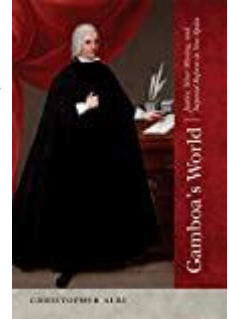


Christopher Albi. *Gamboa's World: Justice, Silver Mining, and Imperial Reform in New Spain (Diálogos Series)*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2021. xiii + 242 pp. \$95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8263-6294-0.



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Commissioned by Casey M. Lurtz (Johns Hopkins University)

Christopher Albi's biography of Francisco Xavier de Gamboa uses the long life of a leading jurist and judge who rose to the highest echelons of imperial rule despite his creole background to examine the era the author reservedly calls the Bourbon Reforms. This extensively researched biography traces the arc of judicial reforms during the second half of the eighteenth century, when Gamboa, depicted in glowing terms by the author, served as a judge on the highest court of New Spain, its *audiencia*. Albi's work demonstrates that the Bourbon Reforms were neither a unified, cohesive program nor were they accepted without resistance. Gamboa's activism targeted inefficiencies in the all-important mining industry and strove to preserve customary legal traditions against the perceived whims of Spanish-born administrators in the Americas.

Albi illuminates Gamboa as an influential legal scholar who defended regional traditions in New Spain while seeking novel approaches to administration for the betterment of colonial society. From his early setbacks as an orphan in Guadala-

jara to his final post as the regent of the Audiencia of Mexico, Gamboa's writings merit attention for how they shaped colonial rule in New Spain. Contemporaries noted Gamboa's importance although he subsequently fell into obscurity, an oversight Albi aims to correct.

Gamboa's World reconsiders long-held, prevailing interpretations of an eighteenth-century creole rivalry with *peninsulares*, or Spaniards born in the Iberian Peninsula, as a driving force of Bourbon-era history. Albi's study instead emphasizes transatlantic Basque connections and financial partnerships as ties that brought together creoles and peninsulars. As Gamboa's life shows, Basques quickly found allies among their countrymen no matter where they traveled in the Americas. Gamboa, for example, participated alongside Spanish-born Basques in the confraternity of Nuestra Señora de Aránzazu and took a leading role in the foundation of the still-extant school for girls known as the Vizcaínas in New Spain. In Spain, he received a warm welcome among the Basque community of Madrid. While the Basque

associations in both Mexico City and Madrid did indeed play a paramount role in creating social networks, Gamboa and many of his creole allies also showed frustration with heavy-handed peninsular administrators. As the epigraph Albi selected to open chapter 5, taken from the “Representación vindicatoria” of 1771, notes, creoles did resent the rule of peninsulars who ruled “full of maxims of Europe unsuited for these places.” (p. 87.)

Throughout his storied career, Gamboa never rose to the heights of many less-qualified peninsulars. Many of his political rivals came from Spain, and while Gamboa belonged to the upper echelons of society, his Mexican birth limited his ascendancy. Thus, Albi’s assertion that Gamboa is representative of the “pivotal middle” is a bit of a stretch. Along with Albi’s skepticism around the notion of a society rent by divisions between creoles and peninsulars, the author also demonstrates doubts around the uniformity of the Bourbon Reforms as an organized, top-down program. Instead, Albi refers to changes in New Spain as the “Galvesian Reforms,” singling out the *visitador* José de Gálvez as the primary engine of change in New Spain. Indeed, many of the administrative adjustments during Gamboa’s lifetime had their origins in Gálvez. Yet the Bourbon Reforms preceded Gálvez’s term of office and continued beyond the lifetime of the famed Minister of the Indies. Perhaps it is better to see the “Galvesian Reforms” as a local manifestation of the Bourbon Reforms rather than a distinct plan. After all, Gálvez’s innovations would have gone nowhere without the active support of the primary architect of the Bourbon Reforms, Charles III.

Overall, *Gamboa’s World* is essential reading for legal historians of Latin America, students seeking a biography as an entry to the era of the Bourbon Reforms, and those interested in *Derecho Indiano*, the legal regime that governed indigenous peoples in Spanish America. Many key concepts and arguments made in less accessible works are presented here as well, such as Albi’s

reminder of the Christian origins of colonial Latin American law. Even if scholars may not agree with all of Albi’s interpretations, he argues them cogently and livens up the field of legal history with *Gamboa’s World*. For a work on an undeservedly obscure legal scholar and mining expert, Albi’s work is surprisingly approachable and classroom-ready, especially for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses focused on the legal regime or political history. While the subject matter of transatlantic legal thought and mining development may not make *Gamboa’s World* an immediate candidate for surveys of Latin America, Albi’s straightforward prose and his fleshed-out leading characters make this monograph a quick read.

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