

RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE
HISTORY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
SPANISH AMERICA

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- REFORMAS ECONÓMICAS DEL SIGLO XVIII EN NUEVA ESPAÑA*. 2 vols. By EDUARDO ARCILA FARÍAS. (México: Sep Setentas, 1974. Pp. 154 and 209.)
- A SOCIOECONOMIC HISTORY OF ARGENTINA, 1776–1860*. By JOHNATHAN C. BROWN. (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Pp. 307. \$24.95.)
- SILVER MINES AND SILVER MINERS IN COLONIAL PERU, 1776–1824*. By J. R. FISHER. (Liverpool: Centre for Latin American Studies, The University of Liverpool, 1977. Pp. 150.)
- THE COLONIAL SLAVE PLANTATION AS A FORM OF HACIENDA: A PRELIMINARY OUTLINE OF THE CASE OF VENEZUELA*. By RAFAEL HERRERO. (Glasgow: The Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Glasgow, 1979. Pp. 41.)
- CONQUEST AND COMMERCE: SPAIN AND ENGLAND IN THE AMERICAS*. By JAMES LANG. (New York: Academic Press Inc., 1975. Pp. 261. \$12.95.)
- FOREIGN IMMIGRANTS IN EARLY BOURBON MEXICO, 1700–1760*. By CHARLES F. NUNN. (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Pp. 243. \$24.95.)
- THE PEOPLE AND THE KING: THE COMUNERO REVOLUTION IN COLOMBIA, 1781*. By JOHN LEDDY PHELAN. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978. Pp. 309. \$25.00.)

The historiography of colonial Spanish America is increasingly dominated by studies devoted to social and economic questions and as a result there are few recently published examples of biography or institutional history. During the last decade, colonial historians have concentrated their research efforts either on social "groups" (the term class seems to be shunned by colonialists as being either too difficult to define or too inflammatory) like merchants, miners, bureaucrats, and slaves, or on the development of basic economic data such as mineral production, grain prices, slave importations, and patterns of land tenure. Interest in these sorts of topics is particularly visible among students of eighteenth-

century Spanish America, since Spain's colonial reforms and the resultant alterations in social structure and economic performance are given greater historical immediacy and relevancy by the subsequent collapse of Spanish power and the creation of independent nation states. It should be mentioned that very few social historians have attempted to investigate closely the relationship between the social and economic topics they have studied and the specific development of the political events of the independence period. Instead they have let the revolutionary events of the later period simply imply significance to their own research in less heroic matters. This failure to connect the processes of social and economic change to political behavior has resulted, in part, from problems inherent in the surviving documentation, but in many cases these problems have been compounded by poor research design and faulty periodization.

The books and monographs under review here represent a rough, somewhat representative cross section of the current work available on eighteenth-century Spanish America. That is not to suggest that the books reviewed here are comparable with the best of the recent historiography, but the topics, methods, sources, and assumptions about the historical process made by the authors are representative. Three of these studies—those by Brown, Herrero, and Lang—are temporally broader in conception and are not, therefore, efforts to evaluate specifically the economic and social consequences of the Bourbon reform period. In the case of Brown and Lang, however, they speak very directly to these reforms and discuss the independence movements in relation to them. I will emphasize here the contributions by these authors to our understanding of the eighteenth century, but will also attempt to discuss generally the remainder of these works as well. Herrero, on the other hand, is only minimally interested in the chronological period and the historiographical context assumed in this essay. He is included here because his concrete case study, the Chuao hacienda in Venezuela, underwent sustained growth during the period and because his effort to relate changes in labor forms and land usage patterns to structural change in both the local and world economy is worth discussing in the context established for this review.

Herrero's brief study, *The Colonial Slave Plantation as a Form of Hacienda*, is an example of a good idea gone wrong. As Richard Boyer recently pointed out, the term hacienda has become more of a cliché than an analytical category and any effort to rescue the utility of this concept should be welcomed therefore by all interested scholars.¹ Herrero's title appears to promise a new effort to define the hacienda and discuss its relationship to the tropical plantation. Anyone unfortunate enough to wander into the conceptual and terminological wilderness of this brief monograph, however, will find that Herrero not only

fails to define his terms but that he promotes further confusion by actually using the terms plantation and hacienda interchangeably.

These problems are compounded by an inadequate bibliography and the most cavalier attitude towards footnotes that I have encountered. The end result is fatally flawed and nearly without value. Herrero argues that Venezuelan cacao growers moved toward "tied" labor (the development of a free peasantry compelled to labor in the export-oriented plantations during the peak seasons) and away from slave labor in response to structural requirements inherent in capitalism. That these changes in labor organization occurred in the late colonial and early national periods is fairly clear, but Herrero does not analyze either the demographic or economic contexts in which they occur—changes in the supply of labor or in the market price of cacao would also provoke changes in labor organization. In fact, his only evidence, the Chuao hacienda, shows a substantial increase in the number of slaves as well as increased cacao production. Herrero is clearly correct when he argues that land tenure systems and labor forms in Venezuela must be analyzed within the context of the developing world economic system, but such an analysis requires a thoroughness and resourcefulness greater than that demonstrated in this failed work.

