

ABOUT THE SERIES



History, as radical historians have long observed, cannot be severed from authorial subjectivity, indeed, from politics. Political concerns animate the questions we ask, the subjects on which we write. For over thirty years the *Radical History Review* has led in nurturing and advancing such engaged historical research. *Radical Perspectives* seeks to further the journal's mission: any author wishing to be in this series makes a self-conscious decision to associate her or his work with a radical perspective. To be sure, many of us are currently struggling with what it means to be a radical historian in the early twenty-first century, and this series is intended to provide some signposts for what we would judge to be radical history. It will offer innovative ways of telling stories from multiple perspectives; comparative, transnational, and global histories that transcend conventional boundaries of region and nation; works that elaborate on the implications of the postcolonial move to "provincialize Europe"; studies of the public in and of the past, including those that consider the commodification of the past; histories that explore the intersection of identities such as gender, race, class, and sexuality with an eye to their political implications and complications. Above all, this book series seeks to create an important intellectual space and discursive community to explore the very issue of what constitutes radical history. Within this context, some of the books published in the series may privilege alter-

native and oppositional political cultures, but all will be concerned with the way power is constituted, contested, used, and abused.

In *Laws of Chance*, Amy Chazkel follows the fascinating trajectory of a notorious Brazilian institution, the illicit lottery known as the *jogo do bicho*, or animal game, from its creation in the 1890s through much of the twentieth century. She acquaints the reader with a shifting (and sometimes shifty) cast of characters ranging from well-heeled financiers and skeptical jurists to small-time ticket sellers, street peddlers, lottery players, policemen on the take, and old men playing dominoes in a public square. Dating from the first decade following the end of slavery and the founding of the republic, this lottery, Chazkel shows, became an integral feature of life in Rio de Janeiro during a period of massive urban renewal programs and the expansion of petty trade, as well as a constitutive element of urban policing. The key question, according to Chazkel, is not so much whether illegal activities were taking place, but why and how this popular gambling pastime became criminalized. The result was not the massive arrest or imprisonment of ticket sellers and purchasers, but rather a “gray area” that allowed the police considerable latitude in restricting the use of public space. Central to Chazkel’s argument is her rethinking of what many historians see as the central flaw in Latin American legal culture: the “gap” between formal legal codes and policing practices, a concept which rests on the expectation of a direct correspondence between the letter of the law and its enforcement. Instead Chazkel argues that this “gap” is precisely the space in which a range of authority figures could enjoy a certain degree of flexibility or wield arbitrary power. In this vein, it is significant that the crackdown on the *jogo do bicho* in 1917 had the effect, not of erasing this “gap,” but of inciting even deeper cynicism about Rio’s police force. It is the final irony of this intriguing historical study that the illicit *jogo do bicho* ends up being regarded, in the popular milieu, as the most reliable and credible institution in everyday life.