

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN CENTRAL AMERICAN HISTORY

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- A BRIEF HISTORY OF CENTRAL AMERICA*. Second edition. By Héctor Pérez Brignoli, translated by Ricardo B. Sawrey A. and Susana Stettri de Sawrey. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989. Pp. 223. \$40.00 cloth, \$10.95 paper.)
- THE HERITAGE OF THE CONQUISTADORS: RULING CLASSES IN CENTRAL AMERICA FROM CONQUEST TO THE SANDINISTAS*. By Samuel Z. Stone. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Pp. 241. \$35.00.)
- LA SOCIEDAD COLONIAL EN GUATEMALA: ESTUDIOS REGIONALES Y LOCALES*. Edited by Stephen Webre. (Antigua Guatemala and South Woodstock, Vt.: Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica and Plumsock Mesoamerican Studies, 1989. Pp. 272. \$16.50.)
- HONDURAS: THE MAKING OF A BANANA REPUBLIC*. By Alison Acker. (Boston, Mass.: South End, 1988. Pp. 166. \$30.00 cloth, \$10.00 paper.)
- GUATEMALAN INDIANS AND THE STATE, 1540 TO 1988*. Edited by Carol A. Smith, with the assistance of Marilyn M. Moors. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. Pp. 316. \$27.50.)
- FOREST SOCIETY: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE PETEN, GUATEMALA*. By Norman B. Schwartz. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990. Pp. 367. Cloth \$30.95, paper \$13.95.)
- SHATTERED HOPE: THE GUATEMALAN REVOLUTION AND THE UNITED STATES, 1944-1954*. By Piero Gleijeses. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991. Pp. 430. \$29.95.)
- NONVIOLENT INSURRECTION IN EL SALVADOR: THE FALL OF MAXIMILIANO HERNANDEZ MARTINEZ*. By Patricia Parkman. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988. Pp. 168. \$28.95.)
- WEAK FOUNDATIONS: THE ECONOMY OF EL SALVADOR IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, 1821-1898*. By Héctor Lindo-Fuentes. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990. Pp. 239. \$34.95.)
- INDIAN SURVIVAL IN COLONIAL NICARAGUA*. By Linda A. Newson. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. Pp. 466. \$36.50.)
- THE NICARAGUAN MOSQUITIA IN HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS, 1844-1927*. Edited by Eleonore von Oertzen, Lioba Rossbach, and Volker Wünderlich. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1990. Pp. 486.)

GENERATIONS OF SETTLERS: RURAL HOUSEHOLDS AND MARKETS ON THE COSTA RICAN FRONTIER, 1850-1935. By Mario Samper. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990. Pp. 286. \$32.50.)

Most scholarly writing about Central America continues to focus on the individual states rather than on the entire region. The political fragmentation of the past century and a half has long since established state sovereignty and conditioned outsiders and natives alike to think in city-state terms and to recognize the obvious differences among the isthmian peoples. Local elites have found it convenient, in protecting special privileges best defended at the local level and often in collaboration with foreign economic interests, to encourage notice of this diversity. The group of works under review here reflect the tendency to focus on individual states and in some cases on regions within the states, an approach that would appear to support the notion of diversity in Central America even more. Surprisingly, however, most of these works reflect patterns similar to other regions of Central America and elsewhere. In enriching our understanding of specific areas, they also contribute to our ability to think more clearly of the region as a whole.

Almost alone among the dozen books under review here in encompassing the whole region is Héctor Pérez Brignoli's *A Brief History of Central America*, a revision and translation of his concise yet penetrating work that first appeared in Madrid in 1985. Advertised as the "first interpretive history of Central America by a Central American historian to be published in English," this volume reflects the strong school of history at the Universidad de Costa Rica as well as the more contemporary orientation of Costa Rican historians. Pérez is actually a native of Argentina, another fragmented Spanish dominion that ironically achieved a large measure of political unity about the same time that Central America balkanized itself. He demonstrates that thin books can hold large contents, for *A Brief History* reflects much of the advance of twentieth-century research on the region. His work is strongly Costa Rican in perspective, with relatively little on the pre-Columbian heritage and only a single chapter on the long Hispanic domination. The translation is generally readable, although in places it appears closer to the original Spanish syntax than to English, and some passages suggest less than full acquaintance with institutions, such as the rendering of the *Consulado* as "Administrative Office for Resolution of Commercial Disputes" (p. 58). The strength of the book lies in Pérez's skill in identifying and developing the major social, political, and economic themes of independent Central America.

