

00:02.60

astudyincrime24

Nicole, welcome to the show.

00:04.57

Nicole

Thank you so much. It's really great to be here. I appreciate it.

00:07.88

astudyincrime24

Well, I appreciate your time. Now I got to tell you, this is the oldest crime I have looked at on a study in crime. I mean, it's a home invasion that happens in Mexico city in 1789 and

00:21.21

Nicole

Yeah.

00:22.59

astudyincrime24

Before we begin, I wanted to give listeners a little perspective of, and I say little, I mean a little, ah of where we are in history since this was so long ago.

00:30.78

Nicole

Hmm.

00:31.08

astudyincrime24

It's 1789, so George Washington is present, the French Revolution begins, and Estados Unidos Mexicanos does not yet exist.

00:41.09

Nicole

Not at all.

00:41.12

astudyincrime24

The crime happens in what is New Spain. So what was Mexico City like at the time?

00:47.94

Nicole

Yes, that's a great place to start. So I'll try to recreate it a little bit for the listeners. So yes, we're in 1789. It's the Viceroyalty of New Spain, Nuevo España, and that's the capital city, Mexico City. And just like today, it's one of the biggest cities in the world. I'd say top 10 or so. And at that time, of course, it was by far the biggest city in the hemisphere. So it's really difficult to

count population in that era, but guess between roughly 120,000 people and to put it in perspective, all the East Coast cities that we're familiar with in the United States were, you know,

01:26.32

Nicole

no more than several thousand at these times. They didn't grow until the 19th century. So the reason why Mexico City was so large, of course, it had ah existed um since about the 1200s as Tenochtitlan, and it had a huge population then as well, indigenous population. So even in 1789, 270 years after the Spanish conquest, a lot of the population of Mexico City was still Indigenous, so 100% Indigenous people who retained their language

01:59.30

Nicole

and a lot of other aspects of their culture as as still exists today. And then um there were, of course, Spaniards, people from Spain, people of Spanish ancestry, and a lot of racially mixed people, ah including people of African descent and people of Asian descent. there was There were Filipinos, a small amount of what they called chinos, which could be Filipinos or possibly even Japanese or from other parts of Asia. um So it's actually quite a diverse city. And you know for people listening, um if you visited there today or anywhere in Latin America or even Spain, you can picture those all kind of monolithic, large stone buildings, cathedrals. Of course, all of that existed in Mexico City. Mexico City is different than a medieval European city in that it was planned by the Spanish on a grid.

02:52.11

Nicole

And that grid kind of overlay the Aztec canal system because the Aztec city was a bit like Venice. So it's really an interesting, interesting city. It was built in the middle of ah a lake. So a lot of it's landfill, which is why it's such a precarious city now at a population of 20 million. Again, one of the biggest in the world and the second biggest in the hemisphere.

03:13.47

astudyincrime24

You said the the the, you said it was laid out but on grid, I mean all the roads are north, south, east, west.

03:15.03

Nicole

Yeah, go ahead.

03:20.57

Nicole

I don't know exactly if it was that, but it was a ah grid. They called

it the tlasa, the kind of grid. So they the Spanish planned a grid city. So it's super simple to navigate around. But yeah, you have those large stone buildings. And not all the streets in Mexico City were paved, um but the ones that were cobblestone were really nicely paved. Yeah. and I'm working on a book right now that's about theater in this era. So they had theater, they had dance halls, they had they had lots of they had hundreds and hundreds of taverns, and they called those pukerias because they sold puke. I'm trying to think what else. you know it was It was a hierarchical city. um A lot of poor people, a majority of the people were poor.

04:10.38

Nicole

Laboring people's domestic servants day laborers um Yeah, very vibrant city. There were thousands of of carriages on the streets um densely populated um Yeah, you know market sellers on the street just like there are today and just like there were in the Aztec era So yeah, that's that kind of sums up. I hope gives a little bit of sense of that the ambiance that people experienced and

04:35.27

astudyincrime24

Okay, excellent. um One other thing I'm gonna tell you, um I forgot to tell you, I have already, excuse me, at this point in the podcast, I will have already introduced to you. So everyone knows who you are, your bio, I read your bio, they'll know what the name of the book is, although I'll mention it later on.

04:43.86

Nicole

Okay.

04:49.54

astudyincrime24

So does I forgot to tell you that.

04:50.43

Nicole

Okay, good job. Yeah, good job.

04:52.05

astudyincrime24

Okay, here we go. Well, let's talk about the home invasion. um Who was Don Joaquin Dango? And what happens that in on October 23 and 24?

05:03.22

Nicole

Yes, so Dongo was a very classic figure of this era and the entire era of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, where he was a Spanish international merchant from a family based out of Seville. So his family had been

international merchants including in the slave trade in Africa for many generations. They were also in the military and this is why they were considered extremely honorable at the peak of their society. They donated a lot to the church, they supported the government, they were involved in important fundraising relating to government ventures, including the military. They supported the justice system. you know Dongo himself helped build buildings that you know were judicial courts and different kinds of buildings. So he was a leader economically. Of course, the the Spanish empire is built on overseas trade. So he's one of the lynchpins of the empire to be a merchant in that way and having that international connection.

06:12.17

Nicole

And he was, you know, at the top of the society, he was a social man. He was 74 years old. He had been married. He was a widower. He had no children. In the Spanish tradition, merchants like him in the New World, um they often handed down their business to their nephews. So the custom was like he came. He was born in 1715. um So he was 74 in 1789 and so he came and kind of Worked under his uncle. That's a very classic tradition in the in the Spanish world and Then it so it didn't matter too much that he didn't have kids because he he had a nephew who he could train so his family connections were super super important in his life as well as church the Catholic Church and his business, so I think a fairly simple man who just did his best in those basic

07:02.94

Nicole

um kind of highly moral, highly respected areas of of how to be ah an honorable man in this era. He covered them all perfectly well. on and you know he was ah As far as can be known, you know we don't know. His people didn't typically keep diaries, and there's you know not much in the way of personal letters preserved. But he was a pretty mild-mannered quiet person, so he had a very large household. his He rented an extremely large house right behind the cathedral, so right in the center of town. Anybody can go there today and you can easily find it. Walk one block from the cathedral to the west.

