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*An Essay on the Mexican Viceroys During the War of Independence: The Question of Legitimacy**

For 150 years historians have been writing about the Wars of Independence in Spanish America (1810-1824) almost as if only the patriot side existed. This is natural enough; it corresponds to human nature and represents the need to discover national heroes for the emulation of future generations. However, the absence of literature about the royalists in this period may lead the student to the false assumption that there was little resistance to independence, that it was universally popular, and that the Spanish empire was so weak it could never have survived. There is considerable evidence to counter any of these three generalizations. In fact, uncritical historians who dwell on the exciting personalities and episodes associated with the rebel side, to the exclusion of the royalists, actually do the cause of nationalism a disservice. To ignore the immense resistance to independence does not enhance the stature of the Liberators, but denigrates it. What makes Iturbide most worthy of study, after all, is that, after so many years and such great sacrifice among the independents, he succeeded where Hidalgo, Morelos and others failed in discovering a politically acceptable program for separation from the mother country. It reflects no shame on the Mexican nation to recognize that Iturbide succeeded because he represented a type of compromise.

Before the rebels succeeded, however, the royalists must in some way have failed. Yet, until the last few years, whenever even the most critical historians came to study the absorbing question of how a system of government that lasted for three centuries could so quickly be shattered, they concentrated not on the actions of the royal power during the Wars of Independence but on essentially "background" factors such as the Enlightenment or the influence of the French Revolution. These are important, but off the mark. To understand how such a fundamental political change in the destinies of the American countries occurred we must devote as much attention to the royal power as historians in the past have devoted to the rebels.

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Though the author has been provoked by this question to begin a study of the royal governments in all four of the viceroyalties during the insurrection, the example of New Spain alone is sufficiently illustrative and vast to absorb the attention of many historians. This paper will be limited to a review of the three last viceroys of New Spain, the representatives of royal authority at its highest level, and how their control came to be viewed as illegitimate by Mexicans. They were Francisco Xavier Venegas, Marqués de la Reunión de Nueva España (1810-13); Félix Maria Calleja del Rey, Conde de Calderón (1813-16); and Juan Ruiz de Apodaca, Conde del Venadito (1816-21).[1]

The importance of these viceroys in the outcome of the independence movement is indicated by their centrality in the pages of the extremely nationalistic first generation of Mexican historians, many of whom had lived through the war. One need only read Bustamante's study of Calleja's military campaigns[2] to recapture a sense of the awe in which they were regarded, in this case even by a man who represents the partisan historian, victorious over his ancient enemies. Though he may have viewed them through the glass of his own political persuasion, Bustamante at least recognized the importance of Calleja and the other viceroys as historical figures. So did Alamán, with considerably less hostility. Whatever their point of view, they never ignored them. Later generations of historians, however, acted as if they had never existed, or if they deigned to recognize that there even was someone at the head of the royalist opposition, they misinterpreted or slavishly repeated the early historians' hostility and cast the viceroys as bloody-minded automatons, non-persons. Throughout this later historiography there is a consistent failure to assess the viceroys objectively.[3] They are never endowed with any purpose other than mindless reaction. This ignores the existence of a Spanish imperial ethos in America that was three-centuries old and so strong that the mere raising of a rebellion could not in itself destroy it. It had to collapse internally before its enemies could achieve success.

The thesis of this paper is that the Spanish imperial power did just that. Paradoxical though it may appear, the same viceroys who rendered such incomparable service to Spain that by 1816 the rebellion was over, were instrumental in weakening the Spanish ethos at its very center. They showed Spanish imperialism to be unsuited to America, they proved established authority invalid. The struggle for independence revolved around the core question of whether Spain could continue to prove itself the legitimate possessor of authority, not whether the rebels could be defeated in battle. Spain won most of the battles but lost the war! It was, in fact, a struggle for sovereignty, and one that would be won, as Hamill has pointed out, by the side that could sway the opinion of the vast non-committed majority of Mexicans.[4] As the ultimate focus of Spanish authority in Mexico, the viceroys played a crucial role in its decline.

In dealing with the question in this way we are making a fundamental assumption which we think can be substantiated, and which is long overdue. That is, the collapse of Spanish authority occurred only during the War of Independence, not before, as much of the existing literature on the "causes" of the movement for independence imply. To be certain, a tiny handful of dedicated rebels in America had lost all faith in Spain's imperial mission by 1810, but it was only during the struggle itself that others were convinced. The moment that there was widespread agreement that Spanish authority was no longer relevant, independence was assured. This is what Iturbide meant when he warned Apodaca, "Is there anyone who can undo the opinion of an entire kingdom? . . . Any country is free that wants to be free."[5]

The victory of the rebels, the achievement of total independence, was not, therefore, foreordained or inevitable. Quite the contrary, in 1810 the vast majority of South Americans still adhered closely to the ancient precepts of the Spanish empire. The validity of Spain's possession of America was substantiated by three hundred years of history. Inertia, time, upbringing, tradition and the natural conservatism of human beings were all on the royalists' side. The rebels did not win instant agreement when they declared that Spain's hour had passed. It had to be proven, and only the chief agents of Spain could prove that.

This brings us to yet another paradox. Legitimacy in Mexico was being eroded constantly and inexorably, but not because of inactivity on the viceroys' part. Quite the contrary, they governed well and effectively, indeed, they even stopped the military threat of the rebellion. Yet they could not revive their authority because it was the very actions they took to defeat the rebels and restore peace that ultimately destroyed legitimacy. In a sense they shared in a wider crisis of legitimacy that swept peninsular Spain in 1808 and that endured there for over a century,[6] but the most immediate effect, as far as America was concerned, of the imprisonment of Ferdinand VII in that year was that the viceroys were required to assume the initiative in America to an extent that Bourbon absolutists would normally have shunned. Thus, in the cause of defending their king's rights, they governed virtually on their own, and in such a way that they could never excuse themselves as being mere titularies.

