

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Race and Rule in the Colonial Andes

Emily Berquist Soule

California State University, Long Beach, US

emily.berquist@csulb.edu

This essay reviews the following works:

Rivers of Gold, Lives of Bondage: Governing through Slavery in Colonial Quito. By Sherwin K. Bryant. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. Pp. xiii + 240. \$35.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781469607726.

Fractional Freedoms: Slavery, Intimacy, and Legal Mobilization in Colonial Lima. By Michelle A. McKinley. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. x + 282. \$99.99 hardcover. ISBN: 9781107168985.

The Disappearing Mestizo: Configuring Difference in the Colonial New Kingdom of Granada. By Joanne Rappaport. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 352. \$25.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822356363.

Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies. By Ann Twinam. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 534. \$32.71 paperback. ISBN: 9780804750936.

Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain. By Nancy E. van Deusen. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. Pp. xi + 336. \$25.60 paperback. ISBN: 9780822358589.

Applying the contemporary biological notion of race to the early modern Hispanic world is a fraught exercise. Nevertheless, imagining how colonial Spanish Americans saw, understood, and used physical difference to order the world around them is highly revealing of how the Spanish erected their global empire. Like most Westerners, the early modern Spanish differentiated among social groups by distinguishing ancestry and phenotype. The Spanish ruled their American territories with an early modern version of “separate but equal” governance, most notably through the division of the New World into the *república de Españoles* and the *república de indios*. Each republic had its own rules, local bureaucracy, and system of courts. The built environment mirrored this divide; walls separated Spanish settlements from unwelcome outsiders. Within cities themselves, separate ethnic quarters—like Mexico City’s Spanish-only *traza*, made famous in Douglas Cope’s classic, *The Limits of Racial Domination*—were meant to keep racial and ethnic groups physically separate.¹ Colonial Spanish society was also organized, and divided, by the concept of *limpieza de sangre*, or purity of blood. However, by the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Spanish Americans increasingly identified themselves and others by the more nebulous term of *calidad*, or quality, whereby one’s cultural position, dress, occupation, and status might not match with one’s actual identity.

These were comprehensive social boundaries that formed a logic of domination. Yet surprisingly, the divisive concepts of the two republics, purity of blood, and *calidad* sought almost without exception to divide the Spanish from the Indian. They largely failed to account for the two million African slaves who

¹ R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). Cope shows how in fact, these built divisions could not actually keep population groups separate.

arrived in the Spanish American territories from 1520 to 1810.² Despite their importance as laborers, slaves were, as Orlando Patterson wrote many years ago, “socially dead.”³ Lifetime chattel status alleviated the need to discuss slaves’ rights or opportunities as inhabitants of the Spanish Empire. Their dark skin, African origins, and ancestral ties to African religions or to Islam meant they had no hope of achieving purity of blood. Although *pardos*, *quinterones*, and other individuals with mixed African-Spanish or African-Indigenous ancestry could generate greater opportunity and wealth for their families through assuming a public identity that might not match their genealogical one, this option was not officially accessible to black slaves.

Like all legitimate inhabitants of the Spanish Empire, black African captives brought to Spanish America were subjects of the Spanish crown. But once captured, branded, transported, sold, and bought, they were subjugated by their masters, who then exercised the king’s power over them. Sumptuary laws prohibited them from carrying guns, riding horses, or wearing fine clothing. But the day-to-day decisions—where they lived, how they worked, where they worshiped, the way their families were constituted, whether they learned to speak Spanish—were the province of their masters. Only the Holy Office of the Inquisition and the judicial system, both imbued with power from the king himself, had the power to compromise a master’s right to rule his slaves.

