



JOSÉ DE BUSTAMANTE &
CENTRAL AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

Colonial Administration in an Age of Imperial Crisis

TIMOTHY HAWKINS

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I could not have written this book without the assistance of scores of friends, family, and colleagues—too many, unfortunately, to name here—who have been more than gracious with their time, ideas, critiques, and support over the past decade. Thank you. For special service to the cause, I would like to acknowledge the mentorship of Ralph Lee Woodward and the patience of Margaret Hurdlik. Despite so much help, I must take complete responsibility for any errors of fact and interpretation found within.

This book is dedicated to my grandmother, Estelle Murzyn.

T.H.

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Introduction

José de Bustamante and the Historiography of Central American Independence

In contrast to the extensive scholarship devoted to the independence of most of Latin America, the bibliography of Central American independence has always been small.¹ The primary reason for such neglect is that the Kingdom of Guatemala experienced a rather subdued separation from Spain in comparison with that of other colonies. As a consequence, historians of the period have long struggled with the problematic task of writing a history of independence without a struggle for independence. Ultimately, this conundrum has prevented the historiography from moving beyond the tradition of *historia oficial* handed down by nineteenth-century national historians. In the absence of a more viable paradigm to explain the distinctive path taken by Central America, research into the period has not kept pace with that of other areas of the former Spanish empire.

For most national historians of the nineteenth century, the Latin American independence period offered an unparalleled opportunity to address the birth of their respective nations from the perspective of a dramatic, turbulent, and heroic transformation from colony to nation-state. In Mexico, chroniclers such as Fray Servando Teresa de Mier and Carlos María Bustamante created founding fathers out of Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos. In South America, the liberators, José de San Martín, Simón Bolívar, and Bernardo O'Higgins, became central figures in the independence histories of Benjamín Vicuña MacKenna,

Miguel Luís Amunátegui, Bartolomé Mitre, and others. Through these works, legendary events such as the *Grito de Dolores*, San Martín's march across the Andes, and Bolívar's *Campaña Admirable* were fixed in the national consciousness and demonstrated the power of national and popular unity. More than simply histories of the transition from colony to nation, these accounts of independence were instrumental in the promotion, projection, and development of a sense of national identity among the populations of Mexico and the South American republics.

Almost alone among the former Spanish colonies, however, Central America did not experience a sustained or widespread independence movement in the period 1810–1821. Instead, it watched quietly as the rest of the empire was torn apart by rebellions, revolutions, and the military confrontation between royalist and patriot armies. No independence leader of more than provincial significance surfaced at the time. And separation from Spain, when it finally came, was achieved peacefully but haphazardly within the framework of the 1821 *Plan de Iguala*, with the isthmus joining the Mexican Empire of Agustín de Iturbide before setting out on its own. By 1840, the nation that had been the consequence, if not the goal, of independence had divided into five barely viable pieces.

Not surprisingly, this history created problems for those interested in writing and interpreting the independence of Central America according to the standard set by Mexican and South American historians. Lacking liberators, a violent struggle, clear examples of public unity in support of independence, and a unified nation, Central American historians made do with what they had, piecing together an interpretive framework for independence out of failed or aborted uprisings, conspiracies, the deeds of the patriotic *ayuntamiento* (municipal council) of Guatemala City, and various martyred or repressed revolutionaries. Deprived of a central hero, these historians instead created an archvillain, arguing that the passivity of the Kingdom of Guatemala during the 1810s was the consequence of the brutal, oppressive administration of Captain General José de Bustamante y Guerra (1811–1818). At once the inhibitor and precipitator of independence, Bustamante became the personification of Spanish absolutism, supervising a “reign of terror” that stifled dissent and crushed overt opposition to Spain during this decade.

At the same time, however, his policies were seen as hardening the sentiment for independence among Central Americans, thereby leading to the great movement for liberation that overwhelmed a more pliable captain general in 1821.

