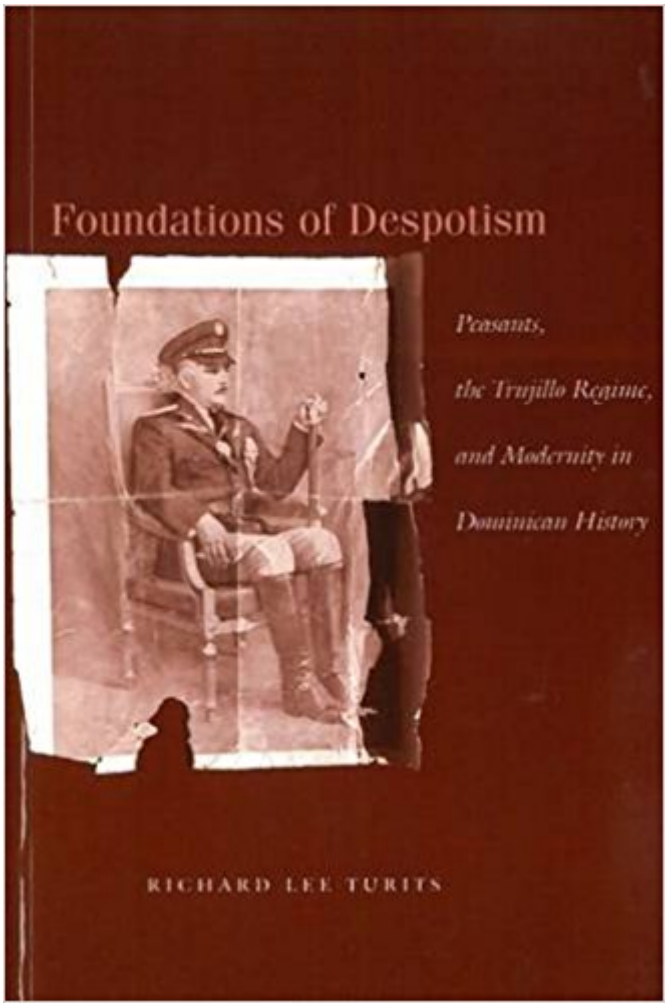
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Foundations Of Despotism: Peasants, The Trujillo Regime, And Modernity In Dominican History



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Synopsis

This book explores the history of the Dominican Republic as it evolved from the first European colony in the Americas into a modern nation under the rule of Rafael Trujillo. It investigates the social foundations of TrujilloÃ¢â ¬â„¢s exceptionally enduring and brutal dictatorship (1930-1961) and, more broadly, the way power is sustained in such non-democratic regimes. The author reveals how the seemingly unilateral imposition of power by Trujillo in fact depended on the regimeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s mediation of profound social and economic transformations, especially through agrarian policies that assisted the nationÃ¢â ¬â„¢s large independent peasantry. By promoting an alternative modernity that sustained peasantsÃ¢â ¬â„¢ free access to land during a period of economic growth, the regime secured peasant support as well as backing from certain elite sectors. This book thus elucidates for the first time the hidden foundations of the Trujillo regime.

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Customer Reviews

"One of the best works ever done on the Dominican Republic, this wonderful book goes a long way toward explaining not only the long-lived Trujillo dictatorship but subsequent Dominican social and political history as well. It is also a powerful critique of the simplistic demonizing of the Caribbean dictatorial model of politics attached to strongmen like Trujillo, Somoza, and Duvalier." (Lowell Gudmundson Mount Holyoke College)"...It becomes clear that Foundations of Despotism is indeed a sophisticated, scholarly antidote to many of the works on the Trujillo regime that have come out in the past four decades...""Turits has given us a solid and original contribution to the vast literature on Rafael Leonidas Trujillo as well as a splendid contribution to the growing literature on peasants,

modernization, and social change." (Canadian Journal of Latin American & Caribbean Studies)"[T]his is an elegantly written, extensively documented, and superbly argued work. Turits combines traditional, archival work with innovative forms of oral history, and no doubt it will stand the test of time as a fundamental text in the historiography of the Caribbean." (The Americas)

This book explores the history of the Dominican Republic as it evolved from the first European colony in the Americas into a modern nation under the rule of Rafael Trujillo. It investigates the social foundations of TrujilloÃ¢â ¬â„¢s exceptionally enduring and brutal dictatorship (1930-1961) and, more broadly, the way power is sustained in such non-democratic regimes. The author reveals how the seemingly unilateral imposition of power by Trujillo in fact depended on the regimeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s mediation of profound social and economic transformations, especially through agrarian policies that assisted the nationÃ¢â ¬â„¢s large independent peasantry. By promoting an alternative modernity that sustained peasantsÃ¢â ¬â„¢ free access to land during a period of economic growth, the regime secured peasant support as well as backing from certain elite sectors. This book thus elucidates for the first time the hidden foundations of the Trujillo regime.

The book provides a detailed account of Dominican history leading up to and through Trujillo. Turtis relies heavily on land documents and testimonies, yet fails to account for the issue of race more throughly. The relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and its peasantry is not fully explored. It’s a dense book that will give the reader further understanding of the inner-workings of the Trujillo regime. It also highlights the fact that not all peasants disguised Trujillo by teasing out the details of his relationship with different geographic regions of Dominican Republic. It’s a fascinating read for anyone interested in the history of this half of the island.

For me this book was an eye-opening history of the foundation of Generalissimo Trujillo’s long-lasting power. When I picked up this title I sought to know, beyond the oppression and excesses, HOW and WHY Dominicans put up with the guy for thirty years. As with Fidel Castro that long a reign takes much more than troops and torture to maintain. Turit’s book offered many lessons on statecraft, nation-building and Trujillo’s role in their development in DR. The largest lesson from this book was that despite the cruel and twisted aspects of his story Trujillo was actually a highly effective head of state whose early policies did great good to the infant nation. His regime sped up and solidified economic processes that unshackled DR from being a marginal backwater. Principally this meant ’domesticating’ our Dominican grandparents who were for the most part stubbornly

nomadic ranchers and gatherers. None had succeeded in this for centuries. He drew the Dominican national boundaries, both territorially and tragically in the sense of identity. He almost literally created the state apparatus of DR. Most shockingly to me he successfully redistributed land to the common man the way so many Latin-American movements of the left promised and often failed to deliver. This last point is the one around which Foundations is centered. Clearly Trujillo acted out of greed and self-interest, but his cunning was in seeing where his interests aligned with those of our then often impoverished, landless Dominican grandparents.Foundations is written in an academic, densely foot-noted style and doesn't have a thrilling narrative. Unless you bring your own curiosity as I did you won't find it as gripping as titles on Trujillo's lurid dark side. Still to me all histories ultimately begin with the material and economic facts, the broad determinants as illustrated by documented particulars, and on that level Turits very much delivers. Read this book to begin to understand the structural reasons why DR generated, accepted and even needed a Generalissimo Trujillo. Fellow Dominicanos will be glad to find that contrary to stereotypes around our history in this work the Trujillo regime is explained not just a puppet government installed over a hapless banana republic by the US State Department. Alongside El Jefe, in this piece of history the unlikely co-protagonist was the Dominican campesino and not the big bad empire.

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