

Laura Gotkowitz, ed., *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011. 416 pages. Paper: \$25.95. Cloth: \$94.95. ISBN: 978-0-8223-5043-9 (Paper). ISBN: 978-0-8223-5026-2 (Cloth).

In the course of a discussion between TAs and a prominent colonial Latin American historian, we all seemed to agree that the most problematic topic, when engaging with undergraduates in this field, is notions of race in Latin America. It is not due to its potentially polemic nature, but rather that a majority of students have a preconceived idea of what constitutes race and racism, and, deriving their thoughts from a modern U.S. perspective, they also believe that race and racism are universal constructs. The struggle in explicating the contested and continuously reshaping notion of race in Latin America is what makes *Histories of Race and Racism* a welcome addition to addressing these concerns.

The subtle title elucidates a crucial point; the issues discussed are not a “history” but rather should be seen as “histories.” Laura Gotkowitz's introduction provides a detailed backdrop to the subsequent essays and engages the current historiography, addressing how conceptions of race and racism have evolved and progressed throughout Latin America. Most pertinent, however, is the goal of the collected essays: it is not—as most traditional historiography engages—to solely ascertain how race is understood, but what the effects of race are. To develop this notion, Gotkowitz argues—and the successive essays illuminate—that it is “necessary to consider the political, economic, and cultural contexts that shape and give like to those uses, practices, and effects” (11). By focusing on Bolivia, Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, and Ecuador, this volume demonstrates that notions of race and racism are constructed on a distinct local and regional level and consequently diverge from the traditional concept of universal ideas of race.

The essays are grouped into four time periods: colonial, the “long” Nineteenth Century, the early to mid twentieth century (1920s-60s), and finally present day (1970s-on). The origins of race can indeed be traced back to the early colonial period. Kathryn Burns uncovers that Spaniards in colonial Peru continuously reshaped race in order to buttress the social hierarchy: from notions of *limpieza de sangre* to the separation of the *república de españoles* and *república de indios*. As the nation-building project began for fledgling Latin American nations in the early nineteenth century, conservative and liberal political elites debated the “Indian” problem in terms of citizenship. Could Indians become “productive” citizens? Conservatives and liberals diverged on the issue, but both continued to support a hierarchy. While conservative leaders desired a continuance of the caste system, Arturo Taracena Arriola explicates how liberal elites incorporated indigenous leaders into the nation state, but regarded the majority of Indians as unsuitable for citizenship. Traditionally viewed as removing caste differences, liberals in fact rejected Indian culture, thereby relegating Indians to a subservient role.

Nationalization projects—specifically, the recreation of national histories in order to unify diverse populations—proliferated during the third period. Claudio Lomnitz demonstrates that Mexico embraced ideas of *mestizaje* (mixing) as a unifying marker in part from its border to the U.S. Beginning with the Texas War, Mexicans in the U.S. became racialized. As the U.S. marked “Mexican” as a denigrating racial term, Mexicans across the border used this racial marker to create a unified “Mexican” race. As a result, racial creation and nationalization became inherently intertwined. The bulk of the essays comprise the fourth time period: present day Latin America. Andrés Calla and Khantuta Muruchi cover the struggles of racism following the 2006 election of Evo Morales, the first indigenous president in Bolivia. An opposition group at the 2007 constitutional assembly demanded the transfer of the capital from La Paz to Sucre (La Paz is

“traditionally” indigenous while Sucre is regarded as more “modern”.) As such, Calla and Muruchi have seen a rise of overt racial tensions since the election of Morales, including violent episodes. Traditional markers of indigenous ethnicity—including “looks,” and clothing —have been singled out. Therefore, overt polemic racism has overwhelmed the previous “silenced” racism, highlighting the underlying tensions for power and authority that was overturned with Morales' ascendancy.

The collected essays are a welcome addition to addressing the “histories” of race and racism in Latin America. Not only is the text a great framework for undergraduates learning about race and related issues, but graduate students will embrace the diverse nature in which Latin American nations constructed race based on their specific political, economic, and social contexts. The wide range of sources (state censuses, political decrees and laws, newspapers, ethnographies, and interviews) will attract social, cultural, and political historians alike. There are minor quibbles: there is a prominent emphasis on twentieth century issues, and consequently colonialists will find the two essays dedicated to the time period insufficient. Furthermore, an inclusion of race and racism in Brazil (and the myth of racial democracy) would have given the collected works even more diversity. Nevertheless, the collected essays from Gotkowitz have expanded the historiographical debate on race issues. They will provide an essential framework for historians in uncovering the contested and continuously shifting contexts within which race developed and currently exists in Latin America.¹

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¹ For further reading on Bolivian indigenous relations, it's worth consulting Kohl, Benjamin, Linda Farthing with Félix Muruchi. *From the Mines to the Streets: A Bolivian Activist's Life*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011.