

INDIANS MEET THE STATE, REGIONS  
MEET THE CENTER:  
Nineteenth-Century Mexico Revisited

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- LA REINDIANIZACION DE AMERICA, SIGLO XIX.* Edited by Leticia Reina. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1997. Pp. 382.)
- LAS NACIONES DE UNA REPUBLICA: LA CUESTION INDIGENA EN LAS LEYES Y EL CONGRESO MEXICANOS, 1867-1876.* By Romana Falcón. (Mexico City: Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, 1999. Pp. 540.)
- NATIONALIST MYTHS AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES: INDIGENOUS INTELLECTUALS AND THE MEXICAN STATE.* By Natividad Gutiérrez. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. Pp. 242. \$50.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.)
- WEALTH AND POWER IN PROVINCIAL MEXICO: MICHOACAN FROM THE LATE COLONY TO THE REVOLUTION.* By Margaret Chowning. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999. Pp. 477. \$60.00 cloth.)
- PATRIOTISM, POLITICS, AND POPULAR LIBERALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO: JUAN FRANCISCO LUCAS AND THE PUEBLA SIERRA.* By Guy P. C. Thomson, with David La France. (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1999. Pp. 420. \$65.00 cloth.)
- MEXICAN COAL-MINING LABOR IN TEXAS AND COAHUILA, 1880-1930.* By Roberto R. Calderón. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000. Pp. 294. \$39.95 cloth.)
- CAPITALISM AND DEVELOPMENT: TAMPICO, MEXICO, 1876-1924.* By Marcial E. Ocasio Meléndez. (Peter Lang: New York, 1998. Pp. 277. \$48.95 cloth.)
- NUEVA FRONTERA MEXICANA: MILICIA, BUROCRACIA Y OCUPACION TERRITORIAL EN QUINTANA ROO (1902-1927).* By Carlos Macías Richard. (Chetumal: Universidad Autónoma de Quintana Roo, 1997. Pp. 347.)

In love affairs, three is a crowd. But in mediation, three is the natural order of things, a truth as valid for historians as for lobbyists and diplomats. Older Mexican history often followed the definitions laid down by such visibly opposed entities as state and peasantry, Hispanics and Indians, or center and periphery. Increasingly, however, this paradigm of confrontation seems to be yielding to one of negotiation and compromise. To ply a different metaphor, the focus of contemporary scholarship has shifted away from

the major organs of the Mexican historical body and toward the connective tissues that joined those organs into some kind of functioning whole. This essay will review eight works that represent in varying degrees a new history striving to connect some of the traditional poles of oppositions, particularly the tension between nationality and ethnic identity, and to identify the ways in which national projects play out in vast stretches beyond Mexico City. In the process, the authors manage to link the themes, problems, and achievements of the nineteenth century to a later national history.

*Native Peoples and the State*

Among the most critical issues to follow the early national period into the twenty-first century has been the fate of Latin America's indigenous peoples. *La reindianización de América, siglo XIX*, edited by Leticia Reina, aims at nothing less than a comprehensive restoration of indigenous actors to the story of emerging nation-states, taking its cue from demands like the Chiapan rebels' recent insistence on "Nunca jamás un México sin nosotros." The scope and variety of themes addressed in this book are necessarily broad, and the conclusions of its seventeen different essays (plus the introduction) do not always fall into tidy patterns.

In a significant number of the essays, however, Indians and non-Indian elites are shown working toward some sort of negotiated arrangement in different national settings. Elite motives have varied, but even when contemptuous of communal institutions and colonial methods of governance, Latin America's national leaders have often found it necessary to defer to the past. Several of the essays, for example, document how Andean elites had to renounce Simón Bolívar's liberal reforms and return to Indian tribute and communal landholding. The individuals most keenly aware of the dilemma were bureaucrats charged with collecting Indian taxes, and they conveyed to higher-ups the need to preserve long-established land-tenure systems simply to maintain productivity—and national revenues. In rural Yucatán, Mayan caciques or *batabs* mediated between peasants and the creole-dominated state until politically related violence led to the uprising known as the Caste War. Brazilian Indians and poor settlers found themselves at odds in Pernambuco until the arrival of aggressive latifundia practices forced them to see common cause. Anti-indigenist discourse became the dominant tone of Chilean elites in the second half of the nineteenth century, but their war of extermination was eventually tempered by a counter-movement of pro-indigenists and by the resistance of the Mapuche themselves. In recent years, Chiapas has earned a reputation for Guatemalan-style repression of the indigenous workforce. But Mario Humberto Ruz's essay points to the late-colonial *fincas* of the Comitán region as cultural crossroads, at times serving the interests of the Indian population and helping to preserve Tojolabal culture in a way that independent village life did not.

