


BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Race, Coloniality, and the Writing of Black and Indigenous Histories

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This essay reviews the following works:

Beyond Babel: Translations of Blackness in Colonial Peru and New Granada. By Larissa Brewer-García. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xvi + 304. \$99.99 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108493000.

Arqueología del mestizaje: Colonialismo y racialización. By Laura Catelli. Temuco: Ediciones Universidad de la Frontera, CLACSO, 2020. Pp. 296. ISBN: 9789562363853.

Key to the New World: A History of Early Colonial Cuba. By Luis Martínez-Fernández. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018. Pp. 220 + 236. \$24.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781683401278.

The Routledge Hispanic Studies Companion to Colonial Latin America and the Caribbean (1492–1898). Edited by Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Santa Arias. London: Routledge, 2021. Pp. 460. \$250.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781138092952.

On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis. By Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 304. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822371090.

Infrastructures of Race: Concentration and Biopolitics in Colonial Mexico. By Daniel Nemser. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. Pp. viii + 232. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781477312605.

The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World. By Elena A. Schneider. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. Pp. 360. \$39.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9781469645353.

Blood and Boundaries: The Limits of Religious and Racial Exclusion in Early Modern Latin America. By Stuart B. Schwartz. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2020. Pp. xviii + 256. \$35.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781684580200.

Where do we look for race within early Latin America's historical record? And how do we identify race as a historically situated category of practice? How would attention to processes of racialization push us to reconsider our periodization of colonial Latin America?

In the 1970s, several field-defining historians asked if class trumped race in colonial Latin America. They referred to race as *casta* (the historically situated term) or as estate, a status that was somewhat fixed at one's birth as membership in a designated corporate group. Yet, at the same time, as they pointed out, *casta* status was also fluid in practice, since legislators, jurists, and local elites often came up with ever new *casta* categories, and often recognized individual movement between official designations. If class trumped race, then perhaps racial status might have been a more flexible category of difference in this world region than in North America. At stake in the analysis was therefore a comparative framework between Latin America and the United States. Did *casta* status determine the kind of occupations one held? Or rather, could one's occupation enable one to change *casta* status? Could one move between occupations? Did members of the same *casta* marry within that *casta* or could they look for marriage partners beyond? Methodologically, scholars pursuing these questions drew on marriage records and census residence data to statistically assess occupational mobility and the degree of white, Indigenous, Black, and mestizo group cohesion. They explored how individual economic mobility affected self- and group identifications. This approach required that *casta* status be assumed to be somewhat transparent for methodological purposes, even though it was also held to have been historically flexible in practice.¹

Since the 1990s, informed by a culturalist turn, many scholars, including some who had been writing on *casta* in the 1970s, have emphasized the contested and plural meanings attached to race across different social spaces, among people occupying a range of social positions, and at different scales (from the everyday and the local to imperial legislative taxonomic processes).² Yet, Nemser's *Infrastructures of Race* and Laura Catelli's *Arqueología del mestizaje* caution us that as we emphasize such pluralism, we risk losing sight of the oppressive nature of colonial domination, which pivoted around racialized processes of extraction. The violence inherent in such practices stemmed precisely from race's embeddedness into colonial institutions, politics, and culture, which gave it temporal resilience, argues Nemser. In Nemser's words, "the emphasis on the fluidity of identity in colonial Latin America has resulted at times in a tendency to downplay the structural character of race," and yet, "tribute was in fact collected, forced labor was in fact performed, and innumerable people were in fact made to die" (9). Throwing away all attention to fixity (to avoid accusations of biologism or of covert essentialism) is not the solution. Rather, Nemser suggests, we should pay attention to how race comes to be fixed as a social structure.

This theoretical bifurcation in our approaches to racialization—between attention to negotiation and pluralism, and emphasis on top-down colonial structures and fixity—brings us to yet another question: Where do histories of racialization cross paths with

¹ Although the authors of these two works mentioned by Daniel Nemser reach different conclusions, their debate illustrates these discussion and methods: John Chance and William Taylor, "Estate and Class in a Colonial City: Oaxaca in 1792," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19 (1977): 454–487; and Robert McCaa, Stuart Schwartz, and Arturo Grubessich, "Race and Class in Colonial Latin America: A Critique," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, no. 3 (1979): 421–433. For other essays on this topic, see Nancy Appelbaum, "Blood, Nation, Science, and Language: Essentializing Race from the Sixteenth Century to the Present," *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 2 (2020): 352–359; Peter Wade, "Racism and Race Mixture in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 3 (2017): 477–485; and Lowell Gudmundson, "Afro-Latin America in Flesh and Blood: Lives from the Battlefield, Cane Field, and Courtroom; Representations from Literature, Politics, and the Genomics Lab," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 4 (2017): 689–696.

