

## LAW AND HISTORY REVIEW, VOLUME 27 - ISSUE 03

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Laura Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880–1952*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. Pp. xiv + 398. \$23.95 (ISBN 978-0-8223-4067-6).

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similarity across the English, American, and Canadian cases stands at the heart of the story. Benidickson's explanation for this convergence points in large part to the three countries' shared common law tradition. A pertinent question the book does not address is the degree of overlap between the history of water pollution within and outside the common law world. In a number of places, the text hints at the possibility that developments in countries such as France and Germany followed a somewhat different course. Most intriguing in this connection is a brief mention of the early twentieth-century reform efforts of a francophone Canadian legislator by the name of Napoléon Belcourt. Belcourt invoked both Roman law and examples of stringent regulation of water pollution in France in his vigorous, but ultimately unsuccessful campaign to establish national controls on water pollution in Canada (177). Yet the reader is offered no further discussion of whether and how the policies put in place in continental Europe differed from those that took hold under Anglo-American law. Greater attention to this question would have better clarified the common law's specific contribution to the cluster of ideas accounting for the culture of flushing.

Beyond its cross-national focus, Benidickson's book departs from other historical works in this area in its somewhat skeptical attitude towards the benefits of nineteenth-century sanitary reform. Martin Melosi's *The Sanitary City* (2000) perhaps best illustrates this point. In his monumental work Melosi highlights the contribution of nineteenth-century sanitation to the prevention of communicable diseases and improved quality of life in the city, even as he recognizes that these improvements came at the cost of adverse environmental consequences. In Benidickson's account it is those environmental consequences that take center stage, with little, if any, discussion of associated gains. Benidickson blames "the convenience of flushing" (126) for the rejection of the land-based conservancy model, but stops short of arguing that the model in fact offered a viable alternative to water-based disposal. Neither is Benidickson willing to offer any policy prescriptions as to the proper solutions to problems of water pollution today (332). The reluctance to extract implementable lessons from the history it recounts diminishes in some respects from the book's ability to speak more directly to contemporary water pollution debates. Where the book succeeds admirably is in bringing its readers face-to-face with the consequences of environmental choices, both present and past.

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Laura Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880–1952*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. Pp. xiv + 398. \$23.95 (ISBN 978-0-8223-4067-6).

In April of 1952, Bolivia experienced what is probably the least studied social revolution in Latin American history. Scholarly accounts of this revolutionary episode have tended to emphasize the role of mine-workers' unions in radicalizing what has been most commonly treated as a brief, predominantly urban insurrection spearheaded by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR). In *A Revolution for Our Rights*, Laura Gotkowitz broadens the interpretive frame by situating the

revolution within a history of ongoing indigenous struggles. In so doing, she makes a major contribution to Bolivian historiography.

Gotkowitz takes as her point of departure the aggressive liberal reforms of the late 1860s and early '70s (chapter 1). These aimed to privatize communal indigenous landholdings and undo the traditional authority structures of Indian communities, while implementing programs to "civilize" the rural indigenous population. As Gotkowitz demonstrates, this provoked a range of innovative legal and political responses by indigenous activists, setting in motion a pattern of agrarian contention that persisted through 1952.

Gotkowitz thus makes the eighty-year period preceding the 1952 revolution the focus of her ambitious study. She maps a complex socio-political landscape populated by indigenous hacienda workers and community members, indigenous leaders, elite hacienda owners, local state administrators and legal authorities, and urban political reformers and state makers. By following the shifting relationships among these actors, Gotkowitz is able to trace unfolding conflicts over the legal status of Indian communities and communal land, over the authority of indigenous leaders, and over the meanings of indigenous rights and citizenship.

The first three chapters set the stage for the rest of the book by documenting early challenges to the liberal project by an emerging network of indigenous leaders. They then analyze the ways in which these leaders influenced and were influenced by the national congressional debates of the pre-Chaco War period.

