

African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean by Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson III

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When constructing the themes for world and Latin American history courses, instructors consistently return to the subject of slavery. For world historians, slavery facilitates massive comparisons of the institution at the global level, inquiries into the cross-cultural impact of ideas and migrations across continents and oceans, and a specific theme that unites a course spanning thousands of years. For Latin Americanists, the burgeoning scholarship on Africans in Latin America, Afro-Latin Americans, and slavery in Latin America link developments and peoples across time and space. Due to this outpouring of scholarship, lectures on colonial Latin American history no longer separate the ‘slavery in Latin America’ lecture from most other topics: the conquest, the colonial state, the military, the Inquisition, women, honor, race, independence. As with any field of literature, one of the difficulties facing many instructors is the construction of refined lectures that tie together the broad overview of a subject with the latest innovative scholarship. For world historians and Latin Americanists, the second edition of Herbert Klein’s *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* currently serves as one of the best sources for material on slavery in the Americas that can be included in their lectures. Klein, a well-established expert on the demography and dimensions of the Atlantic slave trade, and Ben Vinson III, a leading authority on freed communities and the African Diaspora in Latin America,

together have ensured that this text will be the foundation for lectures on the history of slavery in these regions, as well as the departure point for integrating the latest research.

The first half of the text traces the institution of slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean from its intellectual and legal precedents in Europe and Africa to its final demise in the Guyanas and Brazil in the 1800s. The first chapter walks the reader from antiquity through the Middle Ages and into the Iberian sugar plantation slave systems in Madeira, the Azores, and São Tomé. This chapter serves both world historians and Latin Americanists by situating Iberia into the longer chronology of slavery while still emphasizing the uniqueness of what will be ‘New World’ or American slavery. The subsequent five chapters follow the institution’s various rises and falls. The second edition does adhere to the first edition’s style by not following the simple chronological framework. Rather, a regional/chronological framework allows for the authors to situate each area into its own setting: 1500s Latin America and the Caribbean, 1600s and 1700s Caribbean, 1700s Mainland, 1800s Caribbean, 1800s Brazil and Guyanas. This is not to say that the authors attempt to isolate any of these regions or time periods. Throughout these sections, the authors continuously remind the readers of global developments shaping slavery in the Americas: imperial conflicts, commodity prices, the French and Haitian Revolutions, the abolitionist surges, the wars for independence. In fact, the authors utilize these events to discuss local and regional comparisons and differences, such as how the Haitian Revolution and rising commodity prices influenced harsher slave regulations and the expansion of slavery in Cuba, Jamaica, and Bahia and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Klein and Vinson repeatedly stress the variations in slavery not only just between these regions but also between the rural and the urban, the plantation and the independent farmstead, the extractive industries and the local economies, auxiliary slavery and mass slavery. Consequently, instructors should be more than able to discuss

slavery in three or four regions, explain how certain global events impacted those regions, and provide extra material on the minutiae of slavery throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Chapters 6 through 8 examine the institution of slavery in terms of its migration and demography, the slave community, and slave resistance. Some of the most vivid material for world and Latin Americanist instructors derives from Chapters 7 and 8, for these chapters reflect the flourishing scholarship on the lives of slaves. In these two chapters, the authors incorporate data and examples from various monographs and articles on the trans-Atlantic dimensions of slave cultures, the creolization of slave communities, and slave plots and rebellions. In a similar vein, Chapter 10 examines the freedmen (Afro-Latin American or Afro-Latino) communities with an encompassing overview built upon the latest research on maroonage, intermarriages, religious brotherhoods, and militias. As with their earlier chapters, the authors continue to compare and differentiate between the various regions, distinguishing the freed communities in Ecuador and Costa Rica from those in Brazil and Saint Domingue (Haiti). Such exercises are sure to be useful additions for the lectures of world historians and Latin Americanists. Lectures on Atlantic slavery can be supplemented with lectures on Atlantic slave communities and cultures. Lectures on the ‘Age of Revolutions’ can be linked to lectures drawing upon Chapter 10 as well as the final chapter, “Transition from Slavery to Freedom,” to examine communities of freedpersons and their experiences during and after emancipation.

