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Excerpt
More Information

Introduction

In late May 1683, the Mexican port city of Veracruz – the most important port in the viceroyalty of New Spain and mainland North America – was desolated. A band of nearly 1,000 French, Dutch, and English corsairs, hiding between the sand dunes that surrounded the city, attacked and overwhelmed its defenses, occupied it, and held thousands of its residents as hostages. The occupation lasted seven days – a single week that vanquished Veracruz's treasury and left one out of twenty of its inhabitants dead while a further fifth were abducted into captivity. The inquests that followed were long and acrimonious. Blame was cast and scapegoats found. Solutions were proposed to a litany of failings, perceived and real, in the hope that future strikes might be prevented. Some were probably adopted, but most were not. After all, what solution could address Veracruz's ultimate failing? It was a port serving the largest and wealthiest of Spain's American colonies. It was a point of connection and exchange in a sea that was, to use a word of contemporary officials, infested with corsairs, smugglers, colonists, adventurers, opportunists, and desperate men and women. The seven days between May 17 and May 24, 1683 suddenly and violently revealed Mexico's most strategically important port to be firmly embedded not in the colony of New Spain, but in the Caribbean.

* * *

In the seventeenth century, Veracruz was one of the most globally connected cities in the world. Its warehouses and markets teemed with Madeiran wine, spun gold and silver from Spain, Chinese silks and porcelain, Cuban mahogany, Dutch linens, Venezuelan chocolate, fine central Mexican textiles, featherwork from Michoacán, and hides from across the

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Excerpt
More Information

Caribbean. Private residences, even those of poorer inhabitants, were appointed with the overflow of its many trades: chipped porcelain, rent fabric, damaged furniture. Beaten and broken luxury in a city at the intersection of commercial routes connecting five continents. Founded at the outset of the Cortés expedition in 1519, by 1525, Veracruz served as New Spain's only legal port of international trade on the Atlantic coast. By mid-century, it was the largest port in North America, one of the largest silver entrepots in the world, and a major transshipment point for Asian commodities in transit from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Travelers, migrants, and captives from around the world walked the city's streets and filled its taverns; sought redemption in its cathedrals, community in its confraternities, and fortune in its docks. Before 1700, first-hand accounts and descriptions of Veracruz had been produced in no fewer than seven languages, including the 1683 account of a Syrian Christian traveler written in Arabic and the missives of a Japanese embassy that passed through on its way to Rome in 1614. Many called it home, but for most, it was one stop, often a brief one, in a much longer journey.[1]

Most people who passed through Veracruz were enslaved. At the start of the seventeenth century, Veracruz was one of the largest slave-trading ports in the Americas. Already by 1599, more than 10,000 captives from West, West Central, and Eastern Africa had landed at the island port of San Juan de Ulúa, where they were inspected, branded, and housed until healthy enough to be sold either in Veracruz, or, more often, in the larger interior markets of Xalapa, Puebla, or Orizaba. By the end of the seventeenth century, tens of thousands more enslaved Africans would pass through the city. Most were bound for hinterland plantations, mines, and factories, but others remained or returned. By the time of the buccaneer raid in May 1683, more than 60 percent of Veracruz's permanent

[1] See: Ilyas Mawsili, *An Arab's Journey to Colonial Spanish America: The Travels of Elias al-Mûsili in the Seventeenth Century*, edited and translated by Caesar E. Farah (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Alicia Girón, coord. , *La Misión Hasekura: 400 años de su legado en las relaciones entre México y Japón* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2015). Multiple accounts are in English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Nahua. See: Thomas Gage, *A New Survey of the West Indies* (London, 1699); Samuel de Champlain, *Œuvres de Champlain*, ed. C.-H. Laverdière, 2nd ed. (Québec: C.-H. Laverdière, 1870); Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, *Giro del mondo del dottor d. Gio. Francesco Gemelli Careri: Parte sesta contenente le cose piú ragguardevoli vedute nella nouva Spagna* vol. 6 (Naples: Nella Stamperia di Giuseppe Roselli, 1708); Fray Alonso de la Mota y Escobar, *Memoriales del obispo de Tlaxcala: un recorrido por el centro de México a principios del siglo XVII*, ed. Alba González Jácome (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1987); Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, *Crónica Mexicáyotl*, translated by Adrian León (Mexico City: Impresos Universitaria, 1949).

