

# Colonial Latin American Historical Review

---

Volume 7

Issue 2 *Volume 7, Issue 2 (Spring 1998)*

Article 6

---

4-1-1998

## Cheryl English Martin, Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century

Oakah L. Jones Jr.

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Jones, Oakah L. Jr. "Cheryl English Martin, Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 7, 2 (1998): 219. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol7/iss2/6>

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](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

## Book Reviews

---

*Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century.* By Cheryl English Martin. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996. vii + 264 pp. Tables, appendix, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$39.50 cloth.)

*Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico* is an excellent social study of colonial San Felipe el Real (today's Ciudad Chihuahua) and its neighboring *real de minas* of Santa Eulalia during the eighteenth century. The purposes of the book are "to examine the dynamics of social interaction that emerged as this diverse group of people [miners, merchants, *mestizo* and *mulato* workers, Tarahumaras, Yaquis, Apaches, and Spaniards from northern Spain] assembled" at San Felipe and Santa Eulalia, and to seek to "understand how people adapted...to the power realities they encountered in their daily lives" (p. 3).

Cheryl Martin, professor of History at the University of Texas at El Paso and author of *Rural Society in Colonial Morelos*, again reveals her expertise in social and demographic history throughout the present book. Her thesis is that "Chihuahua provides an instructive window through which to glimpse the kind of social negotiation that characterized eighteenth-century Mexico" (p. 7) and that the "ethics and regional diversity of lower-class *mexicanos* and their limited access to wealth and power made it difficult to recreate cultural practices or community traditions they may have known in their places of origin" (p. 16). Accommodation and acculturation led to the creation of a "*sociedad de castas*" (p. 14) and a "multicultural society" (p. 158) in Chihuahua.

The author's tight organization, clear narrative, and sound research are commendable attributes of the book. Seven topical chapters on the *villa* of San Felipe, the people, labor relations, the ethos and rituals of governance, social etiquette in everyday life, and the practice of patriarchy are supplemented by an introduction, thoughtful conclusions, and especially an appendix on "Selected Demographic and Political Data for San Felipe el Real and Its Jurisdiction." Martin's research is principally from primary Spanish documents and microfilm from the Chihuahua municipal archives, the Archivo del Ayuntamiento de Chihuahua, and the Archivo Municipal de Parral, along with parish registers from San Felipe and Santa Eulalia.

Although there are no maps or illustrations (except for one on the dust jacket) and some of Martin's observations are not new, there are many fresh statements that break new ground. These include the mining practice of the

*fundición* (smelting by fire) instead of the mercury or *patio* process; the use of bonuses known as *pepenas* or *partidos* given by employers prior to 1740 to attract workers who were allowed to keep some of the silver they mined after they met their established quotas; and observations that "few of the area's economically powerful people were absentee owners" (p. 139) and that mine workers had "considerable autonomy in negotiating the terms of their employment" (p. 62).

Some minor criticisms may be directed at Martin's statements that "the town of Arizpe in Sonora served as official headquarters" for the Commandant General of the Provincias Internas del Norte which, in fact, moved to San Felipe in 1783 (p. 27), and that the "cabildo of San Felipe el Real remained viable even as municipal institutions atrophied elsewhere in the Spanish empire," (p. 192) an observation that counteracts the works of other recent historians who have shown that cabildos did not decline in importance in Texas, Mexico City, Guatemala City, and Peru. These oversights do not detract from the overall significance of this book in which Martin achieves both her purposes and thesis. It should be of considerable value and learning for specialists of the Spanish Borderlands and colonial Latin American society.

Oakah L. Jones, Jr.  
Professor Emeritus  
Department of History  
Purdue University