First elaborated by Alejandro Marure in the 1830s, this characterization quickly pervaded the Central American Liberal historiography of the nineteenth century. Incorporated into the *historia patria* of writers such as Rafael Aguirre Cinta and Agustín Gómez Carrillo, it entered the school systems and became part of the established, official explanation of the regional independence experience. Revitalized by Ramón Salazar early in the twentieth century, the negative view of Bustamante has managed to infuse both native and foreign views of Central American independence to the present.

Considering the progress made over the past decades toward a greater understanding of the independence movements in other parts of the Spanish empire, the long-term dependence among historians of Central America upon a historically suspect interpretation of independence is all the more striking. This paradigm was created and developed to fill the need for a national history in Central America. It was based upon certain assumptions about the nature of the Latin American struggle for independence that do not necessarily fit the Central American experience. As a result, it has tended to distort both the role of Bustamante and the sentiment for independence in the kingdom in order to conform better to the standard model.

To a great extent all accounts of Central American independence have been shaped by the first, Alejandro Marure's *Bosquejo histórico de las revoluciones de Centroamérica desde 1811 hasta 1834*. Originally published in 1837 following a commission from the Guatemalan chief-of-state, Mariano Gálvez, the *Bosquejo histórico* was expected to serve as part of the national history of the Central American Federation and as a means to bind the young nation together by recounting the shared, patriotic struggle for independence. Yet, it was also the product of a scholar whose father was Mateo Antonio Marure, a prominent intellectual, republican, and victim of the Bustamante regime. These two factors, Liberal nationalism and family tragedy, led Marure to paint a vivid picture of the Bustamante decade as one characterized by a titanic

struggle between the forces of fanaticism and superstition, led by the captain general, and those of liberty, symbolized by Marure's martyred father and other Central American patriots.

The central theme of this monumental work is the inevitable victory of the Liberal cause in Spanish America. According to Marure, this movement, a product of the American and French Revolutions, took hold in the Spanish empire following the French invasion of Spain and allowed Americans to proclaim "the same principles against the Metropolis that it [Spain] had utilized against [Napoleon]."² Yet, while these events precipitated revolts throughout most of the empire by 1810, "the Kingdom of Guatemala remained peaceful and submissive instead of becoming angry over the deceptions of the Metropolis."³ Into this scene stepped Bustamante, and, in one of the most widely reproduced and influential passages in Central American historiography, Marure wrote:

This Spaniard had recently demonstrated his zeal against the pro-independence movement at his posting in Montevideo and was one of the most suitable peninsulars to delay the emancipation of the Guatemalans. Hard, inflexible, suspicious, absolutist, vigilant, and reserved, his method of governing was in perfect harmony with his character. He re-invigorated the measures which he found established to contain insurrection and adopted newer and stricter ones; he systematized the persecutions and denunciations and had a special knack for choosing his agents and spies; he constantly disobeyed the moderate provisions which the Metropolis at times would decree in favor of the disloyal and took charge of their cases in the most arbitrary manner.⁴

Despite such oppression, the sentiment for independence survived in the kingdom and sparked a series of haphazard uprisings in San Salvador and Nicaragua at the end of 1811. Marure described these early revolts as premature, poorly planned, and incomplete: "honorable for their instigators, but unlucky for the nation."⁵ San Salvador, León, Granada, and the Belén conspiracy of 1813 launched a new generation of republican activists and martyrs, but little else. For Marure, the uprisings served only to increase the despotism of the colonial administra-

tion, which prevented Central America from achieving its rightful independence until Bustamante was recalled in 1818.

During the long Conservative domination of the region that followed the collapse of the Federation in 1838, Central Americans did not develop an alternative historiographical tradition to compete with that of Marure. Thus, with the return of the Liberals by 1871, Guatemalan historians either simply picked up where Marure left off—a prime example being Lorenzo Montúfar's *Reseña histórica de Centro-América*—or, when dealing with the preindependence decade, summarized and enlarged upon his conclusions. With the *Reforma* government's growing emphasis on public education and *historia patria*, the image of Bustamante as detailed in the *Bosquejo histórico* began to reach a wide audience.

