

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

All Politics Are Local: Nineteenth-Century Mexico Revisited

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This essay reviews the following works:

Popular Politics and Rebellion in Mexico: Manuel Lozada and La Reforma, 1855–1876. By Zachary Brittsan. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 220. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780826520449.

El jefe político: Un dominio negociado en el mundo rural del Estado de México, 1856–1911. By Romana Falcón. Mexico City: El Colegio de México; El Colegio de Michoacán; CIESAS, 2015. Pp. 9 + 744. \$39.99 paper. ISBN: 9786074627381.

Independent Mexico: The *Pronunciamiento* in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821–1858. By Will Fowler. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. Pp. viii + 362. \$40.00 paper. ISBN: 9780803225398.

Mexico's Supreme Court: Between Liberal Individual and Revolutionary Social Rights, 1867–1934. By Timothy M. James. Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 2013. Pp. ix + 149. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780826353788.

Conflict and Carnage in Yucatán: Liberals, the Second Empire, and Maya Revolutionaries, 1855–1876. By Douglas W. Richmond. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 177. \$49.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780817318703.

Las élites empresariales y la independencia económica de México: Estevan de Antuñano o las vicisitudes del fundador de la industria textil moderna, 1792–1847. By Evelyne Sanchez. Mexico: Plaza y Valdés Editores, 2013. Pp. ix + 363. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9786074026177.

The political history of nineteenth-century Mexico has made a comeback. Until the 1970s the research of Walter V. Scholes, Nelson Reed, Lesley Byrd Simpson, and others predominated, painting a picture of confusion, chaos, lawlessness, caudillo leadership, and economic instability.¹ Everyday folks did not appear in the narratives. Women were seemingly nonexistent. History was a parade of regime changes and a list of the forty or so men who occupied the presidency. Thereafter, with the proliferation of regional histories and the introduction of everyday people, especially women, into the story, the picture of the nineteenth century changed. Beginning with a thorough reexamination of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1877–1911), and then gradually working from independence through midcentury, historians discovered, first, that there was far more order and continuity than chaos; second, that the economy apart from mining was steady or perhaps stagnant, rather than in depression; third, that country folk had a lot of say in local and national politics rather than serving as tools of charismatic despots; and fourth, that women contributed mightily to all aspects of politics, economy, and society rather than having no influence over

¹ Walter V. Scholes, *Mexican Politics during the Juárez Regime, 1855–1872* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1957); Nelson Reed, *The Caste War of Yucatán*, rev ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Lesley Byrd Simpson, *Many Mexicos*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960).

their own lives. This latest cohort of books, written by Mexican and U.S. historians, however, has turned back the historiographical clock.

For much of the past four decades, Mexican history has focused on the regions outside Mexico City. The studies produced by Mexican, European, and U.S. historians were researched meticulously in local, state, and federal archives. Turning the focus away from the capital resulted in less attention to the larger-than-life figures such as Antonio López de Santa and Benito Juárez, and more on the circumstances and contributions of everyday people. The research emphasized continuities, not chaos, and negotiable interactions, not tyranny. Underlying the great events of the forming nation, such as multiple foreign invasions and a thirteen-year civil war, these investigations found functioning arrangements that served most entities more or less well during most of the half century after independence. The major disruption came in the form of the Liberal revolution at midcentury. Likely disillusioned by the humiliating loss of half the national territory to their upstart neighbor to the north, some Mexicans looked for a new path; the old ways were no longer satisfactory. Mexico required a way to modernity. Liberals saw the route to modernization through the end of the economic domination of the Catholic Church and the privatization of collectively held lands. They also initially espoused personal liberties and local and regional autonomy (federalism), though they soon abandoned much of the latter advocacy when resistance to their plans for economic development required centralized government and coercion to implement.

