women shopkeepers, tradespeople, and merchants. The passion and complexity of urban romantic liaisons are clearly detailed in riveting accounts of adultery, bigamy, battery and—more touchingly—the struggles of ordinary men and women to forge meaningful partnerships and find companionship in a legal context in which any sexual relationship outside of formal, legal marriage was a crime. Lesbian lovers, incestuous bed-sharers, and violent rogues abound in the rich case-study material, along with women pawnbrokers, nefarious debtors, and fights over spoiled shrimp. Black’s creative and thoughtful reading of his sources provides enormous insight into the day-to-day workings of the legal system and also reveals popular conceptions of sexual propriety, business ethics, and the operation of credit—and how these sometimes differed from the standards imposed by governing elites. The author ensures that we never lose sight of how gender norms related to the operation of the law and how they could be used both to impose particular norms of propriety and as a tool through which women could seek to extend their practical and strategic goals. He traces how women’s ability to wield these norms to their advantage changed over time, as the privileges women held as a colonial corporate group were replaced by the egalitarian impulse of state liberalism.

If the case-study detail is compelling, Black is less convincing in his broader arguments. He demonstrates very effectively the way in which white elite and some mestiza women were able to use the idea of special privilege to their advantage in the colonial era; however, his claim that “all social groups of the city” were able to benefit (161) is not fully borne out by his evidence, and indigenous and black women are not highly visible in his study. Black does show that women became more dependent on male legal representation as liberalism rose. He is not as convincing in his claim that some women’s ability to represent themselves in the colonial period and to mitigate the rigors of the legal system through appeals to customary norms meant that the colonial state was not patriarchal. The working of the legal system is not quite the same as the operation of society and should not be read as shorthand for it. Suggesting that, because some women had some access to legal rights some of the time, there was no patriarchy is like saying that the colonial system was not based on racial hierarchy because some indigenous communities held corporate protections, and some enslaved Africans were able to gain manumission.

The original and provocative nature of Black’s arguments means this book deserves a wide readership—especially among those interested in Latin American independence, gender history, or global liberalism—even if readers do not always find themselves fully in agreement with what they read.

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Chazkel, Amy
Laws of Chance: Brazil’s Clandestine Lottery and the Making of Urban Public Life
Durham, NC: Duke University Press 368 pp., $94.95, ISBN: 978-0-8223-4973-0 Publication Date: June 2011

Laws of Chance is a theoretically grounded study of Brazilian modernity and the making of the informal sector through a focus on the jogo do bicho, the well-known animal game practiced by Rio’s popular classes throughout the twentieth century. Amy Chazkel deeply analyzes the thin line that separated legality from illegality in twentieth-century Brazil, a line that forms part of the contested ground through which the country’s popular classes negotiated relations with the state. Laws of Chance, thus, contributes to ongoing debates on Brazilian state formation, working class culture and elite normalization, and the development of a judicial apparatus in this post-emancipation society that targeted the everyday life of the poor as processes of enclosure transformed Rio’s landscape within the expansion of capitalist privatization. As Chazkel argues, these processes of enclosure developed legal fences around the occupation of the city’s public spaces that confined certain popular activities to a world of illegality that was in conversation with the official and legal world of market trading.

The animal racket game (jogo do bicho) emerged in the late nineteenth century and was criminalized from its very beginning. Those who played the game were Rio’s poor, for the most part Afro-Brazilians who had converged on the city to seek employment in the post-emancipation period. They filled the ranks of the city’s lower classes, occupying the urban space as petty vendors selling a world of goods from the city’s agrarian hinterland. They were joined by European immigrants who had come to form part of the poor in Rio. Playing the jogo quickly emerged as a staple of working-class culture and mores, as Chazkel painstakingly discusses. The game itself provided the opportunity to quickly earn needed wages in the tight free-labor market of the early twentieth-century. Despite the central role of the game in the life of the poor and its popularity, the jogo was quickly attacked by the legal apparatus of the consolidating Brazilian state. During the first twenty-five years of its existence, Chazkel argues, although those who played the game could regularly be found in police arrest records, only four percent of the cases ended in conviction. Chazkel studies the seeming contradiction between the high arrest rates and the very low conviction rate, as well as the general outcry from legislators, concerned citizens, and politicians to combat or to repress the game based on “a timeless agreed-upon principle that games of chance threatened social order” (8).

As she demonstrates throughout this richly researched study, ambivalence about how to combat the jogo do bicho as a threat to social order provides a window onto how the criminalization of the game unfolded and how it existed in a blurry area between legality and illegality. Indeed, at issue was whether the game should be legalized and regulated or whether practitioners should be branded criminals and the game itself be criminalized. This debate hinged on the fact that the state had its own lotteries and its own capitalist market culture, so the jogo could simply be legalized and regulated in Rio.

