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Ann Twinam. *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. 553 pp. $34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8047-5093-6.

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Money whitens, as the aphorism goes, but under what circumstances is it possible to "purchase" whiteness? If whiteness resides in the body, then what precisely does it mean when individuals of African heritage can purchase whiteness? How does the ability to purchase whiteness disrupt biological reductionist theories of race? Historians and other scholars interested in the social construction of race have long been intrigued by the concept of whiteness as a purchasable identity. If black bodies could be commodified and purchased, so too could whiteness, or at least, the socioeconomic privileges ordinarily reserved for whites. As Ann Twinam's phenomenal study demonstrates, from the very beginning of the transatlantic slave trade, enslaved and free blacks and their mixed descendants determinedly asserted their natural rights to freedom and full humanity. They actively sought multiple routes toward emancipation and social mobility, for themselves and their descendants. Many found interstices to squeeze through discriminatory law, such as entering the militia, absenting themselves, self-purchase, or securing grants of freedom from owners. Even when successful, such efforts did not remove the "dubious defect" (p. 123) of African heritage, and except for a select few, most struggled to breach discriminatory barriers to professions and institutions reserved for the white elite.

Purchasing Whiteness is the result of Twinam's persistence over many years to locate *gracias al sacar* petitions and letters and other documents produced by petitioners, elites, and colonial bureaucrats, buried deep within archival collections. Twinam's eventual breakthrough in locating documents that had eluded previous searches for evidence of this practice was facilitated by twentieth-century technology. Until Twinam's discovery, the contested whitening historiography had rested on analysis of a mere four petitions. Using digitized archival collections, Twinam eventually discovered thousands of documents, among them forty whitening gracias al sacar petitions submitted between 1743 and 1816 from across Spanish America. Their discovery and analysis enabled Twinam to push historiography of whitening in the Spanish Americas in entirely new directions, revealing the complex variables that facilitated the mobility of successive generations of Africans and their descendants in Spanish America. Twinam excavates the bureaucratic processes that influenced whitening outcomes, the negative and positive factors that influenced decisions (reputation, occupation, genealogy, family connections, timing, geographical loca-

tion, for example), and the alternative pathways taken when whiteness was denied.

In 1795, for the first time, the possibility to purchase whiteness appeared among the imperial list of various purchasable dispensations. The whitening gracias al sacar offered ambitious ***pardos*** and ***mulattos*** a legal pathway to purchase, if not ***physical*** whiteness, the right to be treated as though one was white, to enter the elite, and to access privileges reserved for whites.

Purchasing Whiteness is organized in five thematic parts. In part 1, chapters 1 and 2 review a century of whitening historiography, the challenges confronting earlier historians as they fruitlessly searched archives for whitening petitions, and methodological approaches to excavating the history of pardo mobilities. In part 2, chapters 3 and 4 take a "long-time" approach, tracing Spanish American attitudes toward, and the legal apparatus that shaped the realities of, enslaved and freed blacks, pardos, and mulattos, before those navigable interstices that facilitated the mobilities of enslaved peoples and their descendants. Parts 3 and 4 (chapters 5-12) represent a historical roadmap to the 1795 whitening gracias al sacar, examining trends in precursor indiviual petitions submitted between 1760 and 1795, and the varied official and elite responses to such requests for ***casta*** mobility. Chapters 8-9 contemplate the aftermath of the introduction of the 1795 whitening gracias al sacar, examining the small number of individual case histories of those who pursued and tested the limits of whiteness. If, as Twinam argued, the whitening gracias al sacar was introduced without thought for its future implications, the following period witnessed robust transatlantic "dissension and discord" (p. 269) over its meanings, application, and implications for the reproduction and stability of the racialized social order. In chapter 12, Twinam considers how the whitening gracias al sacar provided the context for broader early nineteenth-century exchanges between Spain and its American colonies over the mutability of blackness (how many generations of racial admixture before descendants could legally claim whiteness?) and the extension of citizenship and civil rights to people of African heritage. Ultimately, although the prospect of imperial wars would lead Spain to acknowledge the role of pardos in securing the stability of its colonial regimes, the extension of full citizenship represented a step too far, and faced by imperial intransigence, pardos began a struggle for independence. The final chapter, 13, explores additional details of further pardo petitioner case histories, situating them within broader centuries-old struggles for mobility.

Several of Twinam's historiographical contributions are worth emphasizing. As Twinam argues, historians of comparative slavery regimes seized on the commodification of whiteness represented by the whitening gracias al sacar as marking a fundamental distinction between Anglo American and Spanish American colonial regimes. Citing the very existence of the gracias al sacar as reflective of an extraordinary fluidity in Spanish America's understandings of race, its categories, meanings, and practices, these historians proposed that free pardos and mulattos in colonial Spanish America experienced a less brutal, more benevolent, racism than their counterparts in the more rigidly stratified and policed racial regimes in Anglophone American slave states. In support of their claims, they pointed to the "one drop" rule, which evolved throughout the nineteenth century and was codified in law in 1924, thus firmly affixing black racial status to ancestry, regardless of the degree of generational whitening.

