


BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

## Racialization of Blackness in the Americas

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Slavery Unseen: Sex, Power, and Violence in Brazilian History.** By Lamonte Aidoo. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. Pp. 272. \$26.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822371298.

**Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas.** Edited by Dania Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018. Pp. 240. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780820354040.

**Becoming Free, Becoming Black: Race, Freedom, and Law in Cuba, Virginia, and Louisiana.** By Alejandro de la Fuente and Ariela J. Gross. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 294. \$24.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108480642.

**Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World.** By Jessica Marie Johnson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. Pp. 360. \$4.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780812252385.

**The Origins of Macho: Men and Masculinity in Colonial Mexico.** By Sonya Lipsett-Rivera. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019. Pp 288. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780826360403.

**Revolutionary Masculinity and Racial Inequality: Gendering War and Politics in Cuba.** By Bonnie A. Lucero. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018. Pp. xiii, 345. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780826363336.

**Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic.** By Jennifer L. Morgan. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. Pp. 312. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478014140.

**Pobres, negros y esclavos: Música religiosa en Córdoba del Tucumán (1699–1840).** By Clarisa Eugenia Pedrotti. Córdoba, Argentina: Editorial Brujas, 2017. Pp. 302. \$33.99 paperback. ISBN: 9789877600742.

**Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection: Manzano, Plácido, and Afro-Latino Religion.** By Matthew Pettway. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019. Pp. 344. \$30.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781496825018.

**Exquisite Slaves: Race, Clothing, and Status in Colonial Lima.** By Tamara J. Walker. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. 240. \$29.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781107445956.

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In 2016, Marisa Fuentes, in *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, put into practice a method she called “reading along the bias grain.” Since the publication of this acclaimed book, scholars of Black histories have continued to employ this method to “stretch archival fragments . . . to eke out extinguished and invisible but no less historically important lives” (Fuentes, 7). Reading along the bias grain is necessary to explore intimacy and private acts that were only recorded because often they went against societal policies. It is a critical analysis of the historical method that seeks out fragmented traces of marginalized peoples (women, slaves, African descendants, Indigenous peoples). It is with this often arduous task that scholars have illuminated an often-complex past that reveals how Afro-descendants survived and thrived while enslaved and once freed. By no means, however, was this process teleological; often their lives after they were freed were very similar, and thriving in freedom could also mirror small but important victories while enslaved.

This review of ten books considers the interdisciplinary nature of the study of the Americas’ Black past: history, musicology, and literature. These authors explore various Black experiences and ultimately provide a view of an engaging and often enduring racialized effect of Blackness. Blackness, as described in these books, continued to evolve, mold, and shift in an effort to justify the subjugation of enslaved peoples, while simultaneously providing a visible and emotional connection for groups of people described as Black to commune and form kinship ties that led to their ability to survive. Themes addressed in these works are African migrations, kinship, masculinity, and anti-Blackness. These texts detail Black experiences from West Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Peru, and the United States prior to the twentieth century. Ultimately, these works make Black men and women the protagonists of their own stories.

### **African migrations, Black enslavement**

In recent years, there has been a strong emphasis or reminder that Africa is a vital component in conversations about the African diaspora. Scholars such as David Wheat, whose book retold the story of Black enslavement as one of African settlement in the Caribbean, have connected African descendants’ actions to African cultural and economic practices prior to disembarkation.<sup>1</sup> These experiences on the African coast fully informed the construction of Blackness in the Americas. Constructions such as beauty and desirability came to fruition on the African coast, often displaying conflicting standards. In her chapter in Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie Harris’s edited volume *Sexuality and Slavery*, Stephanie M. H. Camp interrogates the Black female body on the African coast during the sixteenth century. Using traveler’s diaries and chronicles of slave traders and English settlers on the African coast, Camp argues that Black women’s bodies were often compared to Black men’s bodies and white bodies as well. Ultimately, she argues, “blackness and in particular black women’s bodies, were viewed as diverse and at times contradictory on the African coast.” They were “black and tawny, sinful and hospitable, corked and symmetrical, scarred and soft, grateful and slavish, foul and clean, loose bodied and hardy, wanton and sweet, naked and well dressed, beastly and beautiful” (Camp, in Berry and Harris, 28). It was the varied notion of Blackness on the African coast that would eventually become solidified and deemed negative in the Americas. These marks of beauty further provided the roots and understandings of access to Black women’s bodies while enslaved, rendering them sexual beings and units of reproduction.

