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 sitiales 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

the 1750s and soon became the wealthiest, most prominent, and most powerful individual in the isthmus.

Central America's upheavals during the 1970s and 1980s stimulated scores of historians to look to the region's past to shed light on the origins of the contemporary crisis. Influenced by the "new" social history, much of the scholarly production emphasized the experience of "los de abajo," the powerless and oppressed majority whose historical role had been generally ignored by traditional historiography. In contrast, scholarly studies of "los de arriba," the privileged few that have most benefited from Central America's skewed economic and social structure, remained scant. This is surprising for, as Richmond Brown notes, "[t]he remarkable resiliency of isthmian elites has much to do with Central America's recent travails" (p. 5).

Brown's volume is therefore a welcome contribution to the neglected field of Central American elite studies as well as to the field of Central American social and economic history. It sheds much new light on the role of elite families in the social and economic development of Central America in general and Guatemala in particular. The book combines intelligent analysis, thorough archival research, and a lucid, readable prose. Brown draws on a large body of private documents, the extensive collection of notarial records housed in the Archivo General de Centroamérica, and the relevant secondary literature. The central question Brown's work attempts to answer is how Juan Fermín de Aycinena and his descendants managed to amass so much wealth, prestige, and power; and how they were able to retain so much of it for so long.

Part of the answer, according to Brown, has to do with the timing of Aycinena's arrival in Guatemala, during a period of unprecedented economic boom, when opportunities in overseas trade were most lucrative. Just as important, however, were Aycinena's "powerful extended family network, mastery of colonial business, and the expert use of church and state" (pp. 8–9). He married into wealth and status, and proceeded to build an empirewide, family-based, commercial enterprise, the scale of which has not been sufficiently appreciated by scholars. By setting up an entailed estate, Juan Fermín hoped to ensure that his descendants would carry on the family's name, noble title, and wealth. His desires were amply realized, as the Aycinenas went on to play a key role in nineteenth-century Central America and to this day have retained much wealth and influence.

Brown's book constitutes a solid contribution to the understanding of the Aycinenas' role and impact on Guatemalan politics and society. However, some important areas remain unexamined. This reviewer, for example, missed at least a tentative discussion of the link between Aycinena's success and the growing pauperization of the laboring classes, a major contributing factor to the social tensions that arose in the nineteenth century and that have prevailed in Central America up to the present. This omission is surprising since the book purports to shed light on the question of how contemporary social and economic inequalities in Central American came about. It is hoped that Brown's future work will address this critical aspect of the Aycinenas' story.

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