The fundamental crisis from which the viceroys could not defend themselves was that the values upon which their authority and the Crown's were based were rapidly becoming irrelevant. The things they were supposed to represent as the living embodiment — Crown, sovereign, mother country — were all in disruption. They actually represented a king who overthrew his own father, a war-torn Spain either subjected to foreign domination or torn

between constitutionalism and absolutism, and for many Americans, an ancient oppression. The confusion concerning the position of the sovereign after Ferdinand's imprisonment, and the revolution in the nation's fundamental political traditions that the Constitution of Cádiz exemplified, together nullified or disproved the political values Americans had previously been taught to believe. Though the viceroys went about the task of suppressing the revolt with cunning and skill, they only vaguely sensed the meaning of this wider, more fundamental crisis of confidence.

Francisco Xavier Venegas, the viceroy who took possession of his office only two days before Hidalgo's *Grito de Dolores,* was the man who faced and overcame the first phase of the revolution. After an initial moment of confusion, Venegas led the royal power to an all-out military campaign against the Hidalgo and Morelos forces that constituted a conscious program of counterinsurgency.[7] Under command of General Calleja, the royal Army of the Center readily defeated the Indian mob of Hidalgo. In addition, Venegas launched a massive and sustained propaganda campaign to maintain confidence in the royal system. In 1811 he faced two direct plots to kidnap or assassinate him in the capital. He organized new militia forces, discovered new sources of revenue in the face of financial crisis, firmly resisted the more radical requirements of the Constitution after 1812, and ended the dangerous lack of direction the government had suffered from since the shocks of 1808. In 1810 and 1811 he created a special police force for the capital, while tribunals were created in the countryside to try both lay and clerical insurgents by martial law.[8] When the cabildo of Mexico City charged that these agencies were tyrannical, he denied their criticism. When the Cortes directly ordered him on several occassions to disband them, he refused.[9] In short, Venegas was able to take and hold the initiative in fighting the rebellion on both military and political fronts, and by 1811 it was clear that the revolution could be contained. This was an astounding accomplishment for an *ancien régime* that had never before in its history faced such a rebellion. It was no feeble house of cards waiting to be blown over. In the fury of the moment it may not have occurred to Venegas that the bill for costs would someday come due.

The costs began to manifest themselves in two directions simultaneously. On the one hand, the rebels' dedication to their cause intensified and deepened. By 1812 or 1813 what had been a vague desire for autonomy and some amelioration in the oppression of the *castas* and Indians began to crystalize into the heretofore undreamt of desire for outright independence. Under Morelos the rebels under arms inexorably moved in that direction, culminating in the Declaration of Independence at Chilpancingo. However, they still represented only a limited portion of the popular will. Among the creole gentlemen representing Mexico at the Cortes, an intensification of

dedication to liberalism and parliamentary monarchy that would one day have great impact upon Mexico could also be noted.[10] More significantly for our purposes, there began to appear a die-hard faction of ultra-royalists, who by 1812 made General Calleja their unofficial spokesman. After publication of the Constitution of 1812 these hardliners bombarded Spain with requests for Venegas's replacement by their hero Calleja. The two leaders of Mexican royalism quarreled publicly over differences in war policy and over what Calleja viewed as Venegas's slowness in promoting officers of his army. They became open rivals. From the point of view of preserving royal government in Mexico on an even keel, this ultraism was dangerous, because Calleja's assumption of the viceregal office in 1813 would constitute the final preemption of alternatives. From that point on the struggle was between black and white — independence or ancient absolutism. In a sense, the radicalization of the independence threat forced this upon the royalists. As Calleja recognized, the Hidalgo movement was not a long-range threat, for the spectre of Indian rebellion drove all non-committed factions under the protection of the viceregal power, and the lack of a program obviated any political support. Members of the creole elite who favored Mexican autonomy (and there were many) could not support Hidalgo. The Morelos phase, on the other hand, seemed far more dangerous because it was characterized by greater discipline and a political program, and it occurred simultaneously with the constitutional regime in Spain. Yet, Calleja's own intense dedication to royalism, discipline, absolutism, and colonial subordination was instrumental in polarizing the royalists to a total commitment to destroy not only the rebellion, but also the much more moderate creole autonomist movement, progressively eliminating alternatives for the elite.

When tracing the question of legitimacy, the Constitution played a much greater role than heretofore emphasized, because it forced the viceroys to place themselves in an irregular position in reference to peninsular law. Their loyalties were seriously divided by the provisions of the Constitution. To obey it, they had to be untrue to their professed beliefs, for they were servants of the absolute king, while the Constitution vested national sovereignty in the Cortes. This was a direct contradiction of the fundamental principle of the Spanish state. The two viceroys who governed during the years 1812-1814 while the Constitution was first in effect, Venegas and Calleja, could not avoid disobeying parts of it. The anomaly of the viceroy fighting for restoration of absolute loyalty to Spain while refusing to comply with its basic law, would not be lost on Mexicans. By their own example the viceroys suggested the illegitimacy of imperial governance. Yet they did not understand it, for all they saw was that the Constitution provided a shelter for rebel conspiracy, impeded the prosecution of the war, and threatened absolutism. Calleja was especially perceptive in pointing out these risks. They

were undoubtedly real enough; the rebels did rejoice at the news of the Constitution for it seemed to be the beginning of a chance for greater Mexican autonomy; but what Calleja did not see, even with all his perceptivity, was that the Constitution endangered nothing, rather their reaction to it cut their authority to the core.

Viceroy Venegas moved effectively after implementation of the Constitution to nullify those provisions he thought useful to the rebels. In November, 1812, the first elections occurred in Mexico City. Not a single European was chosen to compose the group of electors who were to select the city council and Provincial Deputation, whereupon Venegas annulled the vote, claiming irregularities.[11] The night of the elections widespread popular demonstrations took place, which both Venegas and General Calleja called riots in their reports to Spain.[12] The secret rebel underground organization in the capital, the Guadalupes, wrote with disgust to tell Morelos that Venegas, "working with his accustomed despotism," had suppressed the election.[13] The fact that in subsequent elections in the capital city not a single peninsular Spaniard was ever chosen to any office conclusively showed the direction of popular feeling, and explains Venegas's hostility. After allowing the second major provision of the Constitution, the free press, to go into effect for two months, Venegas annulled it as well, on the grounds that it gave cover to rebel propaganda.[14] During the remaining months of his term, none of the really substantive provisions of the Constitution were implemented. In response to the cries of the Cortes, particularly of Mexican delegates, he simply kept his peace. In a sense, Venegas had become by the beginning of 1813 something of a lame-duck figure anyhow when compared to General Calleja, who was by then military governor of the capital, victor of several major battles, center of a party of powerful and loyal supporters, and universally recognized as the true head of the royal resistance to independence.

