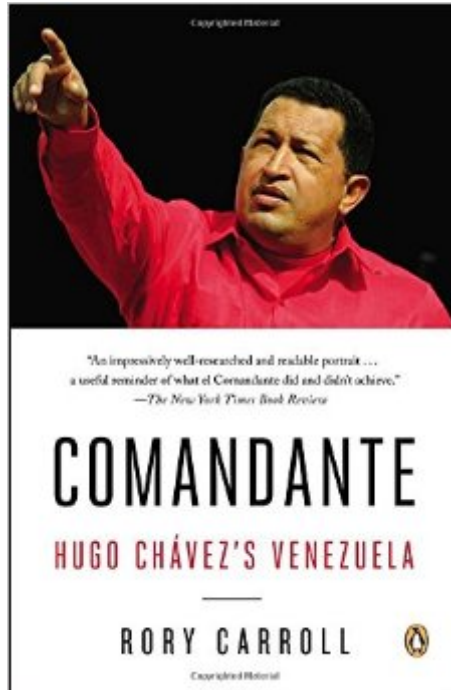


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Comandante: Hugo ChÁavez's Venezuela



Synopsis

The inside story of Hugo Chávez's rule and complex legacy. Few leaders in our time have been as divisive and enigmatic as the late Hugo Chavez. In *Comandante*, acclaimed journalist Rory Carroll tells the inside story of Chávez's life, his time as Venezuela's president, and his legacy. Based on interviews with ministers, aides, courtiers, and citizens, this intimate piece of reportage chronicles a unique experiment in power that veers among enlightenment, tyranny, comedy, and farce. Carroll also investigates the almost religious devotion of millions of Venezuelans who regarded Chavez as a savior and the loathing of those who branded him as a dictator. In beautiful prose that blends the lyricism and strangeness of magical realism with the brutal, ugly truth of authoritarianism, *Comandante* offers a cautionary tale for our times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the United States, most of us glimpse Venezuela in flashes. We know that Hugo Chavez is dead, and we know that his socialism has run Venezuela into the ground. As of this writing, in August 2015, it is a crime-ridden hellhole that has reached the stage of military confiscation of foodstuffs from farmers for redistribution, and is declining fast to Zimbabwe levels. But most of us don't know more. That's where this relatively short book provides real value. Carroll's book, written shortly before Chávez's death, takes us through Chávez's life, largely through anecdotal flashbacks from the present day. The author lived in Venezuela as a reporter for a UK newspaper for all the relevant time period, and he seems to be very well acquainted with all the complexities

involved. He thinks Chavez a pernicious failure who took the gifts given to Venezuela and destroyed the country, and he demonstrates that with verve. Hardly a shocking conclusion, but given that most of us have no real idea of what happened in Venezuela, it is a compelling, as well as very useful, story. It's compelling because of the people and their stories. Carroll draws them very well, from all walks of life. And Venezuela is a useful case study because it shows a possible future for the United States both in terms of our social comity and in the rule of law. American conservatives frequently prophesy doom from following our current course, conjuring apocalypses like Communism or the French Revolution. But Venezuela, a purgatory rather than an apocalypse, is a more likely future. As to comity, we are more polarized in the US than we used to be, thanks mostly to the deliberately divisive Alinskyite tactics of Obama and his sycophants in the ruling class, but we have nothing on Venezuela.

When asked his opinion of the French Revolution Deng Xiaoping is reputed to have said, "It is too early to tell." Rory Carroll shows no such hesitation in writing Comandante Hugo Chavez's Venezuela even before the controversial leader died. Carroll presents a rather negative picture of Chavez's years in office. He traces Chavez's rise from his beginnings in the military through his aborted coup and into the years of his presidency. The picture we get is of a charismatic leader who is confrontational and who succumbs to Lord Acton dictum that "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Chavez was released from prison after only two years for his part in the coup attempt and turned to politics and was elected president in a surprise result. He showed his quirkiness from the beginning, declaring his intending to transform Venezuela from one with a small elite and impoverished masses to a country in which the wealth would be shared more broadly. Oil made it possible and as the price went up Venezuela garnered in the riches. But Chavez angered people with his abrupt manner and undignified ways. He also became close to Castro and Cuba. After winning a second term it appeared that he would be barred from further control by a constitutionally imposed two term limit. But after one failure Chavez succeeded in changing the constitution and was re-elected for a third term only to die of cancer shortly after the publication of this book. The problems I have with this book is that it is written too soon after the term of office of a very controversial figure and that most of the people Carroll talked with were critics of Chavez or persons he removed from office.

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