
REVIEW ESSAYS

MAKING LEVIATHAN SNEEZE: Recent Works on Mexico and the Mexican Revolution

Eric Van Young
University of California, San Diego

¡EMILIANO ZAPATA! REVOLUTION AND BETRAYAL IN MEXICO. By Samuel Brunk. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. Pp. 360. \$45.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)

LA HACIENDA PUBLICA Y LA POLITICA ECONOMICA, 1929–1958. By Enrique Cárdenas. (Mexico City: Colegio de México and Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. Pp. 230.)

RESPUESTA CAMPESINA A LA REVOLUCION VERDE EN EL BAJIO. By Laura González Martínez. (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, n.d. Pp. 319.)

EVERYDAY FORMS OF STATE FORMATION: REVOLUTION AND THE NEGOTIATION OF RULE IN MODERN MEXICO. Edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994. Pp. 432. \$59.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)

EL GRAN PUEBLO: A HISTORY OF GREATER MEXICO. Second edition. By Colin M. MacLachlan and William H. Beezley. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1998. Pp. 560. \$37.60 paper.)

FORGE OF PROGRESS, CRUCIBLE OF REVOLT: THE ORIGINS OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION IN LA COMARCA LAGUNERA, 1880–1911. By William K. Meyers. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994. Pp. 293. \$39.95 cloth.)

SPENT CARTRIDGES OF REVOLUTION: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL HISTORY OF NAMIQUIPA, CHIHUAHUA. By Daniel Nugent. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1993. Pp. 225. \$39.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

THE POWER OF GOD AGAINST THE GUNS OF GOVERNMENT: RELIGIOUS UPHEAVAL IN MEXICO AT THE TURN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. By Paul J. Vanderwood. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998. Pp. 409. \$65.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.)

"I didn't let myself be swallowed:
it was the monster swallowed me!
And now, what are we to do here
in the dark?" "Resign ourselves
and wait until the Dog-fish
has digested us both."¹

Great revolutions typically breed apologetic historiographies.² As human activities go, this tendency is neither surprising nor especially corrupt. Much like individuals (think of our revisionist inventions about our own lives), societies seem to be hard-wired for it. More clear-eyed, critical deconstructions of large-scale political upheavals (uninformed or less informed by obvious factional sympathies) take time to develop and to replace officialist and mythogenic biographies, demonizing histories of the ancien régime, and triumphalist narratives of post-revolutionary change. Certainly this trend has been true of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, whose long teleological shadow is virtually inescapable in historical writing on modern Mexico.

Thus the history of Mexico as often written, at least from the beginning of the nineteenth century, seems to lead up to or away from the Revolution of 1910 in a much-rehearsed scenario (with celebratory and critical wings), one now familiar to most Mexicanists. In it, one failed or partial rev-

1. The Leviathan of my title echoes trebly those of Thomas Hobbes, the builders of the modern Mexican state, and Carlo Collodi (Carlo Lorenzini, 1826–1890), author of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883). In the 1940 Disney version, Pinocchio is swallowed by Monstro the whale and makes his escape by building a fire in the animal's belly, which causes Monstro to sneeze and expel the boy-puppet and his father, Gepetto. In Collodi's original story, the great sea creature is not a whale but a "Dog-fish" two miles long. Father and son make their escape by creeping out the creature's mouth while it is asleep, without the aid of any incendiary devices. In the Old Testament, *leviathan* is alternately identified as a crocodile, a whale, or a dragon. The epigraph is drawn from "C. Collodi" (Carlo Lorenzini), *Pinocchio: The Story of a Puppet* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1914), 212.

2. Other works mentioned in this review essay include Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution: Contemporary Mexican History, 1910–1989* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995); Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); and Allen Wells and Gilbert M. Joseph, *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatán, 1876–1915* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

olution gives way to another, and the Great Event is somehow immanent in all of them. The Bourbon Reforms of the eighteenth century attempted to jump-start *etatiste* forms of modernization in the colony (so the narrative runs), creating social and political contradictions resolved only in part by independence from Spain. Independent but not yet a nation, the shaky new state stumbled, was preyed upon and eventually dismembered. It fell victim to forms of praetorian opportunism and internecine struggle resolved only in part by the liberal revolution of the Reforma, then by a second and more effective wave of authoritarian modernization during the Porfiriato. These great cycles of change-within-stasis awaited a society-wide upheaval to send the remnants of the old society crashing down, a denouement that took the form of a great revolution. The post-revolutionary state effectively consolidated, deepened, and extended economic modernization; sculpted a durable neo-authoritarian political arrangement made decent with a populist fig leaf; and finally managed to generate a feeling of Mexicanness across large sectors of the national population. This affective and moral project was one that creole patriots, liberal reformers, Porfirians, and even 1910 revolutionaries had failed to realize. In this rendering, the Revolution of 1910 was not just another whitecap rolling in toward the beach but a mighty tsunami that permanently changed the Mexican landscape.

Stepping outside this teleological framework may prove as difficult as constructing the framework itself must initially have been in the face of recalcitrant social forces—an operation roughly akin to lifting oneself off the ground in one's own chair.³ But in keeping with some interesting recent writing on post-revolutionary Mexico, I may venture to note that one major reason for the centrality of the Revolution of 1910 to interpretations of Mexico's national history is that the groups that emerged triumphant from the revolution and their legates managed to seize the levers of not only political, economic, and social reproduction but also cultural reproduction. The nation builders were thus assured access to the symbolic coordinates by which citizens locate themselves in their social surroundings as well as to the historical memory by which they construct a meaningful past.⁴ The de-

3. This scenario is the one generally adopted by Aguilar Camín and Meyer in *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution*. For example, they attribute the belief in a historical teleology leading up to the Great Revolution "to all Mexican leaders, starting with Venustiano Carranza" (p. 159). But the authors themselves seem to share this view as well.

4. Insightful discussions of these issues are to be found in a number of other recent works, including *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, edited by William H. Beezley, Cheryl A. Martin, and William E. French (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1994); and Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997). Even when critical of the prevailing regime and its abandonment or distortion of the social program of the revolution, some prominent Mexican intellectuals have managed to produce a sort of semi-officialist history. For a scathing critique in this light of Enrique Krauze's *Mexico: Biography of Power*, translated by Hank Heifitz (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), see the recent re-

naturalization of both the triumphalist and demonizing tendencies in the grand narrative of the revolution implied by this realization has made considerable strides in the last decade or so. The earlier and broader turn of historians to forms of social and cultural history has strongly influenced Mexican historiography in general, and in particular the historiography of the Mexican Revolution considered as a wider historical phenomenon. Anthropologically minded historians and historically minded anthropologists have delved into the origins and dynamics of the armed revolution itself (1910–1920). They have problematized the consolidation and technologies of power of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary state, analyzed relationships between the state and civil society, located forms of quotidian resistance to the state's ambitious claims, and related popular cultural expressions to dominant ones.

