

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Michael Hogan.** *Abraham Lincoln and Mexico: A History of Courage, Intrigue and Unlikely Friendships.* San Diego: Egretbooks.com, 2016. 361 pp. \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-9857744-9-3.

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Michael Hogan's work, *Abraham Lincoln and Mexico: A History of Courage, Intrigue and Unlikely Friendships*, is a corrective to what may be less known or understood about how and why Abraham Lincoln is so revered in places outside of the United States, such as Mexico. The book is a short but dense chronology of the Mexican American War, sandwiched by Texan independence from Mexico and annexation to the United States (1836 and 1845 respectively), through to Mexican expulsion of French imperialists in 1867. While the time frame includes the US Civil War, this is not another Civil War monograph. Using letters and other communications from the then congressman Lincoln regarding his early views on Mexicans and the Mexican American War, slaves, and slavery, Hogan reveals how Lincoln's views evolved over time, and dispels the idea that he was just another "crafty politician" in his rebuke of President James Polk's war or that he was callous toward the enslavement of black people. By doing so, tries to persuade readers of the effectiveness of friendship, diplomacy, and the ability to change one's mind in the modern era.

Divided into eighteen chapters, the book reads quickly and easily. It includes outlines of the political and cultural background of Mexico as well as interesting (sometimes humorous) sketches of the political and military figures who played key roles, culled from the abundance of political and military histories that cover this period, both recent publications and some much older. The first three chapters provide an overview of the political state of affairs in Mexico during and shortly after the Texas rebellion and President Polk's preparations to annex the new republic and to provoke Mexico in order

to gain its territory all the way to the Pacific. For those unfamiliar with the US invasion of Mexico and the devastation wrought by American forces, this section is a quite useful summary.

Chapter 13 reveals the highlight of Hogan's source material, the papers of Matías Romero, the Mexican chargé d'affaires from 1861 to 1867 who visited Washington, who befriended Lincoln (and his wife), and whose letters provide a key to understand the diplomacy of friendship between the administrations of Lincoln and Mexico's beloved President Benito Juárez. The next four chapters focus on the French invasion and imperial occupation of Mexico, which could have resulted in an alliance with Confederate forces but due to Lincoln's refusal to recognize their legitimacy, such an alliance did not manifest. Hogan praises both Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Philip Sheridan for their part in doing "more to save the Mexican Republic than anyone has heretofore credited," supplying arms to the Mexican troops covertly, and keeping the Texas border secured from the French (p. 145). "Lincoln's impact on the Mexican people and the history of Mexico is considerable" (p. 173): his opposition to the Mexican American War of 1846-48; his support and encouragement of Romero, Grant, and Sheridan; and his providing military experience to newly freed slaves all combined to ensure Mexico stayed independent and has remained a friendly neighbor to the south.

Hogan, a history teacher at an American School in Mexico, was prompted by his students' interests in the Mexican American War to fully interrogate the long-lasting effects of this often neglected episode in US his-

tory studies. This is an endeavor I can appreciate as an instructor of Mexican American history survey courses; oftentimes my own students come away frustrated, asking, “Why didn’t I learn this earlier?” Hogan’s aims are clear: “Lincoln’s views on the war with Mexico are ones that should inform every briefing on border politics, every discussion on illegal immigration, every class engaged in a discussion of the conquest of Mexican land, every polemic about border walls” (p. 84). His work is a transnational history of the US and Mexico premised on the war of aggression started by President Polk and subsequent friendship between Mexican leaders and President Lincoln, a relationship Hogan believes can and should be a model for modern political relationships. It

is an excellent resource for use in the classroom, specifically at the community college or survey level where students require an introduction to events but then also have a chance to review and analyze the primary source documents for themselves, made far easier by including such documents as resources. In addition, many of the endnotes have Internet links, which simplifies access to additional research. At just under two hundred pages of text, *Abraham Lincoln and Mexico* is concise but minces no words, and in an era of ugly political rhetoric and wall building at the border, is ever so timely.

*Errata: A previous version of this review stated that Lincoln had been a senator instead of a congressman.*

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