On March 4, 1813 Calleja assumed the viceregal power. At his own request, the usual full-blown investiture celebrations were not observed.[15] The combined threats of Morelos and the Constitution had to be dealt with, and though Calleja usually evinced great fondness for pomp and circumstance, it was not necessary on this occasion because he required no introduction. The Spanish Tamerlaine, as Bustamante called him,[16] Calleja had lived in Mexico since 1789, had a creole wife, and owned property near San Luis Potosí. He knew the country more intimately than perhaps any viceroy ever had. The country knew him very well too. Everyone recognized that his appointment meant the beginning of a massive unified assault against the rebellion. The Guadalupes, some of whom were personal acquaintances, assessed him for Morelos: "[Calleja] possesses more diverse knowledge than Venegas, more wisdom, highly placed relatives and connections, more military skill, more

valour, a stronger disposition; the troops want him; in Mexico City he has a large party composed of creoles and gachupines; he is a great politician, . . . [and possesses] a dark ambition."[17]

Calleja was all these things and more. The force of his personality, the clarity of his vision, and his obsession with destroying the rebellion made him the dominant royalist figure in the Mexican War of Independence. In his first public proclamation on taking office he reminded Mexicans that Spain itself was in no less miserable circumstances than Mexico and called on them to equal the heroism of the peninsulars.[18] Always blunt, always straightforward, but always the consummate politician, Calleja, who deeply distrusted the Constitution, now wrote to the government in Spain to say innocently, "that although his predecessor, for reasons that were as yet unknown to him, had taken the extraordinary measure of suspending the implementation of the Constitution . . . he himself believed that this same Constitution, sustained by a strong army, would bring peace to America."[19] When he publicly announced at the end of March that he intended to implement the Constitution in full, the Guadalupes immediately saw his object: "The astute Calleja, in order to delude us in his favor, has begun to put the Constitution into practice."[20] The viceroy, meanwhile, sent out agents in an attempt to influence the election. When the votes were counted in Mexico City, the creoles again swept the field. The Guadalupes rejoiced, "We have given a second attack in this city to our ferocious enemies . . ."[21]

Yet while Calleja permitted the long-overdue elections to take place, he refused to do anything about restoring the free press, even ignoring several direct orders from the Cortes for its implementation. The elections he thought he could control, they even suited his purposes for they drew dissidents out in the open so they could be identified. The free press, however, he knew he could not control. The viceroy's willingness to put most of the Constitution into effect may well have been motivated by the hope, which he expressed himself, that it might be an agent of reconciliation. Yet, he was soon disappointed in that expectation, as both his public and private statements illustrate.

During the ensuing year Calleja launched a multi-faceted offensive against the insurgents militarily, politically and in propaganda, that brought him almost total military success. He publicly promised "to dedicate myself exclusively to the destruction of Morelos,"[22] and he swore to Spain that he would not let Mexico go while he remained in office even if he had to march at the head of the whole army across the country laying it waste with fire and sword.[23] At the time Calleja became viceroy the rebel threat was at its peak. They controlled Oaxaca and much of Michoacán, the road between Mexico

City and Puebla was closed and the capital was without communications for months. The rebels besieged Acapulco, and were even active as far north as Texas. In the capital, conspiracy and intrigue were widespread. The treasury was exhausted, the royal forces widely dispersed, food supplies scarce. In three years of unparalleled activity, however, Calleja defeated the major rebel armies, captured and executed Morelos, freed Oaxaca, Michoacán, Acapulco, cleared out Mexico and the other central provinces, opened the highways, forced through sweeping new taxes and special loans, and began the process of national recovery. Every contemporary, whether friend or foe, recognized his genius and his accomplishments. Lucas Alamán said of him that "if Spain had not lost dominion over [Mexico] as a result of subsequent events, Calleja would have been recognized as . . . the second Hernan Cortés."[24] The cabildo of Mexico City called him "our Liberator," and "the Reconqueror of Mexico."[25] No viceroy in the three hundred year history of New Spain accomplished so much in such a short time.

Calleja's control over the viceregal government was enhanced by the restoration of Ferdinand VII to power in 1814 and by the king's nullification of the Constitution in May of that year. The viceroy reacted "with unspeakable joy," as he wrote himself, upon hearing of the king's return. With icy hauteur he commanded the dissolution of the various constitutional bodies in New Spain as orders to that effect arrived from Madrid, and the government was restored to the institutions that had existed in 1808. He publicly dared the Mexico City Council to take a stand in support of the Constitution, and it meekly backed down.[26] His relief at weathering the storm of anarchy is evident in the quickening pace of his assault against the rebellion. The king approved of Calleja's actions, including his refusal to obey the Constitution, and authorized him to take whatever measures necessary to stop the insurrection.[27] Throughout 1815, while his armies smashed the rebel military, he turned against the underground of rebel sympathizers in the capital itself and decimated it.

