



2004

Defiance and Deference in Mexico's Colonial North: Indians under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya. By Susan M. Deeds

Charlotte M. Gradie

Sacred Heart University, gradiec@sacredheart.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [Latin American History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gradie, Charlotte M., "Defiance and Deference in Mexico's Colonial North: Indians under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya. By Susan M. Deeds" (2004). *History Faculty Publications*. Paper 4.
http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac/4

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History Department at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact ferribyp@sacredheart.edu.

Defiance and Deference in Mexico's Colonial North: Indians under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya. By Susan M. Deeds. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. Maps. Tables. Figures. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. xiii, 300 pp. Cloth, \$40.00. Paper, \$19.95.

Ordinarily a first book appears at the beginning of an academic career, but this one is the culmination of the author's many years of research and publication on the ethnohistory of northern Mexico. It is not surprising, therefore, that those who know Susan Deed's work will find here many familiar themes. In this book, Deeds expands on previous research to draw conclusions about how five indigenous peoples of present-day Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua responded to different aspects of the Spanish conquest. The author's objective is to account for the survival of the Tepehuanes and Tarahumaras as distinct ethnic groups into the twentieth century and the simultaneous demise of the Xiximes, Acaxees and Conchos. All five were subjected to Spanish demands for labor and pressure from missionaries, primarily Jesuit and Franciscan, to convert and move into mission villages. Likewise, all experienced the devastation of disease and the pressures of acculturation from both Spaniards and other ethnic groups, African and Indian, who moved into the frontier. The ways in which native people reacted to these various aspects of the conquest Deeds calls "mediated opportunism" which she defines as "the cultural and environmental creativity that indigenous people showed in responding to Spanish invasion." (p. 196). She argues that those who were most successful in using elements of mediated opportunism survived as ethnic entities. Those who, for various reasons, did not were absorbed into the expanding multi-ethnic, mestizo population of northern Mexico.

The author capably describes the interaction among the complex social, economic and environmental forces that produced changes in native society. Among these were mines and haciendas which demanded labor, coerced from the natives through the systems of *encomienda*, *repartimiento* and slavery. Work obligations necessarily drew natives away from traditional activities, so that even paid labor was detrimental to cultural preservation. These entities eroded native culture in other ways as well. Mines not only attracted Spaniards, but also natives from the south as well as mestizos and African slaves. Interethnic exchanges led to the creation of a mestizo culture that subsumed some Indian groups. Haciendas grew and encroached on native land. Charcoal making and overgrazing destroyed forests and caused erosion and flooding, resulting in the loss of territory for native agriculture and hunting and gathering activities. A third institution, the *presidio*, brought more Spaniards to the frontier, enhancing the ethnic mix. *Presidios* also acted as agents of cultural change by suppressing overt native resistance and enforcing coercive labor systems. Disease, of course, was the most challenging element to native cultural and physical survival, and the resulting precipitous decline in the native population threatened the mining economy as well as native culture.

The author discusses various native reactions to these pressures. In the seventeenth century, Spanish *entradas* elicited "first generation" revolts that were unsuccessful in repulsing the invaders. Traditional culture seldom offered methods of successful resistance. The only successful technique the author identifies is withdrawal which worked for both the Tarahumaras and the Tepehuanes. The Acaxees and Xiximes were

done in by their high-walled fortresses, useful in defense against other native groups, but not the Spanish, and by their traditional enmity which allowed the Spanish to divide and conquer. But where decentralization may have helped the Tarahumar resist conquest and maintain their culture, it did not help the Conchos, who, the author admits were “probably even more decentralized than...the Tarahumaras.” (p. 51).

The focal point of Deeds’ analysis is the missions, the place where “ethnicity was redefined”, and the common link among the various elements of change on the frontier. Missions helped pacify natives, congregated them into villages, provided essential labor to the mines, the engine of economic growth, and to the haciendas, which provided beef and wheat to the mines. They provided security and material benefits to natives and also acted as a vector for disease that decimated native populations. This changed by the eighteenth century during which time the economy of the Jesuit missions declined and their population became less indigenous. This is the weakest part of the author’s analysis because, as her own research shows, it could also be argued that the mines acted as the most important catalyst for change, not the missions. The Tarahumara, for example, were able to resist missions until silver was discovered in their area (p. 110).

Defiance and Deference capably synthesizes much of the work of the past twenty-five years on the history of the Mexican north in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries while raising questions for further study. It is an important addition to the historiography of colonial Mexico.

Charlotte M. Gradie, Sacred Heart University