In deciding how to govern racially distinct foreigners, the Spanish utilized a long-standing polyglot legal tradition based on Roman, Islamic, biblical, and medieval European law. Although slavery had been a feature of Iberian societies at least since Roman times, it was not until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that the Spanish began to pair overseas conquest with enslaving “others,” first in the Canary Islands, then in northern and sub-Saharan Africa. Once Columbus and his expeditions arrived in the Caribbean, these rehearsals became the framework for conquest, slavery, and colonization in the so-called New World. Inspired by the vast wealth the Portuguese had accumulated by infiltrating the trade in gold and slaves from sub-Saharan Africa, Columbus and the Catholic kings hoped that in America they would also be lucky enough to find slaves, whoever they turned out to be. In this case, they were the natives of the Caribbean: the Tainos and the Caribs. In February 1493, Columbus confirmed this when he reported to the Spanish kings that on Hispaniola, they could easily locate “slaves, as many as they shall order to be shipped.”⁴

Recently, scholars of slavery in Spanish America have begun to assume broader perspectives that extend the story of slavery and the slave trade beyond the dominant narrative of the transatlantic trade in African captives. In 2014, Tatiana Seijas’s groundbreaking study *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico* told the story of slaves from Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent who traveled to New Spain on the Manila galleons and became a large portion of domestic servants there until they gradually assumed indigenous political identities and thereby, their freedom from slavery. This was followed by Andrés Reséndez’s 2016 *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement*, nominated for a National Book Award for its take on indigenous slavery in North America.⁵ But the story of the native Americans taken captive in the Caribbean and sent back to Spain in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was largely neglected by scholars until the 2015 publication of Nancy E. van Deusen’s *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain*. In this invaluable work, van Deusen tells the story of how 650,000 Caribbean natives were integrated into and subsequently freed from the culture of domestic slavery in sixteenth-century Spain. By examining the 127 lawsuits that 184 indigenous slaves brought to the Casa de Contratación (House of Trade) and the Council of the Indies from 1530 to 1585, van Deusen situates these women, children, and men as motivated advocates for their own freedom. Her masterful retelling not only paints a vivid portrait of their turbulent lives but also makes an essential contribution to the scholarship on race, slavery, and the law in the early Spanish Empire.

Van Deusen illustrates how even though Queen Isabella first decreed against Indian slavery in 1501, native Americans continued to be brought to Spain as slaves throughout the first half of the sixteenth century.

² Alex Borucki, David Eltis, and David Wheat, “Atlantic History and the Slave Trade to Spanish America,” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (2015): 434.

³ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

⁴ Christopher Columbus, “Letter to Luis de Santangel,” Canary Islands, February 15, 1493, Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Libraries and Archives, American Journeys Collection, Document No. AJ-063. On the linked origins of slavery and the Spanish Empire, see Emily Berquist Soule, “From Africa to the Ocean Sea: Atlantic Slavery in the Origins of the Spanish Empire,” *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 15, no. 1 (2018): 16–39. These topics will also be treated in my book in progress, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*.

⁵ Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2016).

Most were seized under the ever-proliferating list of exceptions to the prohibitions of Indian enslavement. In cases of cannibalism, just war (resisting Christianity), originating from a portion of America where Indians were deemed to be “bellicose and barbarous” (4), or being “rescued” from serving another Indian as a slave, known as *rescate*, Spanish and Spanish Americans were legally able to enslave American Indian vassals. Still other native Americans were categorized as *naborías*, a paradoxical label which meant they could not be sold like chattel slaves but that they nevertheless owed a lifetime of service to their Spanish guardians.

Van Deusen’s work with the New Laws focuses on their effects on the other side of the Atlantic, revealing how their passage was key in early attempts to dismantle the institution of Indian slavery. In Spanish America, the *encomenderos’* epic reaction to the Laws’ threat to their hereditary rights over people and land is notorious. Chastened by the utter fury of the *encomenderos*, Charles V began a more limited test case implementing the laws across the Atlantic in Spain, beginning to set certain Indian slaves free. In so doing, he also created the first distinctions among the diverse slave population in fifteenth-century Spain. No more native Americans would be legally enslaved. Existing *indio* slaves had the opportunity to petition for, and in some cases win, their freedom. This was an unprecedented right in the Spanish Empire’s history of slavery, and one afforded only to the American natives.

