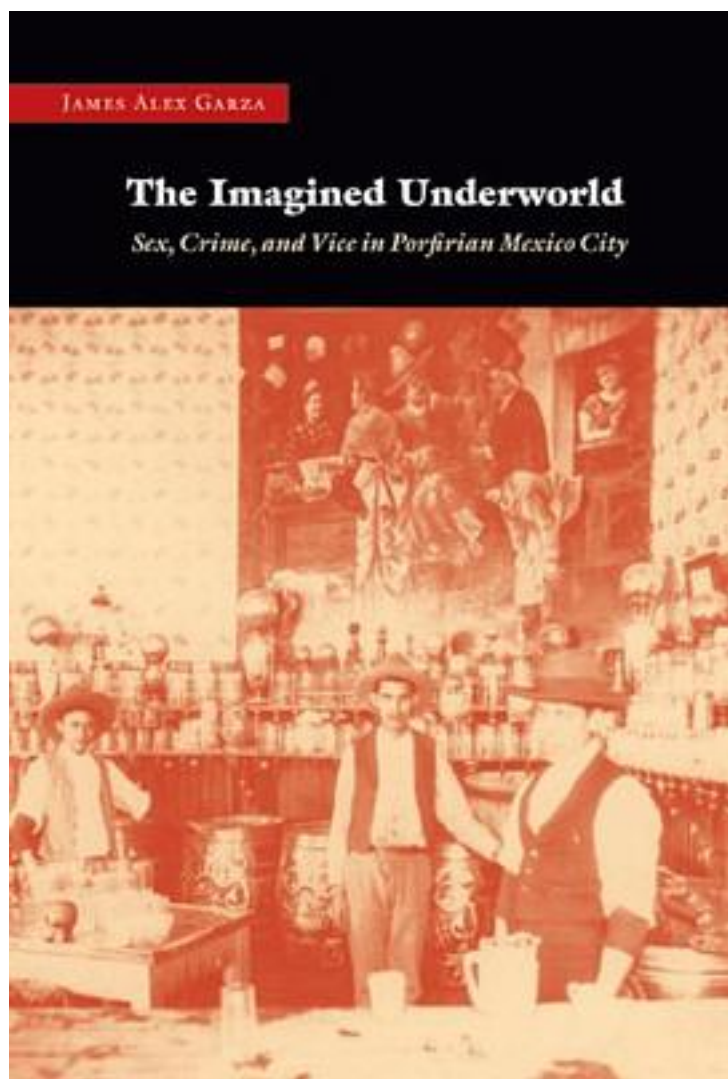


The Imagined Underworld



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Emerging from decades of turmoil, late nineteenth-century Mexico City was a capital in transition. Yet as the city and its republic embraced technological and social change, it still faced perceptions of widespread disorder. Accordingly, the Porfirian government relied on an elite group of government officials, prominent citizens, politicians, urban professionals, and newspaper editors to elevate the Mexican nation from its perceived backward condition. Influenced by theories such as positivism, this ruling class sought to impose modernization on the country and its premier city. While elites guided the middle class toward this ideal, they viewed the capital's growing urban underclass with apprehension and fear. "The Imagined Underworld" recounts six infamous crimes committed in nineteenth-century Mexico City and the underworld they were used to create. Through a careful examination of judicial records, newspapers, government documents, and travel accounts, James Alex Garza uncovers the truth behind some of nineteenth-century Mexico's most notorious criminals, including the serial killer 'El Chalequero'. During his sensational trial, elites linked the killer's villainous acts with the impoverished urban world he inhabited and victimized. This pattern would be repeated for all crimes committed by the poor. In an effort to construct a social barrier between the classes, elites invented a dangerous urban periphery populated by the deviant and murderous. However, the Porfirian elite did not count on middle-class and police involvement in crime. In numerous incidents, including a deadly love triangle, elites were betrayed by their own role in criminality. By analyzing the cases used to forge the underworld and those that defied its myth, Garza uncovers the complex reality that existed beyond the Porfirian ideals of order and progress.

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