

ECONOMIC HISTORY AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ARGENTINA

Joel Horowitz
St. Bonaventure University

- Historia de la clase media argentina: Apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919–2003.** By Ezequiel Adamovsky. Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 2009. Pp. 538. \$113.00 (ARS) paper. ISBN: 9789504921066.
- The Politics of National Capitalism: Peronism and the Argentine Bourgeoisie, 1946–1976.** By James P. Brennan and Marcelo Rougier. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. Pp. xxiii + 221. \$60.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780271035710.
- The Political Economy of Argentina in the Twentieth Century.** By Roberto Cortés Conde. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xi + 388. \$85.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780521882323.
- The Ruins of the New Argentina: Peronism and the Remaking of San Juan after the 1944 Earthquake.** By Mark A. Healey. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. Pp. xvi + 395. \$94.95 cloth. \$25.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822348832.
- The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina.** Edited by Matthew B. Karush and Oscar Chamosa. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. viii + 309. \$84.95 cloth. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822347385.
- Industrial Development in a Frontier Economy: The Industrialization of Argentina, 1890–1930.** By Yovanna Pineda. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 209. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780804759830.
- Subalternos, derechos y justicia penal: Ensayos de historia social y cultural argentina 1829–1940.** By Ricardo D. Salvatore. Buenos Aires: Editorial Gedisa, 2010. Pp. 351. \$95.00 (ARS) paper. ISBN: 9788497842747.
- Políticas del sentimiento: El peronismo y la construcción de la Argentina moderna.** Edited by Claudia Soria, Paola Cortés Rocca, and Edgardo Dieleke. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2010. Pp. 287. \$65.00 (ARS) paper. ISBN: 9789875743809.

Examinations of the political-economic world of twentieth-century Argentina have changed dramatically in the past several decades, reflecting not just interest in Argentina's depressing inability to maintain economic growth and stability but also major shifts in scholarly approaches worldwide. Recent works are encouragingly difficult to categorize, as they are increasingly complex, nuanced, and

cross-disciplinary. The books under consideration here can be loosely divided into two categories, economic history and cultural history with a decided political emphasis.

ECONOMIC HISTORY

The attempts to explain Argentina's economic problems have been transformed by the introduction of what has been called the new economic history: "These studies rely on empirical evidence and use both macro- and micro-level data to examine specific characteristics of Argentina's business, investment groups, banks, labor, legal institutions and credit markets" (Pineda, 13). In other words, they use the tools of modern economists. Although not without earlier precedents,¹ these studies have taken investigations to a higher level of sophistication and specificity. They have allowed economic historians to draw surer conclusions, but their techniques limit readership because they are difficult for those less schooled in economics to understand.

Roberto Cortés Conde uses the tools of the new economic history to examine the Argentine economy from the 1880s, when, according to the author, the expansion of the modern economy began, until 1989, when hyperinflation set in. The author considers the latter a major inflection point. Despite the author's use of econometric tools, this is very much the work of a skilled historian. Cortés Conde describes his basic approach thus: "Although the past does not determine the present, it limits future options and choices. No one, neither governments nor individuals, made decisions in isolation; each choice was contingent on a range of possibilities that resulted in current conditions but that were also restricted by past conditions" (1–2).

The book's goal is to explain why Argentina failed to sustain its position as a wealthy country, which it had achieved in the first decades of the twentieth century. The author, while speaking in a confident tone, points out that his findings are tentative. Although there were visible problems starting with World War I, Argentina more or less followed international trends. Cortés Conde sees the decline beginning with the Perón era, due to protective measures that made the importation of capital goods difficult. He argues that the social measures could have been carried out by other means, especially taxes. Subsequent regimes did not alter course. This led to major disincentives to investment and therefore generated inflation, with those who suffered the most being the poor. Governments did not make major policy changes because they were politically weak as a result of the deep fissures in a society that was almost evenly divided between Peronists and anti-Peronists. The vacuum of authority left interest groups to compete for power, sometimes violently.

The conclusions are not totally novel but are supported by an impressive collection of large data sets. It will be difficult for anyone interested in Argentina's economic decline not to take this work extremely seriously, even if they disagree

1. For a pioneering work in this vein, see Carlos Díaz Alejandro, *Essays on the Economic History of the Argentine Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

with many of its conclusions. What the book shows, although it does not provide much detail, is the importance of political weakness to the fate of the Argentine economy, and this nexus merits further investigation. Cortés Conde makes strikingly clear the continuity of basic economic policy despite governments that held very different sets of beliefs and very disappointing economic performances. Exactly why political weakness led to this consistency needs to be explored further.