But as *Global Indios* makes clear, the difference between design and implementation of the law was vast. Rather than simply clarifying that Indians were Spanish vassals who could not be enslaved, the New Laws created an even more complex idea of who these *indios* were and what could be done with (or to) them. They were not “natural slaves” who could be perpetually held in bondage. The Spanish could no longer use the rubric of “just war” to claim legal enslavement. The 1542 laws also banned forcing Indians into slavery under the pretense of *rescate* and in cases of rebellion against the Spanish crown and its representatives. But those Indians who already found themselves enslaved in Spain were not automatically freed; they had to manage the complex legal system and prove their freedom. This was no easy task, particularly because of the case-based tradition of Spanish law, which meant that each case was reviewed and decided on an individual basis according to royal law and statute, and outcomes were therefore unpredictable.

A 1543 inspection of Indian slaves in Seville subsequently freed one hundred individuals, but the abuses continued nevertheless: some Indians who had been freed were recaptured and jailed, Spaniards continued to sell and buy free Indians as slaves, and other natives were left languishing in the liminal status of being “neither slaves nor free” (5). Not until a second inspection was called in 1549 did the crown erect a systematic legal process through which *indio* slaves could petition for their freedom. Concurrently, they received their own legal representative, the first *procurador de indios*, who represented Indian cases for freedom in the Spanish courts. In van Deusen’s telling, these legal processes were an essential part of how royal administrators began to differentiate between free laborers and slaves.

The 650,000 indigenous slaves brought to Spain and Europe during the fifteenth century were, of course, a tiny minority when compared to the millions of American natives who died of epidemic disease in the first decades of Spanish settlement in the New World. The standard narrative of Spanish conquest has long sustained that the loss of an estimated 90 percent of America’s native population drove the Spanish to import African slaves to America. Sherwin Bryant’s *Rivers of Gold, Lives of Bondage: Governing Through Slavery in Colonial Quito* turns that argument on its head, along with others embedded in the scholarship on slavery and blackness in colonial Spanish America. Through looking at the processes and politics of enslavement and slavery, Bryant demonstrates that Africans were not just a much-needed labor force. Instead, he argues, “enslaved Africans were fundamental to claiming New World territories and the development of colonial sovereignty.” Through this process, African slavery became “one of the chief claims that constituted Castile’s colonial relation to the New World,” and “one of the chief European technologies used to exercise dominion over the Indies” (1–2).⁶

Bryant’s work is an essential contribution to the scholarship on race and slavery in Latin America for how it both situates slavery as a method of imperial governance and offers the first comprehensive portrait of slave lives and experiences in the Real Audiencia of Quito (modern-day Ecuador, along with parts of northern Peru, southern Colombia, and northern Brazil). Like van Deusen’s work with the legal status of the *indios* in Seville, Bryant analyzes how the colonial Spanish judicial system both circumscribed the lives of slaves and, on some occasions, afforded them opportunities for agency. The fact that the slaves of Quito had far fewer opportunities for freedom than the *indios* studied by van Deusen reminds us that in the hierarchy of subaltern subjugation, native peoples typically fared remarkably better than black Africans.

⁶ David Wheat makes a similar argument about black African slaves acting as “de-facto colonists” in the early Spanish Caribbean. David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 8.

Rivers of Gold takes slaves' court cases and petitions as useful strategies for challenging oppression, thereby reaching beyond individual outcomes to make a broader argument about how slaves fought their subjugation from within the system. Bryant shows how slaves' lawsuits against their masters were closely linked to "more radical forms of resistance" like rebellion and running away. When faced with those more drastic modes of slave resistance, royal authorities found motivation "to consider seriously the concerns of the peaceful" who brought their grievances *within* the colonial system, instead of rejecting it altogether (120). For their part, slaves learned to frame their complaints within the proper parameters, thereby demonstrating facility with and acceptance of the colonial order. Bryant also offers an insightful and original take on the royal slave codes, arguing they should be understood as applying to both slaves *and* their owners. By prescribing how masters could treat slaves and limiting their control of their human property, the slave codes "signaled that slavery was an elemental feature of governance" for all Spanish Americans, master and slave alike (117).