² See, among others, Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Joanne Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo: Configuring Difference in the Colonial New Kingdom of Granada* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

Black and Indigenous history? In other words, how do we account for Black and Indigenous actions and epistemes in the making of colonial era racial paradigms? If we do think about the structural fixity of racial paradigms, how do we go beyond approaching Black and Indigenous subjects as objects of imperial projects? Too much attention to the colonial structures of domination can result precisely in such epistemological objectification. Too little attention to those structures can dilute the violence of colonial extraction.

Through gripping narrative, the eight books analyzed here grapple with these questions and more. Read together, they show that elite visions of control did not always take hold. Also, such visions did not necessarily coalesce into a single coherent structure. Subaltern strategies of evasion occurred in a wide range of idioms. But the authors also suggest that we need to go beyond documenting such pluralism as an indicator of agency or resistance. Larissa Brewer-García and Stuart Schwartz each offers insights into what is at stake within an analytic framework that could account for both the oppressive nature of racialized colonial domination and pluralistic forms of social classification—a new approach to early modernity. Brewer-García shows that Black actors themselves interpreted what it meant to be Black. Such interpretations were not just incidental to a larger narrative of colonial oppression; they were little-known, yet essential epistemic processes associated with state building and with modern theories of the human. Schwartz offers a theory of early modern personhood/subjectivity, which he developed across several of his works beyond the one analyzed here. He shows that status depended on more than lineage, and social taxonomies across Latin America and in Iberia remained very unstable. The story of structure and agency cannot run in parallel, the two authors suggest; they are part of the same narrative.

Disciplinary distinctions, to a large degree, inform alignment around these questions. Historians, such as Luis Martínez-Fernández, Elena Schneider, and Schwartz, and literary scholars who are in deep conversations with historical scholarship, such as Brewer-García, are concerned with change over time and with process. As a result, they are more likely to pay close attention to how racial ideologies played out in practice, which makes contestation, negotiation, and pluralism more visible to the analytic eye. Moreover, they approach empire building as a historically situated phenomenon. Literary scholars, such as Catelli, Nemser, or Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, are more attentive to the textual practices of the elite and to present-day critical theory as a source of insight into histories of dispossession. The power of their analysis lies in attention to what does not change: racial hierarchies and dispossession, an outgrowth of European colonization; hence their theoretical approach sees colonialism as something whose afterlives lasted well after independence, rendering the distinction between the colonial and national periods questionable. An empirical study of colonialism could risk overemphasizing the role of negotiation, and through it, the flexibility of racialized social structures. By contrast, a more theoretical approach to colonialism can risk representing political action (such as movements for emancipation or independence) as an afterthought to what truly matters—the unchanging colonial structures. It could therefore also end up recentering those who conceived of those structures and described them in the archival record—elites, usually of European descent—as history's protagonists, everyone else being relegated to the status of a sidebar in an unchanging trajectory. The authors examined here navigate these two approaches with care and savvy, clearly aware of the risks they take.

Daniel Nemser's engrossing *Infrastructures of Race: Concentration and Biopolitics in Colonial Mexico* calls for a materialist approach to racialization in New Spain. The author's materialism is borne out of conversations with feminist Marxism and critical race theory. As such, it is a materialism that considers the impact of cultural ideologies on processes of primitive accumulation and dispossession—examining, for instance, how, in being culturally assumed to be less valuable, some types of labor and certain lives (women's, Afro-descendants', Indigenous people's) are made available for economic exploitation.

Nemser argues that it is colonial infrastructures that best reveal the workings of racialization in colonial Mexico. He conceives of infrastructure broadly, both as a physical process that refers to the making of population concentrations and as a cultural process of subject formation that occurred through such concentrations.

He considers four spaces where humans and nonhuman objects were concentrated as illustrations of how colonial infrastructures racialized bodies and selves: centralized towns, religious schools, segregated central districts, and botanical collections. These case studies take the reader through more than two hundred years, from the 1550s to the 1780s, even though, as Nemser points out, resonances of population concentrations occurred as late as the nineteenth century (in Cuba, with the *reconcentraciones* of the War of Independence), or in Mexico in the late twentieth century.

