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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Agency and Nation-State Making in Latin American History

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This essay reviews the following works:

Bandits and Liberals, Rebels and Saints: Latin America since Independence. By Alan Knight. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022. Pp. xvi + 423. $35.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781496229786.

Latecomer State Formation: Political Geography and Capacity Failure in Latin America. By Sebastián Mazzuca. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 448. $50.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780300248951.

Republics of Knowledge: Nations of the Future in Latin America. By Nicola Miller. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. ix + 304. $42.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780691176758.

The Mexican Revolution's Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920–1929. By Sarah Osten. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xiv + 290. $29.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781108401289.

Five Republics and One Tradition: A History of Constitutionalism in Chile, 1810–2020. By Pablo Ruiz-Tagle. Translated by Ana Luisa Goldsmith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. x + 314. $110.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108835312.

Liberalism as Utopia: The Rise and Fall of Legal Rule in Post-colonial Mexico, 1820–1900. By Timo H. Schaefer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. x + 248. $29.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781316640784.

A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sánchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and the Beginnings of Argentina. By Jeffrey M. Shumway. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019. Pp. xvii + 334. $34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780826360908.

Los juegos de la política: Las independencias hispanoamericanas frente a la contrarrevolución. By Marcela Ternavasio. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2021. Pp. 264. Arg$1,720 paperback. ISBN: 9789878010809.

A Life Together: Lucas Alamán and Mexico, 1792–1853. By Eric Van Young. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 833. $50.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780300233919.

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In this essay, I take stock of the historiography on nation-state building in Latin America by considering the place of human agency in several recent books. I discuss three approaches to the analysis of agency: experiential agency; transformative collective agency; and critical juncture agency. I make no claim that these approaches represent a comprehensive menu of the ways in which scholars bring agency into their historical work. But each strategy does represent a distinct and coherent way of capturing the human dimension of nation-state construction in Latin America. Each strategy offers a particular lens for making sense of certain events and processes in Latin American history that would remain unseen in purely structuralist accounts of political development.

At its core, the idea of agency suggests intentional, conscious, and often change-directed behavior.[1] An actor exercises agency by explicitly deliberating over and pursuing certain goals. When strong agency is present, the pursuit of goals is conscious and broadly rational and willful rather than unconscious, haphazard, and/or habituated. Perhaps the most powerful demonstrations of agency involve conscious and costly efforts to transform structures or to change habituated behavior. At the same time, some agency is involved in even the most routinized reproduction of existing patterns.[2]

A historical account or explanation is agent-centered insofar as it focuses on and assigns weight to the choices, decisions, ideas, beliefs, and goal-directed behavior of actors. These can be individual or collective actors. All but the most stringent methodological individualists recognize that groups and organizations possess collective agency, and we must view their behavior as sometimes deliberate, self-aware, and intentional. Whereas the transformation of one's own life often requires the exercise of personal agency, the large-scale structural transformation of countries often requires group actors to exercise collective agency.

The first strategy, which I call *experiential agency*, involves the analysis of the subjective reality of particular individuals as they experience the world and act within and upon it. With this mode of analysis, historical researchers focus on the lives of particular individuals as they make sense of and contribute to the events around them. The researcher considers individuals in light of the larger society in which they embedded, using both past and contemporary sensibilities to evaluate and perhaps judge their behavior as well as the societies in which they behave. I explore this strategy in conjunction with discussing Eric Van Young's *A Life Together* and Jeffrey Shumway's *A Man, a Woman, a Nation.*

Second, historical researchers study *transformative collective agency* by exploring the intentional and goal-directed behavior of group actors, including especially subordinate groups that challenge dominant structures. This research brings to life the ideas and ideologies of nonelite individuals as they work together to change the societies in which they reside. Whether or not collective agency is effective at actual transformation may be a secondary consideration; the main purpose of the analysis is to understand and explain the collective agency itself, including the intentions, goals, ideas, beliefs, and strategies that characterize the group under study. I discuss how this strategy is used in Timo Schaefer's *Liberalism as Utopia*, Sarah Osten's *The Mexican Revolution's Wake*, and Nicola Miller's *Republics of Knowledge*.

Finally, historical researchers focus on *critical juncture agency* when they consider how particular actors make choices that are causally consequential for the societies in which they live. With this mode of analysis, the focus is not only on the individuals who make the critical choices, but also on the historical contexts that allow their choices to carry great

[1] Eric Selbin, *Modern Latin American Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993); Alexander Wendt, "Agency, Teleology and the World State: A Reply to Shannon," *European Journal of International Relations* 11 (2005): 589–598.

[2] Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, "What Is Agency?," *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (1998): 962–1023.

