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Nicole von Germeten, Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro- Mexicans

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deftly culls out women's political loyalties, placing them in their social and racial context. The author is at her best when she shows how women altered their lives to meet the demands of industrialization and how society changed to meet women's demands for self definition in an enlightened world. Elite white women, for instance, put a price on their modesty, purity, and beauty by the end of the nineteenth century. If they were to become commodities traded in marriage for social advantage, then they would participate in the selection of their suitors. The plight of black and mulatto women reflected the unchecked power of white patriarchy that sexually exploited women of color and emasculated their men. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the mulatta had gained the reputation as a seductress and wily social climber. White wives could say little about their husbands' exploits and had to endure their infidelity.

But women did more than suffer men's sexual exploitation. Prados-Torreira demonstrates how mothers taught children to love their country. National legends, songs, food, aesthetics, and attachment to nature were passed from generation to generation through stories and customs practiced in the home. The notion of *cubanidad* took shape around the hearth. Family was not the same experience for white and black people, of course. Independence had different meaning for women of color who wanted citizenship for the male members of their families and freedom for slaves. So, mothers of color, with some trepidation at first and more boldly with time, not only taught love of country, they committed themselves and their families to the freedom of the colored race.

Mambisas is well researched, nicely written, concise, and accessible to undergraduate and graduate student alike, although the book is too expensive for classroom use. It should be assigned, however, because it clarifies the contributions women made to the independence age in Cuba, thus bridging an important gap in the history of Cuban women.

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Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans. By Nicole von Germeten. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. xiv + 287 pp. Map, tables, graphs, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth.)

Research on New Spain's black population has experienced a veritable renaissance over the past decade or so with most scholars focusing their attention on socioeconomic concerns rather than religious or cultural ones. Some work has focused on spiritual transgressions, such as witchcraft,

documented in the voluminous records of the Inquisition, but as Nicole von Germeten demonstrates in *Black Blood Brothers*, such cases hardly exemplify the colony's black population.

Based on research conducted in over thirty Mexican archives and libraries, von Germeten identifies the central role black Catholic lay organizations played in the viceroyalty's cities, mining camps, and haciendas. Using founding constitutions, last wills and testaments, judicial cases, and episcopal inspections, the author reconstructs the history of these organizations and how they helped shape the collective identity of their members. While initially African and Creole slaves used confraternities to attain some semblance of community, in some places the institution later served as a vehicle and expression of upward mobility for free-born mulattos, much as Ben Vinson has shown for the colonial militia. Socioeconomic change may have impacted confraternity life, but the author is careful to recognize that race continued to inform these organizations and the conflicts that they occasionally engendered. In this respect, the study counters Douglas Cope's influential thesis regarding the growing primacy, at least in late-seventeenth-century Mexico City, of a class-based plebeian identity over a racial one.

The opening chapters delve into a number of challenging topics given the fragmentary nature of the source material. Chapter One traces the earliest years of black confraternities in the baroque milieu of seventeenth-century New Spain, suggesting that the humble status of enslaved and free Afro-Mexicans was accentuated through religious processions and penitential acts that could appeal to whites as well as blacks. Chapter Two highlights female leaders of black confraternities in the seventeenth century and how these positions were eventually lost to free mulatto men as opportunities for the latter and patriarchal values became more prevalent. Both chapters offer intriguing interpretations—such as the possible influence of African sensibilities for female leadership roles—even if a few remain conjectural due to the patchy historical record.

The heart of the monograph comprises case studies of black confraternities in three distinct settings: Mexico City; Valladolid (today's Morelia), a provincial capital; and Parral, a northern mining town. With relatively few sources to work with, the discussion of Mexico City is somewhat circumscribed, stressing, among other matters, how black sodalities were not automatic tools of colonial domination and assimilation by revisiting their role in the infamous 1612 slave conspiracy and the survival of a Zape-based brotherhood for much of the seventeenth century. The rich collections of Morelia's bishopric and notary archives allow for a more in-depth examination. The author traces the shifting fortunes of two brotherhoods, arguing that an ever more free and mulatto constituency emphasized their rising status and prominence as both craftsmen and supporters of the city's religious life over the modest origins and penitential practices of their seventeenth-century predecessors. Eighteenth-century Parral, in contrast, offers a cautionary tale of the limits to socioeconomic mobility. There, in a

town experiencing economic downturns and boasting few religious spectacles, black *cofrades* faced a great many constraints on their autonomy and decades of struggle to emancipate themselves from the tutelage of members of Parral's elite. A final chapter canvasses the vicereignty to illustrate further how myriad local conditions impacted other black confraternities and the understanding of racial difference.

In sum, this book is an impressively researched project on a difficult and important topic. It will be of interest to specialists of Afro-Mexican history as well as scholars of the larger African Diaspora in the Iberian colonial world.

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