

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Historical Atlas of Central America by Carolyn Hall and Héctor Pérez Brignoli

Review by: David J. Robinson

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a map of the festivals and local culture regions? Why is Louisiana's *joie de vivre* not depicted? Fortunately, treatment of the Mississippi River and flooding is ample. What the editors included is spectacular and certainly significant; what they left out is an opportunity awaiting a more systematic atlas.

The essays are solid historical summaries, but they are uneven in their support of the atlas's centerpiece, the maps. Paul Hoffman's informed and critical essay on early-colonial-era mapping is stirring, as is the collection of images that exhibit subtle increments in knowledge acquired by the colonial powers. One can pore over the tracings of shorelines and rivers, settlements and cartouches, for hours, and Hoffman's essay places both the maps and the mapmaking in historical context. Ralph Ehrenberg's essay effectively uses major cartographic contributions as a way to bracket the state's development in the early nineteenth century. The rest of the essays are less informative as critical discussions of the history of charting Louisiana. The authors, though adept at tracing the state's political and military history, offer far less insight into the reason for the maps' preparation, the technologies used in the process, or their shortcomings and strengths. Nonetheless, the essays provide readers with a useful historical context for the maps themselves.

The final chapter focuses on New Orleans, as is appropriate given the city's prominent role in the state's historical and cartographic development. John Magill's well-informed chapter contains numerous historic photographs that add considerably to his narrative. With an emphasis on early cadastral depictions of the French Quarter, the maps also introduce such important issues as drainage, real estate development, and flood protection on an urban scale. The atlas contains no maps of New Orleans after 1958, and such obvious issues as sanitation, parks, race, and suburbanization are neglected in the selected maps. Nonetheless, the New Orleans depictions include some real gems.

I suspect that one of the most difficult challenges the editors faced was deciding which maps to exclude. Omissions notwithstanding, this is a rich volume that makes available to the public many noteworthy maps currently sequestered in various archival collections. This in and of itself is a notable contribution. When one takes into consideration the obvious care taken in the production of this satisfying volume, coupled with the informative essays, its value grows. The Historic New Orleans Collection has produced a high-quality publication that will become a standard reference tool.—CRAIG E. COLTEN, *Louisiana State University*

HISTORICAL ATLAS OF CENTRAL AMERICA. By CAROLYN HALL and HÉCTOR PÉREZ BRIGNOLI. xiv and 321 pp.; maps, diags., ills., bibliog., index. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. \$99.95 (cloth), ISBN 0806130377.

Rarely is a reviewer—at least this one—able to use such words as “sumptuous,” “magisterial,” or “definitive” in assessing the merits of a book, but on this occasion such accolades are not only permissible but obligatory. This new atlas marks a turning point in the historiography of Central America, and its authors, the geographer Carolyn Hall and the historian Héctor Pérez Brignoli, together with its cartogra-

pher-in-chief, John Cotter, and the various institutions that supported what must have been an expensive venture, all deserve our collective congratulations. If one normally expects an atlas to simply contain a collection of maps, then this volume is much more than an atlas: It is a historical geography of Central America from pre-Hispanic times to the end of the twentieth century. Each and every map displayed is interpreted via a succinct text; debates and doubts about data and sources are revealed; and interrelationships between spatial patterns and underlying factors are discussed. But one of the finest characteristics of the atlas is the simple joy one can experience in looking at the maps: the color combinations, the legibility of the materials, even the high-quality feel of the paper on which they are printed—these are sensual pleasures that subtly reinforce one's enjoyment of the scholarship found on every page.

Given the extensive temporal and spatial coverage of the atlas, the authors wisely subdivide their survey into five sections: environment and territory; people and places; colonial societies; formation of national societies; and the challenge of development. Individual themes and specific topics are mapped at a variety of scales, with legibility the key concern. Thus, to take a few examples, the diffusion of the colonial Catholic mission orders in the entire subcontinental region are displayed on facing pages (pp. 74–75), allowing one to appreciate their differentiated patterns. Life zones are similarly displayed (pp. 22–23). Administrative structures of church and state in colonial and postcolonial periods are neatly displayed as organizational charts. The careful mapping of routes, trails, and paths allow one to follow in the footsteps of a colonial friar (p. 123) or examine the mail routes of the 1820s, or trace the student marches of the flag riots in the Panama Canal Zone in 1967. And thankfully, when no precise map sources are available, there is no hesitation in deftly sketching the likely shapes and sizes of colonial estates or a twentieth-century Costa Rican coffee hacienda.

For those who consult the atlas carefully, the evolution of mappable data is also revealed throughout its pages. Whereas in the pre-Hispanic and colonial periods, located symbols must be used to represent urban populations, agricultural production, and the like, slowly but surely during the late nineteenth, and at ever-quicken- ing pace in the twentieth century, areal data become available. The problematic boundary issues now emerge as keys to patterns on the maps if not on the ground. Who has not struggled over debated and disputed municipal, cantonal, or provincial boundaries? And with the growth of the region's nation-states their boundaries—the limits of their territorial control—become not just cartographic symbols but the edges of power worth fighting and dying over. The external pressure of Uncle Sam was often required to “settle” frontier disputes (pp. 48–49).

Although politics can be represented spatially as the areal extent of party affiliation or voting levels (pp. 236–237), the temporal range of regimes is equally significant, and the authors effectively use color-coded columns—pink liberals versus blue conservatives—to document what at times become bewildering switches in dominant ideologies (p. 186). The same effective method is used to represent the persis-

tent military regimes that have plagued the region (p. 232). Equally artful are the graphic methods used to represent the ever-present external influences in the region's history. British imperialists were covetous of Spanish dominance in the Western Hemisphere (pp. 34–36), and after 1823 the Monroe Doctrine allowed the United States to embrace Central America within its strategic reach, the “Americas” becoming the favored term of the times. With such continental extensions and pretensions, the isthmus, that narrow waist of Central America, became ever more strategic: It had to be cut through to allow the mighty empire of the north to integrate its seaboard (pp. 42–43).

Adding to the value of this superb cartographic production are the scholarly addenda. The reader is provided with a glossary of foreign words, no fewer than twenty-four pages of sources used in the drafting of the maps, tables, and graphs, a full listing of credits for the many historic photographs and paintings that are strategically placed throughout the work, and a detailed index.

Whoever teaches courses on Latin America or Central America will need to refer to this atlas, for its coverage is encyclopedic: from pre-Hispanic cultures to refugee migrations of the 1990s; from patterns of physical hazards to the evolution of urban metropolises over the last 100 years. For the general public, the atlas will provide something that has been desperately lacking in the past: a benchmark source of information about one of the world's most significant historic regions (notwithstanding the recent attention to that other “middle” region). This is a volume that should be in every public school and university library (one hopes that a CD version will be soon made available). Simply put, it is a monument to the energies and scholarship of its authors, a stunning achievement.—DAVID J. ROBINSON, *Syracuse University*