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weight. The analyst identifies a set of permissive conditions under which agency can be especially impactful. The analyst then explores the ideas, innovations, goals, and strategies of the actors who make choices and carry out actions in this enabled environment. Counterfactual analysis is often used as a tool to explore the difference-making effects of agency during the critical juncture. This strategy is discussed in conjunction with Sebastián Mazzuca's *Latecomer State Formation*, Pablo Ruiz-Tagle's *Five Republics and One Tradition*, and Marcela Ternavasio's *Los juegos de la política*.

I conclude by considering agency from an inside-out perspective: the agency of the historical researcher in the analysis of Latin American history. I specifically examine how Alan Knight's *Bandits and Liberals, Rebels and Saints* features a historical narrative in which the author's voice is woven into the fabric of the narrative itself.

Experiential agency

The works of political biography considered in this section focus on the experienced reality of elite individuals as they lived through the early decades of nation-state formation in the region. The studies bring to life the beliefs, goals, choices, successes, and failures of the protagonists under study. At the same time, they consider the larger contexts that provided meaning for their behaviors and that shaped and limited the opportunities they encountered.

Van Young

Eric Van Young's magisterial book *A Life Together: Lucas Alamán and Mexico, 1792–1853* exemplifies how the exploration of a single individual can open a window for understanding a whole nation's political history. Van Young tells the story of Lucas Alamán, a leading conservative in Mexico's elite political nation in the decades after independence. Alamán was an influential businessman, statesman, politician, and historian. He famously asserted that Mexico, during its first thirty years as a sovereign country, had moved from infancy to decrepitude without passing through a vigorous youth or a confident maturity (651–652). Van Young captures the experiential agency of Alamán through the examination of countless documents from archives in Mexico City, the Lucas Alamán Papers and other special collections in Mexico, and correspondence related to Alamán's own historical work.

Alamán's ideological inclinations were "rooted in the unabashed Hispanophilia of an aristocratic Creole intellectual who believed that the most civilized and desirable traits of his society—its Catholic religion, its literary and linguistic tradition, much of its institutional framework, and more—had been inherited from Spain" (435). Alamán was not alone as a hardcore Hispanoamericanist—the characterization captures well the ideological tastes of conservative intellectuals in many parts of Spanish America before 1860. From Alamán, we gain a sense of what Mexico might have looked like if the country had somehow been shielded from competing liberal ideas. Alamán sought to promote economic development, especially industrialization (e.g., textile manufacturing), rather than relying so heavily on silver mining and agrarian exports. He was the founder of the Banco de Avío, and he invested heavily in his own doomed textile factory. Both the bank and the factory might have succeeded if not for political instability and the difficult economic circumstances of the time. Alamán serves as a reminder that nationalist economic policy and the promotion of industrialization were not invented in the 1930s; he was an advocate of import substitution industrialization in the first decades of Mexico's history. He sought political centralization, stability, and order; his

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willingness to use repression and his indifference to free elections foreshadowed the Porfiriato.

Regarding international policy, Alamán attempted to build a strategic alliance and defensive union among the new countries of Spanish America, in part to counter the liberal United States. This early Spanish American league never really got off the ground, however, again in part because of political instability within Mexico as well as upheavals in the other countries (e.g., Gran Colombia was splintering apart at the time that Alamán pushed for the league). Had conservatives enjoyed a stronger hold on political power in Mexico and Peru, it is possible that these countries might have led a defense alliance in the region. Whether or not such an alliance would have affected subsequent events, including the United States' war with Mexico, is hard to know. But Van Young's narrative allows us to explore this counterfactual question by taking us through the history of the aborted supernational league.

The role of agency and the importance leadership is featured throughout the book. We encounter the strategic behavior of Anastasio Bustamante, Antonio de López Santa Ana, Vicente Guerrero, and many other political leaders, and we see the goal-directed efforts of collective movements through Alamán's elite statesman eyes. We are treated to vivid depictions and insider views of a vast array of topics; this book really has something for anyone interested in nineteenth-century Mexico. Van Young frequently injects his own candid beliefs, operating as an exceptionally knowledgeable and masterful guide.[3] The book is meticulously documented and elegantly written, setting a new gold standard for biography concerning nineteenth-century Latin American history.

Shumway

The lives of two Argentine contemporaries of Alamán are the subject of Jeffrey M. Shumway's recent book, *A Woman, a Man, a Nation: Mariquita Sánchez, Juan Manuel de Rosas, and the Beginnings of Argentina*. Whereas Van Young leaves no stones unturned concerning the life of his main protagonist, Shumway uses his two protagonists to understand the divisions that plagued Argentina in the first half of the nineteenth century. These protagonists are Mariquita Sánchez (1786–1868), a leading social figure in elite Buenos Aires society in the decades surrounding independence, and her childhood friend Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793–1877), one of the most powerful and notorious leaders in Latin American history. Shumway's account is written for a general audience, and his sources include the large historiography on Rosas and the less extensive work on Sánchez as well as various primary materials.

