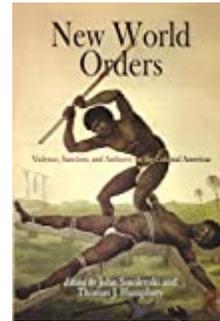


**John Smolenski, Thomas J. Humphrey, eds.** *New World Orders: Violence, Sanction, and Authority in the Colonial Americas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. 376 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-3895-2.



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## Ordering the New World

According to co-editor Thomas Humphrey, the essays in *New World Orders* “throw into dispute some of the terms on which scholars too often depend, compelling historians to question those deeply held assumptions that they have buttressed with words such as legitimacy, legality, and authority.... [These] chapters knock down those barriers, pushing us outside of our comfort zones to show how people justified their specific acts of horrifying violence and how they condemned the equally vicious attacks of their opponents” (p. 274). This volume does just that: individual essays explore myriad implications of violence, sanction, and authority in the colonial Americas. The volume as a whole avoids proto-nationalism, says Humphrey, because the chapters span the chronological and territorial scope of the early Americas, covering the full period of initial contact and European settlement, and offering “a fresh take on the early Americas by illuminating overlapping and competing new world orders”(p. 274).

In presenting a collection that examines violence, sanction, and authority in a variety of New World colonies, this volume successfully places these familiar

themes into broader Atlantic contexts. *New World Orders* contains general and section introductions, an afterword, and eleven chapters divided into four main parts: “Narrating Violence and Legality,” “Authority and Intimate Violence,” “Colonial Space and Power,” and “Race, Citizenship, and Colonial Identity.”

Four of the essays address Spanish colonial efforts, three English, two French, one Dutch, and one which transcends old world national boundaries—Richard Price’s “Dialogical Encounters in a Space of Death,” which focuses on the “post-Columbian Caribbean rimland” (p. 48). Although assigning time periods to the essays narrows them unfairly, the bulk of the book focuses on the eighteenth century, with the seventeenth century exhibiting a recognizable presence, and the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries appearing to a lesser extent. Tamar Herzog’s “Early Modern Spanish Citizenship: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Old and New World” stretches temporal boundaries earlier with its discussion of Old World Castilian Spain.

The juxtaposition of various European settlements, and each authority’s decisions on how best to assert

power and establish political and socio-cultural dominance, works very well in this volume. *New World Orders* is part of a burgeoning trend to bring together linguistically diverse subfields in the New World, and it works well in this case. Readers can assess for themselves the similarities and differences between British, Spanish, French, and Dutch American experiences with authority and violence as they read through the volume. The usefulness of this volume is greater than the information contained in each individual essay; together, they expand the discussion of violence as authority beyond narrow periodization and strictly defined nationalism.

Previous historiographical generations of work on crime and violence have usually focused on a specific locale or time.[1] *New World Orders* moves beyond the confines of space, time, and language, centering on the Atlantic World and New World colonial similarities and differences. The former could be surprising: Gene Ogle's essay on the 1774 beating of a white peddler by a liveried black slave, following his master's orders, took place in Saint Domingue, but the situation could have easily occurred in South Carolina. Differences between European colonies in the New World could also be stark: Ann Twinam's essay focuses on a 1795 Spanish New World price list that allowed a dark skinned *Quinterón* (one-fifth black) to purchase official whiteness in the Americas (p. 249). The list has no official equivalent in the British New World, and is a tangible example of the cultural divide that could exist between European New World colonies.

While the volume is substantively strong, the editors could have taken a stronger role stylistically: some pieces felt choppy, while others seemed uneasy with their own conclusions or contained evidence that could have been better utilized. Having said that, three essays stood out to me as being particularly praiseworthy: Kimberly Gauderman's "The Authority of Gender: Marital Discord and Social Order in Colonial Quito," Sharon Block's "Violence or Sex? Constructions of Rape and Race in Early America," and Gene E. Ogle's "Natural Movements and Dangerous Spectacles: Beatings, Duels, and 'Play' in Saint Domingue."

