Barbara H. Stein and Stanley J. Stein. *Crisis in an Atlantic Empire: Spain and New Spain, 1808–1810*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. 808 pp. ISBN: 978-1421414249, $89.95 (cloth).

There is a quote, probably apocryphal, in which Lenin remarked there are decades when nothing happens and weeks where decades happen. Nowhere could this be said more accurately than of Spain and Mexico in 1808-1810, the focus of the fourth and climactic volume of Stanley and Barbara Steins' history of merchants and imperialism in the Spanish Empire.

The Steins' first two volumes described the emergence of Spain as a "rentier state" that literally survived by virtue of the flow of silver from Peru and then New Spain (Mexico). In the third volume, as the established foundations of this "empire" eroded under the assault of interlopers, the "reforming" Spanish Bourbons sought to reestablish control through new merchant clients in Veracruz, Havana and Buenos Aires. However, these proved not quite up to the task set them after the Seven Years' War, the retention and redirection of colonial silver to the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, rising British and long-established French interests pursued different strategies to thwart the Bourbons' aims. The British relied on naval power and the efforts of neutral agents, especially in the United States, for greater access. The French, on the other hand, struck directly at the heart of empire, by seizing control of the peninsula and establishing a puppet state under Joseph Bonaparte. With French connivance, coups at the Escorial (1807) and Aranjuez (1808) ejected Charles IV and his favorite, Godoy, from power. Thus opens the final volume, with the botched abdication of Charles and the Prince of Asturias at Bayonne (1808), the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, and the detonation of civil war in the peninsula. And so the struggle in Spain and in the colonies began, with the emergence of competing regional councils (juntas) jockeying for power and influence in the face of both collaboration and opposition from senior royal appointees whose careers, and sometimes lives, depended on the choices they made.

Although much would ultimately depend on the fortunes of war in Europe and the Atlantic, the true theater of conflict was the Americas. Here the Steins take up the related narratives of Spain, Cuba, and New Spain with an emphasis on the colonial civil servants' career patterns and experiences, family and bureaucratic relations, and their service in the imperial system that conditioned their responses to events in Europe and the Americas. There were, in essence, two models. Cuba, the rising pearl of the Antilles, was perhaps, one of two colonial possessions the Spaniards could not afford to lose. While its sugar plantations and vast acquisition of slaves had only just begun to make their

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presence felt in world markets, the Captaincy General of Cuba was second only in prestige and potential value to the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Its chief official, the Marques of Someruelos had begun an assiduous courtship of the island's merchants and planters, both of whom, ironically, advocated an open economy and a closed polity—such was the distorting effect of African slavery in a plantation economy. He was between a rock and a hard place: he needed to control the island while the Havana merchants hoped to turn it into a Caribbean entrepot linked to both Veracruz and, increasingly, New Orleans. Someruelos was also, quite possibly, slated to become the Viceroy of New Spain. He would not be the first captain general of the island to be so elevated.

Mexico had become the crown jewel of the empire. Not only was it the wealthiest colony, but it also financed the defense of the Caribbean basin and the astonishingly costly wars of the Spanish Bourbons. Yet its constitutional status within the empire was highly ambiguous. The argument about whether New Spain was a Kingdom or a colony was far from a semantic one. A colony was the possession of a state, and whatever happened to the Bourbons, the Spanish state maintained its existence, contested though its sovereign might be. Yet an equally strong current of thought, a product of the defunct Spanish Hapsburgs, but never repudiated by the Bourbons, held that Mexico was a Kingdom essentially governed under viceregal proxy for the Crown of Castile, under whose authority its primitive conquest had taken place. If there was no legitimate King of Spain (who held, among others, the Crown of Castile in what has been termed a "composite monarchy"), then Mexico had no legitimate sovereign, or at least no *obviously* legitimate sovereign. The abdication of Charles and his son at Bayonne had taken care of that. So the Viceroy of Mexico was suddenly an even more important figure than his military rank or bureaucratic position normally implied. Was the Viceroy, Iturrigaray, somehow a presumptive sovereign now in Mexico? And if not, then which of several colonial corporations were? There was no clear body of law or custom to address this, thus, in the course of events, the matter would necessarily be settled by negotiation or by outright force. Here was the position in which the viceroy found himself in the late summer of 1808.

