

POWER AND CULTURE:  
The Social History of Nineteenth-Century  
Spanish America

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- CHILDREN OF FACUNDO: CAUDILLO AND GAUCHO INSURGENCY DURING THE ARGENTINE STATE-FORMATION PROCESS* (La Rioja, 1853–1870). By Ariel de la Fuente. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001. Pp. 249. \$54.95 Cloth, \$18.95 Paper.)
- CONTAINING THE POOR: THE MEXICO CITY POOR HOUSE, 1774–1871*. By Silvia M. Arrom. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001. Pp. 398. \$59.95 Cloth, \$19.95 Paper.)
- FROM SUBJECTS TO CITIZENS: HONOR, GENDER, AND POLITICS IN AREQUIPA, PERU, 1780–1854*. By Sarah C. Chambers. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. Pp. 286. \$55.00 Cloth, \$19.95 Paper.)
- HONORABLE LIVES: LAWYERS, FAMILIES, AND POLITICS IN COLOMBIA, 1780–1850*. By Victor Uribe-Uran. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000. Pp. 276. \$50.00 Cloth.)
- IMPOSING DECENCY: THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY AND RACE IN PUERTO RICO, 1870–1920*. By Eileen J. Suárez Findlay. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999. Pp. 328. \$59.95 Cloth, \$19.95 Paper.)
- SHAPING THE DISCOURSE ON SPACE: CHARITY AND ITS WARDS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO*. By Teresita Martínez-Vergne. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999. Pp. 235. \$32.50 Cloth, \$17.95 Paper.)

The historiography of Latin American society has come to revolve largely around the themes of culture and power. In one form or another, the exercise of power within society has provided such a central theme in histories of the region for so long that its continued prominence hardly requires explanation. More innovative is the insistence—growing out of the “new cultural history” of Latin America—that power (along with many other phenomena) be viewed in cultural terms. A

definition of the new cultural history remains elusive, but for purposes of this essay it is sufficient to say that this school of thought assumes that historical knowledge is best advanced by interpreting a wide range of historical processes as cultural processes, and that it often focuses on the social construction of cultural meanings (including social identities) through the analysis of discourses (Knight 2002). By this standard, all the works reviewed here demonstrate the influence of the new cultural history on the field of social history, though it would be difficult to argue that most of these works exemplify the new cultural history.

The six books address the intersection of culture and power in a variety of ways, which in turn serve as the basis for organizing the essay. Victor Uribe-Uran and Alejandro de la Fuente both examine social processes linked to the formation of national states and construct analyses that revolve around cultural values. Sarah Chambers and Eileen Suárez Findlay ask how political transitions (from colony to republic in Peru, and from Spanish to U.S. rule in Puerto Rico) resulted in struggles to redefine gender relations and concepts of honor. Finally, Teresita Martínez-Vergne and Sylvia Arrom arrive at different conclusions regarding the applicability to Latin America of Michel Foucault's view of disciplinary institutions as instruments of social control. As a group, these works raise three issues to which I return at the conclusion of the essay: the location of power within society, the theoretical relationship between culture and power, and the extent to which cultural struggles of the nineteenth century arose out of issues related to modernity.

#### CULTURE, SOCIETY, AND STATE FORMATION

Victor Uribe-Uran and Alejandro de la Fuente approach the question of state formation by casting their analyses in terms of social and cultural history. Uribe-Uran joins the growing number of historians who interpret Latin American society through the concept of honor (Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera 1998; Twinam 1999). But while recent studies of honor are usually confined to the colonial era and often focus on the relationship between honor and gender, Uribe-Uran ranges across the late colonial and early national periods in order to show how lawyers' quest for honor (or "status-honor") became intertwined with the emergence of Colombia's national state. During the colonial period law school graduates invested considerable time and energy in securing bureaucratic appointments from the Crown because government jobs conferred honor; the material rewards of office were, according to Uribe-Uran, a secondary motivation. As he demonstrates, some prominent families secured government (and church) positions consistently over several generations, establishing creole "bureaucratic dynasties" that often survived the anti-creole reforms of the Bourbon era.

