

# COLOMBIA

## Territorial Rule and the Llanos Frontier

Jane M. Rausch

University Press of Florida

Gainesville · Tallahassee · Tampa · Boca Raton

Pensacola · Orlando · Miami · Jacksonville

# CONTENTS

List of Maps, Tables, and Illustrations vii

Preface ix

Note on Illustrations xii

## **Part I. Territorial Rule during the Liberal Republic**

Introduction 3

1. The Territories before 1930 5

2. Laying the Foundation: Enrique Olaya Herrera, 1930–1934 27

3. “Revolution on March”: Alfonso López Pumarejo, 1934–1938 47

4. Consolidation: Eduardo Santos, 1938–1942 73

5. The Last Hurrah: López Pumarejo and Alberto Lleras Camargo, 1942–1946 102

Liberal Territorial Rule: An Appraisal 121

## **Part II. The Liberals and the Llanos Frontier**

Introduction 127

6. The Comisarías of Vichada and Arauca: The Far Eastern Frontier 130

7. The Intendancy of Meta: “The Future of Colombia” 157

8. Boyacá’s Province of Casanare: The Forgotten Frontier 188

The Llanos Frontier on the Eve of La Violencia 215

Abbreviations Used in Notes and Bibliography 220

Notes 221

Bibliography 251

Index 263

## PREFACE

The two parts of this book are separate but related studies that grew out of my earlier research. The idea for the first part, "Territorial Rule during the Liberal Republic," began to take shape as I was studying the impact of the Llanos Orientales on Colombian history between 1830 and 1930. Although my focus was specifically on interaction between the highlands and the Llanos frontier, it became clear that the system of special territories tentatively adopted by the Conservative governments in the 1840s and ambitiously expanded by the Radicals between 1861 and 1880 affected not just the plains but also the Amazon region, the Guajira Peninsula, the islands of San Andrés and Providencia, and the Pacific Coast. I realized that Colombia was a nation with not one but several frontiers, each presenting unique geographic and demographic challenges, and that by considering only one section of the lowland periphery, I was overlooking the fact that frontier policy might be generated by events occurring in the other regions.

As I started to examine the era of the Liberal Republic, there seemed to be even more reason to consider Colombia's multiple frontiers. First, it was the war in Leticia that alerted the government of Olaya Herrera that the peripheral territories were vulnerable to foreign encroachment, and it was the war in Leticia that unleashed a wave of popular nationalism and triggered the official campaign to "rediscover Colombia." López Pumarejo was eager to promote the development of the eastern plains, but a major concern of his administration, as for that of his predecessor, was to resolve the Leticia border crisis. To concentrate on developments in the Llanos without taking this situation into account was hardly possible. Second, the intendency of Chocó on the western frontier played a key role in the political discussions of the time. During World War II its abundant supplies of platinum enhanced its strategic importance, and throughout the era influential Liberal leaders such as Diego Luis Córdoba and Adán Arriaga Andrade were able to claim for Chocó the lion's share of the national terri-

torial budget. Third, Chocó's successful achievement of departmental status in 1946 offered an intriguing contrast to the fate of Casanare on the eastern frontier. Both provinces had been important under the Spanish colonial regime, but during the nineteenth century their faltering economies and declining populations prompted their incorporation into neighboring departments: Cauca took over Chocó in 1858 and Boyacá claimed Casanare in 1857. The twentieth-century factors that allowed one region to flourish while the other continued to languish seemed important to explore. Finally, although there are many studies of the administrations of Olaya Herrera, López Pumarejo, and Santos, all the studies virtually ignore their efforts at territorial reorganization. If one wants to understand why Colombia remains a collection of disparate regions in the 1990s, it would seem appropriate to analyze the successes and failures of the Liberal attempt to bring about more complete integration.

The decision to examine the impact of Colombian territorial policy on all its frontiers forced me to become more familiar with the regional histories of the Amazon, Pacific Coast, Guajira, and the Caribbean islands. Secondary sources dealing with these areas are still fragmentary, but with the development of professional graduate history programs at many Colombian universities, regional studies are becoming more sophisticated. Just as young scholars from Meta, Casanare, and Arauca are beginning to study the economic and social history of the Llanos in a more systematic way, interest in the Amazon territories and Chocó has been growing steadily, and for the Caribbean area Eduardo Posada Carbó's *The Colombian Caribbean: A Regional History, 1870–1950* (Oxford, 1996) is a good example of the kind of understanding regional monographs will soon be able to deliver.<sup>1</sup>

In the second part of the book, "The Liberals and the Llanos Frontier," I trace the history of the Llanos territories of Meta, Arauca, Vichada, and Casanare from 1930 to 1946 within a comparative framework and examine their role as a frontier region vis-à-vis the highland interior. By continuing the narrative presented in two previous volumes, *A Tropical Plains Frontier: The Llanos of Colombia 1531–1831* and *The Llanos Frontier in Colombian History: 1830–1930*, published by the University of New Mexico Press in 1984 and 1993, part 2 of the present volume marks the conclusion of a project I started in earnest in 1973.

Over the past twenty-five years there has been a sea change in the way historians approach the concept of "frontier." North American historians have abandoned the notion popularized by Frederick Jackson Turner of the frontier as a line "separating savagery and civilization" in order to think of it as a zone of transculturation—multiethnic and multiracial. For their part,

South American historians, who previously negated the role of frontier regions, are taking another look at the impact of the Amazon and Orinoco territories in the formation of their national identities.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this book I regard the frontier as a geographic area where the edge of Hispanic settlement meets the wilderness. Since the wilderness is not empty but inhabited by indigenous peoples, the frontier is also a zone of interpenetration between previously distinct societies, but the geographic characteristics of the area place limits on the nature of human activities. The Colombians intrude into the area from their base of operation or "metropolis" in the Andean highlands and establish institutions designed to incorporate the land and people into the republic. Over the course of centuries, the interplay of cultures with the environment produces a regional identity that has an impact on the metropolis.<sup>3</sup> The indigenous contribution is an integral part of the story, but because of the nature of my sources, my primary concern is with the Colombian side of the frontier.<sup>4</sup>

Both parts of the book draw on research conducted over a twenty-five-year period at the Biblioteca Nacional, Biblioteca del Ministerio de Gobierno, Biblioteca del DAINCO, and the Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango in Bogotá; the Archivo Departamental de Boyacá in Tunja; and the W. E. B. Du Bois Library of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Repeated visits to the Llanos towns of Villavicencio, San Martín, Granada, Arauca, and Yopal have enabled me to observe firsthand the amazing changes that have taken place in some aspects of *llanero* life as well as the lack of change in others. During this period I have received generous grants from the National Geographic Society, the American Philosophical Society, the Fulbright Program, and the University of Massachusetts Graduate Research Council. I am indebted to the directors and staffs of all the archives and libraries where I have studied for their courtesy and invaluable assistance. In addition I want to thank David Bushnell and James D. Henderson, who read an earlier draft of the manuscript and made many constructive suggestions, and Maria Eugenia Romero Moreno, Hector Publio Pérez, René de la Pedraja, Catherine LeGrande, Libardo Torres, Pauline Collins, and Karen Graubert for their encouragement and help. Peggy McKinnon performed a Herculean task in preparing the electronic version of the manuscript. Finally, I am grateful to my husband, Marvin D. Rausch, for his support. His unwavering confidence in the value of my project has helped me to stay the course. For all of its errors and shortcomings, however, I take full responsibility.