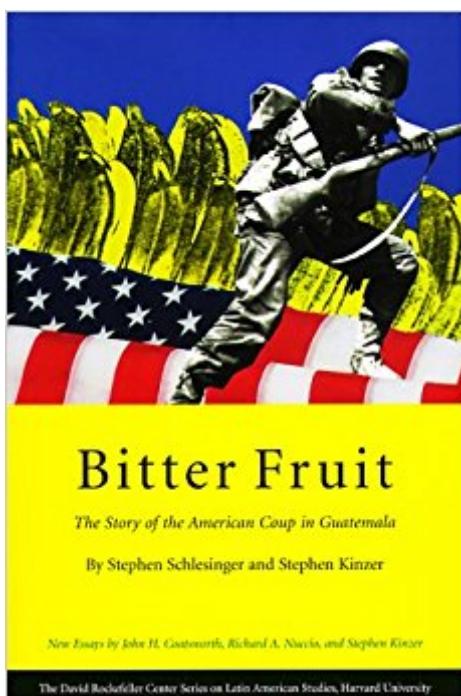


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# Bitter Fruit: The Story Of The American Coup In Guatemala



## **Synopsis**

There is a newer edition of this book. Bitter Fruit recounts in telling detail the CIA operation to overthrow the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala in 1954. The 1982 book has become a classic, a textbook case study of Cold War meddling that succeeded only to condemn Guatemala to decades of military dictatorship. The authors make extensive use of U.S. government publications and documents, as well as interviews with former CIA and other officials. The Harvard edition includes a powerful new introduction by historian John Coatsworth, Director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies; an insightful prologue by Richard Nuccio, former State Department official who revealed recent evidence of CIA misconduct in Guatemala to Congress; and a compelling afterword by coauthor Stephen Kinzer, now Istanbul bureau chief for the New York Times, summarizing developments that led from the 1954 coup to the peace accords that ended Guatemala's civil strife forty years later.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The reappearance of this small classic is most welcome and important. It helps us understand the disasters that misshaped U.S. and Central American relations after 1954, especially into the 1980s and 1990s. --Walter LaFeber, Cornell University

With an introduction by Harrison Salisbury and a new foreword for the 1990 edition, the authors

have written a history which reads like a thriller, detailing the dirty tricks, the manipulation of public opinion, and the corrupt foreign policy which characterized U.S. involvement in Guatemala. They show that this covert action became a blueprint for later incursions by the U.S. into Central America.  
--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I ordered this book because I had to give a conference in Guatemala and was confused about the beginning of the country's long armed conflict. I figured this was a good place to start, and it was. It helped me understand better not only the American role in Guatemala, but also a lot of the current attitudes and opinions in Latin America about work, big international companies and America. Unlike some reviewers, I don't find it biased at all, in fact I read it without much knowledge of the conflict and understood clearly both sides of it. This isn't a story about good innocent guys suffering from the hands of bad gringos, it's a story about wrong incentives both among Guatemalans and owners of the United Fruit Company. I currently work in a Mexican company started by one of the 150,000 Guatemalan immigrants of the 80s. I had never given much thought on this before, but now I can even relate better to the history of my own job and the nature of some cultural traits I find both in Mexicans and Guatemalans.

Schlesinger and Kinzer did indeed write a classic. The book is well-written and very readable. While it is certainly an academic work and may be considered a textbook, it is not as dry as such the connotation suggests. On the contrary, the story at times feels like a best-selling espionage novel or a Hollywood conspiracy-theory movie, but much better in my opinion. More importantly, *Bitter Fruit* is supported by excellent sources - many Freedom of Information Act documents and also many memoirs and interviews of people involved in the events. This is comforting and assures that while the book is almost written in the style of a fictional thriller, the authors did not take any liberties of rewriting or embellishing history to make the book more fun to read. Schlesinger and Kinzer also do an excellent job of providing the background of the parties involved and the historical context in which the revolution and coup took place. They also wrap up the book well in their 'Aftermath' final chapter and provide much needed closure to the story, in which they discuss the fates of the major players since the coup. Highest recommendations.

I first heard of the book, *Bitter Fruit*, when I was traveling in Guatemala. Our half Mayan guide told some stories of his country's recent history, of massacres and bombings, and of the severe hardships his family endured while he was growing up. Although he mentioned that those horrors

were executed by those who were financed, trained, and directed by the USA, I had no knowledge of the history of that part of the world or of my country's intervention. When I returned home, I ordered the book on for about half the price it sold for in Guatemala. I had thought it would be hard reading as an academic production. I was wrong. This carefully documented book gives in great detail the recent history of Guatemala, and America's role in that history. For me, it was extremely interesting. It read like a John Grisham novel; I couldn't put it down; I wanted to know what happened next. Tragically, it is a true horror story, with terrible consequences for Guatemala and thus for all of us. An estimated 200,000 Guatemalans died in a civil war begun by the clearly illegal and immoral actions of the USA CIA and army, with the knowledge and approval of US Presidents starting with President Eisenhower. As a result, progress in such matters as land reform and justice for all in Guatemala has been compromised to this day. I hope that all Americans read and take to heart this very powerful book.

Whether you're a connoisseur with a PhD in international relations, a high-school dropout looking to enhance their missing education, or someone who just wants to read an engrossing book with a little intellectual flare to it, one can be both entertained and appalled by the story contained in "Bitter Fruit". Kinzer and Schlesinger's writing is impeccable, and somehow manages to stay apolitical. The authors do an excellent job of not flaunting the miscues of the American overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected government, but merely let the facts from all angles tell their own story. In addition, the writing is quite fast-paced in style but pays attentive detail to fact and exhaustively denotes the sources behind the writing. I purchased this for reading as part of a class assignment - and then cited it in two places in my senior essay! So instead of buying a FICTIONAL thriller or adventure or spy novel for your downtime reading, why not pick up a book where the plot . . . actually happened?! In addition, despite being originally published a quarter century ago, the book is amazingly relevant to issues in today's foreign policy (\*cough\* Iraq \*cough\*). Also, I HIGHLY recommend for history buffs like myself - but this book can be enjoyed by anyone. Well, "enjoyed" isn't really the word - after reading this book, I felt a sense of anger towards our government for their selfish actions 50 years ago, and a sense of pity toward the people of Guatemala, who had no idea what hit them. But the feelings weren't on the level as to wish that I had never read the book - on the contrary, it made me feel more enlightened both about the Cold War era as well as today's international climate.

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