

and though it conflicted with imported liberal economic doctrine and experiments, it survived past midcentury, albeit with significant variation from nation to nation and from region to region within nations. Such state intervention “proved costly” both in the colonial period and after independence, imposing heavy tax burdens, a cumbersome bureaucracy, institutionalized inefficiencies, and pervasive corruption (pp. 249–50).

With independence the colonial state collapsed; and its republican replacement lacked legitimacy, administrative capabilities, and financial capacity. Resulting changes in policy both benefited some sectors of Spanish American society and disadvantaged those who had been “protected” by the colonial scheme. Nevertheless, the region’s new political leaders often attempted “to maintain essential elements of the colonial state’s economic role” (p. 252), though this varied in regard to productive versus regulatory activities and from one nation to another.

This emphasis on the survival of colonial political culture and the premises of political economy is not new in the historical literature, nor for that matter in the literature of economic historians who have studied Spanish America. Indeed this argument constituted the central thesis of perhaps the most important textbook written on the Latin American economies (Glade, *The Latin American Economies*, New York, 1969). The call for systematic and empirical research on this topic, and illustrations of some of the directions such research might take is an important contribution made by Andrien and Johnson. So is the clear demonstration that historians must consider continuity *and* change, that comparative research and theory is essential, and that theory is no substitute for old-fashioned and new-fashioned hard-core empirical research.

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Brutality and Benevolence: Human Ethology, Culture, and the Birth of Mexico.

By ABEL A. ALVES. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996. Bibliographic essay. Index. ix, 247 pp. Cloth, \$59.95.

This book has two interwoven but distinct components. The first is a standard description of the Spanish conquest and early colonization of Mexico. Readers seeking new information from untapped archives will be disappointed, for the author relies almost exclusively on a handful of familiar secondary works and the usual repertoire of published primary sources, chiefly sixteenth-century chronicles and documentary collections (e.g., Paso y Troncoso’s *Papeles de la Nueva España*). Major recent historiographical contributions receive relatively little attention; for example, Woodrow Borah’s monumental work on the General Indian Court is cited only once, in a chapter entitled “The Pursuit of Justice.”

The book’s second component is a theoretical framework based on sociobiological studies of primate behavior. All humans share over 98 percent of their DNA code with chimpanzees, and on this premise Alves bases his “attempt to seek out the animal universals underlying the nuances of human culture and custom” (p. 11). Like their pri-

mate cousins, sixteenth-century Spaniards and Mexica alike were capable of extreme violence, but often tempered their aggression with acts of benevolence.

Wedded with Alves's narrative, however, the theory tells us little that we did not already know. For example, scholars have long noted Cortés's establishment of the Hospital de Jesús in Mexico City and the role that such charitable gestures played in solidifying Spanish domination. The fact that Cortés's behavior bears a striking resemblance to that of food-sharing dominant male chimps at a Dutch zoo is interesting but does not advance our understanding of colonial Mexican society. Moreover, Alves promises that this exercise in comparative ethnology will yield new insights on the importance of gender in the creation of a new Mexican cultural synthesis. In fact, he delivers little more than conventional treatments of La Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe. His brief discussion of the role played by indigenous women in preserving traditional material culture will be familiar to readers of Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru's work, while those interested in his observation that "the aspects of Amerindian cultural tradition that most readily survived . . . were not those associated with male games of dominance and display" (p. 96) will find a much more satisfying treatment of this phenomenon in Irene Silverblatt's studies of colonial Peru.

These criticisms aside, historians would do well to consider Alves's suggestion that sixteenth-century Spaniards and Mexica understood one another more fully than we might expect. Before going into battle both sides engaged in aggressive and far-from-subtle display not unlike that of male primates. Alves therefore argues that "contemporary cultural constructionists should be less than certain that culture and language serve as insurmountable barriers" (p. 74), and that we may have overestimated the incidence of "double mistaken identity" in sixteenth-century Mexico.

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Holy Wednesday: A Nabua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico.

By LOUISE M. BURKHART. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

Photographs. Plates. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xii, 314 pp.

Cloth, \$42.95. Paper, \$18.95.

Around 1591, a Nahuatl writer translated a play about the passion of Christ and the Virgin Mary's role in it for performance before native audiences in Mexico. This play, termed "Holy Wednesday" in the translation, had been written less than a decade earlier by a bookseller in Valencia, Spain. In her impressive study, Louise M. Burkhart examines the significant modifications and additions that the translator made in the text to render it more comprehensible to the native audience. But, as Burkhart well knows, he did so without simplifying the concepts or subtleties found in the original work. He even added four new speeches at the end, two for Mary and two for Christ. The translation is in high classical Nahuatl.

In this, the earliest known play in an indigenous language, Mary has more author-