

## Introduction



The essays in this volume—the earliest dating back about thirty years, the most recent with the ink barely dry—are both artifacts of change in the discipline over those three decades, and signposts I have left along the road of my own individual development as a historian.<sup>1</sup> The route, however, has not been an entirely random one. My scholarly energies have been occupied since 2000 in researching and writing a biography of the early nineteenth-century Mexican statesman, entrepreneur, and historian Lucas Alamán (on whom more in a moment). On one level the logic of how this inquiry grew out of my previous research is fairly clear. At the suggestion of the eminent Mexican historian Enrique Florescano, my interest in Mexican rural history came to be focused on the colonial Guadalajara region for doctoral study. Where the interest itself had originated, I confess, is a mystery to me. While working on that project, my archival encounter with prolonged insurgent activity during 1810–1821 in the Lake Chapala basin, to the south of Guadalajara, especially among Indian villages, led me to a study of popular groups in the Mexican independence movement more generally. Finally, my reading of Alamán’s multivolume, magisterial, and deeply opinionated work on independence opened to an interest in the author and the way his political career was entwined with

1. This introductory essay is a somewhat more developed but heavily overlapping version of my introduction to Eric Van Young, *Economía, política y cultura en la historia de México: Ensayos historiográficos, metodológicos y teóricos de tres décadas* (San Luis Potosí: Colegio de San Luis Potosí/Colegio de la Frontera Norte/Colegio de Michoacán, 2010). I would like to acknowledge highly useful comments on several aspects of the collection from Margaret Chowning and Gil Joseph, who read the manuscript for Stanford University Press; Norris Pope at the Press for entertaining the notion that such a volume might be of value; and a generous subvention to aid in publication authorized by Arthur Ellis, vice-chancellor for Research, University of California, San Diego, and help in obtaining it from John Marino, my colleague and sometime chair in the Department of History at UC San Diego. Acknowledgment of permission from various journals and presses for republication of the articles and chapters appears at the beginning of each essay.

the new nation whose movement for separation from the metropolis I had just studied and he had chronicled. There is another level in the logic of this progression no less clear to me, if perhaps less obvious to readers of my work, which follows a trajectory from economic history, to social and cultural history, to biography. This tracks a growing interest in what I would call “interiority”; that is, in people’s interior lives, especially their emotional and experiential processes, whether in groups or as individuals. This virtual obsession (for such it has become) was not on my horizon when I opted to study the Guadalajara region and the logic of regionality more generally, but emerged more and more clearly as I puzzled over how to interpret the actions and symbolic understandings of popular insurgents in my research on Mexican independence. I had moved, therefore, from the relatively impersonal, large-scale processes of economic history to the more intimate, often hidden dimension of culture and the dynamics of social groups in the context of collective political violence, albeit also on a large scale. Any reader familiar with my book on the popular sectors in the independence movement, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology and the Struggle for Mexican Independence, 1810–1821* (Stanford, 2001), will notice the attention I devote there to forms of internal mental life, psychopathology, collective manias, and even psychoanalytic approaches to history. From this cluster of interests I was drawn to a history of Mexican psychiatry from the late colonial period to 1930 or so, a study for which I began research but in which I never advanced beyond the publication of a single essay on the theme.<sup>2</sup> Although biography as a form of writing history still remains quite *retro* in North American academia, it seemed to offer another route to the same sort of interiority I had hoped to explore in charting the delusional worlds of the mentally ill, but within the framework of political culture rather than psychopathology and the social intervention of state institutions in the lives of the mad. While the first two stages of this evolution are represented by the essays in this volume, the third is only hinted at and awaits the completion of my project on Lucas Alamán to be fully realized. My readers will perhaps indulge me, then, as I begin with a few thoughts on Alamán.

#### LETTERS AND LIVES

The age of electronic media and the personal computer has for most of us eclipsed the art, habit, and pleasure of writing letters on paper. The widespread practice in the Western world of corresponding in written

2. Van Young (2001b); republished in an expanded version as Van Young (2005).

form depended upon the advent of inexpensive paper and writing implements, the spread of literacy, the establishment of relatively reliable state-sponsored postal systems, and the development of international commerce and banking arrangements requiring detailed, timely, and confidential correspondence. During the last several centuries, the transmission of information in letters has served a variety of purposes. Especially for common people of some education, letters have facilitated the pursuit of love, the nourishing of friendship, the acquisition of wealth, and the exchange of scientific ideas and information. For states and powerful political actors the sending and receiving of letters have also underwritten the integration of polities, the administration of justice, the collection of taxes, and the advance of political, military, and colonial projects.

