

PATRIOTS, POVERTY, TAXES,  
AND DEATH:  
Recent Work on Mexican History, 1750–1850

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- THE LEGACY OF VICENTE GUERRERO, MEXICO'S FIRST BLACK INDIAN PRESIDENT.* By Theodore G. Vincent. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001. Pp. 336. \$55.00 cloth.)
- TORNEL AND SANTA ANNA: THE WRITER AND THE CAUDILLO, MEXICO, 1795–1853.* By Will Fowler. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. Pp. 308. \$69.50 cloth.)
- VAGRANTS AND CITIZENS: POLITICS AND THE MASSES IN MEXICO CITY FROM COLONY TO REPUBLIC.* By Richard A. Warren. (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001. Pp. 202. \$60.00 cloth.)
- CONTAINING THE POOR: THE MEXICO CITY POOR HOUSE, 1774–1871.* By Silvia Marina Arrom. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000. Pp. 398. \$59.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- DE COLONIA A NACIÓN: IMPUESTOS Y POLÍTICA EN MÉXICO, 1750–1860.* Compiled by Carlos Marichal and Daniela Marino. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2001. Pp. 279. N.p.)
- LOS NOBLES ANTE LA MUERTE EN MÉXICO: ACTITUDES, CEREMONIAS Y MEMORIA, 1750–1850.* By Verónica Zárate Toscano. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, Instituto Mora, 2000. N.p.)
- ALONE BEFORE GOD: THE RELIGIOUS ORIGINS OF MODERNITY IN MEXICO.* By Pamela Voekel. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. Pp. 233. \$64.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.)

“The poor you always have with you. . . .”

—John 12:8

“In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.”

—Benjamin Franklin

Ancient and modern authorities agree that some things never change, but historians usually know better. Theodore G. Vincent's new book on Vicente Guerrero is the first major study of that Mexican patriot to appear in English since 1939, and only the second to be published in English.<sup>1</sup> It contains extensive scholarly apparatus (appendices, footnotes, a bibliography, lists of archives and interviews) and was published by a major university press (the University Press of Florida, distinct from but heir to the legacy of the University of Florida Press, a major publisher of Latin American history). Nevertheless, Vincent's *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President* is not an example of conventional historical scholarship in Mexican history. Its title provides two clues to its distinctive point of view: the use of the word "legacy" and the identification of Guerrero as "Mexico's first black Indian president." The first signals that the book is as concerned with genealogy as with biography; the second signals that the book takes a point of view that is firmly rooted in U.S. history and racial categories.

Nearly three-quarters of the book deals directly with Vicente Guerrero's life and times. Vincent provides students of nineteenth-century Mexico with a whole chapter on Guerrero's term as president. He includes a long excerpt from a speech published in a newspaper in 1829, one of the few examples of Guerrero's rhetoric that appears in print. It is unfortunate that Vincent provides no credit for the translation since his own work is so riddled with elementary errors that it undermines his credibility as a translator. Even when Vincent provides a fresh perspective on a familiar story, he frequently compromises his position by uncritical acceptance of sources that are consistent with his populist bias. For example, I was intrigued with the argument that the Spanish invasion in 1829 was contained on the coast by local resistance, probably militia troops of African heritage, until the national army under Antonio López de Santa Anna arrived to claim credit. Vincent cites a census manuscript for the racial background of the region, but his reference for the military action itself includes no evidence and is merely the assertion of a clearly biased secondary source.

Vincent takes a genealogical approach to Guerrero's legacy in the final seventy pages of the book, which follow the careers and marriage choices of succeeding generations of the family. Most interesting is his

1. The first was William Forrest Sprague, *Vicente Guerrero, Mexican Liberator, a Study in Patriotism* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1939). Two dissertations have been written in English: Eugene Wilson Harrell, "Vicente Guerrero and the Birth of Modern Mexico, 1821–1831." (PhD diss., Tulane University, New Orleans, 1976); Mario S. Guerrero, "Vicente Guerrero's Struggle for Mexican Independence, 1810–1821." (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1977). Although Vincent cites Sprague frequently, Harrell's and Guerrero's dissertations do not appear in his bibliography.

description of how African Americans in the United States imagined the Mexico they read about and how as tourists and immigrants in Mexico they observed and experienced society and racial relations there. On these issues, seeing Mexico through the lens of race as constructed in the United States is not a problem, but transferring this conception of race to nineteenth-century Mexico is an obstacle to understanding history. Race does not mean the same thing in all times and places.