<sup>1</sup> David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

Recognizing that Black women's bodies became commodified through their reproductive capabilities, Jennifer L. Morgan's study *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* provides a counter-history that explores the "triangle of economic logic, the Black radical tradition, and kinship as both racial formation and Blackness as enslavability" (10). Morgan relies on various sources such as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, slave ship voyage accounts, and chroniclers to delve into African experiences in the Atlantic slave trade. In exploring Black women's experiences on slave ships, she provides a deep examination of numeracy and race and stresses the need to continue along that line of interrogation. First, she emphasizes that African men and women encountered notions of commodification before and after European contact. In examining the Atlantic slave ship, Morgan looks at how Black bodies were converted into notions of wealth with assigned value that was "exchangeable and distributable through transport and markets" (24). Relying heavily on the Trans-Atlantic Database, she reminds us how much Black bodies counted: both figuratively and numerically.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the continued slave trade to Cuba strengthened its bonds to the African continent and, in particular, the cultural transference of West African belief systems. Matthew Pettway, in *Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection*, points to directly African-inspired spirituality as a part of an official religious discourse used by Gabriel de la Concepcion Valdés, otherwise known as Plácido, and Juan Francisco Manzano, Black poets in nineteenth-century Cuba (9). Arguing that their poems "portrayed African-inspired spirituality beneath the surface of Hispano-Catholic aesthetics," Pettway states that these poets "transformed early Cuban literature into an instrument of black liberation" (7). By using Bakongo and Yoruba cosmologies, they subverted the Catholic doctrine. These African cosmologies continued to influence social networking and gatherings such as cabildos as well as poetry. Pettway deliberately puts Africa back into the practice of Black liberation in Cuba and challenges previous notions that Plácido and Manzano represented mulattos who repudiated their African religious heritage. Pettway establishes that depictions of them as mulattos are problematic and whitewash their efforts of Black liberation. Furthermore, in putting Africa back into Black liberation, he adds to our understanding of Black resistance throughout the Americas.

Africa remains central in understanding the freeing and freedom practices discussed in Jessica Marie Johnson's *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World*. Johnson relies on court cases, probate and notarial records, legal codes, and ecclesiastical documents to interrogate Black women's freedom. Beginning her monograph in seventeenth-century Senegambia, Johnson emphasizes the journey across the Atlantic that brought Black people, ideas, and kinship practices to the Caribbean and the Gulf Coast. In Senegambia, free African women at *comptoirs* or administrative outposts became a part of a network of residents, traders, commercial agents, and families. There they acquired wealth and property, which included slaves. Johnson argues that these ties on the African coast became acts of resistance to patriarchal and French domination. For instance, these African women eschewed Catholic marriage and opted for *mariage à la mode du pays* (marriage in the manner of the country), modeled after Wolof and Lebu customs. Still, while some women, through marriage, were able to acquire and maintain status, such status was also at times precarious and depended on the maintenance of the marriage and the good standing of the husband. Black women, free and slave alike, therefore often turned to the institution of godparenthood and Catholic baptism to help secure the future of their children. These practices created intimate and kinship ties that allowed Black women on both sides of the Atlantic to ascribe to meanings of freedom that went beyond European definitions. In Senegambia, these practices included marriage and baptism in addition to practices of hospitality, pleasure, and taste that would be transferred to the Americas and serve as points of resistance throughout the eighteenth century.

## Kinship: The ties that bind

The legal frameworks of kinship and the understandings of the household are crucial to understanding Black enslavement and later freedom. Codes, policies, and laws set the bar on how familial relations and the household could be governed and, more important, the ways in which intimacy could be constructed. In this case gender relations are crucial in our understanding of what has been considered over the years a “private space.” Recent scholarship, however, has seen a consistent blurring of “private and public spheres.”<sup>2</sup> By examining the following works, what becomes clear is that the household is within the purview of the political framework and social understandings of Blackness that emanated from metropolises, and spread to cities, towns, regions, and countries throughout the Americas.

