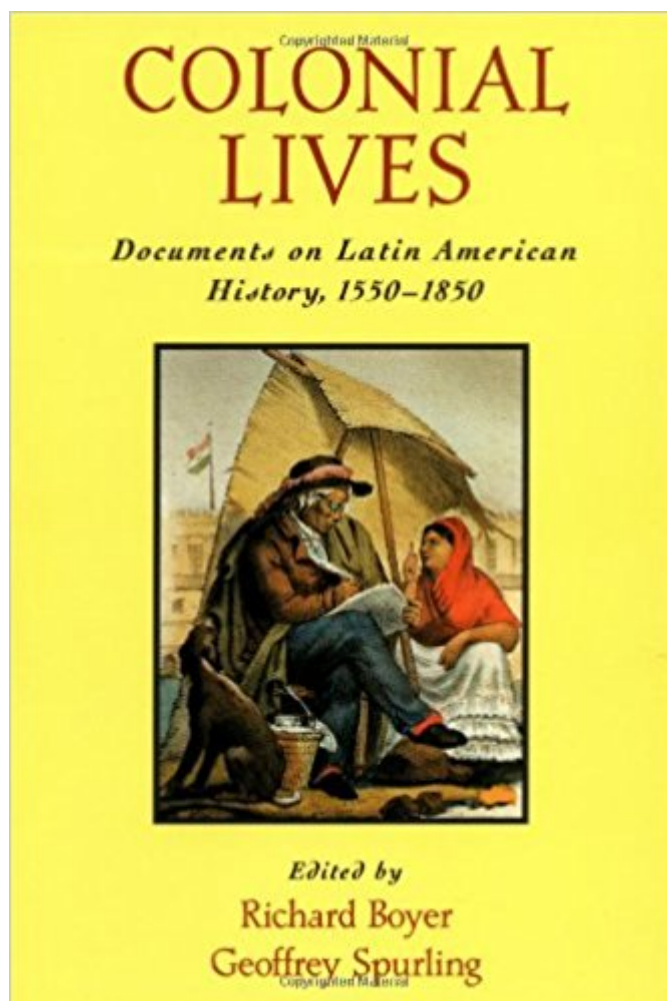


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Colonial Lives: Documents On Latin American History, 1550-1850



Synopsis

Colonial Lives offers a rich variety of archival documents in translation which bring to life the political and economic workings of Latin American colonies during 300 years of Spanish rule, as well as the day-to-day lives of the colonies' inhabitants. Intended to complement textbooks such as Burkholder and Johnson's Colonial Latin America by presenting students with primary sources -- the raw materials on which the facts in other textbooks are based -- this reader strives to illustrate the impact of issues such as race, class, gender, sexuality, culture and religion in the daily lives of both natives and colonists alike. The concerns, struggles and perspectives of the inhabitants of colonial Latin America are reflected in transcripts of civil and criminal court cases, administrative reviews, ecclesiastical investigations, Inquisition trials, wills, and letters the editors have included in this reader. Each document is prefaced by an introduction that places it in the social and political context of the period. The book also includes a glossary of terms and lists of suggested further readings. Most uniquely, the book offers helpful thematic cross-referencing sections and an index of themes which allow instructors to easily adapt the book to their courses and to assign readings according to the criteria of their own specific curriculums.

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Customer Reviews

"A superb collection of original sources with judicious interpretations--it allows students to come closer to the past and experience the archival record."--David J. Robinson, Syracuse University

Richard Boyer is Professor and Chair, Department of History, and Geoffrey Spurling is Assistant Professor, Latin American Studies Program, both at Simon Fraser University.

For students of history only. The original documents are preceded by a historian's "cliff notes" about what is that you are going to read. Read the cliff notes, and skip the original documents unless you want to become a researcher, as you will not be entertained. The only part worth reading are the notes; as the original documents you will not comprehend without a very good understanding of Spanish history, culture and language. I have all three, but after reading the first document, I stuck with the cliff notes and was entertained for 30 minutes:-)

Arrived on time and ready for class

The editors and authors provide a valuable resource for teachers and students alike. "Colonial Lives" has two main merits: it enlightens readers about ordinary people's experiences, and effectively uses the primary sources, notably legal documents, essential for social history. In this respect it resembles the classic collection by Nash & Sweet (eds), "Struggle & Survival in Early America," though mostly excluding North America here. Like that book, the caliber of contributors and their contributions is consistently high. "S&S," however, locates its case studies where colonial populations were also concentrated, enhancing its representative quality. With only 2 of 23 chapters on Brazil, "Colonial Lives" is mostly on mainland Spanish America. That skews it away from a major colony which was also the largest slave society in history. Marginalizing Brazil in this fashion makes the book less helpful for grasping the broader picture. (The Caribbean also receives scant attention.) Instructors and readers looking for supplementary material can use a wonderful document collection on Brazilian slavery: R. Conrad ed, "Children of God's Fire".

I hoped this book would be useful in my teaching and, in particular, that it would be a valuable resource for students who sought inspiration for their term papers. Colonial Lives has several merits: it is a carefully organized, well-edited, and lively collection. Each chapter assembles a set of short documents related to a particular issue or incident in Latin American history. The collection emphasizes sexuality, violence, religion, and witchcraft, all topics that appeal to students and make for lively storytelling. Taken as a whole, the book opens a window onto the complicated politics of race, class, and gender in colonial Latin America. Several of my students have, in fact, enjoyed using it to write short microhistory-style research papers. And yet . . . I have reservations. Colonial

Lives is a provocative and engaging book, but its contents are simply too eclectic to make it the sole or primary reader for a course on colonial Latin American history. Kenneth Mills's classic *Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History* serves that purpose much better. Unless you're teaching an advanced seminar for students who already know a fair amount about Latin American history, *Colonial Lives* is best used as dessert rather than as the main course.

To an English speaking reader, this book offers translated excerpts of original source documents from Latin America, during the years 1550 to 1850. You can see the interactions (some would call it suppressions and oppressions) of the Spaniard rulers with the native populations like the Maya. Unsurprisingly, the documents invariably were written by Spaniards. Military, administrative, clergy and others. But even from these vantages, the modern reader can get a sense of the subjugation that happened. The so-called Inquisition also extended to the Americas. One document talks about its activities in Guatemala, suppressing heresies with all the fervour that it exhibited in Europe. A modern reader will appreciate the different world views epitomised by the book.

Informative and useful scholarly work. I am pleased to find the information available on .

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