Yovanna Pineda's book is written in much the same style as Cortés Conde's, but its goals are narrower. She attempts to answer a question that has bedeviled attempts at analysis for decades. Why did Argentine industrialization not take off in the period before 1930? There have been a number of efforts to answer that question, including Guido Di Tella and Manuel Zymelman's addition of a stage to W. W. Rostow's vision of development.² More recently, Fernando Rocchi in an excellent book addressed the question using fewer econometric tools than Pineda and found that the chief reasons for the failure to industrialize were the small size of the market, lack of key goods such as coal and iron, and relatively high labor costs. He also included valuable information on the creation of a consumer society.³

Using the tools of economists, Pineda examines such factors as manufacturing productivity and concentration, importation of machinery, and profits. She concludes that more traditional explanations for lack of sustainable industrialization, such as the nature of the industrial class and the lack of government aid, did not work. She argues that both financial and political responses were inadequate. The banks, though large, were generally unwilling to supply long-term credit. The political actors, while interested in industrialization, were too willing to compromise and did not think through tariff policies that were adopted, nor did they adopt innovative tactics to provide credit, such as establishment of an industrial bank.

The arguments make sense, but one wishes that Pineda had confronted Rocchi's point that state-controlled banks did loan to industrial companies. In addition, we do not see much about firms not listed on the stock exchange or the branches of foreign companies that became common after World War I. Furthermore, Pineda argues that labor laws may have curtailed growth, referring specifically to a 1924 law governing women's work and mentioning the textile industry. However, labor laws were frequently not enforced, especially outside the city of Buenos Aires, and in 1935 almost two-thirds of textile workers in the city of Buenos Aires were women.⁴ Pineda's suggestion about political compromise rings true but needs further substantiation.

The book leaves us with plausible theories about why sustained industrialization failed and, just as important, a series of data sets on a large number of firms

2. Guido Di Tella and Manuel Zymelman, *Las etapas del desarrollo económico argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1967).

3. Fernando Rocchi, *Chimneys in the Desert: Industrialization in Argentina during the Export Boom Years, 1870–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

4. See Joel Horowitz, *Argentine Unions, the State and the Rise of Perón, 1930–1945* (Berkeley: Institute for International Studies, University of California, 1990), esp. 53.

and economic sectors, the compilation of which was surely a herculean task. We emerge with a better idea about why firms behaved the way they did.

The work by James Brennan and Marcelo Rougier is both economic and political, and it shows how Peronism transformed elements of Argentina's political and economic culture in parts of the interior. The authors study the behavior of what they label the "national bourgeoisie" between 1946 and 1976, with particular attention to the periods when a Peronist was president. The national bourgeoisie included local industrialists, commercial interests, and some agro-industrial interests, and the authors examine its activities in the political economy.

The authors do an excellent job of pointing out why entrepreneurs in Córdoba, Chaco, and Tucumán behaved differently than those in Buenos Aires and also than one another. This is not surprising, as one would not expect the well-established, if economically troubled, sugar producers in Tucumán to have similar interests to entrepreneurs in the newer, rapidly changing auto-parts industry in Córdoba. However, their organizations and views previously have not been explored in depth, a contribution made here by analyzing them in the context of the political economy of their provinces.

The other focus of the study is the relationship between the entrepreneurial classes and Peronism. The precise composition of the Peronist coalition has always been a matter of controversy, with the role of the industrialists especially debated. This can be seen clearly in the authors' discussion of the industrialists' role in Perón's rise to power in 1945 and 1946. They provide the most nuanced and sophisticated analysis yet of this complex moment, but it is not a definitive answer to the question of whether industrialists played a key role in Perón's rise, since so much depends on what is meant when one says that industrialists as a class supported or did not support Perón. Brennan and Rougier throughout their book show that the entrepreneurial class's relationship with Peronism was then and remains a complex and ever-shifting one, as interests change on both sides, as do the organizational schemes of the entrepreneurs. Future scholars will find it difficult to analyze the political and economic world of Argentina in the conflictive thirty years between 1946 and 1976 without consulting this book.