*La reindianización de America* offers a fine overview of nineteenth-century indigenous peasantries and their roles in larger national histories. Here native peasants appear far more engaged in both the politics and the economic trends of their world. At times the analysis of the essays runs counter to Reina's own highly influential *Las rebeliones campesinas* (1984), in which peasants too often seemed angry reactionaries interested in little more than the restoration of communal lands.<sup>1</sup> Probably the most striking example is Reina's relatively upbeat account of Zapotecs in the isthmus of Oaxaca, who not merely survived but flourished during the years of Mexican Liberalism. Even when married to foreigners, Zapotec women retained their language and their indigenous last names. The distance between these two volumes underscores how much historians' perspectives have evolved over the last sixteen years and how themes of adaptation and cultural compromise have reached a status nearly equal to that of resistance.

The problem of pluralism also preoccupies Romana Falcón in *Las naciones de una república: La cuestión indígena en las leyes y el congreso mexicanos, 1867–1876*, an exploration of the difficult relationship between indigenous groups and the Mexican nation during the years of the Restored Republic. Through systematic use of congressional papers and newspaper accounts, Falcón documents the growing elite intolerance of the diverse cultures that characterized colonial Mexico and the swelling initiative to impose cultural and political hegemony on the peoples of the republic. She articulates what might be deemed the consensus on this brief but tempestuous period: that the years 1867–1876 brought neither peace nor prosperity nor unity of national vision. The struggle against Conservative reaction and French imperialism made Liberals more doctrinaire and intolerant than ever. And their determination to persist in the Reform provoked rebellions from Sonora to Yucatán.

Falcón's *Las naciones de una república* differs somewhat from the other volumes treated here insofar as it combines a study of indigenous peoples with a focus on the national Mexican Congress—an odd couple to be sure, but with altogether real connections. More than half of the book is devoted to an edited collection of historical documents, an elaborate chronology, an index of congressional documents and decrees, and a roster of congressional representatives during the Restored Republic. Production values are top of the line, from the book's luxuriously realized cover to the numerous arresting photographs of people and places. The lengthy appendices will undoubtedly benefit historians interested in exploring this problematic decade.

Yet Falcón's dual focus on regionally based Indians and the national Congress leads to occasional dissonance as the congressional record often reveals an elite looking down on the people from impossible heights. What

1. Leticia Reina, *Las rebeliones campesinas de México, 1819–1906* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1984).

was the effect of the flurry of post-imperial legislation curtailing long-established popular behavior? Did the pulque bars really close at ten A.M. on Good Friday (p. 114), and if so, what did the Mexican people have to say about it? Much the same effect results from an overreliance on newspapers. In this case, mediation is what is most lacking. In some future study, for example, it would be instructive to follow the members of the national legislatures listed in Falcón's appendix to determine the issues and controversies that molded their attitudes toward the indigenous peasants of their home regions.

Falcón's emphasis on the Yucatán peninsula seems to me somewhat misplaced in terms of its relation to her argument. Despite heated debates among the Yucatecan and Campeche elites over reconquering territory claimed by the Caste War rebels, the Restored Republic witnessed a gradual de-escalation of Caste War conflict. As in many other parts of Mexico, the worst wrangling took place between rival Liberal factions. Historians must be wary of privileging elite-peasant conflict over intra-elite rivalries when pinpointing the motor of tension and change in the decade preceding the Revolt of Tuxtepec in 1876. Finally, the larger conclusions of *Las naciones de una república* remain more implied than explicit. Falcón hints at a lingering schism between the low and high ends of Mexican society, a schism only partly bridged by modern developmental programs and greater cultural understanding in the century following the revolution.