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Excerpt
More Information

residents were Afro-descended, as many as a third of whom were not born in Mexico, but in Africa, Europe, or the Caribbean. Many of these men and women were free. Most spoke Spanish or Portuguese, but some spoke Kikongo, Mbundu, Fon, or Vai languages. The diversity of Veracruz's African and Afro-descended residents was preserved in its social and religious associations. By 1667, at least five of Veracruz's confraternities used African ethnic language to mark their members, while others existed for its black creole and Portuguese residents.

Despite being at the center of routes of trade and migration that, by 1571, connected Veracruz to the luxuries of five continents, it never attained the size or status of other major American port cities, like Philadelphia, Havana, or Cap-Français. Within a decade of its founding, Veracruz gained a reputation for pestilence, keeping settlers away and the city small. Even merchants who relied on the port for their trade often opted to live in the more salubrious highlands of the interior, visiting Veracruz only when ships were in port. The city did not have a large financial sector and, despite being the port of entry, cities in the near interior like Xalapa and Orizaba developed larger marketing systems off Veracruz's trade. In the absence of free settlers, over the course of the sixteenth century, the city increasingly relied on the labor of enslaved Africans. Using a nascent vocabulary of race, many early modern Europeans who traveled through the city remarked – in Italian, French, English, and Spanish – on the asymmetry between the wealth of Veracruz's trade and the poverty of its people.

An asymmetry persists too in the treatment of Veracruz within historical scholarship of colonial Mexico and the early modern Atlantic: As New Spain's most important port, Veracruz regularly plays a central role in Mexico's colonial narrative, but the social and cultural world of its residents is not always fully illuminated. In the history of colonial Mexico, for example, Veracruz has been a featured location in monographs on African diaspora, international trade, and warfare and imperial competition.[2] It has also featured in religious history, as the Inquisition

[2] For histories of African diaspora featuring Veracruz, an abbreviated list: Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Control, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007); Patrick J. Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991); Nicole von Germeten, *Black*

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Excerpt
More Information

found Veracruz to be a potent site for crimes like bigamy and crypto-Judaism, as well as a key location for the censorship of books and paintings entering the colony.[3] These studies have contributed a great deal to our knowledge about each of those important subjects, but in each, the tendency is to ask what Veracruz can tell us about Afro-Mexico, colonial economies, defense, or religion, rather than to question the history of Veracruz itself.

There are a few notable exceptions to this rule. The most important is Antonio García de León's magisterial *Tierra adentro, mar en fuera*, published in Mexico in 2011, an exquisitely researched tome that brings Veracruz and its people to full life.[4] Over nearly 1,000 pages, García de León elaborates the economic, social, and cultural world not only of Veracruz itself, but, as its title suggests, of its interior and Atlantic entanglements. Importantly, García de León's research is distributed equitably across the colonial period, as he dedicates hundreds of pages to New Spain's "middle century." This contrasts with some of the other major works that center Veracruz, which, like much history of colonial Latin America, tend to be balanced either toward the period in the sixteenth century popularly known as "conquest" or the period between

Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006); Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, *Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucares de Córdoba, Veracruz, 1690–1830* (Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1987); Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570–1650* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). On trade and imperial competition, see: Matilde Souto Mantecón, *Mar abierto: la política y el comercio del consulado de Veracruz en el ocaso del sistema imperial* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, Instituto Mora, 2001); Pierre and Huguette Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique, 1504–1650* (Paris: A. Colin, 1955–9); Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Edge of Crisis: War and Trade in the Spanish Atlantic, 1789–1808* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Paul E. Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean, 1535–1585: Precedent, Patrimonialism, and Royal Parsimony* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); Vinson III, *Bearing Arms*.