07:44.75

Nicole

and um So he rented this large house that was three stories with a mezzanine. And that house was both where he lived, where his employees lived, and also where he kept his warehouse. So again, normal for important merchant to live and work in the same building. you know, a very large ah substantial stone building on a street with a lot of religious institutions as well as tradesmen stores, et cetera. Um, but yes, so on the night of October 23rd, 1789, again, he was 74 years old.

08:15.87

Nicole

He went out to, um, what's called a tertulia, which is like a a salon where they were a friend of his, a wealthy aristocratic woman, you know, had, um, a little party, just like you can imagine in the 18th century. She actually had her own personal orchestra, so these are very wealthy people, probably all kinds yeah all kinds of food and and all that sort of stuff, and they would just sit around and talk ah probably about about religion, about philosophy, about politics.

08:34.96

astudyincrime24

Nice.

08:44.73

Nicole

So he went to that Tertullia and He left kind of early, and you know after after these this tragedy happened, his friend testified that he did seem nervous, that he did seem worried, that he wore his sword that night. There's nothing too odd about that in this time period to walk around with a sword, but it was unusual for him. He was a peaceful person. um anda So he left early and he he, of course, had his own coach. So he went with his coachman and he had another servant in the coach with with him, what we call a page. And they went back to his mansion slash warehouse.

09:24.79

Nicole

And as soon as he opened the door of the coach house, you know he pulled into the coach house, which was connected to his house. He would walk into his patio, his kind of foyer, and he would notice, obviously, that his servants had been killed. So when he came back, there would be eight bodies in the house, and then the three killers would still be there in the house. So they met up with him. as he walked up the steps. And the idea is possibly this is coming from the perpetrators, so we don't know for sure, but possibly he might have said something or acted a tiny bit aggressive. I mean, of course he would, you know, he's a Spaniard whose home has been invaded. That's a ah severe violation of his castle, in a sense, in the honour honor system.

10:11.60

Nicole

And so then he was on quickly murdered as well as his coachmen and his page who were with them. They were all together you know coming from from this party through into the house. So that's pretty much what happened to him in terms of the timeline of the killing. and He was killed like the 10 other people in his household with a machete. So the perpetrators brought in each each of the three killers had a machete and so they most of the killings were done by cutting the

residence of the house, cutting into their head.

10:47.94

Nicole

So they they had extremely large head wounds. and My belief is, some people disagree, but my belief is that the idea was that they could rapidly go through the house. And even if there was some shouting or fighting or protesting going on, because they quickly basically chopped into people's heads, obviously those people would be almost instantly silent, right?

11:11.91

astudyincrime24

Mm hmm.

11:13.70

Nicole

So that's that's my thought of how it happened. Other people say it must have been really loud, but I think because the house was so large, the killers could move through it kind of quickly. People are on different floors. One person was sleeping, you know, people might've been working, that kind of thing. So they, um, yes. So Dongo was killed by a machete wounds to his head, just like the 10 other people who lived in his house and worked for him that night. And I believe it happened pretty rapidly. Although I think the timeline is a little confusing, the specific hours.

11:46.13

astudyincrime24

I think you mentioned like 830 at night in the evening.

11:49.74

Nicole

Yeah. So he got home around nine ish, which would be normal for him. And yeah. And so I think my, my understanding is that it happened really fast. And just want to tell the listeners, I'm not getting this information from any publication or book. What I do as a historian is I read the original case files. So there's a notary, which I think we'll talk about pretty soon, um who took notes in these depositions, and then he copied down the notes in a clearer form, you know in ah in a more formulaic and well-written form and a narrative.

12:26.64

Nicole

And he did this all at the time, like within a couple days of the killing. So that is what I am reading. I i get those documents at the National Archive in Mexico City and I read the case notes handwritten with a quill pen in 1789. So it's not something like, oh, I went to Wikipedia and found this. you know that's not That's not how I know these details.

12:46.82

astudyincrime24

Yeah, let's hope you don't do that.

12:48.28

Nicole

It's it's from the that court scribes handwritten notes.

12:51.92

astudyincrime24

Yeah, so primary source is basically.

12:54.26

Nicole

Yeah, and I do think that you know people become so used to cases that have been written about so many times that they assume that there's an easier way to access it, but that's not the case here.

13:05.12

astudyincrime24

So you mentioned ah Don Joaquin Dango being wealthy, being very well respected. And I'm not familiar with you know how criminal justice worked at that time, but the authorities, they they acted really quickly.

13:19.53

Nicole

Yeah.

13:19.55

astudyincrime24

And i'm I'm kind of curious, is that because of the status? Do you think you think if the victims said had been ah poor or lower class people, they would not have received that kind of quick action and thorough investigation?

13:32.93

Nicole

Yeah, that's a very interesting question that I did put some thought into. and I feel as an academic historian that if I give any definitive answer, it would be speculation because there's a very substantial judicial record. And this is a horrific crime. So I feel that if it were a poor family and 11 people were killed in this brutal fashion, the authorities would also be very distressed. They wanted law and order. So I don't think that

14:01.99

astudyincrime24

Mm

14:03.54

Nicole

i don't I don't know that for sure would be the case. I mean, it was a high profile case because this is a somebody of the elite ruling class, but they didn't ignore crime. They wanted law and order. So it's pure speculation to to to think anything else. we just We have to have a case.