The issue of Indian identity and the state moves to the present day in Natividad Gutiérrez's *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities: Indigenous Intellectuals and the Mexican State*. Gutiérrez is concerned with how indigenous peoples came to be excluded from Mexico's national consciousness, how they fit into modern Mexico, and what forces sparked the emergence of a class of indigenous intellectuals. The answers to these questions lead down a circuitous path of interpretive battle lines and empirical data. She begins by weighing two prominent theories of nationalism: Ernest Gellner's structuralist nationalism, which views concepts of the nation as imposed by the modern state; and Anthony Smith's modified rendition of the original nationalist theory by Johann von Herder, who saw concepts of nation and "a people" as issuing upward from shared daily experience. Gutiérrez inclines more toward Smith's reading. But she reminds readers nevertheless that minority or dissident national mythologies can live on inside the myth articulated by the dominant group, while Gellner's state imposition, an essential means of conveying that myth, can also reinforce minority views by educating schoolteachers and "small intellectuals" who learn to articulate the minority myths. This is precisely what has happened in Mexico. Efforts to train rural indigenous schoolteachers, originally a strategy for cultural homogenization, produced the opposite effect when young men and women taken out of the village and groomed as torchbearers of na-

tional Mexicanismo learned to articulate national history according to the village.

*Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities* will provoke much rethinking of Mexico's post-revolutionary social history. Gutiérrez's chapter on "Mexicanization" provides one of the best overviews to date on the evolution of Mexican *indigenismo*, broadly defined as the right of nonindigenous people to make decisions that would bring ethnically distinct groups into the cultural and economic realm of the mestizo. Her analysis follows the story from its inception under Mario Gamio and Moisés Sáenz to the protests led by such figures as Fernando Benítez and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla.

Certain dimensions of the book's methodology invite doubt, however. To explore what Gutiérrez identifies as the nascent class of indigenous intellectuals, she interviewed nine indigenous schoolteachers who went to Mexico City for training, and she distributed questionnaires to sixty more. These sample groups seem extraordinarily small. Moreover, the intellectuals' relationship to their own people must be taken on faith. One suspects that departure from their isolated origins necessarily changes them, while Mexico's less assimilated indigenous peoples continue to suffer from fragmentation, disadvantageous social and economic circumstances, and limited resources. It is not evident that the emergence of such a class will necessarily change the political and social balance of Mexico in a significant way. Howard Campbell's recent *Zapotec Renaissance*, for example, documents how a relatively small number of college-educated isthmus Zapotecs briefly gained control of the city council of Juchitán, Oaxaca, only to be won over by the political steamroller of presidential candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1988.<sup>2</sup> While this is not Campbell's reading of events, the conclusion is difficult to avoid for those familiar with the co-optational strategies of modern Mexican politics: the more obdurate the resistance, the more favorable one's bargaining position within the system. Despite Gutiérrez's illuminating analysis of national myths and indigenism, then, it is not clear whether the nascent indigenous intellectuals she interviewed will seriously alter the dominance of mestizo nationalism or simply introduce a new set of brokers who, like the nineteenth-century caciques, will base their importance on their linguistic skills and their ability to speak to constituencies above and below them. The answer is less likely to emerge from interviews than from careful examination of indigenous-based social and political movements in specific regions.

