# *Upriver: The Turbulent Life and Times of an Amazonian People* by Michael F. Brown (review)

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communities in Latin America were merely the objects of celebration, rather than analysis, seem to be numbered.

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## AMAZONIA

*Upriver: The Turbulent Life and Times of an Amazonian People*. By Michael F. Brown, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014. Pp. x, 336. $29.95 cloth.
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*Upriver* is a finely-wrought portrait of the Awajún, an indigenous Peruvian people who over the last four decades have channeled their formidable ambitions into a sometimes maligned political power. It is also a memoir of a North American anthropologist learning to listen and see in turn.

Michael F. Brown moved to Huascayacu, a community in the Río Alto Mayo region of northeastern Peru, in 1976. Then a graduate student, Brown was interested in Huascayacu's inhabitants, the Awajún, whom outsiders have called Aguaruna. Like other members of the Jivaroan linguistic family who defend that space where Andes and Amazon mingle, the Awajún have met centuries of encroaching indigenous, European, and Latin American rivals, empires, nations, and capitalists with a firmness that enemies color into caricature. Most famously, as Brown notes, earlier practices of harnessing enemies' power by smoking their heads into fist-sized *tsántsa* were "instrumental in turning the Jívaro into icons of primitivism for the West" (43).

Brown came to the Río Alto Mayo region seeking neither primitivism nor tsántsa—the latter "about as relevant to the daily life of people in Huascayacu as the War of 1812 is to contemporary Americans," as he drily observes (97). Rather, Brown was ensorcelled by a confident people that had only recently made fixed settlements, "drawn by the gravitational pull of schools, health posts, and secure land titles" offered by Peru's then-leftist military government (50). His year-and-a-half with the Awajún in Huascayacu and neighboring communities yielded publications on their sacred and practical knowledge before Peru's political violence drove him to turn his research to fights over the appropriation of indigenous spirituality and culture in the United States.

For this new book, Brown revisited his field notes and the region itself, taking a look backward to reflect upon where anthropology and the Awajún were in the late 1970s, where they have been since, and how they might remain connected. This study is therefore an elegant counter to *Tristes tropiques*, Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1955 meditation on his Brazilian fieldwork of the late 1930s, a cri de couer for a communal idyll lost to urbanized humanity. To Brown, in the 1970s, the Awajún's internally fractious history complicated such structuralist pieties, but his return to his observations with the

distance of time made him more empathetic to the particular ravages of that anxious moment in the Río Alto Mayo. Sorcery killings and violent revenge plots were giving way in the Awajún's encounter with Peru's expanding legal, economic, ethnic, and—in the form of Christian evangelicals—religious frontier, but unevenly, while child death and predominantly female suicides held on.

Also unlike Lévi-Strauss, Brown returned. The book's luminous first section provides the foundation to his subsequent political consideration of the Awajún and the Río Alto Mayo in the decades since his first departure, when interethnic marriage and land rents contributed to greater internal inequality, and non-Awajún settlers continued to threaten lives and autonomy. The Awajún are still portrayed as violent by coastal and Andean Peruvians, especially after 2009's Bauguazo massacre: Peruvian police murderously repressed Awajún and other allies protesting then-president Alan García's throwing open of resource rights in the Amazon, and Aajún militants executed captive officers in response. Brown's book makes clear how that retributive violence—like an earlier Awajún raid on squatters that left 16 dead—"must be blamed in part on the state's unwillingness to protect Awajún rights in frontier areas" (226).

But he also underlines how Awajún populations have grown, and shown a situational deftness at self-representation in the public sphere, one that is conscious of their representation by anthropologists and others. Brown returned to the region in 2012. His interviews with a growing population of Awajún professionals and politicians—like translator Dina Ananco, anthropologist Wilson Atamain, and Eduardo Nayap, an evangelical who in 2011 became the first indigenous Amazonian elected to Peru's congress—attend to the ways that they have mobilized their reputation as warriors to respond to new realities. In the Awajúns' light, Brown's final, heartfelt meditations on our continued need for ethnography's "attentive listening and close observation" shimmers with historical truth (277).

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## POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND MEMORY

*History of Political Murder in Latin America: Killing the Messengers of Change*. By W. John Green. Albany: SUNY Press, 2015. Pp. 382. $26.95 paper.
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Which murders are political? W. John Green's answer begins in the subtitle. He is concerned with Latin American elites (on the right) who have employed murder as a systematic weapon against agents of political change on the left or center-left. In this, there is a strong link between hegemony and murder, wherein the state has frequently functioned as a terror regime, sponsoring the killing of opponents. This is the analytical