Sherwin K. Bryant, Rachel Sarah O'Toole & Ben Vinson (eds.)

Africans to Spanish America: Expanding the Diaspora. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012. 262 pp. (Cloth US\$50.00)

This volume reflects the dialogue that has been going on in the past two decades between historians of the Atlantic world, the African diaspora, and Latin America. It aims to contribute to Afro-Latin American history and to the history of the African diaspora by clearly synthesizing the potential and challenges ahead for scholars interested in these two fields. For that reason, the editors' task has been to produce a text that highlights the links between the two fields and at the same time provides evidence of the productive relationship between them. *Africans to Spanish America* can and should be read both by scholars specializing in Afro-Latin America and those specializing in the African diaspora. The first will appreciate the methodological and epistemological value of using the African diaspora paradigm to study and write about Spanish American history. The latter will recognize the constructive view of lesser known areas of Spanish America as constitutive of African diasporic history in the Atlantic world.

A clear introductory chapter by editors Sherwin K. Bryant, Rachel Sarah O'Toole, and Ben Vinson opens the book with the proposal that Afro-Latin American history has entered a new "wave," or phase, in which the foundational questions about the "black presence" in Latin America are being transformed. This historiographical essay reinterprets the trajectory of studies about slavery, freedom, race, and nation in Latin America. Most importantly, it offers valuable leads into the future. Highlighting the need for further social historical research centered on the study of Africans and their descendants, it invites historians to go beyond the national and regional to create new narratives through the diasporic framework.

The book brings together essays by nine scholars whose work illustrates the possibilities of such a critical approach. And while studies about Brazil are abundant since the mid-twentieth century, this collection showcases Afro-Latin American history in areas that are less identified with the subject of slavery and blackness such as Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru.

In the first part, Leo Garofalo's essay on Afro-Iberians complicates our sense of the diaspora's unidirectionality and suggests that Africans are among the agents of European colonialism across the Atlantic Ocean. Trey Proctor and Rachel O'Toole study the development of African diasporic ethnicities in the context of the Americas. These three essays focus on Spanish colonialism before 1700, elegantly interrogating sources such as marriage records and wills to reveal the vitality, and the constructedness, of African diasporic identities.

The book's second part concentrates on the significance of Christianity for people of African descent, a theme of longstanding importance in Afro-Latin American history. The essays by Charles Beatty-Medina, Joan Bristol, and Nancy van Deusen clearly show how Africans in Spanish America participated in the religion of the empire in their own terms. The emphasis in these chapters on black politics in the context of empire is perhaps the best evidence that the African diaspora lens has productively transformed the study of religion in Spanish America by transcending the question of resistance.

In the book's final part, Karen Morrison and Michele Reid-Vazquez write about Cuba in the nineteenth century. Reid-Vazquez demonstrates the importance of taking gender seriously in order to understand how racism and colonialism functioned and changed in the Atlantic world. Morrison disputes a trope that dominates Latin American history: whitening. And Herbert Klein's concluding chapter maps out an agenda for future studies, arguing that we still need to fill a crucial void in the study of free blacks, and explaining why doing so promises to reveal much about the differences in diasporic experiences across the Americas.

Taking Klein's concluding remarks as an invitation, we should not forget that the African diaspora is necessarily a comparative field of study. As a programmatic proposal this book validates the search for new lines of inquiry and will inspire collaboration across geographical regions. Therefore, future research could move beyond the examination of particular cases or examples to take on larger questions about the relationships between varying slave regimes and postemancipation societies in the Americas. Along with Klein's suggestion that we need to explore more deeply the histories of free blacks in the continent, another urgent theme for future research is the process of abolition of slavery—still an unexplored gap between the two moments privileged by the current historiography, as evidenced by this book itself.

Among the book's contributions to the historiography of the African diaspora are the studies by O'Toole, Garofalo, and Beatty-Medina, which provide much-needed evidence and analysis of the lives of people of African descent who were part of an early diaspora that was central to Spanish colonialism from the Iberian peninsula into the Pacific areas of South America. Aside from "expanding" diasporic history geographically, *Africans to Spanish America* also reminds us that between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries the experiences of people of African descent in Spanish America were more varied than the paradigmatic plantation-centered historiography of the Caribbean and Brazil has implied.

In terms of Afro-Latin American history, or Latin American history more generally, this innovative volume does not simply contest earlier problems in

the field but actually moves forward into the critical implications of writing the history of Latin America from the African perspective. In this sense Karen Morrison's piece stands out. Her creative research strategy has undone the central assumption about nineteenth-century nation formation in the region, which presumed that individuals across Latin America were largely aligned with the hegemonic value of whitening fashioned by governments and national elites. Her move to challenge the absolute prevalence of this principle by centering on the family, instead of the traditional focus on the nation and individuals, exemplifies the promise of reconsidering longstanding assumptions and implicit values to effectively rewrite Latin American history through the diasporic lens.

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