These family-based linkages between government employment and honor survived into the first decades following independence, leading Uribe-Uran to argue that early republican political battles should be viewed as cultural struggles over honor. During the 1820s and 1830s, conservative “aristocratic” lawyers with family traditions of state or ecclesiastical service, intent on preserving their status-honor, squared off against ambitious liberal “provincials” who did not have histories of bureaucratic appointment, prefiguring the split between Liberal and Conservative parties. These disparities, which revolved around old versus new sources of prestige and power, lay behind disputes over the role of the Church and the proper degree of political centralization. In sum, the colonial connection between honor and state service shaped early national politics.

New understandings of honor began to emerge in the late 1830s and promoted elite consensus in favor of free-trade doctrines as the new basis of the Colombian state. In part because of laissez-faire and utilitarian ideologies, elite Colombians came to doubt the beneficial role of the state bureaucracy and eventually concluded that government employment, rather than conferring honor, was evidence of a corrupting *empleomanía* in which privileged wastrels vied to live at the public trough. As the tobacco export economy developed, entrepreneurial activities—as well as legal work at the service of commercial interests—became the new badges of honor. The liberal economic reforms enacted during the mid-nineteenth century, according to Uribe-Uran, did not represent the triumph of the provincial-liberal faction but rather a new elite consensus regarding the proper role of the state in promoting economic modernization. Similarly the new, entrepreneurial understanding of honor may appear to have constituted a victory of the provincial/liberal faction, but in fact families associated with both factions embraced the new ethos, with lawyers leading the way. As Uribe-Uran argues,

This common antibureaucratic frame of mind started to blur the status differences between individuals and families with or without a colonial bureaucratic tradition, gradually eroding one of the key social differences between aristocratic and provincial elites discussed throughout this work. (148)

Although liberals and conservatives continued to argue over a variety of issues, their agreement on a liberal political economy and entrepreneurial activity as the pre-eminent sources of male honor provided crucial elements of cohesion for Colombia’s state during the mid-nineteenth century.

Uribe-Uran’s *Honorable Lives* thus offers new insights into both social and political history, and suggests that cultural values provide a means of linking the two. His argument about changing codes of honor

adds yet another piece to the puzzle of how Latin America's colonial heritage came to be reshaped following independence. Furthermore his work demonstrates that while historians have devoted much attention to the place of the masses and of popular culture in state formation, new insights can still be derived from the careful examination of changes in elite values.

Rather than focus exclusively on elite or popular cultures, Alejandro de la Fuente examines the cultural bonds between gaucho Federalists and their caudillos in the Argentine province of La Rioja during the years that Federalism suffered political defeat at the hands of the centralist Unitarians (or liberals).<sup>1</sup> He argues that Federalism was an expression of gaucho culture, and that regional caudillos wielded power not on the basis of their economic clout, but because they embodied popular cultural values. Thus, he follows John Charles Chasteen's thesis that caudillos were charismatic leaders whose power depended on their followers' view of them as "cultural heroes" (Chasteen 1995).

Although his argument privileges culture, de la Fuente's analysis pays close attention to the material context of life in nineteenth-century La Rioja. The poverty of the region was striking: the largest landowners in the province would be considered small proprietors in Buenos Aires province. Rural laborers made their living as much from agriculture as from cattle ranching (in La Rioja, "gaucho" referred to all rural workers, whether they were cowboys or farm laborers), but they all lived at the edge of subsistence. In such a context, the material aspects of patronage and political leadership mattered, even if they did not become paramount. Gauchos who joined an insurgency did so knowing that it was a rare opportunity to eat beef. They also expected that their caudillos would allow them to loot and plunder in times of war, and would not let them starve in times of peace. Conversely, Unitarians made their political control over La Rioja concrete in the 1860s through new taxes and forced military recruitment, pushing a war-weary and destitute people even closer to starvation.

De la Fuente argues that class, ethnicity, and religion formed important aspects of the gauchos' Federalist identity. La Rioja's population was made up largely of indigenous peoples, Afro-Argentines, and mestizos—with whites constituting a minority—and most people in the province clung tenaciously to popular Catholicism. Federalist leaders shared many of the social and economic characteristics of their followers; even Angel Vicente ("el Chacho") Peñaloza, the most prominent Federalist leader in mid-nineteenth century La Rioja, was a man of modest wealth, and illiterate. Meanwhile, Federalists viewed the region's handful of white, wealthy, Unitarian families as

1. De la Fuente explains his usage of "Unitarian" and "liberal" on pages 24–5.

representatives of a secular, alien culture. The crux of this religious and ethnic divide is exemplified in the notion that Federalism revolved around the defense of a local, Catholic culture against white “heretics” (143–63). By emphasizing the survival of this popular, Federalist worldview for several decades after the Unitarians’ political triumph, *Children of Facundo* suggests that their cherished goal of cultural transformation remained elusive in La Rioja.