Iturrigaray is, naturally, a controversial and widely disliked figure in Mexican history. The Steins view him as a professional soldier and bureaucrat searching for a compromise that would keep the Mexican creoles happy and New Spain firmly in Spanish control. Iturrigaray sent the representative of the Junta de Sevilla, who claimed to represent "popular" Spanish sovereignty, home unhappy. Iturrigaray maneuvered, threatened to "resign," and hinted at calling a colonial assembly. Deeply suspect in the eyes of the mercantile establishment, much of which was

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peninsular Spaniard by birth, culture, or general orientation, Iturrigaray was overthrown in a meticulously planned coup d'etat that originated in the Audiencia on August 15, 1808 and hustled off to Veracruz, to await repatriation to Spain, where he later died. While the Steins refer to the affair as New Spain's first coup (p. 347), this is, technically at least, not accurate. Viceroy Gelves was overthrown in 1624, and although "restored," it was only for a day. The error is of no real consequence except in the revealing context of the Steins' distinctly revisionist account of Iturrigaray as somehow uniquely, not to say historically, wronged by intransigent merchant interests. Perhaps, but perhaps not.

In any event, the heaving and pulling continued in Spain. Multiple regional juntas had arisen, each certain of its own authority. Cadiz, of course, had most of the money, if not the historical prestige of the Council of Castille, but Sevilla had exercised prior claim. Compromise was in order for two reasons: to prevent Spain from simply disintegrating into its historical constituents, and for the sake of controlling America, and especially New Spain, whose silver became increasingly key to Spain's survival. However, the lessons of 1808 and of the French Revolution had been impressed on peninsular consciousness as well. If the monarchy could not be counted upon to preserve national sovereignty—and it had miserably failed to do so—then some overarching assembly, or *Cortes,* in historical terms, might represent the sovereign people, or, as the Steins intimate, the political nation of peninsular bureaucrats, clerics and military men dependent on the rents of Empire. By 1810, the Junta Central had collapsed, leaving a Regency, which called for an election of colonial representatives to the Cortes, in its place. The Regency itself, however, was not only reactionary but divided, and in no position to respond authoritatively to colonial demands for autonomy.

Yet it was already too late. Active rebellion had broken out in Caracas (Venezuela). In Mexico, the creole professional class, especially lawyers and clerics, were openly considering a break from Spain while resentment festered in some provincial centers, where the reach of colonial authorities was somewhat less effective. The Regency in Spain seemed Hell-bent on alienating the Americans. Its actions in Mexico amounted to a vote of confidence in the most extreme elements of the peninsular party that overthrew Iturrigaray. In the remarkably fertile plains of the Bajío, where high agricultural productivity had allowed the beginnings of an early transition to industrialization, there was an agricultural and industrial proletariat–oppressed, resentful, exploited, and above all, of mixed blood, and hence, inferior. The grievances of the creoles took a backseat to theirs when rebellion erupted on September 16, 1810 led by the parish priest of Dolores, Father Hidalgo, two years to the day after Iturrigaray was overthrown in Mexico City. During those two

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years, argue the Steins, the Mexicans intellectually left the Empire. The insurgency violently ratified a fait accompli.

Withal, this is a remarkable book, and a fitting conclusion to a monumental project first conceived over a half a century ago. For reasons all too well known to scholars, the effort is unlikely to be duplicated. It is less a criticism of the work than an observation that if the Steins fixed on the imperial finale, the novelty of its circumstance is too much emphasized because it ended in spectacular catastrophe. The early 1620s, for instance, saw the overthrow of the Viceroy Gelves, the result of ministerial ambitions to bring the colonials to heel. We know little about the implementation of the Conde Duque de Olivares' Unión de Armas in the Indies, other than it too was, at bottom, a fiscal reform. José María de la Peña similarly described a New Spain that was a field of plunder for Hapsburg retainers, a creole oligarchy formed in the century 1520. Then too the Mexicans refused to be "reformed." Yet the damage in the 1620s was quite limited. The rural population was at its nadir, and the explosive demographic pressures of the 1810s were absent. The expropriation of the creole interest was of a different order, for it was Peru, not New Spain, that was then the wealthy hub of empire. Havana existed, but barely. Above all, there was a legitimate monarchy—intact, albeit increasingly remote. By 1810, however, Mexico was a mature colony and had long been. Thus, the Bourbon rulers did not "reconquer" America as David Brading famously argued, but rather, as the Steins contend, finally lost it. Thus the true significance of this magnificent history: It radically alters the perspective from which to view the events of 300 years in New Spain. History, the Steins argue, is about change. What better place to learn that lesson once and for all than in these volumes?

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Consumer credit has been a crucial element of modern mass consumption societies across the globe. The way lending institutions evolved,

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