
**TRUE TALES FROM
ANOTHER MEXICO:
*The Lynch Mob, the Popsicle Kings,
Chalino, and the Bronx.***

By Sam Quinones. Univ. of New Mexico Press. 336 pp. \$29.95

"Poor Mexico," lamented the dictator Porfirio Díaz, "so far from God and so close to the United States." Echoing Porfirio, most Americans writing on Mexico portray it as a pitiable place, impoverished, corrupt, and hopeless. And so this beautifully written collection of essays is a wonder and a delight.

Quinones, a journalist who has covered Mexico since 1994, opens with the tale of Chalino Sánchez, the smoldering-eyed Sinoloan who created a new genre of popular music. In the late 1980s, having done time for petty crimes in a Tijuana prison, Chalino was in Los Angeles washing cars when he began to write his *corridos prohibidos*, or narco ballads—songs recounting the lives of the drug smugglers from Mexico's tiny northern villages. He sang them with his own bark of a voice and sold the cassettes at car washes, butcher shops, bakeries, and swap meets. Though no radio station would play them, "Chalino's rough sound ignited immigrant Los Angeles." Shortsightedly, Chalino sold the rights to his music for some \$115,000 in the early 1990s. Today, the songs are worth millions.

Millions of dollars also changed hands when Televisa, Mexico's entertainment conglomerate, sold its soap opera *Los Ricos También Lloran* (The rich also cry) to Spain,

Italy, Yugoslavia, Russia, and other countries. When the show's star, Verónica Castro, visited Moscow, so many people came to greet her that the airport had to be closed. Her presence at the Bolshoi Ballet caused a stampede. Muscovites who spotted her on the street, she told Quinones, would "cry and cry and cry."

Equally remarkable is the chapter called "The Popsicle Kings of Tocumbo," about the thousands of ice cream shops that dot the republic from Tijuana down to Tapachula, hard by the border with Guatemala. These little shops have proved so prosperous that the entrepreneurs' tiny hometown, Tocumbo, Michoacán, is filled with lavish houses, forests of satellite dishes, a beautiful park with a swimming pool, a church designed by a world-renowned architect, and a statue, "big as a three-story house," of an ice cream cone.

Not all of the stories end happily. "Lynching in Huehuetla" was so gruesome I found it difficult to read. The author also takes an unblinking look at glue-sniffing gang wannabes, the unsolved murders of young women in Juárez, and a cult-run town where, on the day Quinones was finally admitted, he found the adults all wearing halos fashioned from wire and tinfoil.

Quinones has succeeded in finding "another Mexico." Intimately tied to the United States, it is at times far from God, but, as this splendid book shows, it is also in the midst of a transformation. In the next decade, Quinones predicts, we will see "a country evolve from a dusty political/economic joke to one that is robust and part of the world."

—C. M. MAYO

HISTORY

**TROUBLEMAKER:
*The Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor.***

By Kathleen Burk. Yale Univ. Press. 491 pp. \$35

In a biography of a celebrated Oxford University historian, one doesn't expect to find a table charting the scholar's annual income or a chapter titled "The Business History of the History Business." In the case of A. J. P. Taylor, however, the accountancy is more than appo-

site, for it measures the distinction of the popular historian who invented a profession. The son of wealthy radicals, Taylor (1906-90) was the first of what Britain dubbed the "telly-dons," an intellectual whose TV shows and radio talks and articles in the popular press made him a public institution.

His Oxford colleagues, naturally, hated his eminence almost as much as they envied it. Lesser men, but better placed, conspired to