

Sensitive to context, Schneider considers this case in light of the military's role in Brazilian society. At the time, it was a sink for miscreants, many of whom were sentenced to military service in lieu of prison time, and its reputation discouraged volunteers from Brazil's middle classes and elite from joining. Yet, the military boasted that its "recruits" may have entered as vagabonds and criminals, but once enlisted they learned to become honorable Brazilian citizens. Because of this, the Black sailors' mutiny was considered a shameful assault on honor in the military, supporting racist arguments based on eugenics that Brazilian society was being corrupted from within due to miscegenation. Thus, the 1910 amnesty resulted in the suspension of amnesty as a political tool until the 1930s, when it was reinstated in a more bureaucratized form and became entangled in the rise of fascism in Europe and around the world and, after World War II, in the repression of communists during the Cold War.

Schneider's account is compelling in the way she weaves various literary accounts into how amnesty enters Brazil's collective consciousness. Her discussion of Jorge Amado is exemplary. His political writing, banned across much of Latin America, ended with his eventual disillusionment, after the exiled writer realized that, as it does today, what passed for justice often depended less on evidence than allegiance.

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CULTURAL HISTORY OF ELECTRICITY IN MEXICO

Electrifying Mexico: Technology and the Transformation of a Modern City. By Diana J. Montaña. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021. Pp. 373. \$50.00 cloth.
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Mexico's energy history presents a curious paradox. Although the literature is vast and stretches back to the early decades of the twentieth century (or perhaps even the late nineteenth, if one considers some Porfirian treatises as historiography), its coverage is highly uneven. Oil has been by far, and for understandable reasons, historians' favorite topic. In particular, Mexico's oil expropriation and themes such as oil and the Mexican Revolution, oil and labor, and the oil industry have been extensively analyzed. Coal and natural gas have, on the other hand, attracted only a few enthusiasts. Electricity and the electric sector boast a sizable collection of works, focused mostly on the history of the electric industry itself. Almost entirely absent from both the historical literature on oil and electricity are studies of their social, cultural, and environmental impacts. That makes Diana Montaña's excellent cultural history of electricity in Mexico a pioneering work in the field.

Adopting a bottom-up approach, Montaña examines the role of consumers and people of different classes, genders, and races as “agents of technological change” (6) who shaped the emergence and growth of what she calls the “electriscapes,” a notion that aims to capture both the “physical and symbolic aspects of electrification” (7). The book argues that Mexico City’s electricity users were not mere passive observers of the electrification of their lives, but active agents who molded the process.

Organized less as a strict chronology than a series of deeply researched snapshots that explore different aspects of electrification between (roughly) the 1880s and the 1960s, the book is divided into three parts, each containing two chapters. The first chapter deals with the installment of public electric lighting in Mexico City during the late nineteenth century. Chapter 2 focuses on the role electricity played in the patriotic festivities, fairs, and other public events of the Porfiriato; in the process, electricity became associated with contemporary ideas of progress and modernity as well as with the identity of many urbanites. Chapter 3 examines electric tramway accidents as a window into popular attitudes and perceptions regarding a new technology at the turn of the twentieth century. Even though the chapter offers grim fun, the revelations are not entirely surprising. Poor people bore the brunt of technological change, and Mexico City authorities largely dismissed such accidents as the inevitable price of progress.

Methodologically creative, Chapter 4 uses court records to bring home the book’s contention that ordinary people shaped electrification, looking at how they “stole” power to serve their own needs, much to the chagrin of city authorities and the Canadian-based company that monopolized the sector. The book’s last section tackles the middle decades of the twentieth century, when electricity had become a fact of life for the vast majority of Mexico City residents. The link between electric appliances and views on middle-class female domesticity during the 1930s and 1940s is the subject of Chapter 5. Chapter 6, this reader’s favorite, examines the crucial and overlooked role of labor in the 1960 nationalization of the electric industry.

Electrifying Mexico is very well-written and avoids the pitfalls of jargon-heavy cultural history. The book also successfully employs the tools of cultural history to capture Mexico City residents’ everyday experience of electrification and untangle the cultural practices and meanings they attached to its use. With its emphasis on the agency of local actors in shaping electrification, the book represents an outstanding contribution and a corrective to scholarship on technology and energy sometimes characterized by an Olympian view of history. As with any other historical approach, cultural history has its own disadvantages, and the book’s focus on cultural matters sometimes comes at a cost. Given the book’s initial promise to tackle both the physical and cultural aspects of electrification, the book could have said more about electricity generation during the roughly 80 years under study. Especially considering that during this period Mexico City’s electric industry shifted from water to fossil fuels as its primary source of energy

production. (This relative lack of attention to energy generation and sources is illustrated by the confusion of coal and charcoal on p. 169.) It would have been interesting to see the author tease out connections between the symbolic elements of the electriscape and some of these critical physical dimensions to electrification. That being said, the book deserves ample praise for its elegant writing, meticulous research, the original use of sources, and as the first (as far as this reader knows) cultural history of electrification in Mexico.

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MODERN MEXICO IN COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Bandits and Liberals, Rebels and Saints: Latin America since Independence. By Alan Knight.
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Alan Knight explores the activities of both state and non-state actors in Latin America during the Liberal era, which Knight frames between the wars for independence and World War II. Liberalism emerged in Europe as a set of ideals, and, later, programs and institutions supporting the rights and freedoms of individuals against the tyranny of privileged classes. In Latin America, Liberalism certainly helped colonies achieve independence from the Spanish Empire, eliminate privilege in their legal systems, create representative governments, and establish market-oriented economies in which, at least in theory, any self-made man could thrive. However, historians have shown how social, economic, and political uncertainties often lured Liberal politicians to prioritize realpolitik over ideals.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Liberals, following Conservative practices, increasingly overlooked their core principles by embracing a strongman who could rule with an iron fist and secure political and economic privileges for his supporters. Often aggressively and without compunction, these leaders repressed their political opponents and exploited the marginalized masses. This tended to perpetuate cycles of political violence as oppressed groups sooner or later assembled enough power to overthrow their tyrants. The Mexican Revolution is the most significant example. This is the historical context of Knight's latest book.

The book is an edited volume, a compilation of unpublished conference papers and lectures that Knight delivered over the course of several decades, although the chapters have been brought up to date. The challenge of any edited volume is to provide a cohesive and organized narrative among often unrelated papers; this book is no different. Knight attempts to provide continuity and a smooth narrative by organizing