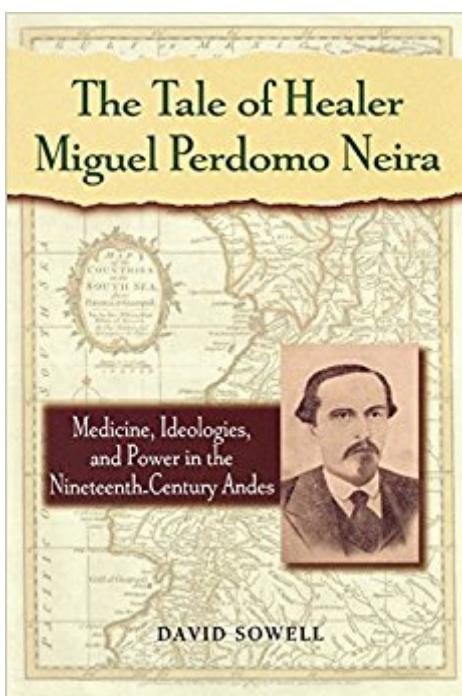


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# The Tale Of Healer Miguel Perdomo Neira: Medicine, Ideologies, And Power In The Nineteenth-Century Andes (Latin American Silhouettes)



## Synopsis

This new book tells the story of Miguel Perdomo Niera, a healer whose amazing cures during his travels through the northern Andes in the 1860s and 1870s evoked both enormous hostility and widespread adulation. A combination of narrative and analysis, the book documents Perdomo's experiences in Colombia and Ecuador and offers valuable insights into the social history of medicine during the Great Transformation in nineteenth-century Latin America. Reactions to Perdomo also illuminate the conflicts between colonial and modern and between religious and secular belief systems in Latin America during this time. This era pitted the norms of colonial Latin America against forces of change that shaped contemporary Latin America. Perdomo's practice of medicine demonstrated a strong religious influence that liberals thought were incompatible with a modern, secular society. Seldom have the contentions surrounding competitive medical systems been so starkly illuminated as in the case of Perdomo. One of a group of empirics, also known as cranderos, bleeders or barbers, who offered health care to people in Latin America, Perdomo did not charge for his services. Many people were perplexed by his cures. The drugs that he used allegedly enabled him to perform minor surgery without pain, swelling, or excessive bleeding. Supporters wrote numerous testimonials expressing their gratitude for his ability to cure illnesses that had plagued them for years. But Perdomo also had his detractors. Physicians, formally trained medicos, and those who supported scientific modernization were critical of Perdomo's practice of Hispanic medicine, even though it was part of the medical system of the day. Blending Catholic healing beliefs with indigenous and African medical ideologies, Hispanic medicine challenged the innovations occurring in the professional medical community. This volume also makes a singular contribution to a scholarly understanding of the emergence of medical pluralism, tracking the submergence of traditional

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Tale of Healer Miguel Perdomo Neira sheds new light on a largely ignored aspect of Latin American society and culture in the nineteenth century. Through the career of Miguel Perdomo, a popular healer in Colombia and Ecuador, circa 1860–1874, David Sowell illuminates the conflict between faith-based empiric healing, as represented by Perdomo, and official, elite-controlled, secular, scientific medicine, as championed by academically trained physicians. Sowell frames this conflict with a concise historical sketch of earlier European and Andean medical systems. He also makes clear its cultural, social, and political dimensions. (Frank Safford, Northwestern University) This historical study of healer Miguel Perdomo Neira offers profound insights into the evolution of pluralistic systems—not just in the medical realm but also within Latin American culture more generally. David Sowell's research uncovers how a riot generated by Miguel Perdomo's presence in Bogotá became the basis of inventive analysis of the relationship between biomedicine and 'other' or 'alternative' medical systems. Free health care is always political, as Sowell demonstrates. This beautifully written study successfully integrates the political dimension and the struggle for professional dominance into an analysis of healing practice. (Setha Low, The Graduate Center, City University of New York) A fascinating story. . . . This book significantly broadens our understanding of the contested meanings of science, religion, sickness, and disease in modern Latin America. (Alexandra Minn Stern, University of California, Santa Cruz) This is essential reading not only for students of the history of medicine but also for anyone interested in the conflictual process of modernization in nineteenth-century Latin America. (Ann Zulawski, Smith College) Recommended as a rare look into the appeal and practices of social medicine in the nineteenth century. (H-Latam, H-Net Book Reviews)

David Sowell is associate professor of history at Juniata College, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

The following book is interesting in that it explains medical/religious concepts from historical European and Arabic communities, and their integration within the South American context. I was

expecting to read more about the man, Miguel Perdomo Neira, rather than a plethora of medical bickering between the bourgeois community in Bogota. I felt that the author could have narrowed the book by 60 pages by eliminating information that was not immediately relevant to the story of Perdomo. I understand that context needs to be set, which the author does very well, but that too much context takes away from the man who was the focus of the product description. If you can truck through the more arduous parts of the book, it is well worth the buy. This short read gives a brief history of the medical community in South America (mainly focused on Ecuador and Colombia, with short mentions about Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Mexico), and I appreciate the overall conceptual material that I didn't have before. Perdomo really did seem like an extraordinary man, and I am very happy I was able to read about a historical figure outside of the more commonly mentioned South American personalities.

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