

Background History of Colombia and author's relevant biography for Gabriel García Márquez, No One Writes to the Colonel and Other Stories and One Hundred Years of Solitude

1. 1824 - Colombia, as part of la gran Colombia, gains independence from Spain ; at this time, the children of slaves declared free (Between 1824 and 1851, there are constant slave rebellions).
2. **1848-1885** - Liberal national government
 - 1848-54 = Liberal national government passes many laws that go against the traditional interests of the Conservatives and the Catholic Church.
 - 1851 = Liberal national government declares the abolition of Afro-Colombian slavery
 - Between 1851 and 1885, there are 4 nationwide civil wars and 51 local revolutions (armed conflicts) between Liberals and Conservatives.
3. **War of 1885** - The Conservatives gain the upper hand and seize the presidency. They rewrite the constitution (1886) and restore their old powers to the Church and the Conservative landowners (hacendados, latifundistas).
4. **1885-1930** - Conservatives hold national power.
5. **1899 -1902** = “**The War of The Thousand Days**” = the most destructive war in Colombia since the Wars of Independence; more than 100,000 dead out of a national population of 4 million. War takes on different characteristics in different parts of the country because the various regions are still relatively isolated from one another. On northern Caribbean coast, the Liberal general = Rafael Uribe Uribe. Under him, the Black population carries out guerrilla warfare against the Conservative landowners (that is, in a conflict where, on both sides, the generals are landowners and the soldiers are peasants, an inter-class conflict takes on the characteristics of a popular struggle with racial overtones). Uribe Uribe signs one of the three treaties that put an end to the war = the Treaty of Neerlandia, in **1902**.
 - (**Uribe Uribe = the historical inspiration for the fictional character Colonel Aureliano Buendía**; therefore, the protagonist of No One Writes to the Colonel served as treasurer in the anti-government (rebel/revolutionary) forces of one of the most popular and populist Liberal generals of the war.
6. During 45 year Conservative period (1885-1930), there is considerable social unrest in the countryside, ie. strikes, repression, disputes between peasants and landowners.
 - **1928** = **Banana massacre** in Caribbean north; Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (liberal) = one of the few national politicians in Bogotá who denounces it; most politicians and the press don't acknowledge that it happened.

= G.G.M. born in Aracataca, a small town in the Caribbean north

7. **1930** - With the Depression, the Liberals win the national elections. Unrest continues but diminishes around 1935, because in 1934, Alfonso López Pumarejo becomes president and, along with the most progressive wing of the Liberal party, he launches the “revolution on the march” (slogan), which promises a wide range of reforms, including agrarian reform and the establishment of social security. These promises, along with a slight improvement in the economy (which somewhat alleviates the pressures of unemployment and the cost of living), temporarily cause the rural unrest to subside. It is during López’s presidency (1934-1938) that the national congress enacts the law guaranteeing a pension to war veterans. (In No One Writes, the Congress passes this law nineteen years before the Colonel writes his letter in Chapter 3 [p. 22]. Thus, it is the Colonel’s own party that passed this law because the Colonel writes his letter either in 1954, (p. 3), 1956 (p. 13), or 1958 (p. 27).

8. **1930-1946** = Liberals hold national power.

9. **1940** - G.G.M. leaves Aracataca; sent to Bogota, the nation’s capitol, to study; based in Bogotá until 1954; starts to work for the Liberal newspaper El Espectador in **1946**; from **1950** on, travels throughout Colombia as a journalist for El Espectador

10. **1946** - After WWII, the country’s longstanding agricultural problems, which have not been resolved, once more give rise to land occupations, etc. In the **presidential elections of 1946**, the Liberal party splits; this causes the Liberals to lose to the Conservatives. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, an extremely popular political figure and a talented mobilizer, heads the left wing of the Liberal party; after the Conservative victory, Gaitán leads the Liberal opposition. Gaitán assassinated in Bogota, April 9, 1948; a riot, known as the Bogotazo, breaks out in the capitol city. One analysis says that with the death of Gaitán, part of the popular movement is convinced that it is no longer possible to hope for reform through legal institutional channels, and this contributes to the frustration with the constitutional system that will find expression in the **Violencia** (The Violence).