For biographers and historians letters of all sorts (and, since at least the eighteenth century, newspapers) have proved to be one of the primary sources for reconstructing the past, and for the study of historical actors both humble and famous. Particularly within a cultural tradition deeply and intensely literate but little given to the publication of memoirs or autobiographies, such as that of the Spanish-speaking world, the survival of letters on paper is for the historian an essential point of entry into the private lives of public people.<sup>3</sup> I have been especially struck with this in recent years as I have advanced through the archival phase of a biography of Lucas Alamán—polymath, political thinker, statesman, avatar of import substitution industrialization in Mexico, Panamericanist, codifier of Mexican conservatism, *éminence gris* behind the last dictatorship of Antonio López de Santa Anna, and arguably the greatest historian of nineteenth-century Mexico. Alamán himself observed in the early 1830s the lack of an autobiographical/memoirist tradition in the Spanish-speaking world more generally (his specific comparison was to France, but one may assume he had in mind Europe more widely), and lamented it as necessarily reducing the access of historians to the lives of past historical actors:

The historical memoirs that form such an important branch of French literature have not up to now occupied writers in our Castilian language. Nonetheless, [such writings] not only provide important historical materials, but also at times [illuminate] history itself with the knowledge of events and the secret sources that produce them. . . . A wit said that memoirs present us with heroes *en robe de chambre*; that is, how they are inside their houses, while history [writing] offers them to us wearing armor or a blonde wig. And it is not rare to find that

3. For a more developed discussion of the weakness of an autobiographical/memoirist tradition in the Hispanophone world, see Van Young (2002), and in the same number of the journal *Secuencia* the wide-ranging essay of Pablo Piccato (2002).

someone who appears grand in a ceremony is reduced to nothing when we see him naked.<sup>4</sup>

Were it not for Alamán's prolific letter writing (although relatively little of his personal, intimate correspondence seems to have survived), it would be almost impossible to reconstruct his thinking, his internal world, and his motives during a long public life.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the mountains of correspondence he generated during his periods as a high official in the national government, there are clusters of quite revealing letters that tell us much about the man and the mind behind the rather aloof and certainly conservative public persona, even if they fall short of intimate self-revelation. Among these are his exchanges in the early 1830s with his friend the political general Manuel Mier y Terán, in the years before Terán's suicide; his brief exchange of letters with the American historian William H. Prescott in the 1840s; and his three-decade correspondence (stretching from the mid-1820s virtually up to the day of Alamán's death in 1853) with the Duque de Terranova y Monteleone, the Neapolitan nobleman and heir to Fernando Cortés's great entailed estate, the Marquesado del Valle, for whom Alamán served as political informant, business agent, adviser, and general factotum in Mexico. Also revealing were his occasional notes to and from Carlos María de Bustamante; the letters he exchanged with informants who provided information for him as he wrote his great history of Mexican independence in the late 1840s and early 1850s; and even his half-dozen or so surviving letters to and from Antonio López de Santa Anna, especially if one reads between the lines.<sup>6</sup>

While he was a great writer of letters, apart from scattered notes and a few fragmentary outlines Alamán seems to have kept no diaries or working notebooks about either his political activities, his business enterprises, or his historical writing, or at least none that have survived or come to light.

4. Centro de Estudios de Historia de México Condumex (hereinafter Condumex), Fondo DCLXXIV, "Memorias de Don Lucas Alamán," French and italics in the original. Translations from Spanish here and elsewhere are mine.

5. The exception to this, apart from a rather formal and remarkably un revelatory autobiographical sketch from the 1840s and the necrological essays published after his death in 1853, is the extremely interesting unfinished autobiographical fragment cited above, written during the 1830s and 1840s, that survives unpublished. There are, of course, biographical treatments of Alamán, and partial accounts of his life, thought, and public activities in many works. The last (and best) full-scale biography is that of Valadés (1938); and for a useful biographical summary, including a time line of Alamán's life, see Morán Leyva (2002).

6. Most of this correspondence is to be found in Condumex and the Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico), Ramo Hospital de Jesús. One would hardly be aware of the magisterial status of Alamán's great *Historia de México* from reading Enrique Florescano's very accessible and often acute *National Narratives in Mexico: A History* (2006), in which Alamán's work merits scarcely three sentences of discussion (pp. 310–11).

His admirer and friendly correspondent, the contemporary American historian William H. Prescott, for example, did keep such notebooks, which have been published and make for mildly interesting reading, especially where the composition of his great historical works is concerned.<sup>7</sup> Alamán's working methods as a historian in gathering information are illustrated in his correspondence with informants, but his larger ideas about historical processes or anything approaching what we might think of as a philosophy of history do not show up in his letters. His increasingly Olympian and rather pessimistic view of Mexico's history (and, by extension, of historical processes more generally) comes through most explicitly in some passages of his great *Historia de México* and must be extracted from that work. His view of how history writing was to be realized *as a craft*, on the other hand, is addressed in the autobiographical fragment of the 1830s that apparently formed the seed of the later published *Historia*.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, a number of modern historians, especially in the Francophone and Anglophone traditions, have left not only ample collections of published correspondence, but also autobiographies.<sup>9</sup> The more formal, self-conscious concern with producing treatises on *how to write history* seems by and large to be a modern tendency, mostly of the twentieth century, when history as a distinct academic discipline separated itself more clearly from a belle-lettristic tradition, although there are some notable earlier exceptions.

