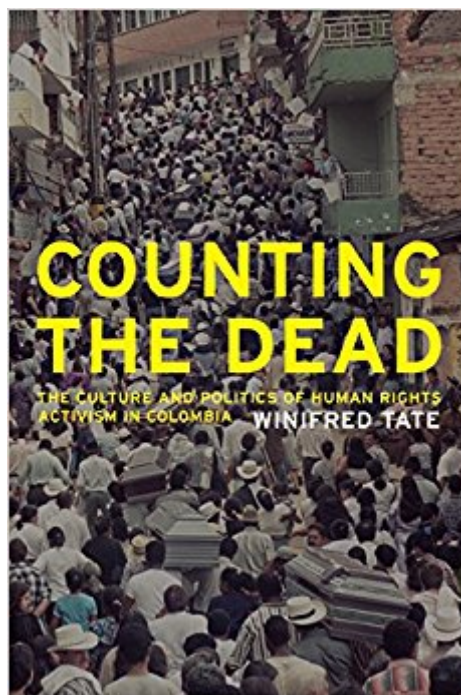


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Counting The Dead: The Culture And Politics Of Human Rights Activism In Colombia (California Series In Public Anthropology)



Synopsis

At a time when a global consensus on human rights standards seems to be emerging, this rich study steps back to explore how the idea of human rights is actually employed by activists and human rights professionals. Winifred Tate, an anthropologist and activist with extensive experience in Colombia, finds that radically different ideas about human rights have shaped three groups of human rights professionals working there--nongovernmental activists, state representatives, and military officers. Drawing from the life stories of high-profile activists, pioneering interviews with military officials, and research at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, *Counting the Dead* underscores the importance of analyzing and understanding human rights discourses, methodologies, and institutions within the context of broader cultural and political debates.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Contributes significantly to our understanding of how activist institutional culture and identity evolves in a context where traditional labor and religious activists increasingly engage with and become more deeply enmeshed in the larger global activist community.” (Stephen Ropp *Hispanic American Historical Review* (Hahr) 2009-02-01)

“A fascinating study of how and why the idea of human rights has gained such currency in Colombian society.” (William AvilÃ©s *Latin American Perspectives: A Journal On Capitalism & Socialism* 2012-10-15)

"There is nothing out there like *Counting the Dead*. Drawing on years of firsthand experience with those on the front lines of human rights work in Colombia, Winifred Tate guides the reader through an untold history of brave but quixotic efforts to build a democratic rule of law amid one of the world's most intractable, complicated conflicts. Written in clear, journalistic language and peppered with anecdotes, *Counting the Dead* introduces us to a fascinating cast of characters-brave but fractious activists, out-of-touch government officials, wily military officers-all of whom tailor the language of human rights to their own agendas. Anyone who hopes to understand modern Colombia-or indeed, the challenges of human rights advocacy and state building amid conflict anywhere in the twenty-first century-would do well to read this book."—Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy

"How do human rights actually work in situations of ongoing conflict and violence? This wonderfully rich and detailed study of human rights organizations and activists in Colombia offers fascinating insights into the complexity of human rights and their advocates-ranging from leftists to the military. Essential reading for those interested in a sophisticated, historical understanding of human rights, the book is a major contribution to the exciting new anthropological field that examines the practice of human rights."—Sally Engle Merry, New York University

"*Counting the Dead* is a fascinating portrait of the pathology, pain, and hope of the struggle for human rights in Colombia. Powerfully weaving together personal narratives with historical analysis, this deeply researched, thoughtful, and moving study offers new understanding of the nature of knowledge and power; it is a model of engaged anthropology."—Alison Brysk, University of California, Irvine

"Winifred Tate has written a deeply researched, critically sophisticated, and compelling ethnography of a little-examined, but enormously important and timely subject: human rights discourse and the individuals and institutions that struggle to define and deploy it within the often violent reality of contemporary Colombia. The author's deep familiarity with NGO and human rights-related scholarship and activism enormously enriches this account. By situating the detailed and particular trajectories of the individuals and institutions she examines within a historically contingent framework that takes into account the influence of larger social, political, economic, and ideological currents in shaping the philosophy and objectives of Colombian human rights workers and organizations over time, Tate is able to seamlessly navigate between fine-grained analysis and abstract comparison and extrapolation. This illuminating and lucidly written analysis has path-breaking implications not only for the study of Colombia, but for those interested in exploring the possibilities and limitations of a human rights framework to shape the parameters of conflict resolution and defense of individual rights in situations of conflict across the globe. A definite

must read."—Mary Jean Roldan, Cornell University

Tate does a good job of framing the background and giving a comprehensive history as to the effects of transnational advocacy groups in Colombia and how they have transformed from a grassroots movements into a more professionalized industry as international funds became involved. It touches on liberation theology and solidarity very briefly. More than anything it gives the reader an understanding of the issues and a broad scope as to the individuals involved.

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