De la Fuente’s analysis reveals a number of paradoxes in the Unitarian drive to assert the authority of the central state over provincial Federalists. Although Unitarians presented themselves as agents of modernity and the sole carriers of a national consciousness—while painting Federalists as parochial and backward—this dichotomy was often turned on its head. As gauchos constructed their Federalist identity, they also developed a national consciousness, which found expression in their oral culture. Thus local popular culture impelled the creation of the Argentine nation as an “imagined community” just as surely as elite (often Unitarian) print culture did so. Less surprisingly, de la Fuente finds that the white Unitarian leaders who subdued La Rioja’s Federalists firmly believed in the desirability of preserving the old colonial system of a racially based social order. Nevertheless, for all his awareness of the contradictions and nuances of Federalist and Unitarian ideologies, de la Fuente did not write his story as primarily one of contested discourses. Rather, by sprinkling his analysis with vivid scenes of political violence, usually ending with a chilling account of throats being slit, he seems to insist that the exercise of power, no matter how important the cultural impetus, was ultimately a matter of blood and steel.<sup>2</sup>

#### POLITICAL TRANSITIONS, GENDER, AND HONOR

Sarah Chambers and Eileen Findlay, drawing attention to the ways in which political transitions have influenced the reconfiguration of gender relationships, join a growing number of scholars seeking to link the history of gender with that of the state (Dore and Molyneux 2000). In addition, each author, like Uribe-Uran, explores the question of how honor codes changed during the nineteenth century; both Chambers and Findlay argue that new systems of honor were bound up with larger changes in the distribution of power. As Findlay states, codes of honor “enforced the gender, race, and class hierarchies on which society was built. Honor, in other words, was an assertion of power over or in relation to others” (21).

In her study of Arequipa, Peru, Chambers sets out to discover what

2. For an analysis of nineteenth-century civil wars that gives greater analytical weight to discourse, see Mallon (1995, 78, 96–7, and *passim*).

happened to local political culture when subjects of the Spanish Crown became transformed into citizens of a new republic. To accomplish this, she relies extensively on judicial and police records, which allow her to analyze the ways in which power was exercised and negotiated in everyday situations in Arequipa's streets, homes, taverns, and courtrooms. She argues that new conceptualizations of honor were crucial in Arequipeños' understanding of republican citizenship. Furthermore, while the new republican code of honor enabled working-class males to claim new rights as citizens, it left women in a position more marginal than the one they had occupied under colonial rule.

Chambers suggests that Spanish colonialism had offered women limited yet meaningful spaces of autonomy. In the cheek-by-jowl bustle of colonial Arequipa, before the development of a professional police force or a local press, gossip played an important role in the regulation of behavior, and women participated in this form of social control. Women also shaped some public spaces—such as *chicherías* (taverns)—to serve their interests. Chambers finds that women owned a significant number of Arequipa's colonial taverns, that these centers of sociability catered to a mixed clientele of men and women, and that women who feared violence from their male partners often found safe refuge in taverns. "That *chicherías* were regarded as public places rather than private businesses turns on its head the traditional separation of spheres into public/male and private/female" (114).

Independence and the democratization of rights among Peruvian males dramatically curbed these spaces for female influence, limited though they were. New conceptions of honor and citizenship provided the impetus for redistributing power within society, and in the process strengthened patriarchal authority over women. During the colonial period, honor had reinforced a social hierarchy based largely on inherited status, in which plebeians often found it difficult to claim honor for themselves. But after independence, plebeians linked honor to republican virtue rather than birth, arguing that they had legitimate claims to honor and citizenship based on their status as economic producers or as veterans of patriotic wars. Chambers demonstrates that plebeian males (and their lawyers) often succeeded in defending their rights as citizens based on these new considerations of virtue. Meanwhile, the republic drew sharper boundaries between public and private spheres, eroded women's limited influence in the public sphere, and gave male heads of households virtually unlimited power over female relatives. In sum, elite and plebeian males, while negotiating the basis of a new republican order, at times found common ground at the expense of women.

