México beyond 1968 is, simply put, an outstanding edited volume. It simultaneously transforms our understandings of politics, society, the state, mobilization, and repression in Mexico’s 1960s and 1970s, while making clear the coherence between chapters that provide their own unique contributions to scholarship on Mexico. The result is a volume that complicates a literature that has all too often focused on Mexico City in 1968 at the expense of other locales and moments of activism and repression.

México beyond 1968 begins conceptually, with prefatory remarks from Pensado and Ochoa that articulate the volume’s two major philosophical projects: to situate the violence and impunity in Mexico in the 2000s and 2010s in the phenomena of the 1960s-70s, and to bring Mexican and Mexican American voices more to the fore in English-language scholarship dominated by non-Hispanics. The introduction then provides a general narrative of mounting and varying forms of social and revolutionary activism in the cities and countryside in the 1960s and 1970s and the concurrent and reactive state violence against movements that challenged the hegemonic Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). In the process, Pensado and Ochoa provide a compelling critique of scholarship that to this point has overwhelmingly focused on the events in Mexico City in July-October 1968, culminating in the infamous Tlatelolco massacre that left hundreds dead on the eve of the 1968 Olympics. The result is introductory material that usefully frames the importance of understanding both the “Global Sixties” and “Subversive Seventies” of the title, providing the unifying glue for the volume while historically justifying the value of the subsequent chapters.

Part 1 continues this conceptual pattern via two essays by Eric Zolov and Wil G. Pansters that lay out the two main frameworks for the remainder of the essays: the Global Sixties, and state-making and subversion in the 1970s, respectively. In the former, Zolov emphasizes the value of the Global Sixties as an analytical framework to situate geopolitical contexts, offering “a transnational lens through which to interpret local cultural and ideological practices” (p. 19) in Mexico. Pansters in turn explores transformations in Mexican state-making and repression and the relationship between the state and society in the 1970s in ways that help us better understand and analyze the “Subversive Seventies” of the book’s title. Though Pansters does not use the term “Subversive Seventies,” Pensado’s and Ochoa’s introduction complements Pansters’s work on the Mexican state from the perspective of social mobilization to compellingly argue for a period of state violence and resistance framed in Cold War terms, challenging narratives that have downplayed Cold War violence in Mexico in comparison to South America.

Parts 2 and 3 provide specific case studies in chapters that focus on mobilization and repression in the countryside and in the cities, respectively. In part 2, the escuelas normales rurales loom large across the five essays in this section, functioning as sites of contestation and mobilization, where students were often from campesino families and drew on that upbringing as they
mobilized around rural inequalities. These connections also spurred student efforts to work with peasant groups, with varying success. Tanalis Padilla, Carla Irina Villanueva, and Adela Cedillo explore rural students’ efforts to mobilize through student politics and, in the case of Cedillo’s chapter, *foco* guerrilla organization in rural areas. Chapters by A. S. Dillingham and Alexander Aviña add to these chapters’ understandings of politics in rural Mexico in the 1970s by exploring the role of the state in the countryside, fitting well with Pantsters’s observations. Dillingham considers the effects and limitations of President Luis Echeverría’s rural development policies, while Aviña turns to the more repressive role of the state in the countryside, analyzing the “war against poor people” (p. 136) in rural areas by means of both “dirty wars and drug wars” (p. 134).

Part 3 shifts its focus to urban areas. Fernando Herrera Calderón’s chapter on Guadalajara, Luis Herrán Avila’s essay on Monterrey, and Gema Santamaría’s work on Puebla sustain the book’s project of moving beyond Mexico City by exploring student activism in other urban centers. Herrán Avila’s work especially stands out for its focus on a group all too neglected in Latin American scholarship—Mexican or South American—one generally: right-wing youth and their role in organization, mobilization, and confrontation. Michael Soldatenko’s chapter on Mexican Maoism and Verónica Oikión Solano’s chapter on post-1968 Mexico City student activism focus on the capital, but provide great headway in the volume’s objective of moving beyond 1968 to explore mobilization and repression beyond Tlatelolco. In part 3’s final chapter, Gladys I. McCormick uses a case study of torture to argue against the narrative of the PRI as exceptional to South American authoritarianism. Diving into the gruesome practices of torture—and of language that associated the counterculture with subversion—McCormick compellingly suggests Mexican repression was not as dissimilar to authoritarian regimes in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina in the 1970s as many would believe. Pensado and Ochoa then close out the volume with some “final remarks” that reexamine the historiography, illustrating how Mexico City 1968 has become mythologized at the expense of more thorough analyses of mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s and pointing to paths for future research and analysis.