2. Howard Campbell, *Zapotec Renaissance: Ethnic Politics and Cultural Revivalism in Southern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

Regions and Reconquests

In Mexico the tension between regions and the political center has always been as important as the conflict between Hispanic and indigenous cultures. Provincial elites mediated and at times initiated national projects, a fact amply demonstrated in Margaret Chowning's *Wealth and Power in Provincial Mexico: Michoacán from the Late Colony to the Revolution*. This study of nineteenth-century Michoacán might well be grouped with similar studies of Guerrero, Veracruz, and Yucatán. In analyzing all four states, the common denominator is a quest for regionally specific factors that conditioned their role in national events. Chowning's inquiry demonstrates that Mexico's grand political changes reached the state through the filter of the upper crust's interests and experiences. Consonant with arguments made by Timothy Anna and others, she finds a relatively broad base for independence among the Michoacán well-to-do. This group had suffered from the Spanish-imposed tax extortion known as the Consolidación de Vales (1804). As a result, many quietly thrilled to the call of the rebellious Padre Hidalgo, even while fearing his angry cast of thousands. The struggle for independence laid waste to the region. And despite initial enthusiasm for Michoacán's own Agustín Iturbide, the next two decades brought little real growth.

At this point, Chowning poses a truly novel argument regarding the Liberal Reform in western Mexico. She argues that the 1840s witnessed a significant economic recovery in the region, accompanied by a construction boom and lavish personal consumption. Here Liberalism emerged as a sort of puritanical reaction to the "nineteenth-century yuppies" of Morelia. The Reform wrought havoc with local productivity, causing Michoacán elites to embrace the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz as a way of returning to the balance long ago signaled by liberator Iturbide. Although the book's subtitle announces an analysis stretching to the Revolution of 1910, most of the documentation and analysis ends in 1876, in something of an upward revision of the Porfirian system as the necessary tonic for reforms that enjoyed neither efficacy nor widespread support. An economic focus predominates, although Chowning finds occasion to score some observations on related cultural change, such as the decline of "boisterous" popular Christianity.

*Wealth and Power in Provincial Mexico* instructs but suffers from a few weaknesses. Chowning can be long-winded. The individual chapters, for example, have separate prologues, some stretching as long as ten pages. Another problem concerns the occasionally incongruent nature of the sources, as when Chowning switches abruptly from rural economics to congressional debates. It is never clear to what degree the debates reflected widespread sentiment. As always in studies focusing on elites, readers remain uncertain about the people below. Michoacán's majority, the Tarascan peasants, have a fairly low profile throughout the book, raising questions of how relatively visible political and economic currents affected the regional underclass.

In other regards, however, the intellectual content of the book is more arresting and guarantees that *Wealth and Power in Provincial Mexico* will enjoy a respected place in nineteenth-century historiography. Throughout her study, Chowning looks for broad consensus in explaining such movements as independence, the Liberal Reform, and the advent of Porfirian society. Michoacán, along with Oaxaca, served as an incubator for the Reform movement, and Chowning's work suggests ways in which the periphery managed to carry its agenda to the political center. *Wealth and Power in Provincial Mexico* thus should offer a critical orientation for future studies of western Mexico, and it will serve to remind scholars of the many cross-currents hidden within seemingly homogenous national doctrines such as Liberalism.

Focusing on the Puebla sierra is Guy Thomson's *Patriotism, Peasants, and Popular Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Juan Francisco Lucas and the Puebla Sierra*, written with David La France. More than any of the other works discussed here, the study focuses on a single mediator: Juan Francisco Lucas, a speaker of Nahuatl who for decades functioned as the connection between state and national Liberal leaders and poor folks of the village of Tetela. For more than thirty years, these villagers functioned as grassroots support for such projects as education, the forced sale of church property, expulsion of French imperialism, and the rise of dictator Porfirio Díaz. Many peasants of the Puebla sierra were in fact landless at the time when the Ley Lerdo broke up corporate property. They seized the opportunity to become small landowners and to break away from the dominance of the Conservative-allied community of Zacapoaxtla.