The remaining five chapters cover the dramatic events that followed Bolivia's devastating defeat in the Chaco War. After the war, debates raged over the citizenship status and overall treatment of the indigenous population (chapter 4). These culminated in the Constitutional Convention of 1938. While the new constitution contained only limited gains for the indigenous population, the constitutional debates provided activists with valuable rhetorical resources and triggered a wave of rural mobilization (chapter 5). Partly in response to this mobilization, the military populist government that emerged in 1944 cultivated the ideal of a mestizo "nation" and attempted to incorporate indigenous movements by staging a national Indigenous Congress (chapters 6 and 7). While this Congress again rendered only modest gains, ambiguity about the new laws, and the fact that the state provided no channels (apart from the indigenous delegates themselves) for publicizing these new laws, helped to stimulate another wave of rural insurrection in 1947—what Gotkowitz calls the "revolution before the revolution" (286).

Indeed, the climax of the book's historical narrative is not the 1952 revolution itself (which is discussed only in the conclusion), but its 1947 precursor. In her sophisticated analysis of this understudied episode (chapter 8), Gotkowitz details compelling continuities with earlier uprisings: in the geographic distribution of events, language of claims making, repertoires of contentious practices, and (perhaps most importantly) institutionally connected networks of legally and politically experienced indigenous leaders. But while Gotkowitz argues that the 1947 "cycle of unrest" played a key role in producing the 1952 revolution (286), it is precisely the strength of her analysis of the origins of the former that highlights her lack of similar evidence for (indeed, the lack of a substantive chapter on) the proximate rural and indigenous causes of the latter.

That Bolivia experienced a more or less continuous history of rural indigenous activism from the 1870s through 1952 is now indisputable, thanks to this important study. That this history must have in some ways “*helped pave the path* for Bolivia’s 1952 Revolution” (3, my emphasis) is equally evident. But the precise *nature* and *degree* of this influence remains unclear. Lacking data from the 1947–52 period, and with only vague suggestions as to the connections between the events of 1947 and 1952, Gotkowitz does not specify exactly how Bolivia’s history of indigenous struggles helped produce and shape the revolution. Thus, it must be noted that while *A Revolution for Our Rights* establishes a novel and compelling interpretive frame for 1952, it does not attempt to revise MNR-centered accounts by presenting new evidence for the revolutionary period itself. Rather, the book should be understood as an exemplary study of Bolivia’s long and complicated history of indigenous struggles over land, labor, rights, and representation, as well as a subtly executed examination of the creative ways in which activists engage with legal language, authorities, and practices to challenge the status quo.

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Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage in China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. Pp. 352. \$60.00 (ISBN 978-0-8047-5688-4).

In *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, Louise Edwards traces the movement for women’s suffrage in China during the first half of the twentieth century. During these years, “suffrage” distinctly meant, as it still does in the West today but no longer in China, the right to vote. Yet Edwards approaches the Chinese campaign for women’s suffrage more broadly as the fight for equal rights in political participation, which is what it achieved. Given how the topics of feminism and women’s suffrage in China have been treated historically, one cannot be faulted for thinking that only an insignificant elite was concerned with women’s right to vote and that these activists were linked with a failed “bourgeois feminism”; or that “the women question” was largely a tool used to further nationalist and other particular political ends; or that suffragism was irrelevant in a period of failed democratic electoral politics and had little to do with the “real struggles” of these revolutionary decades. Edwards, however, documents an “impressive record of feminist success” (2), and her work shatters these assumptions by offering new and important historical insights.

The author narrates how after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, women gained equal political rights in several provincial constitutions and began to sit in local legislatures. Activists from privileged backgrounds “crafted political identities for themselves as women that were both public and antagonistic” (5–6). With the aim of proving themselves equal to men, the first women suffragists had a distinct military bent due to their participation in overthrowing the Qing. Despite betrayal in 1913 by their male colleagues who formed the new republican governments that followed the Qing, the early suffragists’ unsuccessful campaign for equal