Shumway's account offers one of the first English-language depictions of Mariquita Sánchez. A prominent liberal throughout her life, Sánchez supported a thorough break with Spanish colonialism; and she was a consistent and outspoken supporter of liberal institutions like those emerging in the United States and Europe. Sánchez had a cosmopolitan outlook, adored European culture, especially French culture, and was an astute follower of both local and international news and politics. The presence and prominence of individuals such as Sánchez are surely what historian Tulio Halperín had in mind when he labeled Argentina "a country born liberal." Sánchez's famous salons held in her home not only celebrated music, poetry, and the arts, they also offered a space for discussing politics. She was a strong supporter of and close ally to Martín Rodríguez during his time as governor of Buenos Aires Province. Under Rodríguez and his minister Bernardino Rivadavia, Buenos Aires experienced its original liberal reform, which included not only ecclesiastical reforms but also a government that featured (on paper) universal male

[3] I won't spoil it for interested readers, but Van Young does weigh in on Alamán's role in the killing of Vicente Guerrero (see chapter 15).

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suffrage. Mariquita Sánchez viewed this liberal episode as a "happy experience." During this time, she founded (with Rivadavia) La Sociedad de Beneficencia, a women's association that assumed important roles in education, social welfare, and childcare that previously were controlled by the Catholic Church. From Shumway's narrative, we learn of Sánchez's autonomous and powerful convictions and see how the influence of women in Buenos Aires society was hardly confined to the home. Although La Sociedad included some conservative women, the institution itself is another striking example of what Halperín had in mind when depicting Argentina as country born liberal.

Yet Sánchez left Argentina in 1837 to live in Montevideo. The main cause was the repressive government of her childhood companion, Juan Manuel de Rosas; she viewed his rule as "an embarrassment to Argentina and an insult to humanity" (as quoted, 189). Sánchez watched with horror from Montevideo when Rosas unleashed the wave of violence known as "the Terror" in response to General Lavalle's plot to overthrow his government. As Shumway notes, "When Mariquita Sánchez left Buenos Aires in self-imposed exile, it served as the symbolic closing of the doors of a certain vision of Buenos Aires held by many porteños of her era—that of a modern, cosmopolitan, and liberal nation born out of Enlightenment and revolution" (183).

Although Juan Manuel Rosas has been the subject of many histories, Shumway's account offers an impressively nuanced view that moves us decisively away from the image of a crude caudillo on horseback who ruthlessly dominated society. After reading Shumway's depiction, one would be more apt to view Rosas as Argentina's original populist leader. Shumway captures the charisma of the young Juan Manuel, including his handsome physical appearance. We learn how Rosas's ability to lead and work with others made him a prominent *estanciero*. The young Rosas inspired loyalty from the gauchos who lived on his land, enabling him to mobilize hundreds of troops for fighting against foreigners and political opponents. Throughout his life, Rosas's view toward Indigenous people was oriented toward compromise whenever possible; he was willing to brutally subdue Indigenous people, but only as a final and less than ideal solution. Likewise, while Rosas had Afro-Argentine buffoons accompany him, he also attended Afro-Argentine celebrations, and he looked to Blacks and mulattos for support. As a political leader, Rosas consistently appealed to common people, using populist rhetoric and imagery to shape public opinion. He justified dictatorial powers as essential for public order and, as he put it, "to pull the country out of the abyss of misfortune in which it [was] sadly immersed" (as quoted, 167).

One cannot help but compare and contrast Rosas with Alamán, and then contrast both of these two men with Sánchez. Rosas and Alamán represent conservative visions of nation-state formation in Latin America. Both men were strongly oriented toward the imposition of order and shared a disdain for liberal ideas and institutions. They both despised public displays of emotion and the sentimentality of romanticism; they practiced rigorous self-discipline, sought to exemplify strong and competent leadership, and advocated hard work in theory and practice. Yet Alamán's elitism was quite different from Rosas' populism. Whereas Alamán traveled in privileged circles and engaged in high culture, Rosas could credibly portray himself as a man of the common people because he was indeed comfortable in "low" cultural settings. One cannot help but wonder if the explanation for the strikingly distinct fates of Alamán and Rosas was linked to this distinction between high elitism versus common populism. According to this hypothesis, those conservatives who were respected within popular circles enjoyed significant political advantages over their culturally elitist counterparts. The hypothesis might help explain the longevity of the populist-conservative dictatorships of Rafael Carrera in Guatemala and Santa Ana in Mexico as well as Rosas in Argentina.