Pérez's brief history contrasts notably with another recent short history of the region written by Honduran Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle, *Historia de Centroamérica*, although both works devote considerable attention

to the social history of the region.¹ Pastor's history is much more heavily weighted toward the colonial heritage, with six of its ten chapters devoted to the period before 1821. Like Pérez's study, it maintains a strong regional focus throughout but, perhaps understandably, pays more attention to Honduras than has been the case in previous general histories of Central America. Two other works by Pastor have contributed more specifically to Honduran regional and economic history: *Biografía de San Pedro Sula, 1536–1954* and *Memoria de una empresa hondureña: Compañía Azucarera Hondureña, S.A., CAHSA*.²

Samuel Zemurray Stone has followed up on his penetrating study of the Costa Rican elite, *Dinastía de los conquistadores*, by extending his thesis regarding the ruling classes to all of Central America in a briefer, but more interpretive, volume entitled *The Heritage of the Conquistadors: Ruling Classes in Central America from Conquest to the Sandinistas*.³ Using genealogical records of the descendants of nine conquistadors of Central America, he tries to show that the elites of the five Central American states have developed different styles of ruling, responding to the differing availability of land, labor, and capital in each state. Stone finds a major difference between what he calls northern and southern Central America. The principal difference, he posits, is that in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, the elites have tended to rule indirectly (usually through the military but sometimes through others, such as middle-class representatives), whereas in Nicaragua and Costa Rica the elites have ruled more directly, holding the presidency themselves. Stone's evidence is taken from his genealogical tables, which show that only three Guatemalan, four Honduran, and eleven Salvadoran chiefs of state descended from his "principal Central American families," as compared with forty-one in Nicaragua and more than a hundred in Costa Rica. These striking statistics, however, reflect more the nine families Stone selected (the descendants of Maestre, Martín del Cerro, Cristóbal de Alfaro, Buonafede, Jorge Alvarado, Bográn, Chamorro, Antonio de la Cuadra, José Antonio Lacayo, and Juan Vázquez de Coronado) than an accurate count of presidential descendants of the conquistador generation. Yet these statistics do serve to emphasize a tendency, albeit one that has varied over the course of the last 150 years. Stone's analysis also ignores the internal geographical and economic changes in the origin of Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Honduran presidents, such as the strong shift in power after the 1871 Reforma

1. Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle, *Historia de Centroamérica* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1988).

2. *Biografía de San Pedro Sula: 1536–1954* (San Pedro Sula: DIMA, 1990); and *Memoria de una empresa hondureña: Compañía Azucarera Hondureña, S. A., CAHSA* (San Pedro Sula: CAHSA, 1988).

3. Samuel Z. Stone, *Dinastía de los conquistadores: la crisis del poder en Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1975).

from Guatemala to Quetzaltenango. A similar shift occurred in El Salvador with the rise of its coffee oligarchy. The statistics thus reflect choice of families and the particularly small society of Costa Rica, where virtually everyone can claim ancestry among the conquistadors. A further distortion becomes evident on perceiving that many of the chiefs of state, even in Costa Rica, actually came from rather recent immigrant stock and are related to the conquistador generation only by marriage. This pattern supports one of the most obvious tendencies in all of Central America: outsiders have frequently moved quickly to the top in economics and politics by marrying into the old families. This characteristic of the quick entry of new families into the power structure of Central America, although acknowledged and supported by Stone's genealogical data, receives less of his attention than his emphasis on conquistador origins.

