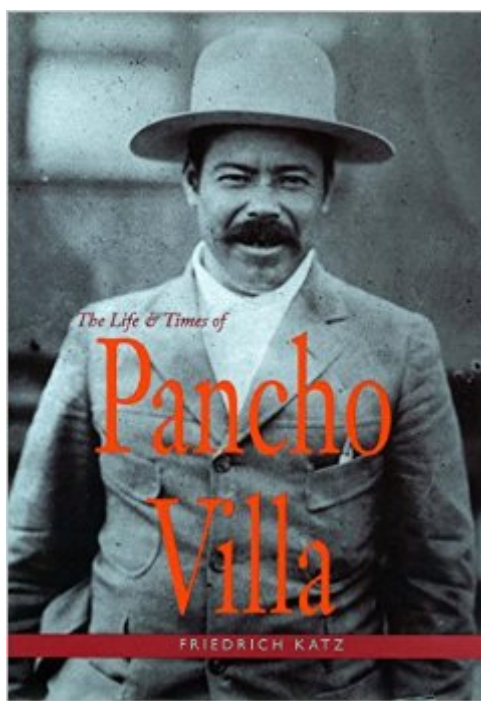


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The Life And Times Of Pancho Villa



Synopsis

Alongside Moctezuma and Benito Juárez, Pancho Villa is probably the best-known figure in Mexican history. Villa legends pervade not only Mexico but the United States and beyond, existing not only in the popular mind and tradition but in ballads and movies. There are legends of Villa the Robin Hood, Villa the womanizer, and Villa as the only foreigner who has attacked the mainland of the United States since the War of 1812 and gotten away with it. Whether exaggerated or true to life, these legends have resulted in Pancho Villa the leader obscuring his revolutionary movement, and the myth in turn obscuring the leader. Based on decades of research in the archives of seven countries, this definitive study of Villa aims to separate myth from history. So much attention has focused on Villa himself that the characteristics of his movement, which is unique in Latin American history and in some ways unique among twentieth-century revolutions, have been forgotten or neglected. Villa's División del Norte was probably the largest revolutionary army that Latin America ever produced. Moreover, this was one of the few revolutionary movements with which a U.S. administration attempted, not only to come to terms, but even to forge an alliance. In contrast to Lenin, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and Fidel Castro, Villa came from the lower classes of society, had little education, and organized no political party. The first part of the book deals with Villa's early life as an outlaw and his emergence as a secondary leader of the Mexican Revolution, and also discusses the special conditions that transformed the state of Chihuahua into a leading center of revolution. In the second part, beginning in 1913, Villa emerges as a national leader. The author analyzes the nature of his revolutionary movement and the impact of Villismo as an ideology and as a social movement. The third part of the book deals with the years 1915 to 1920: Villa's guerrilla warfare, his attack on Columbus, New Mexico, and his subsequent decline. The last part describes Villa's surrender, his brief life as a hacendado, his assassination and its aftermath, and the evolution of the Villa legend. The book concludes with an assessment of Villa's personality and the character and impact of his movement.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Probably, the most important thing about this book is the fact that, though its subject is one of the most misunderstood characters of world history, it rests on an extremely rigorous research. Prof. Katz, one of the most serious and best historians you can read, and a specialist in Mexico, sought and found every available source of information. His history is as objective as it could be. But this is much more than just a biography of Pancho Villa; it is a history of the Mexican Revolution that develops around Villa and his movement. Besides, the life of Villa is more impressive, exciting and interesting than many, many fictional characters, even when the historian puts the legends aside and stays within the boundaries of solid data. It is really a pity that most people have an idea of Villa which comes from easy novels (like "The friends of Pancho Villa"). These novels may be good or bad, but most of the time they are pure fantasy. For example, most of them paint Villa as a bandit who led a disorderly band of killers. Well, surprise! Villa, who certainly had a past as an outlaw, managed to organize the most formidable war machine of the Revolution. During the 1910-1911, and 1913-1915 campaigns, his army was the best in terms of logistics, organization, discipline, morale, and strategy (until Villa made serious mistakes and Obregon defeated him). And more surprises: of all the revolutionary armies, Villa's was the most disciplined in terms of their behavior. Villa strongly prohibited and punished vandalism, rapes, destruction and raids. This is not to say they were a band of angels, but their cruelty and the devastation they created must be put in context. Carranza's army was much more terrible, and Carranza was no bandit, but a wealthy landowner.

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