



Urban Indians in a Silver City: Zacatecas, Mexico, 1546-1810

By Dana Velasco Murillo



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In the sixteenth century, silver mined by native peoples became New Spain's most important export. Silver production served as a catalyst for northern expansion, creating mining towns that led to the development of new industries, markets, population clusters, and frontier institutions. Within these towns, the need for labor, raw materials, resources, and foodstuffs brought together an array of different ethnic and social groups?Spaniards, Indians, Africans, and ethnically mixed individuals or *castas*. On the northern edge of the empire, 350 miles from Mexico City, sprung up Zacatecas, a silver-mining town that would grow in prominence to become the "Second City of New Spain."

Urban Indians in a Silver City illuminates the social footprint of colonial Mexico's silver mining district. It reveals the men, women, children, and families that shaped indigenous society and shifts the view of indigenous peoples from mere laborers to settlers and *vecinos* (municipal residents). Dana Velasco Murillo shows how native peoples exploited the urban milieu to create multiple statuses and identities that allowed them to live in Zacatecas as both Indians and *vecinos*. In reconsidering traditional paradigms about ethnicity and identity among the urban Indian population, she raises larger questions about the nature and rate of cultural change in the Mexican north.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Dana Velasco Murillo's exploration of urban indigenous identity breaks new ground. Her analysis, based on impressive research in qualitative and quantitative records, represents a major contribution to Mesoamerican ethnohistory." (Susan Kellogg *University of Houston*)

"In this essential study of Zacatecas, Dana Velasco Murillo emphasizes the agency of urban indigenous peoples living and working in the ethnically diverse cities of colonial Mexico. Her book ushers us past older stereotypes into a greater understanding of the complex nature of society in a supposedly 'Spanish' mining community." (Robert Haskett *University of Oregon*)

"As the Spanish authorities attempted to dissolve the institutions that had shaped Indian society, it seems that the indigenous population remained but started to blend in with the rest of Zacatecas's residents. The exposition of this process and its effects on the confraternities and the families are the most compelling and convincing aspects of the book...In short, this book will appeal to historians of indigenous societies, urban Indians, and colonial institutions of governance." (Laurent Corbeil *Hispanic American Historical Review*)

About the Author

Dana Velasco Murillo is Associate Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego.

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