If these men are examples of conservatives who traveled in high versus low cultural circles, then Sánchez offers an example of a liberal woman who traveled in high culture. Indeed, to be a liberal woman in early nineteenth-century Latin America (as opposed to

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late nineteenth-century Latin America) was often possible only by virtue of access to high society. In the case of Sánchez, she was born into a well-off family, and she managed to retain elite status despite the early death of her first husband and the trials of her second. Sánchez was decades ahead of her time on most issues, including her ideas about the role of women in society and politics. Yet, as Shumway is careful to point out, she was still a part of a narrow liberal movement. The liberal circles in Buenos Aires and Montevideo often harbored contempt for popular culture, including blatantly racist views of Black, mulatto, and Indigenous people. This elitist side of liberalism would of course rear its ugly head during the late nineteenth century, when male politicians seized state power and created authoritarian and exclusionary regimes in the name of liberalism.

Transformative collective agency

The books discussed in this section focus on transformative collective agency through the analysis of nonelite knowledge, ideas, and beliefs. The authors provide new insights into the role of common people in generating and sustaining political ideologies and the knowledge and practices that underpin nation-states. These works show that transformative collective agency is not limited to protests, rebellions, or even everyday forms of resistance by subordinate actors. Rather, collective agency is present whenever individuals act in concert with shared subjective awareness.

Schaefer

In *Liberalism as Utopia*, Timo H. Schaefer examines the legal cultures of mestizo towns, Indigenous towns, and haciendas in nineteenth-century Mexico. He draws evidence from the government archives in Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí, focusing especially on documents related to local courts and police forces. By examining ordinary settings, Schaefer allows us to consider how liberal institutions and values were experienced and embraced by common people outside of the usual elite networks. Schaefer brings regular people back into our understanding of liberalism. He argues that important scholarship overstates the extent to which hacienda residents embraced popular conservativism during the later nineteenth century. He finds that lower-class individuals on haciendas often embraced liberal-democratic principles, challenging the argument that hacienda residents at least tactically advocated traditional values.

Schaefer focuses on revolutionary liberalism, defined as "the project, at once minimal and utopian, to assure the equal treatment of all men (in those years, not yet women) before the law" (6). He is concerned with the struggle of ordinary actors—both mestizo and Indigenous, and both town-based and hacienda-based—to realize the political components of liberalism in the legal realm. This struggle was possible and sometimes successful because the courts were a point of access to the state that was not systemically denied to nonelite men. Whereas the executive and legislative branches of the Mexican state were often captured by elite networks, the courts and their justices exercised greater autonomy, including the ability to fairly dispense justice for ordinary citizens. Schaefer captures both the individual and collective agency of mestizo townsfolk, hacienda residents, and Indigenous community members in their struggles to hold postcolonial Mexico to an egalitarian legal standard in which male commoners had as much political power as rich merchants, large landowners, and army officers.

Schaefer's evidence is convincing that ordinary people often carried democratic principles forward through their actions and arguments in nineteenth-century Mexican courts. For at least some people and communities, revolutionary liberalism was a true moral project, and Schaefer has recovered their beliefs and agency. Schaefer uses this

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evidence to dispute the viewpoint that regular Mexican citizens were generally conservatively oriented in the nineteenth century. He concludes that revolutionary liberalism was sufficiently developed to require a basic reworking of this viewpoint. Whether or not he is right is a topic that historians will surely want to weigh in on. In anticipation of this debate, I note that Schaefer acknowledges that perhaps most common people in nineteenth-century Mexico did not actually hold egalitarian values. The question then becomes at what point we can say that revolutionary liberalism was a major current within what might have remained a predominantly conservative political culture.

Osten

In *The Mexican Revolution's Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920–29*, Sarah Osten considers the political history of southeastern Mexico during the period when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was in formation. Her analysis turns the spotlight on the agency of a group whose history of political organizing has been largely left in the shadows: the southeastern Socialists and their followers in the states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Oaxaca, and Veracruz. Political leaders here enjoyed autonomy in governance in part because this heavily Mayan region was generally hostile to outside interference. Osten's account draws evidence from the correspondence of local Socialist governors and national political leaders who were influenced by southeastern Socialism. The result is an agency-centered book that assigns the ideas, political choices, and dilemmas of political leaders and movements to center stage. Osten recovers both the Socialist ideologies of this era and the specific actors who formulated and advocated for these ideologies.

Treating the southeastern Socialists as only a minor footnote in Mexican history is a mistake, as Osten makes clear. For one thing, a full understanding of the roots of the Mexican Revolution requires us to consider the significant influence of Socialist governments in the Southeast on the revolutionary leaders in Mexico City. The Southeast provided influential examples for how to build political parties, engage in political organizing, and forge multiclass coalitions. When Plutarco Elías Calles announced the creation of the party that was to become the PRI, he and other revolutionary leaders were drawing on lessons from Socialist experiences and experiments in the Southeast. "In recognition of the importance of these experiments," Osten notes, "President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40) once famously described Socialist Tabasco as Mexico's 'laboratory of revolution'" (6).

