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Review of A Tropical Plains Frontier: The Llanos of Colombia 1531-1831 By Jane M. Rausch.

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A Tropical Plains Frontier: The Llanos of Colombia 1531-1831. By Jane M. Rausch. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984. Maps, illustrations, tables, glossary, bibliography, index. 317 pages. \$21.95.

The strength of this monograph is evident in its solid documentation of three hundred years of Spanish and creole settlement in the tropical plains (llanos) frontier of Colombia, which extends east from the Andean cordillera into the greater llanos of Venezuela. Although speaking directly to a general historiographical

and theoretical interest in the frontier, particularly in Latin America and specifically in Colombia, Jane Rausch also provides important background detail about rural history as it relates to political and economic development, especially for Latin America. While limited to discussion of the Colombian llanos, Rausch's synthesis of parochial detail permits tantalizing comparative insight into issues of broader thematic interest, such as the mission in Latin America as a frontier institution or the various frontiers as (paradoxically) centers of independence movements in Latin America.

A careful and balanced organizational framework contributes to the success of this synthesis. An introductory chapter describes geographic and ecologic constraints on frontier society and gives some background data on the indigenous population. The subsequent chapters essentially follow a standard periodization reflecting mostly Spanish experiences in this frontier. A discussion of early exploratory and conquest expeditions provides the framework necessary to understand the dynamics of over one hundred years of the "missionary thrust." Evidence documenting modest missionizing successes invites further comparative comment, particularly in light of recent scholarship on missions in northern Mexico, Paraguay, and northwest Argentina. By analyzing local conditions during the notable Comunero Revolt of 1780, Rausch reveals a revised and less morally charged picture of the consequences of the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 and the re-orientations of colonial frontier society under the Bourbon Reforms. Assessment of Colombian frontier society, especially the famed llaneros, in the Wars of Independence adds specific and detailed political background to the classic portrayal of Simon Bolívar's military victory, but Rausch's conclusions could have been more forceful. Finally Rausch describes the growth of caudillism and political repression and the decline of population and economic production in what has become a "permanent frontier."

This work goes beyond traditional studies in its focus on regional frontiers. However, the

analysis falls short in treating the native peoples who comprised this tropical plains frontier society, focusing instead on the local administrative and clerical elite. Though an explicable oversight, given the time span covered and lack of available archival materials, particularly for the earlier centuries, lack of attention at least to the motives of the Indians (*why* did some groups opt for missionization, others for autonomy, and others for trade?) produces a somewhat static picture of these people. Rausch leaves unquestioned the old images of Good Indian/Bad Indian. This perspective, I think, leads to an again understandable but unfortunately artificial separation of the Colombian frontier from the Venezuelan llanos. Rausch addresses this problem in her concluding chapter, but more systematic attention throughout the monograph would have been helpful. The final comparative essay does summarize characteristics unique to the tropical plains frontier of New Granada in contrast to Venezuela, and suggests that through investigation of other Latin American frontiers historians may "discover that these frontiers have played a greater role in national formation than has previously been conceded" (p. 246). Rausch has aptly shown this to be so for Colombia.

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