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Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe (eds.), *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. xiii + 406, £70.00, £16.99 pb.

The growing literature on African-descended populations in Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean in the decades since the Second World War has contributed greatly to the broadening discourse on race and national identity in the region. Led largely by anthropologists, historians and sociologists, much of the scholarship has centred on regions in the Americas with populations recognised regionally and nationally as Afro-descendants, with nations such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Colombia and Panama receiving the most significant attention. These efforts have tied the history of blacks in Latin America to the legacies of slavery and colonialism, the decline of plantation societies, and their role in influencing late nineteenth- and twentieth-century economic, cultural, social and political movements in the region. Moreover, this scholarship has recently linked the history of African descendants in Latin America to the broader historical discourse of the African Diaspora and the Black Atlantic. However, as editors Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe and the several contributors to *Blacks and Blackness in Central America* note, Central America has remained on the margins both geographically and conceptually in this literature due in part to the lack of understanding by scholars of the role of Central America in the earliest colonial slave trade and of the fact that Africans represented the majority of the non-indigenous population in the region for much of the colonial period.

In many of the Central American countries, the lack of an African presence in the historical narrative is also attributed to post-colonial adoptions of mestizo or mixed-race identities that promote the indigenous and Iberian legacies of the region while diminishing the role of Africans over space and time. Through a historical analysis of the Central American colonial past and modern Caribbean enclaves, the authors engage with academic discourse on transnationalism, creolisation and the larger Latin American historiography. The book is divided into two sections: the first focuses on colonial slavery and freedom, while the second centres on modern nation-building and race. Four of the five historical republics of Central America – Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Honduras – are the emphasis of many of the chapters, with Guatemala and Honduras dominant in the chapters on the colonial period and Nicaragua and Costa Rica more prevalent in the modern era.

The chapters in the first section of the book offer new perspectives on the fluid and ambiguous nature of colonial slavery in Central America. The dynamics of African slavery in sugar and cacao plantations in Guatemala and Costa Rica, while similar to patterns in Brazil and the Caribbean during the early development of the institution, uncover a rich and complex African presence in two areas of the region that have established national narratives which until recently denied the existence of blacks. The study on royal slave workers at the Spanish fort of Omoa in Honduras is indicative of this trend in that it reveals the blurring of lines between slavery and freedom among the enslaved, many of whom were able to exhibit a high level of autonomy within the Spanish settlement due to the negotiation of wages and rights to develop and settle crown lands. Some were able to purchase or negotiate their freedom through service or earning income by hiring themselves out with their owners' permission. The ability of the enslaved population to earn wages was the result of Spanish fears of slave uprisings, which re-emphasises the fact that Africans, though

enslaved, represented the greatest threat to Spanish hegemony in the region. The inclusion of Honduras in the volume, whether in urban centres such as Omoa or in peripheral areas such as La Mosquitia, is a departure from much of the scholarship on the country in that it establishes very early the African, indigenous and European dimensions of the nation and the ways in which all groups negotiated their existence and identity in the Spanish colonial context. The essay on Angolans in Guatemala affirms this by furthering the argument that Afro-descendants, particularly mulattos, were instrumental in the development of *ladino* identity in places such as colonial Amatitlán.

The chapters in the second half of the book address established themes such as the rise of American enclaves along the Caribbean coastal areas of the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to the development of the banana and tropical fruit industries. Costa Rica and Nicaragua are the nations covered in this section. Established themes such as the expansion of an Afro-descended proto-peasantry in the banana zones, the perception of Afro-Caribbean descendants in Costa Rica as marginal citizens, and the impact of the liberal/conservative debate in Nicaragua are revisited. The essay on the Nicaraguan political debate and its influence on racial identity and issues of loyalty and national sovereignty during the filibuster period offer new interpretations to an overlooked period in Central American history.

Through its careful and thorough research, broad chronology and in-depth analysis that situates the history of people of African descent within the wider literature on race and identity in Latin America, *Blacks and Blackness in Central America* offers a welcome contribution to the study of the African Diaspora. No longer can the histories of people of African descent be subsumed beneath homogenising national discourses or US foreign relations-centred narratives. While the authors have worked to integrate the history of blacks in Central America into the larger Latin American and Black Atlantic historiography, the essays in the volume are equally important to the study of the African Diaspora and contribute greatly to that literature, something that is often understated in the essays. The scope of this volume has made it impossible for Central American history to be ignored. The volume does expose the continued lack of attention given to El Salvador, a country often alluded to in the larger literature as having a small but relevant African presence, but the groundwork laid by the scholars in this volume provides a framework for future scholars to uncover the history of African descendants in that country and other areas throughout the Americas.

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Laura Gotkowitz (ed.), *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. vii + 400, \$94.95, \$25.95 pb; £69.00, £16.99 pb.

This book has many strong points to recommend it. First, it deals directly with the concept of race in Latin America, not just past but also present. As Gotkowitz notes, more and more scholars and activists are ‘finding it impossible not to use the word “race”’ (p. 2), which is not quite the same as using the word ‘racism’. Second, it combines historical and anthropological approaches to provide a satisfying *longue durée* account of the work that race has done and still does in