But who could link national Liberals with the hard-bitten Serranos? The answer proved to be Juan Francisco Lucas, a schoolteacher whose father had sided with Juan Alvarez in the 1854 Revolt of Ayutla. Juan Francisco had grown up steeped in the ways of Puebla warfare and politics. For half a century, this mediator of the mountains brokered a version of Liberalism often at odds with its Mexico City counterpart. For Lucas's followers, Liberalism meant popular militias, responsive officials, and the egalitarian ethos of Serrano life. Lucas opposed both the 1857 Conservative revolt and the French Intervention but then wisely chose to back the 1876 Revolt of Tuxtepec, a stance that earned him a secure political position in the subsequent regime as well as annual Christmas cards from Porfirio Díaz himself. Unlike the later Zapatista movement of Morelos, the Puebla mountain Liberals always worked within existing frameworks of legitimacy to justify themselves before the state. The weakness of the Serrano group, however, lay in its inability to shift from a military power base to a civilian base, necessarily limiting the degree of influence that men like Lucas could exercise in an age when power increasingly rested on connections with the agro-mineral export sectors.

Thomson's reconstruction of seventy years in the Puebla sierra re-traces to some degree work done by Florencia Mallon, but in a more lucid

and focused manner and always through the guiding theme of Lucas the mediator. The research undergirding this tome is nothing short of heroic, and every minute of the more than twenty years that Thomson spent in the archives shines through in its pages. The microscopic detail and careful analysis in *Patriotism, Peasants, and Popular Liberalism* will inspire future historians. Like Mallon, Thomson wants to know how high-profile, explicitly national ideologies found their imperfect reflections in local strains of thought and action. In terms of the nation, however, one has to wonder how representative Juan Francisco Lucas truly was. Much of his brokering power lay in the sierra geography. Strategically positioned between Mexico City and Veracruz, the port that connected it to the wider world, the Puebla mountain range represented an important key to national stability. Are scholars likely to find a similarly favored underclass in less critical regions, such as the Tabascan river communities or the ranchos of Durango?

As the nineteenth century waned, the periphery increasingly meant the northern frontier. Here, Roberto Calderón's *Mexican Coal-Mining Labor in Texas and Coahuila, 1880–1930* explores a little-known dimension of the economies of Mexico and Texas. Following the U.S. Civil War, railroads gradually connected the southern-central United States with the rest of the country and also penetrated Mexico to revive mining, stimulate agriculture, and facilitate national political stability. Coal was the original fuel of this critical transport system, and the opening of fields in south Texas and Coahuila helped stoke the trains that integrated the North American continent. Texas mining was concentrated in two regions: Webb County, north of Laredo; and in the counties of Erath, Maverick, and Medina, all southwest of Fort Worth. Mexican coal miners provided most of the labor for both fields.

Here the main conflict erupted not between peasants and regional big men but between a migrant Mexican workforce and a series of well-capitalized Anglo mining companies. On both sides of the Rio Grande, coal miners eventually met with setbacks. In Texas the conversion to oil and gas as primary energy sources led to a decline in the fields from the 1920s onward, while the introduction of strip-mining techniques eliminated much of the Mexican labor previously needed to bring coal out of the ground. In Coahuila the coal miners ran afoul of the emerging state-sponsored union known as CROM (the Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos) and eventually found themselves with no significant influence on the political system emerging after the revolution.

Calderón adopts a dual focus—the industry and the workers—but the first dominates *Mexican Coal-Mining Labor*. Aggregate statistics and technical mining information tend to crowd out information on the lives and culture of the Mexican laborers. Readers learn that their work was a young man's game, that they spoke mostly Spanish, that they lived in nuclear households, and that in the heyday of the Texas coal mines, they earned



good wages. Demographics are critical, but what did these workers believe, and how did the experience of moving north of the Río Bravo shape their attitudes and aspirations? The text remains silent on these points.

Much of what is known about this group derives from the inevitably distorted and often contemptuous accounts found in coal company correspondence. Events in Texas tend to dominate those of their Coahuila counterparts, perhaps the result of better record-keeping and document preservation. At times the book's confusing organization makes it difficult to follow the long history of strikes and repression. What is clear is that Texas-Coahuila coal was a far more critical industry than previously thought. Like petroleum or commercial henequen production, the coal boom of the Porfirian and early revolutionary years entered the border area and transformed human lives, relocating hundreds of families only to abandon them as evolving technologies rendered Texas coal a thing of the past. *Mexican Coal-Mining Labor* is certain to become a basic source in the history of labor along the U.S.-Mexican border. Calderón, himself from the south Texas Hispanic community, comes away indeed with a key filament of his own posterity.

