10.17953/A3.61938

Republic of Indians: Empires of Indigenous Law in the Early American South. By Bradley J. Dixon. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024. 308 pages. $45.00 hardcover.

Bradley Dixon's *Republic of Indians: Empires of Indigenous Law in the Early American South* follows a similar trend in current publication of sociopolitical history in the early South; through an exploration of archival materials, Dixon seeks to resituate Native peoples as playing an active role in shaping colonial life and political history. Dixon engages in a comparative analysis of Spanish colonial Florida and English colonial Virginia between 1608 and 1715. In many ways his book is an application of Eliga H. Gould's assertion that the early English Atlantic was not central, but rather a Spanish periphery, and Dixon's University of Texas dissertation adviser Jorge Cañizares Esguerra's point that these colonial histories are greatly "entangled."

The book recounts the "process of mutual creation" that unfolded between colonizers and Native Southeastern nations, including the Pamunkeys, Apalachees, Chiahominies, Guales, Timucuas, Tuscaros, and Chowan (9). At times constrained by archival evidence and by the politics of whose voices were recorded and included, the book follows the logic Alejandra Dubcovsky uses to read between the archival lines, highlighting the economic influence, political power, and social prowess of Natives in the early South. However, one should be cautious about this approach as it can downplay the multiple scales of distress, pressure, and violence that Native peoples faced during and since colonization. As becomes clear in Dixon's discussion of the Pumankey's *weroansqua* (leader) Cockacoeske during the encroachment and violence of Bacon's Rebellion—Native leaders and peoples were often in a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" position.

It is without a doubt that the early colonies could not have survived without help from Native nations whose peoples were vassals and tributaries, allies and fighters in proxy wars, and served as political buffer zones. As Dixon notes, "Neither the English nor the Spanish could wipe out their Indigenous enemies, nor subdue them forcibly, certainly not without substantial help" (69). How this played out across these differing colonies is important to consider. The Spanish colonies seemingly tried to incorporate Native peoples into their communities as qua citizens while English colonies considered Native peoples as outside the boundaries of citizenship. These differing approaches led to differing outcomes and different levels of "loyalty" and perceived subjugation in the face of political order, discontent, and violence. The matter of citizenship (or subject) is an interesting and contentious one that colors much of the assertion and use of the category "republic" to describe the political and governmental structure of Native nations in their interactions with colonial governments.

We now understand "republic" as a form of government in which people elect/select leaders to represent them. As suggested above, and throughout the book, a republic style of government implies citizenship. But the Spanish legal concept *República de Indios* as implemented by Francisco Álvarez de Toledo may be better understood in the classical sense of Cicero, as a political society endowed with necessary means to govern itself. In the elaboration of this concept by Spanish philosopher Francisco de Vitoria, a republic would be whole unto itself, not part of another republic, but have its own laws, magistrates, and councils. As operationalized in Peru and Mexico, the purpose of these *Repúblicas de Indios* was primarily to facilitate Christianization and to aid in the integration of Indigenous people into the greater Spanish Empire. They made their own decisions about use of communal property, tax collection, and regulation of commerce. Hence, "republic" is neither the most accurate description of customary governance of Native peoples in the early South nor the one that was thrust upon them by colonizers. As Dixon notes numerous times throughout the book, the colonial powers often usurped and imposed political situations upon Native peoples. For example, Dixon notes that "the English, unlike the Spanish, claimed the power to appoint Native leaders and defend their appointees" (89). Clearly, at least in the English colonies, despite treaties, colonial citizens and their monarchs denied Native nations' inherent rights to self-government.

Although Dixon tracks how the Spanish and English monarchs were in communication and, at times, in collaboration about how to set up and rule their colonies, there is a lack of critical consideration of how Native Southerners were in communication about their experiences dealing with the European colonies. Indeed, Dixon spends much of the text considering how Native peoples utilized petitions and direct communication to the monarchs across the Atlantic to secure their liberties, property, and leadership. However, he does not consider that the large and expansive networks of Native peoples could have influenced these practices from Spanish to English settlements.

Students and scholars of the Native Southeast, comparative history, and empires of the Atlantic are all likely to enjoy and benefit from this book. Readers are given multiple instances in which Native peoples' actions helped form colonial legal institutions. Focusing on the context of the contested spaces of Florida and the Carolinas, the book not only elucidates the tensions between Indigenous peoples and European empires but helps readers begin to understand the ongoing contradiction experienced by Indigenous peoples of these lands—simultaneously "natural lords of the land" and Imperial vassals/citizens.

Delaney O'Connell
State University of New York, University at Buffalo

Robert B. Caldwell Jr.
State University of New York, University at Buffalo