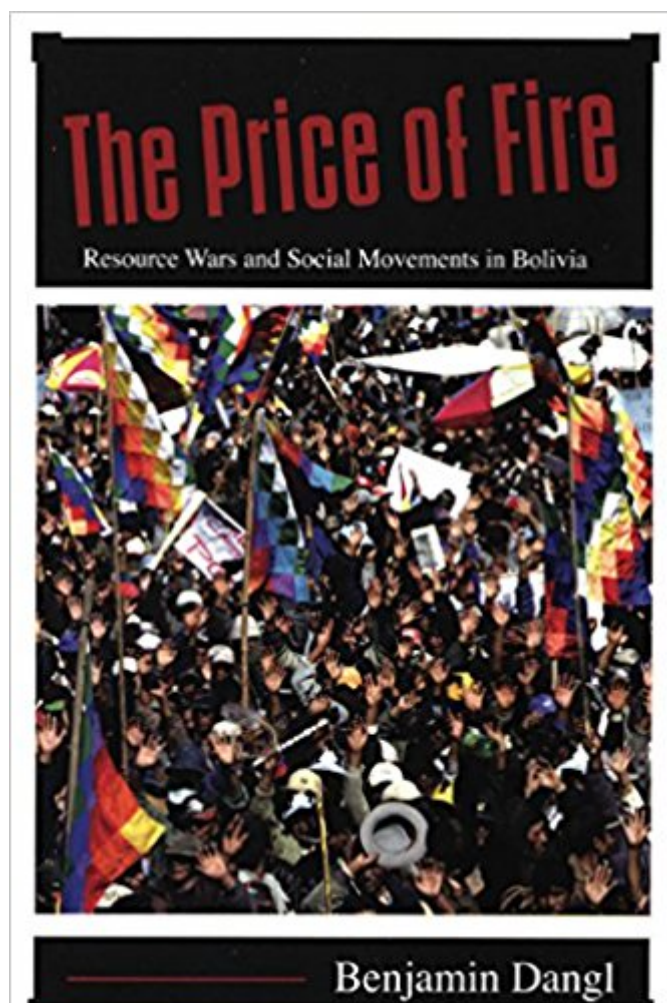


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The Price Of Fire: Resource Wars And Social Movements In Bolivia



Synopsis

New social movements have emerged in Bolivia over the "price of fire" — access to basic elements of survival like water, gas, land, coca, employment, and other resources. Though these movements helped pave the way to the presidency for indigenous coca-grower Evo Morales in 2005, they have made it clear that their fight for self-determination doesn't end at the ballot box. From the first moments of Spanish colonization to today's headlines, *The Price of Fire* offers a gripping account of clashes in Bolivia between corporate and people's power, contextualizing them regionally, culturally, and historically. Benjamin Dangl has worked as an independent journalist throughout Latin America, writing for publications such as *Z Magazine*, *The Nation*, and *The Progressive*. He is the editor of *Toward Freedom.com*, a progressive perspective on world events, and *UpsideDownWorld.org*, an online magazine covering activism and politics in Latin America. Benjamin won a 2007 Project Censored Award for his coverage of US military operations in Paraguay. "Price of Fire is not yet another bleak account of globalization, its pages are filled with stories of resistance, struggle and, above all, hope. Teo Ballvé, editor of the NACLA Report on the Americas and co-editor of *Dispatches from Latin America* "Ben Dangl takes the reader on an unforgettable and inspiring journey through Bolivia and neighboring countries, providing a window on the revolutionary struggles of the poor and dispossessed, and particularly on the resurgence of indigenous resistance and leadership. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, author of *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* "Most Americans know nothing of Bolivia, an ignorance that only plays into the hands of empire. Ben Dangl's book is both informative and inspiring, a cure for the apathy that grows from that ignorance. A must-read for those already interested in solidarity with Latin America and indigenous people. Tom Hayden, author of *The Zapatista Reader* and *Street Wars* "Ben Dangl has found himself under the skin of the Bolivian freedom struggle: he accurately represents its constraints, its opportunities, and its hopes. Vijay Prashad, author of *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* "With great empathy and lucid prose, Dangl captures the exemplary courage that has put Latin America in the vanguard of the new internationalism and has made it one of the few bright spots on an otherwise dismal global landscape. Greg Grandin, author of *Empire's Workshop* "Price of Fire by Ben Dangl informs, outrages, and builds hope. People's movements for societal betterment in South America are an inspiration for human rights activists worldwide and Dangl gives us a full serving of encouragement and hope. He documents how historical imperialism, dominated

my US corporate/government capital interests, is being successfully challenged by indigenous activists. Price of Fire is the story of cultural resistance from the street to international geo-political alliances. I highly recommend this book for working people, students, and radical democrats to hear the voices of South American people and their chronicle of grassroots democratic empowerment." — Peter Phillips, Professor Sociology, Sonoma State University, Director Project Censored, and co-editor with Dennis Loo of Impeach the President: The Case Against Bush and Cheney

Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: AK Press (March 1, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 190485933X

ISBN-13: 978-1904859338

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.7 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,342,513 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #68 in Books > History > Americas > South America > Bolivia #679 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Colonialism & Post-Colonialism #1167 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America

Customer Reviews

Benjamin Dangl is an independent journalist with one foot in Latin America and the other in the United States. He is the editor of TowardFreedom.com, which offers progressive perspectives on world events and UpsideDownWorld.org, an online magazine uncovering activism and politics in Latin America. He won a 2007 Project Censored Award for his reporting on US military operations in Paraguay.

