



Natives, Europeans, and Africans in Sixteenth-Century Santiago de Guatemala

Robinson A. Herrera

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The first century of Spanish colonization in Latin America witnessed the birth of cities that, while secondary to great metropolitan centers such as Mexico City and Lima, became important hubs for regional commerce. Santiago de Guatemala, the colonial capital of Central America, was one of these. A multiethnic and multicultural city from its beginning, Santiago grew into a vigorous trading center for agrarian goods such as cacao and cattle hides. With the wealth this commerce generated, Spaniards, natives, and African slaves built a city that any European of the period would have found familiar. This book provides a more complete picture of society, culture, and economy in sixteenth-century Santiago de Guatemala than has ever before been drawn. Robinson Herrera uses previously unstudied primary sources, including testaments, promissory notes, and work contracts, to recreate the lives and economic activities of the non-elite sectors of society, including natives, African slaves, economically marginal Europeans, and people of mixed descent. His focus on these groups sheds light on the functioning of the economy at the lower levels and reveals how people of different ethnic groups formed alliances to create a vibrant local and regional economy based on credit. This portrait of Santiago also increases our understanding of how secondary Spanish American cities contributed vitally to the growth of the colonies.

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