

outside the Soviet body politic, subject to suspicion and to numerous forms of discrimination; many fell victim to the deadly campaigns against “anti-Soviet elements” during the Stalinist terror of 1937–38. By the late 1930s, rehabilitation and redemption were no longer among the most important of “Soviet values.”

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J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. Pp. 560. \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 0-300-11431-1); \$22.00 paper (ISBN 9-780-300-11431-7).

J. H. Elliott has spent a lifetime exploring the society and politics of early modern Spain and Spanish America, most recently as Regius Chair of Modern History at Oxford. He has drawn on this deep knowledge to produce a magisterial comparison of the Spanish and British empires in the Americas. The book thoughtfully synthesizes secondary sources rather than presents new findings based on archival research. Since my review appears in a journal of legal history, I will concentrate on his treatment of government and post-revolutionary statebuilding, though at the cost of placing to the side Elliott’s discussion of social structure, religion, demography, identity, and a host of other important subjects.

Elliott notes that much comparative work on British and Spanish America either draws strong contrasts (as suggested by the title of James Lang’s *Conquest and Commerce: Spain and England in the Americas* [1975]), or finds underappreciated commonalities (as when Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra emphasized the shared chivalric, crusading spirit of both empires in *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* [2006]). Elliott appears equally interested in similarities and differences. He does not devote chapters wholly to one empire or the other; nor does he proceed chronologically. Instead, he organizes his chapters by problems or developments common to both empires (say, “occupying American space” or “confronting American people”). This format allows him to present material from both the British and Spanish experiences sequentially within the chapter or intermixed, almost braided, in ways that highlight similarities and differences in how the two empires met shared challenges. While Elliott devotes attention to indigenous peoples and Africans, he mainly emphasizes settler societies.

His treatment of government in the British and Spanish empires does not present a novel interpretation so much as lay out themes developed over the last two generations of scholarship (to which Elliott himself contributed much). The Spanish crown imposed administrative, judicial, and ecclesiastical bureaucracies on its territories in order to reap the immense riches of the Americas and oversee the Christianization of millions of Native-Americans. The crown did not permit representative assemblies, and elected town councils over time hardened into self-perpetuating oligarchies. The bureaucracies provided a site for negotiation and compromise among the metropolis, American officeholders, and settler interest groups, thereby allowing for the limited resistance and reciprocal relationship that vassals expected in their dealings with the crown. In English America, political and administrative

institutions “were more likely to evolve from below than to be imposed from above” given the scant imperial presence in the seventeenth century (134). Representative assemblies and widespread local participation in law enforcement were at the heart of political culture. Behind these differences were common challenges. Neither empire possessed the fiscal, military and administrative resources to rule far-off colonies as though they were provinces of the mother country, not least because of the distance, expense, and time lags created by the Atlantic Ocean. Both needed to achieve political decentralization, ceding unusually large authority (by metropolitan standards) to local officials in the Americas. The dissimilar administrative structures and political cultures of the two empires provided different strategies for achieving political decentralization and continual negotiation over vast distances.

The English colonies of mainland North America appeared markedly heterogeneous in comparison to the more uniform settlements in the core areas of the Spanish empire. Without powerful crown bureaucracies and royal officials to encourage administrative homogeneity and provide a model for emerging elites, and lacking a single established church, the English colonies retained much of the distinctive religious and cultural characteristics of their founders. Yet this observation points to a puzzle. Why did the American Revolution lead to a unified nation, while the early nineteenth-century revolts against Spanish authority broke the empire into a group of quarreling countries, unsettled and often violent within? This question lies at the heart of Elliott’s comparative treatment of revolution and state building. Day-to-day governance in the English empire depended on colonial assemblies and county and town tribunals staffed by local notables, all of which remained intact when imperial authority dissolved. By contrast, the Spanish crown appointed and oversaw government throughout all levels of the empire’s viceroalties and *audiencias* without the use of provincial assemblies, so that the withdrawal of imperial power left a void. Without familiar political institutions to serve as a rallying point; divided by vast distances and poor communications; unskilled in representative politics; suffering from protracted wars of independence whose savagery fed off of racial, class, and ethnic tensions—the Spanish empire broke apart as independence came to its constituent territories at different times. This story only hints at the scope and richness of Elliott’s masterful comparative history.

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Ken MacMillan, *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World: The Legal Foundations of Empire, 1576–1640*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. xiii + 235. \$90.00 (ISBN 0-521-87009-7).

A lot has been written lately on the intellectual roots of the European colonization of the Americas, much at a high level of generality. In this short and engaging book Ken MacMillan takes a close-up view of a thin slice of the subject. He limits his attention to England; we hear of other parts of Europe only as competitors for control of the New World. He ends his story in 1640, when the English colonial enterprise was only just getting started and before many of the frequently cited