Much as this second generation of Liberals tempered the fervent idealism of Marure's progressive age with a strong belief in the benefits of order, their negative impression of Bustamante was likewise qualified by acknowledgment of his particular gifts of command. One of the leaders of the Liberal Reforma, Miguel García Granados, described this period in his memoirs:

Ever since 1811 . . . there had been efforts and movements in favor of independence in San Salvador as well as Nicaragua, and perhaps these would have grown if not for the vigor, prudence, and skill of Captain General Bustamante, who had arrived at this time to take command in Guatemala. This governor was endowed with the qualities that, in a country that by the nature of its government should be ruled despotically, constitute the gift of command. Without being cruel, he knew how to inspire not only respect but also terror, and his vigilance was admirable. He knew, then, to cut off danger at its roots, and during the entire time his administration lasted, he maintained Guatemala at peace and bound to Spain.⁶

While García Granados emphasized the relative calm of the Bustamante years, implying that the great push for independence occurred only between 1818 and 1821, the official view of the independence period was more expansive. Other writers, notably the historians Agustín Gómez Carrillo and Rafael Aguirre Cinta, in a number of patriotic,

classroom-oriented works, took great pains to link the Kingdom of Guatemala to the great revolutionary movements of the early 1810s while reasserting Bustamante's role as the "Great Inhibitor of Independence."

Taking his cue from Marure, Gómez Carrillo declared in his *Estudio histórico sobre la América Central* that "[t]he desire for independence penetrated the Kingdom of Guatemala, the same as in Mexico, Colombia, and Peru, and was helped by the political emancipation of the United States as well as the prestige of the principles which the French Revolution proclaimed to the world."⁷ From his perspective, the Spanish imperial crisis of 1808 made separation from the metropolis a real possibility, and the natural consequences in the Americas were the 1810 Hidalgo revolt, the creation of revolutionary juntas in South America, and the Central American uprisings of 1811:

In 1811 Marshal González Saravia left his command . . . with General Bustamante y Guerra to take his place; but although the terror which this latest official instilled with his conduct was expected to intimidate the friends of liberty, such aspirations did not languish; rather, they became more noticeable and spread in all directions, with the struggles undertaken in Mexico and South America by the illustrious patriots Hidalgo and Morelos, San Martín, and so many other legendary heroes of the grand Hispano-American epic contributing to this.⁸

For Gómez Carrillo, the fight with Bustamante created a number of Central American heroes deserving of a place alongside the great emancipators of Spanish America: Manuel José Arce, José Matías Delgado, José Francisco Córdova, and José Francisco Barrundia, among others. In the years to follow they would all receive their just biographical attention from Central American historians as the pantheon of the *próceres* of independence began to fill.⁹

Along with the various promoters of independence from across the kingdom, the great moments in the Central American struggle against Spanish oppression received increased attention in the national histories of the late nineteenth century. Up to this point, El Salvador and Nicaragua could claim a monopoly on overt opposition to the crown. However, in his *Lecciones de historia general de Guatemala, desde los tiempos primitivos hasta nuestros días, arregladas para uso de las escuelas primarias y*

secondarias de esta república, Rafael Aguirre Cinta argued in favor of a kingdomwide movement of emancipation that included not only the uprisings of San Salvador, León, and Granada but those of Guatemala as well.