Some of the studies under review here exemplify this newer tendency well, particularly the late Daniel Nugent's *Spent Cartridges*, Paul Vanderwood's book, and the widely cited anthology that Nugent coedited with Gilbert Joseph.⁵ Although heterogeneous in approach, these and other works (most of them produced by Anglophone scholars) are ploughing new ground. Many of their authors are engaged in a project that is being called "cultural history." This project is to be distinguished from recognizably traditional but still fruitful modes of historical inquiry in its guiding assumptions, specialized language, methods, interpretive strategies, and goals.⁶ Exemplars of the traditional tendency discussed here are the works of Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer and of Colin MacLachlan and William Beezley (synoptic narrative, mainly political in its emphasis), Samuel Brunk (political biography), William Meyers (structuralist social and economic history), and Enrique Cárdenas and Laura González Martínez (political economy and economic history).⁷

view essay by Claudio Lomnitz, "An Intellectual's Stock in the Factory of Mexico's Ruins," *American Journal of Sociology*, no. 103 (1998):1052–65. Krauze's response, Lomnitz's rejoinder, and Krauze's last word appeared respectively in *Milenio*, 18 May 1998, pp. 40–43; 25 May 1998, pp. 38–40; and 1 June 1998, pp. 3–5. Aguilar Camín and Meyer's *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution* exemplifies in some measure the same tendency that Lomnitz criticizes.

5. See also the books by Alonso, Becker, and Wells and Joseph cited in note 2.

6. For a useful airing of some of the potentials and problems of the "new cultural history" of Mexico, see *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (May 1999), in which my article on the cultural history of the colonial period joins those of William French on the nineteenth century and Mary Kay Vaughan on the twentieth, along with extensive commentaries by Stephen Haber, Claudio Lomnitz, Florencia Mallon, and Susan Socolow. Haber's extended review article fired the first salvo in what has become an interesting discussion among Mexicanist and other Latin American historians about cultural history. See Haber, "The Worst of Both Worlds: The New Cultural History of Mexico," *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, no. 13 (1997):363–83. I will touch briefly on some of these issues in this review essay.

7. Also worthy of note in the category of political economy or economic history is Linda B. Hall, *Oil, Banks, and Politics: The United States and Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1917–1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

The avowed goal of the cultural historians is to criticize and in some cases actually invert conventional wisdoms about the Revolution of 1910 and its legacy for modern Mexico, particularly with regard to subaltern groups. Yet there is no inherent reason why cultural history should be limited to subaltern groups, given that the constructing of meanings and constructing of signs are not a monopoly of common people. This approach involves turning the Mexican Leviathan—not only the 1910 Revolution, but the still-potent PRI regime—inside out, or looking down its gullet to see what is in there, or more modestly, making it sneeze, hence the title of my essay. Because this tendency is a relatively recent and in some ways problematic one in the historiography of twentieth-century Mexico, it deserves some scrutiny. After commenting on each book individually, I will therefore turn to a more focused but necessarily brief concluding discussion of the cultural history project exemplified by some of the authors whom I have mentioned.

A Synoptic History

A college-level textbook, Colin MacLachlan and William Beezley's *El Gran Pueblo: A History of Greater Mexico* covers Mexican history from independence to 1993 (the 1994 two-volume edition is split at 1911). Now in a second edition, this work of synoptic history has much to recommend it and might be read profitably by educated laypersons or even historians and other scholars. Its general interpretive framework—the perils of modernization, particularly the slippage between economic development and political power and culture—is shared with other recent works on post-independence Mexico, such as Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer's *In the Shadow of the Mexican Revolution* and even Paul Vanderwood's resolutely culturalist *The Power of God against the Guns of Government*. *El Gran Pueblo* also shares with many modern histories of Mexico the assumption that the Revolution of 1910 was not only the forge of modern Mexico but also the living post hoc explanation of what went on in the country during the preceding century. MacLachlan and Beezley pay a good deal more attention than some (Aguilar Camín and Meyer, for example) to “cultural issues” in the narrower construction of the concept, especially popular culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: forms of mass media, art, styles, material life, gender roles, and so forth.

Beyond their basic narrative, however, the authors also try to structure their book around the idea of “a Greater Mexico,” the idea that Mexican history can meaningfully be understood in the context of a human and cultural diaspora embracing not only Mexico but large parts of the contemporary United States. Replete with marvelous photographs, extremely useful timelines at the head of every chapter, and good maps, *El Gran Pueblo* also comes equipped with monograph-like endnotes for each chap-

ter, a glossary, and a good bibliography. Given the volume's breadth, high readability, and thoughtfulness, it is a pity that someone did not proofread the text more carefully and eliminate factual errors, such as the rechristening of Independence-era chieftain Ignacio Allende as Miguel Allende (p. 6).⁸

MacLachlan and Beezley's claim that their synoptic history abandons the common narrative device of organizing Mexican history by presidential terms is in part belied by the fact that most of their chapters follow a political scheme up to the last three (Chapters 10–12). The earlier chapters include "Porfirio Díaz Triumphant," "The Porfiriato," "Prelude to Revolution," and "Making a Revolution: The Borderlands Emerge, 1905–1917," while the last three invoke "the Mexican miracle." This organization is not particularly blameworthy in itself because most historians and readers of history seem to find the locus of "history" in its broadest sense in the story of public life. But this scenario does not leave much room for innovative revisionism in that many of the "facts" of public life are hardly at issue. Still, one strength of *El Gran Pueblo* is that its fairly conventional narrative is studded with essaylets of considerable interest: on such topics as the Manuel Gonzales interregnum (1880–1884) during Porfirio Díaz's rule; the evolution of border identity; Mexican repatriation from the United States during the early years of the depression; and pachucos and the zoot-suit riots. In contrast, as a revisionist twist to lend originality to the more or less conventional narrative, the irredentist theme of "Greater Mexico" does not really work well, functioning as a thoughtful add-on rather than a central interpretive axis. First, the treatment of Mexican populations outside Mexico deepens only with Chapter 10 (on the years 1937–1946), rendering the subtitle of the book, *A History of Greater Mexico*, something of a misnomer. Second, it is never clear what sort of analytical or explanatory weight the Greater Mexico concept is intended to bear, given that the major venue of the history evoked clearly stops at the borders of Guatemala and the United States.

