

Colonial Latin American Historical Review

Volume 4
Issue 1 *Volume 4, Issue 1 (Winter 1995)*

Article 8

12-1-1995

William H. Beezley et al., eds., *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*

Judith Francis Zeitlin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr>

Recommended Citation

Zeitlin, Judith Francis. "William H. Beezley et al., eds., *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 4, 1 (1995): 100. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol4/iss1/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colonial Latin American Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico. Edited by William H. Beezley, Cheryl E. Martin, and William E. French. (Wilmington: SR Books, 1994. xxxii + 374 pp. Notes. \$55.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)

For the specialist in colonial Latin America, fifteen articles spanning four centuries of Mexican cultural history may present an unfamiliarly long chronological view of public behavior, festive celebrations, and the political forces which have shaped them. Indeed, even the five contributors to this volume who deal with pre-Independence popular culture address, to a greater or lesser degree, the way in which "enlightened" policy-makers of the eighteenth century strove to recast formal and informal behavior. These Bourbon planners, it is noted, set the stage for nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformers with their own modernist agendas, which are the book's primary focus. That the editors would give more weight to the creation of public ritual after 1821 reflects the critical role they see it playing in the molding of Mexico's diverse social groups into a national citizenry.

What will make this volume interesting to all students of cultural change is the vivid portrait the authors provide of the invented traditions of ritual performance and public display used to legitimize newly constituted authority. Secular parades and patriotic fiestas were important vehicles for transferring the social identification and emotional allegiance that colonial society invested in religious ritual to the nation-state, its mythologized heroes, and its current leaders. What may disappoint some readers is the sense that, having been transported to the parade's sidelines, often we must be satisfied with the spectacle before us and its more transparent social and political functions.

Several authors delve more deeply into the social tensions that programmatic change brought to the surface. Among them, Susan Deans-Smith places the strict workplace regulations of the tobacco factory into the broader context of industrial labor in late colonial Mexico and the specific ways in which the predominantly female factory workers manipulated Bourbon rules to meet the demands of their own lives. The assertiveness of popular culture and its intractability in the face of reformist policy is well illustrated by William French's subtle analysis of the politics of inversion as displayed by turn-of-the-century Chihuahua miners. Articles by Adrian Bantjes and Mary Kay Vaughan offer contrasting images of the post-Revolutionary rural landscape, with Bantjes dramatizing the corrosive impact of radical educational programs in Sonora and Vaughan emphasizing the integrative role promoted

by teachers in Tecamachalco, Puebla, who heeded local cultural values in constructing patriotic fiestas.

However, as Eric Van Young points out in a penetrating commentary that itself covers important methodological terrain, only one article explicitly considers ethnicity as a factor in conditioning the practice of received cultural innovations. In an analysis drawn from diverse ethnographic accounts, Guy Thomson proposes some intriguing structural hypotheses to account for the different roles taken by twentieth-century brass bands in Zapotec, Tzotzil Maya, and Tarascan villages. That this consideration of local cultural variability should stand alone underscores a fundamental weakness in approaching Mexican history through comparative models forged from European cultural studies. Although the volume editors draw our attention to these models repeatedly in introductions to chapters, the experience of nation-building in ethnically and racially plural Latin America was profoundly different than that of revolutionary France. Also, because the failure of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century political leaders to engage all segments of society in the symbolic discourse on Mexican identity continues to impede the formation of a national consensus, we need to hear more clearly the full range of dissonant voices from the past.

Judith Francis Zeitlin
Department of Anthropology
University of Massachusetts