Despite its sustained emphasis on the conquistador generation as the origin of today's Central American ruling classes, much of *The Heritage of the Conquistadors* rambles over contemporary problems on the isthmus. Stone makes much of the diversity among the ruling classes and the states themselves, a feature that is certainly obvious to anyone who has been in Central America for any length of time. Yet these differences appear less pronounced than analogous differences within Brazil, Mexico, the United States, or almost any western European nation (Spain, Italy, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium come quickly to mind). Stone acknowledges that many Central Americans have viewed reunification as one solution to some of Central America's problems, but, like most of Costa Rica's elite, he rejects that solution. His description of the various ruling elites seems to support the thesis that their rivalry and protection of local privilege have been the main obstacles to national reunification and formation of a government that might better protect Central American interests against the foreign influence that Stone characterizes as so devastating to the region. Indeed, although he does not propose it, seldom has anyone made a stronger case for Central Americans' need to solve their own problems by overcoming the privilege of local elites via a national (Central American) solution. Stone's analysis of elitism and class in Central America and the subtle differences in values among them in the several states is the most valuable part of *The Heritage of the Conquistadors*. This aspect reflects the author's long association with Central American leadership and his experience as director of the Centro de Investigación y Adiestramiento Político Administrativo in San José.

A work with a more consistent colonial focus is Stephen Webre's *Sociedad colonial en Guatemala*, which contains seven articles written specifically for this volume by Guatemalan, European, and North American scholars, with particular attention to economic and social factors. The essays include Anne Collins's description of the Mercedarian missions in western Guatemala, Pilar Sánchiz Ochoa's penetrating discussion of

Spanish-Ladino social structure in the sixteenth century, George Lovell's survey of forced native labor in the Cuchumatanes, Julio Pinto's overview of the agrarian history of colonial Guatemala, Michel Bertrand's analysis of rural society in the Baja Verapaz, Webre's study on the economic origins of *regidores* of the Ayuntamiento in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Santiago de Guatemala, and Inge Langenberg's review of urban structure and social change during the first half-century of the new capital of Guatemala City (1773–1824). These essays, all based on solid archival research, build on earlier, more theoretical surveys of Murdo MacLeod and Severo Martínez Peláez to enrich and refine scholars' understanding of life in the Kingdom of Guatemala. They also underscore the blending of Hispanic and indigenous culture that is so much the essence of Guatemala.

There continues to be a need for serious, analytical histories of each of the Central American states. Although Alison Acker's *Honduras: The Making of a Banana Republic* does not fill that need, it offers a readable synthesis of much of the available, if scant, published literature on that country's history. She presents the highlights of Honduran history, blaming much of its modern problems on the United States and a failure to develop a more socially conscious indigenous movement, but she recognizes that "Hondurans seemed unlikely . . . to opt for revolution" (p. 136). Although Acker pays considerable attention to the role of the Catholic Church in recent Honduran history, she overlooks some of the recent literature on that topic. She cites her sources clearly and provides a readable overview of the country's history, but without much understanding of how Honduras fits into the larger history of Central America before the 1980s. Her brief conclusion suggests her point of view: "Peace was the first need, but it could not, alone, produce the social or economic justice for which the Sandinistas, the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front in El Salvador, or the National Revolutionary Unity of Guatemala had been fighting. Honduras, too, would have to do more than quit the U.S. ranks if it was to find any measure of social prosperity. It would have to implement fundamental change" (pp. 137–38).

Also providing useful outlines, but hardly the definitive histories needed, are two new volumes in the series of national histories sponsored by the Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, a series entitled "América Latina: Una Historia Breve." Pablo Yankelevich's *Honduras* focuses primarily on the nineteenth century, providing considerably more detail than Acker offers on that century.⁴ It ends with the accession of Tiburcio Carías in 1933. Mónica Toussaint Ribot's *Guatemala* is also largely limited to the nineteenth century, closing with the Manuel Estrada

4. Pablo Yankelevich, *Honduras* (Mexico City: Alianza Editorial Mexicana, 1988).

Cabrera dictatorship.⁵ Ribot's study is useful primarily as an outline of political events.