While Bryant's analysis of slavery as an economic driver in colonial Quito fills an important gap in the historical literature, *River of Gold's* most important contributions lie in its broader argument that slavery itself "was one of the chief claims that constituted Castile's colonial relation to the New World" (3). Bryant's groundbreaking discussion of the "constitutive practices" of slavery considers the "ceremonies of possession" by which Spaniards transformed newly arrived African captives into slaves. First, they were "blackened"—a process that included inspection, appraisal, and recording in imperial ledgers—all with the understanding that their blackness marked their essential difference and inferiority. Next, slaves were scarred with the king's brand, an act confirming that "the monarch was the ultimate ruler of all slaves" (81). Finally, they were baptized, an act which marked their incorporation into the Catholic community.

In his analysis of slaves' participation in Catholic ritual and community, Bryant challenges the dominant cultural paradigm that paints religious life as an essential opportunity for slave agency. He differs from scholars such as Herman Bennett, who sustains that slaves built community and family networks through participation in Catholic worship and rituals, and Nicole von Germeten, whose research demonstrates how black *cofradías* served similar associative functions.⁷ While Bryant does not discount their findings, he counters that slave baptism and slaves' subsequent participation in Catholic religious life should not be overemphasized as a positive opportunity for community building and self-expression. Instead, he casts Catholicism as a central concept through which the Spanish crown "turned the juridical institution of slavery into a royal system of surveillance and power that radiated throughout the realm" (81).

In *Fractional Freedoms: Slavery, Intimacy, and Legal Mobilization in Colonial Lima, 1600–1700*, historian and legal scholar Michele McKinley also digs into the complex relationship between slaves and the law, demonstrating the remarkable facility that slaves in seventeenth-century Lima had with both the secular and ecclesiastic court systems. McKinley's extensive work with church documents complicates the existing scholarship on slaves as legal actors by scholars such as Marcela Echeverri, Alejandro de la Fuente, and Lyman Johnson, which tends to favor state archives.⁸ McKinley shows that in fact, while state-run Audiencia courts tended to hear the cases masters brought against slaves, slaves themselves were more likely to have their cases heard in the ecclesiastical legal system. Under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, a slave could hope to elicit better treatment through a church-issued *censura general*, a decree detailing the masters' offenses against the slave.

Another of the book's many strengths lies in the compelling life stories McKinley structures from the archives. Through telling their diverse narratives, she concludes that when slaves brought suits against their masters—for broken promises of manumission, denial of conjugal rights, and even general mistreatment—they were actually demonstrating the sort of litigiousness that the early modern Hispanic world was known for. In her telling, the legal system became more than just a "weapon of the weak" for the slaves of seventeenth-century Lima. It represented their "creolization and unfolding Catholicisation" (247)—their incorporation into the Spanish imperial machine, even from such a disadvantaged position.

McKinley also offers a primer on the most prominent types of legal disputes involving slaves. Slaves often filed complaints against their masters for spousal separation, because the letter of the law stated that slaves

⁷ Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

⁸ See, for example, Marcela Echeverri, "'Enraged to the Limit of Despair': Infanticide and Slave Judicial Strategies in Barbacoas, 1789–1798," *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 3 (2009): 403–426; Alejandro de la Fuente, "Slaves and the Creation of Legal Rights in Cuba: Coartación and Papel," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (2007): 659–692; and Lyman L. Johnson, "A Lack of Legitimate Obedience and Respect: Slaves and Their Masters in the Courts of Late Colonial Buenos Aires," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (2007): 631–651.

who had contracted marriage in the Catholic Church had the right to remain within reasonable proximity to one another. These suits were typically brought to ecclesiastical courts, because the Church deemed endangering a Catholic marriage to be a serious crime. Unsurprisingly, slaves also brought suits against masters who reneged on promises of manumission. Babies born to slave parents were among the most likely to experience manumission at baptism but be re-enslaved later. McKinley shows that while baptismal manumission looked magnanimous on paper, freeing an infant was ultimately meaningless: babies and children needed full-time care and therefore remained with their enslaved parents. But from the owners' perspective, this gesture had the benefit of keeping slave parents "more dependent and tethered to their owners by powerful bonds of loyalty and compliance" (167).