The first space that Nemser focuses on is the *congregación*. Mendicant orders advocated for the creation of centralized towns (or *congregaciones*) during the early process of colonization as a means of gathering an Indigenous population that lived spread out across the landscape and that had been severely weakened by pandemics and genocidal violence. Through these *congregaciones*, structured as grids (predictable, linear), the friars sought to evangelize, govern, and exploit. It was within such spaces that the category of “the Indian” (one that transcended regional, ethnic, and linguistic differences) was forged by colonial officials, argues Nemser.

The second space that Nemser analyzes is the Colegio San Juan de Letran in Mexico City, which was used to enclose mestizo boys deemed to be homeless and in need of shelter and disciplining. At first, the goal was to prepare them to take on the religious habit. However, by the middle of the sixteenth century, the ordination project collapsed because mestizos came to be regarded as unable to commit fully to the Church. It was a new conception of the body that closed the mestizos’ path to ordination: theologians started to approach their Indigenous mother’s milk as a more powerful shaper of their identities than their Spanish father’s blood, and their loyalty to the Church was put in doubt.

The third space is the *traza*, Mexico City’s Spanish center. After a riot in 1692, the Spanish elite decided to impose a strict segregation of the *traza*, removing the population of mixed descent from it. The riots have been understood as a major turning point in histories of difference making in New Spain, a moment when *casta* distinctions lost their power (participants in these food riots belonged to different *castas*). Nemser offers a distinct interpretation of this process. He points out that it is not just that *casta* distinctions became more fluid, allowing individuals to move between categories under certain circumstances. Perhaps more significantly, the category of “the plebe,” now used by officials to describe people of mixed descent, indexed a new form of racialization: a whole group of people defined through their mixed status and officially deemed to be in need of social control. After the riot, official efforts to contain the plebe spatially failed; the population of mixed descent continued to inhabit spaces they had been barred from, partially because the white elite, who spearheaded these social engineering projects, still relied on this class for essential domestic and economic services. Yet, spatial containment was replaced by a new mechanism of social control: a more diffuse and widespread form of policing.

Nemser’s last chapter pushes us to think about how taxonomies, as infrastructure, move seamlessly between the human and the nonhuman. Racializing language used to describe plants became a metaphor for imagining human differences. While scholars of racialization have considered this question with reference to the application of Linnaean taxonomies to humans, Nemser takes this one step further. He decenters northern Europe as the space where such efforts culminated, shifting attention to the first botanical collections in Madrid and Mexico City in the Bourbon Reform era.

Nemser’s sources and readings capture primarily the thinking of colonial administrators and elite agents: prelates and religious men, governors, and natural scientists.

This focus enables the author to emphasize how and why infrastructures of race became retrenched again and again in the face of challenges from below. Nemser's findings and sophisticated theoretical apparatus, both of which open up new potential avenues of inquiry, will leave an indelible mark on the reader.

Like Nemser's *Infrastructures of Race*, Laura Catelli's *Arqueología del mestizaje: Colonialismo y racialización* examines elite discourses about race and their resilience, but in this case through the lens of *mestizaje*. Across a thoughtful introduction (in which the author situates her own subject position), four chapters, and a conclusion, Catelli challenges nationalist myths of *mestizaje* as peaceful inclusion. She argues that by shedding light on the colonial roots of this process, its violent politics of domination, which have been obscured by Latin American nationalisms, become clearer. Catelli builds on a wide-ranging theoretical apparatus including postcolonial theory, Chicana feminism, and poststructuralism to point out that underlying *mestizaje* was a biopolitical criollo agenda that facilitated the reproduction of colonial structures into the republican era. Therefore, eugenicist policies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, rather than being wholesale imports, developed out of colonial legacies.

Catelli traces the beginnings of *mestizaje* to the state of siege that Indigenous populations were subjected to during the sixteenth-century encounter. She explores the juxtaposition of this violence with colonial legislative efforts to promote marriage between Spanish and Portuguese settlers and Indigenous women in Hispaniola, Brazil, New Spain, and Peru. Through rereadings of Guamán Poma and Inca Garcilaso, she aims to shed light on the different ways of thinking about *mestizaje* among mestizo intellectuals to show the plurality of such interventions. The author couples this study with a reading of the *casta* paintings to show that the notion of purity of blood pervaded all these works and that their authors concealed the violence of colonialism underneath domestic images of peaceful family making. This study offers new readings, fueled by strong theoretical acumen, of canonical works.

