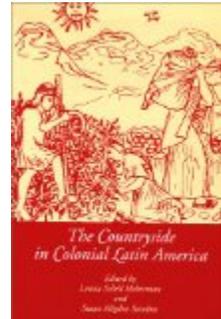


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Louisa Schell Hoberman, Susan Migden Socolow, eds. *The Countryside in Colonial Latin America*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. xiii + 295 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8263-1711-7; \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-1710-0.

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The appearance of a specialized collection of essays destined for use in the classroom often signals the public inauguration of a sub-field of study, sometimes many years after it has already secured a legitimate place in the minds of scholars. Such is the case with Louisa Schell Hoberman's and Susan Migden Socolow's *The Countryside in Colonial Latin America*, whose publication announces the arrival of rural history as a delineated sub-field of colonial Latin American history, replete with its own tools, reference works, and canonical masterpieces. The colonial countryside has attracted scholarly attention for a long time, mainly as the dioramic turf of the "exploitative encomienda" and the "great hacienda," but it was not until the late 1960s-1970s that it enjoyed a renaissance of research activity distinguished by theoretical debate, broad acceptance of quantitative methods, and more diverse use of archival sources.[1] The essays in the present volume encompass many of the lessons and findings from the past three decades presented in a format fit for distribution to novice historians across North America.

As part of the Dialogos Series of academic teaching materials for Latin American history, *The Countryside* complements Hoberman and Socolow's earlier *Cities and Society in Colonial Latin America* (1986), also published by the University of New Mexico Press. Both works collect essays written by established scholars on their own areas of expertise, "combining the results of primary research with surveys of secondary literature." The editors desisted from imposing more specific guidelines on contributors in order to allow each to address his or her topic as individually as possible, so that students might "appreciate the diverse approaches and styles historians can adopt." In their effort to appeal to a target

audience of "upper division undergraduates and beginning graduate students," the editors decided to eschew "much of the scholarly apparatus that is usually found in historical studies." Mainly, this meant streamlining citation notes to a bare minimum in favor of a bibliographical essay. Finally, the majority of the essays in both books focus on the social actors who inhabited the rural- and urban-scapes of early Latin America. In the newer book, however, the editors included three essays on "broad systemic and institutional features of the colonial rural world." The main essays are divided into two groups: those focusing on agrarian and everyday structures (chapters 1-3) and those focusing on social groups ("Landed Elite," "Clergy," "Middle Groups," "Blacks," and "Indigenous Peoples"; plus an essay that looks at "Conflict, Violence, and Resistance") (chapters 4-9). An epilogue by Hoberman places the essays within a broader historiographical context. After briefly summarizing the content and format of the main essays, I will briefly evaluate the book, attending mainly to its prospective usefulness as a textbook.

## SUMMARY

The first three essays deal with rural structures and ably manifest the editors' desire to provide up-to-date syntheses of recent research that also highlight the individual styles of contributors. Eric Van Young's essay "Material Life" begins by retelling a "true crime story" from eighteenth-century Mexico. Echoing the style of Carlo Ginzberg or Natalie Zemon Davis, Van Young adopts historical narrative as a way of reading and representing a single court case that allows him to pry into the daily routines, habits, and emotions of a bygone era. Besides introducing student-readers to the sheer sensual

pleasures of historical time travel, Van Young's piece also surveys many of the key themes and methods utilized by contemporary historians to approach the material aspects of everyday life. In sections dealing with diet, clothing, consumerism, housing, and personal belongings, Van Young discusses how variables such as seasonal climate, distance from cities and markets, consumer income, and available technology affected the material cultures of both high and low sectors of rural society. Although the focus of the essay is on "private" property within the household economy, Van Young also considers the country store as a site for channeling goods and the religious *cofradia* as an institution for controlling community wealth. Historians have explored these topics mainly through surviving inventories of goods and last wills and testaments. As with the court case, Van Young reads these documents in ways that emphasize the fullest sense of "material culture," as a record of human creativity that "not only mediates between human beings and the natural world, but also amongst human beings."

