Chapter five, titled “Fantasy,” is a logical consequence of the previous chapter to the extent that it explores the way individuals became empowered revolutionary subjects and made sense of a senseless world through the aid of fantasies. Legrás uses the term fantasy in psychoanalytical terms, as a mediation mechanism. After giving an overview of several instances of elite and popular fantasies generated by the revolution, the author focuses on Diego Rivera’s murals, seen as paradigms of the process of developing comprehensive social fantasies. The last chapter of this book, titled “Synchronicity,” centers on the role of photography and film during and after the revolution. These visual technologies were instrumental in promoting a unified portrait of the heterogeneity generated by the revolution. The chapter explores the tensions and paradoxes of this objective by bringing into discussion several concerns derived from well-known theories of photography and film, such as the dialectic between concept and image, stadium and punctum, and index and icon. With an in-depth knowledge of the revolution’s visual archive, the author performs insightful analyses of specific photographic and filmic works from diverse provenances and intentions, but most of all, he conveys a convincing theory of what he terms textuality.

In sum, Culture and Revolution: Violence, Memory, and the Making of Modern Mexico provides a comprehensive and groundbreaking approach to the study of the Mexican Revolution. Through an exploration of the thick fabric of textuality, Legrás shows us the profound diversity of the culture this revolution inspired, the radical transformations it envisioned, and the exact meaning and full significance of its sociopolitical and cultural reality.

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This new study of early sensational cinema and journalism begins with an eye-catching statement: “Films that restaged public spectacles of real-life violence became the first popular successes of both Mexican and Brazilian cinema” (1). Violence, priority, and mass success thus characterize this understudied corpus of cinema and journalism in Mexico and Brazil and drive its analysis, even as some of the artifacts in question have barely survived the test of time, both metaphorically and literally. By examining largely forgotten films and lost ones reconstructed from journalistic narratives and other extant texts, Rielle Navitski attempts to show how “the sensational mode is uniquely revealing of the transformation of quotidian experience and public life” in contexts where “modernization . . . often accentuated profound social divides” (2). More specifically, Navitski links the thematics of violence to modernity, arguing that “the sensational visual culture of early twentieth-century Mexico and Brazil voiced profound desires for economic and technological development and an implicit acceptance of modernization’s costs” (12).

The book is organized geographically and chronologically, devoting two chapters to the case of Mexico and three to the case of Brazil. Besides providing
some historical and economic background, the introduction lays out the study's theoretical and methodological groundwork. The methodology includes an articulation of fictional and non-fictional conventions, a recuperation of the ephemeral artifacts of popular visual culture (as opposed to precious studies of “high” culture), and an intermedial approach that reads these early sensational cinemas “through their intertexts in print culture and popular entertainment, examining local horizons of film reception and production alongside region-wide affinities and international exchanges” (9).

Covering both the Porfirián as well as revolutionary periods in Mexican history, the first chapter explores how images of crime, punishment and conflict simultaneously portray state control and its crisis. Early illustrated journalism and non-fiction films gave way to adaptations of true stories, such as the crime serial *El automóvil gris* (Enrique Rosas, 1919), which profited from public violence as popular entertainment, curiously linking such criminal activity to Mexico’s emergence within cosmopolitan modernity. The post-revolutionary period discussed in chapter two is characterized by adventure films with a nationalist cultural agenda. Movies such as *El tren fantasma* (1926) and *El puño de hierro* (1927) were received by the popular press with both enthusiasm for their violent subject matter as well as skepticism prompted by their perceived cultural dependence on Hollywood.

In the case of Brazil, Navitski argues in chapter three that the fast-growing cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo became the scenarios of violent spectacles, in word and in deed. Real-life theft, murders, and crimes of passion in the press inspired sensationalist films, literary, and stage adaptations rife with drama and moral messages. Among the films studied in this chapter are *Os estranguladores* (*The Stranglers*, 1908), documenting a famous murder case known as the Crime of Carioca Street, and the fictionalization of robbery aboard a steamship, *O caso dos caixotes* (*The Case of the Strongboxes*, 1912).

Chapter four looks more closely at the case of imported serial films which held wide and popular appeal in Rio de Janeiro, prompting both locally-themed films and novelizations. Productions highlighted, and were appreciated for, their successful stunts and cinematic effects. Exploring the intersection of national and foreign as well as print and film media, this chapter tackles the cross-medial form of the cinematic serial novel, a national tradition of serial literature that interacted with imported crime and adventure serials. Examining the production, exhibition, and journalistic reception of sensational melodramas in regions outside the two large urban centres of Brazil, chapter five addresses both the geographic and economic disparities in the country. The productions employed adventure melodrama conventions while attempting to make use of local color by shooting on location and taking advantage of actors’ and cinematographers’ skills. Violence does not play as fundamental a role in this chapter, but these films broach the question of regional modernities outside São Paulo and Rio.

Painting a dim picture of the current state of both countries, where violence perpetrated by the state and by organized crime have reached unprecedented levels, Navitski hazards a final, somewhat risky conclusion, namely, that the “pervasive exercise of violence by both state and non-state actors in contemporary Mexico
and Brazil’s ‘violent democracies’ and the hypervisibility of this violence in the public sphere resonate with early twentieth-century forms of mass culture that framed violence as an acceptable consequence of industrialization and urbanization” (258). The difference in the degree and causes of violence in the early twentieth century compared to contemporary times might be too vast for the comparison.

This thorough and solidly researched study is noteworthy for the amount of little-known film and journalistic material that it brings to light in a manner that fills a gap in the cinematic history of the two countries. Digging up archival material and citing vast amounts of primary sources, possibly discussed in scholarly terms for the first time, is a major strength of this work. However, the thematic focus on violence, though at times solidly borne out by the examples, at others is less so. Likewise, avoiding slippage between the concepts of violence and crime and more methodological care in the theorization of violence—violence as spectacle, for example, as posited by Foucault, and even a distinction between types of violence and types of crime—would have lent this study more rigor in its thematic orientation. One question that might merit more scrutiny would be what specifically distinguishes the violence portrayed in the films studied here as “quintessentially modern,” setting them apart from a history of violence in both countries that goes back centuries? How, for instance, does the age-old practice of banditry in both Mexico and Brazil link up with modern crime? Also, because the study attempts to connect context closely to representations in the cinema and popular press, some idea of the actual state of crime (for example, via historical or sociological studies) might have put into perspective the reasons behind the privileging of the topic of violence, providing more weight to this thematic choice. Still, this study clearly breaks new ground in Latin American film studies and is a welcome addition to a growing number of interdisciplinary works that persuasively connect the cultural contexts of Brazil and Mexico.

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Daniel Nemser opens his ambitious study of the dual and, as he argues, linked processes of racialization and concentration in sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century Mexico with a vignette from late-nineteenth-century Cuba. In 1896, the Spanish Captain-General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau arrived with the mission to quell the ongoing unrest on the island. One of his strategies was to implement a policy of reconcentración, forcing the removal of civilians from their homes to campos de reconcentración where they would be housed in camps ringed with barbed wire. Nemser points out that some scholars have cited Weyler’s policy as the origin of the twentieth-century concentration camp. Nemser’s objective, though, is not so much to trace the horrors of the campos in Cuba to the Holocaust as it is to suggest that these practices from the tail end of the Spanish colonial era