This emphasis on the dynamic nature of honor codes and on the connection between political structures and gender systems also

emerges in Eileen Suárez Findlay's analysis of social values in Ponce, Puerto Rico, under Spanish and American rule. Like Chambers, she rejects any notion of a monolithic or unchanging code of honor. Findlay begins her analysis with an examination of competing, class-based discourses of female honor. While Ponce's elite viewed female respectability in terms of traditional ideals of chastity and formal marriage, plebeians often insisted that females could live honorably within a framework of serial monogamy. The tensions between these two class-based and often racialized codes of honor complicated the work of bourgeois feminists who began to publish their writings in the 1890s. Findlay argues, for example, that such women writers could not raise the issue of their own sexual satisfaction within marriage for fear of being identified with the "bestial sensuality" that elites attributed to lower-class women of color and blamed for the alleged instability of family life among the masses. In this argument, as in much of the book, Findlay suggests that discourses of honor and gender had the potential to constrict or to liberate the people she studies.

The American invasion modified gender relations in ways that contributed to the empowerment of women of all classes, but it did not erase the division between popular and elite conceptions of female honor and sexuality. U.S. officials, alarmed at the low rate of formal marriage among the Puerto Rican masses, hoped to change this pattern by making both marriage and divorce more accessible, decreeing both to be civil procedures and dramatically expanding the grounds for divorce. Once the new laws were in place, Puerto Ricans did not marry at higher rates, but many did take advantage of the opportunity to divorce. Although both men and women sought divorce, the change proved especially dramatic for women; many *portorriqueñas* remembered the availability of divorce as one of the principal changes that accompanied the transition to American rule.

As Findlay demonstrates, U.S. attempts to impose uniform, homogeneous standards of honor and sexuality on the people of Puerto Rico—whether through new laws governing marriage and divorce, or through an early twentieth-century campaign against prostitution—repeatedly failed. Not only did the divide between plebeian and bourgeois honor codes remain, but working-class men and women became increasingly divided (or at least increasingly vocal) in their views regarding the roots of female oppression. Findlay's analysis indicates that discourses of honor and gender fragmented and multiplied along with the increased pace of social change after 1898. Taken together, the works by Findlay and Chambers suggest that linkages among power, honor, and gender provide a dynamic focus for studying processes of social transformation.

## CHARITY, DISCIPLINE, AND FOUCAULT

Both Teresita Martínez-Vergne and Silvia Arrom use the work of French theorist Michel Foucault as a point of reference as they examine elite projects designed to coerce, confine, and reshape the character of the poor. Both authors pose questions within the framework of Foucault's ideas regarding disciplinary institutions and "moral" reform as modern techniques of social control. Despite the similarity of their topics, materials, and temporal periods of study, however, Martínez-Vergne and Arrom arrive at substantially different views regarding the usefulness of Foucauldian paradigms.

Martínez-Vergne declares forthrightly that *Shaping the Discourse on Space: Charity and Its Wards in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico* is about power, and that Foucault's theories of power have influenced her the most (ix). Specifically, Martínez-Vergne is interested in how San Juan's rising bourgeoisie sought to assert its power over the city's growing population through the deployment of a discourse designed to control public space. The author's decision to frame her argument in terms of "space" is not merely a concession to theoretical fashion; rather, it reflects one of the dilemmas confronted by nineteenth-century liberalism, the ideology of many civic and political elites in San Juan (14–15). Liberalism impelled them to proclaim the freedom of individuals and the ability of the market to order society, but their own interests and anxieties pushed them to control the growing mass of poor, seemingly rootless and threatening people who spent much of their lives on the streets. This analysis suggests that the liberal bourgeoisie attempted to resolve the dilemma of social control by masking their efforts to control people as attempts to control public space (a relatively thin mask, to be sure). Thus civic authorities developed and disseminated a discourse of social norms (embodied in laws and official decrees) governing the use of public space. They intended for these standards to regulate a whole array of behaviors, such as begging, prostitution, and dress, among many others. Martínez-Vergne argues that as the bourgeoisie's project of social control evolved, it invaded the allegedly private space of the home and shifted from a focus on the behavior of the poor to an attempt to control the bodies and minds of those who deviated from bourgeois standards. Although the poor resisted and thus played a role in shaping moral discourses, this analysis clearly sees the balance of power-favoring elites, with the urban masses attempting at best a defensive action against the imposition of alien norms.