To continue with the Alamán theme for a moment, the strong influence of public circumstances—the political instability in Mexico during the decades following independence, and the war with the United States, for example—and the disappointments of his own life (the failure of several business enterprises, his long semixile from the center of national political life, and the death of several of his children, common enough though such personal losses were at the time) seem to have tempered his earlier positive views about the significance of human agency in history. These ideas could never at best have been characterized as “optimistic,” and what he may well have thought of as failures in many areas of his life and that of his country led him to the cool, rather melancholic pronouncements at the close of his *Historia de México* toward the end of his life. Take, for example, his view of the historian's task at the beginning of his autobiographical fragment, apparently written in the early 1830s. Here he began

7. For Prescott's memoranda to himself, mixed with diary entries, see Prescott (1961); a selection of Prescott's letters is to be found in Prescott (1970/1925).

8. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (1992).

9. Some recent well-known examples from the Anglophone world are Schlesinger (2000) and Hobsbawm (2002); on historians' autobiographies in general, see Popkin (2005). Closer to home for readers of Mexican history is the revealing autobiographical essay of Brading (2007).

to approach the writing of political history, which occupied his attention throughout his life as a writer, almost from the point of view of a social historian, allowing much room in the course of history itself for chance, and even the play of ludic elements. Near the passage quoted above he penned some thoughts on the historian's craft that are worth quoting at some length, I think:

Frequently the greatest events depend upon [such] small, even ridiculous causes that the gravity of history would be offended by presenting them in all their details; nonetheless, it is through these details that we come to know men. . . . And although history should make us know them in all their aspects, there are still in almost all great actions small circumstances, perhaps unfavorable to the person who figures [in those events], that the historian and the writer of tragedies try to dress with the majestic clothing with which they dress their heroes, while the memoirist and the comic poet strive to present them in the nude, and even sometimes with malignity.<sup>10</sup>

Alamán took up his pen again in the early 1840s to advance the memoir, a decade or so after he had begun it, but by then the work itself had mutated from a more personal account to a larger-scale, more self-consciously historical one (tellingly, from “Una memoria de mi vida” to “Una memoria de mis tiempos”) and had become a sort of predraft of what some years later would come to be the *Historia de México*.<sup>11</sup> The earlier, almost lighthearted tone of the lines just quoted had given way to a much darker, more fatalistic vision reflected in the later sections of the “Memoria,” in which Alamán wrote of

. . . the great revolutions that have lifted from nothing those nations that have come to be lords of a great part of the world, and which give origin with their destruction to other nations that in the impenetrable order of providence have played a part in their time, suffering [in their turn] the same vicissitudes. But there is the force of circumstance, and such conjunctures of these that compel the will. . . . There are [many] examples of these verities demonstrated on every page of history. . . . And so it is that the form of the world changes ceaselessly, empires and nations succeeding each other, with no human power sufficient to impede it.<sup>12</sup>

10. “Memorias de D. Lucas Alamán.”

11. The titles of the two works bear a striking similarity: that of the early 1830s and early 1840s, given to the work in 1843, is “Memorias de D. Lucas Alamán, Ministro de Relaciones exteriores e interiores de la República Mexicana en diversas épocas. En las que se contiene la verdadera historia de esta República desde el año de 1808 en que comenzaron la inquietudes que condujeron a su independencia hasta el año de 1843. Escritas por el mismo”; whereas the complete title of the great published work we know by its abbreviated title of the *Historia de México* is *Historia de México desde los primeros movimientos que produjeron su independencia en el año de 1808, hasta la presente época*.

12. “Memorias de D. Lucas Alamán.”

And by the time Alamán came to write the concluding passages of the *Historia* a decade later still, he famously voiced the doubt as to whether a nation called Mexico had ever existed at all, whether there were any Mexicans, and by implication whether Mexico *could* come to exist in future. The focus had narrowed here from the history of nations and revolutions in general to that of Mexico in particular, but the vision is no less dark.

