

Book Review

– *Urban Indians in a Silver City: Zacatecas Mexico, 1546-1810*, by Dana Velasco Murillo. Stanford University Press, 2016.

Historian Dana Velasco Murillo's *Urban Indians in a Silver City: Zacatecas Mexico, 1546-1810* is a much needed revision of mining history in the Spanish Indies, a narrative long dominated by the deeds of Spanish mine owners and merchants. With impeccable archival research and utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the author shows precisely why we can't understand this history without including the experiences of indigenous men, women, and children so integral to the silver mining industry and to the evolution of the city itself. This is no easy task, since, unlike the Central Valley of Mexico, documents written by native people in New Galicia are few and far between. However, by drawing together an extensive array of Spanish sources, the author pieces together a lively history of urban indigeneity during the colonial period. With a *longue durée* approach, Velasco Murillo masterfully traces some 250 years of indigenous peoples as settlers, laborers, and political actors in colonial Zacatecas. The author's bright narrative voice moves us through the general arc of migration and settlement, community cohesion, and the maturation of indigenous socio-political organizations.

In the first chapter, the author identifies the conditions that drew large groups of indigenous peoples to Zacatecas and work in the mines in the sixteenth century. Those who came voluntarily were attracted by the promise of paid work and exemptions from tribute and labor drafts. With these newcomers came the establishment of "semiautonomous neighborhoods" (19), spaces where indigenous peoples were relatively free to live lives of their own design. In the second and third chapters we see how, once established, multi-ethnic indigenous peoples organized themselves as a unified group by embracing Spanish-style sociopolitical identities and institutions. Once indigenous settlements were established on the outskirts of the Spanish *traza*, confraternities also emerged. Catholic mutual aid societies and Spanish-style political organizations created the means for recreate a self-designed life for themselves in this new place. The fourth chapter dives into a context wherein indigenous culture

was maintained and even strengthened in spite of—or perhaps even due to—constant interethnic contact. The final and fifth chapter provides an especially insightful view of how natives met new challenges born of mining busts and booms, as well as new socio-economic and political realities due to the Bourbon Reforms.

The contributions of this book are many; the author does heavy lifting in a single monograph, particularly if we keep in mind that reconstructing histories of native peoples in this time and place is rife with difficulties. Three major arguments distinguish this work: first, that native people were indeed present in colonial Zacatecas. The author repopulates this supposedly “Spanish” city with the presence of the obscured yet majority population of native peoples. Second, she shows that as opposed to passively suffering the hand that colonial rule had dealt them, native peoples were active participants in the colonial world. For example, we learn how and why many purposefully migrated to Zacatecas and chose to work in the mines. While cruel exploitations are acknowledged, it is the “active choices” of these people that occupy the author (13). Finally, Velasco Murillo demonstrates that the adoption and adaptation of Spanish-style civic identities such as *indio* and *vecino*, as well as structures of the dominant culture’s political institutions did not eliminate, but actually ensured, the survival of indigenous culture/heritage. Many native people utilized the term *indio* as a way to mark themselves distinct from Spaniards, garnering the rights and privileges associated with the category. At the same time, they used the term to foster an “urban group identity” among native peoples of distinct ethnic backgrounds. While this book is firmly grounded in historical methods, the focus on the construction of indigenous identity, and critique of the idea of “indigenous authenticity” also places it squarely in Critical Indigenous Studies. For its method and scope this is an exemplary source for graduate seminars, and is indispensable for scholars interested in the history of northern Mexico, indigenous movements, urban indigenities, and comparative indigenities.

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