The *juntas de beneficencia* (local committees overseeing charitable works) created by Spanish Liberals became an important actor in the bourgeoisie's attempt at social control. One of the principal undertak-



ings of the San Juan junta was the establishment in the late 1830s of the Casa de Beneficencia, an asylum dedicated to the modernizing, Enlightenment notion of reforming the character of the poor and the unruly so that they could become “productive” members of society. Most perniciously, in Martínez-Vergne’s view, the junta de beneficencia sought to manipulate the character of indigent, orphaned, and unruly children by employing “the medicalization of deviance,” through which authorities “equated departure from the bourgeois norm with sickness” (132). The overarching goal implicit in these and other campaigns for moral reform was “subjectification” (16), the process in which the people targeted for reform internalize dominant norms and eventually regulate themselves in a *laissez-faire* setting. While liberals never realized their utopia, their moralizing discourse did become embodied in concrete projects of social control with which the poor and the marginal population of San Juan had to contend.

Martínez-Vergne’s theoretical position may be considered as that of a Foucauldian structuralist with a decided emphasis on discourse and class interests as crucial aspects of the exercise of power. While incorporating the stories of many flesh-and-blood characters wrestling with everyday concerns, the book also flows from the conviction that power operates as an impersonal system, and that competing class discourses play a fundamental role in constituting systems of power. Martínez-Vergne never adheres slavishly to Foucault, but her ideas on disciplinary projects, the deployment of power through discourse, and the coercive potential of moral norms, imply the utility of a Foucauldian perspective on the past.

By contrast, Sylvia Arrom’s study of Mexico City’s Poor House calls into question the applicability of Foucauldian paradigms. Although Arrom began her research intending to follow the general outlines of the “social control school” (i.e., Foucault and like-minded scholars), the archival materials she encountered erased her initial assumptions (3). While the administrators of the Poor House and the political leaders who supported it advocated an institutional regime along strict disciplinary lines, the reality of the Poor House proved far different. The gulf between the discourse of disciplinary enthusiasts and the lived experience of Poor House inmates was, in Arrom’s view, enormous.

The ideology behind the Poor House remained remarkably similar throughout the century of Arrom’s study (1774–1871)—a century in which begging was legally banned in Mexico City. Politicians and administrators from the Bourbon era to the Restored Republic shared basic goals and assumptions regarding poor relief, embracing what Arrom refers to as “the Poor House experiment.” A series of decrees mandated that anyone asking for alms on the streets of the capital was to be taken to the Poor House. There, adult vagrants deemed physically able would

be assigned to public works projects or to a private employer, or would be inducted into the army. Meanwhile, the deserving poor—including the elderly, the infirm, and children—would be confined to the Poor House. The bylaws of the institution clearly aimed to reshape inmates' character as well as their behavior, proclaiming a regime of constant labor, vocational training, and religious instruction and ritual. Although some governments (such as the late eighteenth-century Bourbon state, some of Santa Anna's administrations, and the Second Empire of 1863–67) proved more efficient at funding and managing poor relief than others, elites throughout this period agreed on the need to reform, as well as shelter, the deserving poor. Their ideology, according to Arrom, consistently mixed modern, secular ideas regarding the "role of the poor in a modernizing nation" (283), with a dash of older, religiously inspired notions of charity; even church officials and ardent Liberals blended these two schools of thought in roughly similar proportions.

This discourse of moral reform, however, did not reflect (much less shape) experience within the Poor House. The workshops, the putative centerpiece of the disciplinary regime, remained closed for long stretches of time or occupied only a fraction of the inmates. Inmates regularly disregarded institutional schedules with impunity. Disruptive inmates were frequently "punished" by expulsion from the institution back onto the streets, a clear abdication of the institutional mission to discipline and reform. The reformist vision of clearing alms-seekers off the streets and turning them into "productive" members of society was never realized.

Arrom argues forcefully that the Poor House experiment failed largely because its modernizing vision of poor relief could not eradicate traditional ideas of charity and social hierarchy rooted in the colonial era. Amidst the gradual erosion of Mexico's racially based social hierarchy, Poor House administrators believed that the asylum had a special duty to aid destitute white families. Thus the asylum offered shelter to a significant number of white paupers from respectable families who voluntarily sought admission to the institution, but who had never publicly asked for alms and who, once in the asylum, lived apart from its scheduled regime. Straying yet further from its original mission, the Poor House in 1806 opened the Patriotic School for orphans, which likewise made its services most readily available to whites. As the Poor House dedicated more resources to "respectable" paupers and orphans, the number of forcibly confined beggars dwindled.

