

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The book is an edited volume, a compilation of unpublished conference papers and lectures that Knight delivered over the course of several decades, although the chapters have been brought up to date.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

chronologically the disparate political themes while weaving them together with the thread of political violence. Although the transitional narratives between chapters are unavoidably choppy, Knight manages to smooth them considerably by using contingencies as a theoretical framework—that is, by focusing on the regional characteristics, events, and decisions that produced different results in otherwise similar historical conditions throughout the Americas. Thus, he manages to present a distinctive Latin American history that is richly flavored with the diversity of national and regional histories.

Fortunately for the reader, this book offers the clever analysis, elegant narrative, and witty commentaries expected in any of Knight's works. He challenges diverse theoretical frameworks, including the Marxist metanarrative of class struggle, and he challenges both revisionist and orthodox Latin American historians. Throughout his book, he makes the case that bandits can be potential agents of social change rather than simply egotistic criminal: he demonstrates that Liberalism was not only a political tool for strongmen, but also a real weapon for the oppressed seeking social justice. He argues that, even though in general there were no religious wars in Latin America, the Catholic Church was often dragged into political violence. He also engages in the comparative history of Mexico and Peru, revolutions in Mexico, Bolivia, and Cuba, and the Mexican Revolution with some of the major social revolutions around the world over the past 250 years. His book also takes the reader to the realm of global politics, particularly focusing on the British Empire's strategy of establishing subtle relations with regional oligarchs, which resulted in what he identifies as "Local Colonialism." As a result, the book is a broad and curious intellectual exercise that aims at demystifying some commonly held assumptions about Latin American history.

However, this book is not really a history of modern Latin America. More accurately, it is a history of Mexico in comparative analyses with some other countries of the Americas. Still, the result is a successful history that is simultaneously broad and deep, including more than 250 pages of detailed notes. The book can be particularly useful to students of Mexican and Latin American history who are seeking a better understanding of the interconnectivity of national and regional histories and to scholars interested in nuanced analysis and criticisms of taken-for-granted theories on modern Latin American history.

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