CULTURE AND PERONISM

Novelist and literary critic Ricardo Piglia says, on the back cover of *Políticas del sentimiento*, "Each generation has understood Peronism in a different manner; this book is the map of the new generation's vision of Peronism."⁵ Piglia is correct, and the cultural-political studies of Peronism, many coming from a younger generation of scholars, represent a third wave of scholarship. These works look at how Peronism changed the cultural and private worlds of Argentines and helps explain why Peronism has had such a long-term impact.

The first studies of Peronism were written by contemporary scholars who focused primarily on how Perón came to power, emphasizing the role of unions and

5. "Cada generación ha entendido de manera distinta el peronismo; este libro es el mapa de la visión del peronismo de la nueva generación." Reviewer's translation.

internal migration in that process. Both Peronists and anti-Peronists described Perón's ascent as a sharp break with the past. As Juan Carlos Torre pointed out, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a large portion of the Left and of young people became Peronist, a new wave of scholarship emerged in the wake of the publication of an influential book by Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, which argued that a sharp break did not occur with Peronism but rather that Peronism developed from ongoing changes within society.⁶ After the reestablishment of democracy in 1983 and the lessening of the breach between Peronists and anti-Peronists, scholarship emerged in the late 1980s that focused on the cultural changes produced by Peronism. Particularly influential were works by Daniel James and Mariano Plotkin.⁷ These works also reflect the so-called cultural turn in the scholarly world at large, which has placed a new kind of intellectual history at the center of many investigations.⁸

Three of the works under review are very much products of this trend. Two are collections, one for Argentines and largely written by literary critics (Claudia Soria, Paola Cortés Rocca, and Edgardo Dieleke) and the other produced by historians for an English-language audience (Matthew B. Karush and Oscar Chamosa). As with all collections, the quality is uneven, but some contributions merit special mention.

Políticas del sentimiento is the product of two conferences, one in Buenos Aires in 2006 and the other in Los Angeles in 2007. The authors are Argentine, and almost all have degrees in literature, many from abroad, and especially from the United States. They examine culture to understand the changes that have occurred in Argentina since 1946. There are studies of propaganda, fiction, and film, among others. Many contributors were strongly influenced by Ernesto Laclau's work on populism. For example, Horacio Legrás's chapter, "Hacia una historia del populismo," does not even mention the principal alternative interpretation of populism, first clearly articulated by the Argentine sociologist Torcuato Di Tella. Most chapters postulate a sharp break with the past with the rise of Peronism. In many ways this is a return to an earlier vision.

A good representative of the contributions is Marcela Gené's interesting examination of the type of images created by caricatures in two opposing humor magazines in 1945 and 1946, *Descamisada* and *Cascabel*, the former being Peronist and the latter anti-Peronist. Rosa Aboy is interested in investigating what life was like living in *pensiones* (what might be loosely translated as "boardinghouses") in the 1940s in Buenos Aires. This was a crucial form of housing for many, especially working women, as an intermediary step in their lives. Finding few sources commenting on life in *pensiones*, she examined the work of two movie directors who use *pensiones* as a central focus of several movies. In the films of Manuel Romero, *pensiones* are the location of an alternative family. The characters share

6. Juan Carlos Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón: Sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1990), 11–18; Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 1971).

7. Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: Propaganda, rituales políticos y educación en el régimen peronista (1946–1955)* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1993).

8. For example, see comments by Anahí Ballent, *Políticas del sentimiento*, esp. 222.

more than just common space. In a work of Carlos Hugo Christensen, the *penión* is exactly the opposite, a place of isolation. Although the chapter is interesting and perceptive, it begs the question of how much the films reflect knowledge of pensiones and how much is derived from the imagination of the filmmakers.

Anahí Ballent's chapter could have served as an excellent introduction to the book but instead was placed toward the end. She discusses the beginnings in the 1980s of the studies of Peronist images and uses of those images, which allowed studies of Peronism to move beyond the emphasis on the socioeconomic and political characteristics of previous studies. Ballent argues that this trend was influenced by studies of the use of images by both fascist and communist regimes, as well as by democracies, to try to create myths. She points out that the use of images from the early stages of Peronism has passed to the general culture—from art, particularly the work of Daniel Santoro (which Susana Rosano examines at greater length in her chapter) to exhibits and movies about Evita.⁹

Although clearly part of the same intellectual trend, the book edited by Karush and Oscar Chamosa has a very different target audience, as it is intended for classroom use or as an introduction to the topic. Two chapters were previously published in Argentina, and several others have since appeared in some form in books by their authors.¹⁰ The collection examines cultural changes in the years between 1943 and 1955 and makes a good case for viewing the Argentina of 1955 as culturally a very different country. These changes left the society more splintered and complex.