#### THE ESSAYS

My research in recent years on the life of Lucas Alamán has stimulated me to think not only about the nature of historical sources, but also about my own career as a historian as refracted through my studies of Alamán's historical methods and writings. The modern world would not be poorer for the destruction of my particular correspondence (most of which, in any case, has for some time taken the form of electronic mail and therefore has a short half-life), or the lack of any autobiography that hubris might tempt me to write. It would have been of enormous value to our understanding of Alamán's life, the history of Mexican letters, and even to the profile of early nineteenth-century political thought in the Atlantic world, on the other hand, had he (or someone) preserved his personal correspondence in a systematic way, and even more so had he finished his autobiography.<sup>13</sup> The publication of the present volume of essays, however, provides me with an occasion both welcome and sobering to consider my own evolution as a historian whose life experience—not easily separable from my writing of history—was shaped by the late twentieth century, and by personal circumstance, no less than Lucas Alamán's was by the early nineteenth century and the events of his life. It is a welcome occasion because one does not often have the opportunity to commit to paper thoughts on one's relationship to one's own work in a relatively formal way that may be read by other people, however few. And it is a sobering occasion for much the same reason, since in the process of remembering and organizing such recollections, one may not only invent things, but also realize how many gaps there are in one's own account of oneself, not to mention that even putting such thoughts into print constitutes an embarrassing act of narcissism. In framing this collection of essays it might be useful for me to offer some observations on the historian's craft, at least as I have practiced it, in addition to placing the essays in the context of my own historical research on Mexico and of how the field of

13. Some of Alamán's political, business, and even personal correspondence is published in Aguayo Spencer (1945, vols. 10 and 12).

Mexican history has evolved over the last three decades or so. With the patient indulgence of my readers, I take the opportunity to do so now, although the emphasis is more on contextualizing the essays published here and explaining why they were written when they were, than on offering any lectures about the discipline, or offering up personal confessionals.<sup>14</sup>

A good place to begin such reflections, perhaps, is with an earlier volume of my essays that appeared in 1992 under the title *La crisis del orden colonial: Estructura agraria y rebeliones populares de la Nueva España, 1750–1821*, all but one of them published previously.<sup>15</sup> With a couple of exceptions those were all substantive rather than historiographical essays; that is, they dealt with aspects of history itself rather than the ways in which history is written by professional historians, with conceptual tools that historians employ, or with the state of historical research on Mexico. Five of the essays looked back to work I had done on the agrarian history of the Guadalajara area (see Chapter 1 in this volume), while four of them looked ahead to a book I was then writing on popular groups in the Mexican independence struggle, and came to be integrated more or less into that work, published in 2001, considerably later than I had optimistically predicted in 1992.<sup>16</sup> In the introduction to the 1992 collection I basically discussed the theme of the materialist interpretation of history versus a culturalist approach, and more specifically which of these might offer the most apt conceptual tools for looking at the participation of common people, mostly indigenous peasant villagers, in the struggle for Mexican independence. This foreshadowed a major concern of mine in the intervening years that forms a major thematic axis in the present volume—the promise and limits of cultural history, and the relationship of cultural to economic history. The basic question for me then, as even now, was whether subaltern participation in the decade-long insurgency that sundered New Spain from the metropolis is most convincingly described as a massive agrarian rebellion, or as a movement to assert localist and ethnic identities, and to preserve the cultural practices associated with them. According to the first scenario, agrarian rebellion would have arisen from material deprivation due to economic conditions in the Mexi-

14. I have made some brief autobiographical notes that address my personal background, and to some degree my development as a historian, in Van Young (2007b).

15. Van Young (1992c). Of the eleven essays in that volume, only one is reproduced here (Chapter 5; chap. 3 in the original version). All the other essays in this volume were published after 2000, except Chapter 6, “The Cuautla Lazarus” (1993) and Chapter 7, “The New Cultural History Comes to Old Mexico” (1999).

16. *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810–1821* (Van Young 2001c); the Spanish edition appeared in Mexico as *La otra rebelión: La lucha por la independencia de México, 1810–1821* (Van Young 2006c).



can countryside: demographic pressures, land scarcity among peasants, the spread of commercialized agriculture, and falling real incomes for rural people. According to the second, an explanatory scheme in a more cultural register would take into account popular, especially indigenous, impulses to vindicate some sort of political rights, assert ethnic identity in the face of late colonial pressures toward homogenization, and defend village communities. These diminutive polities were bounded by Indianness, a distinct ritual cycle, lifestyle, and a diminished subjecthood signified under the colonial regime by ethnic prejudice, differential tax obligations, legal disabilities, and so forth.

