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Upriver: The Turbulent Life and Times of an Amazonian People

Michael F. Brown

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In this remarkable story of one man’s encounter with an indigenous people of Peru, Michael Brown guides his readers upriver into a contested zone of the Amazonian frontier, where more than 50,000 Awajún?renowned for their pugnacity and fierce independence?remain determined, against long odds, to live life on their own terms.

When Brown took up residence with the Awajún in 1976, he knew little about them other than their ancestors’ reputation as fearsome headhunters. The fledgling anthropologist was immediately impressed by his hosts’ vivacity and resourcefulness. But eventually his investigations led him into darker corners of a world where murderous vendettas, fear of sorcery, and a shocking incidence of suicide were still common. Peru’s Shining Path insurgency in the 1980s forced Brown to refocus his work elsewhere. Revisiting his field notes decades later, now with an older man’s understanding of life’s fragility, Brown saw a different story: a tribal society trying, and sometimes failing, to maintain order in the face of an expanding capitalist frontier. Curious about how the Awajún were faring, Brown returned to the site in 2012, where he found a people whose combative self-confidence had led them to the forefront of South America’s struggle for indigenous rights.

Written with insight, sensitivity, and humor, *Upriver* paints a vivid picture of a rapidly growing population that is refashioning its warrior tradition for the twenty-first century. Embracing literacy and digital technology, the Awajún are using hard-won political savvy to defend their rainforest home and right of self-determination.

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