14:21.79

astudyincrime24

hmm.

14:24.09

Nicole

and and the problem is if There were another, sorry to be kind of academic, but if there were another killing and it weren't investigated, we wouldn't know as academic historians. So we can't, we can't know the answer to that question. If you see what I'm saying.

14:38.31

astudyincrime24

Fair enough.

14:39.38

Nicole

Yeah.

14:39.70

astudyincrime24

Fair enough. So they this massacre, so this massacre occurs and a police force does not, you know, the kind of police force we talk about today does not yet exist in Mexico City at the time.

14:41.10

Nicole

So it's a little pedantic, but.

14:52.73

Nicole

Mm hmm.

14:53.06

astudyincrime24

And so the investigation is carried out by by two men, ah Augustine de Emperin and Rafael Luzero. Can you and tell me who those guys were and how did they get involved?

15:05.09

Nicole

Yeah, so they had, you're absolutely correct, they had no paid night patrols. um They had volunteer patrols like most places. Paris is the most modern in terms of policing and of course they have the revolution, so that's all kind of connected. Right right around this time. But yeah, most most cities in the greater Atlantic world just have these volunteers and so the volunteers were the ones who alerted the court and there's multiple multiple different courts in The Spanish Empire and in Mexico City itself. There's so many um in In the town and that that's something that ah people would need to read about because I try to lay it out But it's super complicated. But so you have a volunteer

15:52.34

Nicole

judicial official who is the first person on the scene in terms of an authority figure, and then he would contact Empan, who is a judge for the Royal Criminal Court. So it's you could say it's one of the superior courts for for crime and the vice royalty. It's more centralized and and with more authority than than local courts might have. So he's a judge. So there's not a jury system in the Spanish system. So he's basically a man who who spends his career

16:27.16

Nicole

judging different cases so he's he's very well practiced and he would understand the kind of sort of system and viewpoint of Spanish justice which is definitely to just prevent insurgency and and kind of keep their their hierarchies in place, you know, so to sort of calm the population down as best they can, whether it's through fear or intimidation, or just kind of resolving people back where they're supposed to be in their social place. um Yeah, so he he does the he has to also sort of take

17:08.45

Nicole

accountability for the investigation. And he has um employees that kind of have a semi-military function within the ah royal criminal court. um the The main person he has, Lucero, who helps him along the way and also investigates and does a lot of the legwork of the case, is is the scribe. So the scribe is, the you know, the word is notary like we use, but it's not just a person who, you know, rubber stamps documents like we have today, who really not very powerful. Scribes in the Spanish system are are very powerful people because almost every time you buy and sell something of importance or any important stage of your life, there is a scribe present taking notes. It's a very well-documented imperial system. That's why we have this case. So those two do the investigation. They do the interrogation. They

18:01.89

Nicole

they plan all the intricacies of the court process themselves with with some helpers who kind of gather stuff physically around the town. You know, they're not physically doing that, but there's no detectives. There's no street patrol. There's no first responders. There's no medical examiners. There's nothing like that. And they they do call in, the the very beginning of the book is when they call in um medical experts, some local surgeons from the hospitals. There's a number of hospitals in Mexico City. So they call those men in to kind of assess the wounds on the spot.

18:37.79

astudyincrime24

I like this guy in parent though. I mean, I'm a, I'm an investigator.

18:39.62

Nicole

Yeah. Right, yeah.

18:41.31

astudyincrime24

This guy's on the ball.

18:42.96

Nicole

Yeah, they're they're very intelligent, and I hope that came out. you know it's when you're reading When you're reading the case, it's a little I want to make it into a narrative as well, so it's already been made into various narratives.

18:46.35

astudyincrime24

Oh yeah.

18:53.98

Nicole

And what I, what I really enjoy is when there is kind of a sense of dialogue and I do get the sense that his dialogue is pretty sharp. Like he's good at interrogating people and confusing them. And these are savvy, you know, let's just say evil people that he's interrogating.

19:08.68

astudyincrime24

Right.

19:09.25

Nicole

So he's, he does a good job, I think kind of discombobulating them. So they finally, you know, give away the information.

19:15.98

astudyincrime24

And one of the things he starts with, you know, here in the US, we have like an APB and all points of bulletin, or the police put out a bolo, you know, be on the lookout.

19:22.79

Nicole

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

19:25.50

astudyincrime24

But Emparent puts out a corruguera.

19:28.01

Nicole

Uh-huh.

19:29.10

astudyincrime24

What is that? And how does that, how does that work?

19:32.04

Nicole

Yeah, that's a lot of people enjoy that part of the book. ah so And it also shows the strength of the Spanish Empire in Mexico at this time. So basically, you know it's an enormous space. it's It's larger than modern Mexico as a nation today. And he needs to get the message out. And of course, there's no other way than to literally walk with pieces of paper around the countryside. So he has four messengers sent out in all four directions, and they stop at certain way points, and they pass on the message, as you said, be on the lookout. So be on the lookout for men who are gambling a lot of money, men coming into town, staying at inns. You know, men that aren't normally in your town and seem to be richer than they should be, right? Because it's a thief. Theft is part of part of this crime, of course.

20:24.12

astudyincrime24

Right?

20:24.48

Nicole

so on he And then they create a chain, like a um you know like a telephone game of telephone, right? But they do it again with the documents. And it's a good thing for for people to learn about about history at this era. is like It's all documented. So the first person runs to a town, you know I guess it's typically 20 miles is absolute maximum. You can travel in a day on foot, right? So go to the next town and then you hand the document to any kind of official because

sometimes these are going to be really small towns and there is no judge. There's no person in the entire town that would function as a judge. It's just kind of an official of some kind. They handed to him.

