
REVIEWS

Recent Collections of Latin American Historical Documents

Kenneth Mills and William B. Taylor, eds. *Colonial Spanish America: A Documentary History*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1998. 372p.

June E. Hahner, ed. *Women through Women's Eyes: Latin American Women in Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1998. 184p.

William H. Beezley and Judith Ewell, eds. *The Human Tradition in Modern Latin America*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1997. 277p.

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For perhaps fifteen years, Scholarly Resources has published with great success imprints devoted exclusively to Latin American history. Although this press brings out various types of books, its most characteristic format is an edited collection of reprinted essays, original contributions, or documentary sources, often touching on an aspect of social history broadly defined. The three books discussed here are certainly of this type. Mills and Taylor skillfully put together the most distinctive compilation of original documents on and from colonial Spanish America yet assembled, accompanied by a select number of interpretive essays by other authors. Hahner brought together selections from nineteenth-century women's travelers accounts from Latin America that comment about the lives of women there. Finally, Beezley and Ewell collected original essays on representative individuals, usually from non-elite groups, from a two-volume set on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This single volume is a condensed version covering the two centuries, thus creating a short work very suitable for courses on the national period.

Colonial Spanish America is designed to serve as a secondary reader in courses on the colonial period, complementing whatever textbook is assigned. But it is

very substantial both in its length — consisting of nearly 350 large pages packed with text — and in the character and complexity of most of the documents. The volume contains 50 entries, 29 of which are original sources; another thirteen are composed of visual representations from the period — generally with explanatory or interpretive text, and eight are excellent reprinted articles on important issues. The documents are often excerpted from extensive texts. Some of the larger works represented by selections are the Huarochiri Manuscript, the 1524 Colloquium between Aztec holy men and Spanish Franciscans, José de Acosta's *De Procuranda*, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, and Concolorcorvo's *El lazarillo de ciegos caminantes*.

The collection is divided into four parts, the first on the precontact worlds of the Spaniards and the native peoples of the Americas plus the era of discovery, and then one for each of the colonial centuries. However, following accepted historical chronology, Mills and Taylor extend “the long seventeenth century” until 1750, with the short eighteenth century beginning then and lasting until the achievement of independence around 1820. A cursory survey of the original documents indicates that seventeen originated in Mexico, fifteen in Peru, five in Spain itself, and two in Argentina. Thus Chile, Upper Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Central America, and the Caribbean are unrepresented by any contributions. Or put in terms fashionable among historians, they concentrate on the central zones to the virtual exclusion of the more numerous peripheral colonies.

The collection is very innovative and is pedagogically oriented, exposing undergraduates to the variety of sources available to scholars. The second selection, for instance, displays and discusses the royal tunics worn by the Inca rulers. The fourth considers the Aztec Stone of the Five Eras, commonly termed the Aztec Sun Stone. The ninth, tenth, and eleventh treat early woodcuts and drawings of native peoples. A healthy representation of other paintings, sculpture, altar pieces, cathedral designs, and the like, are gathered in each of the book's major sections. The thirteenth entry offers a segment from the town council minutes of the Indian community of Tlaxcala from 1553. Already by this early date numerous native peoples of central Mexico had learned to record their own languages using the European alphabet. Consequently, we enjoy an abundance of documentation composed by the natives of Mexico themselves with minimal cultural interference or mediation by Spaniards.

As to the themes addressed, seventeen entries speak to religious issues, fifteen to Indian matters, six to the system of governance, four to the nature of colonial society (especially ethnicity), three to geographical or urban descriptions, three more to artistic concerns, and only one to aspects of personal or family life. This

distribution is perhaps more understandable given that the most recent books by both authors address elements of the Church and religion in colonial life, with the impact of the institution on the native population being major concerns in both of the studies.¹

The collection, though, omits some important aspects of colonial Spanish American history as it has been studied by scholars over the past couple of decades. Most notable is the scanty coverage of social history, for the volume hardly considers social structures or patterns of mobility. The entire Spanish social world in the Americas, substantially urban in orientation, is ignored. Similarly disregarded is the vibrant and complex colonial economy, with such dimensions as overseas and provincial commerce, mining, processing, and agriculture and animal husbandry of virtually every variety. The employment of great numbers of people of African descent in Spanish America as slaves on plantations and in mines and cities is scarcely represented. However, the presence of mulattoes and of communities of escaped slaves is well noted. Entry 40, for example, covers the official recognition of a community of runaway slaves who had resisted the authorities' repeated efforts to recapture them. Also overlooked is the migration of large numbers of native peoples to colonial cities and the process of acculturation that they there experienced.

Even the numerous documents on the native peoples say little about the cultural process by which Catholicism, or at least important components of it, were incorporated into their cultures. The editors' examples are more likely to be works by nonparticipant observers arguing about why the native peoples were not more orthodox or, on the other hand, defending the evangelizing policy of the Church. Nor do they examine the impact of epidemics and European material culture on the native way of life.

The undergraduate reader's appreciation of the issues that contemporary scholars examine and the sources and approaches they utilize is stimulated by the superb set of interpretive essays that are distributed throughout the four major sections. The very first of these — Olivia Harris on the subject of perceptions of "otherness" in the early encounters (she largely discounts them) — is representative of the importance of their themes and the sophistication of the analysis. Others treat such subjects as indigenous historical memory, priests and Indian rebellions, and a late colonial urban riot.

Whatever shortcomings this collection of documents may possess, it constitutes the most diverse and illuminating set yet assembled on colonial Spanish America. The authors' introductions to the individual selections themselves often amount to fresh, penetrating, independent essays. Mills and Taylor have succeeded

brilliantly in combining highly useful original sources intended for the serious undergraduate with a scholarly apparatus and commentary of the highest order. Lastly, many of the documents seem quite suitable for courses on colonial Spanish American culture or literature, and not just strictly history.

