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In Memoriam: *Eric Van Young 1946–2024*

ERIC VAN YOUNG, scholar, teacher, mentor, and friend. Eric Van Young's departure from this life on December 20, 2024, was greeted with expressions of admiration and warm memories mixed with sorrow among communities of scholars across the Americas. In the academic circles of Mexico and the United States, where his life-long career left the greatest imprint, his death was noted by the Comité Mexicana de las Ciencias Históricas, the Academia Mexicana de Historia, Mexico's leading universities, and in an essay published in the cultural review *Nexos*. Special editions of academic journals are in preparation in both Spanish and English to honor Eric Van Young's lasting contributions to the historical profession over four decades of scholarly output, undergraduate and graduate teaching, generous mentorship, and service to the profession. During his tenure at the University of California, San Diego (1982–2015), he was named Distinguished Professor of History in 2009; Eric served his university's administration as Chair of the History Department, Associate Director of the Center for US-Mexican Studies, and Interim Dean of Arts and Humanities. In addition, Van Young contributed to the Conference on Latin American History of the American Historical Association and to the program and publishing committees of the *Reunión de Historiadores de México*, bringing together historians of Mexico, Canada, and the United States,—as well as more broadly global regions—who work on varied facets and periods of Mexican history, anthropology, political economy, and culture.

Four major works constitute the pillars of Eric Van Young's unique contributions to the history and historiography of Mexico and—by extension—to Latin America: *Hacienda and Market in Eighteenth-Century Mexico. The Rural Economy of the Guadalajara Region, 1675–1820* (University of California Press, 1981, 2nd ed. Roman & Littlefield, 2006); *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Struggle for Mexican Independence, 1810–1821* (Stanford University Press, 2001); *A Life Together: Lucas Alamán and Mexico, 1792–1853* (Yale University Press, 2021); and *Stormy Passage: Mexico from Colony to Republic, 1750–1850* (Roman & Littlefield, 2022). Taken together, these works mark the principal accomplishments and turning points in Eric Van Young's broad intellectual trajectory. *Hacienda and Market*, developed from his UC Berkeley

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dissertation directed by Woodrow Borah, constitutes a thoroughly researched economic history of the rural–urban nexus of Nueva Galicia over the mature colonial period. Even more, this study addresses the conflicts over territory, labor, and market access among privately owned estates—haciendas—and the Indigenous pueblos that continued to anchor the extended countryside of which Guadalajara emerged as the commercial and administrative center. Translated into Spanish and published in two editions in Mexico, most recently in 2017, *Hacienda and Market* challenged the prevailing paradigm of mining as the "engine" of Spanish colonial economies to highlight agriculture and livestock raising as central to understanding the rhythms of market exchange, credit, and the landed basis for regional societies. It continues to influence research in socioeconomic history, especially for the conflictive duality of village and private estate landholdings and the formation of regional marketing networks. Moreover, it points to Eric's conceptual forays into spatial history, regionality, and the enduring presence of Indigenous and rural cultures in Mexico and beyond.

The Other Rebellion, published two decades later, seemingly took Van Young's scholarship in a new direction. This ambitious work grew out of rigorous archival research, copious reading, and reflection on the theoretical frameworks for the much-debated concepts of rebellion, revolution, and peasant political agency linked to the historical narratives of the early phases of the Mexican Independence movements. Nevertheless, Eric brought to this project some of the ideas he had begun to work out in *Hacienda and Market* concerning the spatial mobility of peasant rebels, regional identities and boundaries, and the multiple dimensions of conflict within and among Indigenous communities as well as between them and private landholders and merchants. He expanded further upon these themes to highlight popular religion, locally based allegiances, and personal loyalties akin to the phrase coined by Luis González y González—*la matria chica*—in ways that questioned the supposed hegemony of liberal political cultures drawn in support of a republican nation-state. Stimulating a lively debate, *The Other Rebellion* was recognized by the Conference on Latin American History with the Bolton-Johnson Prize (2003) for the best book published in English on Latin American history. It received acclaim in Mexico as well, where it was published in 2006 under the title of *La otra rebelión* (*La lucha por la independencia de México, 1810–1821*).

Continuing to straddle the conflictive century of transition from colony to nation-state, 1750–1850, Eric turned his critical approach to the prevailing trends of historiography to undertake a political biography of Lucas Alamán—statesman, historian, and outspoken proponent of conservative politics—during the formative period of Mexican national development. Dominant themes that are familiar to

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scholars and the Mexican public alike include the popular insurrection ignited in 1810 by Miguel Hidalgo's *grito* in the village parish of Dolores and sustained by José María Morelos until his capture and death in 1815; Mexico's first constitution of Apatzingan inspired by Morelos's vision of a Mexican Catholic nation without slavery, tribute obligations, or caste differences; Spanish counter-revolution and simmering bands of guerrilla warfare in the forested sierras of southern Mexico led by Nicolás Bravo, Vicente Guerrero, and Juan Álvarez; the ephemeral empire of Agustín de Iturbide and the transition to a republic under the Constitution of 1824. Notable achievements such as the abolition of slavery in 1829 and liberal legislation to support the institutions of a secular nation-state, championed by José María Luis Mora and Valentín Gomez Farías, were overshadowed during the first four decades of Mexico's national history by disputed presidential elections, betrayals, and assassinations behind the figure of Antonio López de Santa Anna. Santa Anna's mercurial politics moved between the labels of federalism/liberalism and centralism/conservatism to create a cult of personalized rule that foundered against secessionist movements in Yucatán, Texas, New Mexico, and other borderland provinces, military defeat by North American invading forces, and the ignominious loss of half of Mexico's territory to the United States.

