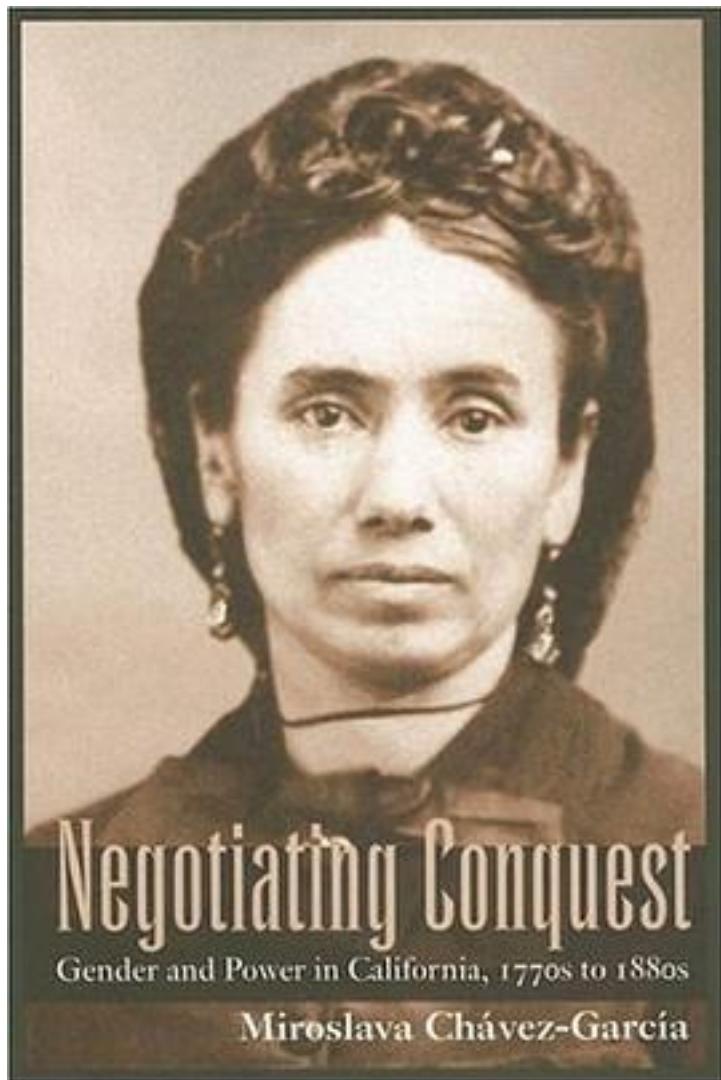


# Negotiating Conquest



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出版者:Univ of Arizona Pr

出版时间:2006-9

装帧:Pap

isbn:9780816526000

Conquest usually has a negative impact on the vanquished, but it can also provide the disenfranchised in conquered societies with new tools for advancement within their families and communities. This study examines the ways in which Mexican and Native women challenged the patriarchal traditional culture of the Spanish, Mexican, and early American eras in California, tracing the shifting contingencies surrounding their lives from the imposition of Spanish Catholic colonial rule in the 1770s to the ascendancy of Euro-American Protestant capitalist society in the 1880s. "Negotiating Conquest" begins with an examination of how gender and ethnicity shaped the policies and practices of the Spanish conquest, showing that Hispanic women, marriage, and the family played a central role in producing a stable society on Mexico's northernmost frontier. It then examines how gender, law, property, and ethnicity shaped social and class relations among Mexicans and native peoples, focusing particularly on how women dealt with the gender-, class-, and ethnic-based hierarchies that gave Mexican men patriarchal authority. With the American takeover in 1846, the text's focus shifts to how the imposition of foreign legal, economic, linguistic, and cultural norms affected the status of Mexican women, male-female relations, and the family. Addressing such issues as divorce, legitimacy, and inheritance, it describes the manner in which the conquest weakened the economic position of both Mexican women and men while at the same time increasing the leverage of Mexican women in their personal and social relationships with men. Drawing on archival materials--including dozens of legal cases--that have been largely ignored by other scholars, Chavez-Garcia examines federal, state, and municipal laws across many periods in order to reveal how women used changing laws, institutions, and norms governing property, marriage and sexuality, and family relations to assert and protect their rights. By showing that mexicanas contested the limits of male rule and insisted that patriarchal relationships be based on reciprocity, "Negotiating Conquest" expands our knowledge of how patriarchy functioned and evolved as it reveals the ways in which conquest can transform social relationships in both family and community.

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