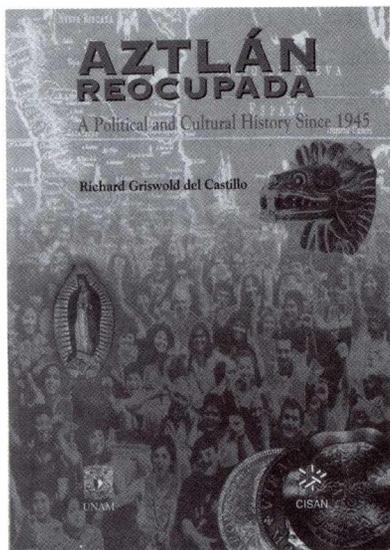


REVIEWS



Aztlán Reocupada: A Political And Cultural History Since 1945

Richard Griswold del Castillo

CISAN, UNAM

Mexico City, 1996, 204 pp.
(Bilingual Edition).

That the Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities of the United States have a complex and dynamic relationship with Mexico should come as no surprise. Along with many factors internal to Mexico and the United States, the two countries' proximity has facilitated one of the world's major migratory movements of this century. However, analytical explorations of the multi-faceted relationship between Mexican-origin populations on either side of the border

are remarkably scarce. This academic essay by widely recognized historian Richard Griswold del Castillo establishes useful parameters for examining the evolution of the relationship since World War II by dividing the post-war era into three periods.

Griswold del Castillo characterizes 1945 to 1965 as the Mexican American generation, the one that sought accommodation with U.S., society through pursuing many strategies. While proud of their Mexican roots, Mexican Americans did not question the American dream but used political, social and labor organizations to press for greater access to that dream. Moreover, more prominent Mexican American presence in local and regional politics, in academic circles and in cultural and artistic endeavors pointed to many successes and led to a broader base for future accomplishments.

"Rediscovering Aztlán" coincides with the height of the Chicano Movement from 1965 to 1975, which Griswold del Castillo considers to be the "radical attempt to redefine the political, social, economic and cultural status..." of Mexican-origin individuals in the United States. Consistent with the spirit of the 1960s but unique to the Mexican-origin community, the Chicano Movement challenged the foundations of the American dream and its exclusion of Mexican Americans, in the process, returning to their Mexican

roots for reinforcement and inspiration. Many even chose to call themselves Chicanos, a derogatory term used for many years to refer to Mexican immigrants. Among the myriad manifestations of the Chicano Movement, the author includes César Chávez and the United Farm Workers Union (UFW), the land grant struggle in New Mexico, the Denver Crusade for Justice, Brown Berets, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), Raza Unida Party, among many others.

Particularly noteworthy and enduring about the Chicano Movement was the creativity it spawned in all the arts and literature, "...changing forever the way that American would see Mexicans in the United States." Using Mexican symbols, many Chicano theatre groups drew inspiration from *Teatro Campesino* organized by Luis Valdez and associated with the UFW to develop political commentaries. A notable school of Chicano muralists used public art based on Mexican mural masters to express their criticism of the United States. Moreover, many Chicano writers used their poetry and fiction to explore their *mexicanidad*, as a strategy to understand their position in the United States.

Griswold del Castillo suggests that since 1975 the substantial immigration from Latin America has modified the perspective of the

Mexican-origin population in the United States. The most preferred label is now Latino, which reflects the increasingly diverse Spanish surnamed community. While poverty, unemployment, low levels of education and other social problems persist, a growing Latino professional and middle class points to a prosperous future, at least for some. Voter registration drives and Latino participation in the political parties are just beginning to bear dividends in some areas.

But, what does the new century hold for Mexican Americans? The intensifying economic integration of the United States and Mexico has opened lucrative opportunities for many businesses in both countries, but its effect on the Mexican origin population is not clear. Obviously, the fortunes of the Mexican American community are crucial for Mexican immigrants, since their arrival in the United States inevitably brings them to a *barrio*. However, the long-term consequences of efforts at all levels of U.S. society to curb immigration, and eliminate social benefits for immigrants' children could cause dislocations throughout the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant community. Essays such as Griswold del Castillo's provide a much needed tool in appreciating the significance of Mexican culture as inspiration for the Mexican-origin population in the United States. ❧

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Tina Modotti: Photographer and Revolutionary

Margaret Hooks

Harpers Collins Publishers,
London

1993, 277 pp.

Margaret Hooks has added yet another book to the literature about women in Mexico in the 1920s. Hooks identified the goal of her work in the Preface, stating that she would try to “demythologize Modotti the legend, extricate her from the shadows of her loves and locate the woman and the artist.” She succeeds in telling Tina’s story; however Tina, the woman, is still an enigma, the unanswered questions are still there.

Hooks, a journalist based in Mexico City, presents a smooth story that embellishes on facts gathered by copious research. The documentation from archives, interviews and texts that the author consulted is impressive. She weaves many names and dates into a journalistic approach of describing people and places. The text is well written, although some of her statements are not factual.

Tina Modotti is a fascinating figure of the Mexican Renaissance, the period in Mexican history following the armed phase of the 1910 Revolution, when major intellectuals and artists plunged into the effort of creating a utopian society. It was at this time that Mexico’s best known muralists, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaró Siqueiros and Jean Charlot, were commissioned by José Vasconcelos to portray the story of the country on the walls of public buildings. The revolutionary fervor attracted many foreigners who wanted to participate.¹ Some, like Bertram Wolfe, needed to get out of the United States because of the persecution of so-called “Bolsheviks,” who were busy unionizing. Others, like Carleton Beals, came because they wanted to contribute to the effort of building a utopian society.

Tina Modotti came to Mexico for the first time in 1922, to bury her first husband Roubaix de l’Abrie Richey, whom everybody called “Robo.” Months later she returned to Mexico with Edward Weston, her lover and teacher, a photographer with whom she lived in that period. Tina remained in Mexico when Weston returned to the United States and stayed until 1929 when she was deported. The doors were closed to Tina in the United States because of her political activity with the Com-

¹ See Henry C. Schmidt, “The American Intellectual Discovery of Mexico in the 1920s,” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 77, Summer 1978, pp. 335-51.