Eduardo Elena's chapter on the magazine *Argentina* makes clear the complexity of Peronist cultural production. The magazine was a product of right-wing nationalists Minister of Education Oscar Ivanissevich and Gustavo Martínez Zuviría (better known as the anti-Semitic novelist Hugo Wast). The magazine attempted to encourage consumption patterns that conformed to those of middle-class morality. While a crucial part of the initial Peronist coalition, these nationalists believed strongly in traditional values. This is not surprising, but it does show that key elements in Peronism lacked interest in a sharp break with the past in some arenas.

César Seveso looks at emotion and memory about the 1955 overthrow of Perón and how this set the stage for long-range support of his movement. Seveso examines oral histories and popular poetry about the sense of loss produced by the change of government, focusing on events in the city of Rosario. Although these memories do not necessarily reflect what people felt in 1955, they do shape how people feel about Peronism. This chapter represents an important first stride in taking studies of Peronism in the direction of examining memory and its

9. A large kitschy outline of Evita now looms from the side of a government building overlooking the widest street in Buenos Aires.

10. See Oscar Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement: Sugar Elites, Criollo Workers and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism, 1900–1955* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010); Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Matthew B. Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

importance in the enshrining of the first Peronist era as the golden era for much of the population.

The concluding reflections by Mariano Plotkin are not just the normal summing up of the chapters. He also points out ways to improve the study of Peronism, which has always been handicapped by the emotions that it stirred and the historical separation of most intellectuals from it. Plotkin argues that Peronism needs to be taken seriously by examining its ideology and symbols and by trying to truly understand them. He calls on scholars to question received wisdom, such as the idea that Peronism necessarily marked a clear break with the past, and to inquire about how people received the Peronist message. Plotkin further suggests that historians examine how families were changed and how unknown bureaucrats shaped many of the symbolic moments.

Complementing these two edited volumes, and using some of their culture-based approaches, is Mark Healey's monograph on the province of San Juan after the devastating earthquake in January 1944 that destroyed its capital city. This remarkable book reshapes the way historians should look at the development of Peronism by studying the attempts to rebuild the city from 1944 until 1962, when the basic job was completed. What makes this work stand out is how Healey examines the politics of San Juan through the prism of culture and national politics. He focuses on the different visions of the architects and engineers who led the rebuilding efforts and the reactions that their plans produced. This study of a single province speaks to a much larger issue, since the provinces that became most heavily Peronist were those like San Juan that were located in the interior and, in 1945–1946, had few inhabitants who could be called members of the modern working class. To date, the studies of Peronism's origins have focused (with honorable exceptions) on Buenos Aires and the pampas region, and thus have failed to explain why the interior became and remained heavily Peronist. Healey's work makes clear that Juan Perón first came to public attention with his attempts to organize relief efforts for San Juan and also shows why many in the province became Peronist.

The book demonstrates that the military regime's attempts to reorder society can be seen first in San Juan. The regime pushed for radical solutions to the devastation produced by the earthquake, such as moving the capital or rebuilding in a modernist form that would hopefully lead to economic development. We see as well the real limitations of the Peronist rebuilding process. Because of constant infighting, operation in a top-down fashion, loss of interest in Buenos Aires, and opposition by local elites, the Peronist rebuilding of the city never went very far. The Peronists drafted the outlines of the plans by which the city was rebuilt after 1955, but those plans would be drastically pared back. Despite this apparent failure to produce rapid results, the Peronists developed real popularity among many sectors in San Juan.

Although San Juan is unique both in having suffered a giant catastrophe and in the continued presence and importance of a provincial populist political party created by the Cantoni family, for the first time we can see in detail how the Peronist party developed in an area where unions were weak. The Peronist party leaders all had ties to traditional political factions and parties; this was

both a strength and a weakness. They understood the province well but were not necessarily driven by a desire for reform, and the only force that held them together was Perón, which meant that power continually flowed to Buenos Aires, as the center was needed to adjudicate quarrels. The opposition was badly divided and seemingly blind to the needs of a significant portion of the population. It is safe to predict that the pattern in much of the interior would not have been very different, though comparable studies of other provinces have yet to be done.