[3] See: Francisco Fernández del Castillo, *Libros y libreros en el siglo xvi* (Mexico City: FCE, 1982); Martin Austin Nesvig, *Ideology and Inquisition: The World of the Censors in Early Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Richard E. Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969); Seymour B. Liebman, *The Jews in New Spain: Faith, Flame, and the Inquisition* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970); Richard E. Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

[4] Antonio García de León, *Tierra adentro, mar en fuera: el puerto de Veracruz y su litoral a Sotavento, 1519–1821* (Mexico City: FCE, Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, Universidad Veracruzana, 2011).

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978-1-009-18032-0 — Veracruz and the Caribbean in the Seventeenth Century
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Excerpt
More Information

the Bourbon Reforms (ca. 1743–1808) and the Wars of Independence (ca. 1808–21).[5]

Whether concentrated on its beginning or end, almost all historians of the colonial period tend to approach Veracruz from the perspective of either of two broader geographic constructs: one called "Mexico" or "New Spain," the other called "the Spanish Empire." The tendency to fix the social and cultural worlds of Veracruz's residents within colonial or imperial structures is evident both in studies dedicated to Veracruz and in those in which it is incidental to the larger topic. In Veracruz, soldiers and militiamen defended the "colony of New Spain." Merchants and sailors involved in the transatlantic silver trade participated in the establishment of Spain's global commercial empire. Africans and free-blacks who participated in corporate groups like confraternities were mediating colony-specific categories of caste and race and becoming "Afro-Mexicans." Inquisitors who prosecuted bigamists and secret Jews in Veracruz were protecting the spiritual purity of New Spain, in many cases literally guarding its border from heretical infiltration. For their part, heretics and witches contributed, in the words of García de León, to the ever-growing catalog of "mestizo devils" that showcase colonial Mexico's cultural and religious diversity, its syncretisms, and multiple (and multiplying) roots. In other words, in most scholarship, Veracruz contributes evidence, data, and cases to the history of Mexico or the history of the Spanish Empire.

Locating Veracruz and its seventeenth-century residents in the context of colonial Mexico (or the Spanish empire) is not wrong. As the dominant geographic framework through which Veracruz's diverse communities are understood, "Mexico" has been and will continue to be a primary organizing historical concept, vital for the understanding of Veracruz's communities, and one that has the distinct advantage of being rooted in

[5] See: Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, *Apuntes historicos de la heróica ciudad de Vera-Cruz, precedidos de una noticia de los descubrimientos hechos en las islas y en el continente americano, y de las providencias dictadas por los reyes de España para el gobierno de sus nuevas posesiones, desde el primer viage de Don Cristobal Colon, hasta que se emprendió la conquista de Mexico*, 3 vols. (Mexico City: Cumplido, 1850–8); Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, *La fortaleza de San Juan de Ulúa* (Mexico City: Citlaltépetl, 1961); Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, *La ciudad de tablas* (Veracruz: Instituto Veracruzano Cultura, 1999); Bernardo García Díaz, *Puerto de Veracruz* (Veracruz: Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz, 1992); Pablo Montero and Daniel Goeritz, *San Juan de Ulúa: puerta de la historia* (Mexico City: INAH, 1996). An important exception is: Pablo Montero and Minerva Escamilla Gómez, *Ulúa, Puente intercontinental en el siglo XVII* (Mexico City: CNCA, INAH, ICAV, 1997).