Calleja was undeniably both cunning and ruthless. He was not, however, wanting in concern for the well-being of the Mexican people, among whom he had lived for so many years. Only his perception of what was good for them differed from the view that finally prevailed. In many of his letters and personal communications, more frank than his public proclamations, he evinced a deep concern for the costs of the war and for the future survival of New Spain. He knew that war risked the security of the people, for their "increasing distress" would act "to reduce us gradually to death's door." With remarkable political perceptivity, he pointed out that what was important was not so much the defeat of one or another rebel chieftain, but the restoration of what he frankly recognized to be "the ancient illusions" that

had cemented the state together — the social, familial and cultural ties that bound Americans to the mother country. The restoration of calm was essential, "For even if the arms of the rebels prove unsuccessful . . . still misery, and a growing consumption, will do that which neither force nor intrigue may be able to effect."[28]

This was Calleja's most acute perception. He was talking not about conquest or government, but about the right to govern, which is authority. He recognized that it was mortally wounded, and he ascribed it to the Constitution. In a letter dated August 18, 1814 he reflected on the impact of the Constitution in New Spain. It had removed from the viceroy every vestige of authority outside the use of plain force that he had possessed, and it could not now be recovered. It had exposed the ministers and magistrates to ridicule. "They have lost their *prestige,* and even their respectability!"[29] In a similar letter, the Mexican audiencia, which supported Calleja firmly during the constitutional era, said that Spain had lost its "moral force" in America.[30] The audiencia reminded the king that the objective of the rebels was not to defeat Spain militarily, but to discredit it, to deprive it of authority. Aware of the vulnerability of their authority, the *oidores* pointed out that "our enemies . . . recognize that it will be lost when the political system is altered, and this has been, and up to now is, the plan of . . . the Insurgents."[31]

They were so close to the real issue involved that it just barely eluded them. They knew the question at stake was authority; they knew that power required authority, but was not the same thing; and they understood that conquest was not synonomous, though they may have thought it necessary before authority could be restored. Calleja even grasped, alone perhaps among all the royal leaders of the day, the danger that the means of conquest posed to authority. Where their perceptions failed them was in assigning it a cause. Ferguson has best summarized this failure at the level we have already introduced: "Like most Spaniards, Calleja never grasped the changes that had eroded the basic premises that supported and sustained the concept of absolute monarchy, the unquestioned relationship of subjects to King, of colony to State."[32] But the failure in perception of Calleja, and of his like-minded audiencia, goes even deeper than that. It was not only the political confusion created by the constitutional regime that endangered their power, but also their refusal to obey the Constitution. The attempted conversion from absolutism to a constitutional monarchy need not have destroyed their authority. Many elements of the creole elite strongly supported the Constitution. Indeed, the Mexicans were so well-disposed toward this autonomist reform that it could have deepened the credit of the Crown. It was the unnecessary, essentially pointless, adherence to ancient absolutism, in a world where that was no longer possible, that was at fault. On the basis of

reform radiating from the mother country, a new, fresh, living loyalty might have been fashioned. The failure of the radical revolutionaries like Morelos, and the success of Iturbide, illustrate the preference of the powerful elite of Mexican creoles at that time for essentially stable, conservative solutions to their political crises. They were searching desperately for a compromise, but Calleja offered only ultraism. A Spanish patriot of the intellectual acuteness of Calleja could have led Spain to take the initiative in the formation of a new trans-Atlantic Spanish nationalism based on the deep respect and regard for the mother country that many Americans still retained. He failed to do so because he did not recognize the opportunity. No one else could come as close, because that tradition of respect for the peninsula could not last forever, and was constantly being eroded.

At the core, then, there is a failure of self-discernment and an opportunity missed. Ferdinand, of course, is as much at fault as anyone. He overthrew the Constitution without consultation with his American viceroys. The struggle between reform and absolutism that was to divide Spain for most of the century was already well advanced. In America it had direct impact on the movement for independence.

The impact was this: In ignoring the fundamental law of the state and in refusing to obey the Constitution, the viceregal absolutists converted a system of government that was merely out-dated, into tyranny. Spanish political philosophy had always recognized a difference between absolutism and firm government on the one hand, and tyranny on the other. Ferdinand VII himself, in his decree of May 4, 1814 annulling the Constitution, could declare that he and his predecessors had never been tyrants. This was so because by definition the king could not be a tyrant. He was the ultimate culmination of the wishes and aspirations of his people. So, too, were his alter-egos, the viceroys. But in America that definition was now collapsing, for this government was not meeting the needs of the people, which made it "bad government," and it did not adhere to the law, which made it tyranny. The realization of this dichotomy between theory and practice began to dawn on the non-committed conservative and reformist elements of Mexican society. The attempt to reanimate eighteenth century absolutism in a colony that had already been exposed to a variety of alternatives to it — from Indian insurrection to mestizo radicalism, from parliamentary monarchy to creole autonomy — was bound to have a disastrous effect on the Crown's credit.

Authority, once corroded, can never be reestablished by force. It might, however, be maintained for an indefinite period of time by force,[33] but it must be constant and unremitting. And so Calleja made it! He confessed to Madrid that, "The insurrection is now so deeply impressed and rooted in the heart of

every American, that nothing but the most energetic measures, supported by an imposing force, can ever eradicate it."[34] His remarkable success in this undertaking is well-known, and frequently is as far as the historiography goes. But it could not restore authority because there was not enough time, and because, as Calleja himself warned, it turned the people's hearts and minds away from Spain. There were really two wars going on. One was for the possession of territory, the other for men's minds. While the first was important, the second was decisive. The Spaniards won the first by 1816, but were losing the second.

Yet Viceroy Calleja saw only the military victories and the achievements in restoring trade, communications and morale. He was immensely proud of these accomplishments, and defended them against his multitude of critics in private and public statements. In a stunning exchange of letters between himself and the liberal Bishop of Puebla, Antonio Joaquín Pérez, the viceroy revealed the extent of his dedication to a military settlement. The bishop wrote the viceroy in April, 1816, complaining about the cruelty of royal troops, the destructiveness of the war in general, the unnecessary destruction of property, the capriciousness of the army, and the publication by the government of false accounts of battles. Calleja replied by saying that the laws of war permitted every excess, that the government had been too easy on secret conspirators, and that political expediency justified the falsification of news reports.[35] He thus reduced his policy to its essence. Open and unashamed terror and force had replaced authority! Several months later, as he prepared to leave New Spain after twenty-seven years of residence there as royal officer and viceroy,[36] he wrote the government at home to say he was leaving in Viceroy Apodaca's hands a country that was well on its way to recovery, "and I have no doubt that his talents will further perfect [the recovery], if the methods that have served me so well are continued."[37]

The situation that existed at the time of Calleja's departure was this: The only real opportunity to re-create a living loyalty, while a government at home was well-disposed to reform, had been missed. After Ferdinand's *coup d'état*, from 1814 to 1820, Spain would not permit reform. The viceroy had confused authority with other elements that actually depended upon it but did not create it — territorial control and military victory. And the chief accomplishment of Calleja — the extension of territorial control, or conquest — was itself responsible for corroding true authority.