Kinship was vital to the survival of enslaved women who crossed the Atlantic, as Jennifer Morgan stresses in *Reckoning with Slavery*. Morgan argues that kinship ties, formulated as early as capture and enduring on the slave ship, provided a means for these African women to understand their role in the development of racial capitalism. Morgan relies on ships’ logs and art to represent what enslaved women knew of their situation and the reasons why they were on the ships. In particular, Morgan uses the story of an unnamed woman who at first resisted capture, until the “love of [her] child compelled the mother to follow” onto the slaver’s ship, reflecting not only her sense of kinship and family but, when she disembarked, the commodification of her body (141). Morgan remarks that historians have focused on the challenges of capturing people to enslave or the mortality that occurred on ships, which meant a loss of capital, and this has allowed for an erasure of Black families. Black women as individuals, mothers, wives, and daughters are further erased by scholarship that emphasizes “fictive kinship” which renders “biological family ties as impossible for captives” (150), thus allowing the commodification process to succeed. Yet, these biological links (mother to child) remained at the heart of hereditary slavery and are at the crux of *Reckoning with Slavery*.

Bianca Premo’s study “As If She Were My Own,” in *Sexuality and Slavery*, delves into the kinship ties that bound slaveholders to their slaves in eighteenth-century Peru. Using Michelle McKinley’s “economy of emotion,” this chapter is meant to “evoke and provoke emotion” (71).<sup>3</sup> The economy of emotion defined household relationships established over generations between slaveholders and the enslaved. Premo examines over five hundred civil disputes involving slaves, in particular slave children. These cases reveal an emotional attachment of the slaveholder to slave that was likened to shock and sadness when their slave sought freedom. Although convoluted and at times difficult for us to understand, these raw and real emotions of attachment, such as the utter surprise and disappointment of slaveholders finding out their slaves did not want to be a part of their household and sought freedom, give us a glimpse into the power dynamics of the household and the “emotional regime” or “the normative order of emotions that facilitate the stability of political structure,” proposed by the historian William Reddy (Premo, in Berry and Harris, 72). The household created an affective and at time fictitious notion of familial bond that was threatened when slaves sought freedom. These freedom lawsuits involved slaves raised in “the house and power’ of their masters—a position of intimacy that at once socialized slaves and masters emotionally and . . . simultaneously raised some slaves’ expectations concerning their own value and ability to determine how and where they or their family members lived and worked” (Premo, in Berry and Harris, 75). This language of affection and intimacy is based on medieval codes that considered slaves as a part of the family. As a result, these power dynamics created an uneasy bond in which the power and

<sup>2</sup> María Emma Mannarelli, *Private Passions and Public Sins: Men and Women in Seventeenth Century Lima*, translated by Sidney Evans and Meredith D. Dodge (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Michelle A. McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms: Slavery, Intimacy, and Legal Mobilization in Colonial Lima, 1600–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

obligations of the masters coexisted with the power and obligations of the slaves within the political space of the household. Premo notes that this “affective exchange” intensified with the enslavement of Africans. Further, the “love language” was often used by both slaves and their slaveholders with opposing objectives. It was especially noted among female slaveholders of female slaves.

These gendered notions of maintaining enslavement and creating kinship based on the law are also viewed in the comparative book *Becoming Free, Becoming Black: Race, Freedom and the Law in Cuba, Louisiana, and Virginia*, by Alejandro de la Fuente and Ariela J. Gross. *Becoming Free, Becoming Black* examines the making of race and freedom in Cuba, Louisiana, and Virginia through laws including codes, royal edicts, local statutes, trials, and adjudications from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Looking at the legal transference of enslaved status from mother to child, de la Fuente and Gross argue that the practice was used to perpetuate slavery by way of *partus sequitur ventrem*, a law from the thirteenth century transferred to Iberian America and later to British America. Because of that law, women were conveyers of slavery and freedom. De la Fuente and Gross’s comparative lens on the overall making of race and enslavement centers policies that regulated Black women’s bodies and the legal understanding of the kinship. Legally, children “inherited” the status of the mother, and that bound them to their mothers but not to their fathers. In fact, Camillia Cowling has noted “slave fathers could, and did, love, nurture, and help to buy the manumission of their children; yet most were not tied to those children though any official link.”<sup>4</sup> This in turn ensured that slaveholding men had unlimited access to enslaved Black women’s bodies and did not have to risk the loss of their property to freedom. De la Fuente and Gross’s analysis looks beyond the household as the space of emotion to the legally bounded relationships that upheld power dynamics in the plantation societies of Cuba, Virginia, and Louisiana.