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Joseph M. H. Clark
Excerpt
More Information

strongly held contemporary understandings of jurisdiction and law as well as strongly held understandings of geography and history in the present.[6] At the same time, however, in ascribing Veracruz's early modern inhabitants with the default appellation of "Mexico" or "New Spain," or in ascribing the city itself, historians who address Veracruz risk the elision of a vital regional perspective that heavily inflected its early history, shaped its social and cultural institutions, and became one prominent lens through which its residents understood and represented their own interests and identities in the seventeenth century: the Caribbean.

What the present work proposes to add to earlier research on Veracruz is not only greater detail on an understudied period or a new trove of documents to illuminate some previously unexplored theme, but a critical perspective that fundamentally challenges the way we understand Veracruz and its residents in the early modern period. What the present work proposes, then, is that Veracruz, in the seventeenth century, was not simply a Mexican city. From the early stages of the conquest of Mexico, Veracruz retained distinct connections to the Caribbean world, expressed in the forms of shared environments, an intensity of commercial interactions, and a common legacy of the slave trade. By emphasizing these material relationships, we can construct an alternate spatial lens through which we can then understand processes of community formation, cultural transformation, and corporate identity.[7] Without diminishing the

[6] See: Eric Van Young, "Doing Regional History: A Theoretical Discussion and some Mexican Cases," *Yearbook. Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers* vol. 20 (1994): 21–34.

[7] This study will not be the first to highlight the abundance of Caribbean entanglements that suffuse Veracruz's history. In addition to García de León's work on the entirety of the colonial period, several scholars – Johanna von Grafenstein, Matilde Souto Mantecón, Dalia Antonia Caraballo Muller, Bernardo García Díaz, and Laura Muñoz Mata, to name a few – have drawn out Veracruz's Caribbean relationships in the mid-eighteenth century and later. This study owes a great deal to von Grafenstein's pathbreaking work on the "Gulf-Caribbean" system of port cities. Beyond reading von Grafenstein's "Gulf-Caribbean" system backward into the seventeenth century, this study attempts to understand not only material relationships between Veracruz and the Caribbean, but how material relationships conditioned the development of the city's social and cultural world. See: Johanna von Grafenstein Gareis, ed., *El Golfo-Caribe y sus puertos, 1600–1930*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2006); Johanna von Grafenstein, *Nueva España en el Circuncaribe, 1779–1808: revolución, competencia imperial y vínculos intercoloniales* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1997); Bernardo García Díaz, *Puerto de Veracruz* (Veracruz: Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz, 1992); Bernardo García Díaz and Sergio Guerra Vilaboy, eds., *La Habana/Veracruz, Veracruz/La Habana: Las dos orillas* (Veracruz: Universidad de Veracruz, 2002); Dalia Antonia Caraballo Muller, *Cuban Émigrés and Independence in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf World* (Chapel Hill:

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Joseph M. H. Clark
Excerpt
More Information

utility of "Mexico" or the "Spanish Empire," applying the Caribbean as an analytical frame can enhance our understanding of early modern Veracruz, allowing us to see patterns of development that are otherwise obscure.

Beyond the history of Veracruz itself, this study calls attention to the necessity of defining precisely the spatial systems that informed the production of social and cultural meaning. In placing Veracruz outside of the frame of "Mexico" or the "Spanish Empire," this study proposes not only a new interpretation of one city's history, but a model of history that does not privilege the perspectives and priorities embedded in colonial archives. As historians, our task is to take a limited documentary record and to organize it into narrative that elucidates patterns of human interaction, social and cultural change, and political and economic development. In most cases, this process requires the rigorous application of a contextualizing schema, whether that schema refers to region, gender, class, race, or something else. In many cases, the most appropriate *regional* scheme aligns neatly with easily identifiable administrative categories commonly used and understood in the period of study. In some cases, however, regions are more obscure, such as in borderlands, where political power is contested, or in isolated frontiers, where no decisive power has evidently asserted itself. There is another option, too, and it is this final option I apply to Veracruz in the seventeenth century. In this case, multiple regional systems operate parallel to one another in the same place, at the same time. They are not opposed to one another, as in the borderlands case, but neither do they work to the same ends.

