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A modern nation in a state of total disorder, Colombia is an international flashpoint_wracked by more than half a century of civil war, political conflict, and drug-trade related violence_despite a multibillion dollar American commitment that makes it the third-largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid.

Law in a Lawless Land offers a rare and penetrating insight into the nature of Colombia's present peril. In a nuanced account of the human consequences of a disintegrating state, anthropologist Michael Taussig chronicles two weeks in a small town in Colombia's Cauca Valley taken over by paramilitaries that brazenly assassinate adolescent gang members. Armed with automatic weapons and computer-generated lists of names and photographs, the paramilitaries have the tacit support of the police and even many of the desperate townspeople, who are seeking any solution to the crushing uncertainty of violence in their lives. Concentrating on everyday experience, Taussig forces readers to confront a kind of terror to which they have become numb and complacent.

"If you want to know what it is like to live in a country where the state has disintegrated, this moving book by an anthropologist well known for his writings on murderous Colombia will tell you."_Eric Hobsbawm