Elena Schneider's *Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World* is also a history of empire as a history of racialization, but one that comes closer to the experiences of Africans and Afro-descendants. In this evocative monograph, the author reminds us that eighteenth-century European empires in the Atlantic world, including the Spanish one, cannot be understood without accounting for their participation in the slave trade. Through a narrative that sets a new standard for how to write imperial and global history, Schneider recounts the eleven-month occupation of Havana by the British in 1762 and 1763 as a global event. The event becomes the lens through which Schneider conceives of interimperial competition over commercial routes, the expansion of plantation production, and the shifting roles of people of African descent in the Spanish Empire.

Around the 1740s, the Havana region of the island experienced the rapid expansion of sugar production, a process reliant on the importation of enslaved labor. The Spanish Crown had historically maintained strict limits on the extent of such imports, yet the planter class managed to avoid them through contraband with British traders. By the 1760s, the British started coveting the island precisely because of this ongoing commercial contact and of the possibilities that they imagined could arise from expanding the plantation economy. The occupation entailed the deployment of the largest military force of the time, evidence of Britain's belief in the future of a slavery-based plantation economy. Enslaved and free people of color figure in this account as shapers of imperial processes, especially in chapters 3 and 4 describing the occupation. They constituted the major oppositional forces to the British. Spanish officials promised freedom to the enslaved in return for their military support, which many petitioned for after the war. Some also helped by providing logistical support (building, hauling resources) and by feeding and healing

soldiers. This is a book about Black loyalism that belongs to a larger corpus exploring the logics of Black participation in the workings of the Spanish Empire.³

Schneider also tells us a story of Spain's betrayal of its Black vassals. In spite of the contributions of the enslaved and free people of color to Havana's defense, the Spanish reoccupation resulted in a hardening of racial lines. The Crown gradually opened up the slave trade to the island, and plantation production expanded. Yet, memories of unrewarded loyalty would persist into the nineteenth century, as some of the direct descendants of those soldiers imagined a future of Black freedom instantiated through Black martial action, a reward for their past loyalty.

Schneider's work is a model for how to write a history of the African diaspora alongside an imperial and military history. As such, it offers a strong foundation for understanding how Afro-descendants' participation in the military in Havana shaped communities of men, women, and children living in the city into the nineteenth century.⁴

Like Schneider, Larissa Brewer-García unearths understandings of Black vassalage, while also focusing on how such understandings shaped empire building, religious governance, and notions of race and the human. *Beyond Babel: Translations of Blackness in Colonial Peru and New Granada* examines the role of African translators in Spanish conversion policies in seventeenth-century New Granada and Peru. The author argues that some ideologies of Blackness within the early Spanish Empire emerged precisely through a limited "gesture of inclusion in the category of the human, not exclusion" (21). It is from this position of limited inclusion that Black subjects developed their own notions of what it meant to be Black and challenged official stigmas. *Beyond Babel* is a breathtaking piece of scholarship: the sources used, the readings, the sustained development of the argument from one chapter to the next, and the quality of the narrative are simply stunning.

Brewer-García points out that theologians had to make some concessions to attract Black converts to Christianity. Such concessions, Brewer-García argues, occurred not out of a sense of magnanimity but rather as a pragmatic response to the realities of conversion to a church that claimed to be universalist. It was Black translators who might have played key roles in how these pragmatic responses were developed, rather than the Catholic friars who managed the conversions.

Why focus on translators? Brewer-García tells us that we cannot understand the early Spanish Empire and the epistemological processes undergirding racialization without attention to language. In the sixteenth century, within elite intellectual circles in Iberia, language was not just a medium of communication—it was also considered to be a substantive aspect of one's thought, and as such, a criterion for difference making. Renaissance humanism placed enormous emphasis on language use as a reflection of a speaker's intentions. Those who could not use language well were deemed to be of an inferior intellectual capacity. This meant two things in the context of Spanish colonialism in the Americas. For the religious orders who took upon themselves the task of converting Africans to Christianity in Africa and the Americas, having access to the original languages was tantamount to understanding the thoughts of the converted. While prelates learned Indigenous languages in the Americas, they did not have the same access to African languages (they claimed that there were too many), relying instead on translators, usually enslaved people, to do this work for them. The importance of language to perceptions of

