

Colonial Latin American Historical Review

Volume 6

Issue 2 *Volume 6, Issue 2, Spring 1997*

Article 5

4-1-1997

Gilbert C. Din and John E. Harkins, The New Orleans Cabildo: Colonial Louisiana's First City Government, 1769-1803

William S. Coker

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr>

Recommended Citation

Coker, William S.. "Gilbert C. Din and John E. Harkins, The New Orleans Cabildo: Colonial Louisiana's First City Government, 1769-1803." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 6, 2 (1997): 204. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol6/iss2/5>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colonial Latin American Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

The New Orleans Cabildo: Colonial Louisiana's First City Government, 1769-1803. By Gilbert C. Din and John E. Harkins. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996. xiii + 330 pp. Illustrations, map, charts, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.)

This is one of the most complete and thorough *cabildo* studies with which this reviewer is familiar. The New Orleans Cabildo only existed from 1769 to 1803, and writing the history of an institution that lasted a mere thirty-four years enables one to discuss it in far more detail than writing about one that lasted for several hundred. Moreover, the ten-volume *Actas del Cabildo* (records of the *cabildo*) and related Spanish colonial government records of New Orleans and Louisiana were available to the authors. Thirteen doctoral dissertations and three master's theses, as well as an extensive number of books and articles, also provided much information on the subject.

This study begins with an excellent overview of Spanish New Orleans, 1766-1803, followed by a good discussion of the background of the New Orleans Cabildo. A detailed review ensues of *cabildo* officials and employees and of the relationship of the *cabildo* with the provincial government, the intendant, the Church, and the Spanish legal system. Since the *cabildo's* primary financial responsibility was to pay for the administration of the city government of New Orleans, municipal finances are thoroughly discussed, from taxation and slavery to tavern and dance hall regulations. The authors' discussion of medicine and health regulation provides good insight into New Orleans' Spanish hospitals. Other topics include public works, land grants, and building regulations, as well as ceremonial functions. The bibliography provides extensive primary and secondary sources.

As in the case of most *cabildos*, there were the usual problems between the governor and other *cabildo* officials. Given the fact, however, that the governor of Spanish Louisiana also assumed jurisdiction over Spanish West Florida for some years after 1779-1781, it is obvious that he was responsible for a much larger area than just Spanish New Orleans and Louisiana. There is some question as to just how much authority the *cabildo* exercised outside New Orleans, but it clearly enjoyed some jurisdiction there. Another major problem the *cabildo* encountered concerned the long delay in receiving approval from Spain for some of its projects; several *cabildo* proposals in fact never received royal sanction.

This extremely readable and well-documented study of the New Orleans Cabildo is a significant contribution not only to the history of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands but to colonial Latin American history as well.

William S. Coker
Professor Emeritus
University of West Florida