Carol Smith's *Guatemalan Indians and the State* is the product of years of research and a series of sessions at professional association meetings focusing on the relation between the state and the Indians of Guatemala. Smith's skillful introduction and conclusion embrace a broadly varied collection of essays by anthropologists, historians, a geographer, and a Guatemalan novelist. The result is a penetrating and surprisingly coherent history of Indian-state relations across more than four centuries (thanks to the splendid editing of Smith and Marilyn Moors). The strong theoretical arguments and factual evidence allow Smith to conclude confidently that the division between the Indian population and the small elite that has controlled the state is the key to the many other complex divisions within Guatemalan society. She also concludes that twentieth-century revolutionary solutions to Guatemala's problems, based on worldwide concepts of social justice, were doomed to fail. Led by splinter groups from the white ruling class, "they failed to draw upon the Indian majority" (p. 280) in this multicultural state. These failures, however, contributed to transforming revolutionary strategy in the 1980s, when an attempt was made to mobilize the Indians. "Had this transformed strategy been fully realized in the most recent revolutionary attempt (i.e., had the cultural and political autonomy of an Indian nation become a central revolutionary goal), it would have increased the chances of a successful revolution in Guatemala," Smith finds, "and had a revolutionary society been constructed whose agenda was the creation of a multicultural socialism, it would have affected the world-historical meaning of revolution as well" (p. 280).

Smith further concludes that in response to the state's attempts to eliminate local political power, the Indians formed corporate communities in order to survive, but she challenges Eric Wolf's concept of these communities as "closed." In her view, Guatemala's corporate Indian communities could not remain closed to events and processes occurring outside them: "Guatemala may have the strongest corporate 'peasant' communities in the world, but they have rarely, if ever, been closed" (pp. 281–82). These essays lead her to believe that the strong militarism of Guatemala's state and society reflects the inherent weakness of its civil institutions, apart from the corporate Indian communities, and its failure to resolve the "national question" and incorporate the Indians into the society. Thus "a modern Guatemalan nation remains a hope rather than a reality" (p. 282). Smith predicts, "the dialectic of violence that forced change in Guatemala's now militarized state will force changes in the forms of Indian

5. Mónica Toussaint Ribot, *Guatemala* (Mexico City: Alianza Editorial Mexicana, 1988).

resistance. As state power penetrates to the local level, breaking the solidarity of traditional Indian communities, new forms of cultural resistance will have to be invented" (p. 282). She acknowledges that the pan-Maya movements now developing might be one form of this resistance, but she goes on to observe:

A more likely form, given the historical pattern of Indian resistance, would be the further fragmentation of Indian cultural communities, over which the state would have little ability to maintain control and surveillance. Throughout history, Indian communities have maintained themselves through diversity, which has prevented them from forming a united Indian nation that could proclaim its own national sovereignty. But this "weakness" has also been the source of Indian cultural "strength," since no centralized power in Guatemala has ever found a single cultural source or symbol to destroy through which Indian culture in general would be eradicated. (Pp. 282–83)

While *Guatemalan Indians and the State* focuses almost exclusively on highland Guatemala, a very different perspective emerges from Norman Schwartz's *Social History of the Petén*. The Petén, which is almost always neglected in Guatemalan historical studies, accounts for approximately half of the state's land area. Schwartz, an anthropologist, has written a remarkable history of the Petén from the Spanish conquest of the region in 1697 to the 1980s, combining archival research with numerous interviews collected in the region over a quarter-century (1960–1985). He demonstrates that in the Petén from about 1720 until the 1970s, Ladinos and Indians had much in common and developed a stable society, unlike the situation in highland Guatemala, where Ladinos have oppressed Indians. In the twentieth century, the export of chicle increased prosperity modestly but did not greatly change the social characteristics of the region, where Indian and Ladino differences had tended to diminish. But since 1966, Schwartz discovers, an enormous increase has occurred in population, farming, ranching, logging, petroleum development, and commerce—accompanied by deforestation, unequal distribution of land and other wealth, political unrest, and militarization. This "second conquest" of the region, Schwartz argues convincingly, "threatens to replicate in the lowlands many of the conditions found in the highlands, including extremes of wealth and poverty, land hunger, environmental degradation, brutal repression, and endemic political violence" (p. 8).

In emphasizing the relation between society and ecology, Schwartz has demonstrated the interrelated aspects of modern development and also shown how the Petén can no longer be overlooked in Guatemalan history. His *Forest Society* is meticulously laced with statistical data on population, resources, and physical characteristics.