The new viceroy, Juan Ruiz de Apodaca, assumed office in September, 1816, after a difficult overland crossing from Veracruz, during which his party was attacked between Perote and Puebla. He later claimed to be the only viceroy of New Spain to be greeted upon arrival with a hail of bullets.[38]

Apodaca was more in tune with European events than Calleja and, because he had been close to the center of action during the Napoleonic invasion and struggle for liberation under the Cortes, he was considerably less absolutist than his predecessor. He was one of the most administratively-minded of the viceroys. A naval commander and former ambassador to England, he came to Mexico from Cuba where he was serving as Captain General.

The end of the Venegas-Calleja period in New Spain and the beginning of the Apodaca government marks an important change in viceregal personality, policy, and objectives. Where his predecessors' job had been to meet and destroy the insurrection, Apodaca's was to restore the nation. We can think of Venegas as the Buffer, first meeting and combatting the uprising; Calleja as the Reconqueror, destroying the rebel military threat; and Apodaca as the Reconciler. In addition, there is an essential difference in personality between Apodaca and his predecessor that derives from their past experience before assuming the vice-royalty. Where Calleja came to the office after years of service in America as a military officer, Apodaca came directly from a career combining naval command with delicate diplomacy. More crucial is the fact that whereas Calleja was a product of the Spain of Charles III,[39] Apodaca was a product of the Spain of the Napoleonic struggle. He did not react to constitutionalism with fear. He never advocated it, and was certainly not a liberal, but he had witnessed so many reforms in Spain that mere change itself held no terror. Whereas Venegas and Calleja had boldly disobeyed the Constitution in the very era that Spain was supposedly devoted to change, Apodaca was not averse to reform in the very era that Spain was devoted to a restored absolutism. Nonetheless, the historian's fundamental problem is to explain why, with so many advantages, Apodaca also failed.

A man of great equanimity who lacked the fierceness of Calleja and had no particular genius in commanding land forces, Apodaca was faced with what appeared to be a much easier task than his predecessor. In a series of monthly reports on the state of the nation, which he dispatched to Spain during 1816 and part of 1817, Apodaca was able to report, without hiding any bad news, a progressive improvement in all aspects of the life and commerce of New Spain. The rebellion, in fact, had been militarily quashed by Calleja. He was not a fool in believing his own optimistic reports, for there seemed no chance that the royal cause would not prevail over the leaderless bandits who now made up the remnants of the revolutionaries. He viewed his chief tasks, in addition to clearing out the province of Veracruz, which had become the last stronghold of the rebels, to be principally the reduction of military expenditures, of part of the immense debt of eighty million pesos that the kingdom now faced, of the number of rebels in the field through the extension of amnesties, and of the war itself.[40]

Even in Europe it was noted that Apodaca abandoned the policy of terror pursued by Calleja and attempted to regain the affection of the nation.[41] On several occasions he criticized Calleja for his "fire and sword" policy and his extraordinary special war taxes. Between 1816 and 1820 he repealed four taxes Calleja had created to meet the cost of the war — a property tax, a forced contribution based on incomes, a forced lottery, and a group of taxes on horses and carriages. For this he received the approval of a nervous king who feared the political consequences of Calleja's hardline financial policy. Most striking, however, is Apodaca's granting of amnesties. A month after taking office he adopted the policy of publishing the names of *indultados* in the public press so as to encourage others.[42] H.G. Ward says that Apodaca granted over 17,000 amnesties during his rule.[43] As it turned out, many of these men made up the backbone of Iturbide's movement. This policy was so far successful that before the end of very many months Apodaca's letters began to repeat the refrain that the rebellion was over. This was still not naiveté, for in 1817 the failure of the Mina expedition seemed proof-positive that the revolution would not flare up again.

No, Apodaca was not naive, as he has sometimes been accused, for the evidence seemed clear, the insurrection was destroyed. Yet, as Ward said, it was a "deceitful calm." This was so because, according to Alamán, Calleja had not actually extinguished the spark of revolution, he had merely persuaded the rebels that it was impossible to obtain their goals by open warfare, for it led simply to ruin and annihilation.[44] It was a time of high intensity and great drama, for it would show whether a policy of reason could solidify the gains won by relentless force, whether authority could be re-created after terror had taken its place, whether Spain still had a right to govern.

When the historian focuses on the chief agents of Spain rather than on the leading rebels or on the rebellion itself, one factor not previously noted about the War of Independence begins to suggest itself. It may well be that 1816 was the true turning point in the movement, the point at which Spain's power had faltered beyond the ability of its agents to restore it. This was chiefly because those agents, and indeed, most of the rebels, did not recognize that the loyalties of Americans could not be measured by the essentially unrepresentative question of which army controlled which territories. In 1816 royal armies were everywhere victorious. The process of reconquering Mexico, however, had required destroying its haciendas, communications, factories, even some of its cities, leading, on the one hand, to such privation that, as Calleja had predicted, the imperial system's ability to feed and house Americans was destroyed, and on the other, to a loss of confidence which the mere presentation of an alternative to royal government by the rebels could never have accomplished.

What Apodaca urgently required in order to carry out his program of reconstruction was plenty of time — the luxury of moving slowly — combined with total support for his policies from Spain and no new turmoil that might impede the delicate task of spiritual reconciliation. He was denied all these. Two fundamental impediments got in the way. One was the intransigence of Ferdinand VII and his government during the years of the restored absolutism, 1814-1820. This was the period when initiative toward reconciliation on Spain's part might have swung the loyalties of Mexicans back to the mother country. But Spain refused to consider reform in political, commercial, or social affairs. The bonds of affection and the right of sovereignty, already damaged, were not allowed to heal themselves. They could have, but the viceroy could not overstep the limits of the king's wishes.

