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Arnold, Linda. *Bureaucracy and Bureaucrats in Mexico City, 1742-1835*. University of Arizona Press, 1988. Pp. xii, 202. Figures, tables, index. \$25.00 (U.S.)

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## ***Book Reviews/Comptes rendus***

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**Arnold, Linda. *Bureaucracy and Bureaucrats in Mexico City, 1742-1835*. University of Arizona Press, 1988. Pp. xii, 202. Figures, tables, index. \$25.00 (U.S.).**

Linda Arnold's book examines the bureaucracy of the viceregal government of New Spain and changes to this bureaucracy after independence. The first chapter argues that in order to understand the modern states that emerged in Latin America, one must carefully examine the professionalization of the imperial bureaucracy in New Spain under the Bourbon dynasty, and the career of that bureaucracy during the Napoleonic Wars and the struggle for independence. Arnold accepts Eric Van Young's concept of the "Age of Revolution" as an apt characterization of the period from 1750 to 1850. Accordingly, she evaluates changes that occurred in the imperial bureaucracy during the transition from colony to independence by examining the bureaucracy throughout this 100-year span of upheaval.

Arnold draws upon previous studies dealing with the biographies of individual viceroys, the Bourbon Reform, and policy changes in the fiscal sector. The most original part of her contribution lies in her analysis of the neglected topic of internal decision-making in the bureaucracy. She also discusses the influence of both imperial policy and revolution on the lives and careers of the men who acted as intermediaries between state and society. The story unfolds in eight chapters. Following the introductory chapter, she deals, in turn, with the overall changes in the size and composition of the bureaucracy between 1742 and 1835, with the reorganization of the viceregal secretariats in Mexico City, and with changes in both the judiciary and the fiscal apparatus. Arnold then examines the job security, income, and families of bureaucrats as well as their

career opportunities, personnel policies, and politics, before providing a three-page conclusion. In this conclusion she states that the modern Mexican nation, linked to its colonial past, "shows no signs of abandoning that colonial legacy." This colonial legacy, Arnold argues, is a product of the Enlightenment.

The strength of *Bureaucracy and Bureaucrats* lies in its wealth of detail. The book falters, however, in those sections dealing with broader historical implications and in the theoretical generalizations drawn from the study. This general level of analysis is inadequate, perhaps even trivial. Arnold grounds her study of government officials in the broader context of changing public policy and the political turmoil accompanying the transition to independence. She does not, however, refer to the vast literature dealing with the "age of revolution" from the social scientific perspective currently being used by most Mexican historians.

Historians rooted in the social sciences, including people such as John Tutino and Eric Van Young, generally explain both political conflict and continuity of cultural norms in terms of the complex dynamic of competing as well as coinciding interests among distinct socio-economic classes. In contrast, Arnold presents both the war of independence and the ensuing period of civil war as primarily the outcome of an administrative program - the *consolidacion de vales reales* of 1804, a program which, she argues, had a disastrous effect on the subjects of the colony. This program is also portrayed as an unsuccessful attempt to bridge the gap between the ideology and the programs of enlightened despotism. The transition from Spanish colony to independent nation is thus analyzed more as the result of an error in public policy (as well as the outcome of events in Europe) than as the outcome of competing social forces within Mexican society. This analysis, which springs up suddenly at the end of the book,

is neither systematically developed in, nor sustained by, the earlier chapters.

The central theme of the book, wound as it is around the role of ideology, does not sit easily with the evidence. According to Arnold, both the republicans who dismantled the bureaucracy of New Spain and the imperialists who professionalized it were inspired by the same belief in progress - a "faith in material ideology" derived from the Enlightenment. The last sentence of the book goes further and suggests that the Porfiriato (with its renewed emphasis on efficient administration) and even the technocracy of Mexico today are additional examples of this continuity in material ideology. The implication of this statement is that perhaps the social problems of contemporary Mexico, like the political turmoil of the 19th century, are the outcome of too strong a belief in the ideals of the Enlightenment. Certainly for the 19th century, Arnold emphasizes an on-going pattern of social unrest and poverty fuelled by a failure to fulfil this ideology. She argues that both imperialists and republicans failed to "bridge the gap between the ideological rhetoric and reality" *notwithstanding* their "remarkable achievements." But why? Nowhere does the author discuss the excessive centralization that, as so many writers have mentioned, bedeviled colonial Mexico, as it does modern Mexico. Nor does she mention the increasing influence of Mexico's northern neighbour. Will the Mexican bureaucracy eventually fall apart again? Arnold's central argument on the theme of ideological continuity simply does not derive from her detailed examination of the intricacies of the late colonial bureaucratic system and its radical transformation in the republican context. In short, the author runs into some logistical problems in applying the findings of her case study to all of Mexican history from the end of the Hapsburg dynasty until today.

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