

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Historical Atlas of Central America by Carolyn Hall, Héctor Pérez Brignoli and John V. Cotter

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the American frontier was perceived as unsettled landscape both in a geographical and a social sense, thus providing a setting in which women could invent alternative personas for themselves – including male-soldier-cum-nun, as was the case with the Monja Alférez, Catalina de Erauso. The counterpart to these permissive territories was evidenced by a growing need to discipline errant bodies that threatened to disrupt the established order, for instance the public torture and execution of Micaela Bastidas after her active involvement in the insurrection led by her husband Túpac Amaru in 1780, discussed by Mariselle Meléndez.

Despite the variety of themes examined, the essays are tightly connected in terms of both analytical approach and thematic interests. The frame is determinedly historical, providing new insights into the texts under discussion as well as the larger cultural, ideological and imaginative landscapes in which they were produced. The essays explore some of the central concerns currently shared by scholars of colonialism, regardless of their geographical speciality: alterity and the construction of the Other; the association of identity, human and territorial, with memory; the political and economical implications of geographical representation; the spatial experiences of gendered bodies; and the role of the city in imposing social and symbolic order. In doing so, they bring new perspectives to themes that have longed interested Latin Americanists as well as reaffirming the growing importance of gender and landscape history to the field.

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Carolyn Hall and Héctor Pérez Brignoli with John V. Cotter (cartographer), *Historical Atlas of Central America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), pp. xiv + 321, \$99.95, hb.

As intellectual interests and fashions change one of the casualties has been the study of the historical geography of Mesoamerica. Scholars who wrote around the turn of the nineteenth century, such as Karl Sapper and Franz Blom, were followed by a brilliant generation, many of them students of Carl O. Sauer at the University of California at Berkeley. Names such as James J. Parsons and Robert C. West come readily to mind. They in turn fostered a third generation including William M. Denevan, Carl L. Johannessen, and David R. Radell. An independent scholar such as Peter Gerhard must also be mentioned as being of this cohort. Some of them have continued to research and publish but it is fair to say that many of their major contributions date from the 1960s.

With a few notable exceptions this tradition has now fallen away, and the magnificent historical atlas by Carolyn Hall and Héctor Pérez Brignoli reminds us dramatically what scholarship on Central America has lost. To begin with, this is a beautiful book. The illustrations are visually attractive, colourful, apt and adroitly placed in the text. The maps are carefully and clearly drawn, convey information without clutter or overloading of data and, while complementing the text, independently tell much of the story as good maps should. Look, for example, at the maps, illustration, and explanatory charts on pp. 120–123, explaining the economy of the mid-colonial period.

Prefatory material is followed by five chapters, each cohesive and self-contained but very much part of the whole. Chapter One, ‘Environment and Territory’, sets

the scene. The region is defined and the historiography of geographical study of Central America is examined. The geographic and environmental situation is followed by an overview of Central America's place in larger histories from prehistoric times to the present.

Chapter Two, 'People and Places: The Patterns of Cultural Change', is devoted to what the authors call 'cultural geography', by which they mean the different culture areas before European invasion, the agricultural basis and staple crops of the region, Spanish explorations and conquests, labour and tribute exactions, new settlement patterns, the missionary Church, the post-conquest demographic disasters, ethnic categories and miscegenation, the pace of acculturation and the twentieth-century population explosion.

Chapter Three, 'Colonial Societies', intensifies the authors' examination of the three centuries of Spanish colonialism. They emphasise Central America's increasing involvement with the outside world, but there is due attention to the nature of colonial government, the role of the Church, social organisation and control, revolts, rural and urban societies, and the first attempts by traders, navies, pirates, and others to the strategic isthmian position, including the famous Panama *trajín*.

The next chapter, 'The Formation of National Societies', runs from the so-called Bourbon Reforms of the late colonial period to the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. The collapse of the infant Central American Republic, the ensuing civil wars, and the opportunities for foreign intruders, especially Great Britain and the United States, created by these divisions, meant that economic development was slow. Later in the nineteenth century, under various Liberal regimes, the five small states fostered development and welcomed foreign investment. New exports such as coffee and bananas created monocultures, and the opening of the Canal re-emphasised Central America's strategic world importance.

