

Colonial Latin American Historical Review

Volume 3

Issue 1 *Volume 3, Number 1 (Winter 1994)*

Article 8

12-1-1994

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Recommended Citation

Henige, David. "Daniel T. Reff, Disease, Depopulation, and Cultural Change in Northwestern New Spain, 1518-1764." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 3, 1 (1994): 95. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol3/iss1/8>

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Book Reviews

When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846. By Ramón A. Gutiérrez. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. xxxi + 424 pp. Tables, bibliography, notes, index. \$52.50 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)

In *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*, Ramón A. Gutiérrez purports to have discovered a "window" from which to view internally the vanquished Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. He laments that previous histories of the region have been written from the perspective of victorious invaders, without taking into account the rich folklore of the native inhabitants.

Highly critical of the research methodology of traditional borderlands historians, who supposedly bore superficially into the archival terrain, Gutiérrez, like an experimental wildcat operator, reportedly drilled deeper and at a slant to tap heretofore unknown and neglected sources of information related to the heritage of the Pueblo cultures. The outcome is a blend of heights and depressions.

Essentially, the author's thesis proposes that marriage in Pueblo society fostered inequality. Using the sixteenth century as a comparative base, he examined the coordinates of gift-giving, relationship patterns between generations and between the sexes, and the symbolism of gender and sex. For the seventeenth century, Gutiérrez relied heavily on anthropological and sociological sources from which he extracted data to construct "theoretical grids" to explain the transformation of "paleolithic hunters and gatherers. . . into neolithic horticulturists and herders," and further to determine how inequality crept into "cultures where lineage modes of production" dominated. Whenever the author deviated from the bedrock of archival documentation and ventured into theoretical marshlands, his composition suffered loss of clarity.

In selecting a provocative title for his study, Gutiérrez predetermined the outcome: whereas the Corn Mothers represented the idyllic environment of the Pueblo people, the invasion of the missionary friars with their strict doctrine connoted destruction of the native theology, which rendered the inhabitants virtually defenseless to alien exploitation and greed. Following the narrow pathway of such logic, the conclusion is inescapable: the intolerant Spanish version of Christianity evicted the benevolent Corn Mothers from their proud domain.

Possibly the most appealing passage in Gutiérrez's ponderous narrative—more from the prism of creativity than historical accuracy—per-

tained to the origin of the Corn Mothers. According to the legend, underneath the earth at a place called Shipapu, two females were born. Presumably their parents were Thought Woman and Uschtsiti. Surrounded by darkness, Thought Woman gave to each female a gift from her father, baskets filled with seeds and fetishes of all plants and animals that were to exist in the world. She instructed the sisters to plant four pine seeds and then to use the trees as ladders to climb to the light. One tree grew so majestic that its limbs poked a hole through the crust of the earth. Just before the sisters began their ascent, Thought Woman taught them to praise the sun with song and prayer. Thought Woman named one of the females Iatiku whom she designated Mother of the Corn; the other she called Nautsiti, Mother of the Sun Clan.

Thus, with outstretched hands they practiced the ritual of proffering sacred cornmeal and pollen. In gratitude for the gift of light, they intoned the song of creation and gently blew the sacred offerings to the sky, praying for happiness, long life, and success in all endeavors.

When the sisters reached the earth's surface, they found the terrain soggy and not ready for planting. As the sun appeared in full splendor, it revealed to them the four cardinal directions, the earth below and the four skies above. Amid a multi-faceted ambience, the corn-planting followed.

Gutiérrez evidently worked so closely with his data that occasionally he wandered beyond the facts. For instance, he asserted that prior to 1680 the Franciscans in New Mexico had established a theocracy. Admittedly, the friars viewed the province as their exclusive missionary field, but they never enjoyed total jurisdictional authority over temporal and ecclesiastical affairs, as the Jesuits did in Baja California. At best, the Franciscans in New Mexico shared authority in the management of the Pueblo missions with royal officials in the gubernatorial palace.

Apparently the author relished finding isolated flaws in the lifestyle of the colonial clergy. In discussing the issue of whether the Franciscans openly coveted martyrdom in the conduct of their evangelization, he concluded: "For the friars, then, the means justified their ends" (p. 130). While it was true that not all missionaries attained the crown of martyrdom, longevity in the field was not tantamount to failure. Notwithstanding the massive accumulation of data extracted from primary sources, Gutiérrez neither understood the purpose of evangelization nor the human interaction of the Franciscans with secular authorities. Somewhere in the verbiage, the sensational sub-themes of marriage, sexuality, and power in the Pueblo society lost their glitter.

When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away will obviously attract the praise of revisionists who abhor the implications of the Columbus encounter. Such accolades to the contrary, the author performed meritorious service by provoking scholars into rethinking old values of the Boltonian

school of historiography. Latin Americanists periodically need a jolt like the one Gutiérrez provided to motivate them into reinforcing the literature with balanced contributions of research and composition.

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Conquest of the Sierra: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Oaxaca. By John K. Chance. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989. xvii + 233 pp. Maps, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$37.50 cloth.)

The vast reaches of the colonial *alcaldía mayor* of Villa Alta were joined by little more than their rugged topography before the *Audiencia* of Mexico imposed administrative unity on the mountainous landscape northeast of the valley of Oaxaca. Populations speaking five principal indigenous languages—Chinantec, Mixe, and the three Sierra Zapotec language groups, Nexitzo, Cajonos and Bixanos—inhabited lands ranging from the hot river basins stretching into Veracruz to the cool rain forests of the western mountains. While ethnographers penetrating these remote villages have found rich cultural resources among the less assimilated descendants of the five groups, little effort was extended towards understanding their historical development. That even the isolated Villa Alta district Indians had not escaped the pressures of the world economy was made clear in Brian Hamnett's 1971 study of late colonial cochineal production in Oaxaca.

In the present book John Chance has made masterful use of the Spanish documentary record to address issues of demographic, economic, and sociopolitical change across the ethnically diverse communities administered from Villa Alta. While adding to southern Mexico's still small roster of ethnohistorically examined regions is in itself a worthwhile contribution, Chance rightly addresses his study to two broader issues, both related to the region's potential for human exploitation. First of all, with the exception of a few substantial lowland towns in the northern part of the district, most of the mountainous terrain could not support large, nucleated settlements. Indeed, the fact that the modern Sierra has witnessed widespread emigration due to demographic pressure on a limited agricultural base makes it all the more unlikely that the 1520 population could have been three times greater, as Chance surprisingly concludes from Cook and Borah's high census projections. He demonstrates more convincingly from other documentary data that the small, often warring communities of the sixteenth-century Sierra are best