

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Darién J. Davis. *Slavery and Beyond: The African Impact on Latin America and the Caribbean* (Jaguar Books on Latin America). Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 1995. \$84.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8420-2484-6; \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8420-2485-3.

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The first thing to note about this book is that it is mistitled; a better title would be *Beyond Slavery*. Other than the editor's Introduction and portions of Esteban Montejo's autobiography (*The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, ed. Miguel Barnet; New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), slaves are not the topic of the book. This is a volume about the societies and cultures constructed by the descendants of Latin American slaves. As such, it addresses a field which is less well-known in the U.S. than slavery: Afro-Latin Americanism.

With the exception of the Introduction and the editor's own contribution, all of the selections in this anthology have been previously published elsewhere. Bringing them together in one volume, focuses the reader's attention on the diversity and breadth of Afro-Latin American scholarship. The editor introduces each piece, providing useful background and context for students. The unifying theme seems to be the manners and theaters in which Afro-Latin Americans have constructed and protected their world. To this reviewer, the readings appear to fall into three broad categories: history, ethnography and identity studies.

The readings in social and cultural history cover the entire period of European presence on the continent. Peter Gerhard's article on Juan Garrido ("A Black Conquistador in Mexico," pp 1-10) sets the appropriate tone for the volume: it is unwise to assume anything about the African presence in Latin America. After all, there were even a few African conquistadors. George Reid Andrews' and Michael Conniff's contributions ("The Black Legions of Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1800-1900" and "Afro- West Indians on the Central American Isthmus: The Case of Panama"; pp 55-80 and 147-172, respectively) illustrate the function of exogenous forces for the Afro-Latin American communities in forming those communities. In the first case, it was Argentine civic disorder of the nineteenth century; in the second, the building of the Panama canal. Another important as-

pect of these articles, which they share with many of the others, is that they extend the geographic importance of Afro- Latin Americans beyond the Caribbean islands and Brazil. Davis' own article ("Afro-Brazilian Women, Civil Rights and Political Participants," pp. 253-264) surveys the long emergence of Afro- Brazilian women in the political sphere. Finally, Armando Entralgo and David Gonzalez Lopez ("Cuban Policy for Africa", pp 265-278) consider the post-1959 Cuban foreign policy of involvement in Africa. As detailed here, civic and military involvement was consistently motivated by policies against imperialism and institutional racism.

The second category of articles could be classified as ethnography. Rebecca Bateman's essay, "Africans and Indians: A Comparative Study of the Black Carib and Black Seminole" (pp 29- 54) straddles this categorization, and is properly considered ethnohistory. This is an examination of the dynamic process and tensions of ethnogenesis of marginalized groups. As a study of slaves and their descendants creating communities and families with indigenous Americans, brought together precisely by their marginalization, this should provide enlightening reading for undergraduate students. Three articles, placed together in the middle of the volume, explore contemporary ethnography of specific groups. In "Afro-Creoles on the Frontier: Conquering the Ecuadorian Pacific Lowlands" (pp 81-102), Norman Whitten explores patterns of settlement and geographic mobility among Afro-Ecuadorians. This article highlights the cultural dynamics underpinning frontier expansion. The fascinating issues of religious syncretism cannot be avoided in any work on Afro-Latin Americanism. In an examination of Haitian voodoo, Luc de Heusch ("Kongo in Haiti: A New Approach to Religious Syncretism", pp 103-121) suggests that the structure, content and form of African religions are more disguised with, than transformed by, Christian beliefs. De Heusch implies that the traditional concept of syncretism is too strong to apply in this instance. Peter Wade, "Black Music and Cultural Syncretism in Colom-

bia” (pp 121-146) provides the fruits of ethno-musicology to the volume. Although using terms and concepts that traditional historians may be unfamiliar with (such as emic and etic analyses, p 123), this is a compelling study in the role of music in defining and expressing evolving ethnic identity.

The third category of essays, dealing with the conscious formation of identity, are quite diverse. Historians consider many of these to be primary documents. The segment form Esteban Montejo’s “Autobiography” (pp 11-28) provides engaging reading, and offers a perceptive student the anticipation of emerging Afro-Latin American identity. Aime Cesaire’s “Discourse on Colonialism,” and Abdias do Nascimento’s “Afro-Brazilian Ethnicity and International Policy” (pp 199-208 and 233-252, respectively) present the work of two important intellectual leaders on the role of Afro-Latin Americans in a global context. Separated by about forty years, these essays are strongly expressed arguments for a commonality of identity, ethnicity, and political purpose among Latin Americans and Africans. Both offer excellent examples of the rhetoric of their movements and times. I would also consider Jose Luis Gonzalez’s “The Four Storeyed House: Africans in the Forging of Puerto Rico’s National Identity” (pp 173-194) as a primary document of political and intellectual history. Gonzalez argues that Puerto Ri-

can political independence is logical because of the racial and class diversity and distinct “national culture” which has resulted from its history. Essays by Kenneth Ramchand and Leonard E. Barrett, Sr., on Marcus Garvey and Rastafarians (“Marcus Garvey and the African Dream” and ‘Understanding the Rastafarians“, pp 209-211 and 212-232, respectively) are useful introductions to the two best known African nationalist movements of the mid- and late- twentieth century.

The format of the volume has some drawbacks. Because they are reprinted, and often abridged, the readings sometimes seem incomplete. One could question the inclusion of some of the readings, and wonder about the absence of some topics (such as economy, the negritude literary movement or the role of gender in constructing these communities and cultures). Nevertheless, having these pieces in one collection highlights the breadth of the scholarship which is available on Afro-Latin Americanism. Given the diversity of the essays, this collection is best used as supplementary readings for undergraduate classes. It does an admirable job of extending the materials available for introductory Latin American History or Society classes to a field which has been neglected. In addition, this book would be a useful addition to the classes in African-American History, for those interested in expanding “America” to its full boundaries.

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