Then in 1820 Spain was again convulsed by an internal political revolution that for the second time threw the lines of authority and power into total confusion. Following a liberal uprising begun by disaffected peninsular troops,[45] the king was forced to restore the Constitution of 1812. Apodaca, the reconciler and the product of the Napoleonic struggle, appeared to make a genuine effort to implement the Constitution. In a sense, he had no choice in the matter but, unlike his predecessors, he made no attempt, until it was too late, to intervene in or control the operations of the constitutional system. Elections were held regularly and without intervention, while freedom of the press was in effect for one full year (it was not abolished until after the Iturbide uprising began and the Plan of Iguala was in wide circulation in the capital). Apodaca reported to the Cortes that he thought the reimposition of the Constitution caused no unrest of any kind in Mexico.[46]

It is at this point that he may be accused of naiveté, but not before. For it was the Constitution that ultimately destroyed Spanish authority in Mexico because it broke the most important of all the ties that bound that country to Spain — the self-interest of her creole elite — while at the same time it revealed the weakness of the monarchy. The stunning royal decree of April 11, 1820, in which Ferdinand VII apologized to the American kingdoms for his error in annulling the Constitution in 1814 and declared that absolutism was wrong while begging dissidents to remember that "errors [in judgement] are not crimes,"[47] gave the final lie to the "ancient illusions" that allowed the Spanish system to function, and around which Calleja anchored his restoration of royal power. In October, 1820 the Fiscal of the Mexican audiencia, José Hipólito Odoardo, reported to Spain that the liberal legislation of the Cortes that was aimed at restricting the power of the church, the military and the aristocracy throughout the empire, had in only seven months completely redirected the loyalties of Mexicans. The vested interests that fought for ten years to preserve New Spain from the chaos of an Indian or mestizo social

revolution now recognized that further loyalty to the mother country could ruin them. Odoardo said that everyone knew a new uprising was imminent and that it would overthrow the royal regime, though he could not predict precisely from which direction it would come.[48] The viceroy himself received a similar prediction from the city councilor Francisco Sánchez de Tagle in January, 1821.[49] Yet, in the very same month Apodaca informed the Minister of Ultramar that all of New Spain's intendencies and civil districts were free of insurrectionary activity and were as peaceful as they had been in early 1810.[50]

Recent works by D.A. Brading and Doris Ladd suggest that the cream of the Mexican elite, the titled nobles, together with their untitled cousins, the wealthy merchants and miners, had long aspired to reform and autonomy (chiefly in the economic sphere),[51] but had been unable prior to 1821 to find a political program that would give them access to power while preserving their own security. The older thesis is that independence finally occurred as the result of outright counter-revolution. Both views are not really contradictory, since they point to the same fundamental disruptive influence — the Constitution and Cortes. Since the Crown was too weak to resist being shackled by a system of hostile legal restrictions, the elite recognized it was no longer the guarantor of stability.

The uprising finally came from an unexpected but logical source — from Agustín Iturbide, a disaffected creole officer of the royal army cashiered from active duty by Calleja for irregularities in the direction of convoys, who in early 1821 proclaimed an uprising at the head of a conspiracy of wealthy Spaniards and Mexicans. In one of the most unique twists of Spanish American history, the viceroy now represented a government of radical reform, while the insurgents represented a much more attractive package deal — the Plan of Iguala — which called for independence, but under a constitutional monarchy, protected status for the church, and the vague promise of racial equality. This compromise could accomplish the objective of independence and self-determination, but without endangering the security of any vested interest that was willing to cooperate in it. Independence suddenly became, for the first time, a reasonable alternative to Spanish government.

The Plan of Iguala was the synthesis around which both conservative and radical could rally. At a single stroke Iturbide combined white elite and *casta* peasant, old revolutionary and new dissident; while Spain had showed itself unfit to possess sovereignty any longer. H.G. Ward best summarized the differences between the alternative to royal government provided by the Iturbide insurrection and those that had preceded it; "Where life and property

are at stake, a man must needs risk everything in their defense; but the case is different where the question at issue is reduced to a question of *right* between two Governments."[52] Iturbide clearly had the right! Spain had lost it in 1816, but until Iturbide, no acceptable program for independence had come forward.

Apodaca had never dreamed of such a threat, and in the face of it he floundered, utterly without resources to combat it. He confessed to Spain that the uprising filled him "with surprise and consternation." He warned that Iturbide had the support of the creole militia officers, and that his Plan, guaranteeing existing privileges that were under attack by the Cortes, would "seduce" many of the elite, while it was equally attractive to the old rebels. His only defense was to offer Iturbide an amnesty, and to proclaim to the public that the rebel leader would destroy the peace and the recovery process. He repeated these charges in a long letter to the government when he announced the Plan of Iguala. He was certain Iturbide was just plain wrong, that he was deluded by personal ambition and by a false idea of what independence would bring, in short, "he has lost his mental judgement."[53] Angry, embarrassed, even a little ashamed, the viceroy honestly did not understand what Iturbide was about or where his tremendous popularity came from.

Apodaca's paralysis and inability to get his orders obeyed led a small group of die-hard veteran army officers to overthrow him on July 5, 1821, replacing him with Field Marshal Francisco Novella.[54] This was nothing less than a public recognition of the illegitimacy of the royal regime. Iturbide's control of the country was too far advanced, however, to permit Novella to retrench and create a royal enclave, and independence triumphed only two months later. It was natural, for Iturbide genuinely embodied at that moment the wishes of the nation; in other words, he possessed the genuine authority. The fact that his lease on it was short-lived does not alter the universal enthusiasm with which the nation greeted him in September, 1821, though it does illustrate the beginning of the problem of legitimacy that continued to trouble the independent nation for a century to come.

Of the three Mexican viceroys, only Calleja understood that the question of legitimacy was central in the struggle against independence, and by 1816 he sensed it was already lost. Apodaca clearly missed the point altogether. In a poignant letter describing his overthrow and Iturbide's victory, Apodaca wrote, "I had a feeling of presentiment about this misfortune in the middle of last year, 1820, but not about the terms in which it would come about nor the means by which it would be effected, because they are so extraordinary that it was not possible for anyone to imagine them."[55] Significantly, both Venegas and Apodaca were members of the Spanish Council of State that in 1828 was

still debating methods by which to "pacify" the "rebellious American provinces."[56] This failure to recognize that the Americans had rejected Spain's right to sovereignty characterized much of peninsular thinking for years to come, and perhaps helps explain Spain's hesitancy to recognize American independence during the lifetime of Ferdinand VII. From their point of view the victory of independence between 1821 and 1824 was perhaps only a phase in the struggle, similar to the royalist victories of 1814-1816. Until the mid-1830's there was an air of suspended animation in peninsular policy toward the new republics, as if they expected to be called back.

