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## Blanchard, Peter, Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru

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The authors are to be commended for their work in combining a vast array of sources and techniques to provide new insight into the first North American Spanish-Indian contacts.

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*Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru.* By Peter Blanchard. (Wilmington: SR Books, 1992. xx + 247 pp. Map, bibliography, index. \$40.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

Canadian historian Peter Blanchard offers additional pieces to the jigsaw puzzle of nineteenth-century Latin American slavery by considering the particular case of Peru. From the early 1820s when first José San Martín and then Simón Bolívar assumed leadership for Peruvian independence from Spain against both royalist forces and reluctant creoles, slavery became an uncertain and contested institution. No steady movement toward abolition emerges in Blanchard's account, but rather a fitful, lurching attempt to regulate slavery, marked by numerous reversals as liberals and conservatives jockeyed for power and a small elite of slave-owning *hacendados* insistently protected their interests.

Both San Martín and Bolívar found it necessary to promise emancipation, less from liberal conviction, Blanchard tells us, than the need to man their armies. It was a cautious and limited emancipation intended to avoid alienating creole slaveholders on whom independence also relied. In 1821 San Martín stopped the source of new slaves by declaring a free womb law, freeing all slave children born subsequently, and effectively abolishing the slave trade by decreeing that any slave who entered Peru would be freed. Three years later, Bolívar ordered that slaves could change owners, and in 1825 declared a set of rules designed to provide slaves with at least minimal care and a maximum work schedule while also insuring a stable work force and hence productivity in agriculture. With expectations among slaves high, and apprehensions aroused among slaveholders, Blanchard then shows us how these measures were ignored, eroded, or rescinded until abolition, again the result of expediency during a period of civil war, was finally promulgated in 1854.

What is at first surprising are the numbers: at the end of the independence struggle, slaves numbered about 50,000, or less than 4 per cent of the total population, and by 1854 they constituted only 1 per cent of the

population. At issue is not their total numbers (few in contrast with Brazil, for example), but their concentration on coastal, sugar-growing estates and in the capital, Lima, where they predominated as skilled artisans and domestic servants, making them a crucial labor force, not readily replaced by either *serranos* or Chinese coolies. In Lima even the less wealthy, relying as they did on the income or labor from one or two slaves, had reason to oppose emancipation in any guise.

Blanchard contrasts the Peruvian slavery experience by setting it against the conclusions or debates drawn from other slave societies. If there were anti-slavery proponents scattered throughout society, he argues firmly that no organized movement for abolition ever developed. Acknowledging that changes did occur to erode slavery, Blanchard sides more with theses proposed by Rebecca Scott or Warren Dean than that of Moreno Fraginals in finding no incompatibility between slavery and the limited capitalist development Peru experienced before 1855. And if slaves managed to take advantage of the law that enabled them to purchase their own freedom, Blanchard is clear that accumulating the money was difficult and freedom, if achieved, precariously held. He takes up the old Tannenbaum debate, arguing that despite legal protections, the lot of Peruvian slaves was harsh in all its aspects: material and working conditions, the ability to preserve family life against sales of family members, sexual abuse, high mortality rates, and access to freedom. In this Blanchard challenges both contemporary writers, especially foreign travelers to Peru, and also modern historians who discovered a milder slavery in urban Peru. On the other side, legal protections mattered and slaves knew how to use the courts to press for their rights. Blanchard finds only rare examples of organized rebellion, and the fugitive bands or *montoneros* scarcely fit any Hobsbawmian notion of "social bandits." It is a clear-eyed account that avoids finding heroes where none existed or exaggerating slave agency.

*Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru* is a modestly revisionist account of Peruvian slavery, presenting a useful contrast to other slave societies. That virtue is also the book's shortcoming, for in the end Blanchard errs in being overly derivative. By relying on debates borrowed from other contexts to frame his discussion, he too often hurries past the potentially instructive particularities of the Peruvian slave experience.

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