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*Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans.* By Alan Riding. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985. Pp. 385. Selected bibliography, index. \$18.95.

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*Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans.* By ALAN RIDING. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985. Pp. 385. Selected bibliography, index. \$18.95.

Alan Riding's *Distant Neighbors* is a very successful attempt to unite two separate lines of inquiry: who are the Mexicans, and why has Mexican evolution taken the path it has? The book makes very enjoyable reading, and for this reason alone is assured a broad audience. Although not written for scholars, *Distant Neighbors* also constitutes one of the few recent works that adequately describes Mexico in the 1960s and 1970s.

Riding's accomplishment is due in part to his suggestive organization of chapters into thematic units. By first demonstrating how corruption functions as both the "oil" and the "glue" of the Mexican bureaucracy, for example, he leaves himself free to develop other ideas when discussing the petroleum-induced boom of the 1970s, and in turn leaves the reader free to contrast the two themes. In a similar way, his description of the Mexican obsession with the past in an early chapter offers provocative counterpoint to the subsequent discussion of Mexico's alienated Indian populations. Such contrasts allow the reader to formulate his or her own ideas about the way in which Mexican development has been affected by who the Mexicans are. In an area full of dogmatic treatises as the study of Mexico is, this approach is refreshing indeed.

Two minor flaws are apparent in the book. Neither of these flaws seriously detracts from its overall value, but recognition of them can provide helpful perspectives for readers unfamiliar with Mexican history.

Riding's review of Mexican history in the second chapter is meant to supply a basic background for his more detailed description of the 1960s and 1970s. His recapitulation of events from the time before the conquest through the modern revolutionary period is accurate but dry. The specialist finds no new material, the novice no analytical framework within which the account of events becomes meaningful.

This deficiency is especially apparent in the treatment of the Revolution of 1910. The complex evolution of the Revolution is made more obscure by the simple recitation of what has become the canon of revolutionary events and actors. Riding fails to evaluate its various social, economic, or political implications for Mexico's later experience. Most importantly, he ignores the role played by this revolutionary canon as an ideological base for later developments in Mexican history. As more and more research on Mexico emphasizes the continuity recognizable in the Revolution, the long-term functioning of the Revolutionary canon as ideology has become crucial to understanding Mexico.

A second problem is Riding's portrayal of the Mexican character in his first chapter. In describing another people, there is a thin line between

racism and romanticism. Riding, although he does an excellent job in general, leans toward the latter pitfall, thinking perhaps that relations between the two countries will improve if Americans view their southern neighbors more favorably. However, even a hint of romanticism is dangerous in the case of Mexico and its people because of the current difficulties in the relationship between the United States and Mexico. Members of influential cultures like the United States have a tendency to romanticize peoples that they desire to dominate; such romanticization can, in fact, be part of the conquest.

It is important, then, that in attempting to understand the Mexicans we come to see them as different from ourselves, without romanticizing the differences. To do so is to accept them as other unique humans and to respect them as such. Distant neighbors can neither denigrate nor romanticize each other's unique characteristics, but must come to view themselves as equals, if they are to become closer working partners and closer friends.

*Distant Neighbors* constitutes an important addition to writing on Mexico, and becomes even more valuable to the general reader with consideration of the two issues delineated here.

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*Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid Under the Radical Republicans, 1867-1877.* By MARK W. SUMMERS. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Pp. xiii + 361. Coda, appendix, abbreviations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$37.50.

The triumph of revisionism in Reconstruction historiography, for all its virtues, stifled interest in significant areas of southern history. The defense of Radical Reconstruction so apparent in the writing in recent years obscured more negative aspects of Republican rule, especially those stressed by earlier scholars hostile to Reconstruction. The topic of railroad subsidies and political corruption offers a case in point. *Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity*, by Mark W. Summers, is the first book-length study of this subject for decades, and it is long overdue. Summers' book moves beyond the concerns of the revisionists to reveal new insights about railroads and economic policy during the period.

There is much in this book to support the revisionist position. Summers is frankly sympathetic to the concept of state aid to the railroads; among other things a successful railroad program could have helped "efface the race issue and woo conservatives." (p. x) Summers found that in most