The wake of the vicious suppression of dissidents in Mexico during the 1960s produced a widespread reevaluation of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920?), which set off an explosion of research into the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911), seeking to find the origins of both the revolution and the recently discredited revolutionary state. Inspired at least in part by Luis González, historians, including myself, sought the answers in the regions (Chihuahua in my case).² Regional history produced and still produces many excellent studies too numerous to mention here. The next generation (roughly speaking) looked to fill in another important gap, independence and postindependence.³ Taking their cue from their predecessors, the new researchers concentrated on the regions as well.⁴ By 2000, historians began to tackle perhaps the toughest era, the midcentury war with the United States and the Liberal-Conservative civil wars. These latter two cohorts came with an agenda to give voice to everyday folks.

When the trend toward regional history began in the late 1960s or early 1970s, there probably was a tendency to stress economic factors in determining motivations: protests against taxation and against hacienda land grabs, for example. Over time, however, the emphasis shifted to noneconomic factors, such as the defense of “a way of life,” local autonomy, and Catholicism.

The books under consideration in this essay pretty much return to the pre-1970 days, emphasizing politics, with little or no attention paid to everyday folk, culture, or gender, though they are by no means as unsophisticated as the earlier studies. There is nowhere, for example, a chapter about Santa Anna’s leg, as there was in Simpson’s *Many Mexicos*.⁵ These studies also present a shift in interpretation. Although they recognize and affirm the importance of the struggle of Liberalism-federalism against Conservatism-centralism, they attempt to revise the place of Conservatives in nineteenth-century Mexico, putting them in a much more positive light than have recent and past historians (mostly reflecting the view of the victorious Liberals). These books argue that Conservatives better represented the people in the countryside in championing the church and traditional values.

The first fifty years of Mexican independence were once known as the age of caudillos, dominated by colorful, strong, national or regional military leaders, usually with a loyal, local popular base, and often with independent resources. The most famous Mexican caudillo was arguably Antonio López de Santa Anna. But there were others of considerable note, such as Santiago Vidaurri, who ruled northeastern Mexico at midcentury, and Juan Álvarez, who controlled much of southern Mexico through the 1860s. Another noteworthy regional boss was Manuel Lozada, the subject of Zachary Brittsan’s *Popular Politics and Rebellion in Mexico: Manuel Lozada and La Reforma, 1855–1876*. Lozada’s career was obscured by the fact that he

² See Luis González y González, *Pueblo en vilo: Microhistoria de San José de Gracia* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1972); Mark Wasserman, *Capitalists, Caciques, and Revolution: The Native Elite and Foreign Enterprise in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1854–1911* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

³ See, for example, Peter F. Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico’s National State: Guerrero, 1800–1857* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), and Karen D. Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens: Local Liberalism in Early National Oaxaca and Yucatán* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁴ Not everyone, of course, followed the trend. Timothy Anna, Michael Costeloe, Josefina Vázquez, Barbara Tenenbaum, and Donald Stevens, to name just a few, looked at the early republic from a national perspective.

⁵ Santa Anna’s leg was blown off in the defense of Veracruz against France’s brief invasion in 1837. Santa Anna in this episode reclaimed the honor he lost when he lost Texas the year earlier. He later buried the leg with full military honors.

led a rebellion in the little-known southwestern reaches of Jalisco, which now form the state of Nayarit. Based in Tepic and the neighboring Sierra de Álica, the seventh canton of the state of Jalisco, Lozada, with the apparent backing of the foreign merchant house Barron, Forbes and Company and the Catholic Church hierarchy, ruled the region as what Brittsan calls a popular conservative, successfully defending against the nationally victorious Liberals led by Benito Juárez. For nearly two decades, until his execution in 1873, Lozada held sway virtually unchallenged; even the relentless, tough-as-nails Juárez would not take him on. Understanding how exactly the regional boss pulled this off against the overwhelming victory of the Liberals in the long national civil war from 1854 through 1867, and subsequent Juárez and Lerdo presidencies, would go a long way in helping us comprehend politics in nineteenth-century Mexico.

