Jesse Cromwell, *The Smugglers' World: Illicit Trade and Atlantic Communities in Eighteenth-Century Venezuela*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 336 pp. (Cloth US\$ 39.95)

The Smugglers' World: Illicit Trade and Atlantic Communities in Eighteenth-Century Venezuela is a deeply impressive work of social history. Jesse Cromwell's vivid accounting of the era is meticulous and exhaustive. Over the course of eight richly-documented chapters, as well as a prologue, introduction, and conclusion, he argues that illicit trade shaped every aspect of Venezuelan society, from its economic fortunes to social and legal practices in the colony. He chronicles the tug of war between Spanish imperial officials who tried to prevent, or at least mitigate, contraband trading and Venezuelans of all backgrounds who resisted these attempts to meddle with the delicate and complex political economy to which they were accustomed.

In the introduction, Cromwell claims that Venezuela's contraband economy reflected circum-Caribbean smuggling practices that emerged in the context of "imperial neglect and commercial isolation" and that inhabitants of these underserved areas "found connection and community through illicit exchange" (p. 13). When representatives of the Spanish crown attempted to suppress this moral economy, they threatened more than just commercial norms; they attacked a "societal ethos" (p. 13). Chapters 1 and 2 offer a compelling reconstruction of why and how smuggling became central to a cacao-rich but imperially-marginalized Venezuela. Chapter 3 details the rise and fall of the Caracas Company (*La Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas*), a controversial and ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the Spanish Bourbon Crown to rein in the illicit trade on which Venezuela had come to depend. Chapter 4 traces the way non-Spanish traders embedded themselves in Venezuelan commerce and navigated the risks that attended their dealings. In Chapter 5, Cromwell explores the distinct fates of smugglers of diverse backgrounds, chronicling how the rich and powerful got away with illicit dealings while the poor and less-connected did not. Chapter 6 shows how Spanish officials forged compromises with illicit traders. Chapter 7 describes the risks and rewards that smuggling presented to Afro-Caribbeans. Cromwell's last chapter details the 1749 León Rebellion against the Caracas Company, considering the possible impact of the revolt on the later Bourbon support for standing armies in their American colonies. In his conclusion, he further reflects on how "nonconforming patterns of economic activity" (p. 303) ask us to rethink the impact of commercial actors on the lived experience of the early modern Atlantic world as well as the functioning of the imperial state.

At no point does Cromwell bury the work he has done to complete this illuminating book. The archival and historiographical scaffolding upon which his argument rests are visible in the dense, copious footnotes, which are a treasure trove for experts and students alike. There are times when the lucidity of his prose traces a particularly clear path through the thicket of his scholarship. Two of the most striking instances of this came in the concluding pages of the book. Reflecting on the enduring influence of Basque and Canary Islander rivalries in Venezuela, he notes that these tensions “exposed the fault lines in white ethnogenesis in the province. European ethnogenesis in the Americas evolved from the exclusion of Africans and indigenous peoples, but also from durable ethnic associations from the Old World that complicated the formation of creolized white-ness” (p. 298). Cromwell is also trenchant on the dangers of projecting the political future onto eighteenth-century León rebels’ use of the word “patria”: he writes “We must resist the teleological urge to completely equate their use of this word with the proto-nationalism that it would come to represent during the independence period” (p. 299). In spite of this welcome caution, I believe Cromwell’s insights into the political ramifications of colonial Venezuela’s political economy should shape larger conversations about trends in global imperial practice and colonial revolts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In his conclusion Cromwell writes that “the influence of commercial actors on the communities where they operated stretched well beyond the realm of the market” (p. 303). He shows incontrovertibly that contraband exchange was embedded in a collaboratively-shaped moral economy. In its emphasis on the cultural and social implications of commerce, *The Smugglers’ World* calls to mind the work of scholars such as Francesca Trivellato and Elvira Vilches who have explored the metaphors and myths that informed evolving early modern commercial practices. Although *The Smugglers’ World* is firmly a work of social history, it provides rich material for scholars interested in the relationship between practice and *mentalité*. Cromwell has produced a significant contribution to the fields of Latin American and Atlantic history, in which it is certain to become required reading.

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