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### Martin Minchom, People of Quito, 1690-1810: Change and Unrest in the Underclass

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## Book Reviews

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*People of Quito, 1690-1810: Change and Unrest in the Underclass.* By Martin Minchom. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994. xvii + 297 pp. Maps, charts, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$48.50 paper.)

*The People of Quito*, Martin Minchom notes in his preface, began as a broad analysis of late colonial Quito, its urban configuration and economic evolution, supplemented by a more narrowly focused analysis of the local market system, and—his principal contribution—the demographics of "non-elite urban groups." The last third of his study shifts to different terrain as he tries to tie certain parishes to protest movements between 1809-1810.

The time-frame ranges from the mid-sixteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, highlighting the long phase of the contraction of Quito's once important woolen manufacturing industry from the late seventeenth century onward; the wide repercussions of economic recession; and the socio-economic involvement of Catholic organizations, notably the Franciscan order. There is a close reading of late eighteenth-century demographic materials: Minchom finds a rise in female-headed households in two parishes (San Roque, San Sebastián) and a high percentage of white-mestizo households. Overall, the data leads him to suggest a basic two-fold social differentiation in Quito (population 25,000), reflecting a "clear racial dimension..." (p. 62) between the white elite (that is, *criollo*) and "popular" society; in between were upwardly mobile, elite-oriented mestizos. Parish data for San Roque constitutes the basis for his findings of "communal cohesion" coupled to "class antagonism" as structural factors of the city's political instability, notably in 1747 and 1765. San Roque, in particular, was marked by many nucleated households and by few elite (*criollo*) families. It was the "parish of popular artisan groups" (mainly tailors, carpenters, barbers) situated close to Quito's central plaza—a "fairly homogenous popular parish with clear collective leadership..." (p. 214) and distinguished by a sense of "community and social class..." (p. 215). This barrio with a "Mestizo identity" was also the scene of accelerated in-migration and social tension. By 1762, San Roque's mestizos feared the erosion of their status as Indians poured into Quito, many seeking to pass as *cholos* (or non-Indians) by adopting mestizo dress to avoid the *tributo*, or tax.

Intervention by colonial authorities investigating illegal aguardiente operations by Franciscans colluding with San Roque parishioners was mainly responsible, according to Minchom, for the 1747 urban unrest. Quito's much studied riots of 1765, the "rebellion of the barrios..." (p. 222), were a reaction

to Madrid's policy of tightening fiscal management by absorbing into state administration tax collections hitherto leased to private contractors linked to some *oidores* of Quito's *audiencia*. Inopportune enforcement of that policy, which would spread the net of taxpayers and increase the tax burden, coincided not only with a deepening of the economic recession in the woolen industry, but also with epidemic disease. Elites, church hierarchy, and the *audiencia* initially opted for overt protest in a *cabildo abierto*. However, once an ill-fated "group of peninsular Spaniards" (p. 226) fired on bystanders, an act followed by lower class violence, the elites backed off. Based upon an official report, Minchom concludes that those responsible for the movement were really from the lower class—women, Indians, and mestizos ("la ínfima plebe")—fearing the imposition of new taxes (p. 232). The "roots of unrest [were] at the lower level of Quito society, beneath and beyond the 'known' Quito society..." (p. 233). More specifically, Minchom underscores as the "engine of unrest" the "popular, homogenous 'Mestizo' barrio of San Roque..." (p. 232).

Two results of the 1765 upheaval were, predictably, the distancing of the urban elite from the lower classes and the latter's curious passivity during subsequent protest movements widespread in the Central Andes in the 1780s. Even when the Spanish Bourbon government collapsed under French pressure in 1808, the move toward local autonomy in Quito lacked pressure from below. In 1809, political instability was a "closed aristocratic affair of a hierarchical, inward-looking region with a white and a substantial Indian population" (p. 242); motivating *criollo* protest were "separateness" and "real or imagined economic grievances" (p. 241). Minchom does not explain why the once politically restive parishioners of San Roque seem oddly passive in the critical years, 1809-1810.

Minchom's careful marshaling of social data, his attempt to identify elements of the Quito crowd, and to link them to political activism, are reminiscent of pathbreaking social history by Soboul (1958) and Rudé (1959). Their studies, however, dealt with a truly major event of national and international repercussions, the French Revolution, while Minchom's principal findings cover an urban *motín* in what was, in 1765, a colonial backwater. Moreover, the unforeseen instability of 1809 and 1810 lacked strong popular support. On the other hand, *The People of Quito's* principal contribution is methodological, an example of how to go about understanding the social dynamics of a late colonial city in Spanish America as well as the "autonomous aspirations" of its "popular" parishes.

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