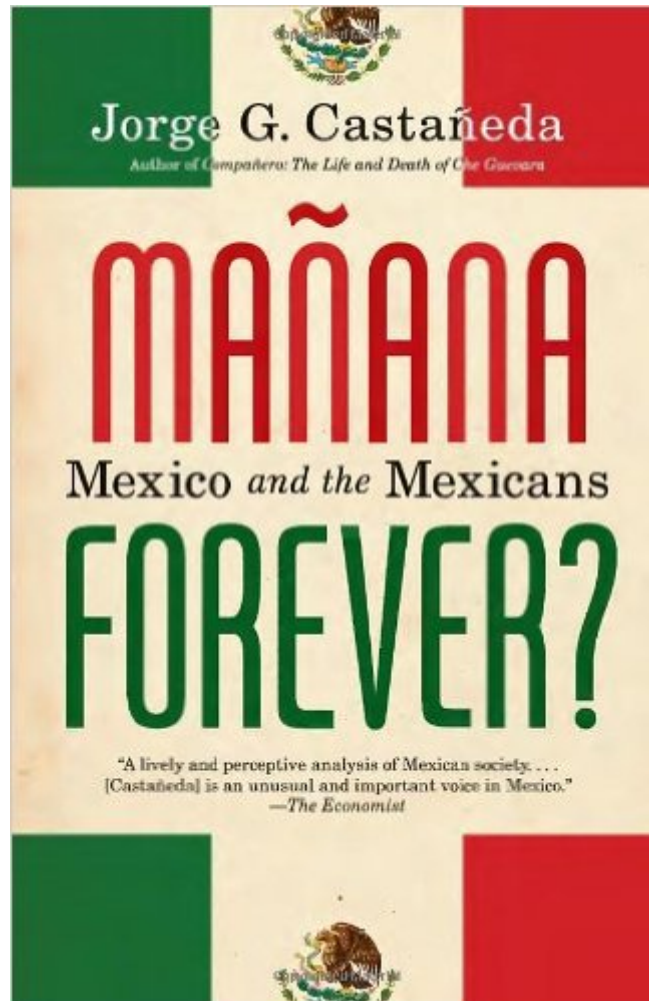


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Manana Forever?: Mexico And The Mexicans



Synopsis

In this shrewd and fascinating book, the renowned scholar and former foreign minister Jorge Castañeda sheds much light on the puzzling paradoxes of politics and culture of modern Mexico. Here's a nation of 110 million that has an ambivalent and complicated relationship with the United States yet is host to more American expatriates than any country in the world. Its people tend to resent foreigners yet have made the nation a hugely popular tourist destination. Mexican individualism and individual ties to the land reflect a desire to conserve the past and slow the route to uncertain modernity. Castañeda examines the future possibilities for Mexico as it becomes more diverse in its regional identities, socially more homogenous, its character and culture the instruments of change rather than sources of stagnation, its political system more open and democratic. *Mexico: A Nation Forever?* is a compelling portrait of a nation at a crossroads.

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Customer Reviews

This book provides a useful introduction to the subject of Mexican national character as well as valuable insights into Mexico's culture, history, and politics that might be difficult to find elsewhere; especially about politics since the author is a former Mexican foreign minister. As the title implies though, this book is really a polemic. Castañeda's purpose is to identify the aspects of Mexican national character that he believes need to change in order for Mexico to achieve its full economic, political, and social potential. I agreed with some of his points but I also found the supporting evidence for many of them to be unconvincing. For example, Castañeda cites excessive

individualism as one of the counter-productive national character traits. As evidence for its existence in Mexico, he points to a preference among Mexico City residents for low-rise housing rather than skyscrapers, thereby making the city sprawling, congested, and polluted. While he does concede that Mexico City is in an earthquake zone, I think the apparent lack of high-rise residential buildings is better explained by the (past) availability of cheaper land on the outskirts of the city along with a lack of central planning in the face of a strong and steady stream of immigration rather than excessive individualism among the city's residents. And does sprawl really tell us something unique about Mexico? Most Americans choose not to live in residential high-rises either. I wouldn't consider Manhattan to be particularly communally-oriented or civic-minded. And probably even less so than a village in rural Chiapas.

Essentially "Manana Forever" compares and contrasts the character traits of modern-day Mexicans in a variety of ways to a variety of current factors such as modern economic, geographic, and political realities especially as Mexico has transitioned into a more democratic and economically open society. Castaneda's method is to identify key Mexican character traits, review the current situation of a particular factor such as politics in a democracy, and then compare the two. In the end he uses the millions of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the United States as a "control group" against which to discuss whether or not Mexican attitudes can change in relation to the factors that make up today's reality in Mexico. For example, Castaneda discusses the average Mexican's attitude towards the rule-of-law, which is ambivalent at best. He discusses how the attitude developed and what that character trait is today. To do this he uses the best available polling data from a wide variety of sources. While acknowledging that the data are incomplete, and that polls are relatively new phenomena in Mexico, he pulls together some interesting threads that paint a relatively accurate picture of the Mexican people. Castaneda then goes into a description of how the Mexican legal system functions on paper and in reality. (Of course, as the author notes, the relative lack of interest in the "rule of law" does not mean it's a lawless state, only that there are traditions that allow Mexico to function in a different way than the rule-of-law.) At the end of the book, the author then addresses how well Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the US accept the rule of law, both in attitude and reality.

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