21:07.51

Nicole

and then the person passes it on, and he includes the message, I received this document you know at 4.30 p.m. today, and my messenger is going off at 4.45 p.m. today to the next town. And that shows that that official is obeying the central authorities in Mexico City, and they know they have to do that. So even as you spread out in the countryside, they they fear the authority of the of the viceroy's capital. And the judicial officials they they obey and then they spread hundreds of miles and it's a very arduous journey.

21:42.49

Nicole

I cannot even imagine doing this journey up and down mountains. I mean how could you even keep yourself fed I don't even understand it or where would you sleep I mean.

21:51.84

astudyincrime24

Yeah, put me down for no on that. I'm not.

21:55.00

Nicole

Yeah, what do I mean, what do you bring? you know A little knapsack and sleep on the ground in a cloak. like it's These people are so tough, right? And they only get lost one time, you know one messenger. And there's probably about 40 or 50 of these messengers as they go through this link system. you know And they end up in the far outreaches of the vice royalty. and all the case when they these distant cities find out okay we gotta look for these criminals the case has already been completely solved because so much time has gone by even though they move fast you know so it's very frustrating when you think about it but they that's just part of their whole system it yeah and you know information is not moving quickly

22:27.62

astudyincrime24

Yeah.

22:31.32

astudyincrime24

That was pretty impressive for the time, I think. oh So it seems a single drop of blood on the hair tie of a man named Don Felipe Aldama blows his case wide open.

22:48.08

Nicole
Mm-hmm.

22:50.51
astudyincrime24

But before we talk about that, let's take a quick break and I'll be right back.

22:59.80
astudyincrime24

Okay, I am back with Nicole von Gurmetin. I think I got that. Let me start try that again. I'm sorry. It's fan von von Gurmetin.

23:09.78
Nicole
Sure, sure.

23:12.08
astudyincrime24
Okay, no, tell me how that proper way is.

23:15.74
Nicole
Von Germerton.

23:17.08
astudyincrime24
Okay, I am back with Nicole Van Kermiten, a professor of history at Oregon State University and author of Death in Old Mexico, The 1789 Dongo Murders and How They Shaped the History of a Nation. So before the break, I was talking about this single drop of blood on this man's hair tie. It leads us to a man named Don Felipe Aldama.

23:39.26
Nicole
Mm hmm.

23:39.53
astudyincrime24
And then of course, two other suspects, Don Balthasar Davila Quintero and a young man named Blanco.

23:44.26
Nicole
Okay.

23:47.95
astudyincrime24
Who were these three men and and and how how did they, when there's no DNA, there's no fingerprints, how do they identify them as the

killers?

23:56.45

Nicole

Yeah, so what I think is kind of interesting, I mean I'm i'm a bit of a true crime fan, is the the day after the murder, so the murder occurred at around 9pm on October 23rd, it was discovered early in the morning on October 24th, and all those details of course are in the book, how how that unfolded. And you know everybody's talking about it. So one of these volunteer law enforcement officials, we could say kind of like a deputy is walking around town, seeing groups of people talking about this, scandalized. And he noticed one particular man talking about it. And just by coincidence, he notices a drop of blood on a hair tie. They're wearing ponytails. It's the 18th century, right? Like George Washington, like you said. um And he says it's about the size of a lentil. And the the main point is,

24:46.35

Nicole

is that this person who's sitting in, you know, or standing in this, I think they're actually standing in the cemetery having a chat, you know, and an urban cemetery in the middle of the city.

24:54.68

astudyincrime24

As one does.

24:56.07

Nicole

Yeah, exactly. They're they're morbid, right? Um, he, um, Aldama is a known person. He has an aristocratic lineage and he has some aristocratic relatives and he has had a decent employment as a mine administrator, but all of it fell apart because it turned out that he murdered a friend of his when they were out shooting birds in the past couple of years.

25:23.85

astudyincrime24

Lovely.

25:25.70

Nicole

So this man was known for being on trial for murder, but the main thing is he was acquitted of that murder. I guess they just didn't have the evidence. I haven't read that particular case. It may exist. I think it does. But I just stuck with this one. So he He is a person who's has been on trial for murder and acquitted. So I think that's what it is. It's like, Oh, that guy, because certainly we would, we would look at him if we were in a town of 130,000 and you're a judicial official, even a volunteer.

25:51.41
astudyincrime24
Mm hmm.

25:57.55
Nicole
you would know that and be a little suspicious of that guy. And he's been kind of, Adama has been kind of living as a waste drawer rogue. you know he He goes to the theater a lot. He bombs off his family and friends. He's pawning his stuff daily as he wins and loses money at the cock fights. He's just a ah man about town who's a bit of a loser.

26:21.20
astudyincrime24
I know people, I know people like that.

26:21.57
Nicole
but Yeah, mooch. you know he's he's not He's not somebody that you'd be proud to bring home to your parents.

26:25.14
astudyincrime24
That's right. Couch surfing.

26:29.52
Nicole
you know and you know he's actually so he And somewhere in the testimony, he mentions his his companions. It just kind of gets mentioned in passing. And so that's how Emparan is like, oh, OK, we better check out those people, too, because they're highly suspicious of anybody who comes in in any way connected to the killings. They're super, super on the alert, of course. So, um, Aldama and the, Aldama's, I believe late thirties, roughly, um, and he is, uh, immigrant from the Basque part of Spain. So he is a Spaniard, just like Dongo, these are all Spaniards.

