



Revolutionary Parks: Conservation, Social Justice, and Mexico's National Parks, 1910–1940 (Latin American Landscapes)

Emily Wakild

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Winner of the Alfred B. Thomas Award and sponsored by the Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies, *Revolutionary Parks* tells the surprising story of how forty national parks were created in Mexico during the latter stages of the first social revolution of the twentieth century. By 1940 Mexico had more national parks than any other country. Together they protected more than two million acres of land in fourteen states. Even more remarkable, Lázaro Cárdenas, president of Mexico in the 1930s, began to promote concepts akin to sustainable development and ecotourism.

Conventional wisdom indicates that tropical and post-colonial countries, especially in the early twentieth century, have seldom had the ability or the ambition to protect nature on a national scale. It is also unusual for any country to make conservation a political priority in the middle of major reforms after a revolution. What emerges in Emily Wakild's deft inquiry is the story of a nature protection program that takes into account the history, society, and culture of the times. Wakild employs case studies of four parks to show how the revolutionary momentum coalesced to create early environmentalism in Mexico.

According to Wakild, Mexico's national parks were the outgrowth of revolutionary affinities for both rational science and social justice. Yet, rather than reserves set aside solely for ecology or politics, rural people continued to inhabit these landscapes and use them for a range of activities, from growing crops to producing charcoal. Sympathy for rural people tempered the radicalism of scientific conservationists. This fine balance between recognizing the morally valuable, if not always economically profitable, work of rural people and designing a revolutionary state that respected ecological limits proved to be a radical episode of government foresight.

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