If Madrid did not recognize that its authority was gone, it did nonetheless understand that the American republics faced a difficult task in creating and legitimizing their own, something few Americans realized. When Spain sent out peace commissioners to some of the independent South American countries in 1822 they carried secret instructions in which they were reminded that the republics now faced the serious problem of a lack of authority, for it had been replaced by "a thirst for power, which is what constitutes the overseas insurrection thus far." This lack of legitimacy "has to produce terrifying evils," said Madrid.[57]

The euphemistic phrases used over the years to explain the central problem of how a movement so thoroughly suppressed in 1816 could have swept the nation so quickly in 1821, point to the conclusion that the focus should be on Spain and how power slipped out of her grasp, rather than on the insurgents into whose eager arms it fell. Alamán spoke of "the desire for independence, which once lighted cannot be extinguished."[58] Calleja spoke of the insurrection as an indestructible Hydra that constantly regenerated itself. These are literary turns, not explanations. The fact is, the revolution was defeated! Furthermore, the idea of independence could have been snuffed out! It was not, however, because as Spain was reconquering Mexico in the years 1813-1816 it was simultaneously destroying its own legitimacy. At the very moment, after 1816, that the formation of a renewed and workable imperial ethos was possible, Spain was governed by the deadly reaction of the restored absolutism which made any accomodation to the valid aspirations of Americans impossible. Besides, the very process of reconquering the nation, the Callejista "fire and sword" policy, had done precisely what Calleja feared it would. It so endangered the wealth of the nation through the destruction it engendered, that privation did what rebellion alone failed to do.

For Mexicans the whole mystique of the Crown had been disintegrating for some time. The mystique was first cracked, then seriously damaged, by the depravity (as Americans viewed it) of the Godoy era, by the forced

abdication of Charles IV at the hands of his heir, by the overthrow of Viceroy José de Iturrigaray in 1808, by the usurpation of the throne by Joseph Bonaparte, by the creation of self-made government at Cádiz, and by the mindlessness of the restored Ferdinand VII. Was this not sufficient evidence of the system's profound disorder? More important, the legitimacy of the king's viceroys in Mexico was discredited by their refusal to obey the Constitution or to permit more than token reform, and by the fierceness with which they polarized the loyalists to a do-or-die struggle between absolutism and any alternative to it. This converted the delicate strands of loyalty, faith in the monarch, and sense of brotherhood of all Spaniards into tyrannical government by foreigners and eliminated the possibility of compromise. The last straw came when the peninsula turned against the self-interest of the very elite who had upheld royal authority, proving the invalidity of Spain's possession of power.

The movement for independence did not destroy Spanish authority in Mexico. Until the Plan of Iguala presented a politically acceptable program, the insurrection was not sufficiently attractive to Mexicans, because it threatened the lives, security, and welfare of too many. The focus of much of our historiography is therefore somewhat off the mark. The mere fact of raising an alternative to Spanish imperial control did not in itself destroy Spanish power. To be sure, the threat posed by the insurrection was great, but Calleja quashed it! Spanish authority was destroyed by the forces that came from within, not from without. It disintegrated of its own internal dynamics. The viceroys had no control over that, but they exacerbated it and participated in it. As the living symbols of the dominion and majesty of Spain, they were also the living symbols of its confusion and, therefore, the agents by which it discredited itself. Spain lost America because it lost its ability to prove its right to sovereignty, its ability to convince. In politics, economics and social affairs it became irrelevant.

NOTES

[1] Francisco Novella, self-proclaimed last viceroy, never received royal confirmation, and Juan O'Donojú, often incorrectly called viceroy, was only Captain-General.

[2] Carlos María Bustamante, *Campañas del General D. Félix María Calleja del Rey*, (Mexico, 1828).

[3] Carol C. Ferguson, "The Spanish Tamerlaine?: Félix María Calleja, Viceroy of New Spain, 1813-1816," (PhD. Thesis, Texas Christian University, 1973), pp. 264-271, briefly assesses the historiography on Calleja, concluding, "No historian has succeeded in providing a balanced view of Felix Calleja."

[4] Hugh M. Hamill, Jr., *The Hidalgo Revolt, Prelude to Mexican Independence*, (Gainesville, 1966), p. 151.

[5] Iturbide to Apodaca, Iguala, February 24, 1821, Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereafter cited as AGI), Mexico 1680.

[6] Richard Herr, *An Historical Essay on Modern Spain*, (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 283-288.

[7] Hugh M. Hamill, Jr., "Royalist Counterinsurgency in the Mexican War of Independence: The Lessons of 1811," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 53, no. 3, (August, 1973), pp. 470-489.

[8] See N.M. Farriss, *Crown and Clergy in Colonial Mexico, 1759-1821: The Crisis of Ecclesiastical Privilege*, (London, 1968), pp. 197-236.

[9] Venegas to Cabildo of Mexico City, Mexico, October 29, 1811, Archivo del Ex-Ayuntamiento, Mexico (hereafter cited as A. Ex-A.), Policía en general, vol. 3629, exp. 176.

[10] For further detail on Mexico's relations with the Cortes, see the essays in Nettie Lee Benson (ed.), *Mexico and the Spanish Cortes, 1810-1822: Eight Essays*, (Austin, 1966).

[11] Nettie Lee Benson, "The Contested Mexican Election of 1812," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 26, no. 3, (August, 1946), pp. 336-350.

[12] Venegas to Minister of State, Mexico, December 27, 1812, AGI, Mexico 1322; Calleja to Minister of Grace and Justice, Mexico, June 16, 1813, AGI, Mexico 1322.

[13] Guadalupes to Morelos, Mexico, January 20, 1813, AGI, Mexico 1482. For fuller treatment of the group, see Wilbert H. Timmons, "Los Guadalupes: A Secret Society in the Mexican Revolution for Independence," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 39, no. 4, (November, 1950), pp. 453-499.