As with any edited volume, the essays here cover a wide range of topics, yet Pensado and Ochoa’s framing imparts an incredible degree of thematic and narrative unity across diverse areas and moments. Zolov’s and Pantsters’s chapters provide a latent glue for some of the chapters, though the utility of both the Global Sixties or the Subversive Seventies varies from chapter to chapter. To their credit, though, no author in the volume ever becomes slavishly devoted to these conceptual frameworks at the expense of their arguments and analyses, so that no essay feels conceptually forced or pigeonholed in a way that limits its effectiveness.

Taken individually, each chapter in this volume makes major contributions that will force scholars to reconsider Mexico’s Cold War, yet the volume is even greater than the sum of its already considerable parts, opening tantalizing avenues for research while capturing the complexities of Mexico’s Cold War. Drawing on archival sources—some of which have since been released and reclassified—the book adds greatly to our understanding of the nature of repression and resistance in Cold War Mexico. Such scholarship that situates Mexico alongside repression in South America in the 1960s and 1970s is fairly recent, and while that scholarship has made great strides, this edited volume furthers that analysis by decentering revolutionary activity both geographically and temporally, moving beyond Mexico City and 1968.

Additionally, although historically rooted, the volume has considerable implications for understanding Mexico in the twenty-first century. From the preface forward, the volume collectively illustrates how the culture of impunity and state violence of the twenty-first century—visible in the unpunished femicides along the border, the drug-related violence of the Calderón administration, and the forty-three disappeared students from Ayotzinapa, among other instances—have their roots in the actions of the Mexican state and its agents, politicians and armed forces alike, in the 1970s. One could argue that the connections between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are more latent in some chapters than others, but that is largely contingent on the particular subject of each chapter. Several chapters contribute to a more general understanding of how, unlike in Mexico City, students in other cities and especially rural areas attempted to bridge the gap between students and peasants or working classes, though these efforts were mixed. Based on the case studies here, the greatest success occurred where students shared the socioeconomic background of the classes they attempted to collaborate with. Likewise, the chapters collectively reveal the varieties of understandings of democracy and radicalism—left- and right-wing—as Mexican students and state agents themselves defined it. Finally, the volume successfully challenges narratives—political, national, and historiographical—of
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the PRI as exceptional, bringing it more in line with its Cold War contemporaries in the Americas in its use of “legal and extralegal mechanisms of control” (p. 6) in this period.

Along this latter point, the volume succeeds not just for greatly complicating the history of Mexican politics, society, activism, and repression in the 1960s and 1970s; it also opens important new avenues to bring in broader comparisons between Mexico and other parts of Latin America and the Global South in the late Cold War. Indeed, it is likely not incidental that McCormick’s essay is the volume’s last, as it points to the need for scholars in both Mexico and South America to pursue this line of inquiry further. The volume itself does an outstanding job in illustrating the nature of repression and resistance in Mexico’s 1960s and 1970s, laying the foundation for comparative work that scholars now need to embark upon. Pensado and Ochoa, and all of the contributing authors, are to be commended for their efforts in providing a major work that should be the keystone for understanding both Mexico’s Cold War past and the impunity and state violence of the present in ways that will speak to Mexicanists, Latin Americanists, and scholars and students of the Cold War more generally. Hopefully, others will follow suit and draw on this volume to spur greater conversation between Mexicanists and scholars of other parts of the Global South in (and beyond) the Cold War.

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