Vincent sometimes demonstrates an awareness of the complexity of historical issues and the difficulties of making judgments about distant places and other times where the ideas about race mixture and racial labeling are distinct. He seems to acknowledge the difficulties of extracting what is African from the racial mixture in Mexico, writing "What is 'African' in Mexico tends to become blended with something else" (38–39). He also acknowledges that politics, class, and racial categories were intermixed; racist language was used not just as a way of expressing superiority over darker social inferiors, but was also employed to denigrate the political enemies of the elite. Vincent notes for example that Anastasio Zerecero "was called by an enemy 'the black who is pure chocolate scum,' although he was socially white" (148). Yet, these statements are only concessions to the indeterminacy of racial characterizations at the margins. Vincent generally writes as though appearance were everything. Zerecero is later referred to as "the light-hued 'black' Zerecero"; Lorenzo de Zavala is described as a "curly-haired, dark-complexioned Yucateño" (180); Ignacio Basadre as "a light-complexioned native of the port of Veracruz" (193).

The best documented example of the problem with naively accepting these nineteenth-century labels as genealogical fact is the case of Juan José Codallos, whom Vincent describes initially as "an 'African' immigrant from Trinidad" (171). Codallos was subject to a recent study by Margaret Chowning who looked into the enigma of a man with the highest connections in the elite of Michoacán (his family was cared for during the War of the South by Agustín de Iturbide's brother-in-law), but who was publicly denigrated for his family and racial background. Chowning concluded that "The evidence strongly suggests, then that Codallos' implied low birth and 'African' ethnicity, despite the fact that they fit the profile of many of the other leaders of the War of the South, were concoctions of the conservative press. . . . They were probably not even intended to be taken literally, but instead were meant to erase any ambivalence in their readers' minds about the unacceptability of his plan or his actions."<sup>2</sup> Thus characterizations as "African" or "black"

2. Margaret Chowning, "Elite Families and Popular Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century Michoacán: The Strange Case of Juan José Codallos and the Censored Genealogy," *The Americas* 55 (1): 36, 44–45 (July 1998).

had a political meaning without regard to genealogy. But Vincent depends on these characterizations and makes concessions in footnotes, only to gloss over the concessions later in the text.<sup>3</sup> His lack of attention to detail is most clearly demonstrated in table 3 (115), “Racial identifications in the independence war, 1818–1820.” The table contains a column “Ethnicity,” defined as “racial identities,” the sources of which are said to be in appendix 2.<sup>4</sup> There is no appendix or documentation for the racial classifications in table 3.

This is not the only way that Vincent’s point of view is heavily distorted by U.S. history; he makes extravagant claims for Guerrero only to back away from them in explaining the details. In his opening sentence, Vincent begins by describing Guerrero as “Mexico’s equivalent of the United States’ Washington and Lincoln” (1) for his participation in Mexico’s War of Independence and his decree abolishing slavery. Guerrero is in some respects more remarkable than Washington, having begun his career, as did a number of independence war leaders in Mexico, as a muleteer. After independence, Guerrero was also an important politician who rose to become president for nearly nine months in 1829, during which he issued an executive order that abolished slavery in Mexico. But Vincent exaggerates the importance of the abolition of slavery. He begins with a concession that President Guerrero was not really a radical advocate for his race:

And for most of his brief term, [Guerrero] appeared more interested in bridging race and class differences, even to the point of accommodating his enemies, than he did in pushing a radical program. The grant from the congress of extraordinary presidential powers on August 25, however, gave Guerrero the chance to become an activist executive. He took it, and it cost him the presidency. (193)

Vincent cites two presidential decrees as exceptionally important: a national tax affecting the Church and the military (and therefore the stuff of conventional history) and Guerrero’s decree abolishing slavery in Mexico. Even here Vincent provides enough information to undermine his conclusion that the abolition of slavery was a significant factor in the opposition to Guerrero. For one thing the decree itself was written by José María Tornel, a member of the social elite, who had been campaigning against slavery in Mexico “to discourage the influx

3. He describes Codallos as having “African descent” (207) and as having “African descent neglected in the histories” (217). The most egregious example of Vincent’s tendency to conflate appearance and reality is his caption for a photo of an ancient Olmec head, which reads, “The Olmec civilization of 1200–300 B.C.E. had contact with Africa, as evidenced in the basalt sculptured heads of the type shown here from the Museum of Anthropology in Xalapa” (2).

