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Michelle McKinley *

Shaping Republics in the Spanish Empire

* University of Oregon School of Law, michelle@uoregon.edu

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Michelle McKinley

Shaping Republics in the Spanish Empire*

Republics of Difference examines how largely disenfranchised peoples utilized the political form of the *república* on both sides of the Atlantic as spaces of self-governance and »as consequential markers of difference within an imperial system« (3). Graubart does not set out to compare the history of the *república* as an institutional or legal transplant across Spanish imperial sites but rather aims to study the ways that religious minorities shaped the *república* to govern their communities and their internal affairs. Structured in three parts, the book moves readers across the early modern Spanish empire from ethnic enclaves in late medieval Seville to 16th- and 17th-century Lima, demonstrating how Andean urban migrants and Jewish, *morisco* and sub-Saharan communities in Seville adapted the *república* to »assert their own practices and notions of justice« (2). *Republics of Difference* joins with other legal histories of the Spanish empire that highlight the profoundly pluralistic nature of Iberian jurisdiction and negotiated authority and autonomy in a polycentric universe. While studies of the *convivencia* acknowledge power and difference, Graubart deploys the structural homology of the *república* to show its adaptability. She uses the period of early Iberian globalization to test her thesis about the adaptability of the *república* on both sides of the Atlantic. Simply put, the *república* offered a structure that enabled its members to exercise limited powers of self-governance over their internal affairs: these could be guilds, *aljamas*, confraternities, and *repúblicas de indios*. Why would sovereigns allow the existence of a political form that potentially led to an erosion of their control over restive subjects? How do scholars map the contours of power, agency, resistance, and consent in this landscape?

Part One: *Republics of Difference* explores the demographic spaces of the *aljama* in 15th-century Seville. These segregated spaces contained Jewish and Muslim subjects with a religiously plural urban environment and created opportunities for inclusive exclusion. How »race« or religion were configured to prevent contamination or pollution is integral to Graubart's inquiry. She shows that while efforts at containment were impractical given the city's dense demographics and entangled labor markets, the *república* provided authorities with opportunities for surveillance amid a general atmosphere of discrimination. She explains how the *república de indios* drew on the demographic design of the *aljama* in Lima and argues that this was not a seamless replication, but a design template that colonial administrators tried to adapt across the Atlantic. Part Two is a discussion of jurisdiction and shared governance. It takes the legal concept of jurisdiction as power *over* and power *within*, and shows how Andean, Black, and peninsular religious minorities negotiated a set of political and legal rights. Jurisdiction here is not just one term in a playbook of legal pluralism with *lex loci* for matters of inheritance or taxation. Instead, jurisdiction becomes the way in which republics »functioned through law« (14). Legal historians will particularly enjoy Graubart's rendition of negotiated sovereignty and its nuanced analysis for Lima. Graubart draws heavily on legal records to reconstruct the limits of internal jurisdiction and the retention of Andean forms of autonomy over territory, inheritance and succession, and labor. Part Three is an in-depth examination of these questions of Black self-governance in two case studies on the peninsula and in the Americas.

While the documentary record is sparse for 15th-century Seville, Graubart uses maps, deeds and titles, work and apprenticeship contracts, and innovative digital humanities methodologies to trace the city's demographic patterns and ethnic entanglements. As she writes, »work determined where Muslims lived in Seville« and »Muslim artisans were likely to have connections across

* Karen B. Graubart, Republics of Difference. Religious and Racial Self-Governance in the Spanish Atlantic World, New York: Oxford University Press 2022, xiii + 351 p., ISBN 978-0-19-023383-9

faiths« (47). Part One is an outstanding urban history of ethnic neighborhoods and connections in Seville and Lima. It is similarly important for the growing field of indigenous legal histories, mining the oft-studied 1613 census and the ample notarial record to expose both »imperial design and everyday uses of space« (56).

The strength of the book is its examination of communities and regions usually analyzed in isolation from each other. The source base is impressive. Imagining social history from these records was an exercise in »negative historical invention« (235). At times, the Seville chapters read much more top-down when compared with the bottom-up chapters on Lima. Indeed, it is when we get to the Andean republics that the reader gets a sense of the malleability of the *república*. Graubart's deep knowledge of the demographic context in the Cercado enables her to disaggregate the census and show how dense living arrangements engendered new identities in the political space of the republic of *indios*. »Contreras [the census taker] uncovered a web of developing beliefs about status, law, and identity« (81). Urban migration to a new »republic« enabled Andean people to reinvent their status, or simply to sever the ties that bound them to pay tribute to their erstwhile leaders. As Graubart concludes, mapping the city through the census is one way to »contemplate how its native residents utilized space to learn crafts, gather wealth, find solidarity, and produce new forms of status and hierarchy« (88).

In Chapter 7, »The Specters of Black Self-Governance«, Graubart claims that a Black republic functioned in Seville but failed to take root in Lima. One might quibble with this distinction. Although the chapter concludes that Black self-governance in the New World was limited, the book seriously engages with debates about sovereignty, *vecindad* or citizenship, and vassalage. Graubart's chapter regarding the African experience in the Americas and in Seville joins a growing field of studies of Black sovereignty and governance. The confraternities did not require freed and enslaved black people to flee, rather it situated them as *vecinos* with recognized political titles in their own right. This chapter provides us with a useful framework to look at political order. Orlando Patterson took a very dour view of Black self-governance in his work on manumission and the elevated status of freedom. Patterson pointed out that Jamaican maroon towns were primed for capitulation once their leaders entered into negotiations with Europeans, as the infrastructure of governance was already established, and, more damningly, that the goal of all who govern was to dominate others. While Graubart's chapter does not engage with this view, it could nonetheless be read alongside and in uneasy affiliation with social death / Afro-pessimism and yield much more productive and nuanced insights.

Hector Duenes, Brian P. Owensby

A *residencia* for Indigenous Polities in North America*

In his book, *Republic of Indians*, Bradley J. Dixon focuses on European-Indigenous interactions in the early Anglo-American South. He describes how Indigenous caciques sought to leverage their status as vassals to kings to form »republics of Indians« within European polities governed by

* Bradley J. Dixon, Republic of Indians. Empires of Indigenous Law in the Early American South, Philadelphia (PA): University of Pennsylvania Press 2024, 320 p., ISBN 978-1-512-82642-5