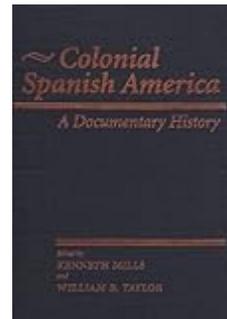


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Kenneth Mills, William B. Taylor, eds. *Colonial Spanish America: A Documentary History*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1998. xxiv + 372 pp. \$30.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8420-2573-7; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8420-2572-0.



Reviewed by Robert Jackson (SUNY College at Oneonta)

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One of the most difficult tasks that a teacher faces is selecting texts that will help students understand the complexities of Latin American history. Choices include conventional texts, articles and/or monographs written by historians of Latin America and other scholars, and documents. The current volume reviewed here combines three types of sources for classes in the colonial period of Latin America: translated documents; visual documents, including paintings, maps and diagrams, and architecture; and a handful of article length studies by professional scholars. The editors provide a useful introduction to the volume, as well as introductions to each document/article. Mills and Taylor have done a good job presenting a user-friendly volume.

For teaching purposes I find this volume to be too idiosyncratic and narrowly focused on the particular interests and orientation of the two editors. The emphasis is on social history and the church as a metaphor for Spanish American society, politics, and economic patterns. For example, William Taylor contributes a short article entitled "Parish Priests and Indian Resistance in Late Colonial Mexico," which is taken from his most recent book on the clergy in colonial Mexico.

One of the visual documents is two *casta* paintings that date to eighteenth century Mexico. The Spanish American caste system and the organization basis of late

colonial Spanish America was a topic that Taylor wrote on some two decades ago. This is not to say that these are not important topics and the documents selected are not interesting, but rather other equally important topics receive little or no attention.

Quantitative topics such as economic and demographic history receive little attention, as does the development of the frontiers of Spanish America. Moreover, despite the inclusion of several documents, the Bourbon reforms also receive inadequate attention. Readers of this volume learn little or nothing about mining, which was a very important economic activity during the colonial period in Mexico and the Andean region. Although the authors include documents regarding the indigenous populations, there are many aspects of the historical experience of indigenous peoples under Spanish rule that does not receive attention. Too many important topics receive little or no attention.

The other problem that I have with this volume is the format. I personally do not present many primary sources to lower division undergraduate students, and prefer to assign articles/monographs that have already digested and analyzed raw data. Latin American history survey classes are lower division classes at many institutions. I could assign some primary documents to advanced undergraduates, and certainly to graduate stu-

dents. Therefore, I would have little use for this volume in my survey classes. I also do not like the format of mixing monographic articles with documents. I prefer a book that does either one or the other, and actually prefer the greater flexibility of being able to assign individual sources rather than having to rely on a book such as the Mills and Taylor text that has chosen the topics. Other in-

structors may appreciate the emphasis presented in this volume, but I find it too narrowly focused to be of much use.

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