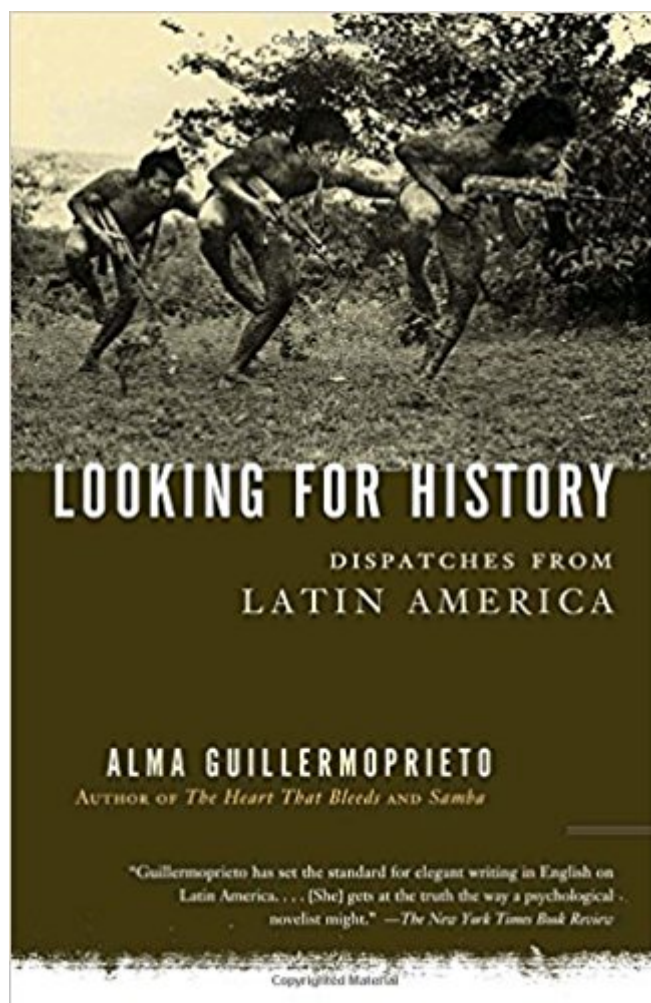


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# Looking For History: Dispatches From Latin America



## Synopsis

From the esteemed New Yorker correspondent comes an incisive volume of essays and reportage that vividly illuminates Latin America's recent history. Only Alma Guillermoprieto, the most highly regarded writer on the region, could unravel the complex threads of Colombia's cocaine wars or assess the combination of despotism, charm, and political jiu-jitsu that has kept Fidel Castro in power for more than 40 years. And no one else can write with such acumen and sympathy about statesmen and campesinos, leftist revolutionaries and right-wing militias, and political figures from Evita Peron to Mexico's irrepressible president, Vicente Fox. Whether she is following the historic papal visit to Havana or staying awake for a pre-dawn interview with an insomniac Subcomandante Marcos, Guillermoprieto displays both the passion and knowledge of an insider and the perspective of a seasoned analyst. *Looking for History* is journalism in the finest traditions of Joan Didion, V. S. Naipaul, and Ryszard Kapucinski: observant, empathetic, and beautifully written.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Guillermoprieto (*The Heart That Bleeds: Latin America Now*), Latin America correspondent for the New Yorker and the New York Review of Books, presents a collection of essays focusing on Colombia, Cuba and Mexico in the 1990s, accompanied by wonderfully elegant sketches of Eva Peron of Argentina and Mario Vargas Llosa of Peru. There is some repetition, but this flaw does not seriously detract from her message that although Latin American political culture in the latter half of the 20th century is largely shrouded in myth, particularly because of its potent relationship with

the U.S., it does indeed have "its own independent life." Apparent throughout is the author's ability to capture a historical moment and place it in context: for example, her observations of the pope's visit in January 1998 to a Cuba led by Fidel Castro dressed in a dark suit, and not his usual army fatigues, who made many political concessions for the privilege of paying homage to the pope. The chapter on John Paul II is flanked by portraits of Che Guevara and of Castro, the former steeped in romantic fanaticism, the latter seen as clinging to power long after his revolution has been bypassed by history. Guillermoprieto's writing seems unaffected by any obvious political bias; she excoriates the violence of the left (the murderous guerrilla brigades of Colombia) and of the right (the murderous Colombian paramilitary forces). Above all, the author displays an insightful grasp of the absurdities and chaos (one of the root causes of which is the U.S.'s inexhaustible appetite for drugs) that, in her view, permeate Latin American politics. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Guillermoprieto, a staff editor at The New Yorker, is a well-known and astute observer of Latin America. This collection of 17 of her essays, all adapted from pieces published in The New Yorker and the New York Review of Books, focuses on recent political events in the region. The essays are primarily about three countries: Cuba, where revolutionary idealism had to face reality; Colombia, where revolutions have always failed; and Mexico, a land of political fantasy. Among the stories, book reviews, and descriptions are perceptive and insightful observations of Latin American politics and society that help illuminate this important part of the world. This volume will be of interest to Latin American collections as well as current affairs libraries. Mark L. Grover, Brigham Young Univ., Provo, UT Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

it is a very good book to read . thank you !!

