

Society, 1750–1820; The Uneasy Equilibrium, 1820–1880; Passage to the Modern World, 1880–1929), Voss's *Middle Period* traces the development of the regional societies that made up Latin America. It highlights how these were formed during the Bourbon reforms in the late colonial period, how they became all-important and almost all-powerful during the early national period and how they were eventually subordinated by the nation-states that emerged following the mid-nineteenth century watershed and during the neocolonial period. The endorsements it receives in its back-cover by eminent Latin Americanist historians such as William B. Taylor, Eric Van Young, Mark D. Szuchman and John E. Kicza, make any reviewer weary of being too critical. All four distinguished scholars coincide in viewing Voss's text as 'a masterful synthesis'. They praise it for 'concentrating on common people who are often left out of large-scale works that focus on Latin America's [...] high politics', for its 'provocative interpretation of Latin America in transition after 1750', and for its periodisation. Overall, this reviewer would tend to agree ... except that: (1) The style is very dry; (2) There are few concrete examples/anecdotes/quotes. In this sense, the narrative/analysis is too generalised. Where are the real people in all this?; (3) Some of Voss's categories are problematic and arguably misleading. For instance, can you really simplify a regional society into only four classes: *gente baja*, *gente de profesiones*, *gente decente* and *gente alta*? Yet the virtues definitely outweigh the sins of this book. For those teachers who are social scientists rather than political scientists, who dislike discussing the liberal-conservative divide, *caudillismo* and oligarchic rule in Latin America's 'long nineteenth century', and who prefer to focus on local regional societies and the way these were affected by Imperial reforms, subsistence and market production, the forces of progress, modernisation and industrial capitalism, this is the perfect textbook for their students.

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Carlos Aguirre and Robert Buffington (eds.), *Reconstructing Criminality in Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 2000), pp. xix + 254, £40.95, hb.

This fine collection of essays is an important contribution to an ever expanding field of research: the history of crime, criminals and criminality in Latin America. As such, it is also a very good example of the type of work that has produced a deep transformation in the study of the law and judicial institutions in the region, from the traditional *historia del derecho* to a wide variety of theoretical and methodological approaches: social history, cultural history, and the history of ideas seem to be the most important actors, but cultural anthropology and literary studies usually make their mark as well. No doubt, one of the most beneficial effects of the transformation has been the fruitful intersection of these approaches.

In this particular volume, the authors address from different perspectives, and ranging from colonial times to the 1990s, 'the way in which different Latin American societies at different times in their respective histories viewed, described, defined, and reacted to *criminal* behavior', as Robert Buffington puts it in his introduction. From the role of the colonial criminal justice system in Mexico in diffusing social conflict, to drug related violence in 1990s Medellín, the scope of the essays is wide in terms of time and space, although Mexico and Argentina concentrate the majority of the papers.

Some of the themes covered touch upon recurring problems in Latin American history: the interaction between the legal world and the wider political, economic, social, and cultural processes through which the transition from colonial status to independent nationhood took place in nineteenth-century Latin America; the clash between the cultural and institutional legacy of the colonial world and the modernising principles of liberal nation-building; the contrast between liberal ideals and authoritarian practices; the rationalisation of the law and the political manipulation of judicial processes; the ways in which political instability and lack of material resources characterised the administration of criminal justice; the interaction between police forces, the judicial systems and the everyday life of the common people; the elites' dreams of modernisation and institutional innovation and the realities of traditional societies. All these polarities indicate that ultimately the dynamic interplay between continuity and change that characterises Latin American societies was particularly salient not only in the evolution of its judicial institutions, but in the definition and treatment of criminality as well.

When we focus more specifically on criminality, it is remarkable the way in which many of the papers successfully reveal the link between the social construction and definition of 'criminal' behaviour and the battle for control of urban and rural public space. Thus, Richard Warren's paper on vagrancy laws in early republican Mexico shows the dire consequences that an accusation of vagrancy, 'more a crime of *being* than *doing*' could have on itinerant workers, at a time when the rejection of conventional forms of work was perceived as a threat to public order and the state. Similarly, Ricardo Salvatore in his fascinating study of the Buenos Aires countryside during the Rosas era (1829–1852), also demonstrates how vagrancy, the most prevalent crime against public order, was used selectively to underscore the negative valuation made by residents of suspicious newcomers (in a context where few of the peons or itinerant workers had written contracts, the indictment of vagrancy could apply to almost anybody). Finally, Pablo Piccato also illustrates the disputes about the use of the city in late Porfirian and early post-revolution Mexico City. To the Porfirian *científicos*, lower class uses of urban space (alcohol consumption, street commerce, beggary) threatened public order, and many everyday practices became 'criminal' in the eyes of elites and public officials. Modernisation in Mexico City was thus characterised by a permanent negotiation between the ideal city and the everyday city.

And this is probably the major conceptual undercurrent holding together this excellent collection: the effects of modernisation on the region; or, as Robert Buffington suggests, Enlightenment and its unfulfilled promises. Not only criminology, but social sciences in general, and the foundations of social policies can be seen as different attempts made by the new nations to find 'modern' solutions to 'modern' problems. The complex process of accommodation, resistance and adaptation of these trends in Latin American societies is well registered in these brilliant contributions to a field that is helping to redefine the social history of these countries.