4. Appendix 2 contains the “The Guerrero/Riva Palacio Family Tree,” rather than documentation for racial categories in table 3.

of white [slave-owning] settlers into East Texas."<sup>5</sup> And slavery was not the divisive issue that led to Guerrero's overthrow or his death. Guerrero conceded a partial exemption for some slave owners in Texas, but the government that overthrew him, reversed most of his decrees, and ordered his execution, not only did not retract the decree on slavery but sought to extend the abolition of slavery to Texas. Unlike Lincoln, Guerrero was not killed for freeing the slaves. Vincent admits as much when he wrote "Slavery abolition was not one" of the "alleged abuses of powers" that his opponents used to justify their actions against Guerrero (200).

Historians are naturally influenced by their own times, but they must attempt to understand other times and places and try to minimize the distortions that distance increases. In countless ways,<sup>6</sup> Vincent allows the late twentieth-century United States to distort the life and times of Vicente Guerrero. The result may increase the familiarity with Guerrero's name for readers in this country, but it will not help our students to understand Mexican history.

The man who actually wrote Guerrero's decree is the subject of Will Fowler's *Tornel and Santa Anna: The Writer and the Caudillo, Mexico, 1795–1853*. The author describes this work as "mainly a biography of [José María] Tornel that pays close attention to his relationship with [Antonio López de] Santa Anna" (174). Fowler looks most intensely at the years between 1824 and 1844, when Tornel and Santa Anna had a final falling out. Based on his PhD dissertation at the University of Bristol, this is a heavily footnoted, exhaustively researched, and important study of one of the principal figures of the time.<sup>7</sup> Tornel was never president, but he was one of the principal intellectuals, most prolific authors, and hardest working politicians of the time. He was congressional representative from Mexico City and the state of Veracruz, governor of the Federal District in 1828 and 1833–34, and minister of war several times in the 1830s and 1840s. He played a leading role in the abolition of slavery in Mexico, reformed both the army and sanitary policy, and encouraged educational innovation in Mexico City. Tornel also

5. Vincent, who is usually eager to describe any possible evidence of African genes, relegates the mention of Tornel's background to the notes at the end of the book, (n. 7, 196); Tornel was from an "Español" family" (n. 46, 299).

6. Anachronistic expressions, apparently intended to make the setting familiar to modern U.S. readers, abound in this book. A few examples: black poets "rapping in verse" (51), "freedom fighter" (101, 103, 110), "funky" used as a positive descriptor (105), "affirmative action" (147), "People's Party" (158ff), the Parian market described as a "mall" (170, 173) or a "social hangout for the elite" (170), "indigenous homeland" (171).

7. The only other major biography of Tornel is María del Carmen Vázquez Mantecón's thinly documented, *La palabra del poder: Vida pública de José María Tornel, 1795–1853* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1997).

administered the Mexico City Poor House. As one of Santa Anna's principal collaborators, understanding Tornel is crucial to understanding Mexico's transition from colony to nation.

This is not a simple, straightforward life in politics, because Tornel was one of the more complex political characters of his time. Fowler makes two principal points. First of all, Santa Anna depended on Tornel. Tornel kept Santa Anna informed while he was out of the capital, used his considerable political skills to prepare the groundwork for Santa Anna's repeated elevations to the presidency, and served as Santa Anna's political adviser and propagandist while he was in power. He provides an essential political vantage point from which to view the politics of Mexico's early republic.

Second, Tornel was not a political chameleon who instinctively changed his rhetoric to suit each new occasion, but a thoughtful, articulate leader who helped to shape the political realities by actively responding to changing circumstances. "As one political experiment after another failed to provide Mexico with the order, stability, and prosperity its political class had dreamed of achieving in 1821, Tornel, with the benefit of experience, renounced certain ideas in order to adopt new ones, in the hope that the day would come when they would succeed in finding a proposal that, in marrying tradition with modernity, and idealism with pragmatism, would consolidate a long-lasting and stable political system" (273). He shifted from insurgent to pro-independence royalist, from moderate federalist constitutional republican, to moderate centralist constitutional republican, and following repeated foreign invasions and loss of national territory, he dropped constitutionalism and supported dictatorship. Biographers usually begin with, or at least gradually develop, some sympathy for their subjects, but Fowler provides a relatively balanced view of Tornel, considering the attacks of his enemies as well as the accolades of his friends and admirers.

