Both works represent good starts for students interested in Southern foodways. The bibliographies are filled with interesting surprises such as crawfish comic books; unfortunately, the texts themselves are not indexed, which may necessitate an interested scholar to do some extra work in following up references. External fact-checking may be a necessity; for example, Pitre fails to distinguish between the folk tune “The Crawfish Song,” performed by the likes of Harry Belafonte and Jerry Lee Lewis, and “Crawfish,” sung by Elvis Presley and Kitty White in the film King Creole (1958). In addition, Pitre’s chapters have a serialized quality to them: facts are reintroduced as if for the first time. These small issues aside, catfish and crawfish (and their consumers) should be pleased by Crawford’s and Pitre’s respective treatments.


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The publication of Kevin Gosner’s examination of an early eighteenth-century rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, is particularly welcome in light of the current events taking place in the same region today. The recent and continuing armed insurrection by highland Maya in southern Mexico is an eerie counterpoint to the discussion in Soldiers of the Virgin of the confusion, anger, and despair which prompted the Tzeltal Revolt in 1712. This well-researched and thorough study, while ostensibly concluding with the capture, trial and execution of many of the conspirators in the aftermath of the rebellion, casts a light well past the early 1700s and into the present.

The scope of this study is enormous. Gosner reveals his purpose by stating that “only by linking a study of the material causes of the rebellion to the cultural history of the highland Maya can we begin to understand the complexities” of the Tzeltal revolt (6). Soldiers of the Virgin is the first book-length analysis of this particular incident in Mexican history, but Gosner acknowledges and examines many earlier works on the same subject, including those of Robert Wasserstrom, Victoria Reifler Bricker, and Herbert Klein. While drawing upon the work of these scholars, Gosner presents a new evaluation of the causes and perceptions of the rebellion. He suggests that regional economic features combined with the disruption by the Spanish authorities of the moral
economy of local Mayan culture provide the fuel for a rebellion which found its spark in the appearance of the Holy Virgin to a young Indian girl.

To present all of the historical pressures and economic factors which contribute to the concept of a “moral economy,” Gosner begins his examination of the Tzeltal Revolt long before the first Spaniards set foot on Mexican soil, and scrutinizes relationships between the indigenous Mayas and their conquerors from the time of the earliest contact. Over half of this book deals with the various and complicated interactions of belief and practice which led up to the brief, explosive rebellion in Chiapas. Pre-Columbian Mayan society, Spanish techniques of land management and economic exploitation, the ecology of the Chiapas highlands, and even the European tradition of religious visions are all examined to see how each contributed to the set of circumstances which resulted in the uprising. Quite helpfully, this book is filled with maps and charts which graphically present necessary information to aid the reader in the task of unraveling all the strands of data which go into Gosner’s analysis.

Gosner begins his introduction by noting that analysis of Indian revolt and peasant insurrection has become a staple of Latin American historical scholarship. Soldiers of the Virgin is an admirable addition to this growing body of work. By including economic, religious, folkloric and ethnographic data, this book presents a complex but eminently readable history of the clash of competing and incompatible worldviews. Kevin Gosner’s conclusion that “the potential for ethnic violence in Chiapas would remain high, and indeed, it has never abated” (159) is both a sad commentary on the continuing strife in that region and a succinct recommendation for his own work, which reveals the roots of a continuing conflict.