The politicization of Black women’s bodies is also the focus in “Wombs of Liberation: Petitions, Law, and the Black Woman’s Body in Maryland, 1780–1858,” by Jessica Millward, in *Sexuality and Slavery*. Millward delves into freedom suits generated by Black women who claimed they were descendants of free women. By focusing on maternity and its connection to freedom, Millard argues that “freedom, like slavery, was necessarily tied to their womb.” As a result, Black women were keenly aware of the legal and political milieu, and furthered their knowledge of “local kinship ties and assessments of anti-black sentiment to gain their freedom” (Millward, in Berry and Harris, 90). Key to these petitions was the knowledge of the kinship and genealogies often based on hearsay—an admissible piece of evidence that allowed Black women’s “words, action, and body” to be used as evidence (Millward, in Berry and Harris, 94). Understanding the sentiment of what was closest to whiteness and in effect furthest away from Blackness also assisted in escaping the stain of Blackness and its synonymous connection to slavery and obtaining freedom. Blackness and womanhood afforded some levels of flexibility in the petitions Millward examined, but motherhood was a biological and at times genealogical measure that provided “certainties” of belonging and descent from freedom. This freedom could be traced to white, Black, or Indian women. After 1809, Black mothers continued to petition for their children’s freedom; but they could no longer use their biology as a factor and instead relied on their rights as a mother and the importance of child-rearing to obtain their child’s freedom.

These actions of kinship and freedom remained an important tactic in New Orleans, as Johnson describes in *Wicked Flesh*. She introduces the idea of “black femme freedom,” a theoretical framework that highlights how Black women and girls, enslaved and free, defined their own rights and limits of freedom. In looking at freedom within the bounds

<sup>4</sup> Camillia Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom: Women of Color, Gender, and the Abolition of Slavery in Havana and Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 54.



of kinship and intimacy beyond manumission or petitions, Johnson pushes us to see freedom in a new light and is quick to note that free status did not define freedom. Moreover, black femme freedom “enacted a radical opposition to bondage, reinterpreting wickedness as freedom, intimacy as fugitive, and blackness as diasporic and archipelagic” (10). These acts were practiced and performed especially during the Spanish occupation of New Orleans. Black femme freedom practices were often at odds with the Edicts of Good Governance. These practices led Spanish authorities to condemn Black dances, restrict Black women’s ability to sell goods in the market, and enact sumptuary laws. These edicts came forward under the Bourbon Reforms and were indicative of larger occurrences throughout Spanish America. These reforms sought to bring revenue to the Spanish crown and reinstitute social order. Edicts targeted Black women’s dress and appearance to restate their inferiority. They were not of the privileged class of Spanish and at times French women in Spanish New Orleans, and these laws constantly reminded them of it.

Dress is a very important and necessary component of Tamara Walker’s *Exquisite Slaves: Race, Clothing, and Status in Colonial Lima*, which centers on clothing and its unique ability to convey an unspoken language of status. Walker argues that dress served two purposes: it was central to elite dominance and claims of superiority while simultaneously providing the means for enslaved men and women to challenge those dominant norms. Walker provides a social and cultural history of Lima, Peru, centered around sumptuary policies. This book sets the stage of body politics and the measures used by Spaniards to break these laws and use clothing to cover and create an ideal image of Blackness. It further delves into the quotidian activities of Lima’s enslaved population and their access to dress. Moreover, the book focuses on the gendered roles of enslaved men and women and self-fashioning, and their ability to politicize their bodies by way of dress. This often allowed for both enslaved men and women to become empowered as they looked to acquire elegance and attire to reclaim their femininity and masculinity. At times, Walker argues, the procurement of certain garments blurred the strict lines of social hierarchy to such an extent that enslaved men and women reclaimed their coveted bodies, transforming their bodies from units of labor into loving individuals. Her use of wills not only reveals the clothing bequeathed to enslaved peoples but also highlights the intimate relationships formed between slaveholder and the enslaved, and between enslaved and freed families.

