

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World. Edited by Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7ww5q1gs>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 16(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Wax, Murray L.

Publication Date

1992

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

able in the context of legal maneuvers, as Parker suggests. Rather they are more clearly analyzed as the result of political power wielded by landowners and political powerlessness suffered by Hawaiians in modern Hawaii.

The vacuum within which Parker seeks to explain the "struggle over Indian and Hawaiian lands" is thus a result of both an excessive legalism and a deep refusal to address characteristic American practices, like genocide and racism, which I have already mentioned. If Parker were more interested in justice and truth and less concerned with an image of objectivity, she would have written a better book. But she has steadfastly avoided issues of culpability (and therefore accuracy) in her telling of one of the greatest evils ever to befall the Indian and Hawaiian peoples.

For those who want more honesty and moral outrage, Parker's book needs to be supplemented by Richard Drinnon's masterpiece, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building*, recently reissued by Schocken, and a pathbreaking work by Hawaiian professor Lilikalā Kame'eleiwi on *haole* theft of Hawaiian land. Titled *Native Land and Foreign Desires*, Kame'eleiwi's book will be published by Bishop Museum Press of Honolulu, Hawaii, in fall 1991.

Haunani-Kay Trask
University of Hawaii

Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World. Edited by Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz. Publications of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, No. 24. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. 288 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

During the course of its prolonged struggle with the Moorish (Islamic) powers, the Spanish Crown had become master of a formidable military and naval technology. Alongside of its armies marched the Church Triumphant, for the Roman Catholic faith was a powerful auxiliary in the process of unifying the Spanish Empire.

In 1492, this formidable set of instruments began to be directed against the native peoples of the Americas. Armed with military technology, the conquistadores devastated the countryside. Although small in number, these ruthless and ambitious men were able to topple the rulers of the great civilized states of middle and

highland South America. In their wake came the Catholic missionaries, mostly members of religious orders: Franciscans, then Dominicans, and later Jesuits. To their credit, some of these tried to defend the natives from the rapacity of the conquistadores, Las Casas being exemplary. Often, they had the ear and the endorsement of the Crown, which wished to create a New Spain in what was, for the invaders, a "New World" and which wanted to incorporate the natives as royal subjects rather than having them exterminated by the freebooters who conquered in its name.

The Inquisition had become an integral part of the Spanish system. The Crown aimed to unify its diverse population with the religion of Roman Catholicism. Initially, it had pressured the Jews and the Moslems (Moors) to accept Christianity, but it soon discovered that forcible baptism does not alter the inner person. The Crown empowered the Inquisition as watchdog, so that those who acknowledged conversion (*conversos*) would become, in thought and in deed, devout Catholics. Its mission was to crush religious dissension and thereby assist in the creation of a unified Catholic empire.

The Inquisition accompanied the Church to the New World, but its position was paradoxical. Among the officials of the Crown and the Holy Office were influential persons who felt that the natives should be brought carefully into the fold of the Church. After all, they were pagans who only now were being exposed to the message of salvation through Christ. Theologically, this stance rested on dubious grounds, for the New Testament (dictated by the Holy Spirit) states that Christ's disciples preached throughout the entire world; if this had been the case, then all of the native peoples were apostates! In any event, the Spanish Crown was generally to follow the policy of using the Inquisition against the *conversos* and other Spanish but not against the Indians. There were some glaring exceptions: "In 1526 [Valencia] ordered the hangings of at least six men and one woman from among the 'most principal caciques' in various *autos de fe*" (p. 29) on the grounds that they were "idolators and sacrificers." A decade later, the first bishop of Mexico carried out dozens of trials, the most well known being that of the cacique don Carlos de Texcoco, which ended with his death at the stake. However, when news of this was brought to the monarch, he not only condemned the action but further ordered that all the victim's belongings be returned to his kinsmen, and he explicitly prohibited the maximum penalty for Indians.

The response of the Crown reveals an aspect of the Inquisition

that was cyclically reinforcing, especially when dealing with Jews and Moors. If the wealth of the victim was forfeit, then greed—individual and institutional—was a potent mechanism for sustaining the attacks. Moreover, if torture could routinely be employed against the accused, then evidence could be created to confirm any fantasy of the prosecutor. And, finally, if the status of being a convert placed one under suspicion, that reinforced kin solidarity and also strengthened the theme of “purity of blood” (i.e., descent), *limpieza de sangre*. The caste system of New Spain and its descendant societies was constructed not around the explicit sign of skin color (as in North America) but on the notion of purity of blood and clarity of descent. As that system evolved, Indians (Catholic, syncretistic, or traditional) were placed at the very base and referred to as “animals.”

The essays in this volume grow out of a conference held in 1988 in Los Angeles. The various contributors are authorities in this field of study. As is evident from the foregoing comments, even when their focus is on New Spain, few of the authorities deal with Native Americans, and none is able to present the viewpoint of those subordinated peoples. Even so, it was seldom the Inquisition itself that affected the lives of the native peoples but rather the intense proselytizing. For the readers of this journal, the most relevant essays are those by Noemi Quezada on the repression of *curanderos*; by Roberto Moreno de los Arcos on the Inquisition for Indians from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries; and by J. Jorge Klor de Alva on the failure of the Indian Inquisition and the rise of “penitential discipline.” Many of the other essays are devoted either to the general nature of the Inquisition or to its focus on Jewish *conversos*, or to the fear and anxiety inspired by the Inquisition among Jews and others. A final result, noted by essayist Silverman, is the transformation implicit in *Don Quixote*, where Cervantes makes lineage (and thereby purity of descent) a matter of indifference to author and readers. Unhappily, this development did not affect the caste situation of the Indians of New Spain.

The reception by Indians of the Catholic message, their response to the appeal and discipline of its evangelists, their integration of its gospel into their cultures, is of great significance. The present work brings scholarly evidence marginally to bear on that topic.

Murray L. Wax

Washington University at St. Louis