
Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush* by Aims McGuinness

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Bobrow-Strain is to be commended for his facility in using oral and archival sources to provide what had been one of the missing pieces in the Chiapas puzzle.

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AIMS MCGUINNESS. *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush*. (The United States in the World.) Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 2008. Pp. xiii, 249. \$35.00.

This fine book tells a multilayered story about intersections among people, capital, and nations in Panama during the gold-rush era. In chapters that mix a chronological and thematic approach, Aims McGuinness examines the dramatic transformations that accompanied the migrations to California, as Panama (under the Republic of Nueva Granada, the predecessor to Colombia) became a bridge that linked the eastern and western United States. The sudden influx of people and commodities associated with "La California," well remembered in Panamanian history, focused complex contests over jurisdiction and power.

McGuinness portrays a Panama beset with the confusions, suspicions, and clashes common in imperial settings. People suddenly thrown together often held differing attitudes about the meanings of skin color, the uses of time, perceptions of gender and honor, and conventions of commodity and monetary exchange. Many from the United States were both fascinated and also appalled by Panama's poverty mixed with natural bounty, its interracial milieu, and its remnants of a more glorious past. Most saw both California and Panama as distant and potentially rich lands that were destined to succumb to more progressive Anglo-American ways. Within just a few years, a U.S. company had linked the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans with a rail line, displacing the local workers who had initially prospered from the surging demand for food, shelter, and mule or canoe transport.

How to make money from the arrivals and departures of gold-rush migrants, however, brought conflicts within as well as between nationalities. North American fortune hunters, for example, often complained about exploitation by U.S. steamship and rail companies. On the other side, Panamanian workers often vied with elite merchants over who might capture the new business opportunities, and splits between Liberal and Conservative parties also became more acrimonious. Ultimately, the U.S. rail company, after importing a workforce and tackling the problem of disease, built a Caribbean-coast enclave that could both profit from, and police, the new commercial and transit hubs. Panamanians saw few of the once anticipated benefits.

The sudden presence of North Americans sparked a number of political developments. Some Panamanian leaders, beset by economic dislocations, a rural rebellion, and fears of U.S. filibuster attempts inspired by William Walker in Nicaragua, came to advocate a Federal State of Panama and envisioned ultimate indepen-

dence from Nueva Granada. Political ferment also interfused with the liberal political revolution in Nueva Granada, bringing the abolition of slavery in 1852 and a constitution in 1853 that granted habeas corpus and universal manhood suffrage with no exclusions based on property or color. Moreover, the idea of a United States-run transit zone in the isthmus would, in time, inspire some American quests for a canal.

The expanding sense of Panamanian pride and distinctiveness clashed with the condescension of U.S. immigrants and set the stage for an incident in April 1856, when an argument between a man from the United States and a Panamanian watermelon vendor spiraled into a fight and then into a brief U.S. intervention. The fear of a U.S. threat also prompted a repression orchestrated by the Conservative party in Bogota. The incident of April 1856, and its diverse historical memories, provide the fulcrum of McGuinness's book, which includes an account of the author's own participation as a historical re-enactor in Panama's 150th commemoration of the well-known altercation and intervention.

McGuinness argues that the gold rush dislocations and, specifically, the U.S. intervention contributed to a new geopolitical idea: the concept of "Latin America." In the 1850s U.S. "manifest destiny," which fueled the war with Mexico, filibustering projects, and talk of an eventual protectorate over Panama, spawned an opposing discourse that pitted a materialistic and industrial "raza yankee" against a noble and spiritual "raza Latina." The imaginary of "Latin America" thus took shape in the context of U.S. empire-building.

Contrary to the fears of many Panamanians, however, the U.S. rail company in Panama was less interested in territorial acquisition than in maintaining a weak government that would not impede the company's business. McGuinness's book thus argues that U.S. informal empire-building, often associated with the end of the century, took shape much earlier in the transportation enclave in Panama.

This book has many virtues: a self-reflexive style; a rich source base in autobiographies, travel accounts, and records from both the United States and Panama; a focus that both acknowledges states and also presents them as comprised of disaggregated actors; a sense of historical change as contested. A set of unbound documents in the Panamanian archive provides McGuinness with the central metaphor both for contingencies in his research and for his aspirations in writing this study. "All bindings in the end are provisional rather than permanent" (p. 15), he writes, and thinking of history as unbounded to any single nation, group, or story opens the possibility of reading events in new ways. A certain mystery related to a cache of unbound documents frames the book's artfully written prelude and coda.