Two Works on Economics

Laura González Martínez's *Respuesta campesina a la revolución verde en el Bajío*, her *tesis de licenciatura* in rural anthropology, does not deal directly with the Mexican Revolution or keep it at the center more subtly, as

8. Interestingly enough, this mistake was also made by the editor of another recent work on Mexico. See Maud McKellar, *Life on a Mexican Rancho*, edited by Dolores L. Latorre (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1994), 17. The error arises from the fact that this Bajío town, known in the colonial era as San Miguel el Grande, had the name of Independence hero Ignacio Allende added to it in the nineteenth century, as many other towns did. San Miguel el Grande thus became San Miguel Allende, and Ignacio Allende, Miguel Allende.

modern synoptic histories tend to do. But her work does touch on themes of modernization in the Mexican countryside traceable to the Cárdenas land reform of the mid-1930s, itself often adduced as the greatest proof that the *fiesta de balas* was in fact revolutionary in its implications. The fieldwork on which the study is based was done in 1976–1978, but the book was not published until about 1989. *Respuesta campesina* consists of an intensive investigation of the history of one micro-region in the Mexican Bajío: Loma Tendida, embraced within the area of the Valle de Santiago. González Martínez also analyzes the coming of agrarian reform and the creation of an ejido there in the 1930s, the introduction of “Green Revolution” technologies in the 1960s and 1970s, and the effects of these landholding and technological changes on peasant families as producing and consuming units over the two generations from 1936 to about 1976.

Respuesta campesina begins with an interesting introduction by anthropologist Juan Vicente Palerm, who directed the work of several young investigators in the Valle de Santiago. It traces the project to a specific moment in the history of Mexican anthropology in the late 1960s and 1970s. At that time, the ideas of Russian agronomist A. V. Chayanov came into fashion, partially as a theoretical critique of prevailing Marxist orthodoxy on peasants. Eric Wolf’s formulations about paleotechnic and neotechnic farming types were also much in vogue, and the economics and history of peasant life swam back into scholarly focus. The Chayanovian emphasis on peasant family demographics and life cycles, the self-exploitative capacities of peasant farmers, and the relationship between production and consumption at the family level inform González Martínez’s theoretical position rather than issues of political economy. On the whole, she applies these concepts fairly effectively, if with a certain degree of naiveté, to the interpretation of her empirical data.

The first chapter presents a compressed but useful treatment of history and geography in the Bajío more broadly, and the Valle de Santiago and the locality of Loma Tendida in particular, tracing the creation of the ejido out of a local hacienda in the mid-1930s. A second long chapter discusses seriatim the technological changes of the Green Revolution, primarily in terms of capital and labor requirements, in the production of sorghum, maize, sunflower, wheat, barley, and garbanzo. These crops figured importantly in the 1960s and 1970s as local cash crops, maize continuing as both cash crop and subsistence product while being displaced from the center of production by sorghum. The third chapter delves into the genealogies and domestic histories of about thirty peasant families whose energies were devoted to different crops and mixes of crops. González Martínez shows that family size tended to grow over the period, while the Green Revolution technologies required ever fewer labor inputs. As a result, strategies of economic diversification evolved (including temporary emigration) that allowed the maintenance of anomalously large peasant

households in the face of labor-saving production techniques. The last chapter resumes the empirical findings and elaborates the theoretical argument somewhat. Although unmistakably thesis-like and of a curiously antique stamp, this study provides an interesting view of the social consequences of economic modernization in the Mexican countryside of a generation ago.

Juxtaposing *Respuesta campesina* with *La hacienda pública y la política económica, 1929–1958*, an elegant macroeconomic history by renowned economic historian Enrique Cárdenas, might well induce a kind of epistemological whiplash. Whereas González Martínez narrows in on a single relatively small locality and the genealogy of several campesino families over two generations, Cárdenas's canvas is the entire national economy of Mexico during the crucial three decades that embraced recovery from the Depression, the Cardenista reforms, World War II, and the beginning (and the beginning of the end) of the "Mexican Miracle." From Cárdenas's point of view of essential long-term continuities in state economic action (such as the government's anti-Keynesian policies over the entire period), he edges even further away from the teleology of the Mexican Revolution, which becomes only a blip in the generation before his story begins. *La hacienda pública* is notable for the clarity of its writing, its compressed but comprehensible argument, the modesty of its claims in contrast with the solidity and even originality of its findings, and Cárdenas's skillful but unobtrusive use of the myriads of statistical tables and graphs. Allusive comparisons to the experience of other Latin American countries shore up his argument, and the chapters are structured so that the interested reader can glean the main points in summaries and conclusions. This work contains much for specialists as well as for interested nonspecialist readers.

A book as dense yet graceful as Cárdenas's *La hacienda pública* is virtually impossible to summarize in a paragraph or two. The onset of the Great Depression, characterized by a fall in demand produced by economic contraction in the United States, led to the establishment of state interventionist mechanisms and policies that helped stimulate internal Mexican economic development: in banking (as in centralizing banking under the Banco de México and abandoning the gold standard, both in 1931), in taxation and fiscal management, and in regulation. Notwithstanding the conventional wisdom about populist programs and state-encouraged reflation of the economy through deficit spending, Enrique Cárdenas shows that the government of Lázaro Cárdenas for the most part followed a policy of balanced national budgets throughout the years 1934 to 1940 (with the exception of 1938), an orthodox policy adhered to rather consistently well into the 1960s. Beginning about the middle of 1932, national economic recovery came faster in Mexico than in the United States, more in line with what occurred in Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina. Because one export commodity did not dominate the Mexican economy as elsewhere in Latin

America, recovery came about more rapidly. Gross national product grew substantially during the mid-1930s, government policies succeeded in staving off the worst effects of the recession in 1937–1938, and public investment in infrastructure and education increased. Throughout most of the 1930s, moreover, the domestically oriented industrial sector experienced the most rapid growth, at the expense of mining, petroleum, and agriculture.

Cárdenas then outlines the profound impact of World War II on the Mexican economy, with the accompanying turn toward private-sector dominance in the social allotment of resources. Exports boomed in response to U.S. preparations for war, as did capital inflows and bracero remittances. But by the end of the war, internal rather than external demand had become the main engine driving the national economy. By the 1950s, previous infrastructural investments began to pay off in a large way, and the conditions of the “Mexican Miracle” were laid as 95 percent or more of domestic demand was met internally rather than through manufactured imports. Despite external shocks affecting price levels and the balance of payments, protectionist policies provided the political floor for continued economic dynamism.

