

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Eric Zolov. *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999. vii + 349 pp. \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-21514-6; \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-20866-7.

Reviewed by Mark D. Van Ells (CUNY-Queensborough)
Published on H-PCAACA (May, 2000)

Although the social and cultural unrest of youth in the 1960s and 1970s was a worldwide phenomenon, scholars have written little about the interrelationship between youth movements in different countries or movements in developing nations. In *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture*, historian Eric Zolov of Franklin and Marshall College examines the impact of Rock and Roll music on politics and culture in Mexico. He shows how Rock music stood at the confluence of several potent forces: modernization, trans-national business, imperialism, and nationalism. He then elaborates on the effects of these forces in America's neighbor to the south.

Rock music first hit Mexico in the 1950s and grew popular among middle class youth, for whom it represented modernity and participation in an international culture. However, Rock music also had its critics; some complained that it represented a threat to traditional Mexican social and cultural values, while others saw it as an instrument of American cultural imperialism. By the 1960s, Rock music had become a "vehicle for free expression" (102), and asserted the concerns of young Mexicans from all classes: the desire to interpret for themselves the meaning of Mexico's revolutionary history, the balance between nationalism and internationalism, and the meaning of democracy. A Mexican counterculture known as La Onda ("the Wave") emerged by the mid-1960s, which challenged traditional values and the ossified official memory of Mexico's revolutionary past. Fearing that La Onda posed a threat to its power, the authoritarian Mexican government suppressed the coun-

terculture movement, including the infamous Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968. By 1980, Zolov contends, the Mexican counterculture had been effectively crushed and nearly forgotten.

Zolov describes the political and cultural milieu against which Mexican youth rebelled in exacting and convincing detail, but some phenomena usually associated with the counterculture in developed nations are discussed only briefly, such as drug use among young Mexicans. In fact, one wonders how accurate a portrait of the Mexican counterculture the Rock music genre can provide. Would a history of Rock in the United States tell the whole story of the American counterculture and political protest movements? Zolov describes Rock as a "mirror" (10) that reflected the concerns of Mexican youth in a rapidly modernization nation. Whether that mirror reflected issues accurately or in a distorted fashion is unclear. Nevertheless, *Refried Elvis* is an important work. It provides a wealth of detail on the youth movement in Mexico and highlights the myriad ways in which the world's peoples have been growing closer together, how a global popular culture has been emerging, and yet how domestic issues can still shape the nature of social and cultural protest movements. The book is an important step in the creation of an international history of "the Sixties" and the worldwide youth rebellion of the Cold War Era.

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Mark D. Van Ells. Review of Zolov, Eric, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture.* H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews. May, 2000.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4141>

Copyright © 2000 by H-Net and the Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate

attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact P.C. Rollins at Rollins@osuunx.ucc.okstate.edu or the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.