
Since the publication of Magnus Mörner’s pioneering work, Political and Economic Activities of the Jesuits in the La Plata Region (Stockholm, 1953), the historiography of colonial Paraguay has been enriched by studies in English, German, and Spanish. Unfortunately, the scholarly literature in the field remains disappointingly sparse. José Luis Mora Mérida’s book is a useful addition to this literature, but not one that breaks new ground.

Based on a few secondary sources in Spanish and some research in the Archivo General de Indias, this modest volume is divided into five chapters. The first two are a background summary of society and the Church in Paraguay in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Chapter 3 is a general account of Paraguay at the beginning of the eighteenth century and of the comunero revolt in the 1720s. Chapter 4 is a summary of the reports on Paraguay written between 1757 and 1761 by Bishop Manuel Antonio de la Torre. The last chapter deals with a series of seemingly unconnected events between 1750 and 1767. The study does not go beyond the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767.

The book is written in clear prose and much of the information distilled by the author from archival documents is useful. But too much of what is interesting and apparently important is poorly documented (there is a general sparsity of footnotes and no bibliography at all). Important material is lumped together with trivial. No central themes hold together the disparate materials presented. Also missing is a systematic analysis of the nature of Paraguayan society in the eighteenth century or of the overall role of the Church in the province. Consequently, the relationship between church and society remains shadowy at best. In sum, although Mora Mérida’s book may be of some use to students of Paraguay’s colonial history, it is a work that is neither strong on interpretations nor notable for fresh insights into that history.

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