

functioning republic, from Iturbide's fleeting ten-month empire in 1823 to Santa Anna's intermittent presidency between 1833 and 1855. The book closes with a final analysis of the prospect of the Mexican economy at mid nineteenth century, particularly the tensions between an unreliable silver economy and an industrialization unable to take off due to insufficient communication infrastructure, an unstable political environment, and a market dependent on poor Mexicans.

Van Young is ideally suited to write this book. For the past four decades, he has been teaching, researching, and publishing on this transitional period. As a result, his writing is both accessible and complex. It includes one of the most straightforward and complex analyses of the intricate reasons behind the events that led to the creation of an independent Mexico that I have read. His explanation of these reasons as "ingredients" in a cooking recipe is a perfect illustration of his book's combination of accessibility and complexity. In addition, his narrative includes occasional interjections in the form of comments, contextual explanations, and interconnections that, far from being a distraction to the flow of the story, make the story more fascinating. Furthermore, each chapter includes "boxes" of witness accounts of events central to the chapter's topic, taken from primary sources and presenting a great addition to those interested in gaining a feeling of the times.

Indeed, despite being a survey book, *Stormy Passage* is surprisingly deep and sophisticated. Although the apparent reader for this book is a college-level student, its engaging narrative and accessibility make this work an attractive alternative for any curious reader interested in early postcolonial Mexico.

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PATRIOTIC MYTHOLOGIZATION AND MEXICO'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

La Güera Rodríguez: The Life and Legends of a Mexican Independence Heroine. By Silvia Marina Arrom. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. Pp. 250. \$29.95 cloth; \$29.95 e-book.
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María Ignacia Rodríguez de Velasco y Osorio Barba, nicknamed "La Güera Rodríguez," was born 32 years before the start of Mexico's War of Independence (1810–21) and died 29 years after its finish. Born into considerable wealth, she spent her life in the manner expected for someone of her station: she looked after her assets, pursued advantageous marriage alliances for herself and her children, and socialized extensively with other members of her social class, including luminaries such as (briefly) Alexander von Humboldt and (more extensively) Agustín de Iturbide.

She was famous for her charm and beauty, but in the first half-century following her death, she met the ordinary fate of not being much remembered, at least in public. In the twentieth century, however, a number of fanciful accounts of Rodríguez's life appeared, linking her to the country's independence struggle and becoming, over time, "increasingly outlandish." By the time of the 2010 bicentennial celebrations, for example, one blogger referred to her as "the fundamental heroine of Mexican independence" (181).

Such are the basics of the story told, with great skill and precision, in Silvia Arrom's study of La Güera Rodríguez's life and patriotic mythologization. To tell this story is on one level an exercise in myth-busting. For it turns out that the facts used to create Rodríguez's status as an 'independence heroine' in Mexican popular culture and even in some academic publications are either uncertain or entirely fictitious. She was involved in an 1809 intrigue whose motives are unclear but which was probably related to the struggle between creole and peninsular factions in Mexico City at that time. Perhaps during and certainly after the Hidalgo uprising, she made some payments to the insurgents—it is not clear whether out of sympathy or to protect her insurgent-occupied properties. She had friendly relations with Agustín de Iturbide, both when he was a notoriously brutal enemy of the insurgency and when he turned against Spain and led Mexico to independence. The idea that she may have been Iturbide's lover, or that she may have had a hand in the drafting of the Plan of Iguala, appears to be baseless. It originated with Iturbide's political enemies, who used it to discredit Iturbide in public.

What is interesting about Rodríguez's life, then, insofar as it can now be documented, is not her involvement (at best tame, and perhaps nonexistent) in any part of her country's independence struggle but rather her private life as a woman of wealth in an era that saw Mexico transition from colonial rule to independence. Few letters in Rodríguez's hand survive; therefore, most of the documents Arrom relies on are court or notarial documents, mediated by legal professionals. Perhaps the most interesting of those documents come from the divorce proceedings initiated by her first husband, José Gerónimo López de Peralta de Villar Villamil y Primo. Twelve years her senior and frequently absent from the couple's Mexico City home, Villamil filed for ecclesiastical divorce in 1802 on the grounds that his wife had committed adultery with three different priests. Rodríguez countered that she was the long-suffering wife of a domestic abuser. Arrom concludes that "[t]he preponderance of evidence points to [Rodríguez's] innocence and suggests that she was a battered wife and he a volatile, vain, and hot-tempered individual who was consumed by jealousy" (26). Rodríguez nevertheless decided to make up with her husband—perhaps motivated by an improvement in his financial situation—only to be widowed by his early death a few years later. La Güera Rodríguez would marry two more times, allowing Arrom to build a rich and fascinating case study of how elite Mexican women pursued comfort, honor, and connections through their marriages.

While Part I of the book describes Rodríguez's life, a shorter Part II chronicles the emergence of the myth of Rodríguez as a libertine and an independence heroine (sometimes alternating and sometimes at the same time) in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Arrom notes that the two parts of the book can be read independently of each other, and whereas the first part will especially appeal to social historians (such as myself), the second part will be of greatest interest to intellectual historians and scholars of nationalism.

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MEXICAN WAR OF REFORM

The Grammar of Civil War: A Mexican Case Study, 1857–61. By Will Fowler. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022. Pp. 313. \$65.00 cloth; \$65.00 e-book.
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In many ways, Fowler's book is not a traditional history. Readers who are looking for an exclusively historical approach to Mexico's War of Reform (1857–61) should consult his previous text *La guerra de los tres años (1857–1861)* (Paidós, 2020). As the author makes clear, the study of the War of Reform provides a historical example from which he wishes to extrapolate the "grammatical elements" that can be found in "all civil wars" (226). Therefore, his text could be understood as an exercise in social science that studies the Mexican phenomenon "from a civil wars studies perspective" and aims to provide "a new analytical framework for the study of civil war" (228).

Even so, any cursory reading of text reveals its author has maintained a firm historical methodology in the pursuit of this objective. His interest in exploring the minute details of the when, where, how, and who within his historical case study suggests that he remains very aware of how differing contexts can determine how his "grammar" might play out. As such, I would suggest that Fowler's work could best be categorized as an exercise in Applied History: an attempt to approach a present-day problem through the study of its historical iterations and the application of this interpretation to the present. The use of history in War and Strategic Studies is quite a recent expression of multidisciplinary crossovers. In the United States, this approach is associated with the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard's Kennedy School. In the United Kingdom, the Engelsberg Programme in Applied History was launched in 2018 by the Centre for Grand Strategy (War Studies Department, King's College London) and the Centre for Geopolitics (Cambridge University); this program also adopts the Applied History form of research.