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Gringo: A Coming Of Age In Latin America



Synopsis

"Gringo" charts two journeys, both of which began a decade ago. The first is the sweeping transformation of Latin American politics that started with Hugo Chavez's inauguration as president of Venezuela in 1999. In that same year, an eighteen-year-old Chesa Boudin leaves his middle-class Chicago life -- which is punctuated by prison visits to his parents, who were incarcerated when he was fourteen months old for their role in a politically motivated bank truck robbery -- and arrives in Guatemala. He finds a world where disparities of wealth are even more pronounced and where social change is not confined to classroom or dinner-table conversations, but instead takes place in the streets. While a new generation of progress-ive Latin American leaders rises to power, Boudin crisscrosses twenty-seven countries throughout the Americas. He witnesses the economic crisis in Buenos Aires; works inside Chavez's Miraflores palace in Caracas; watches protestors battling police on September 11, 2001, in Santiago; descends into ancient silver mines in Potosi; and travels steerage on a riverboat along the length of the . He rarely takes a plane when a fifteen-hour bus ride in the company of unfettered chickens is available. Including incisive analysis, brilliant reportage, and deep humanity, Boudin's account of this historic period is revelatory. It weaves together the voices of Latin Americans, some rich, most poor, and the endeavors of a young traveler to understand the world around him while coming to terms with his own complicated past. The result is a marvelous mixture of coming-of-age memoir and travelogue.

Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Scribner (February 16, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1416559124

ISBN-13: 978-1416559122

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #624,092 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in [Latin American Books > Travel > Central America > Guatemala](#) #3480 in [Latin American Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers](#) #17222 in [Latin American Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Memoirs](#)

Customer Reviews

“My four parents had always decried the labor abuses perpetuated around the

world. Four? Yes. When Boudin's radical Jewish parents were imprisoned in New York from the early 1980s, he was raised in Chicago by Weathermen William Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn. Over the last decade, the award-winning Rhodes and Rotary Scholar has interrupted his academic studies to travel to 25 countries across Latin America, and this gripping narrative weaves together his personal journey with his acute, on-the-ground political observation. There is no self-importance, no simplistic message, always the wry awareness that he is the privileged tourist gringo in his cargo pants and multipocketed vest, even as he witnesses ecological devastation, economic crises, and the struggle of the indigenous movements. Down a mine in Bolivia, he is reminded of his regular prison visits to his parents. Even readers who skip the detailed local politics from Venezuela to Colombia will be held by the broader issues, as he confronts the difference between need and want, the value of privacy, the luxury of space. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"'Gringo' might well be Orwell's 'Down and Out in Paris and London' for the Millennial Generation, except that instead of Paris and London, it's Caracas and Quito and the Basin." -- Russell Banks, author of "Cloudsplitter" and "Dreaming Up America"

"In 'Gringo', Chesa Boudin takes us on a delightfully engaging trip through Latin America, in an ingenious combination of memoir and commentary. The personal story is unflinchingly honest, and the political judgments nuanced and thoughtful. Latin America is at the outer edge of consciousness in this country, and Chesa Boudin brings it back to our attention, eloquently and vigorously." -- Howard Zinn

"This marvelous voyage of personal discovery provides a vivid portrait of the richness and diversity of Latin America, its wonders and suffering, the courage and irrepressible spirit of its people, as they are revealed to a thoughtful and sensitive eye during the most exciting and hopeful decade since the European conquests. It is an enthralling account, stimulating and provocative." -- Noam Chomsky

"This superb travel memoir has the benefit of an appealingly honest, intelligent, and reliable narrator, whose humorous self-scrutiny and compassionate insights bridge two worlds with extraordinary tact. I found it engrossing, moving, and compulsively readable." -- Phillip Lopate

"Boudin has a pitch-perfect ear for the cadences that make up daily life in a region grappling with change. More than a well-written and clear-eyed guide to the efforts of yet another generation of Latin American leaders and activists trying to chart their own way, it's a handbook for 'estadounidenses' on how to listen to and learn from those below the Rio Grande who also call themselves Americans." -- Greg Grandin, author of "Empire's Workshop"

"A compelling firsthand account of the unregulated greed, social neglect, and deliberate misrule that has provoked so many Latin Americans to demand a

better life for themselves and their children. Boudin's vivid reports are filled with memorable characters whose stories capture the tragedies and the promise of this vast region." -- John H. Coatsworth, director, Institute of Latin American Studies, Columbia University" This is not Latin American for Yuppies, which shouldn't be much of a surprise, knowing the lineage. It's cheap beer, fried plantains, long dusty bus rides, radical politics, the repeated kindness of desperately poor people sharing what they have with an outsider, and Chesa Boudin's eagerness to share what he's seeing and what he's feeling, with sympathy and empathy -- as he tries to sort it all out. There's much to learn in this book." -- Seymour Hersh, the "New Yorker"

The book moves a little slow but I enjoyed reading about his travels. I received the book for a gift and I would not have purchased it if I had previously read it.