A great book that I would recommend to anyone and everyone.

Purchased for a birthday gift for couple who spent a year in South America. Seemed pleased to continue reading about the area.

For anyone wanting to learn more about the exciting social movements that are rocking Bolivia and transforming the continent, I highly recommend this informative book. Benjamin Dangl has really done an amazing job bringing to life the various struggles of working-class Bolivians to reclaim the basic elements of survival like water, gas, land, and dignified jobs. More than just the triumphant story of the people's movement to elect the indigenous leader Evo Morales, this book is about the popular resistance of Bolivian miners, farm workers, factory workers, and students to the economic and political catastrophes caused by neoliberalism. Internationalist in perspective, this book interlinks the Bolivian revolution with revolutionary movements in Venezuela and Argentina. As someone interested in integrating art and politics, I found the chapter on Bolivian hip hop, street theater, and Mujeres Creando to be especially fascinating and imagine that others involved in, say, building giant street puppets, painting public murals, or writing folk music would enjoy this as well. As the poorest nation in South America, a nation burdened with the tragic history of Operation Condor and the military dictatorship of Hugo Banzer, Bolivia is helping to pave the way for justice, peace, and liberation in Latin America.

As a North American, the media, if it reports about Latin America, our southern neighbors, at all, it is usually muddled and simplified. I am always skeptical when all the media is biased in union and regurgitating the same refrains. I always have to make an extensive effort to get even a basic understanding of what is really happening in the "Other Americas". This book is a clear window. It contextualizes events instead of using a broad stroke for the entire continent. It makes clear and startling connections between what is happening down there and the United States deliberate and active roles in it and in their history and current events. For anyone curious about the social changes and revolutions happening down there, for anyone desiring an unmuddled view of Latin America and its past events, get this book. This is from an independent journalist without corporations he needs to please. Definitely recommended. An inspiring, thought provoking read. (Thank you AK Press for sending me this as my monthly book for being a Friend of AK Press!)

Things across Latin America look like they've heating up in the last five years to the breaking point. After decades of military rule, right-wing forces, banana republics, and domination by foreign companies, governments in Latin America crushing left-wing movements and people fighting the old orders of extreme wealth and extreme poverty, it really looks like those days are through. Social movements are no longer an isolated thing. From the autonomous movements in Argentina, to the Landless People's Movement in Brazil, to even (to some extent) charismatic left-wing rulers like

Hugo Chavez, to the Zapatistas and their supporters in southern Mexico, it looks like from this vantage point in the mid-atlantic region of the United States, that Latin America has some really big things going on right now. Bolivia is no different. "The Price of Fire" explores struggles and movements in Bolivia, focusing on the last five years. The book's title refers to what many of the struggles there are tied around: the simple price of fire, or gas for heating. Dangl talks about many different issues going on there, and especially issues like the coca trade, access to water after the government privatizes the water and begins billing people for it, and the community mobilization across the country in response. These uprisings are called "wars", like the Water War and the Gas War, for very good reasons. One interesting aspect is that the coca leaf is used as a symbol of resistance. Coca can be processed into cocaine, but it's also a main ingredient in coca-cola and is used locally as medicine. Because of the US insistence as a part of the "War on Drugs", the government and sometimes US Forces, regularly bomb, destroy, and prosecute coca farmers. Indeed, sometimes the soldiers themselves sent to destroy the crops are chewing coca leaves as they burn coca plants. The military also murders farmers who refuse to plead guilty to drug trafficking. In response, at the city of Chipiriri, the cocaleros formed a coca farmers union, and set up a tightly controlled market to sell their goods, while forbidding any drug dealing or usage at the market. Two major uprisings, the Water War in Cochabamba of 1999 and the Gas War of 2003, are vividly described in the book. After three years of pressure by the World Bank to either privatize its water or face losses of billions of dollars in loans, the Bolivian government relented and pushed for the water of the nation to be placed into corporate hands in 1999. This totally enraged the population of Cochabamba, which has around half a million people and is growing rapidly, after costs skyrocketed, distribution failed, and the poorest were completely cut off from water at all. Road blockades, huge street demonstrations, and occupation of the water company offices forced the government to act, and they made the company public. On September 19th 2003, the Gas War starts in Cochabamba, and quickly escalates as cocaleros join in huge road blockades, made even more popular by events in Argentina as a form of protest. The issue is on whether to export natural gas to foreign countries when there is a shortage for the very poor in Bolivia. Large popular assemblies gather, and unions, community groups, and other organizations unite around this issue, which eventually brought down the President. An anarchy-feminist group, Mujeres Creando, agitates for the end of patriarchy and women's submission in their center "The Virgin". Neighbors in the neighborhood El Alto also emerge at the head of the mobilization. At the end, a left-wing President, former coca-grower and indigenous Evo Morales is elected, with the understanding that if he does not stand up against International Companies and the World Bank, that he can be forced

out of office as well. This book takes a wide view of the situation in Bolivia, as the author worked as an independent journalist throughout Latin America, writing for a variety of left-wing magazines like Z Magazine, The Nation, and the Progressive. I recommend that if you have read Marina Sitrin's Horizontalism, you read this one right afterwards. The two fit together like a hand in a glove, one focusing on Argentina and one focusing on Bolivia, but seemingly talking about the very same thing: poor people, indigenous people, and women rising up against corporations and the rulers of their lands. A lot of theory and analysis makes you want to jump off a cliff with how depressing it is; books like this and Sitrin's fills you with hope and examples of how people are organizing and fighting back.

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