

## COLONIAL AND INDEPENDENCE PERIODS

*Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720.* By MURDO J. MACLEOD. Berkeley, 1973. University of California Press. Maps. Tables. Figures. Appendix. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 554. Cloth. \$20.00.

Colonial Central America has been the subject of some very able historical studies. Among others, León Fernández, Ernesto Chinchilla Aguilar, and Héctor H. Samayoa Guevara, writing in Spanish, and Robert Chamberlain, Troy S. Floyd, Robert S. Smith, and John Tate Lanning, writing in English, have made important contributions. But the truth is that colonial Central America is not a subject that has loomed large in our perception of the totality of Latin America's past, nor is it one with which most historians of Latin America feel conversant. Within colonial Central American history we lack the connective fabric that would make sense of our monographic topics. And in the absence of an intelligible framework, the events of colonial Central America tend to degenerate into minor variations on Mexican themes.

H. H. Bancroft could have corrected some of this, and he sought to do so in his *History of Central America* (3 vols., 1882-1887). But for complex reasons Bancroft's work tended to be underrated, and in any case a history published in the 1880s could hardly be expected to serve present-day needs. Murdo MacLeod started his researches with our present-day needs very much at the forefront, particularly the need for an understanding of the Spanish American seventeenth century, and he selected the Audiencia of Guatemala, he tells us in an admirably revealing Preface, as a sample area for seventeenth-century research. The result is a major study of the first two centuries of colonial Central American history. In the socioeconomic sectors, where our lack of some coordinating orientation has been especially acute, MacLeod provides a plausible and straightforward guide. It is a work of very substantial scholarship, the result of prolonged researches in Central American and Spanish archives, with full bibliography and documentation.

The book is presented in three parts, corresponding to the three periods into which these 200 years are divided. The first (1520-1576) is the period of conquest and encomienda, with Indian slave export, some mining, and a cacao boom in Soconusco and Izalcos. The early Spaniards sought individual wealth and many found it in encomienda and cacao export, while the native population was reduced in size and complexity, to emerge as a laboring peasantry under Spanish control. The second (ca. 1576 to 1635) is identified as a time of "trial and

much error.” Depression, especially in cacao, induced efforts to revive declining industries or to establish new ones. The most successful product now was indigo, which expanded rapidly to 1620 and brought a new confidence and optimism to the Central American economic scene. After 1620, and to nearly the end of the century, though indigo exports continued, the industry failed to realize the further development that had been anticipated. The third period (1635-1720) began under circumstances that we think of as typically seventeenth-century: reduced labor supply, economic stagnation, an administrative-conventional-formal role for cities, the first new haciendas in the countryside. These persisted into the eighteenth century. But in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries some changes occurred. Indigo expanded again. Mining in Honduras, though limited, possessed a certain local dynamism. The “solution” of widest application in the early eighteenth century was smuggling. Thus the conditions were laid for the “prosperity” of the last colonial century, a subject that now cries aloud for a work as thorough and sophisticated as this.

Again and again MacLeod gives us new insights, fresh interpretations, and the well-digested results of investigations into subjects not examined before. Students of colonial history, as well as all those concerned with development and underdevelopment, past and present, should take note of his conclusions on the character of the economic enterprise, that it was not demonstrably feudal but tended rather toward “early modern entrepreneurialism.” In the first period, with its manifold opportunities for individual profit and its plentiful supply of labor, Spaniards had an “emphatic lack of interest in the possession of land.” Only a few of the early settlers sought to create landed estates. With respect to *encomienda*, it was not the earliest grants but rather those of the mid-sixteenth century that were crucial for the cacao industry and the subsequent economic leadership. Contraband, so far-reaching a phenomenon in the eighteenth century, was negligible in the earlier period.

The great strengths of this work lie in the area of economic history. What emerges most clearly is the progress of the trade in cacao, cochineal, indigo, and other products. The author has a talent for organizing the economic details of the archival data and perceiving their drift, meaning, and implications. Prosperity and depression, informed by the nuances of locality and particularity, are key subjects. Social history, in turn, while adequate to the economic relationship, seems subordinated to it here. The principal social topics discussed are those most closely connected with the economy, such as demographic change and Indian society as a labor source. The view of

society tends toward the Malthusian. We do not have here an analyzed social typology like that that James Lockhart has given us for Peru, nor do we see in detail the “life” of the individual or the family or the community, Indian or Spanish. The author’s emphases in all this are deliberate and explicit, and they lead to a final observation, namely that this is a book of scrupulous and unusual honesty, in which nothing is claimed in excess of the evidence, and where the author “levels with” the reader at every opportunity.

University of Michigan

CHARLES GIBSON

*Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819.* By WARREN L. COOK. New Haven, 1973. Yale University Press. Yale Western Americana Series, 24. Maps. Illustrations. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiv, 620. Cloth. \$17.50.

Most of this impressive work on the history of Spanish exploration in the Pacific Northwest concerns the eighteenth century, but Professor Cook introduces his main theme with an enlightening discussion of Spain’s activities there in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Spanish exploration finally ceased, but when Spain learned of Russian movements somewhere on the Northwest Coast in the 1760s, she began to take countermeasures to protect the wealth of her empire in Mexico. Settlers went to Alta California in 1769, and explorations of the Northwest Coast recommenced.

The first of these expeditions, in 1774 under Juan José Pérez Hernández, made the first recorded sighting of Nootka Sound, soon destined to be a center of international discord. Professor Cook’s discussion of the many Spanish expeditions following this one is outstanding. Building upon Henry Raup Wagner’s distinguished pioneer monographs, he makes good use of archives in the United States, Canada, Mexico, England, and Spain to locate original accounts of the voyages, log books, diaries, and other pertinent material. Notably, he pays special attention to Indian chieftains, such as Ma-kwee-na, whose attitudes toward the white men helped to determine the eventual outcome of their rivalry.

Russia was not the only threat to the Spanish presence in the North Pacific, for Spain’s age-old rival, England, was soon on her tracks in the area. Captain James Cook entered Nootka Sound in 1778 in the course of searching for a Northwest Passage. The inevitable confrontation between England and Spain took place a few years later, giving rise to the celebrated Nootka Sound Controversy of 1790, which almost