Taken together, van Deusen's, Bryant's, and McKinley's interpretations of race in the colonial Andes and the broader Spanish Empire confirm that perceived racial distinction was a central organizing factor of Spanish colonial governance. But the concept of race was also essential in creating the social and cultural structures of life in colonial Spanish America. In *The Disappearing Mestizo: Configuring Difference in the Kingdom of New Granada*, anthropologist Joanne Rappaport details how, for individuals of mixed indigenous and Spanish descent, social identity and legal capacity were much more fluid. The people of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century New Granada, Rappaport argues, understood the visible distinction between races through the "notion that external characteristics were mutable" (37). This was particularly true in the case of mestizos, who cultivated flexible social identities that allowed them to move between Spanish and indigenous identifications. Rappaport argues that these individuals were so successful at navigating between "Spanish" and "Indian" that the very notion of mestizo came to be "a disappearing category" (10).

Rappaport also undertakes original analysis about the intersections of race and gender in colonial New Granada. Elites, she argues, were more willing to overlook the "stain" of mixed race background in the case of females. Male mestizos, in contrast "found it almost impossible to scale socioracial barriers" (2). This difference derived from the paternal concept of descent and heritage that shaped colonial society: with lineage determined by paternal bloodlines, male mestizos could never escape their dubious identity. However, mestizas who managed to contract a good marriage with a Spanish man could hope to have their own perceived deficiencies overlooked, if not officially on paper, then at least in daily interactions with friends, family, and the community. But Rappaport cautions her readers not to underestimate the coercive elements inherent in this "privilege" extended to some mestiza women. "Social climbing," she points out, "was best accomplished by harnessing the reproductive power of women" (104).

Rappaport builds on the mutability of the concept of the mestizo to reach broader conclusions about race in the Spanish Empire and the colonial Andes. How one became a mestizo, or, for that matter, a mulatto or a pardo, was not predetermined by birth and heritage alone. Instead, in legal testimony and in day-to-day existence, people defined each other through a complex of signifiers, including age, size, build, skin color, hair, and any individual markers like scars or brands. Such a flexible approach to racial identity allowed some mixed-race individuals to navigate among different social groups. But at the same time, it strengthened the coercive hegemony of Spanish power brokers, as it allowed them to decide whom they wanted to push up or down the social hierarchy.

Rappaport also addresses one of the key questions in the scholarship on race in colonial Spanish America: did racial restrictions harden as the colonial period went on? Scholars have often studied the so-called *casta* system and *casta* paintings as proof that racial divisions constricted over the centuries, especially in eighteenth-century New Spain. Rappaport shows how in colonial New Granada—a peripheral area of colonial rule throughout the early modern period—this paradigm does not hold up. Instead, by the mid-eighteenth century, people of mixed race, particularly mestizos, were actually a majority in New Granada. The proliferation of mestizos made it much more challenging to distinguish an actor's social standing by simply examining physical appearance. If mestizos were everywhere, how could they be singled out as different? Rappaport pushes this analysis to bigger conclusions. If the term *mestizo* was so "volatile," Rappaport concludes, "we may also be in error when we speak of the categories of Spaniard, African, and Indian as entirely stable" (230).

In *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies*, Ann Twinam poses similar questions about the place of pardos, mulattos, and other people of mixed-African descent in the colonial Andes and the Spanish Empire. Her extensive archival research shows how racial and social identity was so mutable that it could actually be bought and sold. Here she builds upon one of the most-discussed portions of her second work, *Public Lives, Private Secrets*: the *gracias al sacar* decrees, by which Spanish American mulattos and pardos petitioned and paid for having racial stains, illegitimate

status, or other less than desirable traits expunged from their official identities.⁹ In *Purchasing Whiteness*, she argues that this tradition arose not “as part of any considered policy to better the status of pardos and mulattos” (29), or even as a fresh revenue stream for the increasingly cash-strapped Bourbon crown. Instead, the *gracias al sacar* developed somewhat organically, as a practical response to demands made by prominent mulattos in America. Many of these demands—as excellent scholarship by Ben Vinson, Peter Blanchard, and most recently Alex Borucki has shown—were based on their exceptional service in local militias.¹⁰

