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Muddied Waters: Race, Region, and Local History in Colombia, 1846-1948 (Latin America Otherwise)

Nancy P. Appelbaum

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Colombia's western Coffee Region is renowned for the whiteness of its inhabitants, who are often described as respectable pioneer families who domesticated a wild frontier and planted coffee on the forested slopes of the Andes. Some local inhabitants, however, tell a different tale—of white migrants rapaciously usurping the lands of indigenous and black communities. *Muddied Waters* examines both of these legends, showing how local communities, settlers, speculators, and politicians struggled over jurisdictional boundaries and the privatization of communal lands in the creation of the Coffee Region. Viewing the emergence of this region from the perspective of Riosucio, a multiracial town within it, Nancy P. Appelbaum reveals the contingent and contested nature of Colombia's racialized regional identities.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Colombian elite intellectuals, Appelbaum contends, mapped race onto their mountainous topography by defining regions in racial terms. They privileged certain places and inhabitants as white and modern and denigrated others as racially inferior and backward. Inhabitants of Riosucio, however, elaborated local narratives about their mestizo and indigenous identities that contested the white mystique of the Coffee Region. Ongoing violent conflicts over land and politics, Appelbaum finds, continue to shape local debates over history and identity. Drawing on archival and published sources complemented by oral history, *Muddied Waters* vividly illustrates the relationship of mythmaking and racial inequality to regionalism and frontier colonization in postcolonial Latin America.

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