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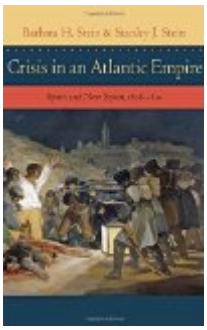

Barbara H. Stein, Stanley J. Stein. *Crisis in an Atlantic Empire: Spain and New Spain, 1808-1810.* The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science Series. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. 808 pp. $89.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4214-1424-9.

Reviewed by Jason Locke

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

The subtitle, *Spain and New Spain, 1808-1810*, is a fairly accurate assessment of the dual focus of this work. Unlike many books about Latin America, which give only a cursory assessment of court intrigues in Spain before returning to a closer examination of the independence story of the place at hand, or Spanish histories, which often accord the growing unrest in the colonies a short paragraph, this book attempts to attack both sides of the Atlantic to get at the full story of the cracks in the once-close relationship between Spain (often called the "metropole" in this book) and New Spain (later rechristened "Mexico").

It is a big bite, and Barbara H. Stein and Stanley J. Stein have structured the book well to take it, dividing the narrative into sections that ping-pong between Europe and Mexico during the fateful two years of struggle. The structure allows the authors to concentrate their attention on the story at hand, staving off the impacts of metropolitan dramas on colonial outposts for a separate section and the justice that each of the separate topics deserve. Also, the lack of a clear central thesis enables the Steins to follow the intellectual threads and to document meticulously everything in their path, rather than delimiting themselves to the ruthless pursuit of one overarching question. It is this thoroughness that makes this tome such a valuable resource book for the story of the crises in the colonial and metropolitan Spanish Empire in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

This is not, however, a book for those without a high level of prior education in late colonial Latin America and Napoleonic Europe. It is clear that this was written for academic professionals and graduate students who already possess a great deal of very specialized knowledge about the intricacies of the period. While the writing is clear, often new topics are introduced with a swirl of undifferentiated political actors and factions whose purposes and political leanings are left undisclosed. Major treaties and agreements are introduced into the text with the assumption that the reader is already familiar with the minu-

tiae. For those less familiar, explanations of some elements occur only when necessary.

A major limiting factor of the accessibility of the text is the somewhat erratic policy toward translation. While Spanish-language proficiency is generally to be expected among Iberianists and Latin Americanists, French-language proficiency is somewhat less common. Nevertheless, this book assumes that the reader is fluent in both French and Spanish, for long passages of strategically untranslated eyewitness statements litter the text. From time to time, the language decisions seem arbitrary and erratic. Why, for instance, is a French diplomat writing to Napoleon in *Spanish*? Why is half of a diary entry quoted in French, while the final sentence, after a break of authorial discussion, translated into English?

That being said, this book is a gold mine for the sheer amount of primary sources brought to the surface. The fact that so many of them are untranslated—while limiting the accessibility to the uninitiated—is an enormous strength, allowing those with great fluency to tease out degrees of nuance in the original text that translations often lack.

This book is a valuable contribution to the shelf of any historian dealing with the independence era in any of the Spanish colonies. Despite the ambitious reach of the book, this is, primarily, an old-school political history. Given that the Steins stayed firmly within the bailiwick of political history, portions of their work could be used a springboard to further research, such as a social history or microhistory, which could also build on the insights developed by modern political and historical writers. A leading follow-up question would be, perhaps, why Peru and Cuba, affected by the same tensions and isolation as Mexico and Argentina, managed to stay loyal as their neighbors opted for independence.