Juan Carlos Garavaglia's piece, "Agrarian Technology and Changing Ecosystems," provides an introduction to the field of environmental history, a graftage of geography and history perhaps best represented by the works of Sherbourne Cook, Alfred W. Crosby, and Elinor Melville. In contrast to these authors, who tend to stress the environmental degradation wrought by the coming of the Spaniards, Garavaglia opts for a slightly more neutral, more interactive characterization of the relationship between humans and ecosystems, perhaps only for the sake of indicating the fullest range of approaches that might be taken to study this topic. Noting that the imposition of any agrisystem atop an existing ecosystem "breaks the continuity of the food chain and thereby impoverishes it," Garavaglia's essay proceeds to focus on the ways humans attempt to recompense ecosystems by introducing new technology such as irrigation systems, complex strategies of crop rotation, and the use of organic fertilizers. In the presentation of his essay, Garavaglia adopts a comparative framework for considering the cases of Argentina and Central Mexico, breaking these units down further to consider cereal-horticultural vs. cereal-cattle zones in the Rio de la Plata, and Spanish hacienda vs. Indian community sectors in Puebla, Mexico. Besides introducing students to the variety of agrisystems that flourished in greater colonial Latin America, Garavaglia's detailed descriptions of seasonal planting and harvesting cycles for major crops should prove helpful to researchers.

Arnold J. Bauer's essay on "The Colonial Economy"

consistently emphasizes the results of recent findings: the vitality of interregional trade networks and rural market systems; the significance of wage and price fluctuations; the variety of capital accumulation strategies; and the complexities of ecclesiastical lending practices. By sustained use of stratigraphic metaphors—"During three centuries of Spanish rule, European economic culture became dominant and leached into the native substrata, but ... indigenous forms persisted and continue today to seep to the surface"—Bauer cogently relates these and other diverse facets of the colonial economy into a highly readable essay about a very complex subject. More than other chapters in the book, Bauer's piece strikes me as being an extremely useful orientational tool for advanced graduate students and historians who do not specialize on economic issues.

Collectively, these three chapters set the tone for the book by highlighting variation, difference, and hybridity. They mark a moment in the life-cycle of Latin American rural history when cross-regional comparative studies and micro-historical analyses of smaller units are being taken up with vigor, while macro-models (dependency theory, world-system analysis, feudalism vs. capitalist paradigms) have lost some of their former luster. The next five chapters (4-8) turn to the treatment of social groups who played dynamic, if not determinative, roles in shaping the colonial countryside.

Stuart Schwartz's essay looks at the formation of "The Landed Elite" and the means of accumulating property that confirmed its aspirants. After summarizing the early sixteenth century as a period when *encomiendas* of Indian labor were liberally granted by the Spanish crown and self-aggrandizing notions of nobility were easily entertained by Spanish conquerors, Schwartz goes on to elaborate the various ways in which rural estates originated and expanded through "land grants, usurpation, *composicion*, and purchase ... as well as marriages, dowry, and inheritance." Importantly, in contrast to popular notions about rural aristocracies, Schwartz does not see the "landed elite" of Latin America as a stable, *a priori* social category, since "various occupational groups could buy land and thus become landowners." Nor did the acquisition of great rural estates automatically confer noble status or its privileges (tax exemptions, right to entail property, preference in office holding, royal recognition of coats-of-arms, etc.). Rather, the composition of this privileged class was susceptible to great flux over time. Regarding the decades-old debate about whether the great hacienda was fundamentally a profit-oriented enterprise or a self-supporting bastion for a

status-garnering elite, Schwartz prefers to lay out recent arguments made on behalf of both positions, thus inviting further deliberation on this classic term-paper problem.

John F. Schwaller's chapter on "The Clergy" cuts against the prevalent tendency to view the colonial Church as a monolithic institution with a singular ideology. Instead, Schwaller presents some of the inner complexity and disjunctive rivalries that existed within the Church. Besides pointing out the distinction between the diocesan and mendicant clergy (as well as further taxonomic and hierarchical divisions within these two branches), Schwaller provides a general periodic scheme that follows themes such as the routinization of sacramental fees and the missionization of Indian peoples through early, middle, and late colonial periods. This is a helpful primer not only for the classroom, but also for anyone wishing to work on the rich archival sources left by clergymen and nuns.