This work is a masterful survey for a comprehensive, comparative text on slavery in the Americas. Additionally, this work belongs alongside the supplemental texts utilized by world and Latin Americanist historians for our lectures. For our ‘World History’ courses, many of us draw upon series such as Peter Stearns’s *Themes in World History* with Routledge for material on sports, warfare, food, sexuality, and even alcohol, yet there is not yet a volume on “Slavery in

World History.” For our ‘Latin American’ courses, there are similar series, such as Stuart Schwartz’s *New Approaches to the Americas* with Cambridge University, on the subjects of women, material goods, and environmental history. While Cambridge does have Laird Bergad’s *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States* (2007), Klein and Vinson’s text provides insights into slavery in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean that move beyond Brazil and Cuba, such as Peru and Mexico. Those building courses on specific themes would also benefit from incorporating this text. A course on the global history of slavery would see this book next to texts on slavery in Africa, Europe, and the United States.¹ Even courses which have already drawn upon comparative histories of slavery in the Americas, such as David Brion Davis’s *Inhuman Bondage* (2006), would benefit from Klein and Vinson’s synthesis of the latest research on slave communities and their experiences with emancipation. Courses on Atlantic themes, such as revolutions, empires, slavery, and slave communities, could see this text supplementing other comparative works, such as Wim Klooster’s *Revolutions in the Atlantic World* (2009), J. H. Elliott’s *Empires of the Atlantic World* (2006), or Jane Landers’s *Atlantic Creoles in the Atlantic World* (2010). Courses on the African Diaspora or the construction of race, drawing upon, for instance, Michael Gomez’s *Reversing Sail* (2004), Jennifer Morgan’s *Laboring Women* (2004), or Frank Andre Guriidy’s *Forging Diaspora* (2010), could turn to this text, as well as its bibliography, to see many of the latest works on Afro-Latinos or African Latin Americans.

In addition to its utility in courses on slavery, world history, and Atlantic history, the text’s greatest contribution is for instructors of Latin American and Caribbean history. Klein and

¹ Klein and Vinson purposefully chose to avoid comparisons between the Americas and the United States, so their text could be placed alongside a survey of slavery in the United States, such as Ira Berlin’s *Generations of Captivity* (2003).

Vinson integrated into their text the latest insights and research on slavery in the region. Since most instructors are unable to draw upon every single monograph or article on Latin American slavery into their lectures, the authors have done a great service through condensing the research up to the publication of this text and incorporating a plethora of examples and accounts that can energize one's lectures. Their chapters on slave cultures, slave resistance, and freedpersons are invaluable for the borrowing of material for lectures on the Inquisition, labor systems, honor, gender, and especially stand-alone lectures on slavery or slave communities. Many of those historians included in Klein and Vinson's bibliography have continued to publish or seen their dissertations turned into manuscript form. For the latest research, though, instructors should inquire into the most recent volumes and edited compilations on slavery, Afro-Latin Americans, and the African Diaspora in Latin America. Vinson recently helped edit, with Sherwin Bryant and Rachel Sarah O'Toole, *Africans to Spanish America* (2012) which includes a marvelous historiographical essay on Africans in Latin America as well as articles from leading authorities. Various series, such as the University of New Mexico's *Diálogos* or Duke University's *Latin America Otherwise*, continue to welcome the additions of monographs and even edited compilations on race, Africans, and slavery in Latin America. From Jane Landers and Barry Robinson's *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives* (2006) to Andrew Fisher and Matthew O'Hara's *Imperial Subjects* (2009), these series produce some of the latest research, often frequented by the very names that fill Klein and Vinson's bibliography. For those instructors wishing to bridge the narrative of slavery in Latin America with the literature on the experiences of Afro-Latin Americans, the authors' final two chapters serve as a strong transition into the appropriate scholarship. The best resource for such material remains George Reid Andrews's *Afro-Latin America* (2004) while additional insights into developing scholarship can be found in the

historiographical essay from *Africans to Spanish America* or edited volumes such as Darién Davis's *Beyond Slavery* (2007). These works will help reinforce the instructor's mastery of the field as well as his/her understanding of the latest research trends.