There is no better illustration of the excellence of the maps and charts than the visual explanations of the post-independence civil wars (pp. 172-75). To many, these chaotic and repeated struggles are beyond logic or understanding, but in this atlas not only do we discover logical sequences and logistical sense, but also, together with the text, the maps make these wars, if not fully purposive at least comprehensible.

The last chapter, 'The Challenge of Development', brings the work to the present. Monoculture exports and the Canal have not solved the problems of Central America's chronic underdevelopment and poverty. Rapid population growth and urbanisation have nullified many advances, and peasant expansion into what had been sparsely settled frontiers has approached their limits.

Democracy has also proved elusive except in Costa Rica and Belize. Armies have consumed scarce national resources and installed dictators or leaned heavily on elected governments. Civil wars, repression and military atrocities have been common features of the last three decades. Intervention by the United States has been an additional complication in several cases.

Such a bald chapter by chapter account does not do justice to this superb work. The text is balanced and judicious, there are few typographical errors, the notes, glossary and bibliography (herein entitled 'Sources') are exemplary. In fact the bibliography in itself is of great utility to scholars of the area. Notable is the way in which many sections assemble previously disaggregated data to make new sense of them. Authors Hall and Pérez Brignoli and cartographer Cotter are to be

congratulated on a work of conceptual clarity, explanatory sophistication and visual beauty.

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Iván Jaksic (ed.), *The Political Power of the Word: Press and Oratory in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 2002), pp. viii + 162, £14.95, pb.

This is a welcome contribution to a field that is increasingly attracting the attention of scholars on Latin America. While the history of the press is at the same time one of the oldest and most innovative areas in other historiographical traditions, it has only made a few preliminary steps on the region. As this volume combines the topic of the press with that of oratory, it is already alerting its readers that the focus here is on the circulation of ideas, or (as the title aptly puts it) on the power of the word in the realm of politics. An introduction by the editor is followed by seven chapters, the first three dedicated to the press, the last three to oratory and chapter four to both.

Rebecca Earle opens the first chapter by challenging the idea that the press had a relevant role as a precursor of Independence. Evidence from New Granada and Chile on low literacy rates and the existing small numbers of printers confirms, in her view, Alexander von Humboldt's impression that the press boomed after the break up with Spain, not before. In the following chapter Carmen McEvoy finds the relevance of the press in Lima between 1791 and 1822 in the articulation and circulation of concepts. She skilfully navigates through the contents of *El Mercurio Peruano* (between 1791 and 1795) and of *El Verdadero Peruano* during the constitutional regime (1811–1814), concluding with the maturity of the press between 1821 and 1822. It is the advancement, timid at first and confident later, of republican principles that connect the different stages of the analyses. The difficulties encountered in Peru by the advocates of civic humanism were similar to those in other Latin American countries at the time: how to create the public sphere necessary for the functioning of republican institutions where structural constraints impeded its birth. The link between state formation and education is studied in the following chapter by Sol Serrano and Iván Jaksic. The expansion of education pursued by the state was seen in Chile as a prerequisite for the construction of an educated male elite that could fulfil its role as citizens of the Republic. The authors concentrate on the figure of Andrés Bello to take the reader through the topics of the relevance given to language and education in the construction of the liberal state and through the slow but ultimate reaction of the Catholic Church against the liberal project. The series of publications launched by the Church by mid-century was a testimony to the relevance acquired by the printed word in political debates, a relevance that forced the Church to embrace the written word that it had for so long distrusted.

The chapter by Douglas Sullivan-González marks the transition of the book towards the topic of oratory. By concentrating on Catholic priests' sermons during the Rafael Carrera's regime in Guatemala (1839–1871), the author looks at the manner in which the oral discourse of the Church accommodated to political circumstance. A particularly insightful contribution is his analysis of the impact of this