Russell Lohse

Africans into Creoles: Slavery, Ethnicity, and Identity in Colonial Costa Rica.

Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014. xiv + 351 pp. (Paper US\$ 34.95)

In this fascinating and impressive study, Russell Lohse breaks new ground in documenting the lives of enslaved Africans in colonial Costa Rica, the complex international rivalries surrounding their arrival, and the strategies for advancement of their descendants. While a number of earlier studies have mined the documentary record within Costa Rica itself, perhaps only Rina Cáceres has made any substantial effort to involve Africa and specific African-born individuals as a special focus.¹ Lohse goes well beyond anything done previously in this direction, with a series of gripping narratives developed out of key moments chosen from a vast number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents.

The book consists of an introduction, seven chapters, a conclusion, and an epilogue. The first three chapters deal with the Atlantic slave trade, highlighting an extraordinary case of the shipwreck off the Costa Rican coast of a Danish slaver that Lohse is able to follow from Europe to Africa to America (and subsequently back to Europe in the investors' battles to claim insurance monies for their losses). Chapters 4–7 present materials on the enslaved within Costa Rica, from enslavement and sale to labor and residence, to marriage and manumission patterns underlying the title's argument: "Africans into Creoles." The epilogue explores a single, particularly suggestive case of slavery's continued relevance later in the colonial period, commented on below.

The edition is elegantly produced, complete with eight maps, twenty-one tables, and an uncommonly thorough glossary (six pages) and index (eleven pages). Ironically, while the specialist will find an impressive level of detail and documentation, the general reader may not be so well served. With approximately one thousand footnotes (fully 83 pages of endnotes for a text of only 215 pages), some readers may run the risk of fatigue or distraction, which would be a shame given the compelling narratives Lohse constructs throughout the study.

Any brief review can hardly do justice to a work as conceptually rich and copiously documented as this. However, two of its framing devices deserve par-

1 Rina Cáceres Gómez, 2000, *Negros, mulatos, esclavos y libertos en la Costa Rica del siglo XVII* (Mexico City: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia); 2001, *Indígenas y africanos en las redes de la esclavitud en Centroamérica*, in Rina Cáceres Gómez (ed.), *Rutas de la esclavitud en África y América Latina* (San José: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica), pp. 83–100.

ticular mention. First, the archival and documentary odyssey related to the doomed Danish slave ship voyage showcases not only Lohse's prodigious detective work but also his talent for a close reading (listening might be a better term here) of the expressions and images employed by the enslaved survivors in their sworn testimonies. He rescues and explores their ubiquitous self-identification as people *hurtado* ("stolen"), both a condemnation of the enslavers' unjust actions and an exaltation of the witnesses' free birth, a term and claim not limited to the African-born thereafter. He also muses on the intriguing cross-cultural meanings evoked by all those whose testimonies claimed that the lightning (and thunder) of foul weather caused the ship to run aground and burn.

The epilogue, on "*los negros de Carmona*," is a forceful reminder that slavery is never safely behind us, as so many historians have sought to convince their readers. In the very heart of the soon-to-be new nation's capital, San José, he shows how the same old practices and institutions, long identified by scholars at home and abroad with Cartago and Matina in earlier time periods, lie just beneath the surface. That some of these refugee "*negros*," who should no longer be there nor be subject to virtual enslavement at the hands of their custodian Carmona, were also English-speaking ex-slaves freed by their own hands in resistance and flight also serves to remind once again just how fully engaged in the larger colonial world Costa Rica indeed was. Lohse's overarching argument for creole assimilation updates and fleshes out a highly complex view of the lived experience of Afrodescendants in an ever more mixed-race colonial environment. His haunting epilogue elegantly warns against any rush to reaffirm an uncritical assimilationism, that blessed, early ethnic homogeneity so dear to traditional nationalists.

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