

Neither of these paths rejects 'race' as a necessary concept for political action. One could argue that changes in Brazil *institute* 'race' as a legal/political category, while the move to multiraciality in the USA merely alters the way individuals and groups define themselves in relation to 'races', at least for the census which now allows people to fill in more than one 'racial' box.

The author betrays his own doubts over continued racialisation towards the end of his book, when he states that 'part of the struggle for achieving fully participatory racial democracies involves deconstructing the very racial categories and identities inherited from colonialism that have long served as the basis of racism and racial hierarchy in Brazil and the United States.' But then he falls back to his prior position, endorsing 'social engineering, government authority and official attention to racial behavior.' So, like almost everything written about 'race', this book is clearly programmatic and the solutions proposed built on the persistent premise that it is possible to combat racism without questioning race as concept and criterion for political action. Whether you agree or not with the author's prescriptions, the book brings new light to new and old problems and is a more than useful contribution to the ongoing comparison of Brazil and the USA.

*Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*

PETER FRY

*J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 39 (2007). doi:10.1017/S0022216X07003069

Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. xiv + 287, \$55.00, hb.

The study of slaves and slavery in the Americas has a long and rich history. Scholars have examined slave labour, the demographics of slavery, slave families, rebellions and resistance, and the winding road towards abolition. In the last fifteen years, the historiography has broadened considerably, with important works being published not just on slaves and slavery, but also on the agency of Africans brought to the Americas, the connections between Africa and the Americas, and studies of regions previously considered to be marginal in the history of slavery and race in the Americas. Von Germeten's welcome new book helps to fill gaps in the literature on this last point, examining the widespread phenomenon of Afro-Mexican confraternities across many contexts in New Spain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It opens with two thematic chapters, on baroque religiosity and women in the brotherhoods, followed by chapters on black and mulatto/*pardo* confraternities in Mexico City, Valladolid and Parral. The final chapter further expands the geographic focus by looking at conflicts in black and mixed confraternities in more regions, including small villages and agricultural zones. Von Germeten uses a wealth of different sources to piece together a history of these organisations, incorporating wills, baptismal records, confraternity books, and other primary sources.

However, despite the importance of the topic, the thoroughness of the research, and the wealth of information in the book, the arguments of the study are somewhat unfocused and diffuse. The stated focus is the change in the confraternities from more African-centred organisations on the periphery of colonial society to organisations more concerned with Hispanic society and norms and more engaged in the life of the colony. The author does a good job of demonstrating the latter point, especially in the case of Valladolid, where she examines individual cases of

eighteenth century confraternity leaders such as the master architect Diego Durán, who struggled to raise the profile of the Rosary confraternity that he led. Yet she also, insightfully, demonstrates the limits of that interaction. Responding to the arguments of R. Douglas Cope, von Germeten demonstrates well that despite this higher level of articulation with creole society, race still played a role in the definition of identity in late colonial Mexico. For example, she demonstrates these limitations in her case of Diego Durán, who never was allowed to use the honorific *don*. The final chapter focuses on these limitations more directly by revealing the widespread perpetuation of racial conflicts in eighteenth century Mexico.

Where the author's argument does not work, however, is in the first part of her claim – that as confraternities moved more towards the centre of colonial society, they distanced themselves from more 'African' traits and practices. On the surface this argument is somewhat self-evident – by the eighteenth century there really were no Africans arriving in New Spain as slaves. The book, however, offers little real evidence offered to support the 'African-ness' of the organisations in their early days. One place where this argument is especially weak is in the chapter on women in the confraternities. Von Germeten claims that the presence of women in leadership positions in the confraternities in the seventeenth century is one of the clearest indicators of African customs being present in the organisations. Yet she offers no evidence of how this phenomenon related to any particular, or even general, practice in Africa, nor does she grapple with the work of Africanists who demonstrate the ways that African societies were profoundly patriarchal. In addition, she ignores evidence that some European confraternities, such as Rosary confraternities, also opened their doors to women. Further, the presentation of 'African' traits in the case studies only works for Mexico City, with her strong examples of the coronations of black kings and queens and the presence of a confraternity exclusively made up of members of the Zape nation. As the ratios of African born to American born blacks shifted in the second half of the seventeenth century, these practices faded away. Yet similar examples are not brought up for the other case studies. The author makes no claim that the monograph is a study of Atlantic World interactions, yet a more thorough examination of even secondary sources on Africa and on African traditions in confraternities elsewhere in the Americas would have strengthened the book's argument tremendously.