Lowell Gudmundson's chapter on "Middle Groups" covers the small landholders, petty office-holders, and traveling traders who occupied the layer of rural society between land-owning elites and an underclass of peasant/Indian laborers. Compared to these latter two sectors, middle groups have been relatively ignored by historians, partially as a result of the fluid, ambiguous social position they occupied. Their personal economic interests tied them to the landed elite in both competitive and collaborative relationships. They competed with landowners "over access to land, rent levels, and harvest divisions or prices," but they collaborated with these same elites in "facing the problems of labor recruitment and discipline vis-a-vis the propertyless" (p. 147).

Besides illustrating the scholarly style of its eminent author, Herbert S. Klein's chapter on "Blacks" and slavery in Latin America also registers some of the shifts presently occurring in the study of colonial labor systems. Over the years, Klein's work has consistently championed a Marxist-inspired quantitative approach to the study of Latin America. With the recent emergence of a "new cultural history," however, many economic and labor historians increasingly seek to affix treatments of socio-cultural phenomena to their materialist analyses of topics related to colonial economy. In this essay, Klein devotes sections to discussing the modes of production that absorbed African slave labor, the social relationships and cultural life of slaves, and, with a final teleological brush stroke, the emancipatory legacies of slave rebellions and manumission practices. While nod-

ding toward a degree of cultural portraiture of slave society, Klein's piece never veers too far from orthodox assumptions about the determinant role of economic structures.[2]

Cheryl English Martin's essay takes a balanced look at the impact of colonialism versus the legacy of survivalism among "Indigenous Peoples"—an approach that counterpoises historical and anthropological perspectives on colonial Mesoamericans. After sketching out Spanish imposition of forced labor systems, Catholicism, and new settlement patterns on Indian society, Martin presents the case that functional "features of indigenous ceremonial life and social relations endured through the end of the colonial period," largely within the sphere of semi-autonomy represented by local Indian *cofradías* and town governments, and largely owing to a strategy of outward conformity to Spanish political and economic institutions. At the same time, a greater trend toward cultural Hispanization and demographic *mestizaje* irrefutably transformed most indigenous communities, especially during the eighteenth century. Thus, from Martin's perspective as an historian, the Indian family and community structures that emerged in the post-Independence era were predominantly the products of intense historical change, which were nonetheless stippled with many continuities from the indigenous past.

The last essay by a contributor is Ward Stavig's "Conflict, Violence, and Resistance," which deals with conflictual interactions between social groups. Stavig briefly introduces some of the early campaigns of repression against indigenous groups (for example, those of Cortez, Pizarro, Landa, Coronado, and Nuno de Guzman), as well as later revitalization movements and revolts (including the 1712 Tzeltal and 1761 Canek uprisings among the Mayans, the 1780 Tupac Amaru rebellion in the Andes, and eighteenth-century *comunero* revolts in Paraguay and Colombia). In each case, just enough contextual information is provided to indicate how differences in time and place resulted in differences in the social composition of rebels; their tactics and leadership; and the outcomes of their efforts. Along the way, Stavig touches on several topics and issues that have increasingly come into play in newer studies of resistance. These include the relation of the timing of revolts to agricultural cycles, religion and culture as spaces of resistance, the phenomena of social banditry, and the use of "moral economy" as an explanatory concept.

In an epilogue entitled "Interpretations of the Colonial Countryside," Hoberman situates the preceding es-

says within broader patterns of revisionism currently operating in colonial historiography. Foremost, she questions the applicability of the traditional model of Spanish colonialism as it pertains to the countryside—as a two-tiered system with Indian and African laborers at the bottom and exploitative *encomenderos*, entrepreneurial miners, and extractive tithe and tax collectors at the top. Hoberman sees in the contributors' essays a general willingness to reconsider the "diversity, symbiosis, and exchanges" that characterized relations between rulers and ruled, ultimately questioning whether the term "colonial" might not overly "homogenize the diversity of enterprises and social groups that constituted the countryside" (p. 250). Particular attention is given to *patrimonialism* as a new heuristic model for explaining the networks of economic and social relations that adhered in the countryside, and which were neither entirely feudal or capitalistic (pp. 238-40). To my mind, Hoberman's epilogue maps out these and other topics of current debate in ways that provocatively suggest new agendas of research.

