

Mexico in World History. William H. Beezley. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 9780195337907

As part of the New Oxford World History series from Oxford University Press, William Beezley's *Mexico in World History* contributes to our understanding of Mexico's past and present by examining how internal and external factors affected Mexico's social, political, and economic development from the pre-Columbian era through 2010. Rather than viewing Mexico in isolation from international influences, as is often the case with country studies, Beezley's work explores Mexican society in the context of its interactions with the global community. Beezley successfully introduces students to the diversity of Mexico's historical development in an easy-to-follow narrative especially suited to students new to Mexican history, culture and archaeology.

Beginning with modern Mexico, Beezley's preface suggests that the country has been constructed in the modern mind as a place of tacos, tequila and *telenovelas*. With exposure primarily to popular and fashionable enclaves for tourists, few visitors know or understand the true history and culture of the country, preferring to limit their time and attentions to beach resorts, mariachi music, and superficial viewings of archaeological ruins. Therefore, Beezley's purpose is to illuminate the historic antecedents behind current pressing concerns such as immigration, the devaluation of the peso, rising crime rates, and the cartels.

Proceeding chronologically, Beezley's chapters initially explore the indigenous empires at the heart of Mexico, touching on the traverse of nomadic peoples from Asia to the Americas and the peoples of the Classic and Post Classic Eras including the Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Aztecs.

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His next chapter discusses Spanish conquest and the formation of colonial Mexico, the response to the Treaty of Tordesillas in Europe, importation of Catholicism to the colony and the rise of the Bourbons in the wake of the War of Spanish Succession. The third chapter delineates the major players in the fight for independence (Hidalgo, Aldama, and Allende) and French threats to Mexico in the aftermath of Texan independence. Subsequently, Beezley discusses Mexico's embattlement in the Mexican American War, Santa Anna, the secularization brought about by the Constitution of 1857, and the stewardship of Mexico by Maximilian and Charlotte. The fifth chapter explores the rise of technocrats who focused on "uplifting" the lower strata of society and the predominance of Porfirio Diaz's policies for progress. Moving forward in time, Beezley discusses the revolution, the idealization of the *mestizo* as a symbol of Mexico, land reforms, the limits imposed on the Roman Catholic Church, and urbanization. The penultimate chapter traces the revolution's impact on the middle sector of society, the rise in educated, urban-born civilian leaders, women's increased participation in the political arena, and the role of Mexico in World War II. He examines invited immigration to the United States under the *bracero* program and the widening gap between the haves and have-nots, which led to the student movements of the 1960s. His final segment discusses the successes and setbacks of contemporary Mexico, including the defeat of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) in 2000 for the first time since 1929.

Drawing on archaeology, art, popular culture including film and song, and, of course, history, Beezley deftly explores how upper and lower strata of society, diverse ethnic groups, and both genders interacted and responded to political, social and economic changes in order to

contour Mexican society into its contemporary shape. Beezley's well-written prose and easy-to-follow narrative allows students—especially undergraduates—the opportunity to explore a wide range of topics that have affected the country from the ancient to modern periods. Furthermore, he exposes students new to Mexican history and culture to important academic methods: he suggests areas available for additional research (such as the mysterious abandonment of classic Maya cities), addresses gaps in sources and evidence (as, for instance, the installation of army commander Iturbide as emperor), and posits a broad spectrum of reasons for effects, where one answer is insufficient (such as instability and foreign intervention during the 1830s and 1840s). Simultaneously, he addresses the impact of external factors on internal programs (e.g. World War II's influence on President Avila Camacho's social programs) and highlights how decisions from the past (the creation of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* and PEMEX oil) fostered circumstances still relevant today. As an added benefit to students, Beezley provides a brief chronology of Mexican history, suggestions for additional reading materials, and a list of useful websites for further study.

However, as with any succinct historical overview, certain issues cannot be explored in depth. This is not a work with bold new arguments for Latin American scholars, but rather a brief, comprehensive introduction to the major themes prevalent in Mexican history. As such, the inclusion of more dates within the body of the text would allow the reader to pinpoint historical changes without flipping back and forth to the chronology. These minor critiques notwithstanding, the text serves as an important and useful introductory tool for those interested in the development of modern Mexico.

More than tacos, tequila, and *telenovelas*, Mexico is a diverse country with a colorful history plagued by foreign intervention, as highlighted in this valuable work. Despite Mexico's current challenges and the negative press it has recently received, Beezley is surprisingly optimistic about Mexico's future. In his conclusion, he asserts that Mexico's citizens should take pride in the accomplishments of their country as evidenced by two centuries of independence and one of revolutionary social change. The current society and government are more devoted to equality, opportunity, and diversity than at any time in the past. Overcoming apparently insurmountable obstacles has been a hallmark of Mexican society, and as a result, Mexico's future is bright, and hope warranted. Beezley's concise and comprehensive book provides students the opportunity to understand more thoroughly the environmental forces that coalesced to create modern Mexico while emphasizing its historical connections with the rest of the world.

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