

rights. A noble cause like human rights, she demonstrates, has its origins in a self-serving process of national healing, and forgetting, after an ignoble war. But *Reclaiming American Virtue* is nuanced as well in that it explores a wide array of historical actors, from obscure non-governmental activist groups to Congress and the White House, to recover a complex and multi-layered historical moment.

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### Latin America and the Caribbean L'Amérique latine et les Antilles

*Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies*, by Ann Twinam. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2015. xvii, 534 pp. \$100.00 US (cloth), \$34.95 US (paper).

In *Purchasing Whiteness* Ann Twinam demonstrates that former African slaves and their descendants played far greater roles in viceregal societies than was previously recognized. She highlights pardo and mulatto struggles for social equality with a detailed tour of the historic interstices that allowed them to either pass as, or legally become, white. Her study centres on the whitening *gracias al sacar*, purchasable certificates that made it possible for the progeny of Blacks to erase the “stain” of their birth and enjoy the offices and privileges of Spaniards and creoles. But these royal decrees were only initially drafted in the late eighteenth century, which is why Twinam argues that processes of whitening clearly “rested on the real mobilities of unknown thousands of slaves, free blacks, castas, pardo, and mulatto vassals” (421).

Twinam analyzes pardo and mulatto mobilities in what she calls “long time,” charting the centuries-long transition from slave to free person to royal vassal to citizen. *Purchasing Whiteness*, as a result, is a lengthy study of thirteen chapters divided into five chronological sections. The introductory part sets the stage with an extensive but arguably necessary survey of the historiography on the whitening *gracias al sacar*, which is immediately followed by a detailed overview of racial thinking in the Spanish Empire. Twinam painstakingly connects petitions for whiteness from various archives across the Spanish world, exposing a series of false assumptions about *gracias al sacar*. She corrects earlier claims that Mestizos were able

to purchase whitening certificates, that these petitions were commonly solicited by pardos and mulattos, and that selling whiteness was the carefully planned policy of a cash-strapped Spanish state to earn money. Twinam also rightly places *gracias al sacar* in a larger tradition of monarchical dispensations stemming back to the medieval period. Whitening certificates, as a result, are not an entirely surprising development given that Spanish kings had eliminated “defects” like illegitimacy or blood impurity for centuries.

When the reader finally gets into the heart of *Purchasing Whiteness* in the second section (81), one is treated to a fascinating sketch of pardo and mulatto strategies for social ascendancy in the 1600s and early 1700s. Twinam shows how some avoided tribute payments, others served in royal militias, a few were able to bypass prohibitions to enter universities, and many, guided by a “Hispanic propensity to think generationally” (126), played “genealogical mathematics” by calculatingly marrying lighter-skinned partners in hope of whitening future generations. Refreshing about the analysis in this section is Twinam’s insistence that the horrors of slavery and the legal restrictions placed upon those of African descent are not the only tales to be told; pardos and mulattos skillfully navigated the confining yet fluid spaces of Spanish law and Spanish American traditions, carving out a better future for both themselves and their offspring.

The third section of *Purchasing Whiteness* focuses on an important transition in the history of whitening that began to occur in the 1760s: pardos and mulattos moved beyond informal strategies of bypassing their inferior status to more ambitious requests for occupational exemptions to practice professions reserved for whites. Pardos and mulattos, for example, sought to be surgeons in Cuba and notaries in Panama, taking advantage of crises in the empire that created a demand for their services. Then, by the 1770s, a small number took the next step and began to petition for total whiteness, which became an official option when the whitening *gracias al sacar* was added to the price list of purchasable favours in 1795. Crucial to this section is Twinam’s close attention to locality. She reveals how options available to pardos and mulattos in one part of Spanish America were closed off to them in others. Their fortunes, Twinam suggests, had much to do with the disposition of elites. In most regions of Spanish America, they were generally supportive of whitening while in Venezuela they were adamantly opposed.

In the final two sections *Purchasing Whiteness* traces changing attitudes of whitening and its varying outcomes from the 1790s to the early 1800s. The history of independence in Spanish America is illuminated by Twinam’s examination of the sessions of the Cortes of Cádiz. She places pardos and mulattos at the centre of these debates as many American delegates fought

for their equality as a way to increase their overall influence in the parliament. But perhaps most intriguing is her analysis of the Bourbon reforms. Twinam's book is not simply about race relations; it is also an account of the efficiency of Spanish administration in its overseas empire. Bourbon efforts to appoint members to the Council of the Indies with experience in the New World filled its ranks with officials who tended to be more knowledgeable of American realities. But Twinam sheds new light on this royal policy by stressing how it also produced long vacancies. Since delegates took several months or even years to return to the Iberian peninsula, whitening cases were often delayed and the overall "effectiveness of the Council of the Indies and of imperial governance" (419) was significantly diminished.

*Purchasing Whiteness* is an important contribution to a growing scholarship on Afro-Latin America because it moves beyond the Spanish-Indian binary guiding traditional accounts of the region. But Twinam's study is also a good reminder of the need to follow both the manuscript trail together with its many silences to understand the quest for social justice in ancien régime societies.

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*The River People in Flood Time: The Civil Wars in Tabasco, Spoiler of Empires*, by Terry Rugeley. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2014. 355 pp. \$45.00 US (cloth).

Tabasco was never Mexico's most hospitable region. Searing heat, infectious diseases, and unpredictable floodwaters were among the hazards facing inhabitants of this southeastern Mexican state. But the environment proved even more vexing for Tabasco's would-be conquerors. In this lively history, Terry Rugeley argues that Tabasco's formidable terrain and tenacious inhabitants managed to frustrate every invader's attempt to tame the region between the end of Spanish rule and the Mexican Revolution. The desire for autonomy and "the need to expel some unwanted intruder," more than liberalism, conservatism, or any of the ascendant ideologies of the era constituted the "defining dynamic" (4) of Tabascan history and culture during the era.

Through exhaustive research, Rugeley has stitched the fragments of Tabasco's historical record — "virtually any paper that did not find its way out of Tabasco before the 1880s has been destroyed" (5) — into a comprehensive history of the region from the pre-Hispanic period to