

to commercial opportunities in Porfirian Mexico. Despite its standing as a global superpower, Britain was not always in a position to impose its will on Mexico, as Josefina Zoraida Vázquez highlights in her discussion of Mexico's rejection of British pressure to recognize Texan independence. And, seen from a more balanced perspective, even the most infamous British capitalists made real contributions to the country's development, as Paul Garner argues in his examination of the career of oil magnate Weetman Pearson. In sum, Will Fowler concludes, while there may be some basis for the view that Britain established an "informal empire" in the Southern Cone, the concept fits the case of UK-Mexican relations much less well. One obvious reason for this is the relatively early rise of the United States as a competitor for influence in the circum-Caribbean region, a development that prevented Britain from being a more significant actor in Mexican affairs, but the point remains that the United Kingdom can be seen as having played a more benign, less exploitative role in nineteenth-century Mexico than some other foreign powers.

For contemporary British and Mexican diplomats, it is fortuitous that the recent trends in scholarship on the bilateral relationship reflected here coincide with an uptick in interest in strengthening ties (particularly those of the economic variety) between the two countries. Indeed, it is striking that this excellent volume is itself the product of a 2015 conference held under the banner of a UK-Mexican *año dual*, proclaimed by both governments and marked by state visits—of Prince Charles to Mexico (where he sampled Cornish-style *pastes* in Pachuca) and of Enrique Peña Nieto to London. Perhaps it would not be overly cynical to suggest a connection between the designation of 2015 as the Year of Mexico in the UK and the considerable interest shown around that time by British oil companies in the opportunities arising from the liberalization of Mexico's energy sector. With Mexico now seen as an exciting field for trade and investment for a post-Brexit "global Britain," this reexamination and reassessment of the legacy of the nineteenth century is timely.

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Taxing Blackness: Free Afromexican Tribute in Bourbon New Spain.

By NORAH L. A. GHARALA. Atlantic Crossings. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019. Maps. Figures. Tables. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. xiii, 292 pp. Cloth, \$54.95.

In 2020 the Mexican government's decennial census will incorporate African descendants into the categories of race and ethnicity, which it has not done since the nineteenth century. In 2015, the Mexican government conducted an interim census where it allowed individuals to self-identify, and more than 1 million people identified as African-descendant. The current presence of African descendants in Mexico goes beyond census recognition, as those considered the *tercera raíz* (third root) have received significant attention by scholars, politicians, and the general public as a result of this population's

continued self-identification as Afro-Mexican. While this is significant for current-day sociopolitical circumstances, such categorization and recognition of African descendants, through registers, censuses, and other documentation, existed throughout the colonial period. In *Taxing Blackness: Free Afromexican Tribute in Bourbon New Spain*, Norah Gharala moves beyond statistical evidence and critically analyzes the ways in which African descendants practiced agency through their identity in New Spain.

The book focuses on Bourbon tribute reforms in New Spain and emphasizes the policies that colonial authorities implemented in the taxation of colonial subjects, with a specific focus on African descendants. Norah Gharala's examination of the expanding Real Hacienda (Royal Treasury) under the Bourbon dynasty reveals the complexity of taxing as a two-way power dynamic for the crown and its subjects. Paying particular attention to colonial subjects of African descent, the six chapters show how "tributary status became a ground of contestation where, ultimately, the significance of blackness itself was alternately attested and challenged in colonial courts and tribunals" (p. 3).

One of the most critical aspects of Gharala's work is that it goes beyond the historiography's focus on race. Instead, the author builds from the growing number of manuscripts, articles, and dissertations that examine African descendants in Mexico in conjunction with the concept of *calidad*. Chapter 1 details the connection between tribute and *calidad*, demonstrating the variety of aspects that the latter encompassed (community, physical appearance, language, occupation, dress, residence, color, and religiosity). For the purposes of this study, Gharala makes clear that "*calidad* and tributary status were deeply interconnected through a process of bureaucratic knowledge making" (p. 44). Chapters 3 and 5 explore *calidad* through the use of complex methodological inquiry into a plethora of sources, including census records, court records, and tax and tribute records (on which Gharala heavily relies). Chapter 3 details how individuals relied on what the author labels "tributary genealogies," in which they discussed and engaged the actions of their ancestors in reference to the contributions to the crown. Chapter 5 moves from individual families and highlights the role of community formation and identity in reference to *calidad*. Each of the aforementioned chapters provides specific examples; however, they also detail the strategic identities that African descendants constructed through the use of the notion of *calidad*.

Such construction plays directly into the agency of those who did or did not pay taxes based on their *calidad*. Analyzing Afro-Mexican arguments for exemptions is one of the critical contributions of this study. In order to understand the process of exemptions, one must first engage the ways that the system assessed eligible tributaries. Chapter 4 engages the tribute system's expansion and the ways that colonial officials collected the taxes and information of their Afro-Mexican tributes. In chapter 6, Gharala details specific cases in which some argued that they were not African descendants despite evidence to the contrary. However, as the author makes clear, not all African descendants rejected their blackness in their claims for exemptions. Some African descendants argued for exemptions using genealogical references focusing on the contributions that their ancestors made to the Spanish crown.

This work is a significant contribution to the historiography of Afro-Mexico in that it demonstrates another aspect of the Afro-Mexican partition and agency within the late colonial regime. Whereas previous studies employed censuses and court records, this study also utilizes tax records (in conjunction with other records) in engaging agency. The book also adds to the historiography on tribute, which tends to focus on indigenous populations, by including the Afro-Mexican populations, while also providing a space for analysis of Spanish tax structure and law in the colonial period.

This text readily fits into history courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels and can be used in a variety of disciplines to engage the complexity of socially constructed identities and economic contributions, political participation, and agency across time and space. Not simply a contribution to contemporary academic and scholarly debate, it also adds to the current social, political, and economic discourse involving African descendants in Mexico.

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A Great Fear: Luís de Onís and the Shadow War against Napoleon in Spanish America, 1808–1812. By TIMOTHY HAWKINS. Atlantic Crossings. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019. Maps. Figures. Appendix. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. xvi, 238 pp. Cloth, \$49.95.

In his book Timothy Hawkins analyzes the impact of Napoleonic emissaries on Spanish diplomacy and bureaucracy in the Americas during the French occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. In doing so, the study adds to the broader discussion initiated some years ago by Jeremy Adelman and other researchers, who urge placing the late colonial and independence period of Latin America in the wider, transatlantic context of imperial competition, reform, and crisis.

As the title suggests, the book focuses not solely on the French emissary or spy, a historical figure who remains a historiographical enigma, but also on the reaction of Spanish American colonial officials to the—actual or supposed—threat of a French conspiracy and intervention in the Americas. Hawkins agrees with the dominant historiographical interpretation that there is little direct evidence of a serious threat of French subversion in the Spanish American colonies. The book argues, in contrast, that the rhetoric of fear of a French conspiracy was eminent among Spanish diplomats and bureaucrats. Among these bureaucrats Luís de Onís, the Spanish representative to the United States at the time, was a crucial figure. While US president James Madison refused to officially recognize Onís as the Spanish ambassador extraordinary of the deposed king Ferdinand VII, Onís considered himself the “de facto supervisor of the entire colonial bureaucracy,” not least because the United States served as the basis for French diplomatic activities in Spanish America (p. 7).

As a result of Onís’s reports, several security and counterinsurgency measures were from 1809 onward implemented in the colonies that even lasted after the liberation of