Brazil Month

On the Origins of the Informal in Brazil: Urban History and the Case of the Jogo do Bicho

Amy Chazkel
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This talk concerns a phenomenon that would require no introduction in Brazil: the ubiquitous but clandestine lottery called the "jogo do bicho," or "animal game." Following its invention in late nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro, the jogo do bicho became an integral part of the cultural landscape of the city and the incipient informal economy. Although forbidden by law, the game spread throughout the federal capital of Rio de Janeiro and, eventually, all of Brazil. By the middle of the twentieth century, the animal game had become an organized criminal practice based on an unofficial partnership between police, bankers, and dealers of the game. Amy Chazkel's talk explores the dialectical relationship between police criminality and urban popular practice in the "gray zone" between the clearly legal and the clearly illegal. Through her reconstruction of the spread, criminalization, and permanence of the jogo do bicho, Dr. Chazkel seeks to add cultural and historical depth to our understanding of the so-called informal sector, which is central to comprehending the development of modern urban society in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America.

Amy Chazkel recently joined the CUNY faculty as Assistant Professor of History at Queens College. She has just returned from two months in Brazil, where she carried out archival research for her book-length study currently in progress, provisionally titled Laws of Chance: The City, the Animal Game, and the Making of Modern Public Life in Brazil, 1880-1968. For the 2003-2004 academic year, she will be headquartered at the CUNY Center for the Humanities as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow. In addition to her book manuscript, Professor Chazkel's recent scholarship includes an article on the Rio de Janeiro city jail and one on petty crime and post-abolition urban society in Brazil. Her research and teaching interests in Latin America and elsewhere include urban history, comparative slavery and abolition, law and society, informal economies, and trans-Atlantic cultural and intellectual history.

Location
Room 9206 (Ninth Floor)
The Graduate Center
365 Fifth Avenue
(Between 34th and 35th St.)

Tuesday
Sept. 23
5:00 p.m.

To reserve, send email to bildner@gc.cuny.edu or leave message at 212 817-2096