

Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War. *By John Mason Hart.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. xi + 677 pp. Index, notes, maps, photographs. Cloth, \$39.95. ISBN 0-520-22324-1.

Reviewed by John E. Kicza

In 1987, John Mason Hart published *Revolutionary Mexico*, an influential overview of the Mexican Revolution. Disagreeing with the (still) dominant interpretation that the Revolution focused on internal Mexican disequilibria and inequalities, particularly in the agrarian sector, Hart argued that it was instead a struggle for national liberation against the economic imperialism that the United States had inflicted on the country, especially during the lengthy dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Hart's new book, *Empire and Revolution*, consists of some 507 pages of detailed case studies of American investment undertakings and business involvement in Mexico from 1865 to the present day. As such, it can be understood as an effort to substantiate his argument in the earlier work.

This is apparent also in the very unequal numbers of pages the author devotes to the different time periods. Hart commits some 63 pages just to the 12 years between the end of the American Civil War and the advent of the Díaz regime in Mexico, nearly 200 pages to the Díaz era from 1876 to 1910, some 130 pages to the “years of revolution” from 1910 to 1940,” and just under 100 pages to the period from 1940 to 2000. The post-1940 era thus receives rather little attention, although most scholars of Mexico recognize that this is when American economic and cultural impact expanded enormously, eclipsing its impact on Mexico during all previous epochs. Further, until Hart reaches the post-1940 era, he concentrates almost exclusively on formal economic penetration of Mexico. However, in that final section, he abruptly shifts to a discussion of how American popular culture, drugs and criminality, and pollution affected Mexican life.

Hart compiled this massive undertaking only after many years of research in business and government archives scattered throughout Mexico and the United States. His dedication and doggedness must be lauded. He shows himself to be very knowledgeable about modern Mexican history, adeptly weaving American financial involvement into Mexico's larger national narrative. The book's lively—and sometimes almost flippant—prose style carries the reader smoothly through what might otherwise have been dense and repetitive case studies. Despite his consistently negative view toward American economic involvement in Mexico over the last century and a half, Hart rarely engages in a systematic evaluation of its impact in any of these

eras. He seems to think that his numerous case studies speak for themselves, but they do not—certainly not with the broader meaning and application that Hart assumes is apparent.

The author assumes that a racist disdain of the Mexican people pervades American business interests, a racism that he argues extends to all such societies. “It would also expose the fatal flaw of that republic conceived in liberty—a deep and abiding racism that still underscores its assertiveness toward underdeveloped nations” (p. 69). But such a sweeping generalization is not consistently demonstrated, even in this very detailed study. To the contrary, Hart cites many examples of partnerships between American and Mexican business interests that lasted over generations, of American families who settled in Mexico and came to identify strongly with it, and of intermarriages between the American and Mexican business and political classes he examines.

Despite his negative perspective, reflected in some sardonic, even sarcastic, comments sprinkled throughout the text, the author acknowledges that Mexico did not have an alternative model of development available to it, at least until well after the Revolution. In fact, the Mexican government and business sectors tend to disappear, or at least to be subordinated in this narrative, perhaps because of the seeming lack of other possible models. Mexico itself thus comes across as a passive player in large sections of this study, devoid of agency in shaping its future. In his portrayal of the interaction between United States business interests and the Mexican government, Hart does not depict the latter as possessing a well-devised design that would ultimately benefit the nation. He does acknowledge, albeit only from time to time, that the massive infusion of American investments sped up the creation of a more modern, larger-scale Mexican economy than would have occurred otherwise.

For the most part, all agency, at least through the first quarter of the twentieth century, seemingly belonged to the large business and investment enterprises of the United States and western Europe. Hart further argues that these huge firms were entering into consortia and other types of cooperative agreements during this period, thereby decreasing the degree of competition among them. Hart thinks little of the apparent policy of the Díaz administration to court European, especially British, investment as a counterweight to growing American domination. Instead, he stresses the collaboration between the petroleum, mining, financial, and other interests in the Western countries. He takes this point so far as to enumerate in an appendix the American banking syndicates that were formed to render financial support to Britain and her allies during World War I—this in a book devoted to the economic impact of the United States on Mexico.

Readers who set aside the author’s assertion of pervasive racist attitudes, and his insistence on supposed collaborations between international investors and businesses, to

concentrate on his many well-developed treatments of individual business ventures, will find much of interest in this vast compilation. The scholarly public must applaud the years of research Hart spent in scattered business and government archives that yielded this rich trove of case studies.

John E. Kicza is professor of Latin American history at Washington State University. He has written on prominent Mexican business families in both the colonial and national periods. His publications include Colonial Entrepreneurs: Families and Business in Bourbon Mexico City (1983) and "The Role of the Family in Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Latin America," published in the Journal of Family History (1985). He is currently studying middle-class businessmen and professionals in late colonial Mexico City.