Looking back now on the introduction to my 1992 volume of essays, it seems to me that my answer to the question I had posed was ambivalent. The ambivalence arose from a growing realization that there exists a salutary but irresolvable tension between materialist and culturalist explanatory frameworks, and between structure and agency in human history. Chapter 7 in this volume, "The New Cultural History Comes to Old Mexico" (originally published in 1999), deepened that discussion in exploring the limits and achievements of cultural history, and the dynamics of its ascendancy during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s in historical writing on colonial Mexico. A number of my colleagues and other readers found the essay to be highly tentative in its assertion of the claims of cultural history, and agnostic about its accomplishments and potential. This opinion surprised me, since I had thought at the time (and still do) that I was merely offering a number of sensible reservations about the writing of cultural history rather than expressing tepidity about its value, or voicing skepticism about whether it can be done at all. In reading this essay my readers may want to revisit the 1999 issue of the *Hispanic American Historical Review* (HAHR) in which the article first appeared along with several other contributions by accomplished historians of modern Mexico addressing the same issues.<sup>17</sup> Ambivalence is not necessarily symmetrical, however, and my ambivalence some years earlier, in the 1992 introductory essay, leaned somewhat toward the materialist end of the spectrum, as suggested by my citation of an anecdote putatively involving the English philosopher Bertrand Russell, an elderly woman in one of his lecture audiences, and a turtle, while the 1999 essay leans in the opposite direction.<sup>18</sup> The final point I was trying to make in

17. Specifically with relation to my book on Mexican Independence, some of the issues about cultural history as exemplified in that work are addressed in my extended exchange with Alan Knight, originally published in *Historia Mexicana* and republished in booklet form as *En torno a La otra rebelión* by El Colegio de México in the series "Miradas a la historia" (Van Young and Knight 2007).

18. Since that anecdote may not be familiar to my present readers, let me quote integrally

invoking that story at the close of my 1992 introductory essay is that however many layers of ideology, culture, mentality, or language one peels back, there must always be a layer of materiality underneath them, basically an economically determined framework of class relations. Certainly this is true in a commonsense way, since we apprehend our surroundings through our senses, which constantly remind us at the most basic level of the world's materiality. Thus our own experience demonstrates to us the barrier that materiality interposes to our understanding of history through the basic fact that people are distinct physical beings whose internal mental processes, as mediated to the world by language and act, are at best only imperfectly accessible to their fellow beings. It is a major part of the historian's job, however, to try to transcend this separateness and make sense of the disparate narratives, and the points of view they represent, which form the basis of historical accounts. This is a rather conservative position these days—that there is an actual object (an event, a person) to be apprehended at the center of historical narratives, or where a number of narratives converge—although most practicing historians seem to hold this view, or at least write history as though they do. In my 1992 introductory essay I invoked the term “culture” just three times, twice as a noun, once as an adjective, and wrote about “collective behavior” rather than culture; that is, about action rather than belief.

By the time the introductory chapter of my book on independence, *The Other Rebellion*, was written in the late 1990s, my ideas about the relationship of culture and the forces of material life to collective political violence had changed considerably, tending ever more in the direction of culture and away from traditional models emphasizing relative deprivation and class relations as the wellsprings of action. When exactly the change in my thinking occurred eludes me now. While this reorientation in my approach to writing history was of course in part impelled by the intellectual currents around me in the 1990s (the general subject of Chapters 3, 6, and 7 in this volume), it also grew out of an encounter with the archives. This recapitulated my experience of some two decades earlier, in the early 1970s, when I was beginning the research for what eventually became my first book, on the agrarian history of the Guadalajara region

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here the paragraph in which it appears: “A well-known scientist (some say it was Bertrand Russell) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: ‘What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise.’ The scientist gave a superior smile, replying, ‘What is the tortoise standing on?’ ‘You’re very clever young man, very clever,’ said the old lady. ‘But it’s turtles all the way down!’” (Hawking 1988, 1).

in the late colonial period (Chapter 1 of this volume is now the introduction to the second edition of that book). On that occasion, however, my shift had been in the opposite direction, away from social history and its larger penumbra, and toward economic history. Influenced by my reading in European rural history (especially the French historians Marc Bloch, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Pierre Goubert, but also English scholars such as Joan Thirsk, R. H. Tawney, and others), my original ambition had been to write a social history of a regionally delimited rural society, but I found that the archives did not readily yield the sort of data I felt was required; or at least I did not have the conceptual tools to squeeze the sources in order to extract social history from them. So in a sense I fell back on economic history; Chapter 1 in this volume is in part an updated survey of the background to that shift, and Chapter 2 is one of its sequelae. As I gravitated toward economic history, moreover, I also became more aware of the debates of the time regarding dependency theory, a body of empirical studies that I have never seen as very theoretical, but simply as instantiating obvious statements about economic asymmetries between societies, and about modes of extraction of surplus value. My book about the haciendas of the Guadalajara area in the late colonial period, therefore, with its emphasis on coherence and change in regional systems of production, consumption, and exchange became a sort of antidependency case study. My writing on Mexican regions and the nature of regionality more generally, represented here by Chapter 5, grew out of this.<sup>19</sup>

