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## Main content

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FEINBERG, BENJAMIN. The devil's book of culture: history, mushrooms, and caves in Southern Mexico. xi, 272 pp., maps, figs, illus., bibliogr. Austin: Univ. Texas Press, 2004. [pounds sterling]18.50 (paper)

As I prepared to read The devil's book of culture, I thought, do we really need another treatment of Oaxaca's magic mushrooms? Having read numerous homages to Maria Sabina and wide-eyed descriptions of the Huautla scene in American hipster journalism and Mexican literature, I questioned the need for another trip down this well-worn path. Fortunately, Feinberg's book transcends the psychedelic literature and contextualizes it, and Mazatec history and culture, within a sophisticated 'metacultural' paradigm informed by Bakhtin, Volosinov, Goffman, and Gellner. Indeed, this book is probably the strongest theoretical work in recent Oaxaca ethnography. It is also pleasurable reading because of the spicy, self-deprecatory vignettes and the author's graceful style.

Feinberg eschews descriptive, positivist ethnography of bounded culture in favour of a 'pictorial' approach and penetrating discourse analysis. He focuses on the multiple voices that articulate and represent conceptions of local history, hallucinogenic mushrooms, and caves as they relate to notions of Mazatec culture. The author shows how Mazatec...

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The Devil's Book of Cultu has been added to your Cart. Add to Cart. Buy Now. While based on regionally specific ethnographic material, I highly recommend Feinberg's book not only to anthropologists, but also historians and others interested in critical theory and identity formation, as well as cultural and historical representation." (The Americas). "...Feinberg's insights are penetrating and he makes important contributions to theoretical critiques of the concept of culture." (The Journal of Latin American Anthropology). "This book looks

at the Sierra Mazateca and its inhabitants in a fresh, engaging, intelligent, and interesting way. . . Home » Browse » Books » Book details, *The Devil's Book of Culture: History, Mushrooms, and Caves in Southern Mexico*. By Benjamin Feinberg. No cover image. Since the 1950s, the Sierra Mazateca of Oaxaca, Mexico, has drawn a strange assortment of visitors and pilgrims--schoolteachers and government workers, North American and European spelunkers exploring the region's vast cave system, and counterculturalists from hippies (John Lennon and other celebrities supposedly among them) to New Age seekers, all chasing a firsthand experience of transcendence and otherness through the ingestion of psychedelic mushrooms "in context" with a Mazatec shaman. Mushrooms, culture, experts, and drugs. (pp. 126-190). This ethnography focuses on the particular webs of politics and poetics that infuse three different discursive spaces with a kind of meaning that comments upon culture and identity. The first of these spaces--history, the past, the movement of time, chronotope--only refers to an actual geographical space through the Einsteinian identity between space and time. The last of these spaces--the underground--refers more directly to a physical location that stores and emits another kind of geographical/cultural knowledge. *The Devil's Book of Culture: History, Mushrooms, and Caves in Southern Mexico* (review). January 2006. *The Americas* 62(4):662-663. This region, home to indigenous Mazatecs, is well-known for its hallucinogenic mushrooms and its vast network of subterranean caves that attracts spelunkers from all corners of the world. To be certain, this is neither a book about psychedelic drug use (ceremonial, countercultural, or otherwise), nor is it a treatise on caving culture and locals' reactions to it. In these narratives, hallucinogenic mushrooms and the special knowledge associated with their use serve as a potent master symbol of Mazatec identity both within and outside the region. *The Devil's Book of Culture*. ebook | History, Mushrooms, and Caves in Southern Mexico. By Benjamin Feinberg. Read a Sample. Add Book To Favorites. Sign up to save your library. With an OverDrive account, you can save your favorite libraries for at-a-glance information about availability. In this highly original ethnography, Benjamin Feinberg investigates how different understandings of Mazatec identity and culture emerge through talk that circulates within and among various groups, including Mazatec-speaking businessmen, curers, peasants, intellectuals, anthropologists, bureaucrats, cavers, and mushroom-seeking tourists.