Running parallel to the story of rebuilding and politics is a fascinating analysis of how architecture and modernism were applied to a crisis situation. We can see how architects viewed their role in the society and also their rivalries with engineers. This is in itself an important addition to the intellectual history of the country. How professional groups saw themselves and also competed for influence is revealed.

In summary, Healey has given us a crucial study that allows us to see much more clearly what Peronism was and was not. For too long the interior provinces have been neglected, and with this extremely well-written book Healey has taken us several steps further down the road to understanding the founding era of Peronism and how it affected the lives of ordinary Argentines in ways that still matter.

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The next two books attempt to rethink large concepts in the historiography of Argentina through the lens of culture. Ezequiel Adamovsky's *Historia de la clase media argentina* is an intellectual history. Although it claims to be a history of the middle class written for both popular and scholarly audiences, it is an intellectual history of the idea of the middle class and its political significance. The author discusses the middle class's development of class consciousness, a parallel to the Marxist concept of working-class consciousness. Yet Adamovsky rejects the standard narrative of Argentine history, arguing that the idea of a large and important middle class that had a heavy impact on Argentine society was and is an illusion. Underlying the work is a belief that what existed was a popular class. In other words, Argentina had a two-class system, elites and everyone else. Adamovsky is arguing that Argentina maintained its nineteenth-century social structure. The segment on the twentieth century through the 1930s is well documented, with the author examining a wide array of primary sources to find that there were very few mentions of the middle class as such before the mid-1930s. He was looking specifically for the use of the term *middle class* (*clase media*). What the author slights in his search for the use of the words *middle class* is the perceived difference that existed in cultural, if not necessarily economic, terms between *empleados* (white-collar workers) and *obreros* (blue-collar workers).

In a telling example, Adamovsky argues that the telephone workers' union had an identity as a workers' union despite representing workers who were *empleados* (153–154). What he ignores is that in the 1930s the organization was largely a union of *obreros*. The key leaders were, or had been, blue-collar workers, as were

the vast majority of the union members. The union had a hard time organizing operators and others who could be considered *empleados*, especially women. The union periodical frequently blamed this on the desire of female operators to dress in the latest fashion and the like—in other words, to be middle class.¹¹

Similarly, when dealing with the retail clerks' union, Adamovsky ignores the large obstacles that the organization faced because of the class views of the men and women who composed the potential membership. Adamovsky points out in a footnote that the union praised Lenin and generally argues that it saw itself as a workers' organization (152). What he ignores is that, at the time, the union was a tiny organization under communist influence. In the 1930s it grew under the leadership of socialist Angel Borlenghi, who recognized that retail clerks were reluctant to strike but could be mobilized for political campaigns that changed the nature of the industry. The politically astute and highly practical Borlenghi, who later served as Perón's minister of interior, realized that he could mobilize retail clerks and most political parties behind campaigns to achieve laws mandating a uniform closing time for stores and a five-and-a-half-day week, thus transforming potential members' lives. The union then just had to see that the laws were enforced. The union grew quickly after these triumphs. Many retail clerks did think of themselves as different from workers.¹²

The second half of Adamovsky's treatise argues that with the rise of Peronism, the country split in two, with the self-identified Peronist *pueblo* being poorer, darker, and perceived as less cultured, and perceiving itself in those terms as well. The opposition to Perón began to identify itself as middle class. Adamovsky sees the writings of two extremely important intellectuals whose works had a wide circulation, Gino Germani and José Luis Romero, as critical to the propagation of the idea of a large and important middle class. This portion of Adamovsky's book is much less closely documented and at times becomes almost an overview of the period, but an interesting and stimulating one. Although Adamovsky does deal with the leftward tilt of the middle class in the 1960s and 1970s, he never fully comes to grips with what to say about the large elements of the middle class that became, even if briefly, Peronist.