Five Histories in the Tragic Mode

It was the misfortune of Samuel Brunk’s generally intelligent and gracefully written political biography of Emiliano Zapata to have followed by twenty-five years the modern classic on the same twentieth-century icon by John Womack Jr.⁹ While invariably compared to Womack’s book, Brunk’s does not suffer terribly in the comparison, in my view, although it has its soft spots. Less passionate and politically committed than Womack’s Vietnam-era hagiography of the revolutionary chieftain, Brunk’s *Emiliano Zapata! Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico* is more distanced and less celebratory but ultimately sympathetic to almost the only major figure of the epic revolution to receive positive treatment by virtually all modern scholars of the period.

Like other scholars before him, Brunk casts his narrative of Zapata as a tragedy. I have the impression that John Steinbeck’s masterful but romanticized screenplay for Elia Kazan’s *Viva Zapata* (1952) was not far from Brunk’s mind as he wrote. As he makes clear, the central contradiction in the Zapatista movement—what brought it to the high-water mark of its influence in 1914–1915 and then to its decline and the death of Emiliano Zapata in 1919—was that Zapata’s military talent, leadership abilities, and personal charisma on local and regional levels (especially in his native state of Morelos) were not readily transferable to the national level. Like Antaeus, the seemingly unvanquishable giant wrestler of Greek mythology,

9. John Womack Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

Zapata seems to have derived his strength from his mother earth. In accounting for the historical arc of this popular agrarian sector within the revolution, Brunk chooses to emphasize Zapata's personal history and his role as a leader, thus differentiating this treatment from those of Womack and Jesús Sotelo Inclán (1943).

Chapter 1 provides a credible portrait of Zapata's social and personal background, in which the turgor of an account based on admittedly thin evidence is topped up by imaginative reconstructions (or extrapolations) of emotions, personal interactions, and individual psychology, as in Emiliano's finding "a certain peace" on horseback (p. 3). What space such reconstructions occupy between novelizing and the (naively?) positivist program of "keep[ing] the record straight" (p. xiii) is never made clear, nor is the potential contradiction addressed by the author. In contrast, Brunk's discussion of the Morelos sugar industry around the turn of the century is largely a replay of Womack's chapter entitled "Planter's Progress," with few new data and fewer details. In fact, the book is not strong on structural (socioeconomic) issues. For example, Brunk insists that the Zapatistas sought to preserve the "relative economic balance between hacienda and village of the colonial years" (p. 69), an equilibrium that John Tutino, Cheryl Martin, Paul Hart (in his 1997 doctoral dissertation), and other historians have shown was always changing, even during the somnolent colonial centuries. In the early chapters, Zapata's personal biography, the rise of his movement, and regional and national politics figure most prominently, followed by an obvious shift to the military history of the revolution in Chapter 5. This approach is in part explained by the author's sources and in part dictated by the narrative and biographical approach to a military figure who was, after all, campaigning much of the time.

Aside from the somewhat speculative but generally believable and sympathetic portrait drawn of its subject, *Emiliano Zapata* makes a solid contribution in its treatment of the urban, small-town, and "organic" intellectuals who attached themselves to Zapata's movement like pilot fish to a shark. Chief among them in Brunk's account was Manuel Palafox. Brunk traces in detail and to good effect Palafox's involvement and increasing influence with the Suriano chieftain, intransigence in Zapata's name, and power struggles with others in the Zapatista entourage (such as Otilio Montaña). Also following the ideological trajectory of the movement, Brunk's analysis in Chapter 3 of Zapata's famous Plan de Ayala (1911) makes plain that its goals were not so much anti-capitalist as anti-monopolistic, aimed less at religion than at the power of the Catholic Church. But in discussing the Convention of Aguascalientes, especially the role of the most famous of Zapata's intellectuals, Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama, Brunk seems unwilling to entertain the idea that Díaz Soto and the other *enragés* were essentially correct in their analysis of the revolution in the larger historical sense: that the disfranchised poor would be thrust aside by the juggernaut of state

building and capitalist development. Throughout his account, Brunk poses the Zapatista peasants “as conscious shapers of their own history” (p. xiv) against the “inauthenticity” and “preening radicalism” of Díaz Soto—and implicitly, of Palafox (p. 132).

But this assessment is based on an implicit view of the Zapatista movement as more or less homogeneous and univocal below the highest level of its leadership cadres, a risky assumption at best. Nor does Brunk attempt to disaggregate the class and cultural nature (the peasantry and villageness, respectively) of Zapata’s following in the sophisticated conceptual manner of Daniel Nugent. Brunk talks instead about “two cultures” colliding in Morelos before and during the revolution (p. 13), presumably embracing a dualistic model of a forward-looking capitalist-oligarchic sector and a backward-looking peasant-populist sector. The other side of this coin is that Brunk describes the northern revolutionaries (Villistas and others) rather stereotypically as “rootless” and “modern,” a characterization fatally undermined by the work of Nugent, Ana María Alonso, Friedrich Katz, and Paul Vanderwood, among others.

Two problems—one methodological, one theoretical and interpretive—dog this readable and engaging study. On the methodological level, although Brunk’s judgments are almost always nicely balanced, a certain aseptic tone characterizes his descriptions, particularly in treating Zapata himself as a sort of “Everyman” rather than the vivid human being that Brunk hopes to evoke. One reason may be that Brunk rarely quotes directly from his sources, either primary or secondary. In reading his source texts, he seems restrained where one would hope for boldness, and bold where one would look for restraint. Furthermore, because the footnotes aggregate sources at the end of paragraphs, it is extremely difficult to tell which data come from where or how far Brunk’s reconstructions lie from his sources, especially regarding motives and affective states.

On the theoretical level, Brunk makes Zapata’s “failure” as the leader of a peasant revolutionary movement within a larger upheaval sound almost completely contingent and accidental, blaming the chieftain and his advisors for their ineptitude in forging the lasting politico-military alliances that might have underwritten their position in national politics as the revolution drew to a close. The implicit theory here seems to be that of agency run amok, but in the absence of a deeper theoretical commitment to structural analysis or at least to “thick description” of Zapata’s social and cultural milieu, it cannot bear all the weight of Brunk’s tragic narrative. The penultimate chapter of the book, which discusses the twilight of Zapata’s career, thus becomes a sort of telescoped afterthought, much the same rehearsal of interfactional diplomatic initiatives that pervaded Womack’s account of a movement now on the defensive. Ultimately, the great problem is that in Brunk’s account, one rarely gets sociological analysis and political biography together in one place.