Furthermore, the Socialists of the Southeast offer their own powerful revolutionary story that needs to be told. In an original account, Osten quite nicely unveils the agency in this story. We learn how Salvador Alvarado formulated a distinctive version of Socialism in Yucatán that combined a pro-worker and pro-campesino social orientation with a respect for tradition and capitalism. Osten explains how Socialist politicians adapted the Yucatán model in other states, building their own party organizations and one-party governments. By the mid-1920s, the Socialist Party itself had become the arena in which political debate was carried out in the Southeast. We also learn how Tomás Garrido transformed the Socialist Party in Tabasco into a clientelist mechanism of political control in which great power was concentrated in the hands of the man in charge. In Osten's argument, specific individuals and political leadership also matter for undercutting collective agency: "Garrido, more than any other individual, demonstrated that even as the southeastern Socialist model succeeded in building substantive relationships between the political class and its previously disenfranchised constituents, often to the benefit of both, it could also be used to empower a small handful of individuals at the expense of transparency, democracy, and the ability to reform the system once in place" (160). Garrido's controlling authoritarian system, operating in the name of common people, was a

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remarkable political invention worthy of study in its own right as well as a rather direct model for the PRI.

Miller

It is common to misdescribe Latin American countries in terms of a cultural essence that defines their national identity. (Who has not informally generalized about Argentines or Costa Ricans?) With this approach, one sees nation building as a homogenizing process through which heterogeneous people acquire a distinctive national identity. In *Republics of Knowledge: Nations of the Future in Latin America*, Nicola Miller presents a quite contrary imagery of nations and nation building. For Miller, the nations of Spanish America represent communities of shared knowledge, which she calls "republics of knowledge." On this view, nations differ from one another not because their citizens embrace a particular national identity and associated set of beliefs and behaviors. Rather, they differ from one another because their internally diverse communities possess different reservoirs of shared knowledge. To study nation formation is to study the creation of these shared knowledge reservoirs.

Miller's empirical analysis focuses on nineteenth-century Argentina, Chile, and Peru, and she uses primary material to examine knowledge in libraries, printing and publications, drawing schools, and popular illustrations. She also considers the role of language, territory, political economy, education, and the engineering of sovereignty in the creation of republics of knowledge. The result is a sweeping study of ideas and cultural practices that will be of great interest to anyone who seeks to understand the ways in which nations are experienced and practiced on the ground.

Collective agency is emphasized in several parts of the analysis. For instance, Miller explores not only how public libraries and universities were used by governments for political purposes, but also how local community actors sought greater access to the knowledge contained with these institutions. Likewise, Miller emphasizes the high levels of popular interest in land and the natural environment, which were strongly associated with the nation. In the case of education, she concludes that "looking beyond the formal state system and the prominent intellectuals uncovers a collective endeavor of popular nation-making through educational practice" (217). In Miller's account, the actors who built the nations of nineteenth-century Latin America are not the usual elite suspects. Instead, they are drawing teachers, linguists, news and book publishers, community botanists, sailors and cartographers, female teachers, and local advocates for national libraries. Miller directs attention to the efforts of these actors to make knowledge and culture accessible to all people without asking them to give up on prior identities.

Miller's knowledge-centered understanding of nationhood is an improvement over the notion that nations are communities of people who all share an identity. This latter "imagined communities" approach has never been satisfying when applied to the heterogeneous countries of Latin America. Miller not only makes a compelling case against the imagined communities approach; she also presents much evidence in favor of the argument that the collective efforts of nonelite actors created the shared knowledge reservoirs that actually constitute the nations of Latin America.

Political agency in critical junctures

The books considered in this section explore how agent choices and goal-directed behavior during critical junctures led countries to follow particular trajectories of subsequent development. The authors identify specific periods in time when individuals carried out actions

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that strongly shaped future outcomes. They explore counterfactuals by asking about the outcomes that might have happened if agents had chosen or behaved differently during these critical junctures.