27:08.62
Nicole
And the other person involved that you said the younger one who's only in about early 20s, Don Joaquin Blanco is also from the Basque region. So these men come over to Mexico City because this is a time of a huge mining boom. Mexico is incredibly wealthy, all the silver. that you can possibly imagine as being mined and exported out of Mexico at this exact moment. So they come over from you know rural areas that aren't booming in Spain, hoping to make it rich in the new world. And of course, they're losers, so they don't. They're bad people, so they fail. So they're kind of both wastrels, right? The third man is older. He's actually

27:51.02

Nicole

has had a quite respectable past at Quintero. He was a pilot in night ah in sort of affiliated with the Navy, which you know basically a ship captain, but he would have been the person kind of at the steering the ship, you know, he had a more hands-on not like a prestigious captain and he But again, he was he had a rank I think he was a sub lieutenant and he had come to the Americas to do some genealogical work for his family Relating to honor so he had come very wealthy and then it turned out when he got to the family They couldn't pay him back for his journey, e etc.

28:09.91

astudyincrime24

Mm

28:29.53

Nicole

So he was kind of living hand to mouth himself and he'd also gotten himself into trouble. He had previously killed himself and and even outside of naval battles that he took part in in the Caribbean as a younger man.

28:36.17

astudyincrime24

hmm.

28:43.26

Nicole

um So he was he had been ah um investigated for crimes himself as had Blanco even though he was such a young man. um So yeah, they were all basically men who were, and and the last interesting thing about Quintero that I can mention is he was from the Canary Islands, but again, a Spaniard. So very international seafaring people, right?

29:03.24

astudyincrime24

Right.

29:06.67

Nicole

um But my my main thesis, because it was the idea of like, why did they act like this? you know, not just motive, but like, why this? Why attack a very distinguished, wealthy Spanish man who epitomizes the empire and all its values, the peak of morality and dignity, et cetera? And my idea, of course, I've worked on this before, is it's about honor. So these men were Spaniards. the They, because they had the honorific title of Don,

29:37.62

Nicole

before their names like people might know like Don Corleone right not that different that means that they were from distinguished families like they were not plebeians they were not peasants it doesn't mean that they were rich or that they were aristocrats they just were kind of lower nobility so then they come to New Spain and they become these utter losers again through their own bad character

29:42.20

astudyincrime24

Oh, you know.

30:01.39

Nicole

And so i there their presence on the street, they they're just shamed. So I feel like money seemed like the answer to them, and they were violent people. So they were used to being violent and dishonest. So it was it was kind of, that's the only way to make sense of how they would do this horrific crime, in my opinion. ah A passionate motivation would be honor.

30:24.87

astudyincrime24

You know, in your book you describe them thusly, Nongo's killers lived as rogues creeping around the edges of polite society, which I thought was a beautiful description.

30:28.28

Nicole

Mm-hmm.

30:36.85

astudyincrime24

But let's talk about motive then, ah which is kind of what you've alluded to.

30:39.59

Nicole

Yeah.

30:41.01

astudyincrime24

Obviously greed is a driving factor.

30:43.26

Nicole

Mm-hmm.

30:43.94

astudyincrime24

You you mentioned that Audama, Quintero, and Blanco could no longer, quote, tolerate their poverty. And maybe you can explain this a little bit better, because this is a time where wealth and status is displayed in society by your clothing, by what you wear. And if I was seen with what I wear, I probably would, they would know where my level assist of is status is. But anyway, so it's a time when wealth and status are displayed in society by clothing, by what you wear, the kind of clothes you have on. Was this one of the driving forces for these men, these three men?

31:17.57

Nicole

Yes, it's it's actually quite interesting. and And what's so fantastic about the records of the Spanish Empire is that they often contain inventories of people's belongings. And that's how I'm able across many years of writing to kind of assess how people lived. So when I saw the inventories, I was like, oh, OK, now I'm in familiar territory. I can work with this. And so, yes, gradually over time, ah somebody like Kentaro, who had been prosperous, had to pawn away all his stuff. So the act of pawning something it with for us as historians of New Spain is basically a person who's dropping down the social ladder. Because if you think, wow, once I was rich enough to have jewelry,

31:59.40

Nicole

Now I'm not. You're falling down the social ladder. It's it's a very obvious thing that's happening to you if you have something valuable and now you can't have it anymore, right? So what they um the way you asked the question actually made me think of it in a slightly different way than I might have said in the book. So ah yes, they stole bags of money. It was like people trying to win the lottery. I'm just desperate. Maybe a windfall will just get me through, right? It's not ah sensible or logical. It's just like, I just need a windfall. I'm desperate, right? So bags of money, yes. But they also stole things like Dongo's shoe buckles.

32:37.99

Nicole

you know, he had silver shoe buckles, he had a beautiful rosary that he wore, that kind of thing. And they, so because Dongo was an international merchant in his warehouse, he had silk stockings from mainland China, you know, imagine how beautiful and precious those would be, you know, in packages. And they stole those and put them on. So they wanted to, those are those are those are symbols of wealth and honor. And it's not that dressing inexpensive clothes made you honorable it was a ah symptom of your honor if that makes any sense so it's not like oh you're rich that means you're important it's very different from our society it's like oh you're a spaniard who's pious

and who's been in the military and you're also rich you've you've hit all the important points you know it's not they're not they're materialistic in a different way than we are but yeah and of course

33:12.60

astudyincrime24

Uh

33:33.00

Nicole

you know they're they're it's very much about because you know especially these men lived in very very simple rooms i mean the youngest one blanco was practically homeless so they're always on the street and people are always looking at what they're wearing and of course like as you alluded to the fashions are extremely strict in these days

33:36.24

astudyincrime24

-huh.