I read this book for my book club. I really enjoyed it and learnt a lot about politics and problems in South America. I live in Ecuador and plan to read more about the politics and problems caused by the USA in South America.

I rarely give out five stars for a book but I almost did here. Well written and intelligent but not pretentious or academic description of travel through Latin America. Amazing stories of being in Colombian jungles and the presidential palace in Venezuela. I find books such as this are rarely objective and Latin America is viewed through an American or European lens but he does a very good job of keeping an open mind. He has leftist ideals but isn't a cheerleader that just praises all leftist leaders. He asks questions and offers criticisms as well. I definitely would like to check out other books by this author.

I bought this book at the same time that I bought *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*--the latter the book Hugo Chavez is reported to have given to Barack Obama. It has been brilliantly marketed, and I applaud the initiative and the integrity of the self-made author, but in the larger scheme of things this is very light reading, in no way comparable to any of the works of Robert Kaplan or Robert Young Pelton, to take the two who are best in class in this particular writing domain. I list books I recommend instead of this one at the end of the review. A few details that stayed with me: Of the ten chapters, three are on Venezuela, with one each on Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Guatemala. He visited but has left for another book Cuba, Mexico, and Nicaragua. Hugo Chavez certainly comes out of this book looking

very well, and I wonder somewhat unkindly if the Cuban intelligence service had anything to do with the crafting of the book. They are wonderfully subtle, as is this book. I do, however, share the author's views on Venezuela and Chavez and the need for an alternative model for Latin America, so I endorse and praise his take on the situation, including: + Chavez is now ten years in power, early on he slammed those who wrote about the end of history, the triumph of neoliberalism, and the Washington Consensus. See *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* for more substance. + Media is in and out of Venezuela, they get it wrong and communicate a false picture of Venezuela. + Winning the election is only the beginning, then there is a very long fight to change the "system" that is deeply entrenched. He crossed 25 borders and spent over 150 hours on bus rides. In Colombia he found human rights being trampled by global economic imperatives, with massive internal displaced persons (see the genocide chapter in *The New Craft of Intelligence: Personal, Public, & Political--Citizen's Action Handbook for Fighting Terrorism, Genocide, Disease, Toxic Bombs, & Corruption*). He is by nature an anti-imperialist progressive, and speak of shame in seeing the impact of US policies and CIA interventions up close, but in the single most valuable sentence that I found in the entire book, he observes that indigenous corruption at the local level is what really hurts those at the bottom of the pyramid, they do not see or even feel the direct effects from CIA interventions or predatory capitalism at the national level. I share Lawrence Lessig's view that corruption is the scourge of all, and I also believe that the sooner We the People can follow ALL of the money and reveal all "true costs," the sooner we can demand and receive honest government at all levels. This is a very fast read, especially if you have lived in Latin America, this is a wonderful book for those who wish to read lightly about the fine combination of a young man making a great deal of himself from very austere beginnings, and one person's perceptions on Latin America over the same period, but at root, this is a travelogue, not an analysis. Other books to consider: Robert Young Pelton's *The World's Most Dangerous Places: 5th Edition* (Robert Young Pelton the World's Most Dangerous Places) *The Hunter, The Hammer, and Heaven: Journeys to Three Worlds Gone Mad* *The Ends of the Earth: From Togo to Turkmenistan, from Iran to Cambodia--A Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy* *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* *Nobodies: Modern American Slave Labor and the Dark Side of the New Global Economy* *High Noon 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them* *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility--Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*

Chesa the young traveller is riding buses up and down rocky, mountainous terrain filled with Latino and Latina locals, and their babies and chickens, saving money and appreciating the difference

between his life at home as an American student from a comfortable family, and the life of the Latin Americans he travels with and comes to know. His experience is deepened by his intensive study of the history of the U.S. in Latin America, and the attempts by Venezuelans and others to take hold of their own history and their national destiny. He throws his lot in with them but with some distance and perspective, and the book brings home the lessons and possibilities of real friendships and solidarity with Latin America. I have given this book to many, many friends. Young friends love this book, take its lessons to heart, think critically about their own privileged lives in this country, and pack their backpacks and take to the road. Older readers love the unique perspective and the compelling tale.

Descriptive of the traditions and culture of the Latin American people coupled with honest expository comment on the wonders of both the geography and Latin governments, Boudin leads us through a chapter in his life where personal growth not only continues into a third decade, but accelerates to warp speed as he takes in everything around him with the clarity of an intellectual many years his senior. Read him now so you know him when he becomes an important part of the fabric of the US as it learns to appreciate rather than exploit its neighbors to the south.

Well written analysis of Latin American politics during the current decade with a different perspective than we usually hear. Insightful and enjoyable to read.

The book is engaging, full of information and a rarity. Very valuable for someone looking for information about current events in South America.

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