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Women In The Crucible Of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis Of Spanish American Society, 1500-1600 (Diálogos)



Synopsis

The evidence of women in the Americas is conspicuously absent from most historical syntheses of the Spanish invasion and early colonization of the New World. Karen Powers's ethnohistoric account is the first to focus on non-military incidents during this transformative period. As she shows, native women's lives were changed dramatically. *Women in the Crucible of Conquest* uncovers the activities and experiences of women, shows how the intersection of gender, race, and class shaped their lives, and reveals the sometimes hidden ways they were integrated into social institutions. Powers's premise is that women were demoted in status across race and class and that some women resisted this trend. She describes the ways women made spaces for themselves in colonial society, in the economy, and in convents as well as other religious arenas, such as witchcraft. She shows how violence and intimidation were used to control women and writes about the place of sexual relations, especially miscegenation, in the forging of colonial social and economic structures. From Karen Vieira Powers's Introduction: "During the colonization process, indigenous women suffered, perhaps, the most precipitous decline in status of any group of colonial women. For this reason, and because they were numerically superior to all other women, I have chosen to make them the heart of this book. Nevertheless, the work also treats Spanish women, racially mixed women (mestizas, mulattas, zambas, etc.), and African women."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

""Women in the Crucible of Conquest" is a well-researched and very readable account of gender

and class in the Spanish Colonial world." . . . highly readable and accessible. . . "Women in the Crucible of Conquest" provides a valuable synthesis of the literature on sixteenth-century Spanish America and is sure to be a welcome addition to introductory and survey courses on colonial Latin America and women in Latin America."

The first history of women's contributions to the Spanish colonization of the New World.

This book is more of a textbook. It was very informational, but also written in a very dry style with very long paragraphs.

The Spanish conquest of the southern hemisphere of the New World disrupted the "gender parallelism and gender complementarity" in the Native American societies. Associate professor of Latin American history at Arizona State U.-Tempe, Powers describes and analyzes how native women of all classes, tribes, and varied capabilities and ingenuity adapted to the patriarchal culture imposed on them by the Spanish conquerors. Virtually all of the women were forced into certain positions resulting in a "demotion in status." Marriage, slavery, employment, and prostitution were among these. But in many cases--Powers's main topic of interest--women tried to varying degrees of success to keep or regain the equal, respected status they had in their Native American cultures. For example, some women became landowners. And the meztizo children from all types of relations between the women and the Spanish conquerors had a central role in modifying, though not changing the fundamental patriarchal structure, of the society. Powers moves the past couple of decades of feminist-motivated scholarship and development of perspective into this relatively untouched area of the changes the Spanish conquest forced on Native American women in particular.

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