Under the rubric of “tragic histories,” I have included with Brunk’s work William Meyers’s *Forge of Progress, Crucible of Revolt: The Origins of the Mexican Revolution in La Comarca Lagunera, 1880–1911*. The Comarca Lagunera is a rich agricultural region in north-central Mexico embracing important sections of the states of Durango and Coahuila. This study focuses neither on the revolution itself nor on a single major revolutionary chieftain. Only in the last chapter does Meyers render an abbreviated treatment of the revolution in this area. Nonetheless, like a number of other scholars who view the revolution as the major “event” on their horizon, Meyers probes back well into the nineteenth century for the origins of this great upheaval rather than just into the contingencies of the period from 1900 or so. The working people of the Comarca Lagunera are his major protagonists. Much more explicit than Brunk’s, Meyers’s theoretical orientation consists of an appealingly nonglitzy, nondogmatic Marxism honestly established early on and applied consistently throughout the work. Despite the virtues of this exclusively materialist approach in explaining regional economic development between about 1850 and 1910, however, Meyers is not quite able to establish convincingly the claims of his interpretation when it comes to the popular social origins of revolutionary participation in the Comarca Lagunera. Still, this volume is an elegant, deeply researched, and thoughtful study of a region that proved central not only to the 1910 Revolution but to the development of modern Mexican capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The introduction and the first chapter of *Forge of Progress* immediately establish the economic importance of the Laguna by the last third of the nineteenth century, although Meyers is a bit too quick to portray the region as being virtually “without a history” before the economic changes of the period after 1850. The early pages are marked by an evocative Braudel-ian encounter with the harsh natural environment of the region, especially the perennial scarcity of water that has defined much of its history. The absence of substantial native land claims left the Laguna open for development along capitalist lines. International markets, railroads, foreign investors, landowners, technicians, and managers did the rest. Wage labor rather than a settled peasantry prevailed on the haciendas in the region, dedicated to the production of cotton and *guayule*, a source of natural rubber. Wage labor also underwrote textile manufacturing and mining enterprises, not unlike what occurred in the late colonial development of the Bajío region a century earlier. Many of these agricultural and mine workers supplied the social base of revolutionary forces beginning in 1910. Common working people were mobilized by a strong regional tradition of armed protest and political violence, the politicizing efforts of the Magonista Partido Liberal Mexicano and the International Workers of the World, the workers’ vulnerability to cyclical economic shocks, and the economic crisis and contraction of 1907–1908.

Chapter 2 of *Forge of Progress* provides a masterful macroeconomic anatomy of the cotton industry, including sources of capital, technical innovation, and investment and ownership patterns, although the catalogue-like structure of the chapter becomes tedious. Chapter 3 discusses regional development, urbanization (as in the city of Torreón), and demographic growth after 1880 or so. Chapter 4 covers the prominent role of domestic entrepreneurs (including the Terrazas and Madero families) and foreign investors in the region as well as the sources of intra-elite conflict. In Chapter 5, Meyers points out that because of the insecurity of their status, casual laborers mostly filled out the ranks of the revolutionaries, and wage demands prevailed accordingly over those for land, in contrast to what Brunk has shown for Morelos and Nugent and others for regions further north, where demands for land eclipsed wage issues. Chapter 6 attends to increasingly bitter intra-elite conflict in the region, primarily over water (such as the famous case of the British Tlahualilo Company's access to the Río Nazas). It pitted the Madero family almost alone against foreign investors of the ilk of the Rockefellers, the Guggenheims, and Bernard Baruch. Occupying center stage in Chapters 7 and 8 are the endemic economic instability racking the region after 1907, the Díaz succession crisis, the spread of a generalized anti-Chinese and anti-U.S. sentiment among popular groups, and the crystallization of oppositional groups in regional and national high politics involving the aging dictator himself and other familiar figures such as Bernardo Reyes, Ramón Corral, Francisco Madero, and Venustiano Carranza.

Meyers's most compelling chapters in *Forge of Progress* deal not with the social analysis of popular discontent, protest, and revolutionary sequelae (Chapters 7–9) but with the long-term historical development of the region, the advent of large-scale capitalist agriculture in the nineteenth century, industrialization, intra-elite conflict, and the relation of all these factors to national politics (Chapters 1–6). This tilt toward dominant groups may be due in part to the sources available to Meyers, but it may also be that the evidentiary linkages sketched in the later chapters between the disaffection of exploited subaltern groups and their putative propensity toward social protest and revolt remain weak as an artifact of his theoretical position. This relationship is more inferred from common people's structural position than proved empirically. In some ways, the Meyers and Brunk volumes complement each other. Meyers is strong on economic history but weak on social history, Brunk strong on biography (and to some extent social history) but weak on the economic side. Yet the portraits they paint of two important regions of revolutionary Mexico cannot readily be combined into a single picture.

More cognate to Meyers's work than Brunk's but viewing the revolutionary process through a microhistorical lens over a much longer period of time is the late Daniel Nugent's *Spent Cartridges of Revolution: An Anthro-*

pological History of Namiquipa, Chihuahua. This work is an occasionally patchy but finally impressive anthropological history of Namiquipa from its remote eighteenth-century origins to the present day. The image of “spent cartridges” in Nugent’s title is drawn from a Namiquipan informant’s characterization of the villagers as having briefly been taken up and then left behind as the revolution moved on. According to Nugent, his study began as an attempt to understand what happens to a revolutionary town after the revolution (p. 2). But in keeping with the newer cultural history project’s goal of trying to deconstruct the prevailing revolutionary teleology, Nugent made the center of his story the three-century history of the relationship of Namiquipa with the Mexican state, rather than the 1910 Revolution itself. He insists convincingly that present-day conflicts over land, politics, and local identity are the outcome neither of some essential nature of the pueblo nor of factors exclusive to the Revolution of 1910 but of a total historical process unfolding over centuries and within a larger political economy. In a discernible way, the “metatext” of Nugent’s account is a “Fall” scenario in which the serpent is the post-revolutionary state (with Eve as his advisee), the *ejido* the apple, and the peasants of Namiquipa so many Adams.

The structure of Nugent’s account is circular, beginning with Namiquipa’s ethnographic present, then falling back to the eighteenth century, and eventually making its way up to the present. The central historical question Nugent poses is how Namiquipa, beginning as a colonial military colony and enjoying a relatively independent and privileged economic and political status until the Porfiriato, ended up in a position analogous to an embattled and internally divided central Mexican indigenous village. Chapter 1 portrays Namiquipa as of the 1980s, when a land war raged within the *municipio* setting the poor against the rich and pitting the ideal-typical and more egalitarian relationships built around an *ejido*-centered economy against a fundamentally capitalist labor regime. The chapter closes with a sophisticated discussion of the concept of “peasantry” in the Namiquipan and broader Mexican contexts, in which Nugent concludes that the category has analytic and descriptive utility, but only if it is contextualized historically and Namiquipans are viewed as a specifically Serrano peasantry. The following chapter traces the history of the *municipio* starting with its establishment as a Franciscan mission in the late seventeenth century, its reestablishment as a colonial military colony a century later, its early viceregal land titles, the tradition of auto-defense against hostile Indian attacks, and the erosion of social and ethnic differences over time to produce the nonindigenous “armed peasantry” widely characteristic of the Mexican North. Intra-elite factional struggles over land and political power began in earnest about the middle of the nineteenth century, dictating the nature of the pueblo’s participation in national-level struggles for the next century and more.