³ See, among others, Marcela Echeverri Muñoz, *Indian and Slave Royalists in the Age of Revolution: Reform, Revolution, and Royalism in the Northern Andes, 1780–1825* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); and David Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁴ Two works that have addressed this question are María del Carmen Barcia, *Los ilustres apellidos: Negros en la Habana colonial* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2009); and Henry B. Lovejoy, Prieto: *Yorùbá Kingship in Colonial Cuba during the Age of Revolutions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

human difference meant something else, too. People of African descent who had been incorporated into the Spanish Empire were often portrayed as inferior with reference to their linguistic practice. Take, for instance, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literary portrayals of Black linguistic practice in Iberia (known as *fala de preto* or *habla de negro*). In *villancicos* (popular songs that became sacred compositions in the sixteenth century), Black characters were described as childlike because of their “impaired” Spanish speech patterns, prone to physical and emotional excess and in need of discipline. Legal texts, such as the first royal ordinances written in the Americas (for Santo Domingo, in 1545), also deemed Black subjects to be in need of coercion; when they infringed on the law, they were sentenced to harsher punishments than whites.

Ecclesiastical texts, however, did allow an opening: they assumed that Black men and women could potentially make autonomous decisions, even while placing them on a lower social rung. Theologians had to recognize the possibility that all those who were converted could become true Christians (and thus, they had to give up on a notion of insuperable hierarchies). At the same time, they also relied on coercion to instantiate conversions, operating under the assumption that some groups of people could not exercise choice well, and therefore had limited consenting power. Jesuit friars, such as Alonso de Sandoval, saw the need to make Christianity attractive to potential Black converts to gain their consent and thus reduce the amount of coercion deployed. Brewer-García shows how Christianity was dissociated from whiteness in the process. Visual representations of Black men were used to catechize. Such representations rendered them as beautiful, their resplendence purportedly originating in their commitment to the Christian faith. Such representations suggested the possibility that they were equally able to be virtuous as white men.

In this work, Brewer-García shifts the needle on a classic body of literature that had assumed that people of African descent were primarily interested in dissociating themselves from Blackness as a means of moving up socially. She argues that if we go back to the seventeenth century, at a moment when ideologies of Blackness were still in the making, we can better see the multiple meanings associated with this concept, and Black actors’ positive valorization of their own Blackness.

The author unearths a stunning archival resource from the archives of the Vatican. Her interpretive work and close readings also mesmerize. Andrés Sacabuche, an enslaved man born in Angola, had served as a translator from Kimbundu and Anchico into Castilian for Pedro Claver, an important Jesuit prelate in Cartagena de Indias in the 1650s. Upon his death, the Vatican assessed the possibility that Claver might be granted sainthood, and Sacabuche was asked to provide testimony about Claver’s life and Sacabuche’s relationship with him. During his testimony, Sacabuche provided an account of his own life as a survivor of the Middle Passage who was purchased by a Jesuit school in Cartagena to help priests convert captives arriving in Cartagena. That Sacabuche was invited to provide an account tells us that the Church did not shy away from Black witnesses and their word. It is from this account that we see how Sacabuche tried to build an understanding about Christianity with Black converts. He altered the pedagogical tools used by Claver to allow for easier memorization, including, among others, comparisons between slavery and a life without Christianity. He also advocated for the use of the body as a mnemonic device among converts who did not read Castilian: converts were taught to use their fingers to remember Catholic prayers.

The author also uses Ursula de Jesús’s spiritual diary and two of her posthumous biographies to bring home the same point: Black intermediaries saw themselves capable of interceding for the souls of both white and Black believers, elites and nonelites. They did not see their Blackness as deficient or as something to flee from. Born in Peru and working as a religious servant in the convent of Santa Clara in Lima, de Jesús was not a translator. She was a spiritual intermediary, relaying messages between God, souls in purgatory, and the living. Like Sacabuche, she “helped document and circulate notions

of Black virtue and Black beauty even as racial hierarchies stigmatizing Blackness were increasingly cohering in seventeenth-century Spanish America” (3).

Brewer-García’s work opens new ground by showing, very concretely, how Black subjects participated in the making of modern institutions, while also capturing the violence they had to withstand. They were deemed to be inferior and subjected to physical and emotional punishment. Even when they could access relatively higher status among the enslaved by working as translators, they obtained a tenuous freedom. Indeed, the author puts into relief their politically ambiguous positioning—close to institutions of power that endorsed slavery and that victimized them—which they sought to navigate the best they could. At the same time, the author also emphasizes moments of incoherence in the elites’ ideology, as well as the elites’ own dependence on Black subjects. Finally, this beautifully written book tells us that imperial history cannot be written independently of Black history because the empire was Black in places such as Cartagena de Indias, and translators such as Sacabuche shaped the state-building process as well as early modernity.