Brittsan maintains that Lozada tapped the “local cultural value system and generated a groundswell of support from everyday people, which challenged the elite worldview” (4). There were three pillars of this culture: local autonomy, collective landowning, and the Catholic Church. Thus, Lozada’s folk opposed the essence of mid-nineteenth-century Mexican Liberalism. Brittsan, however, considers Lozada’s dominance a purely local phenomenon having little to do with national politics (other than to negotiate being left alone or to fend off invasions from the outside), and still less to do with national ideologies. Moreover, Brittsan rejects any concrete comparisons with other (though admittedly similar) rebellions elsewhere. His thesis boils down to this: for thirty years after independence, the people of Nayarit were pretty much left alone to do as they had done for centuries, but then the modernizers or Liberals appeared, won the civil wars from 1853 to 1867, and threatened to impose their worldview and policies on them. Lozada led the resistance. So strong was the opposition that the Liberals were not able to defeat popular conservatism in Jalisco even though they had won the national civil wars.

In some ways Brittsan reinforces the long-held Liberal stereotypes of country people as backward, anti-progressive, religious obstacles to modern development. Although his depiction of the people of Nayarit is sketchy, he points out that they were mostly indigenous, had workable Spanish but were illiterate, and rarely, if ever, ventured out of the seventh canton. Brittsan surmises, admittedly with very little evidence, that they were more religious than populations elsewhere. Their leader Lozada is something of a mystery as well. He was an outlaw for years before he led his rebellion and based his fortune on smuggling in partnership with the British merchants Barron and Forbes. To reinforce the Liberal portrait of the country folks as ignorant brutes, Brittsan reveals that Lozada was ruthless. During the War of the Reform (1858–1860) the seventh canton became a zone of terror. Lozada slaughtered 260 people in one instance. Though to be sure, his fiercest opponent Liberal Antonio Rojas conducted a harsh campaign in response.

Much is missing from the story as Brittsan tells it. First, as mentioned above, we do not learn much about the Lozada rank and file. Though the majority of the people of the canton were indigenous, were his supporters mostly indios or mestizos? Were they victims of the Liberal reforms? Did they lose their collective lands? Brittsan discovered that there were many land disputes, to be sure, and that Lozada set up commissions to arbitrate, but it is not clear that these conflicts were the result of the Liberal reforms. Did Lozada have support among local leadership at the village level? Did he have to negotiate constantly with these local leaders? Brittsan found that Lozada held annual gatherings of the villages and presumably their leaders attended. But we do not know how these meetings functioned and how much Lozada took the local people’s suggestions and complaints to heart. Brittsan’s picture of Lozada is not one of a benevolent democrat. How did he raise his army? Were soldiers volunteers or conscripts? In Brittsan’s telling, his soldiers seem to appear magically. How big was the army? Brittsan provides readers with an estimate of seven thousand for the 1872 campaign against Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada, who succeeded Benito Juárez as president. This was 10 percent of the region’s population, an extraordinary number. Was his army always this large? Did his followers pillage, plunder, and rape, like so many other rebels? (The Zapatistas did later on, for example.) Did they wear out their welcome in the pueblos, like so many other insurgent groups, when their demands for supplies and their rough treatment of the villagers grew oppressive? Brittsan determined that after failing to initiate a rebellion in 1873, the “massive number of rural residents” who had mobilized returned home quickly. Had Lozada’s constant fighting for nearly two decades finally alienated at least some of his support? What role did intervillage rivalries have in the revolt? And what of the large landowners of the Sierra de Álica (if there were any)? Or the merchants? These were the main beneficiaries of the confiscation of church lands and privatization of collective holdings elsewhere. Did they back Lozada? Or tolerate him? Did he terrorize them?

Because he was on the losing side of the civil wars at midcentury, and the victorious Liberals wrote the history that ensued, Lozada was consigned to the ash heap of history until very recently. He was shunted aside perhaps because, for much of his career, he was a bandit, then a brutal military leader, a

traitor—collaborator with the French—and a relentless opponent of Mexico's greatest nineteenth-century hero, Benito Juárez. Brittsan maintains that Lozano's resurrection owes to the rehabilitation of Zapata and the recognition that the Liberals, despite their triumphs, had ignored a crucial element of the Mexican population, the country folk.

