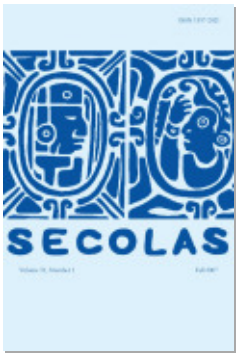
The Ambivalent Revolution: Forging State and Nation in Chiapas, 1910–1945 by Stephen E. Lewis (review)



Andrew G. Wood

The Latin Americanist, Volume 51, Number 1, Fall 2007, pp. 106-109 (Review)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

Puerto Rico. Throughout, the volume is focused on highlighting the regional manifestations of forces resulting from globalization, the growing agency of the Caribbean peoples in the modern world, and the delicate balance between homogeneity and difference among residents of the region.

Moreover, *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context* celebrates the "hybrid" nature that is the Caribbean. Unlike traditional studies that concentrate on a particular island state or linguistic grouping, this collection bridges boundaries to provide a more interdisciplinary and postmodern perspective of the area. *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context* examines the region's cultural patterns in both their localized and diaspora communities. Their perspective, however, is very interesting because of its attempt to give a synthetic view of Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora history and in the process some regional differences are obscured. Those wanting more might seek direction from the endnotes and its outstanding bibliography. While *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context* represents a thoughtful and important critical addition to the world of Caribbean studies, scholars of this region may have appreciated the inclusion of one or two pieces that deal with the Circum-Caribbean or the Caribbean basin as a more collective and representative space for discussion.

In sum, this book is a rich addition to contemporary Caribbean studies and will be of interest to several academic constituencies, especially those in the social sciences. It is by any standard, illuminating, easy to read, and reflects sound research. Knight and Martínez-Vergne are to be congratulated on producing such a substantive work that advances our knowledge of the connections between the Caribbean and the global world. *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context*, above all, reflects the fundamental challenges posed by globalization as well as the organic forces responsible for the cultural dynamism that for centuries defines this region.

H.J. Manzari
Department of Modern Languages
Washington and Jefferson College

***The Ambivalent Revolution: Forging State and Nation in Chiapas, 1910-1945*. By Stephen E. Lewis. Albuquerque: U New Mexico P, 2005, p. 288, $24.95.**

Chiapas is a land rich in natural resources with a population largely indigenous and poor living in near constant tension with a powerful *mestizo* planter and rancher minority. During and after the height of nationwide revolutionary conflict, state elites desiring to maintain their power and rule the state on their own terms often clashed with federal officials. In the long run they generally won, managing to do little about the persistent inequality, grinding poverty and anti-Indian racism that has convinced many (however

accurately or not) that the Mexican Revolution "never came" to Chiapas.

Intense conflict between state elites and federal officials during the 1920s and 1930s is detailed by Stephen E. Lewis in a revealing study of the Ministry of Public Education's (SEP) postrevolutionary campaigns in Chiapas. Making effective use of archival documentation in Mexico City and Chiapas, Lewis traces the rise and fall of SEP programming across three critical decades—years that proved key in developing the "nation" as a modern society and state.

After providing background on the late nineteenth century, Lewis deepens his narrative when describing the coming of the Constitutionalist faction (followers of Venustiano Carranza) to Chiapas and the reaction of various state elites (dubbed "Mapaches") as they rose up in revolt beginning in late 1914. Careful not to include the majority indigenous population in the struggle, countless villages and towns nevertheless suffered at the hands of the rival combatants until Mapache *caudillo* Tiburcio Fernández Ruiz brokered a deal with Constitutionalist general Carlos Vidal and revolutionary leaders in Mexico City to officially retake control of Chiapas.

Shortly thereafter, subsequent agrarian, labor and related reforms essentially came to naught as Fernández Ruiz diligently worked to block all federal legislation while restoring Chiapas to its bad old pre-revolutionary social order. Distrustful of "foreign" federal administration influence coming from outside the state, the governor disassembled nearly all educational programming and fired many of the teachers. This latter move helped initiate a long battle over education, culture and, ultimately, power in the southern Mexican state.

Following orders from Mexico City, SEP agents soon set out to promote a remaking of local society and full endorsement of revolutionary citizenship. Arriving in the state in 1922, the earliest of these SEP "missionaries" actually spent less time in the classroom than they did in the community. In their encounter with residents they sought, among other things, to root out alcoholism, rural paternalism and what they viewed as a pervasive religious "fanaticism" in the region.

Fostering its own brand of *indigenismo* (an alleged valorization of indigenous culture by non-Indians), SEP officials opened Mexico City's Casa del Estudiante Indígena in 1926. As a boarding school for native boys the institution represented an important revolutionary experiment in SEP efforts to incorporate Indians (including some virtually "kidnapped" from the Chiapas highlands) into urban mestizo life. The program also endeavored to train a cohort of native elites who would then return to Chiapas as teachers. Only a few students graduated before the school closed in late 1932, however. Nevertheless, officials felt sufficiently encouraged to believe that, with the necessary support and materials, indigenous people could be sufficiently trained to become "modern" and "civilized" citizens.