33:51.95

Nicole

And there's a lot of people walking around Mexico City, maybe not a lot, but you know a few hundred, maybe a few thousand who are wearing imported clothes from France, silk from China, you know the most beautiful things you can imagine, jewelry from the incredible wealth of the Americas, you know gold, silver, diamonds, emeralds, pearls. Everybody's wearing that. Anybody who can afford it, it's a very lavish, appearing society. People from Europe at this this time would come over and they would be like, wow, people are flashy here.

34:23.67

Nicole

like It was much flashier than Europe across across classes because there' you know there's so much wealth through mining right and trade. So yeah, the when the when the and these men walked around, they they only had a couple outfits.

34:33.55

astudyincrime24

Let me ask you, yeah go ahead.

34:37.99

Nicole

you know And you know that people in those days they might have had a ah nice suit like wealthy men and then of course they're linens so these men probably only had one or two changes of clothes that's it so that's yeah

34:50.87

astudyincrime24

Let me ask you about the rose reed. I'm not Catholic, but why I was curious why they would steal them.

34:57.43

Nicole

It's a piece of jewelry, for one thing, you know, it's expensive, and it's also again it's. um That's a part of honor that might be somewhat more relatable and from from the listeners point of view and that being a pious person being a good person within the church in this case the Catholic Church. made made you meant that you're basically a good citizen. You're a good neighbor. You're a good person. So it's ah it's a symbol of being part of the mainstream of society and in an accepted moral way. so it's And it's like ah it's a fancy piece of jewelry that a man could wear that would also say he has good character.

35:36.97

astudyincrime24

So they killed these 11 people.

35:39.06

Nicole

Mm-hmm.

35:39.72

astudyincrime24

And my question is, why was it so violent? I mean, why didn't they just tie them up and take the money and just rob them? But they I mean, they really went to town with machetes on on on all these people's heads. And why but why was it so violent?

35:55.00

Nicole

I think that the two things that I can think of, thinking about this for a few years, is first of all keeping it as fast and quiet as possible, just practical. Second of all, I just think these were really bad guys. I mean, they had stolen from their relatives. they were they were in a society that was violent. They were surrounded by violence. Their favorite activity was the cockfights, you know? They draw in blood, they're you know, bullfighting, all this stuff.

36:22.64

astudyincrime24

Okay.

36:26.98

Nicole

Like, as I said, Quintero had been in the Navy, so he'd probably been

involved in skirmishes and whatnot. he'd And seeing kind of gory things was Part of normal life and so I think they're and in the previous two crimes that that the older men had committed um That they had and gotten away with they they did the same thing. They're like, oh, wow, I need money I'm just gonna kill somebody to get money. That was like their first impulse It was almost like, you know, maybe they were psycho or but something in our terms right in our in our kind of casual terms because it was like

36:58.92
astudyincrime24
Okay.

37:03.12
Nicole
I need something. Somebody has what I need. I'm kind of trained to kill. It's part of my world. So I'll just do it. you know I see violence. I see blood. I'm strong. And they had the there's some evidence that they practice with the machetes back in Quintero's apartment rental rooms that he lived in. So they practice to see, do they have the strength? Did they have accuracy? like Imagine them in in this little rented room, like laying out a piece of wood and just take each of them taking the machete and just like attacking the wood with it because they left marks. That's what the court found to sort of show that they were capable of doing this quickly and with the appropriate strength. you know so it's They're brutal men.

37:46.75
Nicole
it's so it's a It's a brutal time. You know, they didn't have sports. They just had fighting. That was that was how people got their, you know, got a let off steam, I think.

37:56.66
astudyincrime24
No WWF for boxing.

37:59.10
Nicole
Yeah, and they yeah, exactly. Instead of those exact things, which we know are fighting right there, they football, they, um you know, people had duels like they actually fought in the street.

38:04.74
astudyincrime24
Right.

38:10.07
Nicole
And there's plenty of records that that indicate that I myself have

read many of them.

38:15.35

astudyincrime24

Well, spoiler alert, Aldama, Quintero, and Blanco are all sentenced to death. And I know it's a spoiler alert, but it happened in 1789.

38:21.61

Nicole

Yeah.

38:24.34

astudyincrime24

So you should everybody should be up on it by now. But I want to um want i ask you about the executions. They're very elaborate.

38:30.79

Nicole

Yeah.

38:31.66

astudyincrime24

you know These three men, they they ride through through the city on mules. They're wearing black hoods. They've got black robes on. After they're executed, they the bodies are are put on display for several hours for people to see.

38:41.08

Nicole

Mm

38:45.14

astudyincrime24

It's really staged.

38:45.40

Nicole

-hm.

38:46.26

astudyincrime24

It's almost like a morality play.

38:47.81

Nicole

Mm-hm.

38:49.76

astudyincrime24

I'm curious, was this intentional or not?

38:53.20

Nicole

Yeah, I think it was extremely intentional because what this this sort of goes back to your last your your question ah a little while ago. um you know the The Spanish want to show that they are in control and that they believe in law and order. So this is a spectacle of vengeance. so the how How their judicial system works is, it's not lots of times students in my classes will say, oh, ah the king is like God, that is totally incorrect. The king is ah is a vengeful father, the highest the most honorable person you know in the realm.

39:30.77

Nicole

So like it when a father is angry, he has to punish his subjects. So that is how their system works. So it's like vindictive. You you disrupt my system. you're You will become a spectacle that everybody else will see, so they fear this disruption. So before before I did this work, I did not know. And I think I'm not alone in this because I've been working on this material since the early 1990s, didn't know that executions were so common in Mexico City. Typically, what we learn about is that only insurgents, so people who are actually rebelling against the system openly, would have these horrific executions and displays of body parts. But after working on this book, I could see that there were actually hundreds of executions in the last half of the 18th century

40:23.67

Nicole

because of this desire for vengeance and to control the population, scare the population. Now I really want listeners, and this is something I would say in my class as well, I don't want listeners to think that the population was scared. So we're talking about 1789 and in 1810 there was an insurgency movement that threw off Spanish rule in Mexico and it obviously never came back.