Like Brewer-García, Stuart Schwartz in *Blood and Boundaries: The Limits of Religious and Racial Exclusion in Early-Modern Latin America* explores the making of empire-wide racial taxonomies and the challenges that people of African and Indigenous descent posed to them. Based on the 2019 Menahem Stern Jerusalem lectures, this book expands the author’s impressive work on these topics, particularly his classic monograph *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World*.⁵

Blood and Boundaries explores the transfer of social taxonomies from Iberia to the Americas, and the transformations that occurred in the process. The book focuses primarily on liminal categories (Moriscos, individuals converted from Islam to Christianity; conversos, individuals converted from Judaism to Christianity; and mestizos, individuals of mixed Spanish and Indigenous descent) and how those placed in them exercised pressure on the existing taxonomies. Schwartz traces the origins of racial thinking within early Latin America to the *limpieza de sangre* regulations that were introduced in the Iberian Peninsula starting around the mid-fifteenth century. It was at this moment that authorities started singling out converted populations as potentially not truly Christian. The assumption underlying these regulations was that a commitment to Judaism would persist in spite of conversion and could be transmitted by blood to one’s offspring. These restrictions were expanded to those whose lineage included Muslims, heretics, ascendants who had been punished by the Inquisition, persons of illegitimate birth, and to those who worked in manual occupations (which were considered to be vile). In the Americas, this way of thinking about difference was mapped onto socioeconomic divisions. Spaniards could claim a higher status as pure of blood, but not just because of their lineage; their ability, along with other practices, to stay away from manual occupations also allowed them to make this claim.

Schwartz shows the limits of this genealogical thinking, as individuals sought to escape the corporate groups to which they were assigned (by changing residence, occupation, becoming economically upwardly mobile, or through marriage). By the early eighteenth century, the free population of mixed descent (mestizos) came to be known as “the plebe” or “the people” and was much feared in the Age of Revolutions, as it claimed access to rights, land, and political recognition. The specter of exclusion, however, haunted its trajectory into the republican era.

In the introduction, Schwartz addresses head-on a question that has been at the heart of the historiography on colonial Latin America for decades now: Was early modern Iberia modern racism’s origin point? Some, such as Aníbal Quijano or Irene Silverblatt, have

⁵ Stuart Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

pointed to this early moment as the beginnings of modern racism and its genealogical thinking.⁶ Others, such as María Elena Martínez, have located modern racism more squarely within the Enlightenment, when genealogical thinking became firmly ensconced in phenotypical assessments.⁷ Schwartz argues that there are similarities between beliefs in the inheritability of moral characteristics associated with particular groups and modern racism. However, definitions of hierarchy in the Iberian empires in the early modern era “incorporated concepts such as nobility, honor, legitimacy of birth, occupation, education, and accomplishment in ways that were quite unlike more modern forms of racial thinking” (9). Social status did not depend on lineage alone; it also pivoted around one’s actions and individual merits. Schwartz makes a key argument here: these criteria introduced a high level of instability into existing taxonomies and enabled individuals to escape categories to which they were assigned at birth.

Like Brewer-García, Schwartz shows the instability of elite regimes of categorization. There were multiple criteria at work establishing status, and their outcomes did not always align. Individual efforts to instrumentalize this instability added further fuel to the fire. This beautifully written work, based on knowledge of the field accumulated over several decades, is also a very erudite synthesis of the current historiography on the topic, a service to the discipline that many readers will appreciate.

General readers and a student audience will find *Key to the New World: A History of Early Colonial Cuba* by Luis Martínez-Fernández attractive. The study draws extensively on secondary literature and on some primary sources and is the first such work to focus on early modern Cuba exclusively in almost a century. We have read similar recent synthetic works on the early Caribbean, but none specifically on Cuba. Across eight chapters, the author takes readers through two hundred years of history covering a vast array of themes. Black and Indigenous history are subsumed to imperial history and are considered to be important elements of the story. We see the island be shaped by colonial economic, administrative, and cultural policies prior to its transformation into the massive sugar producer that it would become in the late eighteenth century.