Through extensive research in Rio’s national archive and the city archive, Chazkel considers an array of sources, including legislative debates, police arrest records, photographs, and chronicles, among others, to explore the specific niche that the jogo do bicho occupied within the law. She borrows from the British theoretical framework of enclosure, which led to the separation of private from common property in early modern Britain, to understand how the game in Rio was symptomatic of larger transformations in early twentieth-century Brazil. Thus, she studies the criminalization of the game as part of the privatization of
public spaces in Rio in the post-emancipation and modernization periods. She provides a novel, long-durée interpretation of Brazilian modernization and modernity related to the enclosures of public spaces and public goods; the development of the informal economy, as the game became one of the popular activities or trades that were left outside the fences of privatization; and the regulation of urban public life. By deftly removing the jogo do bicho from linear studies of criminality and defining it, instead, as a type of trade—a good on the city’s streets that came to inhabit the gray area between legality and illegality—Chazkel is able to integrate the particularity of the game with the research on urban violence and on racial and class segregation in late twentieth-century Brazil found in Janice Perlman, Brodyn Fischer, and Teresa Caldeira’s scholarship.

This study, thus, has broader relevance to contemporary debates on the root of drug trafficking and urban violence in late-twentieth-century Brazil. It will enrich the reading list of graduate seminars on the making of the informal sector, urbanization, and legal cultures in Latin America in the twentieth century.

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Johnson, Lyman L.
Workshop of Revolution: Plebeian Buenos Aires and the Atlantic World, 1776–1810
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Publication Date: May 2011

Lyman L. Johnson, the author of Workshop of Revolution, is professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. He is coauthor of Colonial Latin America (Oxford University Press, 2009) and editor and coeditor of several books, including Essays on the Price History of Eighteenth Century Latin America (University of New Mexico Press, 1990); Aftershocks: Earthquakes and Popular Politics in Latin America (University of New Mexico Press, 2009); and The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America (University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

Workshop of Revolution shows how the relationship between Spanish authorities and local artisans became increasingly strained during the course of the late eighteenth century. The book begins with a story of how the colonial administration attempted to limit access to certain crafts by establishing artisan guilds, most of which excluded members based on race and ethnicity and imposed high guild fees. Such examples led to the humiliation and exclusion of the plebeian artisans, who eventually eagerly joined the militia to battle first against the British blockade of 1806 and then for independence from Spanish authorities in 1810. This book’s layers of information enhance our understanding of the plebeian and artisan classes in colonial Buenos Aires during the Atlantic age of revolution and place Buenos Aires within this important period of Atlantic history. By the late colonial period, Buenos Aires has started to undergo social, political, and economic changes, largely because of the growing connections between this port city, Spanish authorities, and the newly industrializing economies of the Atlantic world.

This book makes three clear contributions. First, it identifies and tracks the tensions between the racially and ethnically diverse working classes and the Spanish colonial administration. Second and most important, Johnson’s rigorous use of quantitative data to develop wage and price series and his close analysis of employment records fill a lacuna in English-language monographs regarding the working class and their skilled labor during the colonial period in Buenos Aires. As Johnson highlights in his introduction, “it is a great misfortune that so many Latin American historians interested in the popular classes have failed to situate their research within the economic structures that framed those lives” (13). Last, although it is not the intent of the book to discuss the effects of natural environmental catastrophes on the lives of the plebeians, the discussion of the region-wide drought of 1802 clarifies the strenuous relationship between plebeians and local administrators. In one instance, the drought was feared because it could cause food, particularly beef, shortages. Administrators feared that rising beef prices would trigger “violent protest” among the local population (183). This same period of the drought of 1802 coincided with a decline in real wages and international market decline.

Workshop of Revolution contains unique scholarship; the devotion, patience, and diligence devoted to collecting and analyzing this body of research are evident in this rich story about the artisan plebeians. From the book’s numerous tables, figures, and illustrations, we learn about the lives of the artisans: who they were, what they crafted, their day-to-day existence, their wages, and their living expenses. Any economic historian of Latin American history should pay particular attention to this data, including the comparative median wages of urban workers in Table 9 (218) and the great daily wage disparity between skilled and unskilled workers shown in Table 11 (240).

The audience for this book could be upper-level undergraduates, graduate students, or historians at all levels. The book is well written and thorough in revealing the origins, skills, and lives of working-class plebeians in late colonial Buenos Aires. It can be cross-listed as social, political, or economic history of the working poor and skilled artisans. The book is particularly valuable for two reasons. First, the author has found and collected scarce and rare quantitative records from the colonial period in Argentina. Such sources could potentially be used by future scholars to expand Johnson’s findings. Second, this book is a valuable contribution to the extant literature on the economic history of colonial Latin America. Another work on Latin American economic history during the colonial period is the Cambridge Economic History of Latin America, Volume 1: The Colonial Era and the Short Nineteenth Century, coedited by Victor Bulmer-Thomas, John Coatsworth, and Roberto Cortes-Conde (Cambridge University Press, 2005). Other important works on Argentine and Latin American economic histories during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries include Victor Bulmer-Thomas’s The Economic History of Latin America since Independence (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and A New Economic History of Argentina, edited by Alan M. Taylor and Gerardo della Paolera (Cambridge University Press, 2003). My hope is that Johnson’s work will motivate future scholars to continue researching the everyday lives of artisans within an economic framework.

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