



A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900

Lauren Benton

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A Search for Sovereignty approaches world history by examining the relation of law and geography in European empires between 1400 and 1900. Lauren Benton argues that Europeans imagined imperial space as networks of corridors and enclaves, and that they constructed sovereignty in ways that merged ideas about geography and law. Conflicts over treason, piracy, convict transportation, martial law, and crime created irregular spaces of law, while also attaching legal meanings to familiar geographic categories such as rivers, oceans, islands, and mountains. The resulting legal and spatial anomalies influenced debates about imperial constitutions and international law both in the colonies and at home. This study changes our understanding of empire and its legacies and opens new perspectives on the global history of law.



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