Deeper in Mexico, Porfirian development involved greater mediation by regional big men. As seen in Marcial Ocasio Meléndez's *Capitalism and Development: Tampico, Mexico, 1876–1924*, Tampico's economic growth did not result purely from a deal between Porfirio Díaz and foreign oil and railroad companies. Municipal business elites played instrumental roles in fomenting urban development. As Ocasio Meléndez observes, "local and regional collaboration was crucial to urban evolution and contradicts the popular notion of urban growth as a peripheral result of imperialist North Atlantic economic forces" (p. xxii). First, Tampico elites lobbied tirelessly for creation of a regional infrastructure. Railroads, the dredging of the Río Pánuco, and the construction of jetties are only the most significant improvements. Second, the Tampico business class courted foreign investment without Díaz's involvement.

Chance played a hand when petroleum drilling and export boomed after 1901, making Tampico one of the world's great petroleum cities. Tampiqueños dreamed of overtaking Veracruz as Mexico's premiere port and saw their dreams verging toward reality. As a consequence of this growth, however, Tampiqueños felt little enthusiasm for either the 1910 political movement of Francisco Madero or the waves of revolution that engulfed other regions in the subsequent decade. With a flotilla of foreign warships guarding against invasions, Tampico remained a haven for both Mexicans and foreigners fleeing revolutionary violence, and the city later served as a cash cow for revolutionary generals eager to tap the coffers of Tampico-based enterprises to finance their war efforts. Control of Tampico, along with Yucatán and Chiapas, proved one of the decisive cards in the winning hand of Venustiano Carranza's Constitutionalist victory.

As analyzed by Ocasio Meléndez, Tampico presented an atypical tale of urban growth. Unlike most important Mexican cities, Tampico was young (founded in 1823), occupied little land (surrounded by sea and swamp), and remained almost entirely linked to foreign trade from its inception. Equally unique was the partitioning of the city. From 1916 onward, Constitutionalists cultivated labor as a political base. In Tampico this strategy involved supporting the claims of industrial workers who had taken up residence in a *colonia popular* (shantytown) on land also claimed by foreign petroleum companies. The national government's eventual decision to favor the workers resulted in dividing Tampico into the old city and a new municipality named Ciudad Madero, dominated by workers now firmly allied with the Mexican state. But separation proved dissatisfying in other ways because the residents of the new municipality remained dependent on old Tampico for goods and services.

*Capitalism and Development* fills an important gap in the history of Mexico's urban and coastal development. Anyone who has seen *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, with its opening scene of down-and-out Humphrey Bogart on the streets of boomtown Tampico, will savor this tale of a port city that clawed its way to the top. If any defect mars the book, it is the frequent disappearance of Tampiqueños from the story. Ocasio Meléndez often retreats from the Tamaulipas coast to explain such larger contextual elements as the Madero revolution and the rise of Alvaro Obregón. While accurate and instructive, this material too often distracts from the story of Tampiqueños as agents in their own becoming. The depiction of Tampico life should be thicker and longer. Only in the final pages, for example, are readers allowed significant glimpses into the social lives of a port where prostitutes and panhandlers shared urban space with merchants, generals, and foreign-investment capitalists. At the same time, Ocasio Meléndez's sympathetic rendition and useful mining of municipal archives points the way to future social histories of life in Mexico's port cities.

Carlos Macías Richard's *Nueva frontera mexicana: Milicia, burocracia y ocupación territorial en Quintana Roo (1902–1927)* moves in a far different direction—to the deep southeast and to the limits of both state and Hispanic hegemony. Here the story deals with Porfirian (and later revolutionary) Mexico's attempts to establish control over what is today the state of Quintana Roo. In the nineteenth century, it was still the tropical forest territory under the control of Mayan holdouts from the Caste War of Yucatán. Macías Richard's protagonists and mediators are the proconsular generals sent to bring this tropical canopy into the national domain. After reviewing a quarter-century of colonization schemes that never got beyond the prospectus stage, Macías Richard documents the massive invasion by General Miguel Bravo in 1898–1901. Bravo succeeded where numerous other Yucatecan-based expeditions had failed, and his forces established much of what would become the basic structures of Quintana Roo. With Bravo, too, began the complicated

