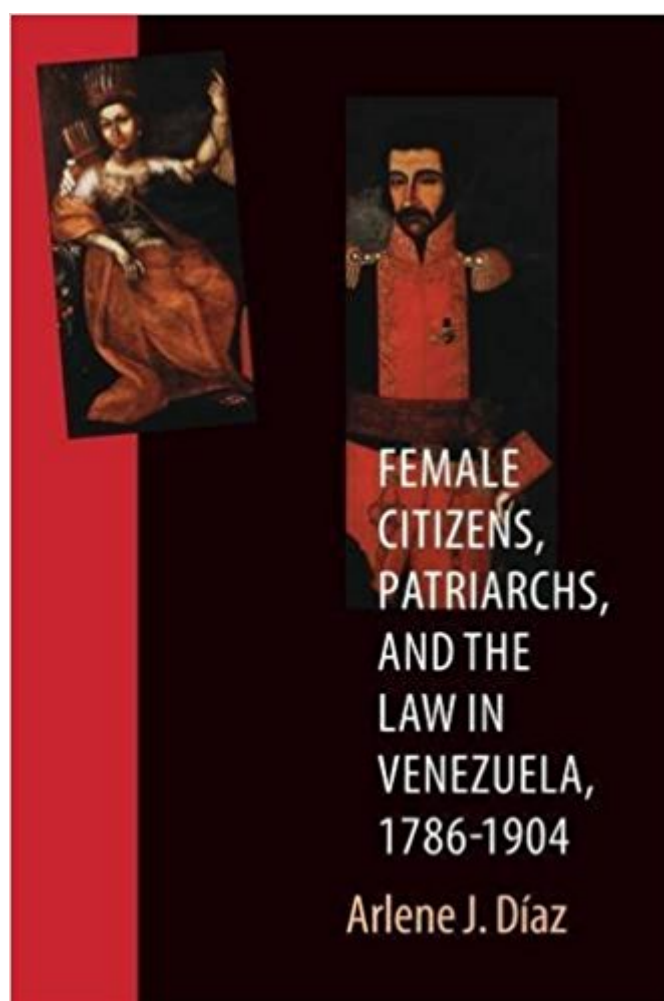


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Female Citizens, Patriarchs, And The Law In Venezuela, 1786-1904 (Engendering Latin America)



Synopsis

Female Citizens, Patriarchs, and the Law in Venezuela examines the effects that liberalism had on gender relations in the process of state formation in Caracas from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century. The 1811 Venezuelan constitution granted everyone in the abstract, including women, the right to be citizens and equals, but at the same time permitted the continued use of older Spanish civil laws that accorded women inferior status and granted greater authority to male heads of households. Invoking citizenship for their own protection and that of their loved ones, some women went to court to claim the same civil liberties and protections granted to male citizens. In the late eighteenth century, colonial courts dispensed some protection to women in their conflicts with men; a century later, however, patriarchal prerogatives were reaffirmed in court sentences. Discouraging as this setback was, the actions of the women who had fought these legal battles raised an awareness of the discrepancies between the law and women's daily lives, laying the groundwork for Venezuelan women's organizations in the twentieth century. Drawing on a wealth of primary sources, historian Arlene D'Aíaz shows how the struggle for political power in the modern state reinforced and reproduced patriarchal authority. She also reveals how Venezuelan women from different classes, in public and private, coped strategically with their paradoxical status as equal citizens who nonetheless lacked power because of their gender. Shedding light on a fundamental but little examined dimension of modern nation building, *Female Citizens, Patriarchs, and the Law in Venezuela* gives voice to historic Venezuelan women while offering a detailed look at a society making the awkward transition from the colonial world to a modern one.

