



# **Kinship, Business, and Politics: The Martinez Del Rio Family in Mexico, 1823-1867 (Lilas Latin American Monograph)**

*David W. Walker*

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The Martínez del Río family was a vigorous contestant in the highly politicized economy of early national Mexico. David Walker's case study of its successes and failures provides a unique insider's view of the trials and tribulations of doing business in a hostile environment. The family's ordeal in Mexico—a series of personal dislocations and traumas—mirrored the painful contractions of an old society reluctantly giving birth to a new nation.

Using previously undiscovered primary source materials (including the private correspondence and business records of the family, public notary documents, transcripts of judicial proceedings, and the archives of Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations and the British Foreign Office), Walker employs family history to analyze problems relating more generally to the development of state and society in newly independent Mexico.

The processes of socioeconomic formation in Mexico differed from those of Western Europe and the United States; accordingly, entrepreneurial activity had markedly contrasting implications for economic development and class formation. In the downwardly spiraling economy of nineteenth-century Mexico, economic activity was a zero-sum game. No new wealth was being created; most sectors remained stagnant and unproductive. To make their fortunes, *empresarios*, the Mexican capitalists, could not rely on income generated from authentic economic growth. Instead, they exploited the arbitrary acts of the interventionist Mexican state, which proscribed the free movement of factors within the marketplace. Speculation in the public debt took the place of more substantive undertakings. Coercive state power was diverted to create artificial environments in which otherwise inefficient and unproductive enterprises could flourish. But however well the *empresarios* might imitate the outward forms of industrial capitalism, they could not unlock the productive capacity of the Mexican economy. Instead, they and their allies and rivals engaged in destructive struggles to manipulate the state for personal gain, to the detriment of class interests, economic growth, and political stability.

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