



# The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750-1850 (Latin America Otherwise)

*Peter Guardino*

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Between 1750 and 1850 Spanish American politics underwent a dramatic cultural shift as monarchist colonies gave way to independent states based at least nominally on popular sovereignty and republican citizenship. In *The Time of Liberty*, Peter Guardino explores the participation of subalterns in this grand transformation. He focuses on Mexico, comparing local politics in two parts of Oaxaca: the mestizo, urban Oaxaca City and the rural villages of nearby Villa Alta, where the population was mostly indigenous. Guardino challenges traditional assumptions that poverty and isolation alienated rural peasants from the political process. He shows that peasants and other subalterns were conscious and complex actors in political and ideological struggles and that popular politics played an important role in national politics in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Guardino makes extensive use of archival materials, including judicial transcripts and newspaper accounts, to illuminate the dramatic contrasts between the local politics of the city and of the countryside, describing in detail how both sets of citizens spoke and acted politically. He contends that although it was the elites who initiated the national change to republicanism, the transition took root only when engaged by subalterns. He convincingly argues that various aspects of the new political paradigms found adherents among even some of the most isolated segments of society and that any subsequent failure of electoral politics was due to an absence of pluralism rather than a lack of widespread political participation.

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