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978-0-521-80414-1 - Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History,
1400-1900

Lauren Benton

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Law and Colonial Cultures

Law and Colonial Cultures advances a new perspective in world history, arguing that cultural practice and institutions – not just the global economy – shaped colonial rule and the international order. The book examines the shift from the multicentric law of early modern empires to the state-centered law of high colonialism. In the early modern world, the special legal status of cultural and religious minorities provided institutional continuity across empires. Colonial and post-colonial states developed in the nineteenth century in part as a response to conflicts over the legal status of indigenous subjects and cultural others. The book analyzes these processes by juxtaposing discussion of broad institutional change with microstudies of selected legal cases.

Lauren Benton is Professor of History at the New Jersey Institute of Technology and Rutgers University, Newark.

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*For Eduardo,
Victoria, and Gabriela*

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Acknowledgments

Some years ago I found myself in Philip Curtin's office at Johns Hopkins University asking if I could study comparative history with him. After I explained that I was interested in the history of the Iberian empires, he asked, "Why not world history?" I suggested broadening my studies to include West Africa. "World history would be better," he urged. I offered to label my interests Atlantic history and culture. "Study world history," he insisted. The training under Philip Curtin that followed – in world history – provided the foundation for this book, begun many years later and after many scholarly detours. I am grateful for his example, and for his unobtrusive mentoring over the years.

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