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Rick Anthony López. *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. viii + 408 pp. $89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-4694-4; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-4703-3.

Reviewed by Susana Nuccetelli (St. Cloud State University)
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Crafting vs. Discovering Mexico's Identity

Rick Lopez's *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* is an important contribution to current scholarship in Latin America studies in more than one way. It unveils a substantial body of evidence that reveals how some leading figures of post-Revolutionary Mexico thought about the tasks ahead in the formation of the nation. But most important, it also sheds new light on how a *mestizaje* view of collective identity gained popularity among Mexican intellectuals in the early part the twentieth century. Anyone interested in the much-discussed issue of Hispanic identity will benefit from a look at Lopez's account of the paradigm shift in Mexico's conception of its own cultural, ethnic, and racial identity that took place during that formative period. For my purposes here, I shall focus on this aspect of *Crafting Mexico*.

From the wars of independence from Spain to the present, determining who the people of Latin America are culturally, ethnically, and racially has been an enduring quest in the minds of intellectuals and political leaders. Seldom offering purely descriptive answers to that question, they often went beyond mere theorizing about which feature, or set of features, all Latin Americans might have in common: they instead undertook several different *normative* projects, each of which aimed at promoting an identity change deemed by its proponents conducive to "progress," "civilization," "social justice," or other worthy goals. Within a normative project, the identity question is not *who* Latin Americans are, but what they *should be* culturally, ethnically, or racially. Examples of normative projects of this sort are not hard to find, as illustrated in the works of the autochthonous positivists of the late nineteenth century and their Arielist opponents at the beginning of the twentieth. Each of these two rival groups attempted to steer the identity of Latin Americans in a certain unambiguous direction: the positivists toward replacing Spanish and *criollo* values with those of either the French or the "Anglo-Saxons," the Arielists toward rejecting positivist values in favor of the values of an ancient Mediterranean culture rooted in Greece and Rome (to which Latin Americans were allegedly connected before the positivists' attempt at brainwashing them through education and repression). Each of these conceptions of identity may be properly regarded as a "crafting," for each aimed at inducing a new identity among Latin Americans. Crafting an identity, then, differs from discovering it–a distinction that is parallel *mutatis mutandis* to that drawn by Edmundo O'Gorman between "discovering" and "inventing" America.[1] Crafting an identity amounts to inventing it, and therefore does not presuppose capturing objective features. Only discovering an identity presupposes its objectivity.

This raises the question of whether the paradigm shift in Mexico's conception of its own collective identity that is one of *Crafting Mexico*'s central topics amounted in fact to a crafting or a discovery of a cultural, ethnic, and racial identity. In light of the evidence provided by Lopez, it is beyond question that such a shift took place in Mexico during the post-Revolutionary period of the early twentieth century. More than merely exploring that shift and its relation to parallel changes in the arts and political institutions and policies, the book provides overwhelming documentation for concluding that it did take place. It thereby puts to rest any skepticism about what happened next: that shortly after the Mexican Revolution, artists and intellectuals began to converge on a *mestizaje* view of their nation's identity, whereby the indigenous peoples' contribution to that identity was vindicated rather than denied. As a result, Mexican artists and intellectuals inscribed themselves within a *mestizaje* view of Latin American identity (which in fact can be traced back to Simón Bolívar, whose early vindication of a mixed identity for Latin Americans fell briefly into disfavor, perhaps as a result of its rejection by Domingo F. Sarmiento,

Juan Bautista Alberdi, and other thinkers of the period of national reorganization that followed the wars of independence). *Crafting Mexico* links Mexico's change of mind about its own identity to a parallel radical change in the nations' aesthetic values, evident in its intellectuals' newly acquired appreciation for the indigenous peoples' arts and crafts. Abundant textual and artistic sources support Lopez's claim that after the Revolution, Mexicans developed an appreciation for local artistic expressions that were a dramatic departure from the previous elitism that had favored art from various Western traditions over local products. In addition, the author maintains that these changes in Mexico can be understood only in relation to the process of nation formation that was taking place at the time–a thesis he regards as supported by recent research in the social sciences as well as by the voluminous textual evidence gathered through his own research.

Although Lopez provides ample documentation in support of the connection between those two processes, it remains a matter of dispute whether the paradigm shift in conception of identity that followed the Revolution can be adequately interpreted as a *crafting* rather than a *discovery*. In my view, there is logical space for taking it to be the latter. It is not implausible to argue that, although the various populations that make up modern Mexico may share no superficial feature, they all have in common some deep-lying features that constitute their collective mixed identity. After all, they share a wealth of communal experiences, including some very characteristic past events that obviously helped to individuate the people they came to be. Arguably, they all have a common history of relations among themselves, with others, and with their physical environment. Although in the end it is social science that will provide a list of the exact features they share, we may conjecture that such a list of identity-conferring events will include the sixteenth-century fateful encounter of Amerindian civilizations with Hernán Cortés, three centuries of Spanish colonial domination, bloody nineteenth-century wars with the United States and with Texan secessionists, the war with Spain for Mexican independence, and the rise and fall of Porfirism. In this realist account of Mexico's identity, what determines it, at least in part, is not something to be crafted but rather something to be discovered by social science independently of what agents of any particular historical period may have theorized about it.[2]

Given the realist account, post-Revolutionary state formation might be construed as a crafting, while the paradigm shift in Mexico's conception of its own identity might not. Since state formation is the result of the activity of certain agents, it makes sense to say that after the Revolution, there was a process of crafting Mexico's state. On the other hand, in light of the above reasons, whether the identity of the Mexican people was discovered or crafted is at the very least a matter of dispute. Hence, no assumption about the crafting of Mexico's identity can be made without begging a significant question.

Notes

[1]. Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of its History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1961).

[2]. I have argued elsewhere that it is the history of conditions and events connecting the various cultures of Latin America that determines who they are as a people. Such history includes the relations among themselves and toward others, as well as with their physical environment. See my "What Is an Ethnic Group?" in *Race or Ethnicity? On Black and Latino Identity*, ed. J. Gracia (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 137-51.

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