

Baptiste Bonnefoy, *Au-delà de la couleur: Miliciens noirs et mulâtres de la Caraïbe (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles)*. Rennes, France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2022.
(Paper €25.00)

Baptiste Bonnefoy focuses on the urban militias of color in the Caribbean basin from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. Yet this is not a military history; it is a social history. His research challenges the essentialism of race that he perceives in public and academic discourse in the United States by moving beyond their emphasis on slavery and the assumed homogeneity of people of color. Instead, he explores “local processes of the formation and institutionalization of social groups” by placing individual experiences in local, regional, and imperial contexts (p. 28), and he identifies militias of color as an “excellent laboratory” to study this (p. 29). He employs sources in four languages to provide a comparative study of the European empires in Latin America and the Caribbean, and he acknowledges his strategic use of digitized sources in his introduction.

Au-delà de la couleur is divided into three parts, each with two or three chapters, to address certain themes: structures, trajectories, and contexts. It begins with a focus on the social and policing roles of the militias of color. The first chapter looks at the origins of militias of color in the Spanish empire, identifying the first such militia in the Americas in Havana in 1570. Bonnefoy explains how militia membership created elites of color in the Spanish Americas, and how other European imperial powers came to see the militias of color in Spain’s empire as a point of reference in forming their own. An appendix provides a detailed chart of the origins of 74 militias of color, specifying the year of creation, name, location, and a source. Chapter 2 demonstrates how militias of color maintained the social order of slavery by policing the enslaved, emphasizing that people of color were not racial allies of the enslaved. The third chapter shows that color was never the only factor in determining membership in a militia of color. Bonnefoy uses examples of militias named according to phenotype but having mixed membership, such as the “2nd company of Zambos” that consisted of 6 *métis*, 10 *quarterons*, 12 *pardos*, 37 *zambos*, and 2 *noirs* (p. 89).

Part Two examines the historical trajectories of militias of color in the Americas. In Chapter 4 Bonnefoy delves into the processes of “whitening” that allowed officers of color some social and spatial mobility (p. 111). He provides examples of how men of color ascended through both merit and birth, some even creating dynasties, which he illustrates in genealogical charts. Militiamen of color also enjoyed geographic mobility, most often from port cities and aboard boats. Some even went to the European continent. Overall, the book highlights the privileges afforded to militiamen of color in peacetime. The fifth

chapter continues the intergenerational discussion of officers of color through the lens of euergetism (public acts of generosity), which played a significant role “in the production and reproduction of elites of color in colonial cities” (p. 165).

Part Three places the militias of color in the context of two imperial wars: the Seven Years’ War and the American Revolutionary Wars. Chapter 6 focuses solely on Saint-Domingue’s militia reforms around the time of the Seven Years’ War. Bonnefoy asserts that scholars have focused on the struggle between metropolitan and creole authorities, but they have missed a multiplicity of discourses, such as that between civil and military authorities. He concludes that the solution to the militia affair satisfied “the interests of the principal local political actors” (p. 183). The seventh chapter explores the various projects designed to professionalize the militias in the Caribbean between 1760 and 1790, using examples from Cuba, Saint-Domingue, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Jamaica to highlight the imperial parallelism during the late eighteenth century. The final chapter explores the Windward Islands, showing the importance of local contexts, including class and religion, during the Age of Revolutions. These islands often experienced changes in sovereignty resulting in frequent social recomposition.

Despite the inclusion of some comparisons among the various European empires in the broadly defined Caribbean, *Au-dèla de la couleur* focuses much more on Spain’s empire than any of the others. Nonetheless, the book offers an opening for a historiographical dialogue across languages and countries. Although Bonnefoy singularly challenges scholars in the United States in his introduction, he contends with and cites authors who publish in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish throughout this work.

Erica Johnson Edwards

Department of History, Francis Marion University, Florence SC, U.S.A.

ejohnson@fmarion.edu