Chapter 3 takes readers into the increasing consolidation of land

holdings by U.S. ranchers, among them the Hearsts (although the Terrazas clan was also important) in the post-1860 period. One finds general echoes here of Meyers's story of the Comarca Lagunera. Nugent goes on to narrate subsequent Porfirian measures decreeing the partition of lands long held communally, the commodification of land rights, and the immigration into the area of "petty bourgeois" farmers in the last decades of the century. Despite these rearrangements in property relations, as Nugent points out, Namiquipans were not as short of land as other Chihuahuan villages. By 1900 or so, they had fought local landlords to a standoff, never allowing the central state to dictate their arrangements and always recurring discursively and juridically to the 1778 *bando* confirming the legitimacy of their founding land titles. Between 1913 and 1916, Namiquipa was for the most part Villista. In 1922 villagers finally petitioned for ejido status (granted in 1926), thus in a sense relinquishing control over the pueblo's lands to the state. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 describe the heritage of the agrarian reform, concentrating on the modern three-tiered production structure (*pequeña propiedad*, ejido, and capitalist farming), labor relations, local politics, and issues of identity and community.

It will be obvious even from this abbreviated gloss on the book that Nugent's account is materialist in its interpretation, emphasizing class relations, as does Meyers's work on the Laguna. But Nugent is a bit more subtle than Meyers in his analysis, insisting throughout (even where he does not completely explain) that individuals' ideological position is not necessarily reducible to their "objective" class position. He is continually at pains if not to unlink ideology and class position, then at least to add a cultural variable to class-based social relationships, political behavior, and self-conceptualization. Nugent notes that the resentment of Namiquipan peasants, translated into revolutionary political alignments, ultimately was directed less at large, commercialized landholdings per se than at the specific invasion of their lands. Their attitudes about labor and property were related to economic realities but also to ideas about masculinity and honor (p. 77 and elsewhere).

Despite this admirable theoretical flexibility, Nugent does not quite deliver on his claim to empty out the subjective experience of Namiquipans vis-à-vis their relations with the post-revolutionary Mexican state and their own complex longer history. Take, for example, his eloquent *cri de coeur* on the dangers of reductionism:

[The Namiquipans'] relationships are "fixed" only through the radical and in the end abstract theoretical maneuver which pretends to organize them conceptually as elements of a social "science." That makes it easy to forget that it is people who are engaged in these relationships, in terms of which they not only act but also come to know themselves or redefine themselves by conducting a similar (but distinct) set of theoretical maneuvers. But for the people, the stakes are much higher than the resolution of a theoretical debate. It is life itself which is on the line. (P. 142)

Some contradiction exists between this impassioned stance and the near total absence from Nugent's *Spent Cartridges of Revolution* of any sustained account of living human beings, except in the plural. Indeed, the subjects' view of all this is not richly represented, despite the ostensibly ethnographic nature of the study. What results is an image of communalism by state compression, impoverished in some ways if credible in others—the apotheosis of a sort of agentless agency. Furthermore, despite Nugent's historicist claims for his work, the documentation is at key points extremely thin by historians' standards (as in his account of colonial land titles in the early chapters). Chapter 3, for example, relies inordinately on secondary sources whose applicability to Namiquipa are debatable. Finally, Nugent was not fully able to realize his own program of investigation because, on the one hand, he did not seem to have the density of sources for a descriptively more profound historical ethnography emphasizing culture, while on the other he was drawn away from the local and cultural dimensions by the neo-Marxist political economy approach that he adopted.

The Power of God against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century is Paul Vanderwood's finely wrought study of the famous millenarian uprising of the early 1890s at Tomóchic, in northwestern Chihuahua. This work may be contrasted with Daniel Nugent's *Spent Cartridges of Revolution* in many ways, although each stands out in its own fashion among recent historical works on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mexico. Whereas Nugent was a historical materialist who allowed room for ideological and cultural factors in the formation of communitarian and vindicationist discourse and collective action, Vanderwood seeks the wellsprings of collective action in forms of religious sensibility while allowing a role for economic factors and social structure to channel that action. Nugent was finally more interested in instantiating large structural arguments about consciousness and politics in the history of a particular village's relations with the Mexican state. Vanderwood's heart is in recovering the shards of individual experience, re-creating the feeling of a small community in some ways antecedent (ontologically if not historically) to any state, and exploring a religious worldview that hardly even produces a blip on Nugent's radar screen. Vanderwood's melancholy and evocative study finally takes more of its cues from post-*annaliste* LeRoy Ladurie of *Montaillou* (not cited in his bibliography, oddly enough) than from any obvious precursor in Mexican historiography.¹⁰ Indeed, in its intense localism, detail, and descriptiveness, *The Power of God* maps a small but complex place on almost a one-to-one scale, rather than from the more sociologized bird's-eye view more typically encountered even in many microhistorical works. This is not to say that Vanderwood eschews analysis,

10. Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *Montaillou, the Promised Land of Error* (New York: George Braziller, 1978).

ideas, or generalizations—far from it. But large generalizations are subordinate to describing this particular place, this time, this history and its sequelae. There is something finally rather mysterious and magical about Tomóchic in this rendering—a mystery and magic that arise paradoxically from the mundaneness of the life Vanderwood portrays there, and which draw the Chihuahua village closer to Gabriel García Márquez’s Macondo than to David Sabeau’s Neckerhausen, for example.¹¹

The narrative axis of Vanderwood’s *The Power of God* is constituted by the efforts of Porfirio Díaz’s regime to squelch what it perceived as an anti-government uprising by the predominantly mestizo villagers of Tomóchic, a farming town in mountainous northwestern Chihuahua. Anti-government the movement certainly was in a sense: the believers led by Cruz Chávez, a farmer of modest means, rejected the authority of the secular state over them and their affairs—and along with it taxes, the use of money, medical doctors, and other artifacts of a corrupt and injurious modernity. But the believers initially undertook no direct action against the state, wanting only to be left alone to pursue their intense folk Catholicism within the tiny ambit of a mountain town already too enmeshed in the market economy to escape the notice of the state’s modernizing project. A series of triggering episodes, including the attempted expropriation by a high state official of an important local religious icon, pushed Chávez and his followers from grumbling into resistance, splitting the small community internally along lines of family, wealth, political power, and divergent visions of Tomóchic’s place in the world and how it was to be understood. The Porfirian government’s bumbling efforts to suppress the movement militarily in late 1891 led to further polarization and the rapid development of a full-blown resistance movement, religiously inspired and linked to a young female folk saint, Teresa de Urrea (“La Santa de Cabora”), in the neighboring state of Sonora. A second attack by *federales* wiped out Chávez’s followers in 1892 (at roughly the same time that Antonio Conselheiro’s religiously inspired community of Canudos in northeastern Brazil was attracting the lethal attention of the central government). Santa Teresa was forced for the rest of her brief life into exile in the United States, where her cult still survives on a small scale. Don Porfirio had made a desert and called it peace, but the movement at Tomóchic would enter the history of the Mexican Revolution—in film, song, literature, popular culture (even comic books), and folk memory—as an avatar of popular aspirations to do away with arbitrary central authority and fight to a standstill the modernizing project that spawned it.