In this small and carefully researched book, McGuinness rises above the specificity of time and place to address broad questions about race, gender, class, nation, and empire. He also stresses the often lopsided nature of historical remembrances. Scholars from many differ-

ent fields will appreciate the book's expansive thematic and interpretive reach.

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Erin O'Connor. *Gender, Indian, Nation: The Contradictions of Making Ecuador, 1830–1925*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 2007. Pp. xxiii, 261. \$49.95.

In this book, Erin O'Connor explores how Ecuadorian conceptualizations of race and gender interacted with nation-state-building during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For Ecuador, nation-building presented a dilemma. While the economic and political elite claimed they were building a nation that included all people, they still wanted to exploit and exclude the indigenous population. "Ecuadorian statesmen were caught between their proclaimed desire to fashion a nation out of liberal individuals and their deeply embedded conviction that Indians were unfit for inclusion in the nation" (p. 13).

O'Connor explores gender and Indian-state relations by focusing on three pivotal points in Ecuadorian history: the debate over the 1857 abolition of the Indian-only tribute tax; nation-building during the conservative regime of Gabriel García Moreno (in office 1861–1865; 1869–1875); and liberal-era secular social reforms, 1895 to 1925. O'Connor holds that "rural peoples . . . were actively involved in shaping the state idea behind nationalism" (p. 8), even if they did so by remaining silent on the state's agendas. Indigenous people, by rejecting the values that the state insisted upon, helped shape the state that formed.

Authentic gains for indigenous people were few. The end of tribute did not bring better conditions for Ecuador's Indians. In its place came a new general tax for everyone in the underclass, and prior Indian protection laws (such as exemption from conscription, sales taxes, and judicial fees), were stripped away. Meanwhile, García Moreno's road building and other infrastructure projects depended on coerced Indian labor. Even the liberal-era abolition of *concertaje* (debt peonage) in 1918 came to be replaced with a similar forced labor system, *huasipungaje*, which lasted well into the twentieth century.

O'Connor rightly emphasizes the ever changing and deeply complex nature of gender roles, showing especially how dominant white formulations stood at variance to those of various indigenous communities. O'Connor provides especially strong treatment of indigenous marriage practices in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the use of *amañanza*, or trial marriage, a custom not honored in the non-Indian world.

In indigenous communities adult women, while outside the orbit of men, could sometimes enjoy economic power and influence. Widows, or "situational widows" (women whose husbands had been forced by circumstance to work elsewhere or who had been pressed into government labor gangs), represented their own inter-

ests in court cases involving land disputes. O'Connor shows how these women filed, pursued, and sometimes won their cases. Yet O'Connor finds more than just white-versus-indigenous differences over women's rights and roles, locating important variability within the indigenous world as well. Access to property was critical and O'Connor carefully demonstrates that women in independent indigenous communities had significantly more land rights and power than did Indian women on haciendas.

Some readers may have trouble with O'Connor's decision to place nation-building at the center of analysis. The evidence from the nineteenth century, a time of political chaos, repeated coups d'état, and endless civil wars, suggests that Ecuadorians were more intent on the project of state destruction than state building. It is an open question as to whether anyone in Ecuador was truly that interested in state-building; the Indians did not care at all, and the most powerful elite groups seemed rather more intent on aggressively pursuing their own interests, evidently unconcerned that this might rip their country apart. In time, an Ecuadorian nation-state would emerge, but it would come while the elite were mostly busy fighting other battles.

O'Connor interprets García Moreno's measures against concubinage and drinking almost solely as part of his nation-building project, giving nearly no coverage to other possible motives. (His most bitter critics thought he was just a moralizing prig.) Likewise, O'Connor generally explores the struggle to end the tribute as motivated by the nation-building goal of making all citizens equal. But coastal cacao growers saw ending the tribute as an essential step in freeing Indians from highland haciendas and making them available to work on coastal cacao estates. Studying political actions only in reference to a single factor—the project of nation-building—tends to leave other motives, disputes, and regional agendas underappreciated.

O'Connor conducted extensive research in a variety of sources: presidential speeches, congressional debates, government reports, hacienda records, and most of all court transcripts. Yet the court cases are not as interesting as one might think and reviewing the trials one by one can make for pretty slow going. Still in all, this book is a strong contribution to the study of gender in the indigenous world of the Andes. O'Connor's work will be of considerable value to all scholars seeking a deeper understanding of gender role constructions across varied historical settings.

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KAREN B. GRAUBART. *With Our Labor and Sweat: Indigenous Women and the Formation of Colonial Society in Peru, 1550–1700*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. 2007. Pp. xii, 249. \$55.00.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the rapidly growing literature on the role of indigenous women in colonial Peruvian society and economy. As with Jane E.