11. After the electoral victory of the Conservatives in 1946, and especially during the elections of **1949**, the Liberals organize several assassination attempts, in part, because the Falangist wing of the Conservative party dissolve scongress, imposes a state of siege, and terrorizes the Liberals. The Liberals’ attempts fail, and some of the local, provincial Liberal groups break away from the national leadership and form more or less autonomous groups. These start to fight against the provincial police and groups of Conservative peasants armed by the government to function as paramilitary anti-guerrilla forces.

12. **1949** - The Violencia begins.

13. The Violencia can be divided into three stages:

1. **1949-1953** - Conservative national government. Conservative President Laureano Gómez imposes another state of siege in **1950**. (**Military coup d'état** = June 13, 1953, supported by elites from both political parties out of fear of escalation of peasant violence in countryside; military gov't. meant to be transitional, to reestablish peace)
2. **1953-1958** - Military government (1953-May, 1957 = led by General Rojas Pinilla; May, 1957 = Rojas Pinilla deposed; replaced by junta of generals that prepare for the plebiscite of 1958)

- a. **1954** - El Espectador sends G.G.M. to Europe as a foreign correspondent. This year the second wave of the **Violencia** begins, now not just against the same enemies as before (which included the local police), but against the army as well, which represents the national government. The army uses airplanes, bombs, and tanks to suppress the peasant resistance.

- b. Soon after the coup, the military gov't . attempts to limit the power of the political parties and persecutes their press. In **1955**, gov't . shuts down the Liberal newspaper El Espectador; G.G.M. left stranded in Europe waiting for pay checks that abruptly stop arriving. He spends a penurious and difficult year in Paris,

working on No One Writes to the Colonel and wondering where his next meal is going to come from. In Dec., 1957, offered a job and an air ticket by a Venezuelan magazine, and returns to South America to work in Caracas. Finishes writing No One Writes in **Jan., 1957** (orig. publ. in magazine in Bogota, in May-June, **1958**; first book publication in Mexico, in 1962). In March, **1958**, he briefly returns to Barranquilla, Colombia, to marry his longtime sweetheart, Mercedes.

3. **1958** - A plebiscite takes place, which establishes the Bipartisan National Front, a power sharing arrangement by the Conservative and the Liberal parties, which agree to alternate in power automatically at every national election. Some say that the **Violencia** ends with the establishment of the National Front; others, that it continues in the ongoing war between the national army and the guerrilla.

Legacy of the Violencia:

Horrible human cost (Between 1949 and 1951, close to 10% of the whole population, and 1/3 of the peasant population, directly suffers the impact of the **Violencia**: between 150,000 and 200,000 killed and another 150,000 flee to Venezuela; there is such massive forced migration that the Colombian population ceases to be predominantly rural and becomes predominantly semi-urban (Acc. to World Development Report, [1996], urban population as % of total pop.: 1960 = 48%, 1993 = 72%); destruction of tradicional rural life (peasants cease to be psychologically dependent on the old señorial system and become more militant);

traditional loyalties to the established political parties disappear; elections lose their sacred aura.

14. [**Cuba** - 1956 = Fidel Castro returns to Cuba, from exile in Mexico, aboard the *Granma* yacht and establishes guerrilla operations in the Sierra Maestra mountains of s.e. Cuba. Dec., 1958, Batista ousted by military coup; **1959**, a general strike in early January forces the military government to relinquish power to Castro's 26 of July Movement; Fidel arrives in Havana, and in Feb., becomes Prime Minister. Triumph of the **Cuban Revolution**.] In **Feb., 1959**, G.G.M. agrees to return to Bogota from Caracas to help open an office in Colombia's capitol city of the recently founded **Prensa Latina** of Cuba. **Prensa Latina** is a news agency that the new revolutionary government of Cuba founds in order to get its view of events in Cuba to an international audience.

Sources include: Germán Guzmán, Orlando Fals Borda, Eduardo Umaña Luna, La violencia en Colombia, 2 volumes (Bogota, 1962, 1964); Antonio García, "Colombia: Medio siglo de historia contemporánea," in Vol. 1 of América latina: historia de medio siglo, coordin. by Pablo González Casanova (Mexico: Siglo veintiuno, 1977), 178-230; Mario Vargas Llosa, García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio (Barcelona-Caracas: Monte Avila Ed., 1971).