As in previous works, Aguirre Cinta emphasized the revolutionary links between Spanish America, the United States, and France. According to him, this movement finally reached Central America on 14 March 1811, the date Bustamante took office, and precipitated a “muffled storm [that] began to agitate the kingdom: the ideas of liberty were propagated secretly, and the seeds of independence began to grow.”¹⁰ In an almost complete paraphrase of Marure, Aguirre Cinta continued: “There was none better than Bustamante to delay the emancipation of Guatemala. Inflexible and suspicious, absolutist, vigilant, and reserved, he dictated as many measures as he thought necessary to contain the movements of insurrection; he encouraged denunciations, promoted espionage, took charge of the cases of treason, and, under any pretext, ordered imprisonments or exiles.”¹¹ In the face of this oppression, however, “superior souls, courageous during the misfortune of their country, and lofty spirits, who scorned danger, forged the first conspiracies that leaned towards the absolute independence of the kingdom.”¹²

According to Aguirre Cinta, the uprising at San Salvador led directly to the Belén conspiracy of December 1813 in Guatemala City. Whereas Marure had dismissed it as an event “famous because the supporters of Spain accorded it too grave a character and an importance which it really did not have,”¹³ by the end of the century this failed coup had become a fundamental part of the *historia patria* of Guatemala, serving as proof of Guatemala’s contribution to the independence movements on the isthmus. Ultimately, despite this difference of opinion, Aguirre Cinta concludes with Marure that “these attempts, all in vain at the time, served to embolden the spirits and give strength to the liberal ideals which were being squeezed by the circle of iron imposed by the terrifying regime of Bustamante.”¹⁴

By the end of the nineteenth century, a consensus had been reached in Central America regarding the essential nature of its struggle for independence. Drawing inspiration from the work of Marure, the established, official interpretation of the period described this process as an isthmus-wide movement with various manifestations throughout the

kingdom, as an heir to the great liberal democratic revolutions of the United States and France, and as a full-fledged cousin to the Mexican and South American independence struggles. Captain General Bustamante appeared as the primary deterrent to the early achievement of independence, with his repressive policies providing both a sense of unity of persecution among the Central American patriots and a crucible in which the subsequent, successful drive could be forged. As the twentieth century unfolded, this interpretation, as yet unchallenged, would develop in two ways. As exemplified by Antonio Batres Jáuregui's *La America Central ante la historia*, Bustamante scarcely deserved attention, becoming either the anonymous, tyrannical captain general or the only slightly more defined stereotype, "the one-eared Bustamante" aligned against the Central American patriots, those "sons of the *pueblo* who distinguished themselves most while braving removals from office, tortures, and even death."¹⁵

However, the greatest influence on modern independence historiography, as well as the most potent vehicle for the Bustamante myth, has proven to be Ramón Salazar's 1928 study, *Historia de veintiún años*. Significant for the detail with which the two decades prior to independence are described, this work reinvigorated the Marure tradition through a systematic execration of Bustamante's role as governor. For Salazar, Bustamante's arrival was a "fatal moment" for Central America that led directly to the outbreak of rebellion:

Bustamante had been governing scarcely eight months and there already reigned in the country a muffled displeasure with him. Absolutist from birth, a sailor and soldier by occupation, a despot on board a ship as well as on land, with an imposing figure and a haughty character, he was disgusted that pro-independence creoles were making the town council into a type of forum where not only the future of the colony was being discussed but also that of the entire Monarchy.¹⁶

This intense anticreole sentiment on the part of the governor, Salazar argues, turned progressive, liberal, and loyal Americans and their institutions against Spain, a reaction that spawned the subsequent creole uprisings in San Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. What could have been a "Regime of Liberty" under the enlightened Constitution of 1812

became “The Terror,” as Bustamante began cracking down on open political discourse: “The letter of the Constitution was a ridiculous falsehood for Bustamante. A man totally without law more than one guided by his whims, he had his hand on the throat of the *patria*, hoping to strangle it upon its first breath and kill off any signs of life.”¹⁷

With the *Historia de veintiún años*, the image of Bustamante as the ogre of independence reached its most perfect manifestation. In much the same manner that the words and perspective of Marure could be traced across the nineteenth century, Salazar became the dean of twentieth-century independence historiography in Central America. As it turned out, the most fervent promoter of his interpretation emerged very quickly. With the work of J. Antonio Villacorta Calderón, the Bustamante myth became even more firmly entrenched in the historical identity of Guatemala.