Piero Gleijeses's *Shattered Hope* offers a new interpretation of the Guatemalan revolution (1944–1954) and the U.S. role in terminating it. Many interviews with participants greatly enrich his work, which is valu-

able mainly for the insights gained from these interviews. Although heavily documented, Gleijeses's study overlooks many important sources, resulting in an account that is eclectic and sometimes superficial but at other times profound or highly detailed. The first four chapters deal with the political currents swirling in Guatemala from 1930 to 1950. Particularly enlightening is the author's detailed explanation of the violent death of Francisco Arana in 1949, which Gleijeses attributes convincingly to Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz. Yet *Shattered Hope* contains relatively little new analysis of the actual program of the Arévalo-Arbenz revolution. Only in the fifth chapter does the focus shift to U.S. policy toward President Arévalo, which Gleijeses shows was increasingly hostile, especially in exerting strong pressure on him to slow down his labor reform. Gleijeses confirms that factors in the U.S. stance were the strong anticommunism of the era and the United Fruit Company's efforts to discredit the Arévalo government. These attitudes contributed to Arévalo's strong anti-U.S. feelings. According to Gleijeses:

It was difficult for Arévalo and the revolutionary leaders to take the Red threat seriously when there were so few communists in Guatemala. Had the communists conspired against the country's first democratic government, Arévalo would have moved against them. . . . The communists, however, were not the plotters; the plotters were the pillars of the upper class.

American officials could not imagine that the president of a banana republic might hold a broader view of political democracy than did they; they also believed that communist influence in Guatemala was more pervasive than Arévalo claimed. (P. 120)

Gleijeses might have profited from consulting Thomas Leonard's study of American diplomats in Guatemala at the time, *The United States and Central America, 1944–1949*.⁶ Gleijeses's account of the Arbenz administration is nevertheless perceptive and will advance understanding of the period. He considers Arbenz's decision to extend the revolution as suicidal, given U.S. policy. Gleijeses acknowledges Jim Handy's recent articles suggesting that the Guatemalan army was the principal actor in the 1954 episode but does not find them completely convincing. Gleijeses argues instead that Arbenz might have more profitably courted the Yankees, moderated the revolution, and maintained the loyalty of his army. Arbenz's not pursuing that course is attributed partly to his own psychological odyssey but more especially to the influence of his wife. María Vilanova, daughter of an elite Salvadoran father and a Guatemalan mother, espoused a Marxism that seemed to offer Arbenz answers to Guatemala's problems. Moreover, Arbenz was managing Guatemalan politics and economy reasonably well, and thus economic chaos could not

6. Thomas Leonard, *The United States and Central America, 1944–1949: Perceptions of Political Dynamics* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984).

be blamed for the downfall of his government, as happened later in Sandinista Nicaragua. The combined opposition of the United States, the Catholic Church, and the Guatemalan upper class eventually became more than Arbenz could withstand. These were the influences operating on U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower when he decided in 1953 to overthrow Arbenz.

Glejeses also blames the Harry Truman administration for reversing a trend toward democracy in Latin America, pointing out that by the time Truman left office in 1952 only Guatemala and Costa Rica were still democratic regimes. U.S.-promoted anticommunism rallied other countries in the region to an anti-Arbenz stance. This topic leads Glejeses into discussing U.S. policy in the other Central American countries. At one point, he concludes that “only men blinded by anticommunist paranoia and imperial hubris could have failed to realize that [José] Figueres was a fervent anticommunist who really embraced the principle of U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean” (p. 240). In recounting the details of the clever overthrow of Arbenz by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Glejeses repeats much that is already known from two recent studies.⁷ But *Shattered Hope* is excellent in characterizing the participants and bringing the events to life by its skillful use of dialogue and description. Glejeses takes issue with Richard Immerman, who argues that the U.S. intervention in Guatemala resulted directly from the arrival of Czech arms in Guatemala aboard the *Alfhem* on 16 May 1954. Glejeses counters that the plot led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas was already well underway by that date and had in fact been delayed only because the Guatemalan troops were not ready (p. 296).