The book starts with a chapter on geography, in which the author points out how the terrain shaped the economic choices that were available to the inhabitants: the insularity and the island’s maritime location facilitated an economy based on long-distance trade, while its fertile soils could be exploited for sugar cultivation. Yet, the same geography also contained spaces of potential escape from oppressive conditions. Forests, mangroves, and keys could serve as protective nooks used by those trying to conceal themselves from the forces of the state, whether they be smugglers, pirates, or fugitives from slavery. In chapter 2, the author draws on archaeological scholarship to classify the different waves of pre-Columbian migration to the island, and draws out some of the social characteristics of these communities (sedentary, ceramics users, slash-and-burn agriculturalists). Particularly interesting in this chapter is the attention to the contemporary Taíno revival movement in eastern Cuba, which is a part of a larger initiative across the Spanish Caribbean. The Taínos were the population native to the island when Spanish settlers arrived there. This recent movement tries to preserve and recreate Taíno music, dance, storytelling, and healing practices, and thereby dispute the declension narrative. Chapter 3 explores the encounter (drawing on Columbus’s letters) and the Columbian Exchange. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the establishment of colonial institutions, conflicts between local elite settlers and between elite settlers and the imperial center, and the making of creole

⁶ Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–232; Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁷ María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

society. Chapter 6 traces the cultural dimension of this process, through attention to transculturation across Amerindian, African, and European cultures. Chapter 7 explores Cuba's role as a military outpost and the kind of economic benefits that it derived from that position. Chapter 8, the final one in the book, addresses sugar production on the island, its failure to expand during the seventeenth century, and the forms of resistance that enslaved people put up. General readers and students in courses on Cuba will find this book, which fills a much-needed niche, of great interest.

On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis, by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, lays the foundations for a new series at Duke University Press that will bear the name of the short title of this book. The authors argue for epistemological and practical distancing from abstract universals originating in modernity and European colonialism. References to racialization as a process cut across the entire volume. When juxtaposed to the other works reviewed here, *On Decoloniality* stands out as a piece of scholarship that asks us to consider the afterlives of colonialism as coloniality into the present and to conceive of ways to upend them. The authors seek to replace abstract universals, which they associate with the colonial project and with "relationality," "the ways that different local histories and embodied conceptions and practices of decoloniality, including our own, can enter into conversations and build understandings that both cross geopolitical locations and colonial differences" (1). The book is organized in two parts, the first authored by Walsh and the second, by Mignolo; the coauthorship as collaborative practice makes a statement for a new kind of research that goes beyond the traditional individualism associated with the Euro-American academy. The first part, "Decoloniality in/as Praxis," focuses on "how decoloniality is signified and constructed in and through praxis," and "how those who live the colonial difference think theory, theorize practice, and build, create, and enact processes, struggles, and practices of resurgent and insurgent action and thought, including in the sphere of knowledge, territory-land, state, re-existences, and life itself" (9). Part 2, "The Decolonial Option," returns to "thinking/doing." It explores how "coloniality of power was formed, transformed, and managed in its history of more than 500 years," and "how it operates today on a global scale" (10).

The notion of decoloniality here goes back to Aníbal Quijano's definition of coloniality. Quijano argued that coloniality consisted of two related processes: racialization as epistemology, and the political economy through which labor was subjected to control and extraction. By this token, modernity and the notions of the human associated with it are by definition colonial. Decoloniality then refers to the fissuring of coloniality, to its upending. According to the two authors, decoloniality is the "struggles for and on territory and land as the base and place of identity, knowledge, being, spirituality, cosmo-vision-existence, and life" (35); it is "the process and project of building, shaping, and enabling coloniality's otherwise" (57); "not a condition to be reached, or a stage of critical enlightenment" that some might have while others lack it (99).

The use of enumerations throughout the book is not just a stylistic choice. It seems to be part of the two authors' semantic agenda to decolonize by showing the global nature of this effort, the many actors involved, and the multipronged characteristics of the power structures. Yet, these enumerations also can make it hard to fathom who the main actors are and who is responsible for what, when, and where. Colonialism appears as a static and rather uniform category, like coloniality, because so abstract. Concepts take over from concrete political-economic processes, which are gestured toward. These long enumerations also have another effect: they push the reader to focus on the politics of language as the main agent of decoloniality, to an extent that leaves materialist politics, far more empirical, out of the picture. This approach shapes how authors think about context as well.