Mazzuca

In *Latecomer State Formation: Political Geography and Capacity Failure in Latin America*, Sebastián Mazzuca formulates a powerful new conceptual apparatus and develops sophisticated and historically grounded explanations of state development in nineteenth-century Latin America. Mazzuca distinguishes two aspects of state development: state formation, which involves boundary creation and territorial stability, and state building, which involves bureaucratic and administrative power within society. The overarching puzzles of the book are to explain why Latin America mostly succeeded at state formation but largely failed at state building (when compared to Europe), and to explain variations within the region in the extent and nature of state failure. In answer to these questions, Mazzuca identifies three modes of Latin American state formation: port-driven (Brazil, Argentina, Chile), party-driven (Mexico, Colombia, Uruguay), and lord-driven (Venezuela, Peru, Guatemala). Each mode is associated with a particular kind of state-formation agent: a political entrepreneur, competing oligarchic parties, and a rural lord, respectively. Each pattern also features its own logic of state formation: enclosing patrimonialism for the port-driven mode, network patrimonialism for the party-driven mode, and top-down patrimonialism for the lord-driven mode. All three patterns contrast with the war-driven pathway of state formation followed in western Europe. The three Latin American patterns produced their own characteristic problems for state building that were connected to distinctive center-periphery interactions. For instance, territory consolidation and violence monopolization did not coincide in the party-driven and lord-driven modes, producing pathologies in state building that were not found in the port-driven mode, where they did coincide.

Mazzuca brings agency to the center of his analysis by focusing on the particular individuals who acted as state-formation agents in the roles of port-based entrepreneur, party leader, or rural lord. He employs a "politician-centered approach" in which "*who* provides political leadership in the region is critically important for its state-formation propensities" (106; emphasis in original). Mazzuca's narrative account is filled with the proper names of the particular men whose choices drove military conflicts, territorial consolidation, and state development in the region. While one might complain of a "great man" bias, Mazzuca is careful to embed his actors within the appropriate political context and the general categories of his framework. Mazzuca uses his conceptual framework to organize narrative accounts that focus on the contingencies and possibilities that existed in early periods of state formation. He explicitly considers counterfactuals in which the borders of the Latin American states turn out differently. The combination of a sophisticated conceptual framework with an actor- and event-centered narrative is quite effective; the book provides both general theoretical discussion and entertaining, action-filled case narratives. Throughout the analysis, Mazzuca considers rival explanations, formulates novel interpretations of specific cases, and proposes new ways of looking at state development in general.

For each of Mazzuca's cases, country experts must decide for themselves if the narrative accounts do full justice to the historical record and the entire range of evidence. Mazzuca's lightly referenced study mostly uses older historical works, including first-person accounts written by participants involved in the state-building processes under analysis. An exception is Mazzuca's brilliant analysis of the Argentine case, which uses original archival material and makes an important contribution to the history of that country. Of the other cases that Mazzuca considers, the one that I know the best is Guatemala, and I read without

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objection Mazzuca's nicely detailed account of Rafael Carrera's lord-led path of state formation. My quibble is with the fact that Mazzuca does not consider the period immediately following Carrera, which also had large consequences for long-term state building. This same issue of stopping the history around mid-century applies to Venezuela. Mazzuca treats Venezuela under José Antonio Páez (1830–1843) as successful state making, even though Venezuela was on the verge of the Federal War (1858–1863), perhaps the bloodiest civil war in all of postcolonial Latin American history. That said, I think these kinds of issues are inevitable in a contribution that does as much as this one. *Latecomer State Formation* is comparative-historical analysis at its finest, and the book makes a compelling case for critical juncture agency in the explanation of state development in Latin America.

Ruiz-Tagle

We gain fresh insights into the promise and shortcomings of elitist liberalism for nation and state building in Pablo Ruiz-Tagle's book, *Five Republics and One Tradition: A History of Constitutionalism in Chile, 1810–2020.* This book was originally published in Spanish, and the English version contains a new preface and afterword. Ruiz-Tagle argues that Chilean history has seen not one, but five different republics, each defined by new ways to use (to greater or lesser degrees) constitutions and laws "to limit power, to consider the Chilean people as the bearers of constituent power, and to uphold the ballot box as the preferred mechanism for representation and participation" (4). The focus of the analysis is on "constitutional moments," or critical junctures when actors encounter increased possibilities for foundational changes. Ruiz-Tagle gives special attention to the political ideas that shaped decisions about constitutional reform. He places agents at the center of the analysis not only by considering the specific individuals who enacted the legal changes during critical juncture moments, but also by considering carefully the political theorists who formulated the principles behind the legal changes. In some ways, these theorists are a Chilean elite version of the popular groups who formulated revolutionary liberalism in Schaefer's account of Mexico. In addition to writings of political and legal theorists, Ruiz-Tagle draws on the constitutional texts themselves, offering historically grounded interpretations of their meanings.