The atmosphere of chaos is nowhere put forth more strongly than by Douglas Richmond in *Conflict and Carnage in Yucatán*, which examines two decades of peninsular politics at midcentury. Hemmed in by excellent studies by Terry Rugeley, Karen Caplan, and Allen Wells,⁶ Richmond has limited himself to what he describes as the attempted implementation of Liberal ideology during the era of the Liberal-Conservative civil wars that tore apart Mexico during this “unstudied” era. The Liberal agenda—consisting of a brutal campaign against the Roman Catholic Church, advocacy of free trade and secular education, and the privatization of indigenous collectively held lands—was in his estimate a failure, because the overwhelming majority of Yucatecans opposed it. In this assessment he echoes Brittsan's theme that the Liberals were far from the noble heroes of nineteenth-century Mexico, for they were often foolish and certainly chose to look away from the country folk, who made up the vast majority of the population. On the other hand, Richmond maintains that Yucatecan elites, though far from unified, favored Liberal policies and attempted to force them on the peninsula. Richmond unabashedly makes the Liberals the villains of the story.

Two other factors contributed to the political disarray in Yucatán. The Maya, who made up most of the population of the peninsula, never surrendered to either the Spaniards or their successors, the Mexicans. Particularly in the eastern regions of the state, the Maya operated their own independent entities, consistently fighting the Yucatecan and federal governments to a standstill. The most notable manifestation of this resistance was the Caste War. The conflict with the Maya, which was not over until after 1900 (if then), was a particular problem; successive state governments failed to put down the rebellion because they did not have sufficient funding to prosecute the campaign against the Maya. Second, from the beginning of the Mexican nation, non-Mayan Yucatecans exhibited an ornery streak of independence, on multiple occasions proclaiming their autonomy from Mexico and in some instances looking for another country to join through annexation.

The two decades of Yucatecan politics under study are confusing. There were multiple groups in conflict. First, the Caste War cast a shadow over all aspects of peninsular society, economy, and politics for over half a century, from 1847 to 1901. Second, elites in Mérida were at odds with other regions of the state over local autonomy. Third, the residents of Campeche, then a part of Yucatán, sought their own state. Fourth, though Richmond does not explain these, there were varied economic interests, such as those of the planters who grew henequen, those who grew sugar cane, and cattle ranchers. The most critical result of these competitions was almost incessant warfare between Campeche and Yucatán, and Yucatán and the Maya, who rebelled under the auspices of the Speaking Cross. It is quite difficult to keep track of all the intrigues, shifting alliances, overthrows, and revolts. Constant through all of the disruptions, according to Richmond, was the endless venality, brutality, and incompetence of successive Liberal regimes in Yucatán. One charlatan followed another into the governorship. Whatever heroes he identifies were Conservatives, in particular the “tall, handsome, easy-to-get-along-with” José Salazar Ilarregui, who governed under Maximilian.

Richmond's narrative, too, seems incomplete. Most important, we do not know who made up the various factions. He presents a list of governors, sometimes with short biographies. But we do not know who supported them, other than the generic Liberals. While we know pretty clearly why the Maya were discontented, it is not evident why anyone else, the people of Campeche, for example, were willing to rebel with armed force. Was the conflict all about local autonomy? Richmond's telling of the tale emphasizes the personal attributes of individual governors.