Mignolo and Walsh mention Indigenous and Black scholar-activists frequently as key voices involved in the production of decolonial discourses and practices. This referencing

is, however, done in ways that isolate these scholar-activists' works from the contexts in which they emerged and from the very concrete and immediate problems that they confront. Context, however, is something that is often key to those activists' theories, the very flesh and blood of those theories. Moreover, that context is the very relations (or, as translated into theoretical language, the "relationality") that Mignolo and Walsh valorize. The two authors do argue for the importance of contextualizing work without a doubt. Yet, when such contexts are invoked, their presentation can feel abstract at times because emptied of process and change over time.

On Decoloniality opens a series. It has a specific function: to advocate and, like most critical theory, to offer a bird's-eye view. For these reasons, perhaps we should refrain from some of these criticisms. The future publications in this series will most likely provide that complex local context and those embedded forms for theorization that this volume advocates.

The Routledge Hispanic Studies Companion to Colonial Latin America and the Caribbean (1492–1898) is also a work that synthesizes recent theoretical developments, while providing concrete empirical and methodological illustrations of what decolonial approaches could look like. This is an edited volume with pieces authored by twenty-eight literary and cultural studies scholars and historians. The introduction, by the two editors, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Santa Arias, lays out the conceptual groundwork for this collective endeavor at this particular moment in the development of the field of colonial Latin American and Caribbean studies. Like Nemesio and Catelli or Mignolo and Walsh, the two editors question the very notion of the colonial period as a colonizing invention that intellectual elites developed "to provide Latin American literary history with a parallel structure to European literary histories" (3). Through this questioning of periodization, the two editors open up the possibility for reflecting on colonialism's long-term legacies, including epistemic ones. The volume is also attentive to the dynamics of colonialism, interrogating static representations.

Martínez-San Miguel and Arias point out three innovations in the field that shaped their project. The first is the expansion of the notion of colonial discourse beyond the realms of literature and the textual to include khipus, textiles, oral traditions, Indigenous materialities, and performances. This particular approach has enabled scholars to consider perspectives beyond those of intellectual and administrative elites—a decolonial method.

A second important innovation is the wedding of Latinx and Latin American histories. While Latin American studies in the United States emerged in the context of Cold War area studies for national security purposes, within Latin America it evolved as part of nationalist agendas. Latinx studies, by contrast, emerged from within ethnic communities with firsthand experiences of US colonialism; in pointing this out, the editors are suggesting that Latinx history emerged fundamentally as an anti-hegemonic project, unlike Latin American studies. The goal of the field has been to unearth alternative modes of knowledge to hegemonic ones—an avowedly political-epistemological project. The conversations that have occurred across these fields, while oftentimes tense, have opened the door for new understandings of the relationship between contemporary colonialism (with a focus on the United States) and past Iberian colonialisms.

The third innovation has been the interdisciplinary nature of the work. Contributors to this volume work across literature, visual and material culture, religious studies, legal studies, and more.

This collection is a great asset in the classroom, with chapters in the first section that can be used in graduate courses to provide overviews of the field. Chapters in the other three parts illustrate methodological approaches to concrete empirical questions. Part 1, "Colonialism and Coloniality," comprises essays focusing on key concepts and debates that have defined the field. There are chapters on race, *mestizaje*, and *criollismo*, among others.

“Knowledge Production and Networks” is the second section, and it consists of chapters that address “the manner in which knowledge was produced, circulated, and appropriated during the colonial period” (26). “Materialities and Archives,” the third section, explores the expansion of the notion of the archive beyond the textual and the written. The final section, “Language, Translation, and Beyond” explores “language as one of the most important areas of contact and negotiation during the colonial period” (26). The chapters examine the transformations of African, Asian, and Indigenous languages during the colonization process, as well as the complex roles of indigenous and African subjects in the translation processes and in the spread of non-Eurocentric notions of self, world, and political sovereignty.

The works reviewed here offer distinct empirical, methodological, and chronological entry points into the study of racialization and colonialism in Latin America. They also go a step beyond identifying the silencing of subaltern voices or locating their agency. Rather, they identify the very concrete ways in which Indigenous and Black knowledge producers shaped modern institutions and epistemologies associated with making race and difference through a range of subject positions. They also point to the resilience of racialized materialist and cultural extractive frameworks, which have managed to reconstitute themselves in ever new shapes and forms across the centuries in response to challenges. For all these reasons, they illustrate the dynamism of the field, the great vigor of the conversations taking place therein, and the enormity of the political and intellectual task ahead of us as we strive to undo colonialism’s many lives.

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