One of the highlights of Fowler's book is his use of documents in the *Archivo Histórico Militar* to follow Tornel's career as an insurgent. Tornel was raised in Orizaba, Veracruz, which Fowler shows had a continuing influence on his political thinking. Tornel began his studies for the priesthood as an excellent student alongside one of the other great intellectuals of the period, José María Luis Mora, in the Colegio de San Ildefonso in Mexico City, where he came under the influence of Enlightenment thinkers. Tornel joined José María Morelos's insurgent movement in 1813, and apparently saved the life of future president Guadalupe Victoria during the insurgent defeat at Puruarán. Tornel was later captured. Nearly executed several times, Tornel was protected by a Spanish friend of his father and eventually was persuaded to accept a pardon. (Years later, Tornel would return the favor by exempting his savior from the laws expelling Spaniards from Mexico.) Fowler considers the possibility that

Tornel provided information to the Spanish authorities, but in any case, Tornel did not keep his mouth shut, and continued to argue for independence. He was confined to the library of San Ildefonso (a fate many an intellectual might envy), then the infirmary (for “greater security”) from which he escaped, and was subsequently recaptured. Confined to the Colegio Seminario Palafoxiano in Puebla, his outspokenness eventually earned him an expulsion. Tornel continued to aid the insurgents until late 1817 when he was threatened with arrest and disappeared once again. When he reappeared, at the time of the Plan de Iguala in early 1821, he was already serving as an officer and aide to Antonio López de Santa Anna in the royalist army. This crucial period is still undocumented and we have only the collapse of the Spanish army in 1821 to suggest that for some time before Iturbide announced his plan, creole officers like Santa Anna and Tornel must have been considering the benefits of independence. If Santa Anna remains the central enigma in early republican Mexican history, Fowler’s biography clearly demonstrates the pivotal role Tornel played.

Much less is known of the political participation of those who were less articulate, and even illiterate—those who left historians no autobiographies offering insight into their motivations and beliefs. Richard Warren’s *Vagrants and Citizens: Politics and the Masses in Mexico City from Colony to Republic* focuses on the period from 1808 to 1836, from the imperial crisis to the end of the first federal republic but takes a longer view on political rituals and celebrations. Warren uses a great variety of sources including “electoral records, criminal trials, debates in congress and municipal council, pamphlets and newspapers” (14), as well as “handbills, poems, skits, songs, jokes, and even graffiti” (16). His comparisons of the rituals introducing various constitutions and celebrating with changing emphasis the heroes of the independence movements are particularly insightful.

As the capital and largest city of New Spain, Mexico City was the scene of political wrangling with national as well as local significance. Despite Mexico City’s rather tranquil colonial history, contentious elites feared the participation of the lower classes in politics, and at the same time, vaguely sensed that legitimacy somehow depended on popular support. Even as early as 1808, conservative pro-Spanish conspirators justified their coup against Viceroy José de Iturrigaray on the grounds that he was currying favor with the plebeians by tossing coins to them and forgoing traditional gestures of respect by allowing a commoner to speak with him without removing his hat. Paradoxically, the successful plotters also felt the need to justify their illegal actions in overthrowing the viceroy by characterizing their efforts as a “popular movement” (27–29). Similarly, Iturbide used Mexico City crowds to promote his prospects as a political leader (eventually rising to be Emperor Agustín

I, in part, on their support for him as an enemy of the hated Spaniards) while also trying to convince the municipal government to keep the unemployed and idle off the streets. Popular support required attention to the will of the sovereign and abstract people, while at the same time not permitting the tattered and dirty members of the body politic to irritate their social superiors. In the end Iturbide was unwilling to rely on his ragged, poorly armed supporters and abdicated.

Given the cursory consideration that most historians have paid to the elections of this period, the attention that Warren pays to ballots and procedures is long overdue. The surviving electoral records that Warren has dug out of the archives allow him to measure participation and compare elections not only within this period of Mexican history but with suffrage in France, Britain, and elsewhere in Latin America. Early on, Mexico had probably the broadest franchise in the world, but it was not a simple process to enroll virtually all adult men as voters. Race discrimination quickly proved to be impracticable: the poor all looked alike. Even before the new nation abolished official caste labeling, those in charge of keeping electoral records found that “any attempt to discern the ethnic background of voters would be fruitless because the city’s black, indigenous, and *mestizo* populations were indistinguishable” (38). Enthusiasm for voting apparently reached a peak in 1826 and 1827, and the subsequent decline in participation owed as much to disillusionment of the electorate as to the intentional restrictions imposed by elitist politicians. “Ultimately, Mexico City’s masses walked away from the polls as much as they were driven from them . . .” (165). All the while, politicians worked to turn crowds from active shapers of political reality to passive spectators of political rituals and uncritical consumers of re-iterations of historical events. Warren’s able use of telling anecdotes and quotations from original sources makes this a lively read as well as an important political analysis.