Twinam’s followers will be gratified to learn more about Pedro Antonio de Ayarza, who in 1795 sent a letter from Portobelo to the Cámara of the requesting that his son Joseph, also a mulatto, be given a whiteness exemption so that he could officially earn the degree he had studied for. Along with his petition, Pedro Antonio included letters of support from the community that confirmed his extensive service as a militia captain, his social standing, and his business acumen as a merchant. He also asked that his two younger sons be similarly allowed to graduate from the university. After much back and forth, the Cámara decided that the eldest son, Joseph, should be allowed to officially graduate. Later they also permitted him to practice law as an attorney. But the Cámara extended no such privilege to the two younger Ayarza sons, deciding instead that “occupations in agriculture and commerce were ‘more analogous to their condition and of the greater private and public utility’” (303).

The fascinating case of the Ayarza family not only illuminates the bureaucratic process of the *gracias* decrees but also considers how these petitions were received by neighbors and acquaintances. In Twinam’s telling, elites were happy to officially welcome the Ayarzas into the white society in which they had been participating for years. In the book’s final section, Twinam ties this inclusive attitude of prominent colonial Spanish Americans to the lengthy discussions about the fate of pardos and mulattos that took place during the Spanish Cortes of 1810–1812. By bridging the all too often uncrossed divide between the colonial and Independence periods, she shows that during these negotiations “a number of American delegates revealed that they were not only intimately aware of, but that they were supportive of *casta* mobility” (371).

Purchasing Whiteness also makes an outstanding contribution to our understanding of the process of imperial governance in the Bourbon period. Instead of presenting the reader with a tedious portrait of colonial administration from on high, Twinam uses the *gracias* decrees to demonstrate how even in the era of Bourbon streamlining, colonial governance remained haphazard, largely based on precedent, tradition, and timing. Administrators responded differently to the dispensations: the Council of the Indies was cautious, but the officials in accounting—who raised the price schedule for the various *gracias al sacar* dispensations by an average of 37 percent in 1801—favored granting as many decrees as possible. But nothing was more disruptive than the decision that the Council of the Indies should be staffed with officials who had real time experience serving in the Spanish American bureaucracy, which would make them better prepared to understand the complexities of ruling Spanish America. The same administrative reforms also attempted to streamline the bureaucratic process by limiting the number of American *fiscales* (crown attorneys) on the Council to two: one for New Spain, and one for Peru. Twinam shows how these decrees meant to improve administrative rule actually caused increased workloads and delayed response times. The resulting gaps in governance, Twinam argues, “disrupted the competence and efficiency of government, failing to provide for continuity in personnel and prompt dispatch of the business of empire” (299).

Together, these works demonstrate how subjugating “the other” for profit was at the basis of Spain’s vast empire in the New World, particularly in the Andean region. Through looking beyond New Spain—which for so long has dominated scholarly research and writing about colonial Spanish America—these innovative studies demonstrate that in the daily experiences and the mental worlds of colonial Spanish Americans, race was far from fixed. Instead, lived racial identities were largely based on performance, perception, and projection, all of which were mutable. Indigenous slaves won their freedom in the courts, mulattos graduated from elite universities, and mestizos made their way in both Spanish and indigenous communities. But in spite of some meaningful exceptions—most famously the *gracias al sacar* whitening decrees—this same flexibility was *not* apparent in imperial laws and codes. The blurred racial boundaries that marked the daily lives of many colonial Spanish Americans were not replicated in official laws. This is because in the Spanish colonial world, systems of governance and systems of slavery emerged from one

⁹ Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ See Peter Blanchard, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008); Alex Borucki, *From Shipmates to Soldiers: Emerging Black Identities in the Río de la Plata* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015); and Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

another. Without a codified method of oppressing “the other,” the Spanish Empire would crumble. Even as Spain’s years of dominance in continental Spanish America came to a close, the ties between governance, race, and slavery were unbreakable. Systemic change, on paper anyway, would come only once the Spanish Americans broke away from the metropolis and formed their own independent nations.

Author Information

Emily Berquist Soule is Associate Professor of History at California State University, Long Beach. She is at work on her second book, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire*. She lives in Los Angeles.

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