

REGIONAL DIVERSITY AND NATIONAL UNITY IN THE ERA OF MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE

TRANSPORTES Y COMERCIO ENTRE MÉXICO Y VERACRUZ, 1519–1910. By PETER REES. México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1976. Pp. 192.)

EN LOS ALBORES DE LA INDEPENDENCIA: LAS PROVINCIAS INTERNAS DE ORIENTE DURANTE LA INSURRECCIÓN DE DON MIGUEL HIDALGO Y COSTILLA, 1810–1811. By ISIDRO VIZCAYA CANALES. (Monterrey: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, 1976. Pp. 340.)

DESCRIPCIONES ECONÓMICAS GENERALES DE NUEVA ESPAÑA, 1784–1817, FUENTES PARA LA HISTORIA ECONÓMICA DE MÉXICO 1. Compiled by ENRIQUE FLORESCANO and ISABEL GIL. (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1973. Pp. 272.)

DESCRIPCIONES ECONÓMICAS REGIONALES DE NUEVA ESPAÑA: PROVINCIAS DEL NORTE, 1790–1814, FUENTES PARA LA HISTORIA ECONÓMICA DE MÉXICO 2. Compiled by ENRIQUE FLORESCANO and ISABEL GIL. (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976. Pp. 360.)

DESCRIPCIONES ECONÓMICAS REGIONALES DE NUEVA ESPAÑA: PROVINCIAS DEL CENTRO, SUDESTE Y SUR, 1766–1827, FUENTES PARA LA HISTORIA ECONÓMICA DE MÉXICO 3. Compiled by ENRIQUE FLORESCANO and ISABEL GIL. (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976. Pp. 326.)

Did the various regions that joined to form the Mexican nation in 1821 share social conditions and political goals sufficiently similar to allow integration into a coherent whole? Each of the works reviewed here contributes toward a better understanding of that complex problem, although none attempts a comprehensive solution. Nor can this short essay begin to outline the dimensions of the larger question. I do hope to suggest, however, that students of the independence era (c. 1750–1850) of Mexican history are approaching a point at which interpretive analyses of such broad problems are both desirable and possible.

Too often, Mexican independence has appeared as an imperial collapse followed by chaos. Yet while many of the ties that bound Mexico to the Spanish empire disintegrated, a more constructive process was also underway—if haltingly and with substantial confusion of ideals and possibilities. A myriad of regional societies, usually composed of single cities or large towns and their rural hinterlands, had to decide whether or not to unite as a nation. And if they did consolidate, how should they cement and regulate their union? Breaking the imperial link between Mexico City and Madrid imposed especially difficult decisions on peripheral regions such as Yucatán, Texas, and California. Should they join in a state with the distant ex-vice-regal capital, the surrounding central highland valleys, and the mining and ranching centers of the north central

plateau? And even the latter areas—the traditional core of New Spain—faced similar problems. Their social and economic interdependence was long established in 1821, yet their local interests remained sufficiently different to raise continuing tensions and occasional conflicts.

Across the far reaches of what had been the Spanish empire, independence unleashed pressures toward fragmentation into small, regional domains. Each regional unit seemed to view the demise of the empire from a local perspective. At the same time, these disintegrative tendencies ran counter to the perception that to survive and prosper in a world of nations, larger units were essential—a belief strong in the old viceregal capitals. Such conflicting tendencies surfaced most visibly in the Río de la Plata region. Localism kept that area in turmoil for decades following independence, and Argentina was finally created without the recalcitrant regional societies of Uruguay and Paraguay.

Similar tensions prevailed in Mexico during the postindependence decades. Perhaps the disintegrative forces have received less attention there because the continuous existence of an extensive Mexican nation masked the strength of localist, even separatist pressures. Yet the 1830s witnessed the short-lived secession of Yucatán and the successful separation of Texas. And these were but the most extreme manifestations of difficulties that usually appeared as wrangling over whether Mexico should have a federal or centralist constitutional structure. Much of the apparent confusion of early Mexican political life reflected underlying struggles among local societies with distinct interests, yet forced by the times to face numerous and various attempts to forge them into an enduring national framework.

From this perspective, a better understanding of early Mexican nation building depends upon analyses examining both regional similarities and diversities, and the strengths and weaknesses of the links tying regions together. To date, research has concentrated on the study of regional variation. For the colonial period, the general inquiries of the generation of Silvio Zavala and François Chevalier¹ raised questions that stimulated the local and regional studies of the generation of Charles Gibson and the Berkeley demographers.² It remains too early to be sure, but there are emerging signs that colonial studies are now returning to more comprehensive approaches.³ Hopefully they will build upon the regional work that preceded and directly face the questions of interregional relations.