negotiations among officers, enlisted men, newly arrived merchants, the Yucatecan state, and the Mayan rebels who yielded to this new presence but in no way consented to lay down their arms. Beginning in 1910, upheavals related to the Mexican Revolution complicated the proconsuls' mission in Quintana Roo by making it necessary to choose between competing revolutionary forces, a risky gamble indeed. Quintanarooenses gained some semblance of routine only in 1920, when relatively greater national stability brought dividends for territorial politics.

*Nueva frontera mexicana* underscores several critical points about Quintana Roo's gradual absorption into Mexico. First, the occupation involved relatively little in the way of military engagement because the remaining Caste War rebels preferred to disperse into the tropical forest when soldiers approached. There they remained, taking part in the prolonged dance of negotiation, ethnography, and intrigue that Paul Sullivan documented in *Unfinished Conversations*.<sup>3</sup> Second, Mexican presence remained tenuous and poorly distributed during the period covered by the book, roughly the first three decades of the twentieth century. The Hispanic presence took root in the newly founded port city of Payo Obispo (today Chetumal) and in a handful of interior outposts.

Third and certainly most central, the colonizing generals had to try to balance an ever-changing welter of interests, including Yucatecan elites, foreign companies that worked the forests for chicle, various unsubdued pockets of Caste War rebels, and above all the rapidly shifting political lines emanating from Mexico's political center. This balancing act was no easy task, given the profound instability of the years from 1910 onward. Failure to make the right call, as when General Arturo Garcilazo failed to align himself with the interests of Yucatán's revolutionary proconsul Salvador Alvarado, led to a firing squad. All this tumult transpired against a backdrop of tropical decay, where malaria and heavy drinking were as predictable as the sunrise.

Macías Richard trains his focus on the generals, and his text both rises and falls on this choice. Readers see much less of the recolonized Mayas themselves, or even of the settlers and soldiers below the rank of colonel. Yet the collective portrait of the colonizing officers reveals men with profound human frailties and perplexing political missions. *Nueva frontera mexicana* will make a lasting addition to the growing literature on the Caste War and the political and economic development of the Yucatán peninsula. It is to be hoped that the study will also lead to broader-based histories of life in the twentieth-century territory of Quintana Roo.

3. Paul Sullivan, *Unfinished Conversations: Mayas and Foreigners between Two Wars* (New York: Knopf, 1989).

Conclusion

Beyond whatever light they shed on their individual themes, the eight studies reviewed here make at least three contributions to the larger sphere of Mexican history. First, they underscore the role of mediation in Mexican history. It may have taken place through individuals who spoke the languages of two different worlds, like Juan Francisco Lucas. Such mediators altered the views and expectations of those around them while creating a space for themselves as political actors. In this regard, Natividad Gutiérrez has put her finger on some fundamental dynamics of modern Mexican history: the unintended backcurrents stirred by historical movements such as state building and the beneficiaries who rose to take advantage of those countercurrents. The emphasis on schoolteachers naturally calls Lucas to mind, while the vision of a state-imposed nationalism that inadvertently fosters Indian identity parallels the way that Porfirian centralization gave birth to a class of Indian leaders (as Thomson shows) and an ambitious class of urban business elites (in Ocasio Meléndez's Tampico). In a similar vein, Mexican national extension into Quintana Roo spawned a series of proconsular governors who operated almost independently by virtue of distance and isolation. The reverse was also true: lack of social and cultural intermediaries amounted to a recipe for conflict. Mexico learned that lesson all too well during the Porfirian era, when foreign companies increasingly became the employers of Mexican labor. For example, the U.S.-owned Mexican Central Railway company brought huge numbers of Anglo managers and workers into Tampico in 1881, provoking the city's first labor uprising. The Texas coalfields offered an even starker example of a workplace where organic connections between Anglo employers and Mexican laborers simply did not exist. Union conflict flared at the turn of the century and ultimately contributed to manual labor being replaced by mechanized strip-mining. When this outcome is contrasted with Humberto Ruz's examination of Chiapan haciendas, it becomes clear that the arrival of international capital in Mexico upset delicate balances that had been evolving in the society since the colonial era.

