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## COMMENTARY

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Mr. Potash has clearly demonstrated the paucity of material in English which might come under the general rubric of “Synthesis of Mexican History”; and he also poses some interesting questions in that field. I would hold that such a synthesis is impossible within the confines of any one book or two, and that furthermore it is impossible at the present moment in view of the lack of sufficient solid monographic material which could be used to construct such a history. The idea of tying together the multitudinous social, political, economic and intellectual threads, from pre-Hispanic times to the present, to construct a flowing whole is enormously attractive; but I would shudder to think of undertaking that monumental task. Mr. Potash has very kindly included my most recent book in his discussion of syntheses, and has quite correctly indicated that it does not obviate the necessity for other and more comprehensive works. I would take issue with him only on one point: my work is not a synthesis and was not intended to be. It was merely an attempt to follow a few highly selected themes through history in order to explain a relatively modern Mexican phenomenon. A synthesis must be much more than that.

But at the moment we do not have the basic tools with which to work. Until we have, for example, a much more sophisticated view of the actual pressures, movements and conditions during the age of Santa Anna, we can scarcely construct a synthesis of that period. How can we tie together the various aspects of the Mexican society of that age, and relate those to conditions of an earlier age, when to date no one has given an adequate explanation of Santa Anna's power? When we have only a vague notion of economic patterns? When we have an even more vague idea of the actual conditions under which the great majority of the society lives? Until we know with greater precision the interplay of the various factors in the society, until we can see that age much more clearly, we can neither develop a synthesis of that age or synthesize that period with those before and after. The same might be said for many other periods.

In his concluding paragraphs, Mr. Potash suggests an approach which I find much more fruitful than that of attempting to put everything together within the covers of one book. Whether the themes he suggests are the most important may be debated, perhaps, but the thematic perception could lead to some excellent works which would give greater depth of comprehension. Mr. Costeloe's researches and publications, for example, show quite clearly that the general assumptions of the past with regard to the Church may well be questioned. A thorough examination of that institution, clarifying both the actual role of that institution and the perceived role from the beginning of the conquest until the present, would be of inestimable value. This type of “synthesis”, in which many

aspects of the society become subordinate to the principal theme, is manageable.

Another manageable form of synthesis is that of periodization, in which a significant era is studied in depth in order to determine the interaction of the various forces within the society, to indicate whether the institutions are viable or static, to see whether there is "movement", and if so in what direction. This has been, perhaps, the form most often used in the past, but very few scholars have been able to achieve the goal of true synthesis within the period. A conscious effort to synthesize might well be the most profitable approach.