Nunn's *Foreign Immigrants in Early Bourbon Mexico, 1700–1760* is a well-researched, but narrowly conceived, contribution to the rapidly developing literature on eighteenth-century New Spain. Extensive research in both Mexico and Spain turned up civil and ecclesiastical records of 609 foreigners, but Nunn suggests that perhaps 1,500 foreigners were resident in New Spain during this period. As one might expect, the most useful and richest resources for the compilation of this estimate were the records of the Church, especially the periodically vigilant Inquisition. However, Nunn worked through an extensive range of materials, including the censuses of 1689 and 1753, in his search for foreign residents. The vast majority of these foreigners presented no threat to the Spanish crown or the Church and were found to be peaceably pursuing careers in the trades, in commerce, or in the Church. In reading this book one is struck simultaneously by two essential characteristics of this tiny segment of the population of New Spain—its political and economic insignificance and its clearly assimilationist ambitions. If it is possible to make any generalization about the larger colonial society from Nunn's analysis of this atypical subgroup, it would have to be that New Spain was a remarkably coherent and rather self-confident society in the first half of the century and as a result demonstrated little of the xenophobia and chauvinism so characteristic of the early national period.

If I have a reservation about this thorough, careful, and thoughtful study, it is that Nunn has elected to study a period where resident

foreigners in New Spain were not particularly important either economically or politically. Nunn clearly acknowledges the very different character of foreign involvement during the more dynamic late colonial period when foreign merchants and foreign shipping played a key role in the economic growth of New Spain, but leaves the reader to guess why he chose to pursue the earlier period. Perhaps he or someone else will continue this valuable project for the later period.

Arcila Farías' two-volume study of the Bourbon reform period in New Spain was first printed in 1955 in Venezuela and all students interested in colonial Mexico specifically or the reform period generally will be grateful to Sep Setentas and Enrique Florescano for making it available again. The first volume provides an excellent summary of the intellectual background and ideological content of the Spanish reform effort and then offers a summary of the various concrete manifestations that this ideology took in New Spain. Of interest also is Arcila Farías' effort to measure, in gross terms, the actual economic consequences of the reforms. He accepts Revillagigedo's evaluation that the formation and success of a new expansive class of merchants dedicated to increasing the volume of trade was the most important consequence of the reform. In addition, he argues that the relocation of the wholesale market from Mexico City to Veracruz and the important reduction in transportation costs, commissions, and insurance rates that followed contributed to growth in the total volume of trade as measured by *alcabala* returns. Even agriculture responded to this increased tempo in the commerce and registered an increase in production of nearly 40 percent between 1770 and 1790.

Volume 2 continues this effort and reviews the various bureaucratic strategies used to promote, control, and tax colonial production. Arcila Farías emphasizes the crucial role played by the bureaucratic and military reorganization of the Bourbons in the stimulation of colonial economic activity. Much of the increased tax revenue of the colonial regime was used locally for the salaries of the greatly enlarged bureaucracy and military establishment. These new colonial functionaries and their families helped to expand local demand for both goods and services. Although the economic performance of the period is only known superficially, it is clear that both total consumption and the number of consumers in New Spain increased dramatically in response to the reforms of Charles III. Arcila Farías is correct, however, in reminding us that, since the total value of European goods consumed in New Spain during this period never averaged more than 4 pesos per person, the economy remained underdeveloped in character. Although this work is somewhat dated and this new edition does not benefit from any attempt to include subsequent contributions by other scholars, it remains a significant study, still worthy of consultation by specialists.

The economic and political reforms that are studied within the Mexican context by Arcila Farías are seen by Lang to be catalysts that provoked the struggle for independence throughout Spanish America. Lang's book is an ambitious effort to compare the development of the American colonial empires of both Spain and Britain. Lang, a sociologist, relies completely on well-known published works for his analysis and fails to provide either a novel or innovative interpretation of events. If available in an inexpensive paperback version the book might have some classroom use, but there is little here that will interest specialists. I think that we have reached a point in our understanding of these colonial societies that would allow a profitable comparison to be undertaken, but such an analysis would have to eschew Lang's narrative format and rigorously define the issues to be analyzed.