Both Brittsan and Richmond write within the bounds of regional history, but unlike the most recent research they reinforce the narratives of chaos and personalism, whose shelf life expired long ago. The authors are telling the story from the margins. Political manipulations among generals and politicians take center stage. Certainly, there is good history here. The problems lie in the disjuncture between the argument and the narrative. Both Brittsan and Richmond maintain (undoubtedly correctly) that there was forceful resistance to the nationally victorious Liberal agenda in the countryside. But the stories they tell are not

⁶ Terry Rugeley, *Rebellion Now and Forever: Maya, Hispanics, and Caste War Violence in Yucatán, 1800–1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), *Of Wonders and Wise Men: Religion and Popular Cultures in Southeast Mexico, 1800–1876* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), and *Yucatán's Maya Peasantry and the Origins of the Caste War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Karen D. Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens: Local Liberalism in Early National Oaxaca and Yucatán* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Allen Wells, *Yucatán's Gilded Age: Haciendas, Henequen, and International Harvester, 1860–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985).

about the substance and operation of the resistance, but rather the political and personal machinations that accompanied it.

Three of the books under consideration here explore terms that, while they are very familiar to historians, are not well understood: *pronunciamiento*, *amparo*, and *jefe político*—roughly translated, proclamation, injunction, and political boss. The explanation of these terms in terms of both abstract concepts and concrete examples provides historians with some interesting insights into nineteenth-century politics in Mexico. They nonetheless represent a return to an earlier approach to history.

In the nineteenth century as related by Simpson and others, the *pronunciamientos* were a symbol of the constant disruptions and discontinuities of the politics of the post-independence era. They were seemingly endless in number—more than 1,500 from 1821 to 1876—and their names were mostly forgettable.⁷ Will Fowler, *Independent Mexico: The Pronunciamiento in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821–1858*, explores in depth these phenomena. He categorizes them according to what “they specifically set out to achieve” (11). First, there were “start-up” or parent *pronunciamientos*, which explained how they had come to pass and set out demands. Next Fowler identifies the reactive *pronunciamientos* (*pronunciamientos de adhesión*). These usually incorporated additional demands to the original. These *pronunciamientos* often became regional start-ups in their own right. Fowler sees a third type in the *pronunciamiento de rechazo*, or counter-*pronunciamiento*, in which an entity, such as a garrison, announces its support of the government against another *pronunciamiento*. A fourth kind was the follow-up, which petitioners issued to clarify their demands or react to counters from the powers that were. Lastly were the *despronunciamientos* or the issuer’s repentance. Interestingly, even though these proclamations were extralegal, they relatively infrequently led to violence.

There are some surprising aspects to Fowler’s findings. In the first half of the nineteenth century, only fifteen of these plans had national impact. Furthermore, Fowler maintains that these plans were important because they expressed the ideas of the factions and political parties of their era and were a means through which news was spread, politicizing the population. Finally, the preponderance of the *pronunciamientos* were not announced by the military.

Fowler, quite in agreement with both Brittsan and Richmond, argues that the underlying cause of discontent—which in turn resulted in the plethora of *pronunciamientos*—was the ongoing attacks on the Catholic Church begun by the Bourbons at the outset of the eighteenth century and continued even more vigorously by nineteenth-century Mexican Liberals. This persecution politicized the countryside. Fowler also reinforces the notion that politics were local and that upheavals, revolts, and movements were almost entirely local in origins.

Fowler discerns, through close reading of the *pronunciamientos* and putting them in the broader context, the major issues that dominated the decade after independence. The roles of the military and regional authorities were paramount. Furthermore, the defense of regional autonomy and the quest for meaningful political representation were also crucial elements of the discourse. What emerges in the decade or so that follows is that subalterns (nonelites) were thoroughly engaged, not only understanding the issues but in a few cases participating in the promulgation of the *pronunciamientos*. Fowler discovers a number of the proclamations put forth by indigenous peoples. Thus, Fowler reinforces two crucial trends in the historiography of Mexico’s nineteenth century: everyday people had a lot to say as active participants in politics, and many of the protests were in response to the attempts to impose Liberal policies on a reluctant countryside (that is, the regions outside Mexico City).

