



The Criminals of Lima and their Worlds: The Prison Experience, 1850-1935. By Carlos Aguirre. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 310, \$ 22.95.

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Carlos Aguirre, an Associate Professor of History at the University of Oregon, has written an impressive study of the Peruvian prison experience. Drawing on a series of previously untapped archival records of the Dirección General de Prisiones (DGP) in the Ministry of Justice, Aguirre crafts a complete look at both the prisons and inmates of Lima's institutions of confinement for male prisoners, most notably the Lima penitentiary, the Cárcel de Guadalupe, and the penal colony of El Frontón. Like so many recent works on European and American prison systems, he offers a sad tale of incomplete, halting prison reform marred by the multifaceted political, social, and economic realities of Peru in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Aguirre organizes his work into three separate but interrelated parts. Part I, "Apprehending the Criminal," examines the new scientific theories of crime that developed in the late nineteenth century. He shows that the ideas of the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso and his followers initially influenced Peruvian criminologists. The Peruvians quickly became disenchanted, however, with Lombroso's narrow biological theories and turned instead to the more comprehensive social interpretation of criminal behavior that became commonplace among positivist criminologists in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the *Boletín de Criminología*, the voice of the DGP, reflected the profound influence of positivist criminology.

Aguirre also offers a fascinating chapter in this first section on the encounters between the police and the criminal classes. He is especially interested in the "policing, monitoring, and arresting" (p. 65) in Lima, a subject he considers important because it shows how the interaction between the state and the lower classes helped define the criminal classes. As he demonstrates, police brutality and arrest of the lower classes were both commonplace. Far more men were arrested than sent to prison. Indeed, he notes that only 4-8% of detainees were ever sent to prison.

Part 2, "Prisons and Prison Communities," details the development—and failure—of the penal institutions in Lima. Chief among these was the Lima penitentiary, also referred to as "El Panóptico." The brainchild of prison reformer Marino Felipe Paz Soldán, it was designed to accommodate the Auburn system of prison discipline. Opened in 1862, the 40,000 square yard stone complex was an imposing structure on the outskirts of the city. The 315 prisoners housed there were subjected to a strict "modern" prison discipline outlined in a formal rule, the *Reglamento*—at least on paper. Lack of money and administrative turnover, among other things, severely undermined the successful implementation of the *Reglamento*, even after its revision in 1901. Later reforms, such as the introduction of the DGP and a new penal code, were important but did little to improve the success of the penitentiary.

Other key penal institutions were the *Cárcel* of Guadalupe and the penal colony on the island of El Frontón. Guadalupe housed many more inmates than the penitentiary (over 700) and was notorious for its poor sanitary and disciplinary regime. Indeed, government officials repeatedly called for the reform of Guadalupe but, as Aguirre notes, "not a single meaningful action was ever taken" (p. 103). Even though it was closed in 1928, its replacement, the *Cárcel Central de Varones*, was characterized by similar hygienic and disciplinary problems. Not surprisingly, El Frontón was likewise infamous for its brutal disciplinary regime.

Aguirre clearly paints a pessimistic picture of these penal institutions. He notes, for example, that "almost eighty years after Paz Soldán launched his program for prison reform, penal institutions continued to be places where inmates suffered the combined effects of despotism, neglect, corruption, and indifference" (p. 107-108). His ensuing broad discussion of the communities in these prisons helps underline this assessment as he shows that these communities were shaped more by the inmates' backgrounds and other external factors than by the formal prison rules.

In Part 3, "The World They Made Together," Aguirre offers a fascinating and view of Lima's prison subcultures. Drawing largely on archival material, he examines what he terms the "customary order," or the order founded not in a set of written rules but in the interactions among the prison inmates, officials, and guards. He shows that this customary order worked in varying ways in the prison of Lima. The penitentiary of Lima had the most regimented disciplinary regime while Guadalupe had the least oppressive disciplinary regime. Buying and selling alcohol as well as borrowing and lending money were common illegal activities in the prison system. According to Aguirre, this customary order worked because of a "mutual economic interest" (p. 145) between the prison inmates and prison employees. The latter, for example, could earn 'extras' through the system, thanks to gifts from the prisoners. Ultimately, though, the customary order had a corrosive effect on the disciplinary regime and created inequality among inmates.

Aguirre then details the daily life of the prison subcultures, prison living conditions, and the ways prisoners challenged the prison system. He offers a rarely seen glimpse into the addictions and sexual practices of prison inmates. He shows that the terrible living conditions as well as the inadequate nutrition combined together to make diseases like tuberculosis a common diagnosis among prison inmates. Prisoners most often challenged the system in violent ways, such as escapes and riots. But political prisoners frequently used their pen and verbal attacks to protest prison conditions.

Ultimately, Aguirre deems the prisons of Lima a failure for three main reasons. As was common elsewhere, financial and political realities played a large role. Also, the prisoners themselves found ways to resist and subvert the modern disciplinary prison regime. Finally, the demands of modern prison reform went against the prevailing social, political and cultural norms of Peruvian society. Rehabilitation was a foreign concept and imprisonment was considered primarily a useful way to contain degenerate and violent criminals.

Some might argue that Aguirre covers too many different but related topics in this excellent work. He could possibly have written separate books on the police systems and on the inmate subcultures. Others may wish he had discussed Peru's prison system outside of Lima. Nevertheless, no one can dispute that this work is extremely well-researched and deserves widespread attention for its comprehensive look at Lima's prisons and prison inmates.

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