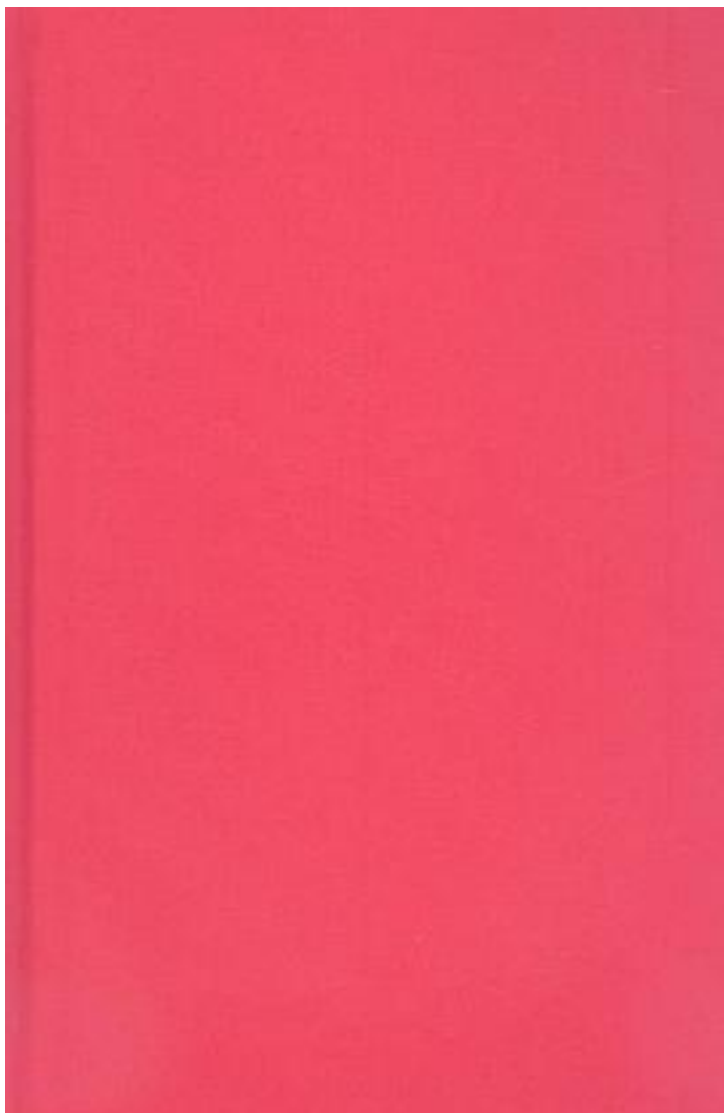


Ugly Stories of the Peruvian Agrarian Reform



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出版者:

出版时间:2009-12

装帧:

isbn:9780822344698

"Ugly Stories of the Peruvian Agrarian Reform" reveals the human drama behind the radical agrarian reform process that unfolded in Peru during the final three decades of the twentieth century. That process began in 1969, when the left-leaning military government implemented a drastic programme of land expropriation. Seized land was turned into worker-managed cooperatives. After those cooperatives began to falter and the country returned to civilian rule in the 1980s, members organized to dismantle them and distribute the land among themselves. In 1995-96, as the agrarian reform process was winding down and neoliberal policies were undoing leftist reforms, the Peruvian anthropologist Enrique Mayer travelled throughout the country, interviewing people who had lived through the most tumultuous years of agrarian reform, recording their memories and their stories. While agrarian reform caused enormous upheaval, controversy, and disappointment, it did succeed in breaking up the unjust and oppressive hacienda system. Mayer contends that the demise of that system is comparable in importance to the liberation of slaves in the Americas. Mayer interviewed ex-landlords, land expropriators, politicians, government bureaucrats, intellectuals, peasant leaders, activists, ranchers, members of farming families, and others. Weaving their impassioned recollections in with his own commentary, he offers a series of dramatic narratives, each one centred around a specific instance of land expropriation, collective enterprise, and disillusion. Although the reform began with high hopes, it was quickly complicated by difficulties including corruption, rural and urban unrest, fights over land tenure and expropriation, delays in modernization, and explosive population growth. As he provides insight into how important historical events are remembered, Mayer re-evaluates Peru's military government (1969-79), its audacious agrarian reform program, and what that reform meant to Peruvians from all walks of life.

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