Studies of the Mexican independence era also have tended to shift between regional and general inquiries, only rarely attempting explicit analyses of integrating links. Most prominent are regional studies with a biographical focus,⁴ and comprehensive works focused disproportionately on Mexico City.⁵ A few books on the independence period have begun to examine regional distinctions in the light of interregional relations. They deserve brief mention. For the late eighteenth century, Brian Hamnett's *Politics and Trade in Southern Mexico, 1750–1821*⁶ and especially David Brading's *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763–1810*⁷ probe the commercial links among regional societies. Nettie Lee Benson's work on the provincial deputations during the formative years from 1812 to 1824 inquires into the interaction of multiple regionalist tendencies

in politics and administration.⁸ And in his *Caudillos y caciques*, Fernando Diaz Diaz examines the formation of both regional and national political alliances and their relative strengths and weaknesses during the decades following independence.⁹ All of these studies help to bring the evolving structures of interregional integration into focus. Hopefully others will follow their leads.

Those who do will find that the volumes reviewed here follow the prevailing pattern. They tend to reveal a great deal about regional diversity and much less about ties among regions. Because it focuses on one facet of this neglected dimension of Mexican history, Peter Rees' *Transportes y comercio entre México y Veracruz, 1519–1910* deserves first discussion. Rees is a historical geographer whose interest is to trace and explain the evolution of transit routes between the capital and its gulf-coast port. His principal conclusion is that routes established to facilitate import-export trade during the century after the conquest endured with little modification into the twentieth century. Rees uncovers another face of Mexico's "colonial heritage." He minimizes even the changes brought by the railroads during the later nineteenth century. It is unfortunate that Rees' work and that of John Coatsworth on the impact of the railroads appeared simultaneously (although they might have consulted each others' studies in dissertation form). Rees' materials would have provided background for Coatsworth's analysis, and the latter would have broadened and perhaps modified Rees' perception of the introduction of the railroads.

Rees bases his work primarily upon official reports of route construction, colonial travelers' accounts, and, for the nineteenth century, records of railroad operations and reports of British consuls. Those sources allow a detailed understanding of the selection of routes and their durability once entrenched. But Rees did not ground his analysis in a thorough review of the published materials on the regions he studies; as a result, he attempts to explain transportation links with only a partial understanding of the regional societies being linked. Rees' principal contribution is thus limited to a description of one major trade route and the revelation that sources are available for studies of evolving transportation ties among Mexican regions.

En los albores de la independencia, by Isidro Vizcaya Canales, is a regional study of a national problem. The book probes the impact of the unsuccessful Hidalgo revolt of 1810 and 1811 in the frontier regions of the Mexican northeast. Vizcaya focuses on events in Monterrey and the province of Nueva León, relating them to occurrences throughout Coahuila, Nueva Santander (now Tamaulipas), and Texas. His materials are dredged from local archives and they allow him to reconstruct in detail the course of northeastern reactions to the insurgency. This work is especially useful when read in the light of Hugh Hamill's study of the *The Hidalgo Revolt*. While the latter emphasizes the active idealism of the insurgents, Vizcaya highlights a perhaps more common situation. The northeasterners reacted to the insurgents not by considering idealistic goals, but by analyzing rebel strength in terms of local interests. The regional elites who are the focus of the study worked primarily to remain regional elites. Such a reaction to the insurgency allowed many to join the rebellion when it appeared successful, later to emerge as staunch royalists when the tide turned.

The weakness of Vizcaya's study is its lack of a unified vision of the societies of the northeast. The book opens with a series of biographical sketches of leading characters, but these background materials are never used to portray in a general way the social environment of subsequent political events. Vizcaya, of course, cannot accomplish everything a reviewer desires, and again much of the problem may result from the simultaneous appearance of complementary studies. The socioeconomic model implicit in Charles Harris' work on the estates of the Sánchez Navarro family of Coahuila might have helped Vizcaya to organize and analyze much of the social information now scattered through the work. At present, such synthesis is left to the reader.

New, more synthetic interpretations of the independence period of Mexican history will be able to rely heavily on the three volumes compiled by Enrique Florescano and Isabel Gil. Much more than *Descripciones económicas*, the documents collected here include important demographic, social, and political materials derived from varied sources. Some have been published previously, but have been long out of print and available in few libraries. Others are printed here for the first time. Taken together, the sources in this collection should become the indispensable companion of researchers studying late colonial and early national Mexican history.