Villacorta, in his *Historia de la Capitanía General de Guatemala*, explained the independence struggle as a long conflict between the allies of the municipal council of Guatemala City and the “arbitrary and despotic” Spanish officials represented by the captain general. Thus he stated, “The highly patriotic conduct of the Guatemalan Ayuntamiento between 1809 and 1810 was known and commented upon throughout the rest of the kingdom, which was governed by intendants who, in imitation of the extreme position of the captain general, saw reasons for mistrust everywhere and persecuted those who showed the smallest signs of discontent.”¹⁸ With this statement, Villacorta aimed to preempt the claims of San Salvador and Nicaragua to be the progenitors of Central American independence. With the ayuntamiento promoting the sentiment of liberty as early as 1809, and with the “evil influence” of Bustamante ensuring that in the capital “persecutions were the order of the day” from 1811 forward, Guatemala could now honorably claim an important, precipitating role in the liberation movement and still explain away its subsequent inactivity.¹⁹

In this context, Villacorta argued that 1813 was a “year of proof for Guatemala.” With the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan uprisings suppressed, numerous patriots in prison, and Bustamante prepared to “make use of all his power,” leading Guatemalan creoles began to plan a revolution in the Belén convent.²⁰ Placing this conspiracy on the level of the revolutionary developments in San Salvador and Nicaragua, Villacorta made

Belén the culmination of the first phase of the independence movement in the kingdom, with the result that “[t]he iron hand of Governor Bustamante weighed unbearably upon the creoles of the Captaincy General of Guatemala: he had weakened the subversive movements of San Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, he had the leading authors of those first buds of liberty in the prison at court, and his followers entertained themselves with the extremely cruel treatment he gave to the convicted.”²¹

For both Salazar and Villacorta, Bustamante was guilty of three overarching crimes: creating, or at least promoting, intense animosity between creoles and Spaniards; suppressing Guatemala’s best chance for a continued relationship with Spain, the Constitution of 1812; and developing the framework of repression that kept the various expressions of creole discontent from becoming successful revolutions.²² Marure’s implication, assumed but never overtly presented by either historian, that this repression guaranteed a more powerful anti-Spanish sentiment following Bustamante’s departure in 1818, would be explored in a number of influential works written at midcentury, including Sofonías Salvatierra’s *Contribución a la historia de Centroamérica* and Arturo Valdés Oliva’s *Caminos y luchas por la independencia*.

To a great degree, the Salvatierra study reworked the ground already prepared by Marure and Salazar, presenting Bustamante as a heavy-handed, implacable tyrant who smothered Central America’s early bid for independence. The uprisings of 1811, 1813, and 1814 receive intense treatment, as do the rounds of persecutions, deportations, confiscations, torture, and imprisonment that followed. For Salvatierra, however, there was no question that these persecutions “produced as a necessary reaction the absolute conviction, which had long been forming, that the kingdom’s government should pass into the hands of the creoles. And the extent of this awareness reached such a level that one cry was enough to make the weapons of conquest fall from the royalist hands that held them on the fifteenth of September 1821.”²³ In other words, Salvatierra argued that the counterinsurgency policies favored by the Bustamante regime actually helped in the propagation and consolidation of independence sentiment by precipitating a strong reaction among otherwise hesitant patriots. Valdés Oliva would take this position one step further.