Pronunciamientos had proliferated to such an extent that by the 1840s some political observers blamed them for the contemporary “backwardness and decadence” of the republic (190). Liberals and Conservatives alike denounced them, even though, of course, they would proclaim one, if it suited their purposes. Fowler sees the 1840s, too, as a turning point, for the *pronunciamientos* became more national, more frequent, more violent, more brutal, and concerned less with negotiating than with overthrowing the current incumbent regime.

Fowler concludes that because the government lacked “authority and legitimacy,” the *pronunciamiento* “as a practice, method, or course of action became without question the most common and widespread means of bringing about meaningful political change in Independent Mexico” (146). Mexicans used them

⁷ Perhaps most notable were the Plan de Iguala (1821), which declared Mexican independence, led by Agustín de Iturbide; the Plan de Ayutla (1854), which propelled the Liberal overthrow of Antonio López de Santa Anna; and the Plan de Tuxtepec (1876), which ushered in the regime of Porfirio Díaz.

as a tool to preserve the constitution (whichever of the several) from government abuse. Anyone who was anyone—every major politician—at one time or another participated in a pronunciamiento.

Timothy M. James, in *Mexico's Supreme Court: Between Liberal Individual and Revolutionary Social Rights, 1867–1934*, makes the argument that Mexico's highest judiciary institution, the Supreme Court, was far more independent both during the Porfiriato and during the revolutionary reconstruction years from 1917 to 1934 than historians have believed. His investigations center on amparo (protection), the concept/tool well used during the Díaz era to protect individual rights from the dictatorship and later, after the promulgation of the Constitution of 1917, the primary instrument of obstruction against the radical social reforms of the revolution. The study makes an interesting contribution with its insistence on the importance of the at times ubiquitous but little understood amparo. The concept originated in the Constitution of 1824, which in its article 24 implored federal tribunals to "protect all inhabitants of the republic in the exercise and conservation of those rights that the Constitution and constitutional laws provide." As established by the Constitution of 1857, the amparo was meant to protect the rights of private individuals. Specifically, the amparo was to proceed "against any public authority that infringed on one of the first twenty-nine articles of the Constitution (titled Of the Rights of Man)." James maintains that during the Restored Republic (1867–1876) and Díaz dictatorship, amparo did just that more often than we would have thought.

James points out that the revolutionary Constituent Convention of 1916–1917, which formulated the Constitution of 1917, reached consensus about the role of the federal judiciary along similar lines. The delegates were surprisingly knowledgeable about the nineteenth-century debates about the place of the judiciary and the function and scope of amparo. The delegates pushed to strengthen judicial autonomy and supremacy. They sought, too, to protect individual rights and believed that the amparo suit was the best guarantee against despotism. The crucial argument at the convention concerned the extent to which individual rights were to be protected when they conflicted with social rights. While the right to property, for example, was an individual right, this came up against the constitution's mandate of agrarian reform (inevitably involving expropriations of private property). The new social rights, in fact, were not intended to be protected by amparo; only individual rights would be protected. However, the Mexican tradition of judicial protection of liberal rights to security, property, and liberty would, of course, be used by opponents of social reforms. James maintains that the initiation of rethinking social rights vis-à-vis individual rights in subsequent revolutionary administrations (oddly?) did not include reassessing amparo. What James is arguing is that in January 1917, the delegates thought that it was possible to have both transformative social and economic reforms that could engender far-reaching improvements in the lives of workers and peasants, while at the same time maintaining the "bourgeois" legality of the previous constitution of 1857, which protected individual rights. The tool to protect those rights was amparo. Unfortunately, during the 1920s it became the primary obstacle to the implementation of the social rights inherent in the Constitution of 1917. After thousands of amparos were issued by the court, stalling agrarian reform, constitutional amendments in 1928, 1931, and 1934 took away the strident independence of the court (lifetime tenure for the justices in particular) and removed agrarian reform from its jurisdiction. These changes were to pave the way for the unprecedented redistribution of lands by the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas.

