

analysis within established interpretations, such as the writer's distinctive woman-centered theology as expressed in her *villancicos* or her audacious and impeccably argued self-defense of the *Respuesta*. If there is no groundbreaking work here, there is a new perspective. Kirk's insight regarding theology and, in particular, her knowledge of Biblical exegesis contribute to existing work on Sor Juana by supplying further evidence to substantiate the nun-writer's unorthodox Marian devotion, her knowledge of scriptures, and her ability to allusively justify her claim to learn and write despite her sex and calling, often by means of Biblical and Patristic *exempla*.

Owing to the introductory nature of this book, chapters are subdivided both to introduce the text in question and to furnish a synopsis of its prior critical treatment. As a result, there is little room for the author's often illuminating inferences. A work of this scope cannot presume to be comprehensive, yet a more detailed account of the accustomized theological practices of seventeenth-century New Spain and the extent to which Sor Juana appropriated or disavowed these would have greatly enriched the volume while at the same time strengthening the fragile bridge between literary criticism and theology.

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Lucha agraria en Puerto Rico, 1541–1545: un ensayo de historia. By FRANCISCO MOSCOSO. San Juan: Ediciones Puerto, 1997. Map. Tables. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. x, 246 pp. Paper.

The period immediately following the decline of gold mining and encomienda labor in the Caribbean is, for the most part, yet to be understood. While an abundant literature exists for the earliest phases of Spanish colonization of the islands, coverage declines dramatically for the years after the early 1530s. It was about this time that island settlers began to turn to agrarian production (of sugar and hides, especially) that was linked to the Andalusian merchant complex and to newly conquered areas in the American continents. How the economic transition occurred and how it affected island societies remains largely obscure.

Moscoso's book throws new light on the social struggles that accompanied the decline of the mining complex in Puerto Rico. He investigates the details of a conflict that ensued when in 1541 a group of colonists demanded the redistribution of choice lands along the river valleys of the north coast, close to the main settlement at San Juan. Earlier, leading members of the conquering party had been awarded enormous land grants, distant from each other by one league, for raising cattle. These landholding units, called *hatos*, quickly came to engulf the most fertile land and best pastures. When at the end of the mining cycle other settlers turned to agriculture and animal husbandry to survive, they found that the original grants did not leave enough free space for new grants—hence their petition to the San Juan cabildo to reduce by half the size of the original grants. Although many parts of the island were still unoccupied by Spaniards

and open to new settlers, the petitioners thought they risked being attacked by maroons if they strayed too far from the city.

At first the cabildo acceded to the petition. The crown agreed, and in a royal provision of 1541 it ordered that all pastures, forests, and water sources be considered and treated as commons. Moscoso believes that the royal intent was to confirm the cabildo's decision to reduce the size of the *hatos*. The original grantees mounted a stern opposition, however, and it would be months and sometimes years before new grants could be distributed among the petitioners. Ultimately the cabildo was able to redistribute the original *hatos*. Some of these grants eventually accommodated sugar production, an economic activity that developed vigorously around midcentury.

With a heavy interpretive hand, Moscoso believes that the conflict over land grants evinces class struggle. He variously describes petitioners as "peasants," "elements of the middle and popular classes," "middling peasants," and "smallholding peasants [*campesinos estancieros*]" and a sector of the oligarchy" interested in the sugar business. About halfway into the book we learn that among the petitioners was a group of miners, whose gold-prospecting business had pretty much dried out. We also learn that both groups exploited the Indian and African slave "masses." The emphasis throughout, however, is on the struggle between a sloppily conceptualized "peasantry" and the rich *hateros*. The author's penchant for sharp value judgements adds to this lack of conceptual precision. Statements like "los latifundistas dieron rienda suelta a una especie de lobo feroz, portavoz implacable de sus intereses" (p. 64), and judgements like the one proffered about Hernando de Lepe, whose representation of the reformists "[le] ganó uno de los sitios de héroes populares de la historia de Puerto Rico" (p. 96), do not help to clear up the confusion. An informal, "chatty" style punctuated by odd references to Jesus Christ, Fuente Ovejuna, and James Bond, among others, likewise detracts from the value of the work. In the meantime, we are left to wonder about the *real* context to the story: the transition from mining to agrarian pursuits. Moscoso hardly touches on this key process, one that would throw much light on the class composition and motivation of the reformists.

Despite these flaws, *Lucha agraria en Puerto Rico* is a welcome addition to a very thin literature. I doubt that its representation of island society in the 1540s will stand the test of time. But if it provokes further interest on this period of Caribbean and Puerto Rican history, it will have made a significant contribution.

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Juan Fermín de Aycinena: Central American Colonial Entrepreneur, 1729–1796.

By RICHMOND F. BROWN. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. Illustrations. Maps. Tables. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. xvii, 298 pp. Cloth, \$34.95.

This book sets out to tell the story of the Aycinenas, arguably the most important of Central America's elite families. It focuses on Juan Fermín de Aycinena, the family's founding patriarch who immigrated from Navarre to Guatemala City via New Spain in