*Traveling from New Spain to Mexico: Mapping the Nation in
Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (review)

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as grounded and reasonable, is not one with which all key players, whether of Maya or Ladino stripe, would agree.

The battle for Guatemala – “from a country for a few to a country for all,” as Severo Martínez Peláez memorably put it in *La patria del criollo*, his still controversial treatise on national identity and development – rages on.

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Traveling from New Spain to Mexico: Mapping the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico. Magali M. Carrera. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. xxi + 325 pp., maps, figures, tables, photos, notes, bibliography, and index. \$24.95 paper (ISBN 978-0-8223-4991-4).

The newly independent nations of Latin America imagined themselves in ways that linked specific pasts to new, national identities. While each emerging nation-state did this slightly differently, Magali Carrera shows that Mexican intellectuals did this by visually constructing—mapping, drawing, photographing, exhibiting and even performing—idealized narratives of Mexican history and geography that defined what it meant to be Mexican. And, Carrera does this in a well-written and visually profuse book that should interest Latin Americanist geographers working with questions of visual culture, national identity, or cartographic intention.

The author is a member of the department of Art History at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, and many readers will know that she is also the author of *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Texas, 2003). As with this earlier work, her new book makes a concerted effort to be interdisciplinary and to appeal widely. Carrera situates her study at the intersection of the history of art, the history of cartography, and visual cultural studies of the nineteenth century. She makes use of several theoretical works by geographers, for example highlighting scholarship by Duncan and Gregory on travel writing. Unfortunately, she overlooks Alfred Siemens' *Between the Summit and the Sea*, and, in general, tends to neglect relevant geographic scholarship on Latin America or Mexico. I do not see this as a problem, however, since she is not reinventing the wheel nor making claims that geographers are uniquely situated to make. Indeed, the keen and deconstructivist eye of the art historian can contribute to our own research on landscape interpretation, representation, and meaning.

At the heart of the book is the argument that older forms of representing New Spain were refashioned to emerging conditions and practices of nineteenth-century visuality—themselves affected by new technologies of lithography, the daguerreotype, photography, and methods of display—to produce a coherent and inspiring nationalist narrative of the Mexican nation. At the center of this story is the life-work of the Mexican geographer Antonio García Cubas, and especially his pre-Porfiriato *Atlas geográfico, estadístico é histórico de la República Mexicana* (1858) and his post-Porfiriato *Atlas pintoresco é histórico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos* (1885). Through the illustration of her thesis in seven chapters—and I mean this literally too, as the book includes 91 black and white illustrations—Carrera does much more than provide a biography of García Cubas.

The first two chapters cover mapping and visual practices of the colonial New World in general and New Spain in particular. The second chapter builds off work by

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and others to show how Creoles mapped and described New Spain in ways that distinguished the people and place from Iberia. Here, Carrera explores the work of José Antonio de Villaseñor, José Antonio de Alzate y Ramírez, and Antonio León y Gama to show how a New Spanish identity was fabricated and how it fed nascent nationalist sentiments. The third chapter summarizes the visual narratives of New Spanish and early Mexican travel accounts. Here, Carrera expands on Anne Godlewska's work on the new visual techniques and synthetic approach used by Alexander von Humboldt, but also the visual strategies and pre-Hispanic reverence of indigenous architecture employed by William Prescott, William Bullock, John Lloyd Stephens, and Frederick Catherwood. Carrera contends that the ideas advanced by these men provided the means through which Mexican intellectuals figuratively traveled from New Spain to Mexico. A fourth chapter shows how geohistorical imagery helped citizens imagine themselves in a newly-mapped Mexican geo-body. New Mexican institutions such as the Museo Nacional (1825) and the Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (1833)—becoming the Comisión de Estadística Militar in 1839—helped form a visual culture that emphasized intense seeing and ordered display. The innovative visual culture was reinforced by the use of multicolor lithographic reproductions in a spate of new pamphlets, serials, newspapers, calendars and more. Daguerreotype imagery arrived to Mexico in the 1840s, the same decade in which new plates were added to Spanish-translations of Prescott's *History of the Conquest*. By the 1850s, "visual culture—through prints, and lithographic and photographic technologies—supported and stimulated the coalescence of an imagined geography for Mexico" (p. 141).

Chapters five and six cover the many distinct projects of García Cubas. Specifically Carrera documents how García Cubas spatialized the same visual history that emanated from New Spain's creoles, travelers, and artists. In short, García Cubas amalgamated earlier mappings and displayed Mexico for Mexicans. His later work was more overtly educational and nationalistic, and, Carrera argues, fit well within the commercial orientation of the Porfiriato by showing that Mexico was available for tourism and investment. Carrera also shows how the work of García Cubas and others had profound silences with respect to women and living Indians in the new nation. In her final chapter, she reveals how García Cubas' *Atlas pintoresco* served as a conceptual and thematic blueprint for Mexico's centenary celebrations, and how his visual style was transformed into dioramas and nationalist performances of great spectacle.

There are two things I wish the book had discussed more satisfactorily. The first concerns whether the visual culture transition Carrera describes is in some way universal to the newly independent states of Latin America, and particularly the role of travelers, new technologies, and cartography. The second issue concerns what might be called reception studies. It would be interesting to know, for example, more about how these visual and graphic ideals of *lo mexicano* were received and interpreted by average Mexicans. But, it is not fair to ask a 400-page book to do more than it set out to do. The strengths of this book are many and its focus on how the invisible is rendered visible through cartography and landscape images should be of great interest to geographers and Latin Americanists.

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