

Book Review

Brian P. Owensby. *New World of Gain: Europeans, Guaraní, and the Global Origins of Modern Economy*. Stanford University Press, 2022. Pp. 378. Paperback \$35.00.

Brian Owensby's *New World of Gain* traces the history of Spanish-Guaraní interactions in Paraguay from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, making several bold arguments about world history. Owensby asserts that Guaraní-Spanish relations were marked by a collision between nascent European notions of "gain" or profit as central to human behavior and Guaraní "substantive mutuality," a social structure centering gift-giving, reciprocity, and kinship. Drawing on economic historian Karl Polanyi's work on the rise of "gain" in modern economics, Owensby argues that gain arose much earlier than Polanyi suggested. Hence, he presents the conflict between gain and substantive mutuality in Paraguay as a case study in the origins of modern economic thought. Offering Guaraní substantive mutuality as an alternate foundation of early modern Paraguayan society, Owensby not only revises Polanyi's timeline of modern economics, but also, by centering Guaraní perspectives, intervenes in historiographies of colonial South America and European economics that have tended to center European actors. All this serves his broader assertion that, despite modern scholars' view of gain as an unquestionable motive for human behavior, neither the historiography nor human economy itself must necessarily center individual profit. This deeply-researched study therefore offers a significant and principled intervention to the field of economic history.

Owensby, Professor of History at the University of Virginia, begins by outlining the philosophical underpinnings of pre-contact Guaraní and Spanish economics. While Guaraní society was based on relationships affirmed through gift-giving and economic reciprocity, he argues, Europe was turning toward a social system centering profit and commerce, which permitted and even valued the pursuit of individual gain at others' expense. As Spanish explorers, settlers, and missionaries in the sixteenth century ventured inland into South America from the Atlantic Coast and encountered Guaraní lands, European and Guaraní social systems were forced to interact. During the following two centuries, Guaraní substantive mutuality confronted European gain in various contexts: the exchange of women in nascent power negotiations, royal calls for "conservation" of

Indians, the founding and operation of the Jesuit-Guaraní missions, the Comunero revolt and Guaraní War, and Guaraní communities after the Jesuit expulsion of 1767. Owensby also analyzes European responses to the Guaraní missions. His methodology converses with the fields of anthropology, linguistics, economics, and political philosophy. His sources include Guaraní and Spanish letters, petitions, and dictionaries; Jesuit Annual Letters; *cabildo* minutes; and European essays and magazine articles.

Owensby's linguistic approach is particularly strong. He reads Guaraní and Spanish documents alongside modern translations of the Guaraní to illustrate "telling gaps between what [the Spanish] were saying and what mission Guaraní would likely have heard" (p. 294). For example, letters responding to the abolishment of the communal system read much more enthusiastically in Spanish than in the Guaraní version. Likewise, historical Spanish and Spanish-Guaraní dictionaries reveal important gaps in meaning. These linguistic explorations support Owensby's overall project of recuperating Guaraní historicity and decentering Europeans in early modern history.

The latter half of the book explores the Guaraní-Jesuit missions' rise and eventual fall. For Owensby, the founding of these missions represented a Guaraní project grounded in notions of mutuality, the Guaraní forming an alliance of sorts with the Jesuits for their own benefit. Jesuit notions of free will and charity aligned better with Guaraní social norms than slave raids and the *encomienda* forced labor system. Thus, the missions created a novel social structure that melded Guaraní and Jesuit ideologies to protect Guaraní lives and mutuality in new ways. Owensby shows how Jesuit *Cartas Anuas*, recorded speeches and catechisms, and even the architecture of the missions embodied reciprocity.

Owensby admits to the challenges of bringing early modern Guaraní perspectives into the work of contemporary historians. Indeed, he problematizes the very practice of Western history as one which "subordinates other ways of thinking about human time" that may not emphasize human agency or linear progress (p. 11). One intervention he offers is a brief discussion of the Guaraní concept of a "Land Without Evil" as a "parallel and distinct temporal horizon" (p. 13). *Tecoá* is another key term, indicating the Guaraní cultural geography comprised of interconnected zones of "forest, farm, and village." Though contemporary, non-Guaraní comprehension of early modern Guaraní ontology is unavoidably limited, the inclusion of

these indigenous concepts is an important effort to decenter Europeans from this study. Overall, Owensby makes a striking argument for a different understanding of not just Paraguayan history, but also Western history more broadly, that takes neither European perspectives nor European economics as essential or inevitable. Historians of the early modern Americas as well as those with an interest in the early modern roots of capitalism will find this book enlightening.

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