[14] Free press legislation was originally passed by the Cortes two years before, but Venegas had consistently ignored it.

[15] Calleja to Venegas, Mexico, March 2, 1813, A. Ex-A., Actas del Cabildo, 132. Though the necessary public events took place, they were distinctly muted compared to Venegas's investiture.

[16] Ferguson effectively shows that this analogy with Tamerlaine is inappropriate. She argues that Calleja had not sought the viceroyalty, at least before the events of 1808 threw him into the center of events, but that he aspired to retire and settle permanently on his estate near San Luis Potosí, "The Spanish Tamerlaine," pp. 65-68. It is a semantic question only, but points out the historiographical prejudice against Calleja. The problem with the analogy to Tamerlaine is not its implication of force, but of mindless force.

[17] Guadalupes to Morelos, Mexico, March 5, 1813, AGI, Mexico 1482.

[18] Proclamation of Calleja, Mexico, March 26, 1813, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico (hereafter cited as AGN), Impresos oficiales, vol. 35, exp. 14.

[19] Calleja to Minister of War, Mexico, March 15, 1813, AGI, Mexico 1322.

[20] Guadalupes to Morelos, Mexico, April 19, 1813, AGI, Mexico 1482.

[21] Guadalupes to Morelos, Mexico, August 5, 1813, AGI, Mexico 1482.

[22] Bustamante, *Campañas del General Calleja*, p. 10 of supplement.

[23] Calleja to Minister of Grace and Justice, Mexico, August 18, 1814, AGI, Mexico 1482.

[24] Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Mejico*, (2nd ed., Editorial Jus, Mexico, 1968), IV, p. 308.

[25] Cabildo to Minister of Grace and Justice, Mexico, April 5, 1816, AGI, Mexico 2770.

[26] Calleja to Cabildo, Mexico, August 22, 1814, A. Ex-A., Historia en general, vol. 2254.

[27] Francisco de Paula de Arrangoiz y Berzábal, *Méjico desde 1808 hasta 1867*, (4 vols. in 2, Madrid, 1871), I, p. 271.

[28] Calleja to Minister of Grace and Justice, Mexico, August 18, 1814, AGI, Mexico 1482; the translation is from Henry George Ward, *Mexico in 1827*, (2 vols., London, 1828), I, pp. 512-522.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Audiencia to Cortes, Mexico, November 18, 1813, in Ward, *Mexico*, I, pp. 497-509.

[31] Audiencia to King, Mexico, October 29, 1814, AGI, Mexico 1483.

[32] Ferguson, "The Spanish Tamerlaine," p. 270.

[33] Carl J. Friedrich, *Tradition and Authority*, (New York, 1972), p. 121. The definition of authority used throughout is Friedrich's.

[34] Calleja to Minister of Grace and Justice, Mexico, August 18, 1814, AGI, Mexico 1482.

[35] "Cuaderno de contestaciones entre el Virey de Nueva España y el Obispo de Puebla," copied July 12, 1816, AGI, Estado 31.

[36] Former Viceroy Venegas had the last word in his rivalry with Calleja, for he submitted a recommendation to the Council of the Indies urging Calleja's replacement, which apparently swayed its decision to remove him. Ferguson, "The Spanish Tamerlaine," pp. 248-249.

[37] Calleja to Marqués de Campo Sagrado, Mexico, September 6, 1816, AGI, Mexico 1322.

[38] Apodaca to Minister of Ultramar, Mexico, January 8, 1821, AGI, Mexico 1680.

[39] As Ferguson emphasizes, "The Spanish Tamerlaine," p. 264.

[40] See the collection "Oficios y Cartas de Apodaca al Sr. Ministro de Guerra," AGN, Historia, vol. 152.

[41] Manuel Palacio Fajardo, *Outline of the Revolution in Spanish America*, (London, 1817), p. 343.

[42] Apodaca to Minister of War, Mexico, February 28, 1817, AGN, Historia, vol. 152.

[43] Ward, *Mexico*, I, p. 164.

[44] Alaman, *Historia*, IV, p. 308.

[45] The uprising first broke out among the troops of the expeditionary army being gathered at Cádiz for the reconquest of America. The royal commander of the troops, arrested by them at Arcos de la Frontera, was Felix Calleja. In 1822 he was again imprisoned, at Ibiza, for opposition to the constitutionalists.

[46] Notice of receipt of report by Apodaca, Madrid, October 17, 1820, AGN, Reales cedulas, vol. 224, exp. 93.

[47] Proclamation of the King to the overseas inhabitants, Madrid, April 11, 1820, AGN, Impresos oficiales, vol. 43.

[48] José Hipólito Odoardo to Minister of Grace and Justice, Mexico, October 24, 1820, in Arrangoiz, *Méjico desde 1808*, II, pp. 12-16.

[49] "Sobre que el sistema constitucional pierde cada día mucho de su valor y eficacia," AGN, Ayuntamientos, vol. 178.

[50] Apodaca to Minister of Ultramar, Mexico, January 8, 1821, AGI, Mexico 1680.

[51] See D.A. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763-1810*, (Cambridge, 1971); and Doris M. Ladd, "The Mexican Nobility at Independence, 1780-1826," (PhD. Thesis, Stanford University, 1971).

[52] Ward, *Mexico*, I, p. 198.

[53] Apodaca to Minister of Ultramar, Mexico, May 29, 1821, AGI, Mexico 1680.

[54] See Timothy E. Anna, "Francisco Novella and the Last Stand of the Royal Army in New Spain," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 51, no. 1, (February, 1971), pp. 92-111.

[55] Apodaca to Minister of Ultramar, Guanabacoa, Cuba, November 17, 1821, AGI, Mexico 1680.

[56] Council of State, Madrid, May 29, 1828, AGI, Indiferente 1564.

[57] "Prevenciones muy reservadas que S.M. hace a los Comisionados," Madrid, 1822, AGI, Indiferente 1570. The negotiations of the commissioners came to nothing.

[58] Alaman, *Historia*, IV, p. 308.