Silvia Arrom’s *Containing the Poor* is an exceptionally good book that looks at the rise of modern social theory and practice over a century, between the Bourbon era and the triumphant return of the Liberals to power at the end of the War of the Reform. Arrom traces the history of a “bold experiment that the most optimistic believed would eliminate poverty and usher in economic development” (1). The late eighteenth-century reformers rejected the traditional Christian view of beggars as the “blessed poor” and espoused a modern view that poverty could be and should be eliminated. Rather than providing the prosperous with the opportunity to exercise Christian charity, those who asked for alms were a nuisance to be eliminated. Begging was legally proscribed and those who violated the law were to be confined, by force if necessary. The 1774 ban on soliciting alms remained on the books until 1871; these dates provide the beginning and the ending years of Arrom’s study.



Her introduction provides a succinct overview of the book and the historiography of social welfare policy. The first two chapters look at the problem of beggars and vagrants and how the Poor House reform was supposed to work. Those who asked for alms when they were able to work were the “unworthy” vagrants who should be forced to work or serve in the military. The “worthy” beggars would be confined to the Poor House where they would be properly sheltered, adequately fed, thoroughly edified, and entirely remolded until they could be redeemed as productive citizens or discharged in the care of someone who would guarantee that they would never return to the nasty habit of pestering passers-by for money.

The remaining seven chapters trace the history of the Poor House within shorter periods determined in part by the external press of conventional political history (and its fiscal consequences) and in part by internal forces making institutional changes in the Poor House itself. Arrom traces the first three decades of Poor House operations from founding in 1774 to the most important internal change, the creation of a school for orphans in 1806. The reform efforts between 1806 and 1811 require a substantial chapter of their own, while a somewhat shorter chapter follows the Poor House through the remainder of the era of independence wars and Mexico’s brief experiment with a national monarchy. The “Republican Difficulties” between 1824 and 1855 have their own chapter, while the arrival of Maximilian in 1863 and his execution in 1867 are significant enough to divide the Reform era into two chapters. The four years between the return of the Liberals and the end of the poor house experiment in 1871 mark an end to the chronological treatment.

Arrom’s conclusions are the epitome of clarity and precision. The Poor House never really worked as intended and the changes were as much the work of the objects of the experiment as those who thought themselves in control. Begging was in fact reduced for the first twenty years of the Poor House’s history, though vagrants were brought in when they should have been kept out. The resulting institution was both repressive and benevolent. Despite the propositions of social theorists, “the Poor House [in practice] neither homogenized nor rehabilitated most of its inmates” (279). Dispensing food and medicine while providing shelter was easier and less expensive than reshaping the identities of the poor or even changing their habits. The Poor House staff soon ceased to discipline the poor and shifted efforts from confining beggars to aiding those who were willing to enter the institution. Rather than keeping recalcitrant beggars off the streets, the staff acted as gatekeepers discriminating between those who would be allowed in and those who should be kept out. It is hardly surprising that this discrimination turned on race, but before long the “worthy” poor who

were permitted to enter sometimes brought their own servants with them! The Poor House directors and staff “turned an institution founded to deter vagrancy and suppress mendacity into one buttressing white privilege” (283) by keeping poor whites from suffering the indignity of begging in the streets. Independence from Spain made little difference to the Poor House. “The major long-term changes—the end of forcible confinement, the growing emphasis on women and children, the loss of ecclesiastical funding and support, and the prominence of the school—were well underway before independence” (280). The arrival of a foreign emperor later in the century did lead to significant changes. It was not until the arrival of Maximilian that innovations (such as the return of religious orders and the introduction of women to management and the governing board) were introduced.