40:45.03

astudyincrime24
you

40:46.88

Nicole

So this is the the population was actually more resilient and tougher than this extremely oppressive, violent judicial system. that I just want to make that perfectly clear. They were not cowed. They were not broken. They they fought back. and um So yeah, they did want a pageant. I don't know, like, I don't have any source that would say how many people watched this, but I think people would have had to accept as part of daily life that there would be public lashings, there'd be public torture, there would be public executions in the in

the main central plaza of the city, which is the Socolo that maybe a lot of listeners have been to. It's the central place you go to. Mexico City is a tourist. It's very interesting.

41:30.46

Nicole

So there were many, many executions there. And I try to actually make a big point in the book that and this is the same location of Aztec human sacrifice. It's the exact same location. So it's a place that has like triple levels of state violence over the last, you know, 500, 600, 700 years. ah The spectacle.

41:50.04

astudyincrime24

It's a the same exact place.

41:53.82

Nicole

I mean, 30 feet away.

41:56.21

astudyincrime24

Wow.

41:56.94

Nicole

Yeah, it's the Temple of Maior.

41:57.07

astudyincrime24

All right, well.

41:59.49

Nicole

It's Tenochtitlan. It's where the Temple of Maior is. They built the cathedral right near it. If you look at a map, which I have the maps in my book, of course. um But yeah, this is about authority and saying we're in charge, just like the Aztecs did and

42:14.07

astudyincrime24

and um meet the ah Meet the new boss, same as the old boss, I guess.

42:18.15

Nicole

Yeah, I mean, you know, people might debate the subtleties of that, but but yeah, it's it's definitely a pageant and it it's so interesting how it's all in that place. And also, as I previously mentioned, that's also where the original murders took place only one block away. So it's like the epicenter of violence right there. That's

why I call the book Death in Old Mexico, because there's a lot of killings going on in like two square blocks.

42:40.80

astudyincrime24

ah this I mean, basic this is basically a massacre, though, and it's it's kind of rare. I mean, even if you think about our time now, if you heard about this in the news, you would be shocked. It's it's not something that happens here in the US. I mean, it has. Typically, it's usually over drugs, but it's still it's still kind of rare even during our time.

42:54.65

Nicole

Yeah.

42:59.77

astudyincrime24

but

42:59.77

Nicole

Yeah, I agree. I mean, think about if we woke up tomorrow morning and somebody said, Oh, one of the wealthiest and most prosperous, you know, businessmen in our country, in our capital city, wherever a big city, he and 10 of his family members and employees were killed all in one night. Like that would be really shocking, right?

43:18.29

astudyincrime24

Yeah, that kind of puts it in perspective, actually, the way you say it that way.

43:20.71

Nicole

Yeah, right. Yeah, that's who this is.

43:23.61

astudyincrime24

Well, and it is shocking, and it's shocking to the people at the time, and it leads to some changes.

43:24.73

Nicole

Yeah.

43:31.64

Nicole

Mm-hmm.

43:32.00

astudyincrime24

Mexico City's first police presence. Can you tell me a little bit about that? What what do what kind of changes do they make?

43:38.89

Nicole

Yeah, i mean that's actually the book I wrote just before this book. So I i spent a lot of time with the with the new kind of law enforcement. but that

43:48.43

astudyincrime24

You're going to make me buy another book then? What's the name of that book?

43:51.36

Nicole

um That's called The Enlightened Patrolman. um That one's a little more academic, but if you're interested in law enforcement, I think it's a good book. it's it's really

43:59.81

astudyincrime24

yeah But even in in death in old Mexico, you do detail what is the core of night watchman, I believe.

44:05.73

Nicole

Yeah. Yeah. I put in one chapter. Yeah. Yeah. And the other one's like, you know, 250 pages, but, but yeah, the, um, yeah, night watchman. So the idea was they had been for about 30 years, the authorities had been trying to figure out, um, street lighting. So we just assumed street lighting just exists, but it really doesn't. So they've been trying to figure out how do we get our streets, um, brighter at night because, you know, we're kind of scared out here. Right. And so they tried and tried to do it like as a neighborhood thing, you know, you put lights out in front of your big house. Of course, that never works, right? Nobody wants to do that. it can't It can't be organized as, you know, I think the idea is this population is not compliant. They're like, I don't want to put a light out, forget it.

44:46.18

Nicole

um so

44:47.30

astudyincrime24

but' Unless it's Christmas.

44:48.88

Nicole

yeah Yeah, any religious thing. Yeah, the church did a great job with that. That's a great point. um But ti yeah, you're absolutely right. You know, Virgin of Guadalupe, celebration, that kind of thing, a million candles, totally. but But if the authorities say, put a light out for crime, it's like, I can't be bothered. But yeah, so so they finally said, okay, This is around the time, ah this is right after these. They're like, okay, if we put a very small tax on flour coming into the city, we can fund streetlights. So they put in about 1,200 streetlights, their oil, their oil lanterns that need to be lit every night. And they need someone to light those lanterns. And that is what they have as the night watchman. So they have a core of about 100 night watchmen. Now these are different night watchmen from Boston or London.

45:37.23

Nicole

because they are centralized. They have a guerde mayor who's like the chief. So again, this is not how it is in other cities in the North Atlantic world. So they have a chief. That's what makes it more modern in terms of police. They are funded by taxes. They aren't the parish guard and they aren't volunteer. Again, that would be the case in the North Atlantic at this time. Their tax paid that and above the chief is the municipal authorities, again, modern. um And they get paid 15 pesos a month, a salary. Another condition of modern law enforcement is it's not paid by the job like a bounty hunter, it's a salary. So those are all modern things. They carry a weapon, a chuso, a pike staff.

