

CULTURAL AND LITERARY STUDIES

Representing the Nation: Sport and Spectacle in Post-Revolutionary Mexico. By Claire Brewster and Keith Brewster. New York: Routledge Press, 2010. Pp. 192. Bibliography.

Not merely a series of sporting events, the Olympic Games have long served as a stage for the elites of host nations to present a spectacular vision of themselves to the world and to their compatriots. Politicians, bureaucrats, architects, designers, and others select national symbols, edit national history, and parade national virtues before a local and international audience, with a greater or lesser degree of success. Such was certainly true of the Summer Games hosted by Mexico in 1968. The first Olympics to be hosted by a developing country, and the first in Latin America, they were to showcase a vision of Mexico as a dynamic, stable democracy—a modern nation, ready to take its rightful place alongside other such nations.

To some extent the effort was successful. In Mexico, however, October 1968 is primarily remembered for the massacre of a still-unconfirmed number of unarmed student demonstrators at the hands of police and military units in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas at the Tlatelolco housing project, just ten days before the start of the Games. The two events together exemplified competing visions of the Mexico of the 1960s: a dynamic, stable, modernizing democracy and a nation mired in poverty, riven by inequality, and dominated by an authoritarian state.

This brief, accessible volume, originally published as a special issue of the *International Journal for the History of Sport*, represents the most comprehensive attempt to date to analyze the two watershed events in relation to each other. The authors use the 1968 Olympics as a window into the complex and contradictory nature of mid-century Mexican society and statecraft. To that end, they trace the process by which Mexico became host to the games, from Mexico City's selection by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1963, through the preparation for the games, to the events of October 1968.

The book begins with a review of the history of sport in Mexico, in particular the politicization of sport and its use as part of a “civilizing project” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Subsequent chapters detail the process by which Mexico came to host the Olympics in 1968. In order to win the bid, the Mexican Olympic Committee presented a version of Mexico that emphasized the country's claims to cosmopolitan modernity, ancient history, stability, and political neutrality in the context of the Cold War. The arguments used by Mexican lobbyists to the IOC, the design and choice of Olympic symbols, and the preparation of the Olympic Villages (spread throughout Mexico City rather than concentrated at a single site) reflected elite visions of the Mexico of the future. The authors' central argument is that those choices reflected a fundamental mistrust by Mexican elites of the culture and behavior of their compatriots. There was, in addition, mistrust on the part of some IOC members and the international media which, drawing on long-standing stereotypes, expressed skepticism over the country's ability to organize the games on schedule.

The final chapters focus on the events leading up to the Games, and the Games themselves. The authors devote a chapter to the student movement of 1968, the massacre of October 2, and its aftermath. Rather than attempting to weigh conflicting accounts of the massacre itself, they assess the relationship between the preparations for the games and the events of that day. In what is likely the most controversial section of the book, they argue that neither the students nor the Mexican government made much connection between Tlatelolco and the Games (although the CIA and FBI did). Such connections, they argue, were drawn publicly only after the event. The authors end with an assessment of the Games themselves, and their long-term impact on Mexican society and culture.

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Autos and Progress: The Brazilian Search for Modernity. By Joel Wolfe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. x, 269. Photographs. Notes. Index.

In twentieth-century Brazil, Joel Wolfe argues, “automobility” symbolized progress and became an essential part of the quest for modernity. No reason to doubt the first claim: for much of the twentieth century the automobile was a worldwide symbol of progress. The second claim is more difficult to assess because Wolfe never clarifies what he believes to be unique or particular about the relationship between automobility and modernity in Brazil. In fact, he obscures the relationship between the two concepts when he states that “there is no simple, agreed-upon formula for what constitutes modernity, but several fundamental aspects of Brazilian automobility constitute its key features” (p. 10). By treating autos, progress, and modernity—the book title’s core terms—as analytically inseparable in the case of Brazil, Wolfe deprives himself of the tools for historical explanation.

Instead, the reader is treated to *crônicas automobilísticas*, a series of stories about the increasing presence of the automobile in twentieth-century Brazil. The stories convey a sense of the awe inspired by the earliest imported automobiles, of the desire to create road networks, and of the commitment to manufacturing cars as a key element of Brazil’s industrialization drive in the 1950s. Most stories are interesting, some amusing, but they do not constitute an argument as to why and how the history of automobility changes our understanding of twentieth-century Brazil. The stories are interspersed with sweeping but ultimately empty claims about the links between automobility, modernity, progress, national unity, and—for good measure—democracy. The book presents no evidence or line of reasoning to support the assertion that “automobility quickly took on the qualities of an ideology, promising to cure all of Brazil’s problems” (p. 27) or that “the physical unification and transformation of the nation had been a central tenet of automobility since at least the 1920s” (p. 124), to highlight just two of dozens of such statements scattered throughout the text.

For sources, Wolfe relies heavily on Brazilian automobile magazines and the company documents of major automobile manufacturers, supplemented by newspaper articles.