*De Colonia a Nación: Impuestos y Política en México, 1750–1860* is a valuable collection of essays that originated in a seminar directed by Carlos Marichal at El Colegio de México in 1997. Marichal and Daniela Marino, in their prologue to the book, point to two themes in the historiography: (1) the success of Spain (relative to France and Britain) of making the colonies pay the costs of increased military presence, and (2) the decline of revenues from the late colonial period to the early independence years. Marichal’s introductory essay takes as its subject this enormous contrast between the relative fiscal success of the Bourbon era and the fiscal weakness of the early republican period between 1750 and 1850. He argues that Herbert Klein overestimated New Spain’s per capita tax burden, which Marichal estimates to be 40 percent higher than Spain’s. He emphasizes the discontinuity between the imperial (not colonial) system and the national republic and argues that the post-independence political problems were rooted in the insufficiency of the fiscal system. Much of his argument is highly traditional: seeing federalism as a U.S. model (rather than emphasizing Nettie Lee Benson’s proposition of Spanish constitutional roots), highlighting “el poco escrupuloso general [Antonio López de] Santa Anna,” (47) and contending that economic fluctuations and fiscal shortfalls caused instability (conclusions that I have disputed elsewhere).<sup>8</sup> Marichal does make the important point that fiscal autonomy really began as regional treasuries stopped sending funds to the central office during the independence wars, and that fiscal analysis is a necessary component of any analysis of social and political history.

8. Nettie Lee Benson, *The Provincial Deputation in Mexico: Harbinger of Provincial Autonomy, Independence, and Federalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Donald Fithian Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Donald F. Stevens, “Economic Fluctuations and Political Instability in Early Republican Mexico,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16: 645–65 (Spring 1986). Quoted phrase from Marichal, appears on p. 47.

The remaining essays examine particular taxes and issues during shorter, politically-defined periods. The collection has two main sections: three essays on colonial fiscal subjects and four essays on taxation controversies after independence. Marino's essay on tribute carefully examines when and how population growth and greater fiscal pressure produced increases in tribute paid to the crown. Despite some successes in collecting the tax, Marino concludes that resistance in New Spain made collecting more tribute difficult, even though the tribute burden was five times higher in the Peruvian highlands than it was in Mexico. Consequently, officials in New Spain chose to increase consumption taxes to produce more revenue. Ana Lidia García Peña examines the apparent passivity of the lower classes in Mexico City (relative to the Mexican countryside or to European cities of the eighteenth century) and concludes that the absence of confrontation and mob violence in the capital of New Spain does not indicate weakness of the popular classes, but rather their ability to survive by means of a thriving underground economy:

La carencia de protestas colectivas no indicó inmadurez o debilidad de los pobladores ciudadanos, sino la habilidad de los pobladores ciudadanos para ejercer presión sobre el Estado colonial para satisfacer sus demandas sin necesidad de recurrir al enfrentamiento directo. (112)

Monica Gómez provides a largely theoretical discussion of the debate on when, how, and what sorts of government revenues might provide an indication of overall economic performance.

The essays on post-independence fiscal systems also are bound by conventional political divisions, but Jorge Castañeda Zavala's contribution has the benefit of examining state "contributions" to the national treasury during both periods of federalism, 1824–1836 and 1846–1861. In the most original essay in the collection Martín Sánchez argues that centralist finances in the intervening period (1836–1844) were not motivated by the fiscal inadequacies of the federal system or the need for extraordinary measures to meet the costs of war. Instead, direct taxes were motivated by the desire to increase efficiency and the proportionality of fiscal burdens in relation to ability to pay, thus improving the morale and civic sense of the population. The fiscal innovations of the centralist system were closely related to the political goals of centralist politicians, and the failure of this fiscal system resulted as much from technical faults of the economy (the lack of markets for property and accurate information) as from the costs of militarism. Sergio Miranda Pacheco examines the finances of Mexico City from 1846–1855, a period of independence from the national government, when fiscal conflicts pitted federalists in the city government against federalists in the national government. Miranda Pacheco upholds the traditional thesis that the conflicts of this era were not driven by ideas but by the need

for revenues given the absence of funds due to the costs of war. The final essay, by María José Rhi Sausi, concerns taxation and political participation in Mexico City during the Regency and the Second Empire of the 1860s.

If taxes are subject to variation over time, so is death, or at least so are the changing rituals and ceremonies associated with our human mortality. Verónica Zárate Toscano's *Los nobles ante la muerte en México: Actitudes, ceremonias y memoria (1750–1850)* looks at death rituals and records among the titled nobility from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century. A contribution to the history of mentalities, Zárate Toscano is interested in their thoughts and lifestyles as well as the "relationship between the living and the dead through religious devotion, social practice and family ties." (15) Titles of nobility provide an identifiable social group of men and women at the apex of the social pyramid (at least as it was conceived in medieval terms).