#### EVALUATION

These summaries indicate some of the possibilities for classroom use offered by this volume. Because the editors encouraged individualistic contributions, the essays are somewhat uneven in terms of coverage and density—some rely more on primary sources and original research, others vigorously synthesize recent secondary literature, while still others serve as basic introductions to their subjects. The book is certainly a welcome supplement to the classroom, but its effectiveness will depend on the skill of teachers in presenting and discussing its materials.

While the purpose of the first three essays was partly to introduce the material, climatological, and geographical dimensions of the countryside, the portrayals of social groups in the later chapters are not always adequately contextualized in rural settings. For example, much of what is said about the rural clergy has a generic quality, and I was often left wondering how religious lives differed in city and country. This is not so much a critique of the contributors as it is an acknowledgment that the social history of rural Latin America is still developing. Luckily, we now have William B. Taylor's *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), which brings our knowledge of the rural diocesan clergy to the highest level.

Topics on which I would like to have seen more coverage, perhaps even whole chapters, include mixed eth-

nic groups and colonial government at the local level. Though Stavig touches on *mestizos* in racial conflict and Martin looks at *mestizaje* as a dynamic process in the transformation of Indian villages, issues of mixed ethnic identity are generally left untouched by the contributors. Likewise, Gudmundson's chapter on "Middle Groups" (which does not refer to racial categories) includes a few pages on *alcades mayores* and *corregidores* in their capacity as tax collectors and collaborators in the invidious *repartimiento de mercancías*, but nowhere else in the book do we get indications of the roles played by royal representatives in the countryside. Since the publication of Woodrow Borah's edited *El Gobierno provincial en la Nueva España, 1570-1787* (Mexico: UNAM, 1985), we should now be looking at the personnel and workings of local governments and courts with greater precision. More detailed examinations of such institutions will provide an important piece of the rural puzzle, since they constituted the main arenas where rural inhabitants interacted with the colonial state.

At the end of the book, there is a bibliographical essay of recommended literature that substitutes for "much of the scholarly apparatus" of extended citation notes. Except for the sections on "Ecology and Agrarian Technology" and "Blacks" (presumably compiled by Garavaglia and Klein), most of these "Suggestions for Further Reading" are in English. While such accessibility is certainly advantageous for undergraduates, it is less so for graduate students. In fact, my one minor quibble with the book involves its aspiration to serve "beginning graduate students." While generally impressed by the ability of contributors to craft essays that synthesize classic and recent historical findings within a "user-friendly" idiom for non-specialists, I constantly found myself plagued with historiographical questions. Hoberman's epilogue performs a general historiographical function, but there is very little "marking" within the individual essays to show where newer understandings have supplanted older knowledge and transfigured debates. The editors easily could have retained the lucid style of the book for undergraduates, while at the same time broadening its appeal for beginning (and even advanced) graduate students by moderately extending the use of citation notes to cover historiographical and, where appropriate, methodological matters, thus more precisely delineating where historical "facts" are controversial and new, old and accepted, and old and defunct. For future editions, this might be a consideration.

One final point: the choice and quality of the illustrations is excellent, to the extent that the legends and

notes written on reproduced archival maps can be easily read (albeit sometimes with a magnifying glass). Teachers who enjoy integrating the analysis of visuals into classroom discussions should be pleased.

#### Notes

[1]. See Eric Van Young's "Mexican Rural History since Chevalier: The Historiography of the Colonial Hacienda," *LARR* 18:3 (1983): 5-61, for background on this renaissance of rural history centering on its maturation from economic-based hacienda studies.

[2]. For historical materialists, underclass cultures are usually assumed to be residual phenomena. In the works of "new cultural historians" and progressive social historians, however, underclass or "subaltern" cul-

tures are more often portrayed as active arenas of everyday negotiation and resistance. Of course, these two perspectives are not unbridgeable, and much exciting work is currently being undertaken that explores the conjoining of cultural and materialist modes of analysis. Among other things, such an interdisciplinary approach requires the development of methodologies capable of simultaneously utilizing very different types of sources. In the study of Latin American slave societies, this might involve critical readings of slave narratives alongside quantitative crunch-work on plantation account books.

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