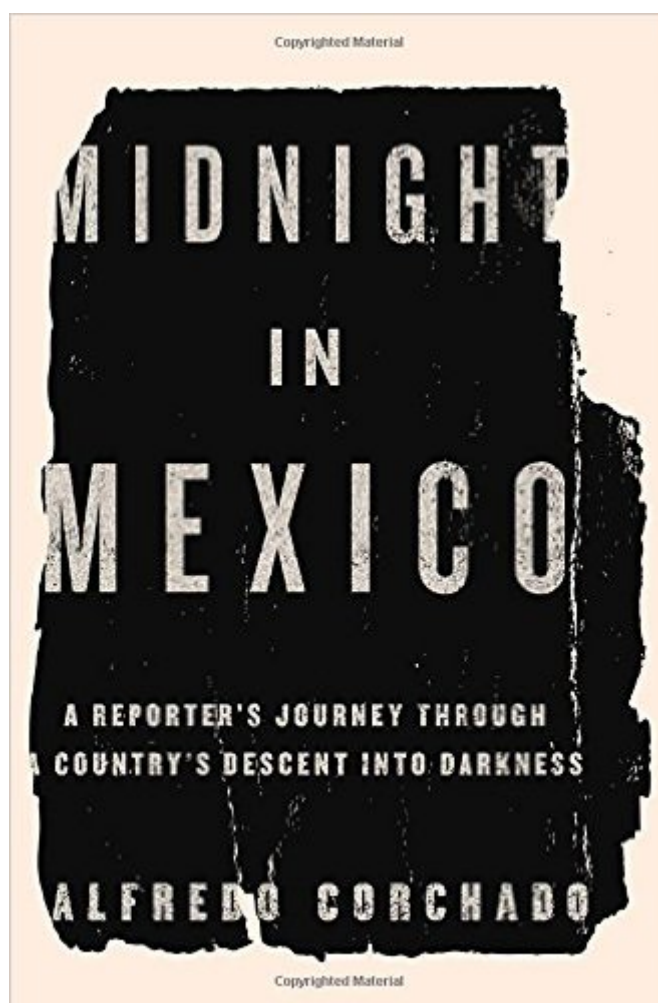


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Midnight In Mexico: A Reporter's Journey Through A Country's Descent Into Darkness



Synopsis

In the last six years, more than eighty thousand people have been killed in the Mexican drug war, and drug trafficking there is a multibillion-dollar business. In a country where the powerful are rarely scrutinized, noted Mexican American journalist Alfredo Corchado refuses to shrink from reporting on government corruption, murders in Juarez, or the ruthless drug cartels of Mexico. A paramilitary group spun off from the Gulf cartel, the Zetas, controls key drug routes in the north of the country. In 2007, Corchado received a tip that he could be their next target—and he had twenty four hours to find out if the threat was true. Rather than leave his country, Corchado went out into the Mexican countryside to trace investigate the threat. As he frantically contacted his sources, Corchado suspected the threat was his punishment for returning to Mexico against his mother's wishes. His parents had fled north after the death of their young daughter, and raised their children in California where they labored as migrant workers. Corchado returned to Mexico as a journalist in 1994, convinced that Mexico would one day foster political accountability and leave behind the pervasive corruption that has plagued its people for decades. But in this land of extremes, the gap of inequality—and injustice—remains wide. Even after the 2000 election that put Mexico's opposition party in power for the first time, the opportunities of democracy did not materialize. The powerful PRI had worked with the cartels, taking a piece of their profit in exchange for a more peaceful, and more controlled, drug trade. But the party's long-awaited defeat created a vacuum of power in Mexico City, and in the cartel-controlled states that border the United States. The cartels went to war with one another in the mid-2000s, during the war to regain control of the country instituted by President Felipe Calderón, and only the violence flourished. The work Corchado lives for could have killed him, but he wasn't ready to leave Mexico—not then, maybe never. *Midnight in Mexico* is the story of one man's quest to report the truth of his country—as he raced to save his own life.

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Customer Reviews

Nearly 100,000 people have been killed or have disappeared since President Calderon launched a war on cartels in 2006. At the time, less than 20% of those detained for drug trafficking were convicted, cops were underpaid and forced to rely on bribes to put food on the table, low rates of tax collection limited funding, and the education system was run by a corrupt union. (The country lost an estimated \$50 billion to tax evaders, criminals, and corruption.) The murder clearance rate was less than 5% at the time. July 2007 was the last time author Corchado felt safe in Mexico - that was when a U.S. investigator with informants inside the cartels told Alfredo, a reporter covering the drug wars, he'd been targeted for assassination. Alfredo been threatened three times previously, but this was the first time a timeline (24 hours) had been attached to a threat. Past threats brought bulletproof office windows, iron bars on his apartment windows, and a panic button connected to Mexican security consultants. I particularly appreciated the author's coverage of how the drug trade got started in Mexico. Opium production began in the 1940s when the U.S. needed morphine for soldiers in WWII, even though growing it was illegal in Mexico. Pot cultivation also began at that time, and demand exploded in the 1960s and 1970s. A few Mexican families controlled the entire production and distribution chain (cartel men married each other's sisters), and law enforcement couldn't get past these family ties. By the 1980s, Americans also developed a taste for cocaine, and Columbia became a supplier. The easy route went through the Caribbean, but American ships and planes made that too risky. Thus, Mexico became the preferred, safer route. Tunnels crossing the U.S.

I think this is a remarkable book. Especially if you've lived in Mexico or in the Southwest, it's almost unputdownable. Corchado is a Mexican-American journalist from a modest family in Durango, and he's spent the last quarter century living in and reporting on Mexico for a number of newspapers. His great virtue, aside from knowing what the Hell he's talking about (rare on this subject) is his unyielding bluntness. There's no political correctness here: death is death, violence is violence; and corruption is corruption. It is of some interest, the fixing of responsibility, on this side of the border or on the other, but not entirely. What matters are consequences. During the sexenio of Felipe

Calderon, Mexico embarked on an American-backed "war" on drugs within its own borders. A real war, with over 80,000 deaths--no one honestly knows how many. The violence, especially in the North, has been almost unimaginable. When I say that I seriously doubt anyone saw this coming--and I mean going as far back as the early 1970s--I am not kidding. A lot of people of my generation sooner expected to see a military coup than what amounted to a civil war between the Federal government and the narcos. But that's probably because they never expected the PRI to fall out of power, the "perfect dictatorship" to crack, and the stable accommodations between power, corruption, authority and regional governance to fall apart. Well, welcome to an unexpected consequence of democracy: institutional failure at nearly every level of Mexican society. And you can't call Mexico City to fix it anymore. Those days are gone for good. If the newly reinstalled PRI comes to terms with the cartels, it will no longer be from a position of strength.

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