This is generally a remarkably thorough descriptive study, and like most works that assume that the pace of change is slow, little variation is found in only one hundred years. Zárate Toscano begins with theoretical considerations about last wills and testaments and the strengths and limitations as historical sources. She examines the domestic nobility (those who resided and obtained their titles in New Spain), the origins of their wealth and their juridical status, as well as how they acquired their titles. Most resided in New Spain and later Mexico, though nearly one in four had been born in Spain; their consorts however, were from a greater variety of places. Zárate Toscano provides a tremendous wealth of detail about the locations of their homes, the circumstances of their educations, their participation in special orders, their limited cultural contributions, and their debts and creditors. She looks into their wills for evidence of affection, for family alliances, and inheritance. Surprisingly few nobles married endogamously and most married only once (though widowers were much more likely to remarry than widows). They had an average of five children, and seldom used terms of affection in their wills. Zárate Toscano analyzes manifestations of piety in the forms of requests for intercession by saints, finding that references to saints were usually abstract and general (almost three-fourths of cases use the expression "santos de mi nombre") (154). This leads to the baptismal records in search of their full names: this must have been exhausting research, especially since wills did not provide birth dates. Zárate Toscano provides a breakdown of male and female names by decade and concludes that most nobles were not given names of the saints of their day of birth. She examines what little is known about the circumstances of their deaths, about burial rituals and circumstances, processions, and places of internment. It is curious that it is not known if women participated in burial processions. Women were

prohibited in Seville, but there is no evidence to confirm their presence and some evidence of their absence in Mexico. Although birth dates were not used in identification and rarely appear in epitaphs, exact dates of death were frequently recorded.

Zárate Toscano's descriptive statistics are sometimes difficult to decipher. More noble titles were created in late eighteenth century, but were officially abolished 1826. The frequency distribution given in table 1.2 (36) demonstrates that most of the wills were written in middle of the period. Zárate Toscano's data set consists of 303 wills written by 181 individuals. A few more than half had only one will, one-third had two, and the rest had multiple documents, sometimes written only days apart. Using the wills as the unit of analysis gives greater weight to those who wrote wills more frequently without regard to the bias this introduces. Were those nobles who more frequently re-wrote their wills less healthy, more worried, better planners, more religious, more superstitious, wealthier, less emotionally stable, or something else? Zárate Toscano frequently tells us about the number of cases rather than the percentage, but as long as wills rather than individuals are the unit of analysis, it makes little difference: it is difficult to get a sense of the group as a whole, or even what sorts of subgroups might make sense of the data. Given the assumption that mentalities change only slowly, during longer periods than that considered in her book, this study is largely synchronic. Yet, at the same time, the data are frequently broken down by decades, displaying the same general shape of the curve in the original frequency distribution. Zárate Toscano concludes that "we are able to intuit the lack of dechristianization, at least with the particular characteristics that Michel Vovelle found for France in the eighteenth century" (295–6). She believes that liberalism is linked to the greater trust demonstrated in executors to carry out the wishes of the deceased in the absence of the explicit instructions that had been characteristic of earlier wills, that burials became more private, excluding wider social sectors. After independence, "los legados para pobres, huérfanos e instituciones prácticamente desaparecieron," (298) while those who mention a "obra pía pero de carácter secreto" increased considerably. But details are missing as most wills are not specific. Zárate Toscano finds a change in devotion, a trend toward greater humility in burials and masses rather than ostentation. The problem is that less than a fifth of the wills (or decedents?) were explicit about the intentions of the deceased.

Pamela Voekel's *Alone Before God* concurs that there was a change in devotion. She finds that modernity for Mexico was rooted in religious thought and that liberalism developed without secularism. The debates over proper locations for burying the dead and for control of death rituals were not a simple religious versus secular and church versus

state conflict. Rather Voekel stresses the division *within both* the church and the state between two different forms of religious thought: baroque and enlightened piety. Her database consists of 2100 wills from Mexico City between the 1620s and the 1850s with additional depth in 1710–20, 1810–20, and 1850–60. She also employs a wide variety of other evidence from both archival and published sources.

Voekel begins by describing the baroque style of burials and piety, which emphasized the miraculous power of saints and their physical relics as conduits of God's power. Priests were important as mediators as well. Exuberance and extravagance were expressions of divine power. Community was structured and organic. Divine power was not evenly distributed in space but was associated with particular places. Burial places replicated the social hierarchy: it was better to be buried under the floor in the chapels of saints and near the altars. Death's presence in the sanctuary was considered necessary to remind the living both of their own mortality and their continuing obligation to pray for the dead.

