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The founding of la Villa Rica de la Veracruz (the rich town of the True Cross) is prominently mentioned in histories of the conquest of Mexico, but scant primary documentation of the provocative act exists. During a research session at the Spanish archives, when John Schwaller discovered an early-sixteenth-century letter from Veracruz signed by the members of Cortés's company, he knew he had found a trove of historical details. Providing an accessible, accurate translation of this pivotal correspondence, along with in-depth examinations of its context and significance, *The First Letter from New Spain* gives all readers access to the first document written from the mainland of North America by any European, and the only surviving original document from the first months of the conquest.

The timing of Cortés's Good Friday landing, immediately before the initial assault on the Aztec Empire, enhances the significance of this work. Though the expedition was conducted under the authority of Diego Velázquez, governor of Cuba, the letter reflects an attempt to break ties with Velázquez and form a strategic alliance with Carlos V, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain. Brimming with details about the events surrounding Veracruz's inception and accompanied by mini-biographies of 318 signers of the document, socially competitive men who risked charges of treason by renouncing Velázquez, *The First Letter from New Spain* gives evidence of entrepreneurship and other overlooked traits that fueled the conquest.