
TOPICAL REVIEW

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF COLONIAL SPANISH AMERICA:

INTRODUCTION

IN THIS ISSUE OF LARR WE PUBLISH A SYMPOSIUM OF THREE INTERCONNECTED ARTICLES on the developing subject of the social history of Latin America in the colonial period.

The three papers originated with a session of the 1968 annual meeting of the American Historical Association. At that meeting, Professors Frederick P. Bowser and Karen Spalding presented papers, Professor James Lockhart gave a commentary, and the Editor was chairman. The three authors' negative reaction to the conventional wording of the session title, together with other historiographical positions they held in common, made them aware that a new movement in social and ethnic history was taking shape in the colonial Spanish American field.* The three colonialists and the Editor of LARR therefore began to plan the joint publication in LARR of articles which would take formal cognizance of the movement and make its scattered members more aware of the issues in the field and of the activities of other scholars engaged in related research.

For publication in LARR, the authors extended the scope of their articles beyond Peru. (Lockhart gave a paper at the 1970 AHA meeting which dealt with colonial social history in general, thus expanding the bounds of the original strict division of labor according to the three ethnic groups, Spaniards, Indians, and blacks.) Each of the authors tended to move from the concept of a catalogue of recent research work to a general discussion of methods, sources, and research problems.

* Not to disregard colonial Brazil. The Editor originally intended, of course, to commission an equivalent article for Brazil, but soon discovered that a number of publications have made that objective superfluous. See Stuart B. Schwartz, "Brazil: The Colonial Period," in Roberto Esquenazi-Mayo and Michael C. Meyer, eds., *Latin American Scholarship since World War II: Trends in History, Political Science, Literature, Geography, and Economics* (Lincoln, Neb., 1971), and Charles R. Boxer, "Some Reflections on the Historiography of Colonial Brazil in 1950-1970," in Dauril Alden ed., *Colonial Roots of Modern Brazil. Papers of the Newberry Library Conference (November, 1969)* (Berkeley, 1972).

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The origins and mutations of the original contributions are thus embodied in the papers that follow. Emphasis on Peru remains, and no claim is made to list all relevant publications. The authors have evolved their own lines of treatment, with some minor overlaps and differences in focus. Indeed, while the contributors regard themselves as allies in the field, they do not wish readers to imagine that they have identical opinions on all subjects. Nevertheless, the papers are complementary, and elucidate many facets of a movement that is an important part of contemporary historical research and writing on Latin America.

T.F.M.

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF COLONIAL SPANISH AMERICA: EVOLUTION AND POTENTIAL

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"SOCIAL HISTORY" SHOULD BE READILY DEFINABLE AS THE STUDY OF HISTORICAL phenomena which transcend the individual and manifest themselves in human groups. But such a definition includes almost all meaningful history; it seems to fit precisely those political and institutional studies to which social history is ordinarily contrasted. Since our main concern here is with practical historiography rather than with questions of genre, I will simply indicate through description and elimination the kind of history I mean.

Social history deals with the informal, the unarticulated, the daily and ordinary manifestations of human existence, as a vital plasma in which all more formal and visible expressions are generated. Political, institutional, and intellectual history, as usually practiced, concern themselves with the formal and the fully articulated. Social history bears the same relation to these branches as depth psychology does to standard biography. While it often discusses humble or obscure individuals, the correlation is not perfect, since study of the daily life and family connections of the famous is certainly social history, of a very valuable sort. Indeed any branch of history can be converted into social investigation by turning attention from its usual main object of study, whether laws, ideas, or events, toward the people who produce them.

Often it is impossible or undesirable to make a distinction between social and economic history. There is, however, a fairly distinct type of economically-oriented research which is concerned more with amounts and techniques of production than with the people involved. It tends strongly toward statistics and macrophenomena, and has much in common with institutional history. In our field of colonial Latin America, it has often been practiced by Frenchmen and French-influenced Latin Americans. This useful branch of historical writing is also not our present concern.

The potential significance of colonial social history is easy to see. Formal institutions in colonial Iberoamerica were weak and spotty, lacking the manpower, mechanisms, and even generally the will to carry out the activist policies of their