



## Fire & Blood: A History of Mexico

*T.R. Fehrenbach*

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## **Fire & Blood: A History of Mexico** T.R. Fehrenbach

The author of many critically acclaimed books, military historian T.R. Fehrenbach provides the reader with this exciting and timely history of the territory that is today known as Mexico. His book sweeps us from the great civilizations of the Olmecs and the Aztecs to the Spanish settlers who brutally claimed the land for their own, and from the political and economic revolutions of the nineteenth century to recent history with its government scandals. In this newly-updated edition, Fehrenbach explains in lucid and compelling prose all of the riveting details that form the history of this turbulent nation.

## **Fire & Blood: A History of Mexico Details**

Date : Published April 1st 2014 by Open Road Media (first published 1973)

ISBN :

Author : T.R. Fehrenbach

Format : Kindle Edition 704 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Historical

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## From Reader Review Fire & Blood: A History of Mexico for online ebook

### Tracie says

Excellent history of Mexico. I did not know much of Mexico's history past the Spanish Conquest so it was very interesting to gain that knowledge of what came next. Definitely a lot of sad history and I wanted to tear my hair out every time the Mexican people put Santa Anna back in power; they turned power over to him at least 4 times even after he had proven a destructive and terrible leader. The author did a great job of really explaining cultural differences and painting a whole picture rather than just describing the various events. Highly recommend this book if you are interested in learning more about Mexico.

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### Todd says

A popular history of Mexico, easy to read but hardly a scholarly work. Fehrenbach tends toward broad generalizations, sweeping statements, stereotypes, and all without reference to specific evidence or usually even a citation. He'll give you the broad sweep of historic events (what happened when and who was involved), but his methods, while keeping the read easy, leave one skeptical about any claims concerning "why" that he might make. He covers the subject from prehistoric America, the earliest inferred migrations of Asians into the Americas, right through the Aztecs, the Spaniards, and Mexican independence. The work ends with NAFTA, but owing to NAFTA's newness at publication, Fehrenbach is unable to provide any assessment.

Fehrenbach tries to be objective, but his skepticism of religion is evident in his description of the various religions involved and the "supra-rational" motives of religious people. While that term is used even by religious philosophers, in Fehrenbach's usage it reads like a thinly-veiled replacement for "irrational." He gives short shrift to the good works of Catholic priests, friars, and religious, but focuses long on the negative impacts of the Church. In tandem (as the Spanish missions were part and parcel of this), he describes Spanish attempts to settle land north of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo as total failures, but then can't help but mention the existence of Santa Fe, San Antonio, and other places that evidently were actually settled, at least to some degree.

He gives almost condescending admiration for the various indigenous cultures he covers, but he seems to hold an assumption of the inherent barbarity not only of the Amerindians, but also the later Hispanic peoples generally, such as their lack of fitness for democracy, their inability to act responsibly, etc. Little brown children waiting for a European to come and lead them, or at least one of their own strongmen to order them around, etc.

Still, his attempts to see the other side of things and try to find the good in his subject does cause him to give almost sympathetic coverage of Montezuma, Cortes, and others. For all his generalizations, that of the damage Spanish culture did to its colonies in terms of bequeathing very unhealthy habits and structures was perhaps the most convincing, as Fehrenbach at least breezily summoned not just Mexico but a wide array of Spanish colonies as evidence.

Fehrenbach almost inevitably admires strongmen, authoritarian solutions, and so on, claiming (without the slightest evidence, and, as many of his claims involved the historical "what-if" of contrasting against a hypothetical alternative history, without the possibility of evidence) that this or that course was the best possible, that the people were better off than others in other places, etc. However, he invariably has to spell

out later the many negative legacies of any one of the strongmen's periods of rule, without referencing or even foreshadowing same while building up each one's many supposed merits.

Fehrenbach seems to think the natural human condition is tragedy and is complimentary of any people in any time who seem to grasp this, while expressing his regret when a people seem to miss this vital point at a given time.

If you are new to Mexican history, this makes a good start. It gives a good, sweeping picture without being too long and without being highly technical. However, one should read it with filters aimed toward Fehrenbach's own biases and flaws, and if one is really interested in Mexican history, should probably follow this up with more thorough or specialized works that exhibit a bit more scholarship.

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### **Kim says**

This is just the book for an English speaker interested in a detailed history of Mexico. Fehrenbach presents a comprehensive story that doesn't compromise the details of civilization from the Olmecs to PRI. I don't agree with some of his commentary on relatively recent events, but after all the book was published in 1973. This is an excellent source of information that is written in a style that doesn't put off the casual history reader, and encourages one to continue the study of this wonderful, very interesting and eclectic culture and its past.

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### **Rebecca says**

This was long and dry. I definitely didn't retain it all. But it was also a good, mostly fact, not too much opinion, version of Mexican history. I felt like the author made some suspiciously pseudo-scientific conclusions about \*why\* things happened as they did (i.e., attributing things to racial characteristics), and that was dodgy. But overall, I learned the bare bones of what happened. Served me well just in time for El Día de la Independencia.

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### **John says**

#### **Mexico's revolution**

This is an honest and guy wrenching account of Mexican history starting with the arrival of Spanish conquistador in the 16th century. The Spanish colonizers had no interest in importing Spanish citizens to farm the land. Their interest was in gold and silver. The result was the destruction of an indigenous culture. A long and violent period was needed to establish a Mexican nation, culture, economy and political system. The author spares no one in this excellent historical account.

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### **Benjamin says**

This is my second reading of this fabulous book about Mexican history written by my favorite historian.

Some have criticized the author for over-arguing his points, that he may have had issues with his ideas taken by others. Perhaps I misunderstood the reviewer, but I did not get that in my reading.