Like his predecessors, Valdés Oliva viewed Bustamante as “despotic, cruel, vengeful, and deceitful,” arguing that the Spaniard was chosen

specially by his superiors for command in America because of these qualities.²⁴ He explained:

When writing about the independence of Central America it is of interest to make an account of the principal motives for such a great event. As a result, we will describe with broad strokes the administrations of the last three captains general, and, with somewhat more references and details, perhaps, that of Bustamante y Guerra, due to three very special circumstances: because he appears in our times with unique characteristics and made himself quite notorious with his harshness . . . [;] because the seven years of Bustamante's regime was the period of the greatest political unrest in Spain and America; and because there is not the least danger in affirming that, due in part to these events but more to the drastic measures of the captain general, this age was for the Kingdom of Guatemala the period of gestation of the new nation, with his repression serving as the impulse for its birth.²⁵

Valdés Oliva supports this assertion with a recitation of the well-established pattern of events: Central America, along with the rest of the empire, awoke to the "splendid sunrise of liberty" by 1808 and began to put an end to the interminable "days of oppression"; some areas had early successes, while in others, most notably Mexico and the Kingdom of Guatemala, "the patriots were sacrificed in the armed struggle without the unvarying rhythm of revolution being detained"; the repression of the Bustamante regime increased as provincial uprisings occurred, though its greatest focus was on the capital, Guatemala City; and, while he could have searched for some accommodation through the Cádiz constitution, instead Bustamante's "irritability increased and he put a lot of effort into ridiculing the law."²⁶ In the end, this process led to the sustained period of abuses against the people of Central America that "compelled the patriots to accelerate their plans to free the colony from Spain. Nothing the king did to alleviate the conditions of the kingdom's towns in the days ahead succeeded in altering the conduct of those who longed for liberty as the only solution for the people. The dictatorship of Bustamante was a powerful factor in this."²⁷

The Bustamante myth, created by Marure and developed over more than a century by a long list of the most influential historians of Central

America as an integral part of the regional independence epic, remained essentially unchallenged until the 1960s. By that time, however, more systematic historical methodology, the waning of the Liberal tradition among politicians and intellectuals, and the first signs of interest in the period from foreign scholars, produced significant alterations to the established paradigm. The preliminary revision was led by the Salvadoran historian Rodolfo Barón Castro in his 1961 biographical essay *José Matías Delgado y el movimiento insurgente de 1811*.

While focusing on the role of Delgado in the first significant Central American uprising of the independence period, Barón Castro also addressed squarely the difficult situation facing the Spanish authorities at the time. According to him, the split between leading creoles and the crown took place before the arrival of Bustamante, with unscrupulous Spanish officials like the soon-to-be-deposed Salvadoran intendant José Gutiérrez and institutions such as the *Tribunal de Fidelidad*, established under Bustamante's predecessor, serving as the leading causes of discontent. Noting that opinions on the captain general depended on one's point of view, Barón Castro felt that the time had come for a less passionate perspective. His Bustamante, in contrast to previous portraits, was "a studious and learned man, a proven patriot, and an effective officer," who was tough, determined, but not inclined to violence.²⁸ "[H]e understood," wrote Barón Castro, "that his strictest obligation was to maintain the territory under his command free from unrest. . . . It is logical that the patriots tried in every manner possible to limit his authority and agitate against the measures he took. This was the most basic dialectic of the struggle. But they found it very difficult to incite him to actions not in accordance with clemency or even less with honor."²⁹ In dramatic contrast to earlier studies, Barón Castro painted Bustamante as a skillful and successful politician, whose role as governor of the Kingdom of Guatemala naturally conflicted with many of the positions taken by the creole autonomists and patriots, but who never ruled tyrannically in preserving order. Instead of looking back on the period secure in the certainty of independence and the unanimity of popular sentiment for it, Barón Castro established 1811 as the first of many years in which Central Americans would be divided over their visions of the future.

Hubert H. Bancroft had provided the first significant history of Cen-

tral America for an English-speaking audience in the 1880s, yet his research on the period of independence proved little more than a paraphrase of Marure and remained unchallenged for more than seventy years.³⁰ As with Barón Castro's work, the first English-language revisionist account of independence was made in a biography of one of the period's central figures. Unencumbered by the weight of the Liberal legacy, Louis Bumgartner's 1963 study *José del Valle of Central America* dramatically altered the historical image of José de Bustamante.