Yet as Twinam points out, such broad comparisons are problematic on several grounds; they not only elide the many complex variations in laws, customs, and practices between states, and changes across historical time, but invariably are founded on vast "methodological jumps" (p. 41), leaving unexplained the intervening processes

shaping the transition from slavery to freedom. Twinam directly confronts and addresses these problems, asking instead, under what conditions do possibilities for mobility present themselves at different historical moments? What local and broader changes in mainland Spanish imperial law and policy made these possible, and how did Africans and their descendants leverage these moments to achieve present or future generational mobility? In bringing a "long-time" perspective to her analyses of petitioners' generational histories, for instance, Twinam maps these long-term strategies--"mathematical genealogies"--such as "marrying up" (i.e., marrying light/white) to eliminate the defect of African ancestry over successive generations. As Twinam perceptively concludes, "The key turning points were less in the abrupt movement from slave to citizen, but rather the more gradual but distinct transitions from slave, to free person, to vassal, to citizen" (p. 41).

Spanish America's racial regimes and practices may have accommodated greater fluidity of racial categories, which in turn *did* create more opportunities for social mobility. Yet, as Twinam cautions, this should not be read as evidence of a considered imperial policy to dismantle the racialized hierarchy or to establish free people of African heritage on an equal footing with whites. Instead, Twinam argues that the whitening gracias al sacar evolved as the logical outcome of earlier precedents permitting some individuals to cast off alterity and access certain white privileges. Pragmatism underscored the decision by an imperial administrator in Spain to include whiteness among the purchasable dispensations. Charged with a directive to compile a list of further purchasable gracias al sacars, officials merely searched for precedents, found disparate earlier pardo petitions requesting whiteness, and simply added whiteness to the category of purchasable favors. If the stain of illegitimate birth could be erased by dispensation, then why could whiteness not also be commoditized? The whitening gracias al sacar was simply the outcome of bureaucratic housekeeping, the formalization of earlier precedents, rather than the outcome of official policy reform.

Yet, for all the interest that the whitening gracias al sacar has generated among historians, only a minority of favored applicants successfully secured white status. The whitening gracias al sacar functioned simultaneously as an instrument of racial inclusion and exclusion. As Twinam demonstrates, traditional exclusionary practices embedded in law and custom remained entrenched, as did attitudes toward pardos and mulattos. Officials deliberated and contested just which individuals' public and private behaviors and reputations were suitably worthy of whitening, and few petitioners withstood critical scrutiny.

Twinam uses several cases to demonstrate how pardos submitted their petitions amidst ongoing opposition to a dispensation that was perceived to threaten the boundaries of whiteness. Whiteness ***could*** be purchased, but not everyone agreed on the desirability of its commodification, as evidenced by the robust debates and contestations between petitioners, imperial officials, and elites over the meanings, implications, and outcomes of such applications. The strength of such opposition--especially in Venezuela where elites, anxious to protect the racial-class order, vigorously protested the whitening gracias al sacar (ironically, as Twinam notes, their vociferous public protests probably brought it to the attention of many more pardos and mulattos, probably accounting for the greater number of petitions lodged in that society)--possibly acted as a deterrent, pushing most pardos and mulattos to seek other, more creative and informal pathways to mobility. As Twinam importantly shows, whitening was merely one among several strategies pursued by ambitious Africans and their descendants in search of mobility, and petitioners for whiteness represented an untypical cohort.

Purchasing Whiteness is quite simply, a magisterial tour de force that will be received as a significant contribution to the historiography of race in colonial Latin America. It exemplifies the very best of historical research. Twinam's groundbreaking methodology that connected previously unknown gracias al sacar documents amounting to some thousands of pages underlines the increasing importance of digital resources to historical research. The work further reveals the very social contingency of race, revealing whiteness as a set of practices and performances, an identity that could be commodified, given, and taken away. But above all, Twinam maintains a fine balance between discussing the lengthy and difficult processes that petitioners negotiated amid a multilayered bureaucracy that spanned the local to the global, and the confluence of "long-term" local, regional, and global events such as the 1762 British invasion or the Haitian Revolution, imperialist conflicts that invariably shaped attitudes and responses to whitening. Influential too are broader Spanish American discourses on race, as they evolved and changed at different historical moments, but for this reader, the interwoven stories of those individuals who, for whatever personal reasons, were motivated to buy into commodified whiteness, are most compelling. Of course, ***Purchasing Whiteness*** is essentially a history of the already privileged, by virtue of their mixed ancestry, striving to leverage that precarious privilege to (sometimes deny or water down or) rid themselves of the defective stain of African ancestry, to eventually claim white status and privilege. It does raise fundamental questions about how those less privileged, those who were not free, those who wore their indigenous or African heritage writ large on their dark skins, those lacking education, wealth, or family connections, could carve out meaningful lives in the face of a racially stratified social structure that sought to deny their aspirations. Furthermore, as a scholar of African ancestry, I'm compelled to think about how we philosophically and morally approach histories of African people of mixed heritage willfully and strategically jumping through bureaucratic hoops to distance themselves from blackness, and what that signifies about their--and wider--beliefs in the inferiority of blackness, leaving unchallenged dominant ideas about the undesirability of blackness and racist structures intact.

Twinam writes with a striking immediacy, in a language that is accessible to undergraduates and advanced scholars alike, and I suspect that ***Purchasing Whiteness*** will rightfully become a core textbook on the complicated yet fascinating history of race in colonial Spanish America.

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