Glejeses also recognizes the important role played by United Fruit in mobilizing anti-Guatemalan public opinion in the United States. But he adds that “while the U.S. embassy’s concern with communism under Arévalo owed much to UFCO’s smoke and mirrors, its concern with communism under Arbenz owed little to the company” (p. 362).

Shattered Hope offers considerable insight into the period, and Glejeses is correct about what was to come in Guatemala: “The drama of the Guatemalan upper class is that, alone, it cannot safeguard its world. The privileged have sought a series of protectors: dictators to control the masses; the United States to topple Arbenz; and now, the army to defeat the guerrillas. They would like the army to be humble, subordinate—as it was to Ubico. But the mercenaries have grabbed power for themselves; they have encroached upon the political and economic preserves of the upper class” (p. 385).

7. See Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); and Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinser, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982).

Somewhat similar to the approach taken by Gleijeses, although using a narrower focus, Patricia Parkman's *Nonviolent Insurrection* relies on extensive research in U.S. and Salvadoran documents together with interviews with participants to describe the fall of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in El Salvador in 1944. Parkman views this event as having substantial significance for other areas of Central America and being characteristic of a twentieth-century tradition of civic nonviolent protest in Latin America. In her historical overview, Parkman states that "the first abortive rising against Spanish rule in Central America took place in San Salvador" in 1811 (p. 5). She thus overlooks a long history of Indian resistance to Spanish rule, and she subsequently ignores the significant revolt in El Salvador led by Anastasio Aquino in the 1830s. This carelessness in the early history of El Salvador need not obscure the usefulness of her study of the Martínez overthrow, but it does begin her study with a reflection of the Salvadoran elite's general failure to acknowledge the indigenous history of that state. Even in its early twentieth-century background information on the rise of Martínez, *Nonviolent Insurrection in El Salvador* is very thin. A chapter on his administration is somewhat more comprehensive, but Parkman focuses quickly on opposition to Martínez and his overthrow in 1944, emphasizing the nonviolent character of the protests that eventually brought about his resignation on 9 May 1944. She acknowledges the possible role of the United States in this resignation, which followed the shooting of U.S. citizen José Wright by police in a disturbance on 7 May, but she downplays U.S. influence on the basis of her examination of the embassy's correspondence.

Héctor Lindo-Fuentes's *Weak Foundations* is a fine addition to the relatively sparse literature on the economic history of El Salvador and provides an accurate and sensitive account of nineteenth-century El Salvador. It is especially useful as a supplement to David Browning's *El Salvador, Landscape and Society*.⁸ Attributing much of El Salvador's uneven economic development to the political problems of the early nineteenth century, Lindo-Fuentes surveys the rise of its dependence on agro-exports, essentially limited first to indigo production and later to coffee, which came to dominate the socioeconomic development of the state. This work is both a political and an economic history of nineteenth-century El Salvador that focuses on the rise of the coffee elite in the late nineteenth century with the transfer of community lands to private ownership. Lindo-Fuentes points out that this incomplete transfer did not begin that trend but was the dominant factor in creating the coffee elite.

One of the more impressive works on the early history of Central America in recent years is Linda Newson's *Indian Survival in Colonial Nic-*

8. David Browning, *El Salvador: Landscape and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

aragua, in which she details the devastating impact of the Spanish conquest on the Mesoamerican and South American peoples. This work is especially valuable because Newson goes beyond the conquest to document meticulously the survival of these peoples throughout the remainder of the colonial period. She deals perceptively with the nature of Indian society and with Spanish consolidation and policy during the long decline of the Indian population and on through the demographic recovery that occurred in the eighteenth century. Newson estimates that the Nicaraguan prequest population of more than eight hundred thousand had dropped to less than two hundred thousand by 1550 and that by the end of the seventeenth century, it had nearly disappeared (to sixty thousand, half of them living outside the area of Spanish control). This remnant represented a 93 percent decline from the aboriginal population. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the number had grown to eighty-three thousand. Newson suggests a model based on the Nicaraguan experience for evaluating the degree of Indian survival throughout colonial Spanish America. She attributes the survival of Nicaraguan Indians to factors of cultural advantage, resources, and less harsh demands made on the Indians due to lack of mineral resources.