The ties that bound enslaved families also included the transferred knowledge of a skill set, as described in Clarisa Pedrotti’s *Pobres, negros y esclavos: Música religiosa en Córdoba del Tucumán (1699–1840)*. A musicologist, Pedrotti examines the music performed by Black men, both enslaved and free, for the Catholic Church in Córdoba, Argentina. In the lives of Black families, the father figure became paramount in transferring his musical skill to his children, who in turn used it to become free. Enslaved fathers also learned to navigate and attend to the social ascent of their children. Enslaved men who learned a craft (such as playing an instrument) often taught it to their children to ensure that the next generation would have skills that could possibly earn them enough wealth to gain their freedom. For example, José Salguero learned to play the organ, along with other instruments, while a slave of the Jesuits. After the Jesuit expulsion, the cathedral purchased him because of his musical ability. His child Hipolito Salguero learned, most likely from his father, how to play the violin and worked for the cathedral even after he achieved his freedom. For his efforts, the cathedral gave Hipolito a house and paid him twenty-five pesos a year. Like his father, José Salguero, Hipolito also introduced music to his sons Tiburcio and Sebastian, who played the clarinet and the horn, respectively. In 1798, Hipolito Salguero paid 217 pesos to free his *mulata* wife, Josefa Gigena. Seventeen years later, he paid 150 pesos to free his son Tiburcio, a cheap price for a slave who played an instrument, who on average could be sold for 295 pesos. This was likely due to Hipolito’s dedication to the Church.<sup>87</sup> Sebastian, his other son, stayed a slave of the cathedral until 1832, when he bought his freedom for 150 pesos, but he continued to work there until 1839. The story of the Salguero family

reveals how craft and talent could transfer from generation to generation in ways that enabled some enslaved African descendants to become free and to free their family members. It further shows the importance of family and the maintenance of kinship.

### **Black men and the interrogation of Black masculinities**

Masculinity remains a burgeoning study among Latin Americanists. A recent study by Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, *The Origins of Macho: Men and Masculinity in Colonial Mexico*, examines the origins of “macho” in the colonial period. She argues that there were different types of masculinities in colonial Mexico, and they remained contingent on social hierarchy, *calidad*, and public displays of what it meant to be an “hombre de honor.” Acknowledging public displays of honor is especially necessary when studying Blackness and masculinity. By studying Black male experiences as musicians, poets, and soldiers, this section delves into the more public displays of Black masculinities. Musicians served an integral role in the patriarchal institution of the Catholic Church. Poets provide the Black intellectual writings that most recently Juliet Hooker and Frank Guridy have stated we must continue to interrogate as valid forms of intellectual writing, which during the nineteenth century was dominated by men.<sup>5</sup> Despite the plethora of studies about Black soldiers, recent studies have examined how their experience on the battlefield enhances our understanding of gender. This section also seeks to look at the intimate experiences of Black masculinities within the private sphere. The often difficult but necessary examination of Black male abuse and the ramifications of the feminization of Black men by both physical and emotional abuse is overlooked in scholarship, but recent scholarship seeks to fill this gap. The following scholars have highlighted the Black male experience beyond gendered labor and allow us to see Black men as integral figures in the arts as well as the battlefield, and further our discussion on the slavery that is unseen.

Pedrotti focuses on decentering the focus of traditional musicology on the cathedral. Instead, she focuses on what contributed to enriching the *paisaje sonoro* (soundscape) of the city: convents, confraternities, chapels, rural parishes, *reducciones*, and Indian pueblos. In doing so she further argues her study is a periphery of the periphery because it focuses on Córdoba, Argentina, a peripheral city. She examines the making of ecclesiastical music during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Convents, confraternities, and chapels are considered marginal to the cathedral by many musicologists. By opening the analysis to all religious urban institutions, Pedrotti is able to capture religious musical manifestations in Córdoba and in turn develop the study of the Black family. In particular she highlights Black male musicians, who are crucial to our understanding to Black masculinity. Traditionally religious music had two groups: singers and musicians. In Córdoba, these groups were divided by race. Whites sang while Blacks played. In most of the consulted material, Pedrotti notes that these Black musicians were often referenced by the instruments they played rather than their names. For some enslaved musicians the labor of their services would provide the means for their manumission, which, as previously mentioned, could also become generational. In general, the Church’s patriarchal structure allowed for some Black musicians to flourish, despite their supposed inherited inferiority, during the colonial period.