Gauderman's essay examines the ways in which married women could use the criminal justice system of colonial Quito against men who abused them, focusing on such crimes as adultery, physical aggression, and abandonment. As she says, her findings "put into question the view that a sexual double standard for women and men was universally accepted by colonial Spanish Amer-

ican society and that men's physical aggression against female family members was considered acceptable behavior" (p. 72). Decentralized Spanish authority, characterized by shifting alliances and conflicts, created spaces in Quito where wives and wronged innocents could exert their autonomy and protect their interests, as long as certain norms were followed: a record of public complaints and non-household witnesses being the two major criteria for successful criminal suits. It would be interesting to see whether or not Gauderman's findings could be translated to British America, and how her theories might complicate the standard patriarchy and paternalism explanations that historians have been using and reusing for so long.

Block's essay examines the multiple cultural views of rape that existed in the eighteenth-century British colonies. The question of whether rape was about sex or violence did not have a clear-cut answer in the eighteenth-century British New World. Block has found that "those who had social power and authority were most likely to be seen as sexual or violent offenders, while those without significant social status were seen as sexually violent attackers" (p. 112). While society and the courts most easily labeled black men's attacks as rape, white men's sexual attacks were more likely to be identified as sexual immorality or physical assault. Situations involving black men and black women were viewed as the least serious, being generally described as sexual mischief. Block argues that, in eighteenth-century British North America, cultural homogeneity—especially beliefs about race, sexuality, and the enforcement of authority-dominated views on rape, rather than any economically or agriculturally defined regional identity (p. 113).

Block is particularly skillful at taking scattered evidence and formulating conclusions that tell us something new and interesting. I found it unsurprising, that the courts viewed black men's sexual attacks on white women as the most severe, while explaining white or black attacks without an interracial component most easily as social situations gone awry. Similar definitions—so-called "date rape" vs. rape by an unknown assailant—exist today, and Block's use of these most unpleasant crimes is interesting. She is able to establish how racial groups defined appropriate social interactions and to show how courts tacitly forgave the violence of white men's behavior when it encroached on women's control over their own bodies. However, I felt that Block could have pushed a bit further with her examination of black-on-white rape. Black men who attacked and raped white colonial women (rather than merely being accused of doing so)

were certainly aware of their actions as being violent attacks against both a female body and a social superior. Malevolence exists, but it also has meaning, and I thought that side of the issue could have been more fully explored.

Ogle's essay, as mentioned previously, centers on the May 1774 beating in Saint Domingue of a white peddler by a liveried black slave following an order from his plantation manager. The peddler had chased the slave across the marketplace, before the tables turned and the slave chased him back. Ogle uses this case "to explore the relationships between violence, status, and race beyond the plantation and patriarchal household" (p. 226). A wide-ranging cultural vocabulary existed in Saint Domingue for discussing public violence, with honor and fears of slave revolts shaping the language and behavior exhibited by participants on both sides. I found Ogle's discussion of the classic duel, juxtaposed with masters' and slaves' concepts of "play" as an appropriate mode of interaction between men of color particularly thought provoking (pp. 240-245). Throughout, Ogle refers to the plantation manager as the slave's master, and discusses him as an elite white. Since my own background is in British North America, I found this point an interesting one, and I thought that Ogle could have more fully explored this distinction. For those who do not have a background in French colonial history, it would have added an interesting dimension to the court case: as a white

man, and a representative of the owner, did the manager have the same authority over the plantation's slaves as the owner?

This volume could be used as a teaching tool; depending on the level of undergraduates' knowledge, individual essays would work well as content-driven pieces, while providing the backdrop for students to engage in weightier methodological and historiographical discussions. It also works as an academic collection; historians trained in the study of specific colonial regions will also find this it a useful starting point from which to examine the variable meanings given to violence and authority in multiple areas of the New World, and how these themes crossed national boundaries.

#### Note

[1]. For example, Douglas Greenberg, *Crime and Law Enforcement in the Colony of New York, 1691-1776* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976); Donna J. Spindel, *Crime and Society in North Carolina, 1663-1776* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Derek N. Kerr, *Petty Felony, Slave Defiance, and Frontier Villainy: Crime and Criminal Justice in Spanish Louisiana, 1770-1803* (New York: Garland Press, 1993); and Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds., *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

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