exporting drugs but from the taxes they place on the growers and laboratory owners (Barreto). But there is a significant rise in the U.S. market from the consumption of cocaine and heroine received from Colombia's FARC group. There are estimated numbers of income the FARC received from drugs which ranges from "\$200 million" to "\$3.5 billion" (cfr). The FARC is prospering and the earnings help cover the expenses of the thousands of soldiers under the FARC and needed weapons. The FARC's earned drug money helps them "stabilize areas that they control" (Barreto) and they came up with new tactics by gaining control of "resources in these areas to... push into other areas" (Holmes). The FARC began to lose sight of it's original aim and solely focused on its money producer, cocaine.

Women and men joined the guerilla to have a way to provide income for their family. Women joined the FARC because in the rural area of Colombia it was mostly male-controlled and the FARC promised equality that they were not accustomed to, it was either "working as a peasant or... prostitute" (PBS). There were barely

opportunities for the lower class women so when the FARC offered a helping hand the women along with peasant men, took it. The FARC's ideology has changed since the 1960s by becoming "unconcerned with... the rural populace" (Coha). The FARC was at first inspired by the struggle of the poor and wanted to help defend them. The desire that began to over ride them with the coca trade began to hide their original motives and replaced it with greed.

Another form of the FARC gaining income was by kidnapping. American journalist Thomas Hargrove was kidnapped by the FARC and the ransom for his release was \$6 million (nytimes). This sent out a message to the public of the strength this group had, along with the kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt who was running for Colombian president. By aiming for important people and highly regarded figures, the FARC was showing its strength. Hargrove's diary was useful to provide insight on the daily life of a peasant living in the jungle with the FARC and how his daily life panned out. Hargrove mentioned his view of the people while held hostage, he says the soldiers "are Colombian peasants, very humble people" (Hargrove). This description of the peasants in the guerilla is an actual representation of most of the people, desperate for money to bring food home, so they join the guerilla in order to have a source of income mind the repercussions.

The FARC had supporters like Cuba who was well known for its foreign interventions in other countries like Bolivia. Cuba has gotten on "friendly relations" with Latin America and gave the FARC advice, "[Fidel] wrote... to the FARC that... you gain power by engaging in the political process" (Gomez). Cuba was involved and watched the FARC and helped them try to reach negotiations. FARC leaders began negotiating

from Venezuela because of a much more lenient and unconcerned government compared to Colombia. Cuba was a reliable and easy place to assemble instead of having to struggle to go into Colombia (Gomez). Venezuela was also an important country involved with the FARC. If it were not for Venezuela, then drug trafficking would not be as successful. Venezuela allowed for Colombians to go in through secret strips in order to trade drugs and also allows for Colombia to get weapons and train in their country (insightcrime).

The FARC's original aim was to help relieve the peasants from a life filled with poverty and help them gain a voice to match the one of the wealthy. As the FARC found a shortcut for providing money in cocaine, the guerilla group began to lose sight of their earlier goal because of greed. Millions of dollars ranging from 500 to 600 million a year (Unric) were rewarded to the guerilla because of the sale of narcotics and the number of poor people had not improved. The FARC turned to coca production because it was cheaper and reaped greater rewards in the form of millions of dollars. However, they could have also turned to cocaine because of the growing demand of the product from other countries like the United States.

Reflection

Historians search for information in various ways, from searching in books to actually visiting the site of interest. Extensive research is done in order for history to be called "history". Events must correlate properly and there needs to be evidence. Avoiding bias is difficult but a historian must find proper information to draw a conclusion and try to eliminate any kind of personal emotion on the piece. My grandparents fled from Colombia because of the fear they had of the FARC and being the next target. Coming

from a family personally involved with the FARC bias had to be removed and I had to research through various sources in order to state a fact and make a proper opinion that was not based on personal bias and undeveloped thoughts. The method used by historians in my investigation was undisputed evidence like body counts which ranged from 200,000 to 400,000. Military groups do not want the opposing force to know how many people in reality they lost so they keep the body count between a range of numbers to not have to reveal the real truth. I have come to an understanding of the challenges that face a historian like primary sources, they give a sense of how and why things occurred but usually are not limited to bias. Secondary sources are usually academic sources and are regularly reliable and void of bias.

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