

***Cinco de Mayo: What Is Everybody Celebrating?***

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Reviewed by Leslie Granier for Reader Views (4/07)

I must admit I had no clue what the celebrations for Cinco de Mayo (May 5) were all about before I read this book. Miles provided an insightful and intuitive book that concentrated mainly on the French and Mexican forces. He also effectively included the ways in which the Civil War that was simultaneously occurring in the United States affected the events of the war in Mexico. It truly made me wonder how history might have turned out differently if the United States had been able to intervene more on Mexico's behalf.

Interestingly, the accounts of this war from France's point of view are similar to what many believe is occurring today in Iraq. As stated on page 81, "the government was concealing the real purposes for going to war, the invading army was led to believe they would be welcomed as liberators" and "there was no plan to deal with the responsibilities after a military victory." He also effectively showed how the U. S. Civil War influenced the war in Mexico."

I appreciated the inclusion of an epilogue that told what happened to many of the major players after the war ended. I enjoy finding out about people's fate after their roles in historical events are lessened with time. For me it provides an end to what would otherwise seem to be an unfinished story.

I think it would be interesting to see this same chain of events written from the French army's point of view for comparison. For me it provided an understanding that there were health issues and food issues involved but I would think the army of a world power would have been more prepared and more successful, especially since other nations did not offer help to the Mexican armed forces.

"Cinco de Mayo" is a comprehensive account of the war between Mexico and France and the role played by the United States. Through the use of vivid descriptions at times I felt I could picture the scenes and see the carnage. This book is an excellent portrayal of the events of May 5, offering immense insight into what happened both before and during the fighting. While not the turning point of the war, the Battle of Puebla inspired the Mexican forces to persevere and accomplish their mission."