Another disturbing aspect of the study is contained in the first chapter which suggests that slaves in the confraternities accepted their slave status as demonstrated through their own emphasis in their documents of their humble status. This theme of humility then reoccurs throughout the text supporting again the earlier part of the argument (that confraternity members moved from this humble stance to a more active engagement with the larger society). Yet a reading between the lines of some of the evidence might have found a more 'hidden transcript' that cleverly used the language of humility popular in the Mexican baroque of the seventeenth century to further the quite conscious agendas of the black confraternities. A more nuanced reading of the documents, with comparisons to other studies from the Americas, may have revealed less African and Afro-Mexican accommodation than presented by the author.

A sub-theme running throughout the book is the wide variation that existed between confraternities in different regions in New Spain. Indeed, the author presents a dizzying array of different contexts using a wide variety of source material for each region. The variety is both a strength and weakness in the book. A narrower

focus may have allowed the book to do a better job of presenting a tightly argued claim – clearly it is a difficult task for any historian to pull together a clear argument with such a broad geographic focus, relatively long chronological period, and variety of sources. Where the book does make an important contribution is opening the door for future, more detailed studies, of the important topic of confraternal life, especially among blacks and Indians, and its role in the larger society – a topic that has been largely overlooked and which this book helps to bring to the forefront of historical inquiry into the colonial past of Latin America.

*Albright College*

ELIZABETH W. KIDDY

*J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 39 (2007). doi:10.1017/S0022216X07003070

Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture and Identity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. xi + 191, \$59.95, hb.

Michelle Gonzalez has two main goals in her book *Afro-Cuban Theology*: to show that Cuban and Cuban-American popular religion are imbued with African-derived symbols and practices, in particular from the Yoruba tradition of the orishas; and to argue that this religious mix carries larger theological lessons for Cubans, Cuban Americans and the rest of us. She largely succeeds in accomplishing these goals, because of her detailed empirical knowledge of her subject, and her immersion in the relevant theology. Her mix of the empirical and normative, of the sociological and theological, continues thoughtfully in the tradition of liberation theology, of which she makes frequent mention.

Gonzalez' discussion of the African influences in popular Cuban religion is strong and well-documented. In a variety of ways she makes the point that the African spiritual legacy pervades the Cuban and Cuban-American worldview. Relying on history, sociology and anthropology, she shows, for example, that the devotion to La Caridad, the advocacy of Mary who is patron saint of Cuba, is closely associated in popular belief with the Yoruba goddess Oshun; that St Lazarus is strongly associated with Babalu Aye, orisha of curing; and so forth. Relying on imaginative literature, she is able to show too that the main character in Christina Garcia's novel *Dreaming in Cuba*, courts 'the intercession of the gods on her own behalf, whether she seeks health, love, or to visit ill will on an enemy'. This type of 'courting' is a clear expression of African spiritual influences.

Turning from such descriptions to their theological interpretation, Gonzalez has freer rein. For Cubans, 'the marriage of the spiritual and material worlds, far from being extraordinary, informs the rhythms of daily life.' This pattern, she suggests, reveals the theological lesson that 'our actions in this world have direct implications for our relationships with those beyond it, and these relationships are vital' (p. 138). The book is filled with this kind of thoughtful, if not exactly surprising, theological and normative reflection. Throughout her theological reflections, she clearly takes sides with the liberation theologians' preferential option for the poor, which allows her to give voice to the popular longing to feel intimate with the divine. But it seems that for Gonzalez the most important theological lesson is a negative one: having observed that most Cubans want to deny the existence of African influence upon their worldview, she argues that this denial is tantamount to sin. '[O]ur full humanity as Cuban-Americans will not be realized,' she writes, 'until we cease denying who we are and how we have marginalized those in our community who do not fit racist