One of the most important resources for the instructor is the primary source, the tool which allows the students to read directly into the history of a certain subject. One of the drawbacks to survey texts is that they do not always direct the reader to such resources, and the primary sources on Africans in colonial Latin America and in Latin American slavery do not exactly fill up library shelves. However, some of those historians in Klein and Vinson's bibliography have contributed the resources they uncovered for some primary sources, and even edited, volumes. Duke University's *The Latin America Readers* continue to produce nation-specific volumes that generally include primary sources. While incorporating lecture material from Klein and Vinson's text on how slaves and freedpersons would contribute to the military defense of a colony in order to make claims for greater privileges or resources, the instructor can assign a selection from *The Costa Rica Reader* (2004) in which the Cabildo of Cartago supports a petition for autonomy from a lower-class mixed-race barrio. When utilizing Klein and Vinson's analysis of the differences between slavery in regions such as Costa Rica and Cuba, the instructor can have his/her class read the testimony from the Costa Rican slave José Cubero in *The Costa Rica Reader* alongside the autobiography of the Cuban slave Juan Francisco Manzano in *The Cuba Reader* (2004). This is not to mention the various accounts of rebellions and uprisings that scatter the readers. The editors of the volume *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives* (2006) included primary sources at the end of their contributors' articles as appendices. The book thus provides not only the latest scholarship but also primary sources on slaves' petitions, Inquisition trials, and maroon settlements, all of which can complement material the instructor

pulls from Klein and Vinson's text. Another source for documents on Africans and slavery in Latin America are Kathryn Joy McKnight and Leo Garofalo's *Afro-Latino Voices* (2009) and Erin O'Connor and Leo Garofalo's *Documenting Latin America* (2011). From these two volumes, the instructor will be able to pull a substantial selection of primary sources concerning religious confraternities, slave resistance, and Afro-Latin American rituals. With these various publications, no instructor should have to suffer from a lack of primary sources.

There is still the drawback that faces many of these survey texts, the absence of footnotes, endnotes, or other citations that refer the reader to the corresponding article or monograph. On one hand, this is not the greatest of problems, for Klein and Vinson provide a comprehensive bibliography that can generally direct the reader to the proper texts. If the instructor is seeking out more information on the Afro-Peruvian mystic Ursula de Jesús, the musical band of slaves employed by Antonio José Dutra, or Afro-Latin American 'witches' in colonial Mexico, s/he should be able to turn to the bibliography and locate Nancy van Deusen's *The Souls of Purgatory* (2004), Zephyr Frank's *Dutra's World* (2004), or Laura Lewis's *Hall of Mirrors* (2003). On the other hand, some of the examples might be a little more challenging, such as distinguishing which monograph contains the information concerning a specific example on Rio de Janeiro or Cuba. The growing scholarship on slavery in colonial Mexico, for instance, includes the works of two historians, Laura Lewis and Joan Cameron Bristol, who touch upon Afro-Latin Americans, witchcraft, and blasphemy. Furthermore, survey texts encourage historians to borrow examples and case studies that embody an historical argument from monographs and articles the authors already reviewed. By discussing how one of Puebla's free militia officers, Captain Joseph de Santander, became a successful entrepreneur, Klein and Vinson provide an example that highlights Vinson's own scholarship on how the militia in

colonial Mexico provided opportunities for freedmen to acquire prestige, secure rights, and even marry outside of their own racial caste. This example can be utilized within a lecture because it aptly represents Vinson's research. However, those experienced with survey texts know that once in a while an example might be incorporated into the text that does not embody the whole of the argument from the original monograph or article. When the authors borrow an example from Joan Cameron Bristol's work,² they select the interesting subject of Gertrudis de Escobar who blasphemed while being whipped by her owner in 1659. The purpose of this colorful example is to illustrate Bristol's overarching analysis of how slaves maneuvered and utilized institutions such as the Inquisition to serve their own ends, for the act of blasphemy might end the punishment and allow the slave to denounce his/her master before the Inquisition. The survey text ends the example with Gertrudis's act of blasphemy, yet Bristol's manuscript stresses how Gertrudis was ultimately found guilty not just for her act of blasphemy but also for her calculated strategy of blaspheming to end the punishment. Bristol even acknowledges that Gertrudis's strategy appears to have backfired (pages 126-132). As with any survey text, the instructor must always be certain that s/he is utilizing a complete example or case study without unintentionally distorting an historical act or subject or the historian's original argument.

If a text emerges which seeks to replace Klein and Vinson's, it will have to find some way to surpass the rigorous and extensive research which these two master historians invested into their comprehensive work. Due to its volume of material, its comparative nature, its broad range as a useful supplemental text for instructors, and its place as the resource for the history of slavery in the Americas, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* will remain the definitive text for some years.

² At the time of publication of this edition of *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*, this was still in dissertation form. Bristol's argument can now be found in her book, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches* (2007).

