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***Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781–1894.* By David Samuel Torres-Rouff. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii, 361. Bibliography. Notes. Index. \ \$65.00 cloth.**

Miroslava Chávez-García

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by the tiresome citation of innumerable confusing examples, or even worse statistical analysis. At the end of the book, the reader actually remembers the individuals under discussion and feels a sense of knowing them as well as possible and understanding how their life experiences elucidate why mestizos represent a “disappearing” category. Rappaport’s analytical narratives include individuals sometimes classed as mestizos, but otherwise known as a duped *doncella*, a politically engaged cacique, an adulterous widow, a frustrated, blustering upwardly mobile Bogotá alderman, a man who just wants to stay with his family and friends in an indigenous village, and even the stereotypical abusive, rabble-rousing mulatto. Rappaport also takes a look at the physical descriptions contained in *casa de la contratación* travel documents, the early modern version of passport photos, expressed in standardized verbiage describing hair texture, skin tone, and most importantly, beards. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the most common color used to describe Spanish skin was brown [*moreno*].

This book corrects simplistic ideas about the timelessness of racial categorization, even including previous efforts to historicize the alleged “hardening” of race designations in the eighteenth century. Rappaport makes an excellent point that historians of other parts of Spanish America should not assume the *sistema de castas* applied beyond New Spain, although it is even doubtful that it works as an analytical framework there. Even if Bourbon reformers attempted to “harden” racial lines or put a “caste system” into effect, scholars who spend their time in archives already know the need to question the effectiveness of these efforts. This book offers an important contribution to the historiography of Spanish rule in the Americas, and might even challenge and complicate undergraduate thinking on race. Understanding the history of the Spanish viceroalties demands mental flexibility, and this book does an essential job of exposing where, through lazy thinking, we still hold onto rigid, anachronistic interpretations.

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Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781–1894. By David Samuel Torres-Rouff. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii, 361. Bibliography. Notes. Index. \$65.00 cloth.
doi:[10.1017/tam.2014.16](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2014.16)

Torres-Rouff breathes new life into the history of nineteenth-century Los Angeles by examining how competing notions of race, place, and identity transformed a region inhabited by Gabrielino-Tongva Indians into a Spanish/Mexican pueblo and, finally, to a city dominated by European American commercial and political interests. The decline in the position of the native and Spanish-speaking populations was neither swift nor complete, as many scholars in the fields of the American West have contended. Rather, it was a prolonged progression, best described as a site of intercultural borderlands where kinship and commercial links kept people bound in community across social, economic, and political interests, leading to what the author calls ‘spatial mestizaje.’

The book does not take categories of race, space, place, and power for granted, or treat them as “natural.” Instead, the work denaturalizes or deconstructs their meaning and demonstrates that those categories were mutually constitutive and interdependent, and that ultimately they were used to wrest power and conquer inhabitants and succeeding residents.

The book opens by showing how impoverished mestizo *pobladores* (settlers) marginalized local Indians and transformed themselves into wealthy *rancheros* (*californios*) and self-sufficient residents (*vecinos*). To claim legitimacy, the settlers rewrote their histories, built a new town, and developed their own ways for defining race and identity based on “ancestry, actions, and achievement” (p. 33). At the same time, they ignored the role of Indians as the original inhabitants and denied them equal possibility for social mobility. As Mexican Californians carved a new racial and cultural identity, they forged social, economic, and cultural relationships with immigrants through intermarriage with *californianas*, allowing the newcomers to integrate at all levels of californio society. These relationships were not necessarily all about profit, Torres-Rouff argues. Instead, they reflected the formation of new families and personal and business relationships, resulting in what he calls an “intercultural society” (p. 19). The newcomers also became key members of the community who served to mediate relations after the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846.

Yet, as competition over identity, space, and municipal power became increasingly complex, fissures over race and civic ideals began to emerge. Those fissures came to a head, the author argues, in the mid 1850s. Until then, Mexican Californians had coexisted with European Americans, sharing views on extralegal justice, land use, water laws, and the press. After 1855, Torres-Rouff contends, those areas of mutuality and coexistence dissolved, leading to injuries and eventually to an unbridgeable gulf between the communities. Ultimately, as the author hints and many scholars have suggested, demographic changes and land loss among Mexican Californians, in particular, accelerated the ideological shift of the emerging European American city leaders, eventually undermining long-standing policies and practices.

The book then examines how Angelenos negotiated the growing rift among the communities and dealt with its impact on family, commerce, and social relations. Despite attempts to maintain the intercultural borderlands, relations began to splinter, especially with the arrival of newcomers from Mexico and the United States in the 1860s and 1870s. Rather than occupy the city center, they settled further away, expanding the city’s spatial dimensions and fracturing remaining links across town. The European American-dominated Common Council added to the splintering by intervening in private commerce and profit-making in ways that disadvantaged even more the most disenfranchised in the city. The result was increasing landlessness and dispossession of Spanish-speaking and other non-white residents, who also lost out over access to municipal services. To further protect what they saw as rightfully theirs, the author reminds us that European Americans engaged in raw and unadulterated violence against the Chinese, ending with the murder of over thirty persons—ten percent of Los

Angeles's Chinese population—some of them children. The election of a new mayor in 1872, a European American interested not in compromise but in commercial growth and expansion, further signaled the demise of the “intercultural civic ideals” and the expansion of “private cooperative ventures” (pp. 21–22).

In the process, Mexican Californians and Chinese Angelenos were deliberately and systematically marked racially and culturally—as biologically inferior to European Americans. Even though Angelenos had become deeply divided across racial, ethnic, class, and political lines, people of all political persuasions continued for some time to come together across social and cultural lines, albeit mainly for special community celebrations. Those events soon came under threat and nearly disappeared. In the early 1870s, the mayor proposed and implemented racially exclusive policies and practices in city planning that benefitted a great majority of European Americans, including business and commercial interests. The marginalization of non-whites, carried out through the configuration and selective delivery of municipal services, he argues, served to mark them and their communities as dirty, backward, and undesirable. Meanwhile, European Americans and their communities were remade and held up as symbols of twentieth-century progress. With that, the social and cultural borderlands of nineteenth-century Los Angeles yielded to a deeply divided city with powerful connotations of race, identity, space, and place, and these in many ways continue to this day.

While Torres-Rouff relies heavily on sources previously mined by many scholars, most notably the Los Angeles City Common Council proceedings and other records, including newspapers, maps, city directories, and published writings, he employs the material in innovative ways. He uses these materials to trace both the growth and expansion and the contraction and demolition of city spaces, and to follow direct links to racial and ethnic interests and political power. The study also makes generous use of secondary sources, some of which solidly support his argument, yet he is selective in deploying that literature. He uses it not only to provide a broader context of the themes he knows less about, such as gender, marriage, and intermarriage, but also to recreate a more vivid and complex picture of the emerging urban landscape than we have known before.

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Indigenous Agency in the Amazon: The Mojos in Liberal and Rubber-Boom Bolivia, 1842–1932. By Gary Van Valen. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2013. Pp. 264. Illustrations. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. \$55.00 cloth.
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The vast Amazon region of South America has not received enough attention from historians. Nowhere is that more demonstrable than in the Amazon of the