46:20.31

Nicole

Modern, you know, that that's a weapon provided for them. Not modern. They only exist in the nighttime. They're not a police force because the police force is 24 hours, right? They're just night watchmen. Also not modern. They don't have a uniform. They're recognized by their lantern and their staff, right? But yeah, so they're patrolling at night and they divide the city up into beats, Ramos they call them, and that's they patrol their certain beat. And that is all because basically the viceroy says,

46:53.39

Nicole

There's robberies and there's murders going on. And this is literally early 1790, so just a couple months later. And he's like, we have robberies, we have murders. Obviously, Dongo is the one everybody would think of. We need to put out night watchmen, right? And that's the idea. Like, maybe if there had been a night watchman, maybe if there had been a light on that street, those killers would have been,

ah you know, ah put off from doing this is the is the concept.

47:19.44

astudyincrime24

And one of their main duties was taking care of drunks out in public.

47:24.98

Nicole

Yeah, that's what my my previous book is all about. um It's fascinating.

47:27.74

astudyincrime24

Just like modern police.

47:29.44

Nicole

yeah way I'd say in my mind, it's quite different because, again, this this is an honor system. So to have people pass out intoxicated to the point of passing out on the street is shameful, and they want those people removed. So to me, it's actually quite different.

47:50.78

astudyincrime24

But these guys, they do a little bit of everything.

47:50.91

Nicole

Yeah.

47:52.58

astudyincrime24

I mean, they're helping.

47:53.37

Nicole

yeah

47:55.83

astudyincrime24

and i mean First aid, all all kinds of stuff.

47:56.05

Nicole

yeah they they Yeah, they help with fires. They're basically their first responders. they um They don't exactly deliver babies, but they call midwives to deliver babies. They call priests and literally call, like knock on a door and say, hey, you got to come out for this. um to They call priests to to do last rites if people are dying in the middle of the night. They help orphans. They take people into the poor

house who are begging. Yeah, they bring the drunks into the drunk tank and give them a few lashings and set them free the next day, all that stuff.

48:28.66
astudyincrime24
ah

48:28.71
Nicole
all the All that good 18th century stuff.

48:29.30
astudyincrime24
which Which which sounds all really which sounds like great stuff But then the next sentence I read in the book is the residents of Mexico City didn't like these guys They showed disdain for him. They they threw stuff at him. Why why the why that kind of reaction?

48:47.73
Nicole
Yeah, that's that's what I think is my favorite part part about that previous book is that um Again, these are not ah compliant people. So, all of a sudden, they see somebody who's basically an agent of the state, and the reason that they don't put them in uniforms and the reason why uniforms for for cops is a big deal in the 19th century is because There's no, if you think about it, imagine if the only people you ever saw in uniforms on the streets were the military and you're in a time of peace. So it's like, why am I seeing these soldiers on the street telling me what to do? So it's like, they didn't wear uniforms, but of course they couldn't blend in because of their lantern. So it's like, okay, now we have these people watching us and shining a light at us

49:36.81
Nicole
and And there's only one of them, and there's 20 of us, so we're just going to smash their lantern and beat them up. And that that's what they did. And that even occurred in a heavily policed city like Paris um at the at the same time. And that's where I got that information from from Europe. um Yeah.

49:52.78
astudyincrime24
It's a thankless job, it sounds like.

49:55.24
Nicole
Yeah, and you know, they they usually these were very ah working class or poor men. So they usually work day jobs as well. And then they just

walk around the street, fall asleep, you know, get harassed, get a little drunk themselves, you know, just regular stuff.

50:09.85

astudyincrime24

Well, the book is fantastic. um And if you like history, even if you don't like history, you weave a pretty good tale. And I would, I recommend it highly.

50:19.56

Nicole

Thank you.

50:20.76

astudyincrime24

Nicole, I'm going to give you the last word. What do we, what do we take away from your book? What do we take away specifically from this dango massacre? What do we learn?

50:29.72

Nicole

Yeah, what i'm what I'm trying to do, as i as I even sort of said in the introduction of the book, is like a lot of people like true crime. And I've read a lot of true crime books where there's tons and tons of details to the point where I'm kind of bored and like, what's the point? you know So I thought, hey, if I read a true crime that's actually, to me, the details that are in the book, you know, which we've only talked about a little bit. We haven't even talked about how they were executed and their body parts after and all that stuff. But it's like this is all information that's pretty directly connected to the crime and setting the stage and creating this world of 18th century Mexico for for readers. I feel like you can learn a lot of things about a society that probably most true crime readers really don't know

51:14.92

Nicole

very much about it all. and And you're also going to get a pretty entertaining true crime and an investigation, like we talked about a little bit. And again, we just scratched the surface. So I feel like if you if you can get through a true crime book with a ton of, in my mind, kind of boring detail, give a shot to one that's actually like educational with good substance context where you can learn about an entirely new society you know nothing about, and you're kind of moving along with the action a bit, um you know, with with some violence, with some gruesome details, with some so tiny bit of suspense here and there, you know. So the idea is my mission as an educator is like Mexico is a very complicated place.

51:58.42

Nicole

I wish more people in the U.S. would know the complexities of Mexican history. You know, that that's sort of what I do for a living, for for decades now. um So that's another thing. If more people kind of learn about it, then maybe we'll we sort of understand, you know, our close neighbors to the South and their own history, which, you know, can't hurt us, right? And, and you know, that they had that they had so many different things going on in the 18th century, not to mention, you know, 16th century. as well But this is just one little microcosm of what an interesting world was going on there at that time.