In Veracruz, the two regional contexts I see working side by side are "New Spain" and the "Caribbean." As the chief administrative unit to which Veracruz belonged, New Spain and its viceroy held legal authority over the city and its residents. Although that authority could be and was at times contested or ignored, it was as often tacitly or tangibly accepted. At the same time, Veracruz was engaged in material exchanges with ports in the Caribbean, the precise nature of which was often tangential to

University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Souto Mantecón, *Mar abierto*; Laura Muñoz Mata, ed., *México y el Caribe: vinculos, intereses, region* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2002); Yolanda Juárez Hernández and Leticia Bobadilla González, eds., *Veracruz: sociedad y cultura popular en la region Golfo Caribe* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2009); María del Rosario Rodríguez Díaz and Jorge Castañeda Zavala, eds., *El Caribe: vínculos coloniais, modernos, y contemporáneos: nuevas reflexiones, debates, y propuestas* (Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, IIH, Instituto Mora, Asociación Mexicana de Estudios del Caribe, 2007).

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Joseph M. H. Clark
Excerpt
More Information

viceregal or imperial concerns. Highlighting these exchanges can offer new ways of thinking about Veracruz and its social and cultural development within a framework that challenges and refines the view from national and imperial vantage points. While we may expect a port city like Veracruz to resemble other ports in its shipping occupation, the material links between Caribbean ports also produced informal networks and compatible local institutions like the free-black militia and confraternal organizations, which in turn mediated the production of ideas about race, nationality, and other social categories. In this way, Veracruz's material links to the Caribbean created social and cultural opportunities that were not designed by colonial architects.

The Caribbean framework is particularly useful as a lens for understanding Veracruz's African and Afro-descended residents. Throughout the seventeenth century, people of African descent constituted most of the city's permanent inhabitants. For Veracruz's African community, connection to other Caribbean ports where Africans also constituted a majority facilitated awareness and access – which J. Lorand Matory has called a "live dialogue" – to alternate means of self-identification that may not have existed to the same degree in the Mexican interior.[8] Drawing Veracruz into the Caribbean allows us not only to compare processes of diasporic identity production in disparate colonial contexts, but to better understand how Africans in Veracruz defined their relationship to the colonial state in a way that transcended colonial boundaries. Moreover, because Veracruz's Caribbean relationships were an "unintended outcome" of the colonial process, the social and cultural formations they enabled were not strictly the product of an interaction between center and periphery, but instead of a multicentric spatial system.[9] In this sense, Caribbean connections not only gave Veracruz's Afro-descended

[8] See: J. Lorand Matory, "The 'New World' Surrounds an Ocean: Theorizing the Live Dialogue between African and American Cultures," in *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology in the Diaspora*, edited by Kevin A. Yelvington (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2006), 151–92. See also: J. Lorand Matory, "Surpassing 'Survival': On the Urbanity of 'Traditional Religion' in the Afro-Atlantic World," *The Black Scholar* 30, nos. 3–4 (2000): 36–43; J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 284–7.

[9] My use of "unintended outcome," like much of my inspiration here, is drawn from Joseph Miller, "Retention, Reinvention, Remembering: Restoring Identities through Enslavement in Africa and under Slavery in Brazil," in *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery*, edited by José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy (New York: Humanity Books, 2004).

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Excerpt
More Information

residents distinctive ways of engaging the state, but tools of self-description that did not depend on a dialectic confrontation with the state. Placing Veracruz within the Caribbean provides one answer, therefore, to the troubling question of how to best understand subjugated communities we typically only see through the eyes of their subjugator.[10]

A recent wellspring of scholarship on Afro-Mexico gives us ways of thinking about community, religion, identity, and status within Veracruz's Afro-descended population.[11] Studies of witchcraft, confraternities, religious devotion, the militia, Afro-Indigenous relationships, free-black tribute, the caste system, family construction, urban and rural labor, and free-black economic practices have rendered in vivid detail the ways in which African

[10] See: Herman L. Bennett, "The Subject in the Plot: National Boundaries and the 'History' of the Black Atlantic," *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2000): 101–24; J. Lorand Matory, "The 'Cult of Nations' and the Ritualization of their Purity," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (2001): 171–214.

