

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

---

The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy by Neil Harvey  
Review by: Jonathan Fox  
*Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Argentine (Feb., 2001), pp. 176-177  
Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)  
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3653660>  
Accessed: 26/11/2011 21:46

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Latin American Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. xviii + 292, £34.00, £11.95 pb.

*The Chiapas Rebellion* persuasively shows that the Zapatista movement is mainly about land and democracy. The Zapatistas were quite explicit about their understanding of the linkages between social injustice and political exclusion. As they declared in their second communique, published on January 11: 'The grave conditions of our compatriots have a common cause: the lack of liberty and democracy. We think that the authentic respect for freedom and the people's will are the indispensable prerequisites for the improvement of the social and economic conditions of our country's dispossessed...' This explanation stood economic determinist ideology on its head, putting democracy first while simultaneously transforming its content and practices. Harvey's research contrasts with widespread claims that resistance to NAFTA or 'post-modern' identities were primary among the rebellion's characteristics (indeed, the EZLN's decision to launch the rebellion on 1 January 1994, the date of NAFTA's inauguration, turns out to have had little to do with NAFTA [p. 198]).

Harvey's carefully documented, analytically nuanced account addresses the rebellion's complex causes. His approach draws effectively on the relevant historical and anthropological literature, while remaining fundamentally a political science analysis. His focus on political actors more than economic conditions or social trends is quite convincing. Any explanation of the rebellion must grapple with the fact that political factors are what made Chiapas so different from Mexico's many other regions that suffer similar economic and social problems, yet did not revolt. Primarily, however, the study focuses on interpreting the political meaning and impact of the last two decades of peasant and indigenous protest in Chiapas. Harvey focuses on the political construction of citizenship, a politically contingent, inherently uneven process that involves both state-society interaction and waves of conflict and convergence within civil society between social and political actors. This process involves gradually transcending defensive struggles, particularistic demands and campaigns for discretionary material concessions, towards establishing what is now known in Mexico as 'the right to have rights'.

Harvey shows conclusively that the EZLN emerged from an already densely-organised rural civil society in Chiapas, the result of more than two decades of grassroots organising. This contrasts with the common tendency to ignore the prior (and current) existence of a wide range of both independent (and pro-governmental) mass organisations throughout the state. During the 1970s and 1980s, Chiapas' independent rural organisations followed diverse strategies, some pursuing agrarian reform, others trying to build community based economic enterprises, while sharing an aversion to conventional party politics. Some previous independent social movements sought alliances with state reformers, while others confronted state power more directly – depending both on movement ideologies and state linkages. Meanwhile, government resources bolstered the official peasant organisations. In spite of occasional partial state concessions to these social movements, the dominant pattern was repression and frustration, leading many local activists to seek more radical political options – especially when the Salinas presidency closed off the few remaining channels for

negotiation. In the process, local communities are acknowledged to be politically constituted and internally differentiated, rather than implicitly single, unified actors.

Harvey underscores four kinds of political impact. First, the rebellion empowered the *rest* of Mexico's indigenous movement, bringing them into national politics. The EZLN-government political agreement signed in 1996 (but later abandoned by President Zedillo), known as the San Andrés Accords, became the touchstone for indigenous movements for democracy throughout Mexico. Second, the EZLN learned after the brief, overtly military phase of its conflict that its fate depended on the rest of Mexican civil society, as well as the national process of democratisation. Third, the EZLN revitalised independent agrarian movements in Chiapas, creating the space for a massive wave of land invasions that was followed by a (corrupt) government buy-out of landowners. Fourth, the EZLN, with its famous Revolutionary Women's Law, created the political space for the emergence of an indigenous women's rights movement in Mexico. Beyond Chiapas, Harvey's study contributes to two broader trends in the rethinking of Latin American politics. First, he effectively articulates the interactive linkages between local, subnational and national politics. Political change has followed a patchwork quilt pattern in Mexico, varying greatly by region and state, which suggests that the implicitly homogeneous nation-state is insufficient as a unit of analysis for understanding regime change. Second, Harvey's focus on forms of representation within civil society, and the difficult construction of autonomy from below, contributes to the trend towards a broader definition of 'social movement impact'. However, Harvey did not detail changing, potentially diverse political meanings of democracy within the Zapatista movement itself. Until a political resolution of the conflict makes such research possible, *The Chiapas Rebellion* is likely to remain the most comprehensive book-length political analysis of the rebellion so far.

*University of California at Santa Cruz*

JONATHAN FOX

John Mason Hart (ed.), *Border Crossing: Mexican and Mexican-American Workers* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1998), pp. xii + 246, \$55.00, \$18.95 pb.

This edited volume examines the diverse experiences of Mexican and Mexican-American workers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book's main goals are to identify 'social, cultural, and political continuities in the history between the Mexican and Mexican-American working classes' and to demonstrate 'the important linkages between the heritage derived from the country to the south and the history of their people in the nation to the north'.

Five of the nine contributors address different aspects of working-class formation in Mexico. They include works by Mario Camarena Ocampo and Susana A. Fernández Apango (on culture and politics among textile workers in the Mexico City area), Bernardo García Díaz (on the socioeconomic and geographic origins of textile workers in Orizaba, Veracruz), Carmen Ramos Escandón (on gender and class formation among textile workers), Elizabeth Jean Norvell (on citizenship and postrevolutionary mobilisation in the port of Veracruz) and Alberto Olvera Rivera (on the sociopolitical origins of working-