Vanderwood has plumbed as deeply as any anthropologically in-

11. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, translated by Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); and David W. Sabeau, *Property, Production, and Family in Neckerhausen, 1700–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

clined historian of Mexico the political thinking of popular groups, showing how it was infused with religious sensibility and the strongest affective bonds to place and community. He blends almost seamlessly local economic history with histories of power, political thinking with religious, and group profile with biography: of Teresa Urrea; of Lauro Aguirre, the young revolutionary journalist and spiritist whose anti-Porfirian political agitation became entwined with the Santa's cult; of Cruz Chávez, the embattled Tomochiteco leader; and of Reyes Domínguez, the small-town bourgeois and intellectual who emerged as Chávez's major antagonist. Vanderwood emphasizes the religious worldview of his subjects, their implicit assumption that a better world—more plentiful, more just, more free, more righteous—was always imminent, just around the corner. If one were to venture a criticism of this magisterial work, it might be of Vanderwood's reticence in disentangling the forward-looking elements from the backward-looking ones in the Tomochitecos' politico-religious ideology. Subaltern agency abounds in Vanderwood's description of this famous episode, but one wonders if their program for a better life, aborted by federal bullets, did not in the end hark back to an invented, mythologized past rather than forward to the alternative reality of a better world.

Finally, let me turn to the substantial and widely cited anthology edited by Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, which grew out of a notable 1991 conference at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Participants were asked by the organizers to address explicitly in their oral presentations and general discussion the work of three scholars: that of James Scott, especially his influential political ethnography of modern Malaya and "everyday resistance" to political subordination and resource extraction on the part of common people there; and that of historical sociologists Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer on the cultural history of English state formation in the early modern period.¹² The underlying concept of the endeavor may be seen as taking the Mexican Revolution and the drawn-out historical processes of Mexican state building out of the crisis-racked, rarefied, even heroic "political realm" and descending with them to the quotidian experience of ordinary people, most of which turns out to be both heroic and tragic. Inversely, readers may think (as some of the contributors do) about the essays collectively as an approach to political culture—about how political events and ideas become infused with meanings that relate them to other idea systems,

12. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985); and also Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). The latter work is less fully discussed by the essayists owing to its relatively late publication in relation to the conference. See also Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

such as gender roles, religious thinking, spatial and temporal conceptions, ethnicity, and so forth.

Something of an avatar of a new wave of political history of Mexico, *Everyday Forms of State Formation* is soaked (mostly to good effect) in notions of resistance, agency, and hegemony, the last of which suffers a good deal of banging about, emerging by (hegemonic?) consensus among the contributors as at best a process rather than an end state (although almost all of them still love Antonio Gramsci). The “Mexican state,” whose everyday modes of formation from the mid-nineteenth century to the present are the ostensible objects of the essays, similarly comes in here for intense deconstruction.

Heterogeneous as they are, the essays in this collection hang together well, partly because of the way in which the original conference was conceived, partly because of the way the volume is arranged. The organization follows simultaneously two tracks, one historical, the other analytical, tacking between the two while moving chronologically up to the present. Thoughtful essaylets by James Scott and Philip Corrigan at the beginning of the volume and by William Roseberry and Derek Sayer at the end frame the project conceptually by discussing the state, hegemony, and popular culture. Of these, I found the Roseberry contribution particularly useful. All these short essays stress in anti-Procrustean manner the historically specific nature of state-project formation and popular response, wagging an admonitory finger at theoretical reductionism. Editors Joseph and Nugent set the general tone for *Everyday Forms of State Formation* with their sophisticated discussion of popular culture as resistance to state-formation projects. This piece is followed by a masterful essay by Alan Knight explicitly comparing the Scott and Corrigan-Sayer formulations, holding them up to the case of revolutionary Mexico and concluding that neither may be applied overconfidently. One of Knight’s major points is to gloss the vexing question of just how revolutionary peasants are, and how scholars know.

Three relatively broad historical studies of culture and politics follow. The first is Florencia Mallon’s contribution on the Sierra de Puebla in the last half of the nineteenth century, especially during the French Intervention, an essay that prefigures her widely discussed 1995 book. Next, Romana Falcón’s admittedly institutional and top-down but nonetheless informative essay on the role of *jefes políticos* during the Porfirian regime takes as its specific venue the state of Coahuila. Finally, Gilbert Joseph presents an engaging short version of his subsequent coauthored book on popular revolutionary mobilizations in Yucatán from 1909 to 1915, their “fizzling” in the face of concerted elite resistance, and the subsequent consummation of the revolution from outside the state.¹³

13. Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994). The essays in the volume by

Several nicely realized case studies of revolutionary and post-revolutionary state and popular interactions follow, each examining a different set of institutions and a different locality: Elsie Rockwell's essay on schooling in Tlaxcala in the 1910–1930 period; Daniel Nugent and Ana Maria Alonso's contribution on resistant localist traditions, gender roles, revolutionary alignments, and ejido formation in Namiquipa, Chihuahua, over about a century; Marjorie Becker's piece on official anti-clericalism and stubborn popular piety in Michoacán during the Cárdenas era, empathic but empirically thin; Jan Rus's offering on the national state's co-optation of local government in highland Chiapas through the late 1960s; Armando Bartra's intriguing, if slightly windy, essay on mass literacy and the *historieta* (comic book) industry in the 1930s and 1940s, in which neither the state nor a hegemonic project raises its head; and Barry Carr's account of Marxism and Lombardismo in Mexican political life from 1920 to 1950, which combines a supremely confident handling of political narrative and analysis with a less completely realized exploration of cultural themes.

