



Women's Lives in Colonial Quito: Gender, Law, and Economy in Spanish America

Kimberly Gauderman

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What did it mean to be a woman in colonial Spanish America? Given the many advances in women's rights since the nineteenth century, we might assume that colonial women had few rights and were fully subordinated to male authority in the family and in society—but we'd be wrong. In this provocative study, Kimberly Gauderman undermines the long-accepted patriarchal model of colonial society by uncovering the active participation of indigenous, mestiza, and Spanish women of all social classes in many aspects of civil life in seventeenth-century Quito.

Gauderman draws on records of criminal and civil proceedings, notarial records, and city council records to reveal women's use of legal and extra-legal means to achieve personal and economic goals; their often successful attempts to confront men's physical violence, adultery, lack of financial support, and broken promises of marriage; women's control over property; and their participation in the local, interregional, and international economies. This research clearly demonstrates that authority in colonial society was less hierarchical and more decentralized than the patriarchal model suggests, which gave women substantial control over economic and social resources.

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