

Mark Overmyer-Velázquez. *Visions of the Emerald City: Modern, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006. Pp. 248. Paper. \$24.95.

Overmyer-Velázquez's *Visions of the Emerald City* is a study on the neglected history of the political and cultural climate during Oaxaca City's radical change to modernity at the dawn of the twentieth century. Based on his Yale dissertation, Overmyer-Velázquez, Professor of History and Latin American Studies at the University of Connecticut, examines how the citizens of Oaxaca de Juarez experienced and contributed to the development of modernity while maintaining their traditional society. Under Porfirio Díaz's "Order and Progress", residents aimed to create a "modern, white, masculine city" while rejecting the "traditional, indigenous, female" alternative (4). Despite the stimulus brought by the mining industry and national railroad, modernity remained only a facade rather than a reality. The government and the elite ruling class presented a city that looked industrial, commercial, and homogenous, but underneath that façade a diverse and traditional population was struggling to keep up with the creation of a modern city. Overmyer-Velázquez uses the allegory of the "Emerald City" from the Wizard of Oz to describe the situation. The metaphorical wizard, Porfirio Díaz, attempts to deceive the protagonists, in this case city residents, to restructure Mexican society by improving political and social relations, and thereby achieving economic stability.

*Visions of the Emerald City* is not chronologically organized; instead, each chapter focuses on a different interrelated aspect of life in Oaxaca de Juarez. The first few chapters explore how the elite class, city councilmen, state officials, and Catholic Church worked together to structure the city in a way that showcased modernity by their standards. They promoted technological advances, education, and economic independence, yet the economy they built relied heavily on international investments from capitalists in the U.S. and U.K. The last few chapters examine how regulations and standards negatively affected foreigners, indigenous people, and other non-elites, further dividing the population based on race, gender, and sexuality. Women were

supposed to display modesty, tenderness, and piety and men were meant to defend women from the male gaze and protect the unity of the family. Nevertheless, prostitution was allowed and was a profitable business, even though it was said to be a dirty and dishonorable trade.

Overmyer-Velázquez's book is the result of eighteen months of research in various archives and libraries in Mexico and the United States. His sources range from official government documents to newspapers, and reveal the struggles of class, gender, religion, and race between commoners and the elites. He provides maps of Oaxaca City that assist in understanding the construction and layout of the city that elites defined as modern. To the government, Oaxaca had to be "legible"; in other words, there had to be parks, roads, and buildings named after the men that symbolized progress like Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz. Overmyer-Velázquez also provides photographs of native, foreign, male, and female Oaxacan workers in jobs ranging from water carrier to prostitute. The images were used by city officials to categorize citizens into distinct classes so they could then tax, survey, and discipline them accordingly.

*Visions of the Emerald City* is a thoroughly researched addition to the extensive collection of Latin American social history. It tells the history of a society whose economic, social, and cultural narrative is controlled by elites, government, and church. Overmyer-Velázquez's central argument seeks to undo the notion that modernity and tradition are polar opposites that eventually led to revolution. He writes that by viewing modernity through the perspective of Oaxacans, readers can challenge their definition of modernity as a unified, uniform and concrete system. He argues that both elites and commoners constructed modernity with tradition in order to define themselves as a central and important part of modern Mexico. Scholars and graduate students will find this book useful. It is a well-written account of a city recognized as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

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