Adamovsky does a good job discussing the period from 1975 through 2001, when the self-described middle class was placed under tremendous economic pressure from the neoliberal economic policies of various governments. Adamovsky sees the crisis of 2001 and 2002 as the moment when the myth of the middle class collapsed and nonelites together overthrew the old system, and it appeared that true change was coming. He argues that the governments of Eduardo Duhalde and Néstor Kirchner were able once again to divide workers from the perceived middle class, thus keeping the economic system largely unchanged and helping to reestablish the middle-class myth. In summary, although the book is overly long, with vastly uneven coverage and a partially flawed argument, it helps historians come to grips with the tricky concept of class in a society in which

11. See, for example, *Federación*, September 1933, p. 3.

12. Sebastián Marotta, *El movimiento sindical argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Calomino, 1970), 3:60; Horowitz, *Argentine Unions*.

upward mobility has been enshrined as a myth, even when it does not fit the reality.

Ricardo Salvatore's seven previously published essays (some have undergone modifications) brought together in *Subalternos, derechos y justicia penal* examine the intersection between law and culture, especially their impact on the poor. According to Salvatore, it is not enough to say that Argentina was a country without law, that the governments were capricious and ignored legal statutes. Laws did have impacts, and it is necessary to study the impact of laws. The author is influenced by the English Marxist historians of the 1960s and 1970s, by Michel Foucault, and by subaltern history. The introduction places his essays in that context and situates them in relation to works on crime and imprisonment in Latin America. Most of the essays address the nineteenth century, and only the final one reaches 1939.

The essays show that laws frequently had unintended consequences, especially for the poor, and that the traditional accounts of the impacts of those laws are far from accurate. The first three chapters examine the postindependence period, especially that of Juan Manuel de Rosas. What we see is a countryside that is much more tranquil than is traditionally pictured. According to contemporary police reports, crime rates were low and much of the existing crime was against the state, such as desertion, traveling without papers, and evasion of military service. In addition, because of the scarcity of labor, people were able to resist many of the state's attempts to control their labor, such as the requirement to carry work papers.

In his examination of the impact of positivists on the legal system, Salvatore focuses principally on the idea that the positivists used bureaucratic positions to examine real problems and were influenced by their belief in the large potential for criminality in the workforce. Salvatore believes that while the positivists dominated discourse on crime, their actual impact was limited. Laws were not passed under their influence until the 1920s. Although model prisons were constructed, most penal institutions had limited resemblance to them. In another essay he argues that the reforms of the judicial system between 1880 and 1920, intended to get rid of the remnants of the colonial system, left the average citizen more vulnerable because of the use of preventive detentions and the deterioration of the state provision of legal counsels for the poor. In another chapter he argues that medicalization of the legal process had a negative impact on the poor.¹³ In contrast to much of the writing that has heretofore been done on the Argentine legal system, Salvatore stresses the importance of looking at laws and ideas not just for what they say but also for what they do, not only for their content but also for their consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

Two auspicious trends are augmenting our ability to understand the fragmented nature of Argentine society during the twentieth century—one a new

13. The example he highlights is the case of Simón Radowitsky, the famous anarchist, which Salvatore wrongly describes. He has Radowitsky dying in prison in Ushuaia (275–276). Radowitsky was pardoned by Hipólito Yrigoyen and died decades later in Mexico.

economic history and the other cultural studies. The trends focus on very different kinds of questions, but they help explain why Argentine society was fragmented and conflictive and why politics offered few solutions. The new economic history, with its reliance on econometric tools, makes clearer why the economy never met the high expectations of the populace. One can, of course, disagree with the conclusions, but it is difficult to dismiss the data and the evidence that political decisions helped produce the bad results. As both Cortés Conde and Pineda make abundantly clear, politicians found it difficult to make hard decisions on the economy, and therefore it became increasingly difficult to maintain prosperity.

Cultural studies help explain why Argentina remained divided in almost all aspects of life (cultural, social, and political) in the long years between 1945 and 1983, and why some of the divisions seem to have been reoccurring in the past few years. Political and economic failure cannot alone explain the sharp antagonisms in society, and the cultural division helps to do so. The cultural division also makes clearer why governments found it hard to make difficult decisions on the economy. The society was too fragmented. Still, as some of the authors note, we cannot know whether today's intellectuals can understand a newspaper article or a movie in the same way that an "average" Argentine did sixty years ago. How receptive was the audience to the messages that we now perceive? We see the message and we see the outcome, but how the change comes about is more difficult to trace, and the causal connection is blurred. Still, what we have is a much more nuanced and complete picture of a changing Argentina, which comes from studies of the cultural political world and from economic history.