Another artistic form that Black men engaged in was poetry. By analyzing the poets Plácido and Manzano, Afro-Cuban men who lived during the nineteenth century, Pettway furthers our understandings of Black masculinities vis-à-vis African spirituality.

<sup>5</sup> Juliet Hooker and Frank Guridy, “Currents in Afro-Latin American Political and Social Thought,” in *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2018).

It is during the colonial period in Cuba that Pettway argues that a paradigm shift must occur in how we engage poets. By moving beyond the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church and engaging the African Atlantic system of religious knowledge, Black liberation can be seen. This allows us to study Black resistance and insurrection through poetry. In doing so it departs from Afro-Hispanic criticism that “divorced African-descended writers from all things African,” and this especially relates to “diasporic spirituality” (43). Plácido’s and Manzano’s poetry bridged the sociocultural divide between free Blacks and enslaved Africans by using African cosmology through coded references to Catholic saints. Pettway provides a myriad of examples of this coreligious experience. For instance, Manzano evokes Saint Anthony as a saint liberated from the plantation. Saint Anthony, to some Africans, would have been the Eleggua, or Lucero Mundo, or the spirit of the crossroads. In particular, Plácido’s accusers testified that he used African spiritualities during the 1844 insurrection. Testimonies stated as evidence Plácido’s subverted use of the sign of the cross—which usually is to venerate the Holy Trinity—as well as administering loyalty oaths at an African cabildo. By delving into these Afro-cosmologies within Manzano’s and Plácido’s poetry Pettway seeks to reveal that the path to African liberation did not just come from European understanding of liberalism and abolition but instead originated and was passed down from Africans to their descendants.

These liberation acts within the first half of the nineteenth century in Cuba would continue to have ramifications culminating in the wars of independence and the use of Black bodies on the battlefield. According to Bonnie Lucero, author of *Revolutionary Masculinity and Racial Inequality: Gendering War and Politics in Cuba*, it brought forward revolutionary masculinity in Cuba. Focusing on the transition of Cuba from Spanish colony to republic, Lucero stresses that revolutionary masculinity was revolutionary because at its core it was a “counterpoint to the gendered logic Spanish colonialism” (7). Masculinity was recast from white and male and inherited at birth to military service based on individual merit. As a result, revolutionary masculinity was afforded to all Cuban men regardless of race. They could prove their manhood. Lucero stresses that revolutionary masculinity “enabled the growing disparity between color-blind discourse and exclusionary practices because it encoded ideas about race in the seemingly color-blind language of gender” (8). In particular she highlights Jose Martí’s call for a “raceless society” to fight against Spanish colonial entrenchment. With this being said, the idea of a raceless society was formulated during this wartime effort to embrace *fraternidad*, that is, manliness and masculinity.

These public displays of music, poetry, and service to the republic have advanced the field of Black masculinities, which has predominately focused on Black men’s gendered labor, resistance, and rebellion. As previous writings have demonstrated, Black men also served a public role in the church as musicians or intellectuals via their poetry. With the new interrogation of the private sphere, also led by numerous studies about Black women, scholars continue to shine a light on the slavery that was “unseen.” Often overshadowed by the more known sexual abuse of Black women, Black men also suffered under slavery. According to the historian Thomas A. Foster in “The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery,” in *Sexuality and Slavery*, rape of enslaved men still remains unacknowledged because historical and current tendencies define rape along gendered lines, “making both victims and perpetrators reluctant to discuss male rape” (Foster, in Berry and Harris, 126). We must continue to confront our own “raced, classed, and gendered perceptions of rape” for this field to develop. His article details three forms of rape: coerced sex with white women, sodomy (which was often overlooked, he further stresses, because of the lack of physical evidence), and forced coupling, sometimes referred to as slave breeding. His sources are slave testimonies in various cases and literature produced during the nineteenth century. He finds that there was a tendency for white women to prefer light-skinned Black men, who he argues may have paralleled the fetish



of “fancy maids” (Foster, in Berry and Harris, 127). Using testimonies from cases, Foster further concludes that having sex with “nearly white” men empowered white women to enact rape. Foster’s piece mainly focuses on coerced sex with white women to further stress the need for the field to acknowledge male sexual abuse; otherwise it perpetuates the stereotype that “reduced black men to bestial sexual predators and white women to passionless and passive vessels” (Foster, in Berry and Harris, 141).

