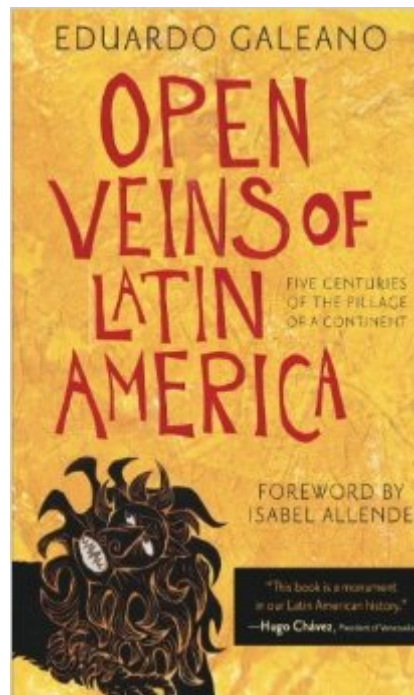


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# Open Veins Of Latin America: Five Centuries Of The Pillage Of A Continent



## Synopsis

Since its U.S. debut a quarter-century ago, this brilliant text has set a new standard for historical scholarship of Latin America. It is also an outstanding political economy, a social and cultural narrative of the highest quality, and perhaps the finest description of primitive capital accumulation since Marx. Rather than chronology, geography, or political successions, Eduardo Galeano has organized the various facets of Latin American history according to the patterns of five centuries of exploitation. Thus he is concerned with gold and silver, cacao and cotton, rubber and coffee, fruit, hides and wool, petroleum, iron, nickel, manganese, copper, aluminum ore, nitrates, and tin. These are the veins which he traces through the body of the entire continent, up to the Rio Grande and throughout the Caribbean, and all the way to their open ends where they empty into the coffers of wealth in the United States and Europe. Weaving fact and imagery into a rich tapestry, Galeano fuses scientific analysis with the passions of a plundered and suffering people. An immense gathering of materials is framed with a vigorous style that never falters in its command of themes. All readers interested in great historical, economic, political, and social writing will find a singular analytical achievement, and an overwhelming narrative that makes history speak, unforgettably. This classic is now further honored by Isabel Allende's™s inspiring introduction. Universally recognized as one of the most important writers of our time, Allende once again contributes her talents to literature, to political principles, and to enlightenment.

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## Customer Reviews

Like many, I bought this book because Hugo Chavez recommended it to President Obama. It was my birthday, so I also bought several other books by Galeano. I am still reading my way thru them. As I read this book, I also read *Walking Words* [Folk Tales] and *Days and Nights of Love and War* [a Memoir]. It is difficult to assess this book and ignore current politics. I would suggest people read '1491' [A Pre-Columbian History of the Americas] This would provide some perspective as to the reality Galeano describes. If your only knowledge of American History is what you learned in High School and a survey course your Freshman year of college, this book may seem to be sheer propaganda. If you are a Republican, or a chauvinistic nationalist, you will hate this book. Eduardo Galeano writes from the perspective of an exile who was forced out of Uruguay by a US supported Right-Wing Military Dictatorship in the 1960s, and then forced to leave Argentina when the Generals took power in the early 1970s. The history of the Americas after 1492 is a history of Colonialism, Slavery, and the destruction of the people's culture. Even an ardent apologist for the status quo would find it difficult to deny that. You may believe the population is better off than they would have been without these gifts of European domination, but that is merely opinion. There is no way to know at this point. One reviewer said that he believed this history was too biased toward Socialism, and that 'no one would leave a Capitalist county to go to Russia or Cuba'. That review was written only 2 months ago, long after Russia ceased to be a 'Socialist' country. As for Cuba, we are talking apples and oranges. Who knows how appealing that country might be, if even visiting were not illegal. This History is well written, and presented more as an economic history than a social or political one. It does not follow the usual time-line format of important dates, Presidents, and Wars. Rather, it discusses how natural resources were developed, and then shipped to Europe to build nascent Capitalism there, and later in the US. Instead of discussing the colonies of Spain and then France and then England, in a stately progression; Galeano discusses the theft of gold and silver in the 1500s, and the destruction of the indigenous cultures and religions. Then, he moves on to the enslavement of the Indians to mine the tin and other metals; and the stripping of guano and nitrates for European farmlands. Once the raw materials have been exhausted, he describes the importation of blacks to turn the South, in both the American Continents, into huge Plantations growing sugar, cotton, rubber, coffee, and whatever else would pay extreme profits. Eduardo Galeano is not very complimentary about the Europeans. That is his own heritage, but he does not defend it. The title of the book is very descriptive of his basic premise: The open veins are the rivers of wealth leaving the Eastern shores of the Americas, for Europe. He is no 'free trader', and believes the economy in Latin America was deliberately stunted by a program of exporting raw materials only, while importing manufactured goods. If you look at the economy in the US today, this book may give you

an idea of our own future, if we continue to shut down our manufacturing base and rely on cheap goods from Asia. Eduardo Galeano has written a history, but even in translation, his writing sings. He is a poet, first, and foremost. No matter what the subject of any one of his books, it is presented in verbal pictures that encourages the reader to sing along. Much as Diego Rivera painted a graphic history of Mexico in his murals, Galeano portrays the Americas as they were, and as they are; with a ghostly image of what might have been, demanding your attention as you read.