Behind the dramatic episodes of these familiar narratives, the protagonist of Van Young's biography adopted a conservative political philosophy to address the pragmatic tasks of institution-building and economic development. Lucas Alamán grappled with Mexico's fiscal and economic weaknesses by establishing a national bank, the Banco de Avío, with the aim of financing industrial development. An admirer of Alexander von Humboldt, with whom he sustained a friendship, he sought to connect Mexico with the intellectual currents developing in Europe. Alamán organized Mexico's national archive around the nucleus of viceregal administrative records, creating the foundation for the modern Archivo General de la Nación. Working within his aristocratic vision of historical memory, Alamán turned to those collections to produce a five-volume Historia de Méjico, a formidable achievement of research and narrative synthesis. Eric Van Young's biography of this important figure—both well known and elusive—is less heroic than it is analytical and retrospective. Much more than a "life and times of … " kind of personal history, *A Life Together* captures the contradictions and ironies of Alamán's political career, his personal foibles, and his entanglement with Mexico's politics, economy, and struggle for national survival. Van Young graced this beautifully written and complex narrative of Alamán as a public figure with considerable attention to Alamán's personal life through his marriage to María Narcisa Castrillo Portú, their large family, and the uneven fortunes of his economic ventures in mining and landholding.

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Parallel to his deep involvement with the political and intellectual trajectory of "Don Luquitas," Van Young worked on a popular history of this transitional period from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries that he considered to be crucial to understanding the countervailing forces of decolonization and modernization for the emergence of the Mexican nation. Interpreting the multistranded threads of historical changes and continuities in late colonial and early national developments from the vision espoused by Lucas Alamán, Eric produced *Stormy Passages* as a synthesis of societal, cultural, and economic signs of both stasis and transformation. Its narrative history is admirably contextualized through the summaries of demographic data and descriptions of local economic production in agriculture, artisanal crafts, and livestock raising. Van Young deals with the ambiguities of the "caste system" and changing attitudes toward class and ethnic barriers that were applied to both Indigenous and African-descendant populations, whose implications are prescient for current debates in Mexico around *los pueblos originarios y de afro-mexicanos*. The central thematic debate that guides the narrative concerns modernity, what the "stormy passage" to a postcolonial economic and political order meant for the historical actors of the time, especially through the lens of Lucas Alamán. Van Young's treatment of this conflictive period helps historians interpret it for the evolution of political institutions, the ebb and flow of Mexico's economic fortunes, and levels of poverty or well-being among the nation's populace.

Interwoven with these major volumes, Eric Van Young's journal articles and book chapters provide an important literature in which he worked out a number of the concepts that guided his research through the analysis of empirical information culled from the archives. His articles gained him notoriety through their imaginative titles, such as "Millennium on the Northern Marches: The Mad Messiah of Durango and Popular Rebellion in Mexico, 1810–1815" (1986) or "The New Cultural History comes to Old Mexico" (1999), and his thoughtful reflections on the necessary connections between economic and cultural history: "La pareja dispareja: breves comentarios acerca de la relación entre la historia económica y la cultural" (2003). Eric brought together his reflections on theory and methodology, tempered always with archival research, in a series of essays published in 2012 under the title "Writing Mexican History." Van Young authored and co-edited a number of works with broad historiographical significance, such as *Mexican Soundings: Essays in Honour of David A. Brading* with Susan Deans-Smith (2007) and *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* with Joseph W. Esherick and Hasan Kayali (2006).

Generosity is the term that most often is expressed by his colleagues, friends, and former students to describe their personal and professional relationships with

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Eric Van Young. Van Young's written critiques of others' work, as observed in his many published reviews, can be acute, but always fair and often magnanimous. His generous spirit is evident as well in his wide network of friendships and collegial partnerships, extending through North American and Mexican institutions; in particular, his deeply personal remembrances of the late Paul Vanderwood and his tribute to David Brading are noteworthy. He did not suffer fools lightly (nor did Lucas Alamán), but Eric shared his vast stores of knowledge and gave unstintingly of his time to mentor students who had demonstrated their dedication to pursue a graduate degree and their potential to contribute original research to the historical profession and develop creative careers as teachers and scholars. The list of more than 20 doctoral students for whom Eric Van Young served as principal advisor and director of their dissertations is a testament to his mentorship that was both generous and rigorous. I was privileged to be one of them. In deep gratitude I close these lines with the words that Eric used in his sign-off for his abundant correspondence: un abrazote, Eric.

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