Also dealing with Nicaragua's indigenous peoples is *The Nicaraguan Mosquitia in Historical Documents*, an especially valuable collection of documents on the eastern coast of Nicaragua. Three brief historical essays precede the documents: "The British Protectorate up to 1860" by Eleonore von Oertzen, "Indian Life through the Eyes of Moravian Missionaries" by Lioba Rossbach, and "The Mosquito Reserve and the Aftermath of British Presence" by Volker Wunderich. The documents are organized to illustrate the articles: fourteen items from the diplomatic correspondence of Patrick Walker (1844–1848); sixty-one documents from the Moravian mission reports (1855–1922); and fifty items from diplomatic correspondence and political papers from 1860 to 1927. An appendix lists the Miskito kings and chiefs during the nineteenth century. This compilation makes available much new documentation for scholars of the region. Along with Robert Naylor's recent *Penny-Ante Imperialism* and Carlos Vilas's *State, Class, and Ethnicity in Nicaragua*,⁹ this study adds measurably to knowledge of an important but often neglected region outside the mainstream of Central American history.

In *Generations of Settlers*, Mario Samper studies the peasant-farmers in the northwestern section of Costa Rica's central valley (essentially the province of Alajuela), their values, and their social relations. In this re-

9. Robert Naylor, *Penny-Ante Imperialism: The Mosquito Shore and the Bay of Honduras, 1600–1914* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989); and Carlos Vilas, *State, Class, and Ethnicity in Nicaragua: Capitalist Modernization and Revolutionary Change on the Atlantic Coast* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989).

gion, in contrast to much of Latin America and the Caribbean, effective land settlement was carried out by a geographically mobile and free population, most or all of whom came from areas settled during colonial times. Samper's research has produced a strong statistical base for this book. He looks particularly at the relation of export markets for the region between 1850 and 1935 and their effects on the rural society in this period of expansion of Costa Rican agrarian capitalism. Samper observes regarding market-oriented production based on household labor, especially coffee production by domestic units, that it

was not only a goal for peasant-farmers themselves, but [was] also fostered actively by the ruling elite of merchant-planters, in the context of a generalization of mercantile relations in the countryside. By facilitating access to the land and providing credit, while establishing a monopoly over processing and the export-import business, owners of capital contributed to the rise of a stronger sector of commercial peasant farming while pursuing their own economic objectives. In so doing, they indirectly expanded their control over production in a highly profitable manner, yet they also strengthened a domestic production sector which would continue to be a major component of rural society, despite subsequent changes in the original conditions. (P. 3)

Much of what Samper describes enforces the historical recognition of Costa Rican uniqueness in the Central American and Latin American panorama, but he also provides a useful comparative chapter discussing other Latin American cases. In it he suggests that while agro-export development followed many different paths, the Costa Rican experience was "far from unique, despite its undeniable specificities" (p. 237). The comparisons are mainly with areas of Colombia where, according to Samper, "early legal landholding patterns, which often preceded settlement, were not decisive regarding the outcome in terms of actual peasant access to the land. Furthermore, the fact that coffee cultivation usually started on relatively large estates, frequently owned by merchants, did not preclude the later predominance of peasant farming in the same or neighboring areas, even if undoubtedly subject to merchant capital" (p. 239). Samper also draws comparisons with Venezuela, Mexico, and the Caribbean, although he acknowledges the divergent development of coffee in Guatemala owing to the large indigenous population and the relative scarcity of land. This meticulous work is based on thorough research in published sources and archives, supplemented substantially with oral interviews. The result is a detailed account of the economic and social growth of the region and the changes that occurred in it.

Taken as a group, these diverse works emphasize the variety of experience among the Central American peoples, reflecting the varied geography, ethnic origins, and economic conditions found on the Central American isthmus. Several of them pay attention to the historic role of the Indians, in Guatemala and in the other states, as accounting for signifi-

cant differences among different regions. Yet surprisingly, many common themes run through nearly all of these works: the concern with underdevelopment and political instability; the strong common cultural heritage left by the Spaniards; and the dominant role of Spain, Britain, and (in the twentieth century) the United States. Perhaps the most poignant from the perspective of the 1990s is the common concern of Central American peoples for solving their own problems without the interference of outsiders.