Be prepared: it is a detailed book in that it is full of information written in his superlative narrative style. I recommend it highly.

Mexico has often baffled me, and this book clears away much of that. How could a country seem to be so contradictory? How could it be so poor? We are not poor, nor is Canada. Why is the other North American country so impoverished and bedeviled by so many problems?

The author wanted to make a work that would make Mexico, its history and psyche, available to English readers. He has largely succeeded despite the weightiness of his tome and its close attention of detail.

He approaches these questions:

Why is corruption so common in Mexico?

Though blessed with abundant natural resources, why is Mexico so poor?

What role did the Catholic Church, good and bad, play in the history of Mexico?

What was the impact of the indigenous cultures of Mexico on modern Mexico?

Spanish influences color Mexican history. How do they shape Modern Mexico?

Is there hope for Mexico yet to become an important world player?

How has the political history of Mexico finally led to stability?

These thoughts and many more are addressed in Fehrenbach's book.

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## **Joe says**

Comprehensive review of Mexico's history from pre columbian time to modern day. Bias is apparent by the author's use of value laden comments regarding the Mexican character and culture. On the US the author has little but good things to say, regarding American involvement in Mexican affairs, certainly a controversial view by many, including me. Still, I recommend this book as a primer on Mexican history.

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## **Jack says**

Great layman's history of Mexico. In under 700 pages Fehrenbach manages to cover from a survey of pre-columbian history through the close of the 20th century in satisfying detail as well as a criticality and vocality that delivers pointed perspectives that spices up the simple accounting of facts and events. The author has an eye for broader perspectives, he is not afraid to deliver sweeping judgements on hispanic culture, causality of the Mexican condition, and the hairy issues of race, war, poverty, and religion. He does back up most of his perspectives with historic evidence, and although you may not agree with all his perspectives, one cannot deny that they are well-informed.

Ultimately the author is a sympathetic historian, his empathy for the Mexican culture and people bleeds through this work, but so does an undeniable sense of North American exceptionalism. If you're at all interested in addressing the general ignorance we have of our southern neighbor, this book is as good a place to start as any.

### **Bill says**

I feel I understand Mexico and Mexicans much more now. The book oscillated between dry and interesting but I'm glad I pushed through. Humans being human influenced by unique circumstances.

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### **Linda says**

Author presents one interpretation of Mexican history. He makes the case for a Mexico that has taken on less than productive habits from lazy/wealth-seeking/unproductive conquistadores. The weakness born from this is used to explain events in Mexican history thereafter. He also is on a mission to reject other interpretations and is very clearly a realist. My advice: take this with a grain salt and enjoy the story.

The first 400 pages of the book were very good, very interesting. It is highly detailed so perhaps not for the casual reader. Around page 400 I found myself getting tired, however, and will probably return to give the last 200 pages their due. Go into this being aware that the author has a clear bias. So long as you factor that into what you're reading, you should be able to get something of worth out of the text.

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### **James Mcw says**

Epic book, with serious issues but gave a deep insihgt into many parts of Mexican history.

Pros:

The epic sweep, 1000s of years of history accounted for an a highly readable style

Really gave a great start and grounding of Mexican history and really want to read more.

Really makes the place names around me in Puerto Vallarta shine out after knowing so much more about the famous figures most roads are named after.

Cons:

Written very much from a realpolitik/pragmatic point of view that was quite forgiving of things like the shooting of students in the 60s.

The admiration for Cortez was downright weird at times.

Missed out on the beginnings of the cartels in the 80s/90s

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### **Dad (Fred) Hansen says**

I first read this book over 30 years ago as an undergraduate at BYU. It was one of the books on my reading syllabus for a history class on the post-conquest survey history of Latin America. Of all the books that I have read on Mexico, this book is probably the best, single-volume history of Mexico from pre-Spanish Conquest through modern day.

My second full reading of this book occurred in the summer of 2002, just after I returned to California after a 25+ year sojourn in southern Louisiana. When I began working for the Law Office of Robert Yarra in

Fresno, California, in May of 2002, I immediately realized that the vast majority of our immigration/naturalization clients were Mexicans, and I had a strong interest in reading this book again to more fully appreciate the historical and cultural background of our clients.

I am reading this book again, but I am taking my time. I started reading this book again in January of 2010, and I hope to be finished before the month of February, 2010.

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### **John says**

I can't remember exactly when I read this, just that it was after a 3 month journey through central and southern Mexico in 1976-77. I remembered the book as it was referenced in a novel I am currently reading. My recollection is that it was dry reading.

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### **Alex says**

I have to be honest this is the best one volume history of Mexico that I've ever read. It's detailed, well organized, and the writing contains an element of literary merit that so many histories completely lack.

It takes skill to navigate through Mexican politics especially right after independence when the nation descended into a series of coups and counter coups, but Fehrenbach keeps it organized, even appropriately labeling that era the age of the Pretorians.

The chapters are organized thematically but still neatly flow chronologically simply describing the events that shaped the nation. The one that stands out the most is an entire chapter on the Mexican constitution, but given that the document's creation was the central achievement of the Revolution and that it still is the constitution used by the nation, I'm not complaining.

I wish the material had been cited in a better manner though. I was having trouble finding more information about some of the prehistoric populations described in the early chapters.

Also as eventually happens to all histories, the book is dated. The first edition I found only went up to the seventies and I was glad to find a newer edition going up to the nineties, but a lot has changed since then. Even the update doesn't detail the fall of the PRI from power, one of the most interesting Mexican developments in decades.

It's still a good reference to have, and a great introduction to Mexican history.

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### **Betty L. Shiffman says**

Enjoyed the first part--prehistory much more than the latter post-conquest part.

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