The Cultural History Project

These days it is virtually impossible to confront with a straight face any grand narrative approach—whether liberal-democratic, *dependista*, demotic, or eschatological—to the last 150 years or so of Mexican history, or at least any triumphalist version of it. Although others may well be constructed after the millennium turns, grand narratives seem to be out of style. This is probably the reason why the synoptic history of MacLachlan and Beezley (or that of Aguilar Camín and Meyer, mentioned in passing), useful as it is, has a slightly antic air about it even while being healthily skeptical of conventional Whiggery about the Mexican Revolution itself. Of work now being done by historians and historically minded anthropologists around the Mexican Revolution or on Mexican history more broadly, some of the most interesting contributions are often made by scholars working in the mode of cultural history. One reason for this trend has to do with the interests and fashions of the day—with the seepage into Mexican historiography of cultural anthropology, subaltern and gender studies, the linguistic turn, and the decentering tendencies of postmodernism.¹⁴

Joseph, Nugent and Alonso, and Becker also prefigure monographs published the same year or slightly later.

14. Arguably, these influences were first felt in the colonial historiography, following annaliste and post-annaliste trends. The “triumphalist” narrative for the colonial era, paralleling that of the Mexican Revolution for the modern period, was the “conversion or deculturation” scenario for native peoples. Setting aside debates over White Legend versus Black Legend, this conventional wisdom began to be eaten away from the inside by careful ethno-historians and social historians at least as early as Charles Gibson's *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* (1964), thirty-five years ago.

Setting aside controversies about the benign or malign influences on historical scholarship of these approaches, another compelling rationale exists for reorienting our perspective so that we encounter the locus of history not only in the higher latitudes of the public sphere and the biography of the state but also in the fermenting bilges of society (in its “vast social bottoms,” to borrow Steve Stern’s anatomical-sounding metaphor), where the differentiation between “culture” and “politics” is altogether less clear.¹⁵ The reason is that certain types of sources and the historiographies designed to exploit them may play themselves out in the sense that while they still yield something useful, the returns tend to diminish over time. For example, many historiographies—of nation-states, churches, economic systems, intellectual upheavals—have begun with formal institutional or public history because the ore for this operation lies closest to the surface of the historical record. But over time, they have descended layer by layer to more diffuse and rebarbative sources. This generalization does not mean that the search for grand narratives is heuristically an unrewarding exercise, still less that hard-edged economic history, public history, or the history of high politics do not yield “truth” about a given era or set of problems. But while statements constructed on these bases may be true, they are not exclusively true and may not even be the most interesting of truths. The social and spatial regionalization characteristic of anthropologically informed cultural history—the reinjection of subalterns into their own histories and the turn to a biography of place foreshadowed by Luis Gonzalez’s *microhistoria* of his natal village—are paths to these other homelier truths in which “history” is privatized and refashioned within the ambit of small communities, affective states, local knowledge, and the everyday practice of thinking about politics.¹⁶ Among the scholars who work in this mode, it is probably difficult to shrug off the impression that we are finding out more and more about less and less. This embarrassment must account in part for the most sophisticated practitioners’ attempts to extract more generalizable conclusions from limited cases and to talk constantly about “process” even as they glory in particularity (as do Joseph and Nugent).

There are nearly as many definitions of *culture* and *cultural history* as there are expositors of them, although if one reads through the Joseph and Nugent anthology and other recent works in this genre, a consensual common denominator can be teased out. One relatively recent but common usage is that of habitual practice or style, as in speaking of the “culture” of an academic department or a corporation. The definition mostly in use by the authors cited here, however, tips more toward anthropology, embrac-

15. Steve J. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late-Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

16. Luis González y González, *Pueblo en vilo: Microhistoria de San José de Gracia* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1968).

ing groups' understanding of the world, the meanings they impute to the actions and words of others, the objects, and the happenings around them, and the mode of social reproduction of those understandings over time. Meaning seems the key element here, and meaning is above all a relational property, an understanding of one thing in terms of another. Meaning forges a path from one system, institution, or practice to another or to a set of ideas.¹⁷ The particular virtue of cultural history, especially in looking at the Mexican Revolution, its antecedents, and its progeny, is to have realized that explaining politics in terms of politics is a singularly sterile enterprise and that it may be illuminating to look at what politics means to common people in a more holistic fashion. What cultural historians have done is to import from the periphery to the center of historical explanation "cultural factors" more typically relegated to ancillary roles or invoked only when socioeconomic explanations go awry or cannot do all the heavy lifting by themselves.

Of the books under review here or mentioned in passing, several have made this kind of contribution by effectively challenging conventional wisdoms. This achievement is not simply a matter of revisionism but of the way the revisioning is achieved. Daniel Nugent's study of Namiquipa, for example, convincingly portrays not the restless northern *vaqueros* of stereotype and legend but settled peasant farmers rooted in community (albeit one with a military colonist and Indian-fighting tradition) and locked in a two-century struggle with a centralizing state to preserve their political, economic, and moral autonomy. Ana María Alonso's study of the same town weaves a gendered reading of politics across traditional forms of frontier maleness and prescriptive economic rights.¹⁸ Marjorie Becker's book on Michoacán campesinos challenges any triumphalist view of Cardenismo in Tata Lázaro's backyard by showing the resilience of popular religion and the power of *campesinas* in staking their claims against cadres of socialist educators, agrarian bureaucrats, and reformist apparatchiks. Allen Wells and Gilbert Joseph's study of intra-elite rivalry, popular revolutionary mobilization, and Maya campesino culture mines arcane and diffuse sources to deconstruct myths about cross-class and cross-ethnic alliances and passivity in the Yucatecan countryside. And Paul Vanderwood's recent study of religious cult, millenarian uprising, and community

17. Some of the discussion in this paragraph is drawn from my forthcoming article, "The New Cultural History Comes to the Old Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (May 1999).

18. Nugent and Alonso's cultural (if not precisely culturalist) approach to northern revolutionaries and their communities can be contrasted with Miguel Tinker Salas's fine but somewhat more conventional account of Sonorense character and history in *In the Shadow of the Eagles: Sonora and the Transformation of the Border during the Porfiriato* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997). This work emphasizes the fighting of Indians, the proximity of the United States, and the advent of capitalism.

life in late Porfirian northwestern Mexico demonstrates how deeply religious was the worldview of rural people, and how far from adequate traditional socioeconomic forms of explanation in accounting for popular violence and ideology. Some of these works, as well as other studies in the genre of cultural history, have their shortcomings, certainly. Among them is a tendency to overinterpret admittedly ambiguous source texts: to let a hermeneutic reading of a limited body of evidence stand proxy for an adequate documentary base. Still, the innovative approaches that such works represent have begun to open up some dark corners of Mexican history that were until recently thought unworthy of the candle or sufficiently illuminated not to warrant any further looking.