The first republic in Chile (1810–1830) was marked by a series of democratic tests in which reformers inched toward republican institutions, self-government, and the development of non-Indigenous male citizenship. Its culmination was the 1828 Constitution, drafted by the Spanish-born José Joaquín de Mora. Mora saw equality, liberty, and property as the basic rights, and he crafted a document that provided for a self-governing republic in which the institution of Parliament would exist in part to support equality. Mora did not see security as a basic right, and thus the constitution did not grant the state extraordinary powers to address crises and revolutions. Critics pointed out that the 1828 Constitution failed to take into account a political reality in which republican political principles were often not respected within society. Extra-legal political challenges soon brought down Mora's liberal document, and the authoritarian 1833 constitutional reform placed new restrictions on freedom, equality, and the dignity of the individual. The Second Authoritarian Republic (1830–1870) was influenced by the republican constitutionalism of Andrés Bello. Bello allowed for strong executive power and sought to limit the autonomy of politicized judges. His mission became the creation of a professionally trained and fully competent judiciary and state bureaucracy.

The causes and context of each of the five constitutional critical junctures receives sustained analysis. Ruiz-Tagle's people-centered account places the rule makers and institution crafters at the center of the narrative. He focuses on both those individuals and ideas that were adopted and those that were not. Although presidents sought to assign great powers to the executive, and although they were sometimes supported by legal

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intellectuals, the book suggests that Chile has always featured a tradition of opposing overreaching executive power. Ruiz-Tagle's work shows how the ideas of intellectuals such as Mora and Bello contributed to the comparatively durable and capable state of nineteenth-century Chile. The critical juncture agency of these leaders helps to explain the exceptionalism of Chilean state development.

Ternavasio

Counterfactual questions about alternative state-building outcomes feature prominently in Marcela Ternavasio's *Los juegos de la política: Las independencias hispanoamericanas frente a la contrarrevolución*. Ternavasio's critical juncture is the tumultuous period from 1814 to 1820, when the independence and overall fate of Latin America remained uncertain. Ternavasio's narrative recaptures the uncertainty of this period, showing that the outcome of independent nation-states was hardly guaranteed. The contingent choices of official and unofficial actors on both sides of the Atlantic determined the future of the region in ways that could not have been known in advance.

Ternavasio explores how the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies could have allied as a united counterrevolutionary force in the Americas. To build this counterfactual, she uses diplomatic correspondence, military records, and private communications that provide insight into the fluidly evolving factions of the times. She takes the reader through several different trajectories that the region could have followed. We consider the complex choices of war versus diplomacy in relationship to the expedition of Pablo Morillo, the Spanish official charged with putting down the revolts in the Americas. Ternavasio explores the intrigue and political calculations behind dynastic marriages in Europe as a way of understanding the tenuous patterns of great power alliance that shaped the fate of Latin America. She analyzes the multiple restorative options that still existed for the Spanish monarchy in 1816, when the Río de la Plata declared independence. The metaphor of political games is used throughout to highlight the strategic choices and maneuvers of actors in different places and at different levels of analysis. The contingency of outcomes is driven by the fact that crucial choices were being made by actors as different as kings and expeditioners and across spaces as distinct as Paris and Tucumán. Even if each individual choice was predictable, their combination and coming together could not have been foreseen.

Los juegos de la política is an outstanding example of an emerging mode of sophisticated and explicit counterfactual history. To produce this kind of history effectively, the author must possess two very different skills. On the one hand, the author must know the general context and master the details of the case under study. Even small changes to history can have large consequences across various domains, such that the author who pursues counterfactual rewriting must be deeply immersed in the case history to weigh the effects of historical alternations. On the other hand, counterfactual analysis requires scholarly creativity and imagination. The author must invent—on the basis of evidence—possible worlds that reflect alternative ways our world could have turned out. By its very nature, counterfactual analysis forces the researcher to consider human agency and the potential contingency of historical outcomes. In her study of the politics of nation-state formation during 1814–1820 period, Ternavasio delivers on both fronts, combining expertise and creativity to help us reimagine Latin American history.

Alan Knight and authorial agency

Alan Knight does not explicitly focus on issues of individual or collective agency in his new book *Bandits and Liberals, Rebels and Saints: Latin America since Independence*. But many

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examples of agency are present in this thematic history of Latin America.[4] The book consists of seven essays on topics that include the utility of the *bandit* category, religion and violence, the evolution of liberalism in the nineteenth century, patterns of economic development in Mexico and Peru, and the role of the colonialism and empire in Latin American history. For each topic, Knight engages controversies in the historical literature, weighing in with his own candid views on the most sensible interpretations and conclusions. The analysis is opinionated throughout but always deeply informed and always respectful to alternative views. Knight lets the reader into his inferential calculations and process of reasoning in entertaining ways; the reader never has the sense that Knight's conclusions are driven by a need to be right.

