

National Period

Riots in the Cities: Popular Politics and the Urban Poor in Latin America, 1765–1910. Edited by SILVIA M. ARROM and SERVANDO ORTOLL. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1996. Illustrations. Notes. Index. x, 248 pp. Cloth, \$45.00. Paper, \$16.95.

In 1987, delivering the José Gil Fortoul Lecture at the Academia Nacional de la Historia in Caracas, the French historian François-Xavier Guerra remarked that in nineteenth-century Spanish America, “the world of politics [was] above all the urban world.” The editors of this volume were not inspired by Guerra’s call to bring political history back in. Instead, they explicitly acknowledge their debt to George Rudé and Eric Hobsbawm. Nevertheless, the urban world has a central place in this book devoted to popular politics during a period when most scholars have either identified popular politics largely with rural peasant rebellions or have ignored the topic altogether.

Indeed, the seven chapters of this volume, comprising essays published between 1980 and 1992, show that politics in Latin America before 1910 was far from being an exclusive concern of the elites. The focus is the “crowd” in urban riots: the “Rebellion of the Barrios” in Quito (by Anthony McFarlane), the Parián Riot in Mexico (Sylvia Arrom), the 1836 rebellion in Salvador, Brazil (João José Reis), the Vintem Riot in Rio de Janeiro (Sandra L. Graham), the 1893 Bogotazo (David Sowell), the *Revolta Contra Vacina* in Rio de Janeiro (Jeffrey D. Needell), and the Guadalajara riots of 1910 (A. H. Bloch and Servando Ortoll). The crowds studied here are somehow different from those of Hobsbawm and Rudé: they were “closely allied with, and initially mobilized by, disgruntled elites” (p. 4). But they also had their own agenda. All these essays examine the different riots in their appropriate contexts and attempt the difficult task of identifying the “faces of the crowd,” their beliefs, and their motives for rioting.

Popular politics in Latin American cities was not, of course, restricted to rioting. Arrom acknowledges this in a thoughtful introduction, which raises additional issues in an interesting revisionist tone. The constant presence of popular *barras* in Congress, the formation of a “public opinion,” electoral mobilization, the notion of the “social compact”: all these are areas yet to be fully explored. As Arrom notes, there is a need to understand how the political system worked as a whole, which requires bringing together the “social” and the “political” in the historical analysis.

The subject that is simply dismissed as “elite politics” has wider social implications, which scholars often ignore. Some of the assumptions hitherto dominant about the politics of nineteenth-century Latin America, as Charles Tilly observes in a perceptive conclusion, may look “dubious, even shocking,” from a European perspective. Tilly identifies features of urban conflict that made enormous differences in European history and are also relevant to Latin America, as these essays make clear. An expansion of the sample to include other countries, such as Chile, Venezuela, or

Argentina, would serve to reinforce some of the arguments raised here. This excellent collection provides an obligatory entry to a promising field of research.

EDUARDO POSADA-CARBÓ, Institute of Latin American Studies, London

The Alamo Remembered: Tejano Accounts and Perspectives. Edited by TIMOTHY M. MATOVINA. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Photographs. Plates. Bibliography. Index. xii, 146 pp. Cloth, \$25.00. Paper, \$10.95.

Reading this collection of documents and the thoughtful comments of Timothy Matovina will be an effective antidote for those who believe history as dry as dust and of little use in contemporary life. Matovina collects in one place vivid accounts of the 1836 battle between the Mexican and Texan armies at San Antonio. In arranging them chronologically and including the words of the newspaper columnists who often took down these accounts, the author provides evidence of how attitudes toward the Alamo changed over time. His comments suggest the ambiguity that Tejanos still feel for the Alamo and the Texas Revolution, and remind us that the past, and the present use of the past, are seldom simple.

Matovina divides the documents into four sections: first reports, conversations with local Tejanos, unpublished petitions and depositions, and published accounts. Documents in the first two sections date from the late 1830s and 1840s and derive from military reports, letters, diaries, and one newspaper article. Observant travelers like William Bollaert recorded some of these Tejano accounts. Documents in the second two sections date from 1850 to 1914, except for the *Memoirs* of Antonio Menchaca, which was published in 1937, although its original text dated from the 1870s. The court documents in section 3 are a particularly innovative source, one that historians do not always use adequately.

From the beginning, Tejano accounts of the Alamo contain considerable ambiguity. Most Tejanos sided with their fellow Texans and sympathized with the dead Anglos, whose bodies they helped stack like cordwood and burn. Still, they understood the Mexican point of view; many had friends or relations who fought with Santa Anna. Indeed, some court documents represent people who sided with the Mexican general. Little bitterness or vindictiveness is expressed toward those who fought for the other side or simply tried to remain neutral.

Anglo interest in the Alamo intensified between 1890 and 1914, the period when most of the newspaper accounts were published. Judging from the journalists' comments, the Anglos had little sympathy for a people caught between two sides—one with a common culture and the other with a common place of residence. Good and evil were much clearer in the Anglo Texan mind.

More than anything else, this book reminds us that history cannot be reduced to a bumper sticker. Time, place, and ethnicity all shape our understanding of the