Such an effort would require minimally the recognition of the great demographic, ethnic, and economic diversity within the Spanish empire. New Spain, I would argue, was always a special case because of its large population and its diverse resource base. In New Spain the growth of population in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century prepared the ground for the economic surge that followed upon the political and economic reforms initiated during the reign of Charles III. This enhanced potential for internal consumption in New Spain was as important in stimulating economic growth as were the reforms that sprang from the new political regime in Spain. In Buenos Aires, on the other hand, colonial reforms promoted more directly both urban population growth and a false regional prosperity that was founded almost completely upon direct and indirect government spending, rather than upon any meaningful increase in regional productivity.

These demographic and economic differences were reflected structurally in the social order. Because Lang never considers seriously either social structure or economy, he is able to gloss over the important regional differences in the content and results of the reform period. As a result he is able to conclude, without major reservations, that the reforms (new bureaucratic organizations, new taxes, more efficient tax collection, and the exclusion of creoles from office) provoked the movement for independence. If the hypothesis he offers is correct, then those colonial centers where the pre-reform political order was most entrenched would have experienced the greatest disruption during the reform and should have manifested strong opposition to the colonial regime. This, of course, was not the case. Lima and Mexico displayed tenacious loyalist tendencies until the end, while the peripheral colonial centers where the reforms confronted few entrenched obstacles and where the creoles clearly benefitted economically from the reforms were the centers from which the independence movements grew and were sustained.

Fisher's intelligent and careful study of the Peruvian silver industry is a useful and necessary companion to the better known studies of the contemporary Mexican mining industry. Fisher argues convincingly that Peru did not fall into economic decline after the creation of the viceroyalty of Río de la Plata in 1776 and the subsequent loss of control over the rich mining region of Upper Peru. From a postpartition low point of 246,000 marks of silver in 1777 Peruvian production rose to 637,000 marks by 1799. Although the disruption of Spanish mercury shipments adversely affected mining production in 1806–07, the amount of silver produced in Peruvian mines remained high until 1812.

These impressive results in mining production, although small achievements when compared with Mexico's late colonial mining boom, were accomplished despite a constant shortage of risk capital in the colony. This shortage of capital, aggravated by the unwillingness of Lima's export merchants to invest substantially in the mining industry, was compounded by technological backwardness, difficult terrain, high transportation costs, and high mercury prices. Any major expansion in production beyond the levels actually reached could only have been accomplished by an important alteration in one or more of these factors. Such a change appeared possible with the introduction of British-made steam technology in 1820, but this potentially fruitful process of innovation was aborted by the destruction occasioned by the wars for independence.

Fisher's study can also be read profitably by students of Spanish colonial bureaucracy. The endemic struggles with the Mining Tribunal and the nearly complete failure of the Nordenflicht mining mission to effect any meaningful improvement in either practical technology or technical education was the result of both local rivalries between miners and Lima's merchants and disruptive competition among the major figures in the local political structure. In the case of the Nordenflicht mission, these problems were exacerbated by the inability of the European experts to demonstrate satisfactorily to local miners that their techniques for extracting silver were in fact superior to local practice. Welcomed with great fanfare and anticipation in 1789, the mission hung on in diminished status as an embarrassing artifact of failure until 1811. In the case of the Peruvian mining industry, the organizational reforms seem to have been costly, disruptive failures. The growth in silver production resulted primarily from the reduced price and expanded supplies of mercury. That is, Peruvian mining expansion appears to have been accomplished without substantial social change or technological innovation. The impact of increased silver production on other areas of the Peruvian economy is not addressed by Fisher, but is central to any comprehensive evaluation of the reform period. How much of this economic growth was squandered on luxury consumption? How much

distributed in wages? In colonial economic history, the questions come easier than the answers.

Brown's study of Argentina's development as an exporter of agricultural and pastoral products is an ambitious and useful book that will be read widely by specialists interested in the Río de la Plata region. My only reservation about the book is that Brown consistently claims more for his study than he delivers. In the introduction Brown claims that he will provide an interpretive alternative to dependency theory and suggests that staple theory—developed primarily by economic historians interested in Canada—more adequately explains the Argentine case. Clearly the merits of dependency theory (in its many variations) are not yet established and staple theory may offer new insights into the development of the Argentine economy. However, Brown does not give either theory a thorough evaluation. Such an effort would require both more uniform documentation and a much more rigorously defined methodology.

Despite the title, Brown does not offer a close analysis of the relationship between economic change and social structure. This failure is particularly obvious since it is on this ground that dependency theory appears to offer its most important contribution. It would seem to me that a project as ambitious in its conceptualization as this would require the creation of a well-developed outline of the colonial social order and an effort to trace its transformation in response to changes in the national and international economies. Unfortunately, the social component of Brown's analysis suffers from both definitional ambiguity and a weak data base and is less useful than his discussion of changes in rural production and trade.

