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Cooperation and Community: Economy and Society in Oaxaca

Jeffrey H. Cohen

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In the villages and small towns of Oaxaca, Mexico, as in much of rural Latin America, cooperation among neighbors is essential for personal and community survival. It can take many forms, from godparenting to sponsoring fiestas, holding civic offices, or exchanging agricultural or other kinds of labor. This book examines the ways in which the people of Santa Ana del Valle practice these traditional cooperative and reciprocal relationships and also invent new relationships to respond to global forces of social and economic change at work within their community.

Based on fieldwork he conducted in this Zapotec-speaking community between 1992 and 1996, Jeffrey Cohen describes continuities in the Santañeros' practices of cooperation, as well as changes resulting from transnational migration, tourism, increasing educational opportunities, and improved communications. His nuanced portrayal of the benefits and burdens of cooperation is buttressed by the words of many villagers who explain why and how they participate-or not-in reciprocal family and community networks. This rich ethnographic material offers a working definition of community created in and through cooperative relationships.

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