Central to the long nineteenth-century struggle for local autonomy were the district bosses, or *jefes políticos*, who served as crucial operators on the local level. These *jefes* exercised legislative, judicial, and administrative functions. The oppression of the *jefes* is often presented as one of the primary causes of revolutionary discontent during the first decade of the twentieth century. Although it is pretty clear that many of these *jefes* remained quite independent and powerful, Romana Falcón, in *El jefe político: Un dominio negociado en el mundo rural del Estado de México, 1856–1911*, maintains that gradually, during the Díaz era, the *jefes* became less the products of local politics and more likely tools of the central government, no longer elected at the municipal level but rather appointed by governors or Díaz himself. Falcón illuminates our understanding of politics from independence through 1910 by examining in detail its operations at the district and municipal levels in the state of Mexico.

What we know for certain, and Falcón concurs, is that there was a lot of bargaining between the different levels of government. For much of the nineteenth century the relationship between the pueblos, municipalities, state governments, and central government were not one-sided. There was room for maneuver. In the state of Mexico, and probably everywhere else, political power depended on the balance of factions and the ability to master the informal client networks.

The districts the *jefes* administered in the state of Mexico consisted of a considerable number of sub-entities: municipalities, villas, pueblos, barrios, haciendas, ranchos, and rancherías. Falcón points out that conflict was constant among these, especially between pueblos, between pueblos and *ayuntamientos* (municipal councils), and between *hacendados* and *rancheros*, and between haciendas and pueblos. They fought to defend their perceived rights and privileges. Primarily they struggled over land, forests, and water. There were ethnic and religious differences as well. The *jefes políticos* stood squarely in the middle of all these conflicts.

Falcón emphasizes the disruptions to the countryside during the years of the Reform and French Intervention (1857–1867), when the eventually triumphant Liberals enacted and then enforced laws that broke up the collective landholdings so important to the pueblos. Under the Restored Republic (1867–1876) and then the Porfiriato (1877–1911), the Liberals (totally going against their once fierce defense of local autonomy) vastly tightened tax collection and other fiscal aspects of government. All of this engendered strong resistance at the local level. The *jefes políticos* were, of course, in the center of this profound conflict as well.

The crucial aspect of the disruptions brought on by the Liberal Reform era was the transfer of land from the church and, most importantly, from the communal villages to individuals. The Liberals envisioned a strong core of yeoman farmers to provide the backbone for the development of the economy and democracy. The appropriation of communal landholdings has been regarded by most historians as the primary cause of the revolution in 1910. Country people (especially in Morelos), according to this analysis, rose up in arms in protest against the theft of their tradition-bound properties by greedy *hacendados* and politicians. Falcón, in a long section in the middle of the book, complicates this rendition of the process of shifting landownership. She maintains that it is not clear that the land was stolen, and that it was not always large landowners who benefitted from the Reform laws. Merchants, muleteers, and others obtained lands. Falcón argues that in the state of Mexico the impact of the transfers of land was varied. Some entities were affected more than others were. In the municipality of Lerma, for example, the agrarian transformations provoked radical changes in the structure of the pueblo.

Falcón is quite in keeping with the themes of Brittsan, Richmond, and Fowler in discerning that local politics was at the heart of nineteenth-century conflicts, focusing on the intrusions of Liberal policies concerning the Catholic Church and privatization of corporate landholdings. And she, like the others, concludes that everyday folk were in the middle of the debates, maneuverings, and violence, and that the national government was not at any point sufficiently strong to impose its policies at the state or local levels. Much negotiation thus ensued.

We can make sense of the nineteenth century, then, by understanding that the core of politics was the struggle to maintain local autonomy in order to retain local cultures and values. The conflict took place in different ways. Locals published their protests, negotiated with government entities above them, joined with others in common cause, and employed violence, when deemed necessary. There also were institutional limitations to federal government authority, in addition to these forms of resistance. People used the courts—far more independent and effective in protecting rights in chaos or dictatorship than one might think—to maintain their rights, and intermediaries such as *jefes políticos* to negotiate their interests. Nineteenth-century Mexican politics were not a jumble of erratic personalities, dominated by chronically disgruntled military, but a rather consistent interplay between proponents of different visions of what their nation should be.