Well written dispatches from Latin America. The chapters on Peron and Vargas Llosa provide an enjoyable and in depth view on the 'rich and famous' of Latin America. They give a beautiful poignant portrayal of how celebrities exceed /'graduate' from their famous uninterrupted lives and encounter the political of their home countries. However, not all excel like a Reagan or Schwarzenegger. Where the book really shines is the writings on Fidel and Marcos. There is well written material on the views and actions of Fidel. How he can be so stubborn in his political causes. His grandiose sense of power, unwaveringness, and intimately control and execute his political

wills. His nature to be against the church and be against capitalism. Yet, when words become actions it is greatly revealed that those are the two things that must become accent and fairly dualistic in Cuba for them to rise from the strifes put upon the country for the past twenty-odd years. The pieces on Chiapas, Marcos, and the Zapatistas are just re-splendid. And the fate of the Mexican presidential parties are astounding. It makes one able to understand better the state of Mexico and the drug trade and the way in which political corruption seems to infiltrate so well into the powers that be throughout the world. Read it.

In a collection of seventeen articles focusing on six Latin American countries (Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, and Cuba), New York Times journalist Ana Guillermoprieto serves up a highly literate and gracefully scripted collage of Latin America today. The limited selection of countries and issues should not detract from the value of this book in understanding the region as a whole, for each of the sets of articles offers some broader insight beyond just the personalities or countries described. The author artfully combines first-hand interviews and reportage from the region with research and masterfully chosen extracts from other important books on this region. Her concise piece on Eva Peron is illustrative of her incisiveness and left me better informed than other sources on this somewhat mystifying subject ( see, for example, *Evita: An Intimate Portrait of Eva Peron*, which I have also reviewed on this website.). By ably reviewing the literature and carefully distinguishing between fact, hearsay, and speculation, the author unravels some mysteries surrounding this QUOTE bland and to all appearances untalented girl, born illegitimate and on a ranch...possessed of an unreconstructed working-class accent and an unfailing gauche manner..in a country where upper-class snobbery reaches extremes of refinement and viciousness UNQUOTE I also enjoyed an excellent piece on Peruvian writer turned presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa whose biographical sketch the author weaves into a broader portrait of Peruvian politics and society in the 1990s. The pieces on Colombia, Mexico, and Cuba may seem dated at first glance, but in fact provide penetrating insights into the Zapatistas, Colombia's civil strife, and Castro. Among books on Latin America, it is unusual in its ability to avoid pretending to be apolitical, while not falling prey to a facile ideological analysis. This book is a reflection of journalism at its best and is written by someone who is not simply peering into Latin America with an outsider's eye, but has a deep sense of the myths, conflicts, and legacies that gives soul to this part of the world. This book should not be a disappointment to anyone with more than a passing interest in Latin America. You may also consider complementing this book with a more pictorial account of this region (see, for example, *America Latina* by Fabienne Rousso-Lenoir, which I have also reviewed on this website).

If you want to know what was happening in Colombia, Cuba, or Mexico during the period 1994-2001, or if you want to look back to that time and the events or trends in those countries then, this would be a most excellent choice. The author not only has chapters about three giant Latin American personalities---Eva Peron, Che Guevara, and Mario Vargas Llosa---but includes interviews and impressions of a number of other Latin Americans who might not be household words in the Anglo-Saxon world. However, I did not find the title very apt. History is more or less lacking here (OK, she was looking for it, we don't find it.) If you aren't familiar with say, 20th century Mexican history, you are going to be scratching your head. And while the impressions are vivid, and she definitely interviewed the right people, I got the feeling that this book would fall into a crack---for those in the know, at least those who already knew a lot about Latin America, it may be old hat. If you read some decent newspapers or weeklies during the period under review, you probably already got a number of these stories, or knew that Cuba, for example, underwent great economic strife when the Soviet Union collapsed and had to boost a moribund economy that could not support itself on sugar alone. That Colombia had a drug and paramilitary/guerrilla problem and that Mexico is corrupt is not exactly big news. As articles that I might have read in a newspaper, these would be topnotch, way better than average. However, I think the book's main problem is, if I may put it this way---choice of audience. If you don't know much about Latin America, I don't think you will be able to start here---it's too detailed without enough background. It will depend on where you are coming from. I found the book interesting, but I was hoping for more insight and overview from a person who obviously knows way more than I ever will.

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