

In This Issue

*H*AHR's final issue of 2008 examines the complex interactions between Spanish colonial rule and local responses to imperial dictates. While state and church officials sought to implement crown policy, indigenous and creole elites and commoners pursued their own goals and objectives. The result was unexpected conflicts, and equally unexpected alliances, that propelled colonial societies in new and unforeseen directions.

Patricia Lopes Don considers the case of Don Carlos Ometochtli Chichimecateuchtlí (1505?–1539), a member of the Nahua nobility who during the last year of his life served briefly as indigenous ruler (*tlabtoani*) of Texcoco. Within months of assuming power, Don Carlos was brought before the Inquisition on charges of heresy, bigamy, and idolatry, and put to death. Lopes Don explains his fall from power as not simply the outcome of his rejection of Catholic orthodoxy. Don Carlos was also the victim both of power struggles among competing factions of the indigenous nobility and of resentment among indigenous commoners of male nobles' sexual prerogatives. For men, and dating back to the preconquest period, one of the core privileges of noble status was unlimited sexual access to women, including the wives and daughters of the rulers' subjects. For indigenous commoners and lower nobility, Catholic prohibitions against polygamy and concubinage provided welcome protections against the rape and abduction of female family members. Don Carlos's insistence on retaining those privileges, Lopes Don argues, contributed to his downfall. Further undermining his position was a small but strategically located group of younger nobles educated in Catholic seminaries. The accusation against Don Carlos, and the most damaging testimony against him, came from a member of this new generational cohort.

Despite his spectacular fall, during most of his career Don Carlos's strategies for accommodating Spanish rule paralleled those of his fellow nobles, who deftly used Spanish policies and institutions to advance their collective goals and individual ambitions. The most effective such strategies were those that combined Spanish and indigenous interests and succeeded in serving them

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both. Edward Osowski examines one such episode: the creation in 1584 of the Sacromonte shrine in the central Mexican town of Amecameca. The shrine, which still exists today, is situated in a hilltop cave in which the Franciscan friar Martín de Valencia did penance in the early 1530s; yet the selection of that site owed as much to indigenous history, culture, and politics as to its Christian associations. The elevation on which it sits had been the spot from which preconquest Nahua authorities had surveyed and confirmed local landholdings and the boundaries of the city-state. Establishing a shrine there simultaneously invested a Catholic site with the power of indigenous history and an indigenous site with the power of Christian sanctity. Local indigenous leaders worked in alliance with Franciscan monks to create the shrine and then cited its presence in the municipality as evidence of their commitment to Catholicism and their loyalty to Spain. As a result of this alliance, “Spanish religious needs and the exigencies of Nahua corporate political survival ultimately reinforced each other.”

Julio Djenderedjian considers a third case of interaction between empire building and local politics, though at the other end of the empire and the other end of the colonial period: the Río de la Plata in the late 1700s. Here Spanish officials sought to secure imperial authority in the frontier regions, especially the borderlands between Spanish and Portuguese territory, by creating new frontier towns and empowering their *cabildos* to distribute lands among newly arrived settlers. Merchants, Spanish immigrants, and others seeking land took advantage of these policies to stake land claims and create farms and estancias. The result was significant economic growth on the frontiers and the emergence of a new class of *estancieros* who cemented their power by taking control of the recently established town councils. When the crown ended the frontier settlement policy in the early 1800s and reduced the role of local *cabildos* in land distribution, the *estancieros*’ resulting sense of grievance contributed to the independence movements and rural uprisings of the 1810s. Thus a policy intended to strengthen imperial control of the borderlands created new social groups and institutions that helped end colonial rule.