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proaching a consensus on this question among so-called experts.

If central bankers can't fully comprehend all of what's going on in the global economy, neither can any of the rest of us. That's the important, if unsettling, message of this book.

**URBAN LEVIATHAN:** Mexico City in the Twentieth Century. *By Diane E. Davis.* Temple. 391 pp. \$24.95

In 1940, 1.7 million people lived in metropolitan Mexico City; today it is home to more than 16 million. What was once a charming city with a leisurely air has become, in the words of the writer Octavio Paz, "a monstrous inflated head, crushing the frail body that holds it up." What went wrong? Why has the development of Mexico City proceeded so disastrously? And what have been the consequences of its unchecked growth for the political and economic well-being of the nation? Davis, a sociologist at the New School for Social Research, provides disturbing answers.

While many observers blame Mexico's current crisis on corrupt and power-hungry politicians in the party that has ruled for more than 60 years, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Davis links it to the physical concentration of social, political, and economic resources in Mexico City, the country's capital and geographic center. According to Davis, the PRI lavished its attention on Mexico City, to the exclusion of other regions, in order to secure the loyalty of its sizable population (today, about 20 percent of all Mexicans). This strategy led to the state's long-standing protection of an uncompetitive class of Mexico City industrialists, who produced primarily for local consumption rather than for export. Their loyalty to the party was rewarded with hefty state subsidies.

Moreover, Davis maintains, the PRI's preoccupation with social and economic forces within Mexico City led it to forgo competitive democratic politics and to rely on a pact with urban labor (based mainly in Mexico City), urban industrialists, and the urban middle classes. The system worked so long as party

leaders plowed enough money back into Mexico City to keep its residents and party constituents loyal, or at least acquiescent. But when the PRI could no longer guarantee prosperity or congenial conditions in the city, Davis claims, grassroots opposition flared.

Davis's history helps to explain both the poverty and the political opposition now so evident in the other regions of Mexico, notably Chiapas, where outright rebellion erupted in 1994. If Mexico's current woes have many causes, Davis's account sheds valuable light on why the endangered PRI is now courting rural populations, advocating regional development, and scrambling to compensate for decades of provincial neglect.

**IN RETROSPECT:** The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam. *By Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark.* Random House. 414 pp. \$27.50

Last spring, after almost three decades of reticence, Robert McNamara finally issued his version of what went on in the highest government circles during the Vietnam War. Predictably, the former secretary of defense drew hot criticism from many quarters for his admission that he remained at the Pentagon even after developing grave doubts about the prosecution of that badly conceived war. Read carefully, however, his memoir is less a mea culpa, as advertised, than an often artful sharing of the blame ("We were wrong") with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his former colleagues in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Nevertheless, to the abundant historical literature he adds a useful, albeit truncated, chronicle of high-level obfuscation and strategic confusion during 1961-68, the years of growing U.S. commitment in Southeast Asia.

As the United States sought to "contain" Sino-Soviet expansionism, both Kennedy and Johnson feared being accused at home of "losing" South Vietnam to the tenacious men in Hanoi. Johnson wanted to "win," but at the lowest possible political cost lest he lose his Great Society programs. That meant no congressional declaration of war, no mobilization