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Book Review: *Politica Continental Americana de Espana en Cuba 1812-1830.*

Albert Manucy

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BOOK REVIEW

Jose L. Franco: *Politica Continental Americana de Espana en Cuba 1812-1830*. No. XV de las Publicaciones del Archivo Nacional de Cuba. La Habana 1949. (Pp. vi, 429, illustrated, bibliography. Not indexed.)

The thesis of this book is well expressed by a single statement in the preface written by Joaquin Llaverias, Director of the *Archivo Nacional de Cuba*: "Havana . . . was the center of whatever political moves and investigations Spain undertook, toward the end of combatting and destroying the revolutionary labors of the *independistas*, who had at their van the Liberator Simon Bolivar and other American patriots, longing for total separation from the institutions of the nation then directed by Fernando VII." In the course of some 400 pages, author Franco defines the hemispheric scope of these counter-revolutionary activities, while showing them hopelessly inadequate due to the weakened condition of Spain itself.

Essentially the book deals with Havana's role in the action and intrigue; but other material explanatory of Spain's internal affairs and her foreign relations makes the work more comprehensive than the title indicates.

The initial chapter sketches political and economic backgrounds of the Empire, while the next three divisions recount Spanish relations (through Havana) with the United States, the Floridas, Louisiana, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, Cartagena, Panama, Veracruz, Buenos Aires, and other important centers, including those set up by pirates. The author's treatment, in general, is to divide his narrative neatly and geographically, in order to finish East Florida (for instance) before he goes on to Louisiana.

The last two chapters present (1) the fact of Spanish-American independence (by 1821 Fort San Juan de Ulua at Veracruz was the only Spanish-held part of the continent), (2) King Fernando's insistence upon the return of the colonies to his absolutist regime (Independence was " 'Contrary to the legitimate rights of the

Crown of Spain and my royal sovereignty, [now] happily established . . . ' ”), (3) the bold plans and frustrated schemes for returning the rebels to the fold (“impossible reconquest”) and finally, (4) recognition of the fact of independence by liquidation of the “continental American policy developed by the colonial government at Havana over a 20-year period.”

Jose Luciano Franco, Havana-born journalist and member of the *Sociedad Cubano de Estudio Historicos e Internacionales*, has chosen a turbulent period full of fascinating intrigue and bold action. His writing is clear and facile, entirely compatible with the orderly manner in which he has organized his material.

Few professional historians dare attempt what journalist Franco has done: use documentary extracts as the backbone of his book. Like the hard, lustrous beads of a necklace, the expressions from the old papers remain cryptic and immutable. Yet they are arranged in meaningful pattern by the chain of Franco's phrases. The presentation is vivid and gives the reader the feeling of watching developments as they occur from day to day. The majority of documentary sources are from the *Archivo Nacional de Cuba*, supplemented somewhat by Spanish and French archival papers and a sizeable number of secondary works.

FLORIDA INTEREST

There is much to interest students of Florida history. The *Politica* is a valuable companion piece to P. C. Brooks's *Diplomacy and the Borderlands* (University of California Press, 1939), a history of the Florida cession of 1821. About one-fifth of the Franco text contains narrative or biographical material relative to the Floridas.

St. Augustine and Pensacola were the citadels from which the Spanish watched the abortive efforts of the “American republicans” to annex these provinces of Spain. Detailed reports went to Havana with news of the schemes - rumored and otherwise - and actions of the hostile frontiersmen. From Havana the Flor-

ida compatriots were succored (in the words of *Intendente Alejandro Ramirez*) "in every way we could. Their commanders cry out like children in a nightmare. It is not possible, nor would it perhaps be wise to send them more for now."

The usurpation of Fernandina by the "Brethren of the Coast" receives considerable space, and many readers will find new material on men like Aury and MacGregor, for whom Fernandina was but a single square in highly checkered careers. Franco gives an overall picture of the pirate problems which plagued the commerce of all nations concerned with Gulf and Caribbean trade. The notorious Lafitte brothers and other traffickers maintained a highly organized "trade," and at various times claimed expedient, if not always cordial, relations with the governments of Britain, Spain, the United States, and the new republics of Spanish America. Moses Elias Levy of St. Thomas is said to have held "all the clandestine traffic of the Caribbean in his hands."

Tampa Bay and Key West also figured in the history of the period. Commodore David Porter was based at the latter port for some months in 1827 with his Mexican squadron; his nephew was slain in a battle with the Spanish frigate *Lealtad* off Havana in 1828.

But in addition to revealing new aspects of the confused turmoil in the Floridas, the book casts brighter light upon many hitherto shadowy figures such as Felipe Fatio of St. Augustine. Franco characterizes him (Florida kin will be pleased to know) as a man "of recognized honor and ability, and - a rare thing in the indolent Spanish bureaucracy - he possessed a great capacity for work . . ." Fatio won his recognition with the Spanish legation in Philadelphia, over the course of a painful expedition to Mexico to procure sorely-needed funds for the legation, and especially for his indefatigable labors in the Spanish cause at New Orleans. Ironically, Don Felipe died in poverty.

The story of William Augustus Bowles and his West Florida intrigues are well known. This book adds little. But it is pleasant

to come across other personalities, such as former Governor Sebastian Kindelan, and discover them in new positions of responsibility after their departure from the Florida scene.

Researchers will deplore the fact that the book is not indexed, and a map would help many Norteamericanos to become better oriented in the wide geographical field of which Sr. Franco has written. Those of us who are required to scan many volumes in the course of a study project could also wish for a summary at the conclusion of the volume.

Withal, however, this is a competent analysis of Havana as a Spanish base of operations - militarily and diplomatically - against insurgents, smugglers, and pirates, as well as a refuge for loyalists during a period packed with unrest and uncertainty. Perhaps of greatest value is the presentation of the Spanish viewpoint on matters which most of us have hitherto seen from a different side of the fence.

ALBERT MANUCY

National Park Service