



# Understanding the Chiapas Rebellion: Modernist Visions and the Invisible Indian

*Nicholas P. Higgins*

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To many observers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mexico appeared to be a modern nation-state at last assuming an international role through its participation in NAFTA and the OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development). Then came the Zapatista revolt on New Year's Day 1994. Wearing ski masks and demanding not power but a new understanding of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, Subcomandante Marcos and his followers launched what may be the first "post" or "counter" modern revolution, one that challenges the very concept of the modern nation-state and its vision of a fully assimilated citizenry.

This book offers a new way of understanding the Zapatista conflict as a counteraction to the forces of modernity and globalization that have rendered indigenous peoples virtually invisible throughout the world. Placing the conflict within a broad sociopolitical and historical context, Nicholas Higgins traces the relations between Maya Indians and the Mexican state from the conquest to the present—which reveals a centuries-long contest over the Maya people's identity and place within Mexico. His incisive analysis of this contest clearly explains how the notions of "modernity" and even of "the state" require the assimilation of indigenous peoples. With this understanding, Higgins argues, the Zapatista uprising becomes neither surprising nor unpredictable, but rather the inevitable outcome of a modernizing program that suppressed the identity and aspirations of the Maya peoples.

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