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# Mapping Latin America: A Cartographic Reader

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## Book Reviews

### General and Sources

*Mapping Latin America: A Cartographic Reader*. Edited by JORDANA DYM and KARL OFFEN. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Plates. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xix, 338 pp. Paper, \$39.00.

The ever-increasing availability of primary sources on the Internet, not to mention classics of the scholarly literature and other secondary sources, makes everyone suspect that printed readers and anthologies have become as anachronistic as the typewriter. If so, however, this particular cartographic reader must be the exception that proves the rule.

Matthew H. Edney, current editor in chief of the multivolume *History of Cartography* (University of Chicago Press, 1987–forthcoming), provides an engaging foreword that explains how maps not only record historical locations, distributions, and movements but are intimately involved in the processes through which those spatial aspects of history emerge. Historians have increasingly appreciated that aspect of cartographic documents and have begun to integrate their analyses into historiographies largely based on textual documents.

The pages that follow Edney's foreword collect together approximately a hundred historical maps, some well known and available on the Internet as high-resolution scans but many not. The volume reproduces them in full color on coated paper at scales large enough to read all but the smallest text. It treats Latin America and the Caribbean from precolonial times through the twentieth century. It includes maps as diverse as a Maya wall mural, a map that accompanied a board game, various city plans, an oil company road map, and many other types. They cover the spectrum of scales from the global and hemispheric to nations and individual properties. Some 50 scholars provide brief interpretive essays, each about four pages long and focused on the analysis of one or several related maps. The editors have grouped the essays into three sections: the colonial period, the nineteenth century, and the twentieth century. Each section contains several thematic subsections with three to five essays that address topics relevant to each period, for example, "Imagining a New World" during colonial times, "Bounding the State" during the nineteenth century, and "Revolution and Resistance" during the twentieth century. The editors close the volume with an appendix of additional resources: a listing of journals, Internet sites, and documentary films focused on historical cartography; and a series of brief historiographical essays on topics such as colonial surveying.

While all of the essayists and the editors have contributed to the overall success of the volume, a limited word allowance here precludes detailed discussion of more than a single essay to illustrate their collective accomplishment. In “Imperial Rivalries,” Matthew Restall analyzes *A Map of the West-Indies*, which Herman Moll, a German resident of London and a well-known cartographer, published in 1715. Restall interprets several features of the map within the context of Moll’s social network of writers, political philosophers, and privateers. Those people provided information to draft the map, capital to complete the project, and customers to buy and disseminate the ideas it brought together and summarized. The details of Moll’s conversations with people such as William Dampier in London coffeehouses remain unknown, but the map that resulted incorporates the information exchanged and the ideas discussed: a materialization of a nexus in a dynamic discursive network. Moll’s use of different colors to distinguish the Caribbean islands claimed by each European power dramatically revealed how many the British, as well as the French and Dutch, had taken from the Spaniards in the preceding several decades, simultaneously displaying British ambition and Spanish vulnerability. Moll also included features that gave practical guidance to privateers who hoped to realize that ambition, for example, the routes of Spanish treasure fleets and large-scale inset maps of Havana and other Spanish ports, but not of British ones. Part imperialist manifesto and part operational guide, then, the map emerged from and became an element in the historical process that so transformed the region over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Some types of maps do not appear in the volume, but pointing them out serves more as an appeal for additional volumes than any criticism of this one. Among other types of maps to consider are those that appear in fiction about the region, a source of insight into how sense of place emerges, changes, and relates to other social and environmental processes. Maps from history textbooks, in contrast, claim to portray real rather than imagined places but can reveal how historians have been active participants in Latin American history rather than objective observers describing a view from nowhere. And navigational charts can reveal the intricate networks that connected Latin America into the broader Atlantic world, such as the trade in enslaved Africans. This volume, which serves as a source of original insights about particular times and places as well as a methodological primer for use in the classroom, will without doubt catalyze even greater interest in the roles of those and other types of maps in Latin American history.

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