

Mexican Field Studies

A Tour of Mexico: National Geographic

Although the pictures and information in the August 1996 edition of the National Geographic are nearly 10 years old, I found the images and accompanying first-hand stories absolutely fascinating. Not only did it show the part of Mexico that I saw—the commercial buildings and the distinctive Saddle Mountain of Monterrey—but also places in Mexico that I might never see. Moving from the northernmost parts of Mexico—its border at Tijuana with the U.S.—to its southern tip in Chiapas, this National Geographic provides readers with a general survey -- primarily through pictures -- of the peoples, economics, entertainments, homes, religious beliefs, jobs, and politics of the United States' southern neighbor.

Although it is general in scope, giving limited snapshots of life from different areas in Mexico, one of the best elements in this National Geographic is its personal tone. It is written primarily from a first-person perspective as the reader vicariously rides in Michael Parfit's Cessna across Mexico, discovering snippets of the lives of Mexican individuals. Rather than being a list of generalizations about Mexico, Parfit allows Mexico to speak for itself as he provides pictures and bits of the lives of street clowns, policemen, and housewives. One particularly noticeable aspect of his writing increases one's knowledge of the relationship between reader, writer, and subject: Parfit occasionally protects the identity of the subject by giving statements such as, "I will call him José."

One of the most interesting areas in this magazine was one closer to home: Tijuana, the famous city that borders the U.S. A quote that was particularly striking in the article was, "The porous border has been called Mexico's vaccine against crisis, because it lets restless young men like Macedo get out of the country before restlessness becomes rebellion" ("Magnet of

Opportunity” 105). However, soon following that sentence is a quote from Héctor Osuna Jaime, the former mayor of Tijuana: “Mexico hasn’t had a big social uprising because we have this escape valve... If there was no place to go, they’d have to make a solution here” (“Magnet of Opportunity” 105). This last comment in particular forces the reader to think, “Well, it might be rather nice if the talent wasted outwitting the border guards were put to work bringing beneficial ideas to Mexico.” The poverty and filth that are depicted throughout this National Geographic could be addressed by such “restless young men” like Macedo. Restlessness could pull a country out of its stagnant corruption.

Then, the very last article on the tour of Mexico talks about Chiapas -- home of the infamous Zapatistas and their charismatic leader Subcomandante Marcos, who is an example of restlessness gone awry. Using strong-arm tactics and force, the Zapatistas attempted to create change in the southernmost state of Mexico. However, in the ten years since the publication of this article, they have failed to accomplish the unity and equality they wanted to establish. According to Joanna Rice, a former resident of Mexico City, they have only managed to create different forms of oppression, including religious persecution.

National Geographic does an excellent job of covering the life and priorities of the unique country of Mexico. From Monterrey to Tijuana to Chiapas, individuals, their concerns, and their joys are shown through words and images. Mexico is truly a diverse nation.