The economic picture of nineteenth-century Mexico has also changed over the past four decades, but not as radically as the analysis of politics. Mexico suffered badly as a consequence of the long wars of independence. The fighting took a heavy toll, with likely a million deaths and incalculable damage to infrastructure and to the leading industry, mining. The problems were not uniform through the country, however. Commerce and industry were hurt, at least temporarily, by the expulsion of Spaniards in 1829. Continued warfare in the north against indigenous peoples stunted the economy of that region. Four foreign invasions and the Texas War led to disproportionate allocation of government resources to the armed forces, and widespread anxieties that discouraged investments in economic enterprises. But in aggregate the economy continued to function, sometimes at a steady level; there was at worst stagnation and at best modest economic growth.

The career of Estevan de Antuñano (1792–1847), as presented by Evelyne Sánchez in *Las élites empresariales y la independencia económica de México*, is evidence of how an economy, not in ruins but extremely hazardous and risky, functioned. Antuñano, an orphan, married into a wealthy family that had

suffered considerably in the aftermath of the wars of independence. Like so many other wealthy landowners, the family had seen the value of its haciendas plummet. In helping to found the textile industry in Puebla during the 1830s and establishing the first mechanized textile mill in Mexico, Antuñano confronted the various obstacles to investment that plagued the country during this period. First, he struggled to raise capital, initially using family connections to raise funds, then taking advantage of his relationship with Lucas Alamán—the prominent politician and the mover and shaker behind the Banco de Avío, a kind of national bank for economic development—to obtain additional investment. Textile manufacture was an attractive investment, despite the uncertainties of the times, because there was a domestic source for the raw materials, local expertise left over from the colonial textile industry, and a domestic market for the product. For at least this window of time there was native Mexican capital willing to invest locally. Those with funds to invest often siphoned them into high-interest loans to the federal government (the infamous *agiotistas*). But Antuñano ran into difficulties, because he had to import machinery and the cost and unreliability of transportation proved to badly disadvantage his venture.

Antuñano complained often and bitterly about the uncertainties caused by the constant changing of governments. Contraband competition undermined the domestic market for textiles. There were no efficient government instruments for preventing smuggling.

As John Coatsworth pointed out nearly forty years ago, there is no question that Mexico fell irremediably behind the United States during the hundred years after independence in terms of population, gross national product, and many other economic measurements.⁸ And, as he also maintains, it was in large part the failure to create the infrastructure in the areas of law and order and transportation and communications that discouraged domestic and foreign investment and stymied economic development. Certainly, this analysis reinforces the general view of nineteenth-century Mexico as a place of disorder. The case of the ventures of Antuñano and Alamán in textile manufacturing complicates this interpretation by illustrating how there were possibilities for industrialization when investment capital was available, despite the difficulties, although in the long term they did not succeed.

Taken as a group, the studies under consideration hark back to earlier, now discredited approaches to nineteenth-century Mexico; they are nonetheless informed by two generations of historians who have placed subaltern culture at the center of their analyses. They advance our knowledge by modifying the ascendant historiography primarily by emphasizing the strength of the opposition to the victorious Liberal program. Although they do not illuminate the composition of the resistance in the countryside, they make it clear that rural folks, for whatever reasons (defense of religion, defense of collectively held lands), were willing to fight to preserve their local autonomy. We also learn that there was inherent stability. James, for example, argues that from the Reform through the revolutionary reconstruction, the rule of law (at least the judiciary) was surprisingly strong, which by implication argues for a more stable political environment than we once thought.

These six works continue the successful effort to demystify the political and economic history of nineteenth-century Mexico. Despite employing somewhat old-fashioned approaches, they have added to our ever-growing knowledge of what was once a dark (and confusing) abyss.

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⁸ John H. Coatsworth, "Obstacles to Economic Growth in Nineteenth Century Mexico," *American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (1978): 80–100.

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