Supporters of the original Poor House experiment also failed to overcome the time-honored assumptions that the poor had a right to ask for alms in public places, and that the wealthy had an obligation to give them. Arrom argues that these assumptions survived as a "moral economy" despite repeated official bans on begging (13, 32, 284). Although officials hoped to rationalize charity by channeling donations

through an institution that served only the truly needy, people of means continued to give alms on the streets rather than make donations to the Poor House.

By emphasizing the resiliency of both the racial component of “respectability” and the moral economy of alms giving, Arrom’s work joins the body of scholarship that sees state action and elite, reformist discourses as less powerful than the deeply embedded cultural assumptions they occasionally challenged (284). The interpretive contrast with *Shaping the Discourse on Space* is dramatic. Whereas Martínez-Vergne sees elite reformist discourse as an active force intruding upon and shaping the lives of the urban poor, Arrom relegates such discourses to the field of intellectual history (42).

## CONCLUSIONS

Each of the books reviewed here makes important, individual contributions to the field of social history. As a group, they address one of the fundamental questions that any historian working on the issue of power must confront: where is power concentrated within a particular society at a particular time? Mary Kay Vaughan (2000, 210, n. 4) has asserted that historians of Latin America are divided between one group that “emphasizes dispersed, multiple sites of discipline and power” within society, and another group that “stresses state agency in shaping and regulating social behavior.” Most of the works reviewed here adopt the former perspective by emphasizing the crucial role of social values (expressed as honor codes, discourses on gender, or the moral economy of begging) in shaping relationships of power, and they present these social values as either guiding the development of the state or withstanding state efforts aimed at social transformation. Even de la Fuente’s analysis of the *political* defeat of Federalism notes the failure of centralists’ efforts to eradicate local Federalist culture. This emphasis on power concentrated in society rather than emanating primarily from the state is logical for studies of the nineteenth century, a period characterized by relatively weak states. Similarly, it is logical that Martínez-Vergne, the author who most stresses state power (or, more precisely, bourgeois power exercised through the state or in tandem with it), analyses Puerto Rico, the one society considered here that did not experience a political rupture early in the nineteenth century.

These works also call attention to two issues that merit wider discussion. One is the recurring confrontation between cultural forces rooted in the colonial past (established honor codes, gender relations, or moral economies) and the modernizing forces that gathered strength in the nineteenth century (the building of national states, the secular-

ization of marriage, or the “rationalization” of poor relief).<sup>3</sup> Of course, not all cultural conflicts were struggles over aspects of modernity but the pattern emerges often enough in these works that many readers would welcome an extended discussion of the relationship between modernity and cultural conflict in the nineteenth century.

Another question lurking in these books is the nature of the relationship between culture and power, a topic to which future debate over the new cultural history could devote greater attention. Do cultural factors explain the outcomes of particular kinds of power struggles—be they caudillo uprisings, struggles over gender roles, campaigns of “moral reform,” or something else—more persuasively than explanations based on other factors? Can the formulation of a discourse affect the distribution of power in society (and if so, under what circumstances), or do discourses more often serve as mere reflections of existing power relations which are fundamentally shaped by material factors? Such alternatives, which are offered as poles on interpretive continua rather than rigid dichotomies, are rarely addressed explicitly in current debates, yet historians can hardly write social histories of culture and power without tripping over these and similar issues. Moreover, such questions would seem to arise naturally from historians’ supposed stock-in-trade: explaining the forces that drive change through time.

I realize that in calling for a more sustained, explicit, and broadly focused discussion of the relationship between modernity and cultural conflict or between culture and power, I raise the specter of new “grand narratives”—precisely the target at which so much new scholarship takes aim. The influence of the new cultural history has been beneficial in so many arenas that it would be a pity if its animus against large-scale historical explanation prevented attempts to synthesize the very knowledge it has produced. Perhaps historians’ proclivity to put the pieces together into new narratives of the past will, in the end, win out.

3. Bradford Burns (1980) offered a provocative synthesis of an earlier generation’s scholarship on the nineteenth century. Although Burns discussed cultural conflicts in the context of modernization, his concerns were different than those that have driven scholarship over the past decade or so.

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