Enlightened piety stressed a more direct, almost unmediated connection with God, and was an inner piety that reduced but did not eliminate the mediation of the Church and thus avoided protestant heresy. Divine power was no longer associated with particular geographical spaces but to inner connection to individuals. Moderation, humility, and simplicity were signs of this internal connection to the divine. Those who believed that they had such direct contact with God rejected extravagance as a superficial distraction from the real business of religion. Their wills demonstrate a decline in bequests to saints' images, to confraternities, and for masses for their souls.

Were public suburban cemeteries proposed in the late eighteenth century to remove burials from mediating control of priests and saints rather than for sanitary reasons? Voekel concludes that they were. "Although health concerns loomed large in Mexico, my research revealed a more fundamentally religious conflict that centered on reformers' desire to lead everyone down the right road to God by creating suburban burial sites far from the superfluous mediating presence of saints' images, clergy, and communicants" (15). Both the clergy and government bureaucracy contained pro-reform elements since they were often the "solid career choice of the well-educated studious sons of the often impoverished lower and middle nobility." (84) Rather than being adopted by an older identifiable social group, enlightened piety emerged as a new social group (one whose members stressed they were "individuals"). Proponents of this new style of religion were not opposed to hierarchy but defined themselves as opposing and displacing the old, vain, superstitious, traditional elite. The main identifiable opponents to reform were the regular orders, who earned income from the older style of burials.

The new form of enlightened piety was particularly evident among merchants in Veracruz who believed their rise was due to individual effort. "In Veracruz's self-congratulatory enlightened we have the fundamental constituent of modernity: the man who believes he has cut all the threads of the social fabric, who conceives of himself as a fully sovereign individual" (143). These new men of reason and moderation would not parade their wealth and status, but would carefully observe their social inferiors in the newly lighted city streets and guide them along the proper path with newly instituted *juntas de policía*, *alcaldes de barrios*, and institutions like the Poor House. Death was no longer the inevitable transition to a better life and the inspiration for prayer, but a personal failing that could contaminate the living and required exile from the civic arena to suburban burial plots.

Voekel demonstrates and articulates the religious roots of modernity "through two of the new republic's most influential liberals," José María Luis Mora and José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi. Both quoted scripture and referred to the history of the early church to support their political positions. "To attach hierarchy was not to promote democracy, and to stress individuality was not to promote equality" (166–7). The ideas of Mora and Lizardi provide an intellectual context for the dramatic decrease in references to saints in wills from 1710s to 1850s that Voekel demonstrates from her database.

During the same period, observation of the body as guide to medical knowledge, a process that has been called the "surgicalization" of medicine, profoundly changed both medical practice and ideas about public health. As medicine became transformed, it became crucial to the burial debate and what had been a religious question began to be argued in medical language. Although Spanish reformer Baltasar Melchor Gaspar María de Jovellanos cited theology to support his enlightened position on burials in 1780, by 1832 a religious confraternity in Mexico City argued against the removal of bodies buried in the parish cemetery not on the basis of dogma, tradition, or connections to the divine, but with the assertion that disturbing the corpses would be a threat to public health. The ideological battle was over in little more than half a century. Among the prosperous group who left wills, three-quarters of those who expressed a burial preference requested burial in a suburban cemetery by the end of this period. Yet, even the 1859 decree secularizing the cemeteries contained justifications of a religious tenor, asserting that the government acted in accord with the ancient religious doctrine of the early church.

Voekel recognizes, of course, that since wills are only written by those with property to pass on, her sources can tell us little about the religious sentiments of the poor majority. But by pointing to the survival of folk medicine, celebrations like Day of the Dead, and the contemporary

struggles against neoliberalism in Mexico, it is clear that “modernity” has been and remains contested in Mexico. Voekel’s *Alone Before God* is a innovative, provocative, and exciting work that illuminates the study of modern Mexican history.

Twenty years ago, historians were divided over whether or not it might be sensible to connect the study of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Mexico. Eric Van Young pointed out that “we are not always asking the most interesting questions in what we study,” and he recommended bridging the historiographical gap that scholars had created to mark political independence.<sup>9</sup> Today the value of such an approach, and the interesting questions that can be asked, are evident in the works considered here.

9. Eric Van Young, “Recent Anglophone Scholarship on Mexico and Central America in the Age of Revolution (1750–1850),” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 65 (4): 683–723 (November 1985).