My methodological, conceptual, and interpretive reorientation of the 1990s, as I have suggested, moved in the opposite direction, away from economic history, toward social and cultural history. The original plan for my book *The Other Rebellion*, in fact, had been to examine the popular insurgency of 1810–1821 using three regional case studies of economic change in the late colonial period—the Guadalajara, Cuernavaca, and Huasteca regions. I anticipated that such a study would support the hypothesis that the intersection of rural population growth, agricultural commercialization by large estates in response to increasing urban demand, growing land shortages in the peasant sector, falling living standards for common people, and increased taxation spurred by the Bourbon Reforms had combined to produce a situation of material deprivation in the Mexican countryside. These changes occurred within a structure of marked class and ethnic differentiation that pushed humble people into rebellious alliance with the Creole directorate of the independence movement under the covering ideology of protonationalism, a providentialist

19. Van Young (1992c), and my introductory essay in that volume, pp. 1–36.

narrative (the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe), and a virulent anti-*gachupín* sentiment shared by commoners and members of the elite alike. This approach would have produced a study similar in many respects to those of John Tutino, Brian Hamnett, or more recently the Mexican scholar Carlos Herrero Bervera, among others.<sup>20</sup> While there is much to be said for this scheme, and while a substantial residue of it remains in *The Other Rebellion* (especially in Chapter 3), I found it wholly inadequate to explain what I was encountering in the archives. In other words, one might say that while the deprivation model of subaltern political action, and more generally a materialist interpretation of the independence movement were true, they were certainly not only true, perhaps not even primarily true, and definitely not interestingly true (to me, at least). It would have been extremely difficult if not impossible, for example, to account with reference to material conditions alone for elements of messianic thinking among popular rebels. Similarly, the political choreography of village riot during the insurgency, the forms of spatial mobility and boundaries in the participation of indigenous villagers, the nature of violence and its objects, and the very different responses to the insurgency of rural people who shared the same material conditions were not easily explained without according culture a more central role in collective political action. To marginalize such apparently anomalous speech acts and behaviors (anomalous only if one tries to extrude them through a rigid materialist grid) as forms of “false consciousness” or hegemonic cooptation would have been to discount deeply the historical actors’ own versions of their reality, and thus foreclose the possibility of a much more nuanced and interesting account of Mexican independence. It would be possible, I suppose, to dismiss the belief of the Lazarus of Cuautla (see Chapter 6 in this volume) that he could be raised from the dead by Father Morelos and his miraculous child as a sort of inconvenient excrescence of his relationship to the means of production; but it would relegate to the dustbin of history his own view of how otherworldly and mundane forces were related to each other, substituting our version for his, and in the process impoverishing our understanding of the ways common people understood their world. Then, too, I found there to be little evidence that ordinary people had material conditions in mind when they took up arms, little indication that they consistently attacked their masters as economic oppressors, and little sign of a program to remedy agrarian grievances or redress imbalances of wealth. All this turned me in the direction of a

20. Tutino (1986), Hamnett (1985), and Herrero Bervera (2001); and see Chapter 4 in this volume for a survey of Independence historiography and the way it has changed over the last several decades.

cultural interpretation of popular rebellion, especially among rural indigenous people, and I even went so far as to place cultural factors—issues of identity, community, ethnicity, and religious sensibility—ahead of material ones, thus reversing the normally presumed direction of causal arrows from the material to the cultural, depicting them instead as moving from the cultural to the material.<sup>21</sup>

The change in my own thinking about the wellsprings of collective action would not be especially interesting were it not for the fact that it exemplifies larger shifts in the practice of history during the last thirty years or so, at least among Anglophone historians. Many of the essays republished here constitute an exploration of this theme, of the shift from more materialist to more culturalist approaches, within a historiographic framework. The arc of this trend in the way Mexican and Latin American history more generally has been approached in the United States (and to some extent in Mexico, although less robustly even now) can be followed beginning with my essay of 1979, “Recent Anglophone History” (not included in this volume), in which I suggested that the older forms of political and institutional history that dominated the middle decades of the twentieth century had given way to economic and social history, a shift I traced in the changing vocabulary of historical work. Where once the titles of monographs and of articles in the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, for example, spoke of *boundaries, treaties, parties, wars*, and so forth, by the late 1960s they were likely to feature such terms as *socioeconomic, stratification, and elites*. The atrophying of economic history among Anglophone scholars, with a few exceptions—although it is much stronger, indeed even thriving in Mexico today—was accompanied through the 1990s by the consolidation of cultural history, developments traced in Chapters 3, 6, and 7 in this volume.