Second, the eight studies open roads that help connect Mexico's early decades to the present. The nineteenth century too often takes a back seat to studies of the Mexican Revolution. Histories of the decade from 1910 to 1920 seem to move toward something coherent and clearly national, something more recognizable, while the events of 1800 to 1876 seem merely to move. Producing a posterity from this plethora of coups and revolts is not easy. The colonial social trappings of sprawling haciendas, ox-drawn wagons, and frock-coated *hombres de bien* yield little in the way of an obvious ancestor. The 1980s witnessed an explosion of Porfirian regional studies (on Coahuila, Chihuahua, Sonora, Yucatán, and Chiapas among others), one that gave sense and depth to the story of the Revolution. But the nature and

meanings of life in the early republic remained unknown, as did the period's legacies to twentieth-century Mexico. As a result of the combined work reviewed here, historians can now see better the connections between rebel-controlled territory of the Caste War and the modern state of Quintana Roo. They can also perceive the ways in which the obtuse upper-class racism of the Restored Republic gave way to early revolutionary indigenism and later to the laudable, if underfunded, federal bilingual education programs of the present day carried out by the Consejo Nacional para el Fomento Educativo (CONAFE) to bring basic literacy to remote villages. Although vast amounts of fundamental social and cultural history remain to be done on the nineteenth century, these studies and other works of the past five years make it impossible to refer to pre-Porfirian Mexico as unknown territory.

Third, numerous strategies of these eight books could serve as methods for future research on the persons, places, and practices of modern Mexico. Examples include urban histories in the mode of Ocasio Meléndez's study of Tampico. Despite some noteworthy examples, at least a dozen other important cities of Mexico still await social and economic reconstructions for the modern period. For instance, the wealth of archival documentation on Mérida, Yucatán, is counterbalanced only by the general dearth of studies of its people and barrios. To what degree can historians speak of a continuity of vision among urban leaders across five generations? Chowning's reconstruction of Michoacán elites and their role in the nation's Liberal Reform also points toward another way of looking at Mexican regions in any period. The Reform clearly followed different prologues in various states and regions, all of which conditioned execution of the Liberal agenda but also generated long-term consequences for both the Porfirian and revolutionary years.

In regard to the work of Calderón, how many lesser-known labor forces are still being ignored? Nineteenth-century Mexico had sailors, artisans, doctors, muleteers, prostitutes, actors, counterfeiters, trouble-making journalists, and even wandering troubadours, all present to varying degrees in the documentation. We know little about them. Calderón also reminds readers that from the Porfirian period onward, a large section of the Mexican workforce lived beyond national territory.

At this particular moment, Mexican history desperately needs more studies that follow Guy Thomson's strategy of using a single well-documented individual to bridge historical periods but also to break out of structurally dominated paradigms that homogenize the real diversity of human experience. Macías Richard's study of the Quintana Roo territory reminds scholars of the need to reapproach the tenure and consequences of the revolutionary proconsuls. Yucatán is receiving saturation coverage, but where are Tabasco, Chiapas, and Campeche, to say nothing of states outside the south-east? Similarly, the issues that Natividad Gutiérrez raises in *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities* will force historians to admit how little is known about

twentieth-century Mexican policy and how policies interacted with their intended constituencies.

Truly modern Mexican history—that is, of the years since 1940—suffers from wafer-thin historical coverage, despite the abundance of archival material and living memory. We have only to compare the number of thick historical studies of the John Kennedy or Lyndon Johnson years of the United States with those on, say, the Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo years in Mexico to see how far coverage of modern Mexico lags behind. In these moments, too, Indians met the state and regions confronted the political center. The glaring dearth of historical writings on these decades can be explained neither by lack of drama nor by absence of materials.