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Texts such as these are rare, in which the reader can find such a thorough history of Mexican federalism, one that considers its political, administrative, social, territorial, economic, and cultural dimensions, to the point that all these elements intertwine to explain in great detail the genesis and evolution of Mexican federalism throughout two centuries.

Roberto Rives’ book is highly recommended for all kinds of public, from higher education students to people interested in the history of the Mexican government’s configuration, since his writing is enjoyable, clear, and highly documented, for which readers can refer to the sources if he or she wishes to engage on a deeper study of the book’s contents.

This review looks to present and retrieve some of the most important events in our country’s history, which the author mentions and through which the author explains the configuration of the Mexican State.

In the first part called “Background: of the configuration of the States, the Federation, and the Federal District”, the author describes the complex structure of the colonial government, referring to viceroyalties as political and administrative entities with functions such as government, civil administration, justice, military functions, treasury, among others. He points out the importance of Audiences (Audiencias) as colleges that administered justice and worked as courts of appeal in provinces, as part of the complex organization of General Captaincies (Capitanías Generales) and the Higher Mayoralty (Alcaldía Mayor), whilst in indigenous communities Co-regiments (Corregimientos) were the local authorities.

In the second chapter, “The first hundred years: 1810-1910”, he presents the historical and political process of the formation of the Mexican Federal
State. Once achieved independence from Spain, the Emperor Agustín de Iturbide was crowned; afterwards, the supreme power was deposited in a triumvirate, and in this context the author points out the role of provincial deputations (recognized since 1812 by the Cadiz Constitution), and in 1823 the integration of the Constitutional Congress and the promulgation of the Constitutive Act of the Mexican Federation, in which a federal system is adopted thus avoiding the nation’s dissolution in 1824.

Later on, the author presents the main arguments that led to the promulgation of the Constitutional Bases for the adoption of a Centralist Republic that lasted from 1835 to 1847. In that last year the Constitution of 1824 was reestablished, coming back to the reformist, federalist, and liberal ideology, although political instability-prone, up to the point in which between 1824 and 1857 –according to– presidents held office for an average of seven months.

The author describes the process from 1860 to 1910, in which the Reform Laws (Leyes de Reforma) were issued with President Benito Juárez, the establishment of Maximilian’s Empire by the Provisional Statute of the Mexican Empire, as well as the government of Porfirio Díaz, oriented to achieve a capitalist development, that the author identifies as based on the belief that the government was in charge of attracting foreign capital.

In the second part of the book, Rives studies the period between 1910 and 2010, with the political and social revolution events that end up establishing the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States of 1917, and the respective local constitutions amongst which Morelos is the last to promulgate its own in 1930, on the same wear the Planning Law is issued. In the next chapter the author refers to the topic of import substitutions and the stabilizing development between 1940-1970, a period considered as some by glorious, the author criticizes and argues that in those years several problems developed such as an increasing unemployment rate, a massive urbanization process, an insufficient taxation according to the demographic growth-related demands, and unfulfilled promises regarding agrarian reform. A fact that stands out regarding the country’s political life is the creation of an Electoral Law that transcended a country with military and warlord governments to a civilian government.

In the next chapter, the author refers to the economic situation’s intensification from the indebtedness of the seventies and eighties, within the ideology of political and administrative reform, the creation of the National System of Fiscal Coordination, as well as the inventory of the country’s island territory, since there were no accurate data.

In the next chapter, the author focuses our attention on the aspects that influenced the abandonment of the idea of the State’s economic
stewardship, and mentions the context of the eighties where the State's interventionist role is questioned, because of its scarce results once the “Mexican miracle” era ended.

He emphasizes the place given in 1995 to public safety in the federal government’s agenda, with the creation of the first Nation Program for Public Safety, by which all deficiencies came to light; in 1996 begins a very important decentralizing process in aspects such as the use of national resources for social spending, education, agriculture, and the services of the Ministry of foreign affairs. It is questioned if it really was a de-concentration process, in the sense that up to this day it hasn’t been possible to build a more competitive federalism where public resources are distributed with state and local strengthening-criteria.

In the penultimate chapter, the effects of democratic transition on the administrative apparatus are stressed out. The author mentions the transformations during President Vicente Fox’s term office, such as in social sector, with the Opportunities Program; the creation in 2002 of the National Governors’ Conference (CONAGO) and its role in the configuration of a new budget arrangement in which federal entities were recognized; the creation of the National Mexican Municipalities’ Conference in a search for strengthening their presence in the context of dual Mexican federalism.

In the last chapter, “Public Administration Evolution from 1976 to 2010”, the author offers us relevant information regarding the structure of the administrative apparatus in every federal entity.

Without a doubt, this author’s work constitutes a reference work that allows us to measure accurately Mexico’s history of federalism, recognizing its centennial heterogeneity and complexity.