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**Review of: *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain*. By Nancy E. van Deusen.**

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Review of:

***Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain.*** By Nancy E. van Deusen. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015. Pp. xv, 319. Preface. Acknowledgments. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$94.95 cloth; \$26.95 paperback.

This is a beautiful and complicated book. At its heart are 184 petitions for freedom filed by indigenous American slaves living in Andalucía, Spain, in response to the New Laws of 1542. Van Deusen continues a recent trend of attention paid to Native Americans traveling west to east in the early modern period. Her argument, however, is global.

As touchstones of colonial reality and claimants to something better, diasporic indigenous slaves in sixteenth-century Spain forced conversations about imperialism into the open. Their pursuit of freedom highlights the grasping geographical extent of early modern European imperialism and “some of the more insidious aspects of colonial governance” (227), including self-serving paternalism, the

desire for possession, the assumption of power over others, and an adherence to “papereality” (128) that justified abuse as often as it protected the weak.

The book starts at a microhistorical level and moves the lens steadily back. The preface and Chapter 1 present case studies: a 20-year-old woman whose Indianness (and thus her eligibility for freedom) was affirmed by Bartolomé de las Casas in 1549, and two mother-daughter pairs living in the town of Carmona, near Seville, who petitioned for freedom multiple times between 1558 and 1572. Van Deusen skillfully paints Seville and its environs as “the world in a village” (34), with slaves from around the globe filling the most parochial towns. Chapters 2 and 3 describe the capture, branding, transatlantic crossing, sale, and service of indigenous Americans in Spain more generally. Here van Deusen makes a crucial turn to consider also the laws and attitudes that made the slave trade possible even after its formal abolition. Legal codes, she writes, were inseparable from the sense of imperial entitlement expressed even by Iberians who had never traveled beyond the peninsula. “The law was not an abstract set of principles placed above the values of patriarchy, paternalism, and privilege: it was cut of the same cloth” (101).

Chapters 4 and 5 summarize the evidence and narratives used to prove or disprove legal possession of an Indian slave in mid sixteenth-century Spanish courts. “*Indios*,” whose natural slavery was now officially rejected, were reconstituted as “*indios esclavos*” with alleged origins in non-Spanish realms, a Muslim heritage, or captures of a “just war” or “*rescate*,” thereby rationalizing their continued bondage. The vaguely defined but oft-granted status “neither slave nor free”—a legal solution to the New Law’s inconveniences that van Deusen terms “palliative” (120)—may have afforded some ex-slaves a measure of personal dignity, but it failed to liberate them from claims to their labor by former masters.

All this sets the stage for van Deusen’s expansive analysis in the last two chapters. The “indioscape” was vast and global, literal and conceptual. Linked first to slavery and then to freedom, the term ‘indio’ could apply to people anywhere from North Africa to Peru to Brazil to Goa. Identity was affixed to geographic origin (*naturaleza*) and corporate community (*nación*) and encoded in highly unstable physiognomic categories of color. Traders and owners sought to maintain possession of indigenous slaves by labeling them “*berberiscos*” (from North Africa) or “*loros*” (an increasingly and usefully vague color term), or assigning them other descriptors favorable to possession. Native American slaves, many of whom had left America as children, poignantly tried to recall their own distant pasts. The courtroom thus became a site of imperial imaginings and “flowing narratives about sovereignty” (214), as witnesses envisioned faraway places, peoples, and customs while inspecting indigenous slaves’ bodies and dissecting their personal histories.

Taking such a broad view risks overreach. It works because of the uniqueness of the source material and van Deusen’s willingness to look beyond indigenous history centered on the American continent or even the Atlantic world. Her fine analysis reveals the interdependence of the Portuguese and Spanish empires, the independent interests of merchants, the instability of ‘racial’ terminology at this juncture in European history, and the willingness of imperial bureaucracy to smooth over the process of emancipation for owners. Nevertheless, van Deusen begins and ends by paying tribute to the indigenous slaves themselves: their survival, tenacity, and exposure of “what was wrong with colonial

governance" (230). In this last regard, her book compares well to recent work on African Americans' pursuit of equality throughout colonial and postcolonial Latin America.

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