Lamonte Aidoo also traces sexual abuse of enslaved men in Brazil in *Slavery Unseen: Sex, Power, and Violence in Brazilian History*. Similar to Foster, he also argues that the field must move beyond gendered notions of sexual abuse and intimate relationships. In particular he stresses miscegenation, which skews the field toward Black women and white men and perpetuates the idea of racial democracy and interracial reproduction. For that reason, he uses the term “interracial sex.” This term moves beyond the “benign term of *miscegenation*” that hides the true aims of racial mixture, “which is for whites to fulfill their purposes for power, control, pleasure, economic gain, reproduction, humiliation and annihilation” (9). Interracial sex encompasses nongenerative sex in Brazilian history which Aidoo argues is noted as a place of “crime, violation, nation making and myth” (9). Using primarily Portuguese inquisition records, travel accounts, literature, and interdisciplinary methods, he provides a narrative rather than statistical analysis. Aidoo uses the term “sameness” to explain the relationship between two bodies that moves beyond miscegenation and instead focuses on interracial sex. This is done to disrupt the long-standing ideas of “racial democracy” that were predicated on racial mixture between white men and Black women. Aidoo examines the sexual relationships among white men and women and Blacks to remove the veil of unseen violence enacted on enslaved Black bodies. He uses allegations of masters who raped their male slaves, white mistresses who were accused of sodomizing their female slaves, and abusive sexual relations between enslaved and free colored people to elucidate the complex mechanism of white supremacy in Brazil. Similarly to Foster, he makes clear that female masters could be just as sadistic and exploitative of their slaves, torturing, prostituting, and raping them.

### The rise of anti-Blackness in “free” societies

The shift to freedom brought forward new opportunities and oppressions cloaked within the new rhetoric of liberalism of the nineteenth century. Within this moment, former colonies also became republics, expediting freedom in various regions throughout the Americas. But that freedom could not erase the legacy of slavery and its negative connotation of Blackness in these new republics.

Walker’s book *Exquisite Slaves* describes elegant dress worn by the enslaved during the colonial period, but she notes that during the republican period of 1821–1854 in Peru, people of African descent used clothing to express their ideas about freedom and independence, even when they did not have the political means to do so. Walker analyses the works of watercolorist Francisco Fierro, who documented the uniformed men of the independence army, many of whom were enslaved, through his paintings. Walker also touches on how enslaved persons at the time navigated such concepts as freedom and independence, which were foundational to the new Peruvian republic. Yet as the republican period progressed, what was previously considered emulation now brought humiliation to the freed Black population. Using the newspaper *El Negro*, Walker traces how the depictions of Black people dressed in elegant clothing was a part of mockery. In the end, the republican period did not come forward as an egalitarian society, and using these various caricatures was meant to reinforce social hierarchies.

Following the legacy of social hierarchies, De la Fuente and Gross’s *Becoming Free, Becoming Black* views the creation of Blackness in post-abolition societies. The book

provides narratives that display a compelling contrast between British colonies, with their rigid racial system as seen in Virginia, and Spanish territories, with their exaltation of *la mulata* or *mestizaje* and fluid social order. The authors demonstrate that such an image miscomprehends both realities, since free people of color challenging a perfect binary racial order were also expressive in Virginia and Louisiana, and racial hierarchies and inequalities remained in Cuba before and after the emancipation. Moreover, French Louisiana's slaveholding elites borrowed from and then expanded the racialized laws contained within the French empire's Code Noir of 1685 when making Louisiana's first anti-Black civil code, the Code Noir of 1724. Lawmakers of all three societies tried and somehow were able to connect Blackness with enslavement, and whiteness with freedom, but it did not entail a total dismantling of the racial categories that many populations of mixed-raced people dwelled in. Whiteness would ultimately define citizenship and belonging in these new nations. Beyond Cuba, other Spanish American republics such as Argentina further this argument of whiteness and belonging.<sup>6</sup> Gross and de la Fuente also highlight the counterproductiveness of this racial project. By attempting to create such a rigid racial order, it was destructive to the vitality of slavery itself.