The volume of general descriptions includes such well-known materials as the statistical tables compiled by Alexander von Humboldt, along with José María Quiróz's attempt to summarize the state of the Mexican economy during the first decade of the nineteenth century. In addition, there are surveys of population, tribute incomes, mills and workshops, militia personnel, ecclesiastical stipends, and more. Each selection covers a broad geographical range, allowing interregional comparisons of the factors discussed. None of the surveys asks identical questions for different times—perhaps the most persistent frustration of scholars seeking numerical materials for the independence years. Thus the pivotal problem of tracing change cannot be accomplished directly from the data included here, but instead must be approached through the undoubtedly risky, but equally necessary, process of scholarly inference.

The two books of regional surveys provide even greater detail about sectional differences, still with a paucity of serial information. In the volume on the northern provinces, the report on the Californias does include time series on population and its distribution among settlements. The data cover only the decade of the 1790s, but even such a limited span constitutes a rare resource. Also included is a compilation on New Mexico that approaches being a comprehensive history of the province from the late eighteenth century until the coming of United States rule. Given the strength of the materials on the Californias and New Mexico, the volume of northern surveys should prove especially helpful to students of the borderlands and Mexican-American history.

The other reports pertaining to the North tend to examine varying social and economic questions for different times in different regions. The benefits and limitations are apparent. To note some fragments of information that bear on the questions of regional diversity and national unity, reporters from two Zacatecas jurisdictions complained about the economic domination of their areas by great

landlords—which often meant Mexico City landlords—thereby reducing local economic opportunities. In the same vein, the report written from San Luis Potosí in the turbulent year of 1814 calls for the Crown to order the fragmentation and redistribution of the province's great haciendas—which also tended to belong to Mexico City landed families. From the regional economic reports emerge clear signs of resentment not of Spaniards or Spanish rule, but of great landed families and the dominance of the viceregal capital. Such sentiments did not bode well for national integration.

The third volume, documents describing the regions of the Mexican Center and South, covers a wide-ranging and varied territory from Guanajuato and Querétaro in the Bajío, through Puebla and Oaxaca, to Tabasco and Yucatán. Unfortunately, there is no report for Mexico City and its immediate vicinity. The materials that are included easily heighten the sense of regional diversity in late colonial Mexico. The description of the skilled mine workers of Guanajuato contrasts starkly with that of the Indian villagers of the Puebla region who grew subsistence crops on village lands and labored seasonally on nearby haciendas. And such typical Indians of the central highlands stand distinct from the Indian majority of Yucatán, many of whom remained seminomadic, engaged in slash-and-burn agriculture, and tied to Spanish colonial society through still extant *encomiendas*.

The mosaic that emerges from the works reviewed here presents difficulties to the historian who seeks a unified understanding of Mexican society in the independence era. Such problems surely reflect the real difficulties faced by the men who tried to build a Mexican nation in the early nineteenth century. Historical studies continue to highlight the diversity of Mexican regional societies and local interests during the independence era. Yet despite the fascinating confusion, a single nation did emerge. The time seems ripe for more scholars to look to the forces that drew together (or drove apart) the diverse Mexican regions—in the colonial period, the independence era, and beyond.

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NOTES

1. The monuments of this period are Silvio Zavala, *La encomienda indiana* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1935), and François Chevalier, *La formation des grands domaines au Mexique: Terre et société aux XVI^e–XVII^e siècles* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1952).
2. The shift to regional studies perhaps dates from the appearance of Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952) and surely attained its high point with Gibson's *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964). The Berkeley demographers' work appeared in numerous volumes of the *IberoAmericana* series and culminated in Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, *Essays in Population History*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, 1974).
3. The recent volume edited by Ida Altman and James Lockhart, *Provinces of Early Mexico* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1976), aims to bridge the gap between regional and comprehensive studies. Enrique Semo's *Historia del capitalismo en México*:

Los orígenes, 1521–1763 (México: Ediciones Era, 1973) aims to synthesize colonial developments and should stimulate others to follow his lead—perhaps by reacting against his conclusions.

4. For example, Hugh Hamill, Jr., *The Hidalgo Revolt* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966) and Charles H. Harris, III, *A Mexican Family Empire: The Latifundio of the Sánchez Navarro Family, 1765–1867* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975).
5. See, Romeo Flores Caballero, *La contrarrevolución en la independencia* (México: El Colegio de México, 1969); Javier Ocampo, *Las ideas de un día* (México: El Colegio de México, 1969); and Doris Ladd, *The Mexican Nobility at Independence, 1780–1826* (Austin: University of Texas Institute of Latin American Studies, 1976).
6. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
7. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
8. *La diputación provincial y el federalismo mexicano* (México: El Colegio de México, 1955).
9. (México: El Colegio de México, 1972).