Kudos to Hugo Chavez for putting this book in the eye of the emerging consciousness of the US public--Obama will not read this book because he already knows the story, he is the front end of the Borg--the system, and so similar in policies to Bush as to possibly wake up the naive. The book begins with one of the finest Forewords I have ever read, by Isabel Allende, and I offer just one quote from her spectacular introduction of the book: "His work is a mixture of meticulous detail, political conviction, poetic flair, and good storytelling." The translation by Cedric Belfrage merits special note. This book sings in English, and the translator has done justice to the original. A major recurring theme throughout the book is that of capital squandered by the few while the many actually producing the capital dies of hunger or disease. I list ten other recommended books at the end of this review. Early on the author makes these points: 1. The indigenous bourgeoisie are the ones who have sold out their countries to the multinational corporations. Toward the end of the book he repeats this with a chapter on the guards that opened the gates. 2. "The human murder by poverty in Latin America is secret--every year, [the equivalent of] three Hiroshima bombs." 3. Quoting Lyndon Johnson: \$5 invested in population control is equal to \$100 in economic growth. This in the context of the author making the case that Latin America is under-populated in relation to Europe. 4. Imperialism and what I call predatory capitalism depends on, imposed, inequality and growing disparity on the countries rich in raw materials. His early account of the European invasion by steel and horse and disease was unique in its time; see 1491 below for a broader more recent treatment. The indigenous population by this account dropped from 70 million to 3.5 million. Among my notes: 1. The historical record is lie--laws were indeed passed protecting the indigenous natives, but never enforced, something history does not document as well. 2. "Ideological justifications were never in short supply." 3. Spanish dressed up the natives in Andalucian costumes, some of the clothing we think of today as traditional was actually imposed on the natives. 4. Spanish and others moved drugs (coca) from strictly ceremonial use to the general population and then into massive export. The history of Latin America is a history of sequential pillaging. First gold, then sugar, then rubber followed by chocolate, cotton, and coffee, then the banana--the tree of hell under United

Fruit. And then Chilean nitrates, Bolivian tin, and finally the "black curse" of petroleum. Sugar in particular devoured both the soil and humanity, first in Brazil then in the Caribbean. The ready use of slavery, both of indigenous natives and of imported Africans, created the economic bottleneck that survives to this day, where those actually extracting the raw materials are virtual slaves and do not derive the fruits of their labor. The author contrasts the manner in which the US used the Homestead Act to grant land to individuals who were incentivized to develop the West, and the latifundo oligarchy that imposes perpetual poverty on generations of indigenous individual families. Myself being a survivor of the Central American wars, and the duty officer the night land reformer Mark Pearlman was executed in El Salvador by an extreme right death squad, I read with interest about the recurring attempts to achieve agrarian reform, only to have push-back from the 14-500 families that "own" the land. I am fascinated by the corporate war between Shell (Paraguay) and Standard Oil (Bolivia) in which the armies of those countries, and the poor of those countries, were the pawns in the "great game" of wealth confiscation. The book is a catalog of all the dictators supported by the USA and enriched by US and European multinational corporations. The second half of the book yields the following notes: 1. Industrial infanticide has been imposed on Latin America by protectionism and free trade (as opposed to fair trade) 2. Loans and railroads (with attendant land rights and obligations) deformed Latin America. 3. The International Monetary Fund (IMB) is the knife that slits the belly of each country to let in the maggots of immoral capitalism. 4. The Ministries of Labor in each Latin American country are the new slave traders. 5. "International charity does not exist." The role of US aid is to help the US domestically. As of the book being written, only 38% of aid was actually targeted aid, all the rest existed to bring greater benefits back to the "giving" country. 6. What Latin America has been lacking all this time is a sense of economic community within its own continent. 7. The book was banned in Chile and Uruguay. I end this summative review with two quotes--cliff notes for the President, if he has anyone active on :Page 261. The task lies in the hands of the dispossessed, the humiliated, the accursed. The Latin American cause is above all a social cause: the rebirth of Latin America must start with the overthrow of its masters, country by country. We are entering times of rebellion and change. Page 285. "The system would like to be confused with the country." and "In these lands we are not experiencing the primitive infancy of capitalism but its vicious senility." Notes and index complete the work. A solid four hour read without interruptions. A great book for anyone desiring to know why the USA is being pushed back while China and Iran are displacing the West in the southern hemisphere. Other books I recommend (you have to look for my summary reviews now, buries serious reviews with a few negative votes). 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before

Columbus  
Confessions of an Economic Hit Man  
War is a Racket: The Antiwar Classic by America's Most Decorated Soldier  
The Trial of Henry Kissinger  
Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War  
Sleeping With the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude  
The Fifty-Year Wound: How America's Cold War Victory Has Shaped Our World  
The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic (The American Empire Project)  
The Global Class War: How America's Bipartisan Elite Lost Our Future - and What It Will Take to Win It Back  
Nobodies: Modern American Slave Labor and the Dark Side of the New Global Economy

Sometimes it is vitally important to read "the other side" of history... and hear the voices of people telling their own story, being interpreters of their own experience. Galeano, both a historian and journalist, writes a masterful history of Latin America - giving voice to Latin American peoples. Much like Howard Zinn's work in *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to Present (P.S.)*, Galeano tells the neglected story. He provides a well-researched history, but his gifts as a journalist shine as he knows how to tell a story that engages the reader... instead of overwhelming the reader with dates and data. Many people (who never read this book) have discarded the validity of this book because Hugo Chavez gave it to Barack Obama... but I hope Pres. Obama has read it. The U.S. and western Europe have to confront centuries of oppression, exploitation, and injustice in Latin America. We can choose to live in ignorance... or begin to hear stories from our brothers and sisters in Latin America and work for a better, more just, future. Reading Galeano's excellent book is a good place to start the process toward justice. I read this book while on a trip to southern CA and Mexico. Numerous conversations were initiated as people noticed my book, especially in Mexico. These conversations only added to my learning experience. I highly recommend this book for students of history and those who want to have their eyes opened so that they might work for a better future. In my opinion, every single person from the West working, serving, vacationing, or studying in Latin America should read this book.

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