

Erika Denise Edwards, *Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law, and the Making of a White Argentine Republic*

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Argentina remains one of the least explored nations in Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of recovering the history of Africans and Afro-descendant populations. Erika Edwards's book *Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law, and the Making of a White Argentine Republic* makes important and much-needed contributions to understanding these groups. She focuses on Córdoba from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. The province was integral to the making of the Argentine nation but is not as heavily researched as Buenos Aires. While Buenos Aires was central in defining Argentina as European, the actions of some Afro-descendant female residents in Córdoba played a significant role in rendering invisibility to all people of African descent in the nation. This contributed to notions of Argentina not only as European but, by proxy, white.

The book's specific focus on Afro-descendant women returns agency to them within historical narratives, one of its greatest contributions. Edwards brilliantly highlights the multiple identifications of the women discussed while analysing the implications of each. She notes the importance of recognising the myriad of classifications used to describe them, including terms like 'inferior lineage' or '*mala sangre*' ('bad blood'). The text is not only a commentary on blackness or African descent, but also offers useful perspectives on whiteness and the particularities of racial hierarchies in the Argentine context. Edwards gives careful attention to the ways whiteness was institutionalised through schooling. This went beyond legal whitening or moving away from blackness and enslaved status. The book furthermore sheds light on the larger infrastructure of *blanqueamiento* via the everyday ways it was implemented in Argentine society. Afro-descendant women could 'contribute to the nation as "republican mothers" who uplifted their children from their blackness' (p. 7), which enculturated them into whiteness. The book does a superb job in painting a more humanising portrait of the experiences of the enslaved.

Being able to determine if someone was of African descent was never a given in a place like Córdoba. The emphasis that local authorities placed on maintaining social hierarchy through laws or edicts demonstrated how difficult it could be to distinguish between the *castas* based on appearance, as dress and behaviour could change your position in the hierarchy independent of phenotype. Edwards notes that refined chastity, domesticity, dress, and other factors were crucial to the performance of a Spanish woman and subsequent ascent in the social hierarchy

for Afro-descendant women. She also highlights the role of Spanish women in policing whiteness and privilege by attempting to control how Afro-descendant women of lower *castas* dressed. The examples presented in the narrative demonstrate the complexities of relationships during the era, romantic and otherwise, between Afro-descendant women and non Afro-descendant members of those societies.

Marriage dissent cases offered a legal means for Afro-descendant women to climb the social hierarchy by claiming mistaken identity and arguing they were really Spanish or Indian (p. 84). Edwards further reveals the complex intimate relationships between enslaved women and other members of their society, noting that some bought and sold slaves to financially support their families. Details like this improve a layperson's comprehension of the institution of slavery by highlighting the complicated layers of entanglement in those human relationships. The author also provides multiple examples demonstrating how enslaved women found ways to legally advocate for themselves when their owners refused to abide by the laws that were in their favour, like the Siete Partidas marriage laws. Edwards notes how the rights and freedoms of enslaved women were intertwined with those of Indigenous populations. These and other layers of complexity are unpacked in the analysis.

There were well-documented nuances in relationships and varieties of heterosexual romantic relationships. These ranged from exploitation, abuse and coercion to mutual infatuation, love and respect. This is quite different from the hegemonic colonial history that is mostly taught. These are truly entangled engagements which are long overdue for analysis. Through *Hiding in Plain Sight* Afro-descendant women become fully human and exercise agency in novel and clever ways. Their stories of resistance and use of all of the resources available at the time to seek freedom for themselves and their kin are moving. The work artfully illustrates the concept eloquently expressed by the Combahee River Collective Black feminist group: 'If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.' Unfortunately, the price paid for those strategies of freedom was the negation of their African descent and its subsequent erasure in the historical record, which would resound for centuries to follow.

The book will be useful to scholars in a wide variety of fields including history, African Diaspora studies, Latin American studies, law and the social sciences. The detailed descriptions of legislation, policies and other documented rules that governed the lives of Afro-descendants create an even more substantive analysis. The book is easy to read and the information presented is accessible to students at all levels as well as to the general public. Additionally, the timeline at the beginning of the book is helpful for contextualising relevant events related to Afro-descendant populations in the region and making comparisons with other territories.

Hiding in Plain Sight contains a plethora of rich description and historical detail throughout, but sometimes Edwards leaves the reader wanting an in-depth critique of concepts like race and patriarchy. Though the author is a formidable expert on the subject matter, a more nuanced gendered and racial analysis of the data would enhance the arguments. The concepts of race and patriarchy are certainly lurking in the shadows but are not explicitly problematised, which is a missed opportunity. An

intersectional or Black feminist reading of the text could easily provide a useful framework for examining the lives of the women described. These issues are easily resolved and the reader can look forward to having the concepts further developed in the author's future work. Overall this debut monograph is a strong opening that makes the reader excited for what historical gems Edwards will uncover next.

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Katherine M. Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement*

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Katherine Marino's study of early- to mid-twentieth-century feminism in Latin America, what she terms '*feminismo americano*', is both enlightening and engaging. The book makes several central and highly significant arguments. First, it demolishes the widely accepted belief that US and European women pioneered the feminist movement. Instead, it illustrates how Latin American women led the struggle for women's hemispheric emancipation from the 1920s through to the 1950s. Marino further credits these women with advancing a more far-reaching and advanced understanding of feminism than their US counterparts did. She also highlights the extent to which the transnational networks these women built facilitated their work and were the source of personal support. Finally, the book establishes that these women repeatedly linked women's rights to human rights, thus challenging the idea that one could exist without the other.

Marino tells the story of the Latin American feminist movement by recounting the roles played by six leading feminists: Paulina Luisi (Uruguay), Bertha Lutz (Brazil), Ofelia Domínguez Navarro (Cuba), Clara González (Panama), Doris Stevens (United States) and Marta Vergara (Chile). To do so she draws on a wealth of documents and the treasure trove of letters these women wrote to each other, many of them over decades. These letters offer much insight into these women's personalities, private thoughts and attitudes, public statements and relationships with each other. As a body, they provide insight into the interior and exterior lives of women whose beliefs, decisions and actions were decisive to the formulation and actualisation of *feminismo americano*.

These six women, along with the other women who make a more fleeting appearance in the book, were highly skilled, articulate, determined and dedicated political actors. They were also educated women, whose privileged social positions