June Hahner's edition of selections from women's travel accounts in nineteenth-century Latin America is rather conventional compared to Mills and Taylor's innovative collection, but it is no less effective in achieving its aims. Hahner systematically examined the numerous accounts of travel written by women to evaluate their views on the character and activities of women from that part of the world. The bias of these writers was towards the highest social strata, since they personally generally circulated within these groups. Nevertheless, some of the better accounts devote considerable space to the lives of lower-class women, *mestizas*, those of African extraction, and Native Americans. It is in their discussions of these social elements that the prejudices of the travelers most readily flow. As they know and understand these people the least, they turn easily to their entrenched attitudes and make unjustified assumptions and judgments.

The book begins with a satisfying sixteen-page introduction by the author that is followed by the ten selections, which cover nearly 170 pages. Hahner concludes the volume with a comprehensive list of "Nineteenth-Century Female Travel Accounts of Latin America" and a selected list of the scholarly literature on Latin American women in the same period. Most women who traveled to Latin America came to either Mexico or Brazil, and this compilation of readings reflects this trend. At least four accounts emphasize Brazil and another two Mexico. Chile, Peru, Paraguay, Cuba, and Guatemala are also represented.

Roughly the first half of the selections cover the early part of the century — of course, it is effectively the achievement of independence by the various new nations of Latin America around 1820 that enables such travels in the first place, and these are easily the more interesting. The second half on the late nineteenth century are less exceptional in their findings, as Latin America overall has become rather better known in the European world and also much more accessible through the development of railroads and steamships. Further, in that era massive numbers of European immigrants flocked to certain areas of the continent.

Some women writers ventured to Latin America as wives of their diplomat or scientist husbands. But others came as schoolteachers or as Protestant missionaries. And Hahner notes that some traveled to find venues of artistic expression, to recover their health, to achieve self-fulfillment, or to pursue economic betterment or recovery. She reports that accounts by men outnumber those by women by a ratio of ten to one in this period.

As noted by the editor, women's accounts could take the form of autobiographies, diaries, or letters. Male travelers often paid considerable attention to the journey itself, noting the hardships they overcame. Their female counterparts rarely addressed the character of the trip itself, seeing it as a necessary obstacle that must be bridged.

The social position held by these female travelers restricted where they could venture and what types of events, social sectors, and interactions they could witness. But their gender did enable them to enter convents and other sexually segregated sites that were forbidden to men. They judged female conduct in Spanish America by the standards of their own cultures. They disparaged local courtship and marriage customs and particularly the commonality of concubinage in these societies. Those who visited the slave societies of Cuba and Brazil stressed the horrors of the institution, pointing out the arbitrariness in treatment and the cruelty that characterized slavery as it was practiced. Those few who visited Indian villages or districts described the inhabitants in the most general and disparaging terms, imposing the accepted racial biases of their era into their characterizations.

They often expressed surprise at the public lives that even local well-off women could openly indulge in. Respectable women did not hesitate to frequent gambling establishments and to drink and smoke in public; however, they were typically poorly educated compared to the norms in the travelers' native countries. With some frequency Latin American women expressed dissatisfaction with the cultural restrictions placed on them. Several writers commented on the high death rate among young children and the emotional strain this placed on the mothers.

The editor has compiled a most representative collection of excerpts from female travel accounts on nineteenth-century Latin America that would serve as a useful supplemental reader for courses in history, culture, or literature. It provides insights into subject matter and an era that are not abundantly treated by other works appropriate for classroom assignments.

In 1987, Beezley and Ewell published a compilation of 21 brief original biographies of a spectrum of Latin Americans who lived in the past century entitled *The Human Tradition in Latin America: The Twentieth Century*. They followed it two years later with a collection of 19 similar portraits of people from the nineteenth century. In 1997, they reduced this total of 40 short essays down to 16 in a single volume covering both centuries for courses that encompass the entire national period.

The editors introduce the collection with a 16-page essay explaining the intent and nature of the contributions. The individual selections run from 12 to 23 pages in length, and all include short introductions by their authors, endnotes, and a

brief consideration of sources. Seven pieces represent the nineteenth century and nine the twentieth. The earliest treats a Mexican rebel during the Mexican independence movement. The latest examines a woman in the Nicaraguan revolutionary movement.

Close to two-thirds of the biographies are of rural dwellers, generally of modest or impoverished circumstances. Rebels are prominently represented, as are leftists. Businesspeople and professionals of every rank are absent, except for a female socialist lawyer in early twentieth-century Cuba. Over half of the contributions examine the lives of women. Most of the subjects are of Spanish or *mestizo* origins, though their ethnicity generally does not play a role in the biographies. One essay does consider the life of a Chiriguano chief in the Franciscan missions of late nineteenth-century Bolivia. Two others examine a black plantation tenant farmer and a famous black soccer player in early twentieth-century Peru. The majority of Latin American countries are represented, with Mexico, Peru, and Brazil getting multiple entries.

The individual contributions are of uniformly high quality and are quite informative. They generally focus on the subject's public life. Little is said about the personal or family life of anyone, except as it might affect the person's public role and behavior. But the authors are quite successful in placing their subjects in the context of their times and making sense of the larger issues and movements that they were part of.

Just as with the first two collections, this set of biographies is highly suitable as a supplemental reader for courses in Latin American history, culture, and literature. The individual pieces are almost all lively and well written. They relate the careers of social types that are likely to interest undergraduate students. ✿

Notes

¹ Kenneth Mills. *Idolatry and Its Enemies: Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640-1750*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997; and William B. Taylor. *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.