Having temporarily abandoned economic history (I think of myself as a recovering economic historian), by the way, for the seductions of social and cultural history, and now returned to economic history with my work on economic thinker and entrepreneur Lucas Alamán, I have come to see as unfortunate the decline of economic history among Anglophone historians of Latin America, and especially of Mexico. I nonetheless issued an evangelistic call for the colonization of economic by cultural history in Chapter 7. I give two main reasons for this intellectual move. In the first place, I make the case that human beings spend so much time getting and spending that economic activities must be the sites of meaning production and expressive practices that are the major arenas of interest for

21. For some examples of this approach, in addition to my book on Mexican independence, see Van Young (1995b, 2009a).

cultural historians. In the second place, even with the interesting shift in interest among some economic historians to the institutional frameworks suggested by the work of Douglass North, I think it useful to explore the notion that institutions do not arise from a vacuum, but reflect the cultural substrate of a given society—religious ideas, normative values, systems of gender practice, and so on. I have since climbed down off this soap box with a partial and implicit *mea culpa*, however, in essays not included in this collection and in the form of private reservations about the hegemony cultural history has come to exercise over the field.<sup>22</sup> My own feeling these days is that cultural history in the absence of economic context is just as likely to render a distorted view of its object as is economic history (or political history, for that matter) extracted from its cultural context. There are of course practical limits to what the individual scholar can do—limits of time, documentation, theoretical preparation, personal interest, the dynamics of academic careers—that make this ecumenism a counsel of perfection. Some of my readers may find in all this navel-gazing and shilly-shallying evidence of a failure of intellectual nerve, while I prefer to think of my reservations as the product of a healthy skepticism and of a lifelong tendency to be eclectic rather than doctrinaire.

Let me return to the theme of culture. Now, it is true that not everyone means the same thing when they talk about “cultural history” as both an object of inquiry and an approach. My own definition would focus on what we might call the economy of symbolic exchange, the arenas of collective representation and discourse, and such matters as religious belief, individual and collective identity, gender relations, the forms in which belonging to a community is expressed, and other ways in which people organize their relationship to the material and human worlds around them, and endow those objects and relationships with meaning. It seems to me that “meaning” is the central category of cultural history—it is the honey in the hive, the nut in the shell, the emotional resonance of the song, the memory or analogy evoked by a smell, a touch, a sound, an image. Since meaning is therefore a relational property—it valorizes one thing by reference to another—and there may be a number of distinct meanings attached to a behavior, a belief, or a symbol, cultural history can get pretty complicated and messy in adding an entirely unseen but inferred layer of connections to any historical scene. This is even more obviously the case when a number of historical actors are involved. Take, for example, the land suit, one of the classic sorts of behavior that colonial historians use to reconstruct past realities. From a purely materialist point of view what

22. In addition to my essay “De razones y regiones” cited above, interested readers may consult Van Young (2003c).

is at issue when a peasant village is pitted in litigation against a private landowner or a neighboring village is encapsulated in the need for peasants to accumulate funds for subsistence, ceremonial rites, and reproduction (seed to plant the next crop); to pay their rents and taxes; and to pass on property to the next generation, however little it may be. Symbolically, however, the piece of land being fought over may “mean” more than its economic value now or in the future. The geographical location of the land—a modest *milpa* (cornfield), let us say—may have significance because of where it is in relation to a cave, a stream, an ancient tree, or some sacral site. Apart from its productive capacity, access to land itself may signify belonging to a community, a lineage, or some other social grouping. Control over a piece of property may entail strongly gendered aspects, such as the right to marry and establish an independent household, the passage from youth to adulthood, or the support for patriarchal dominance over women, other family members, or non-kin dependents. And those “meanings” are only projected by one party in the equation, and may be reflected, mirrorlike, in the unspoken or even unconscious mental realm of the contending party to the litigation.

It will be noticed that this very broad (critics might even say flaccid) definition is by no means class-specific; that is, it does not suggest that the study of cultural history need be limited to those social groups that leave written records, or are the producers and consumers of the literary artifacts of a given society. The way I myself have practiced it, the boundaries of cultural history clearly embrace social groups not inscribed in the historical record, which embraces most of the population in most societies during most of history, although one always faces the issue of limited or ambiguous sources in dealing with subaltern groups. Nor should cultural history, in my view, be limited explicitly to expressive realms of human activity such as celebratory life, religion, or ritual, but should map a huge geography including everyday life and activities not perhaps universally regarded as the territory of the “cultural.”<sup>23</sup> By the same token, cultural history is strongly linked to local knowledges in the sense propounded so powerfully (and sometimes opaquely) by cultural anthropologists such as the late Clifford Geertz. Nor does cultural history in any way *exclude* economic life except by convention, a point I have made above and at some length in Chapter 7, in which, in particular, I try to develop the point that although the institutional approach to economic history associated with Douglass North and his followers has somewhat loosened the grip of neoclassical

23. I have dealt with issues of definition and delimitation in a number of essays in addition to those included in this collection, among them the conclusions of at least two volumes of essays: Van Young (1994a, 2001a).

models on economic history, it is arguable that institutions themselves are the products not only of contingent historical conditions, but also of underlying cultural templates that express pervasive social values as well as instrumentalist ideas about the frameworks of economic action.

