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In *Electrifying Mexico*, Diana J. Montaño examines how government officials, engineers, citizens, and others worked to illuminate and power up Mexico City, the nation’s capital and emblem of progress. Montaño’s book is in dialogue with other recent works that study technology and engineering in Mexico, with an eye toward how everyday people shaped and reacted to processes of modernization. Examples in this genre include contributions to *Technocratic Visions: Engineers, Technology, and Society in Mexico* (2021), edited by J. Justin Castro and James A. Garza, and *Technology and the Search for Progress in Modern Mexico* (2015), by Edward Beatty. Like these books, Montaño’s study focuses on the interactions between people and technology. Here, the people are “electrifying agents,” and the different manifestations of electricity they interact with constitute the “electricscape” (p. 11). What distinguishes Montaño’s book are the diversity of the electrifying agents she discusses and the meticulous detail she uses to explain their relationships with electricity in different forms. Rail car riders and electricity “thieves” are featured in earlier chapters, while later chapters focus on housewives and labor union members. As a social history of technology and modernization, *Electrifying Mexico* treats all these actors with nuance and depth.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and concluding in the middle of the twentieth, *Electrifying Mexico* spans a broad chronology. Its periodization distinguishes it from other histories of modern Mexico that rarely examine the pre- and postrevolutionary periods together. In her introduction, Montaño situates Mexico in a globally focused historiography on electricity and breaks down “Western/non-Western binary” ideas of modernity (p. 5). With its focus on Mexico City, Montaño’s book is an important departure from the historiography on electricity that privileges the North Atlantic. The book’s first chapters center on the decades of dictatorship under Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911). Through electricity, especially electric lighting, Diaz and his striving lackeys tried to develop Mexico City and emulate other North Atlantic cities by replacing turpentine and gaslights.
with electric ones. But as Montaño shows, the results of these new lighting schemes were uneven and the reactions to them mixed. Montaño depicts women who were horrified by their appearances in the new, starkly bright electric lights. Other residents found it increasingly hard to search out places to be alone, in the dark, in an electrified capital. While such businesses as department stores benefited from lit-up storefronts to advertise their wares, the municipality and electric companies struggled to meet the public's demands for electricity. Early chapters underscore one of Montaño's main arguments: that while the Porfirián administration imported its expectations of what modernity meant from abroad, Mexicans made it their own through their quotidian interactions with the electricscape.

Access to electricity became an important social marker. Montaño makes this argument by zooming into the everyday lives of Mexicans. In chapter 3, the author takes a close look at electric trams and their users. Although Mexico City residents loved being able to get around the city more quickly, trams caused many accidents, some gruesome. Rather than fault the new transportation technology, however, the newspapers that covered the accidents blamed the riders themselves, calling those who were injured “imprudentes,” low-class brutes who did not know how to properly board or ride modern transportation (p. 131). Trams further engendered class divisions when they created first- and second-class cars. Those who could not afford electricity became electricity thieves, ladrones de luz. But as Montaño describes in chapter 4, these thieves almost always eluded legal repercussions, as there were no laws governing electricity, an intangible object, at the turn of the century. When women siphoned electricity from a nearby company to use in their homes, “virtue” empowered them to dismiss the male inspectors who showed up on their doorsteps to investigate, as social decorum did not permit men to enter private domestic space (p. 164).

In chapter 5, Montaño takes readers into the kitchens of housewives in the mid-twentieth century. Electric appliances promised to make women's lives easier and women themselves more modern, even more patriotic. The cookbooks of Josefina Velázquez de León, the “Julia Child” of Mexico, are a key source for Montaño in this chapter. Images from these cookbooks, which Montaño includes in the book, offer glimpses of women who must cook to keep their husbands and guests happy but who do not tire from doing so, since modern appliances do much of the work for them. Cookbooks also led housewives to believe that their kitchens would be more sanitary, and therefore more modern, because appliances, rather than human hands, were being used. This chapter will appeal to historians of gender, especially. It, like all the chapters in Electrifying Mexico, is assignable on its own—a boon for use in undergraduate classrooms.

As Mexico City's population grew exponentially in the 1950s and 1960s, electricity transformed from a luxury available only in the center of Mexico City to a public good expected by the citizens of barrios who lived on the outskirts of the city. Battles between labor unions and electricity companies, most foreign owned, take center stage in Montaño's final chapter. Montaño explains how labor unions spent years campaigning to make electricity Mexican-owned like the nation's natural resources. But when President Adolfo López Mateos appropriated foreign-owned electric companies in 1960, labor unions' struggles and patriotism were downplayed while López Mateos was made out to be a revolutionary hero.

Montaño's source base is rich, diverse, and innovative. Newspapers and the penny press, court records, posters, municipal and union records, cookbooks, and more are all used here. The thirty-some visual images that Montaño includes bring her arguments to light. The image of a light-skinned housewife monitoring her electric mixer alongside a comparatively less white woman grog-
ing dough with her hands is one powerful example. A full list of the images Montaño uses would have been a helpful reference for readers at the outset of the book.

Because of its wide chronological scope, diversity of actors, and varied and creative source base, Montaño's book will find a broad audience. It is a must-read for scholars of modern Mexico and Latin America. Historians of modernization and urbanization of any region will be interested in Montaño's book, particularly those looking to examine these topics beyond the North Atlantic. Graduate students will benefit from examining how Montaño analyzes and juxtaposes sources about tram drivers, housewives, and labor unions and then develops a cohesive and powerful argument about technology and social history from these seemingly disparate historical discussions. This book is appropriate to assign for advanced undergraduate students, though the length of the book, coupled with some in-depth historiographic discussions throughout, may deter some undergraduate readers who do not have any background in Mexican or Latin American history. Overall, Electrifying Mexico is a gripping read and will appeal to a wide range of scholars and students of Mexico, Latin America, urban history, and technology.

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