On Lingering and Being Last: Race and Sovereignty in the New World

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Abstract:
What are we talking about when we talk about sovereignty? Is it about formal legitimacy or practical authority? Does it require the ability to control the flow of people or goods across a border; is it primarily a principle of international recognition; or does its essence lie in the power to regulate the lives of a state’s citizens? Political theorists, historians, scholars of international relations, lawyers, anthropologists, literary critics all approach the dilemmas of sovereign power with a mixture of urgency and frustration. In this book, the author argues that the logic of sovereignty that emerged in early modern Europe and that limits our thinking today must be understood as a fundamentally racialized logic, first visible in the New World. The modern concept of sovereignty is based on a trope of personification, the conjunction of individual and collective identities. In Grotius, Hobbes, and others, a fiction of sovereign autonomy enabled states to be personified as individuals, as bodies politic, even as individual humans could be imagined as miniature states. The contradictions of this logic were fully revealed only in the New World, as writers ranging from Aphra Behn to Thomas Jefferson and Herman Melville demonstrate. The racialized sovereign figures examined in this book are always at once a person and a people. They embody the connection between the individual and the collectivity, and thereby reveal that the volatile work of sovereign personification takes place in a new world constituted both by concepts of equality, homogeneity, and symmetry and by the realities of racial domination and ideology in the era of colonial expansion.

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State sovereignty is the concept that states are in complete and exclusive control of all the people and property within their territory. State sovereignty also includes the idea that all states are equal as states. In other words, despite their different land masses, population sizes, or financial capabilities, all states, ranging from tiny islands of Micronesia to vast expanse of Russia, have an equal right to function as a state and make decisions about what occurs within their own borders. Canada may even make politically embarrassing public complaints in the world media. However, Canada cannot simply tell Brazil to stop the rainforest project and expect Brazil to obey. Under the concept of state sovereignty, no state has the authority to tell another state how to control its internal affairs. While states can still be sovereign principle actors, their sovereignty can be diminishing (overall significant decrease of ability to self-govern) or transforming (new ways to self-govern and new responsibilities) at the same time due to globalization. But this begs the question, whether sovereignty is diminishing, or transforming as states get new responsibilities and new ways to self-govern itself in the globalized world. The new standardized rules, reached by agreement between states, can only work if there are territorial agencies that can enforce them locally and have the power to do so. In the globalized world, the transformed sovereignty of states gives them the power and authority to act in the best interests of their people, considering all factors and influences. Elmer, Jonathan, On Lingering and Being Last: Race and Sovereignty in the New World, New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. Elmer, Jonathan, Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allen Poe, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995. Elmer, Jonathan, “Torture and Hyperbole,” Law, Culture and the Humanities 3.1 (2007): 18–34. Grandin, Greg, The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom and Deception in the New World, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014. Greeley, Horace, “Slavery at Home,” in Hints toward Reforms, in Lectures, Addresses and Other Writings, New York: Harper, 1850, 352–56. Greenberg, Karen J., and Dratel, Joshua L., eds., The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Thus, a new world order is required. But who will define its basic outlines and rules? In some works globalization (after some American political scientists) is sometimes defined as a process of the USA’s will obtrusion to the rest of the world, as a process of establishing new world order, profitable for the USA. Actually, the USA’s influence is evidence and quite real[14]. But does it mean that exactly Pax Americana should be established, as many sincerely believe in the USA? Undoubtedly, Russia will be able to play an essential role in the new world order, if it selects the right strategy. As has been stated above, in practice the sovereign rights and powers both of states and nations were always limited by various factors.