

H-Net Reviews

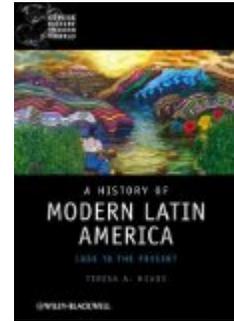
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Teresa A. Meade. *A History of Modern Latin America: 1800 to the Present*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. xviii + 389 pp. \$89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4051-2050-0; \$44.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4051-2051-7.

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Modern Latin America

Abandoning traditional approaches to regional history, this new textbook on the history of Latin America since 1800 by Teresa A. Meade, in the author's words, "presents Latin American history as seen through the prism of social class, gender, race, and ethnicity" (p. xiv).

An initial chapter presents an overview of the region's geography, demographics, economies, politics, and culture. Following a generally chronological framework, subsequent chapters focus on particular topics as Meade emphasizes the more important events and movements in the region's history. "Latin America in 1790" describes the colonial period, briefly highlighting general characteristics and then providing somewhat more detail on the events leading up to the respective independence movements. Independence itself is discussed in its many varieties in a third chapter, followed by "Fragmented Independence" in which a few examples of the *caudillismo* of the early national period receive attention.

The rise of export-oriented economies in the latter part of the nineteenth century is the theme of "Latin America's Place in the Commodity Chain," but it is hardly comprehensive, as the author again seems content to offer a few samples. Chapter 6 turns to social aspects of the same period, entitled "Immigration, and Urban and Rural Life," followed by a chapter on the Mexican Revolution. A more general analysis of leftist movements in the early twentieth century follows as "The Left and the Socialist Alternative."

Meade treats the populist movements that often resulted in right-wing dictatorships in a chapter entitled "Populism and the Struggle for Change." World War II and political change in the postwar period comes next, with particular attention to Guatemala and Bolivia, before a chapter on the Cuban Revolution. Other revolutionary movements and their suppression she discusses in chapter 12, "Progress and Reaction," especially in South America. This is followed by "Revolution and Its Alternatives," with particular emphasis on the turmoil in Central America and Colombia in the late twentieth century. A final chapter, "The Americas in the Twenty-first Century," provides examples of recent developments, especially in Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Chile, as well as the role of the United States and its relation to the prevalence of neoliberal economic policy.

Illustrations, maps, charts, and sidebar boxes containing eye-witness accounts, documents, and excerpts from fiction enhance the attractiveness of the volume as a textbook. It also has a useful glossary and bibliography, emphasizing especially recent works in English.

The author's emphasis on "social class, gender, race, and ethnicity" is not so much integrated into the book's narrative as inserted in specific sections of each chapter, as for example sections labeled "Changing Gender Roles," "Gender and Liberalism," "Women in the Arts," "Women and Shining Path," or "Women and Politics." In the same way, short sections in each chapter deal with the cultural

history of the region. While most of the work provides selective examples of the political and economic history of Latin America, these topical sections supplement it with gender, ethnic, and cultural history.

Throughout the work there is reference to events beyond the region and Meade has done a good job of relating Latin America to world history, especially that of Europe, Japan, and the United States. Her topical approach, however, gives the work an episodic quality, as she moves from one short section to another without much continuity. Her approach also results in quite a bit of the history of Latin America being left out. She herself

acknowledges this problem in her preface: “The resulting interpretation derives from a process of sifting and sorting through an immense amount of material: choices have been made as to what to include and, often with terrible regret, what to leave out” (p. xv). The process of synthesis essential to a textbook also at times has led to some minor, if unfortunate, inaccuracies as, for example, when she says that Guatemalan President Juan José Arévalo was “installed in office by force” (p. 225). In general, however, the book presents an accurate and balanced account of Latin American history from a somewhat leftist perspective. It is highly readable and offers a fresh approach to the region’s history.

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