Since manumission was a somewhat obtainable resource for some people of African descent in all three jurisdictions—even if more prevalent in Cuba because of the influence of religion and Iberian legal tradition—the formation of communities of free people of color was an evident theme that ran across the realities of all three societies. Unwittingly, by trying to associate Blackness and enslavement regardless of people's actual status as free or freed, the law ended up forcing communal relationships among enslaved and freed, whose alliance could provide the necessary resources for seeking manumission. The reaction to the increased populations of free people of color in all three jurisdictions resulted in attempts to impose further limits on the manumission process and to deport free people of color. All of these efforts had relatively more success in Virginia and Louisiana. Cuba was a case where the same efforts took place but were heavily hindered by Cuban courts that held to Iberian legal precedents of slavery and interracial marriage. Interracial marriage, as chapter 5 demonstrates, was heavily regulated in the United States, where the association between whiteness and citizenship rights was cemented by the mid-nineteenth century.

Lucero continues the conversation on Blackness and social whitening in her book *Revolutionary Masculinity and Racial Inequality*. Examining Cuba's late nineteenth and early twentieth century, she focuses on the independence period, post-war, and the racial silence that took place. Similar to Gross and de la Fuente, Lucero also argues that whiteness is the basis of citizenship; rather than rooted in Spanish or Iberian notions of whiteness, it takes on a US imperialist understanding of citizenship. Following the US occupation, many Afro-Cubans faced even harsher conditions and sanctioning of political representation, because the United States excluded them from political discourse and jobs. Lucero even notes how the early republic's leader Batista was a *mulato* and was harassed for his association with Blackness. Moreover, a growing criminalization of black veterans further perpetuated the stereotype of Blackness in Cuba. The US-controlled island perpetuated a fear of Black criminalization that needed to be parented and controlled by white veterans turned political elites, or "new men." Black criminalization allowed some white Cubans to justify racialized policing while at the same time upholding the idea of revolutionary masculinity's promise of racial equality.

Further examples of Black criminalization and homophobia at the end of the nineteenth century are also detailed in Aidoo's book, *Slavery Unseen*. These notions disrupt Brazil's still popular notion of racial democracy. Similar to Lucero, Aidoo examines social whitening

<sup>6</sup> Erika Denise Edwards, *Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law and the Making of White Argentine Republic* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2020).

and its effects within the Black population. It becomes clear that free and elite Blacks at times put self-interest above uplifting the Black population. Aidoo stresses that this is one of “complex white supremacist mechanisms” (111). Some of these acts included passing and a performative take on whiteness. For free Blacks and mulattos, that also meant they clung to “freedom” to further differentiate themselves from slaves, and as a result whites won “the loyalty of free blacks and mulattos while discouraging them from seeking affiliations with slaves” (119). Still, limitations abounded for free Blacks, and they were constantly reminded that they did not meet the qualifications of whiteness. Furthermore, the criminalization of Black men led to the notion of the Black homosexual predator, which perpetuated further fear. Aidoo argues that the fear was that Black men, no longer under the control of white masters, would destroy white society. Creating a Black homosexual rapist turns the idea of effeminate men into aggressive demons that would destroy society. Moreover the “deheterosexualization” of Black men eliminated them from the nation, as they could not “reproduce,” which was crucial to the making of a nation. Left with sexual prowess and aggression, they had to be subdued.

## Conclusion

These texts provide a wide view of Black men and women throughout the Americas. By including Africa and United States in conversation with the Caribbean and Latin America, these books reveal common and similar experiences of Black men and women throughout the Atlantic and the Americas. Ultimately the racialization of blackness equated Africans with enslavement in various colonies and nascent republics. This degradation continued in freedom, leaving many free and freed African descendants in continued marginalization in republics and nations throughout the Americas. Examining the themes of African migrations, kinship, Black masculinities, and post-abolition anti-Blackness, this essay has stressed that Black life mattered and manifested in several ways.

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