I have alluded in passing to the differences in the way the history of Mexico is written in Mexico and in the United States, or in the wider Anglophone world, for that matter; cultural history exemplifies one of these, although it is becoming increasingly difficult to generalize about it. Another difference, at least until a few years ago, would have been the application of Marxist theory to the writing of history, which was never strongly established among Anglophone historians of Mexico in particular or Latin America more generally (although dependency theory was), while it seems to me that it flourished in Mexico. These differences, however, are not restricted to theoretical approaches. They are also very noticeable with regard to certain themes, although the treatment of the themes also takes place within prevailing models of what effective history writing looks like, and these can be very distinct in Mexico and the Anglophone world. This is the subject of Chapter 4, which deals in a necessarily abbreviated way with the Anglophone and Hispanophone historiographies of Mexican independence. The essay traces the textual and ideological genealogy of writing on the insurgency of 1810, touching on some of the great canonical works produced by nineteenth-century Mexican scholarship, moving into the twentieth century, and ending with a long section on how the trends in United States historiography in recent decades have influenced how the history of independence is written there, and in what ways this literature differs from what Mexican scholars have produced during the same period. Apart from the early pages in this introduction, discussing my work in progress on Lucas Alamán, and Chapter 6, which is essentially a methodological essay about interpreting ambiguous source texts so as not to lose their cultural importance, Chapter 4 is the only essay in the volume that deals directly with my research interest of the 1980s and 1990s, the rebellion of 1810–1821.

Let me close with a word about the ways in which the essays have, and have not, been revised from their original forms.<sup>24</sup> Some repetitions between the original essays—identical passages and close paraphrases—have been eliminated. There have also been some changes in titles and

24. Throughout this volume published works are cited social science style, with the author's last name and the date of publication in parentheses, either within the text or in the endnotes. I have done this to avoid cluttering the text unduly and to keep the length of the book within reasonable limits. Readers are encouraged to consult the unified bibliography at the end of the volume.



other minor adjustments for the sake of clarity of exposition. This still leaves two potential problems that might well crop up in any such collection of essays authored by one scholar over the span of nearly twenty-five years: the age of some of the chapters, and overlap among them. Overlap occurs primarily between the first two chapters and the last one. Chapter 1 was written during 2004–5 as a historiographical update encompassing works on the colonial, and to some degree the nineteenth-century, Mexican hacienda since the initial publication in 1981 of the book *Hacienda and Market in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*, and my 1983 article “Mexican Rural History since Chevalier: The Historiography of the Colonial Hacienda,” not reprinted in this volume although it has appeared in several other venues over the years. While the historical research on the colonial landed estate was just cresting in the early 1980s and dropped off sharply in quantity over the ensuing years, a great deal of work was still to appear. There is comparatively little overlap or cross talk between Chapter 1 and the 1983 article, therefore, except for purposes of setting a framework for the newer essay. But what there is in Chapter 1, I have chosen for the most part to leave in place so as not to disrupt the continuity between what should finally be seen as “Part I” and “Part II” of the same project, much in the way that movies sometimes spawn sequels. The overlap between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 is substantial but contained. My account of the Spanish American highland hacienda literature in Chapter 2, an essay written around 2006–7, constitutes about one-third of the text, relies substantially on Chapter 1 for that part, and is meant to provide an opening into a broader discussion of Latin American rural history parallel to extended treatments of export economies and slave-based sugar plantations. Excising the hacienda section of this chapter would be like removing one leg of a three-legged stool—the entire thing would topple over. Thus I have left that section of Chapter 2 largely as it is, not out of indolence but rather a concern for coherence and breadth. On the other hand, what was to have been Chapter 8 in this volume, an essay titled “The Meeting of Economic and Cultural History,” was a sort of narrowed development of the earlier-written Chapter 7, but a conceptual extension rather than a historiographical one. The two essays were written five or six years apart, the second after further reading, and after my own deeper experience with cultural history had fermented a bit conceptually in the writing of my book *The Other Rebellion* and several essays. However, my thinking on these issues is not so profound that it needs to be preserved intact, like an ancient papyrus or a Shakespeare first edition; thus I have incorporated much of the conceptual pursuit of the points of encounter between economic and cultural history as portrayed in the erstwhile Chapter 8 into

the current Chapter 7. Similarly, while I gave some thought to the possibility of publishing Chapter 5, on Mexican regions, in its original form, I finally decided to incorporate much of the material from a later essay on regionalism and regionality (Van Young 1992b). This makes for a considerably longer, more complex essay. In the end my readers will judge whether these overlaps and emendations produce synergy or just tedium.