Drawing on substantial primary research, Bumgartner sketched an outline of the independence period and Bustamante's actions that tended to reinforce the conclusions of Barón Castro. Thus, Bumgartner found that the creole/peninsular rivalry and the climate of suspicion so often blamed on the hard-line policies of Bustamante were consequences of an inevitable conflict over governing philosophies that began in 1808 with the collapse of the Spanish monarchy.³¹ Upon arriving in the colony in 1811, the year following the outbreak of armed insurrection in Mexico and South America, Bustamante was faced with the reality that accommodating the creole desire for autonomy would appear treasonous to Spain, while preserving the status of Central America in the empire would provoke cries of tyranny. Described as a "steadfast royal servant," the captain general demonstrated his loyalty to the crown by refusing all attempts to share his authority with the creoles, though his early policies could fairly be described as moderate in light of the context. In fact, reversing the argument of Salazar and Villacorta, Bumgartner argued that the Guatemala City ayuntamiento deliberately provoked Bustamante and set out to make him appear arbitrary and tyrannical in order to further the autonomist (though not the independence) position.³² With the return of absolutism in 1814, Bustamante personified an empire that was divided against itself; however, according to Bumgartner, this did not detract from his strength as a governor or his skill in keeping the peace during the seven critical years of his administration. In the end, Bumgartner concluded, Bustamante's tenure had little effect on the path taken by Central America toward independence.

If Rodolfo Barón Castro and Louis Bumgartner indirectly paved the way for the modern reevaluation of the Bustamante myth with their studies of José Matías Delgado and José del Valle, in 1971 the Guatemalan historian Clemente Marroquín Rojas made a frontal assault, with his

Historia de Guatemala, on the fundamental assumption about Central America's role in the Spanish American struggle for independence that had been nurtured by nationalist historians since the 1830s:

We have noted that Guatemala did not suffer destructive revolutionary shocks. The war was devastating in Mexico, New Granada, Venezuela, Chile, in all the Spanish dependencies; however, our Captaincy General registered only two rebellions by small groups and two conspiracies with no lasting consequences. Governor Bustamante is criticized for his firmness and active vigilance, but considering the situation that surrounded the Kingdom this is unfair. All leaders should behave like Bustamante, with the exception of those who conspire against the authority in whose service they govern, as Gainza would do, and in the end Iturbide as well.³³

Having reduced the colony's contribution to regional liberation from Spain to two insignificant uprisings and a pair of failed plots, Marroquín Rojas continued his revision of the Bustamante image by turning to the details of those signs of discontent: "Bustamante y Guerra is accused of initiating a period of abuses and arbitrary acts, both in the Kingdom's capital and the provincial centers, a tyranny that gave rise to the preliminary uprisings for emancipation. Nevertheless, the coup in San Salvador, which did not result from independence aspirations or from the supposed tyranny of the governor, demonstrates that this individual was not as fierce and terrible as he is made out to be."³⁴

As evidence for this perspective, Marroquín Rojas cited certain facts about the handling of the rebellions that had been either ignored or manipulated by earlier historians. He saw the 1811 Salvadoran uprising as primarily directed against the unpopular Intendant Gutiérrez (a not uncommon expression of discontent at the time), with Bustamante still enjoying somewhat of a honeymoon in his relations with the colonial elite. In fact, following news from San Salvador, Bustamante went to the ayuntamiento of Guatemala City for advice, ultimately choosing two of its members to mediate a peace and replace the deposed intendant, an act that "refutes all that literature which paints Bustamante y Guerra as a terrible governor." Similarly, in Nicaragua, Bustamante confirmed the León protestors' candidate for intendant, thereby proving that he did not act "like the ogre that historians have asserted, but rather as an able poli-