The book contains examples of all three kinds of agency considered in this article. In terms of experiential agency, Knight probes into the world of bandits, especially Pancho Villa, who was genuinely oriented toward social reform and popular betterment. Knight explores Plutarco Elías Calles's profound anticlericalism, Porfirio Díaz's misinterpretations of what was happening in Mexico, and the extent to which Augusto Leguía was ideologically disposed to lead a revolution. With respect to collective transformative agency, Knight examines the role of religious beliefs—including preconquest religions—in shaping collective action and revolts during the nineteenth century. He provides a short summary of the causes of the Mexican Revolution that highlights (among other factors) the agency of often ancient peasant communities in confronting expansionist landlords facilitated by the Porfirian state. Finally, Knight's analysis engages critical juncture agency, using counterfactuals to consider the difference that particular individuals made for later outcomes. For instance, Knight suggests that Mexico might have retained much of its territory in the United States if Santa Ana had died from the gunshot wound that took his leg; that the Mexican Revolution might not have happened if Díaz had not miscalculated so badly; and that the distinctively Jacobin character of the Mexican Revolution depended on the rise to power of Calles, an outsider from a peripheral region who harbored a genuine hostility to the Church.

Bandits and Liberals, Rebels and Saints exhibits another kind of agency that is often disguised and discouraged in our historical writings: authorial agency. I define authorial agency as the explicit presence of the author's voice, views, choices, interpretations, and values in the substantive analysis. Knight's presence as author is visible on every page of the book, including both the 217 pages of text and the 160 pages of notes that accompany the text. Benjamin Smith's blurb on the back cover really hits the nail on the head in noting that the book stands out for its "theoretical digressions, the jaded take on academic fashions, the telling examples, and the sharp, witty asides. Such elements . . . add to the impression that when reading this book, you are sitting down at a table with a world expert not only in Latin American history but also global history."

One reads this book in part to learn what Knight thinks about important historical controversies, including both controversies related to historical explanations of specific events and controversies related to how to best pursue historical explanation. A few of the specific conclusions that Knight reaches are the following:

- Eric Hobsbawm's concept of social banditry retains some validity, especially when applied to cases like Pancho Villa. However, not all bandits were socially oriented, and the revisionists are correct that some were basically economically oriented rational actors.

[4] See also Knight's discussion of political leaders and movements in his review essay "Revolution and the Left in Latin America," *Latin America Research Review* 54, no. 3 (2020): 772–783.

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- It is still useful to view nineteenth-century liberalism as evolving through three stages: constitutional liberalism, institutional liberalism, and developmental/positivist liberalism.
- The successes of nineteenth-century liberals in Mexico set the stage for the successes of the Porfiriato, which set the stage for the Mexican Revolution. The revolution was a reaction to both the Porfiriato and the authoritarian liberal reform period led by Benito Juárez.
- British diplomatic understandings of twentieth-century revolutions were often strikingly different from American understandings, due to fact that Britain functioned as only a "hovering dwarf" in the region by the mid-twentieth century. The diminished British role allowed British Foreign Service officers to adopt a more detached, less prejudiced, and somewhat more balanced view of the revolutions in Mexico, Bolivia, and Cuba.
- When compared to other successful revolutions, the Mexican Revolution can be usefully conceived as a Jacobin statist revolution with interesting similarities to Ataturk's Turkey. The Jacobin interpretation captures the Revolution's hostility to the Catholic Church and its nationalist, republican, and centralizing tendencies.

Clearly, not everyone can (or should) write a book in which the author's voice is so prominent. Knight's authorial agency is grounded in a career of seminal historical research and a firmly planted reputation as a charismatic and witty British historian (one who is rather adored by us North American readers). Yet it bears emphasis that Knight has hardly produced a lazy book in which he spins out yarns and casually throws out unsolicited views. This book is grounded in the historical literature, with explicit citations in the notes to particular works, including specific page numbers. When discussing the inclusion of these notes, Knight quotes Anthony Grafton: "A serious work of history must travel on an impregnably armoured bottom, rather like a tank" (24). Knight's new tank of a book has a thick armor-plated bottom whose construction alone belies any frivolous characterizations of the work as being armchair history.

The idea of authorial agency provides a fitting way to close this essay, for some degree of authorial agency is needed for the recovery of agency in history. Ultimately, historical researchers are the ones who must decide whether, how, and to what degree agency mattered in shaping past events and causing distant outcomes. The books reviewed in this essay make clear that researchers are choosing, in a variety of different ways, to explore and even emphasize the role of agency. This new research is neither a return to great man scholarship nor a denial of the effect of structure on the shaping of Latin American history. Rather, authors are finding ways to bring agency into the analysis using solutions that steer a middle course between voluntarism and determinism. The result for readers is an even-handed exposure to the role of human choices, ideas, and intentionality in the creation of the modern nation-states of Latin America.

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