What Brown does do is present a clear, well-written narrative summary of existing knowledge on Argentine economic development from the creation of the viceroyalty of Río de la Plata in 1776 to the solidification of central authority in 1860. He also presents important new material on settlement patterns, particularly in the pampa, land use, and international commerce derived from Argentine, British, and United States materials that will be generally useful to students of the region. The section dealing with the colonial period is largely based on secondary materials of uneven merit, but the discussion of commerce and rural production for the later colonial period clearly benefits from Brown's greater reliance on original research.

Brown also provides a good overview of the colonial commercial structure that was dominated by the large merchants of Buenos Aires. Anyone interested in the colonial merchant class and its role in the regional economy should also read Susan Socolow's excellent *The Merchants of Buenos Aires, 1766–1810*, but Brown is particularly helpful on trade routes and commercial patterns.² The enhanced commercial and

political role assigned to the city by the Bourbon reforms promoted, in turn, the slow commercialization of the surrounding rural area. However, the region's economic development at least until 1810 was promoted more by the accretion of political and military functions in the city of Buenos Aires than by the growth of pastoral or agricultural production as would be suggested by staple theory. In fact, in the Río de la Plata, one is struck by the slow response of the rural sector to urban population growth, improvements in transportation, and the growth of credit.

The death of John Phelan was a great loss to the profession. The book reviewed here was in the final stages of preparation when he died and this must be kept in mind when reading it. The narrative discussion of the *comunero* revolt is at times repetitive and difficult to follow, but, despite these problems, the book is a valuable addition to the history of New Granada and to the reform period and demonstrates the same thorough scholarship and perceptiveness found in his earlier work.

Like John Lynch and others, Phelan saw the bureaucratic restructuring of the Bourbons, the new monopolies, heavier taxes, and resultant political struggles within the colonial apparatus as central to the subsequent growth of creole nationalism and the movement toward independence.³ Unlike many other commentators on the *comuneros*, Phelan did not view the revolt itself as a precursor to the later independence movement, and argues that the *comuneros* were not social revolutionaries. The movement was, according to Phelan, fundamentally conservative in intent, an effort to restore the pre-reform political balance between local power and imperial control. If there was a foreshadowing in the *comunero* revolt of later political tendencies in Colombia, it was of postindependence anticlericalism and federalism.

Phelan prefaces his analysis of the events of 1781 with an excellent review of the imperial reforms undertaken during the reign of Charles III and discusses in much greater depth their impact in New Granada. These reforms had both political and economic components. The old viceroalties that concentrated power in Lima and Mexico were reduced in power and size and New Granada and the Río de la Plata were granted both vastly expanded political status and new economic opportunities within an invigorated imperial commerce. The Spanish crown imposed new administrative officers, like the intendants, throughout the Empire and abolished some existing offices, *corregidores*, in order to compel a more uniform colonial administration. As a result of the reform, taxes were collected directly by crown officers and new, highly remunerative monopolies on playing cards, tobacco, and *aguardiente* (*pulque* in Mexico) were created. By reforming the tax structure—especially reducing taxes on mineral production and reducing the cost of mercury—and by liberalizing trade within the empire, the imperial gov-

ernment helped to stimulate further and prolong a period of colonial economic growth that had begun previously in response to population growth and enhanced demand in the colonial market place.

Both Phelan and Arcila Fariás are correct in pointing out that the rapid expansion of employment in new or enlarged bureaucracies and the rapid development of the colonial military establishment explain an important part of the area's economic growth in the late eighteenth century. The Bourbon reforms created a vast new class of consumers, the employees of the colonial regime, whose demands for goods and services help explain the growth in both international and local trade. By concentrating their attention on the decline in creole participation at the highest levels of the colonial political order, the *audiencia*, many historians have missed the gross increase in creole office holding that resulted from the expanded fiscal and military establishments and from the creation of crown monopolies. At least at this point in the development of the literature, it is unclear whether the political disaffection of prominent creoles that resulted from the discriminatory appointments of peninsular Spaniards to high colonial office was historically more significant than the enhanced (and largely unexplored) political consciousness developed by large numbers of creoles and *castas* drawn into the expanded civilian and military establishments.

This entire process was accomplished coincidentally with the reorientation of the colonial economy away from local markets and small-scale production and toward the European market (particularly for tropical products) and the increased concentration of wealth and economic power in the hands of the export sector. The colonial economy (and attendant social order) that resulted from these changes was both larger and more vulnerable than the pre-reform economic order and was much less able to withstand the disruptions caused by the European wars that brought the reform to a close.

NOTES

1. Richard Boyer, "New Views of Colonial Mexico," *Canadian Journal of History/Annales Canadiennes D'Histoire* 14, no. 1 (Apr. 1980):83.
2. Susan Migden Socolow, *The Merchants of Buenos Aires 1778–1810* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
3. John Lynch, *Spanish Colonial Administration, 1782–1810: The Indendant System in the Viceroyalty of the Rio de la Plata* (London: Athlone Press, 1958).