Book Information

Series: Engendering Latin America (Book 7)

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: University of Nebraska Press (April 1, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0803266405

ISBN-13: 978-0803266407

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #843,144 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #35 in [Books > History >](#)

Customer Reviews

"This is an intriguing study that throws light on a little-examined aspect of nation-building in Venezuela as it moved out of the colonial world and into the modern age."-- "British Bulletin of Publications""Diaz has written a very engaging study that fills in the gaps in the history of liberal thought and the development of masculine imagery in the law. By engendering traditional Latin American political and legal history, this study contributes to our understanding of the limits of nineteenth century republicanism."-"American Historical Review""This work is a rare contribution where gender dominates throughout as the foremost category of analysis, and where the voices of women and of men emerge in an analytically distinctive yet contrapuntal dynamic. It is challenging where it fails and where it succeeds. In sum, it will provide grist for serious discussion." "Diaz's is a major contribution to the growing scholarship on Latin American women's and lower classes' role in the political culture and the transformation of their society. . . . "Female Citizens, Patriarchs, and the Law in Venezuela" is an innovative contribution to the history of Venezuela, gender studies and state formation."

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While we may rightfully praise our Democracy, this book, *Female Citizens, Patriarchs, and the Law in Venezuela, 1786-1904*, goes a long way to prove that it is a mistake to judge Latin American politics by our own experiences in the United States. Though the book focuses exclusively on issues in Venezuela, the book easily applies to all Latin American countries: with few exceptions, Spanish Law and customs were equally implemented in all the colonies, and many of the issues affecting women (and men) in Venezuela, had counterparts in other Latin American colonies. The author, Arlene J. Diaz, has researched the Judicial Archives, and used 578 cases involving women as litigants as the basis of her story, with augmenting information from other well known sources. It is a fascinating look at the complex, and paradoxical world of Venezuela under the archaic traditions and double standards from a culture that was no longer part of the young country's future--yet all those elements have remained ingrained in its people. But don't be fooled by the title. While the book deals with the reasons and results of cases involving women and the Ecclesiastical and Secular courts, and the progress or lack of in women's rights, the book is really about the history of Venezuela from the point of view of an insider who has spent time thinking about all the issues which have made the country, its government, its people, and ideals, work, and fail. Here is the story of an elite group of men who built their power through the use of archaic secular, and ecclesiastical, laws brought to the Colonies from Spain. In turn, these men were ruled by an inflated sense of superiority, a false code of morals, and a double standard in everything they did. Yet, in spite of, or maybe because of these qualities, they were able to succeed: in their independence, in granting slaves their freedom in 1854, and in establishing harmonious racial relationships in spite of the old guard's fanatical adherence to their "purity" of blood and religion. Here is a country that was influenced by everything French, yet did not seek its independence from Spain until Napoleon installed a puppet king in Madrid. This, too, is the country where women were invisible, not out of their own volition, but because men made them so. Yet, these women took their husbands or lovers to court for rape, mistreatment, abuse, seduction, divorce, and abandonment; and when civil marriage was instituted in 1873, it was many of these women who chose to live outside of marriage in order to preserve their independence. Living in the shadow of a Constitution which entitled them to equality and all the benefits of the law--but for one small caveat; they were not men--these

women, slowly but continuously, striving for their independence, became an indirect mirror for the future of the country. This book is a page turner, and the author, Alene J. Diaz, writes with ease and intelligence.

An history tracing the late eighteenth and nineteenth century political conditions in Venezuela, and the way this balance was highly gendered. Looks at different stages of the colonial and republic history to see how new legal rights were highly patriarchal in tone, focused on property rights, family unity, honour and maintaining female subordination. It also shows challenges to these conditions by women, and intense political involvement through the legal framework with individual petitions and communal associations. Overall quite effective, and well structured. Almost too well structured, really. The clear layout of the main argument proved exhausting after a bit, the run through of gender detail and overall argument so effective that it proved predictable where the account would go next, making for an effective presentation of the main argument but not the most lively of accounts. Nevertheless, for the close detail of the topic and clarity of overall approach this work is recommended.

I had Professor Diaz for a class. I can say without a doubt that this book is absolutely amazing. I'm slightly biased because I think she is one of the most wonderful instructors I have had in my life. She uses the evidence to create an account that is not one-sided, just like she has us do in her classes.

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