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U.S. Intervention In British Guiana: A Cold War Story (New Cold War History)



Synopsis

In the first published account of the massive U.S. covert intervention in British Guiana between 1953 and 1969, Stephen G. Rabe uncovers a Cold War story of imperialism, gender bias, and racism. When the South American colony now known as Guyana was due to gain independence from Britain in the 1960s, U.S. officials in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations feared it would become a communist nation under the leadership of Cheddi Jagan, a Marxist who was very popular among the South Asian (mostly Indian) majority. Although to this day the CIA refuses to confirm or deny involvement, Rabe presents evidence that CIA funding, through a program run by the AFL-CIO, helped foment the labor unrest, race riots, and general chaos that led to Jagan's replacement in 1964. The political leader preferred by the United States, Forbes Burnham, went on to lead a twenty-year dictatorship in which he persecuted the majority Indian population. Considering race, gender, religion, and ethnicity along with traditional approaches to diplomatic history, Rabe's analysis of this Cold War tragedy serves as a needed corrective to interpretations that depict the Cold War as an unsullied U.S. triumph.

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Customer Reviews

Stephen G. Rabe has written several works on cold war Latin America, and this is certainly one of the best of the genre. In retrospect it seems baffling why the US should have agonized so long and hard over a such a speck of sovereign jungle as Guyana. But totalitarian hegemony will not tolerate

any deviation from submission, no matter how trifling. Cheddi Jagan had the "distinction" of being overthrown twice by two powers, and was in fact the first left-nationalist leader so deposed in the cold war - a year before the more notorious intervention in Guatemala. The subversion of Guyana was only one act in the very hot US war against Latin America, maintaining an imperial sphere of influence under cover of anti-Communism. The latter, of course, meant whatever those in Washington wished it to mean (ie, the "duck test"). Neutralism was all good in Asia, Africa, or on the Yugoslav rim of the Soviet bloc: but certainly not an option in the Western Hemisphere any more than the Danube basin. In seeking to prevent "another Cuba," Washington ironically justified to Castro the wisdom of his own course: go for broke and burn bridges via a revolutionary dictatorship, refusing to be bound by rules of democracy the other side had no intention of respecting while formally defecting to the opposite side with no apology. Interesting, too, was the US embrace of "affirmative action" in the form of Forbes Burnham's racist demagoguery, at a time when Black Power advocates were the subject of FBI entanglement. Jagan was lucky - unlike other left reformers, he survived to see his own vindication by returning to power and - this last time - serving his full elected term.

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