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*La criminalidad en la Ciudad de Mexico, 1800-1821*, by Teresa  
**Lozano Armendares**

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*La criminalidad en la Ciudad de México, 1800–1821.* By TERESA LOZANO ARMENDARES. Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987. Tables. Appendixes. Bibliography. Pp. 368. Paper.

Through an examination of 283 criminal cases, Teresa Lozano Armendares endeavors to provide insight into the daily life of the poor in Mexico City during the last two decades of Spanish rule. The core of the book, however, focuses on the period 1800 to 1812, since, the author contends, relevant criminal records in the Archivo General de la Nación are scarce and incomplete for the succeeding eight years. As a result, social unrest and social control in the populous capital city during most of the decade before independence could not be adequately discussed. A brief essay on crime after 1812 appears as an appendix. Another appendix, accounting for almost half the book, consists of tables of biographical and judicial information compiled from the criminal cases.

Of the eleven types of crime noted, the most frequently recorded were theft (the most common), homicide, assault, sexual offenses, and vagrancy. Regardless of the crime, most offenders were single or married male artisans under 30 years of age who were just as likely to be Spanish as *casta* or Indian. The higher criminal courts, such as the Sala del Crimen, generally followed lenient sentencing practices and adhered to due process.

Despite the abundance of information and prolific use of colorful statements from the criminals, organizational and methodological problems abound. There is no discussion of the statistical validity of the criminal records. While acknowledging that the sample of cases is small, the author assumes that the surviving records are representative of the type and extent of criminality, an assumption that ignores the existence of the lower municipal courts which oversaw thousands of cases yearly, sending only a handful of the more serious offenders to the higher tribunals for prosecution. In addition, it is impossible to assess the profile of the criminals because of the lack of a control group, an essential and standard feature in studies of deviancy. Generalizations (in a statistically based book), moreover, are used all too frequently. For example, there is a discussion concerning the extent of poverty without providing a definition of poverty in the colonial context.

In most instances, there is little effort to go beyond a year-by-year summary of the criminal cases; thus, the reader is left to draw conclusions and meaning. Perhaps reliance on a wider array of archival materials and recent secondary literature might have encouraged a more analytical and interpretive approach to the daily lives of the urban lower classes.

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