SEP undersecretary Moisés Sáenz soon created an "experimental station of Indian incorporation" in Michoacán. Difficulties, including low attendance, lack of funds and local bossism, soon discouraged him. As Lewis writes,

Sáenz subsequently began to think that rather than incorporating Indians, Mexico should fully "integrate" herself through a process which "respected its indigenous and mestizo campesino roots and institutions while appropriating the progressive elements of Mexico's 'white' population" (63). After 1932, this more "holistic" brand of *indigenismo* would prove the guiding ideology for SEP programming.

Despite fierce resistance in many areas, SEP efforts did produce some results in Chiapas. During the *cardenista* sexenio (administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934-40), several communities loyal to SEP teachers did enjoy a modicum of agrarian reform. Moreover, Lewis considers that "even if the SEP's overt attempts to forge more secular, sober Mexicans produced disappointing or inconclusive results, SEP teachers convinced most rural Chiapanecos of the value of school and the messages and skills that it taught" (xiii).

Nevertheless, indigenous communities yielded little to ambitious SEP plans aimed at "incorporating" them into the nation. Instead, an unintended consequence of early indigenista training resulted in the assumption of power by those trained by the SEP in highland communities. Lewis finds that, with the help of the state government office of Indian Affairs, those who opposed these regional *caciques* (bosses) found themselves forced to take refuge in the Lacandon rain forest—ultimately the center of neo-zapatista organizing and eventual rebellion in early 1994.

As the program evolved during the 1930s, SEP workers embraced a "socialist education" that often included extra-curricular efforts encouraging agrarian reform, labor unionizing, challenging of paternalist networks and other social action. In contrast, historians looking at different areas of Mexico have found a range of results in regard to the SEP during this time. In Chiapas, however, state leaders along with members of the rancher and planter elite deeply resented federal intervention and endeavored to neutralize fully nearly all SEP influence. As Lewis observes, SEP programming faced more challenges in Chiapas than in any other state in the nation.

On the political front, President Cárdenas did manage, for a time, to build important political alliances in Chiapas. This allowed him to reshape the national ruling party (PNR) in the state and have a handful of his favored candidates elected. "But what worked for Cárdenas at the national and state levels," Lewis cautions, "could not work in each of the dozens of municipalities in Chiapas." In the end, "Cardenistas fought an uphill battle against those who had long profited from the exploitation of highland indigenous communities" (154-55).

The Ambivalent Revolution is a well written and fascinating study that will engage readers with its critical discussion of key issues of social and cultural change in one of Mexico's most perplexing and downtrodden areas. Yet the analysis is pertinent not only to revolutionary Mexico but also to other nations where revolutionary agents have attempted wholesale social and cultural change. Ultimately, Lewis's intrepid historical work makes clear

the tragic twentieth-century legacy forged in Chiapas – one that goes a long way towards explaining the ongoing Zapatista challenge today.

Andrew G. Wood
Department of History
University of Tulsa

***Nation & Citizen in the Dominican Republic, 1880-1916.* By Teresita Martínez-Vergne. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2005, p. 256, $24.95.**

In a thought-provoking combination of intellectual and social history, Teresita Martínez-Vergne examines the foundations of Dominican national identity at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Although scholars of Dominican history have placed the origins of Dominican nationalism as early as the 1820s and as late as the 1930s, Martínez-Vergne contends that the main impetus toward Dominican nationalism began in 1880 with the rise of the Liberal export-led political economy. The author, an associate professor of history and coordinator of the Latin American Studies Program at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, contends that the small, urban Dominican intelligentsia, especially in Santo Domingo and San Pedro de Macorís, sought to impose its version of nationalism on the rest of Dominican society. Martínez-Vergne, however, is quick to point out that subaltern sectors of society, such as immigrant laborers, bourgeois women, and members of the working class, had their own notions of what Dominican nationalism and citizenship meant.

In 1865, after the Dominicans achieved their independence for the third time in the nineteenth century, the two predominant political parties in the Dominican Republic, known as the *Rojos* [Reds] and the *Azules* [Blues], engaged in fierce political fighting. Between 1865 and 1879, the Dominican presidency, dominated by *caudillo* [strongman] rule, changed hands no fewer than twenty times. At the end of the 1860s, the leader of the *Rojos*, Buenaventura Báez, believing that independence was not a viable option for the Dominican Republic, attempted to annex his nation to the United States of America. In October 1879, however, Gregorio Luperón, the leader of the *Azules*, took control of the Dominican Republic. In 1880, Luperón instituted a Liberal constitution inspired by Positivism and Social Darwinism. This new constitution promoted economic and military reforms, public education, private property, inclusive politics, modern agricultural techniques, and an export economy based on the production of sugar cane. Notwithstanding the dictatorship of Ulises Heureaux, the Dominican intelligentsia attempted to impose this view of modernity on Dominican society until the U.S. military intervention in 1916.

Emphasizing the impact of the Dominican intelligentsia on nation building in the Dominican Republic, Martínez-Vergne argues that "nationalism