[11] See: Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches*; Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*; Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*; Ryan A. Kashanipour, *Between Magic and Medicine: Colonial Yucatec Healing in the Spanish Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming); von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*; Miguel A. Valerio, *Sovereign Joy: Afro-Mexican Kings and Queens, 1539–1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*; Vinson III, *Bearing Arms*; Matthew Restall, ed., *Beyond Black and Red: African–Native Relations in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas, and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Robert C. Schwaller, "'*Mulata, Hija de Negro y India*': Afro-Indigenous *Mulatos* in Early Colonial Mexico," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 3 (2011): 889–914; Robert C. Schwaller, "The Importance of Mestizos and Mulatos as Bilingual Intermediaries in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," *Ethnohistory* 59, no. 4 (2012): 675–90; Vera Tiesler, Pilar Zabala, and Andrea Cucina, eds. *Natives, Europeans, and Africans in Colonial Campeche: History and Archaeology* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2010); Vera Tiesler and Pilar Zabala, eds. *Orígenes de la sociedad campechana: Vida y muerte en la ciudad de Campeche durante los siglos XVI y XVII* (Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, 2012); Norah L.A. Gharala, *Taxing Blackness: Free Afromexican Tribute in Bourbon New Spain* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019); Ben Vinson III, *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Robert C. Schwaller, *Géneros de Gente in Early Colonial Mexico: Defining Racial Difference* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva, *Urban Slavery in Colonial Mexico: Puebla de los Ángeles, 1531–1706* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Danielle Terrazas Williams, *The Capital of Free Women: Race, Legitimacy, and Liberty in Colonial Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

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Joseph M. H. Clark
Excerpt
More Information

diasporans in Mexico navigated baroque systems of status to build families and communities; to mitigate immiserating legal circumstances; and to claim rights and privileges, both individually and collectively. These studies offer a valuable model for understanding Afro-descended communities in Veracruz. At the same time, elaborating the city's Caribbean connections offers both new insights into these issues and the opportunity to consider explicitly how diasporic experiences in mainland Mexico were mirrored and informed by those elsewhere.

To their credit, scholars of Caribbean history and culture are ecumenical in the definition of the Caribbean region, and questions of the Caribbean's geographic limits are often addressed explicitly and with great care.[12] While the Mexican littoral does not always feature in Caribbean history, neither is it always excluded, and Veracruz itself regularly appears in histories of the early modern Caribbean in particular.[13] Although not all Caribbeanists include the Gulf Coast in their definition of the region, I doubt many will be surprised by the act itself. What I hope to offer to the field of Caribbean history, then, is first an approach to the region that emphasizes the diachronic evolution of its component societies.[14] Scholars of Caribbean history and culture have long questioned the meaning of the region's "supersyncretic"

[12] See: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Caribbean Region: An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 19–42; Dale Tomich, "Spaces of Slavery, Times of Freedom: Rethinking Caribbean History in World Perspective," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 17, no. 1 (1997): 67–80; Sidney W. Mintz, "The Caribbean Region," *Daedalus* 103, no. 2 (1974): 45–71; Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), xiii; Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern*, 2nd ed. (London: Duke University Press, 1997); Lara Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (2006): 615–30.

[13] See: Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500–1750* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Jane G. Landers, "Cimarrón and Citizen: African Ethnicity, Corporate Identity, and the Evolution of Free-Black Towns in the Spanish Circum-Caribbean," in *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Jane G. Landers and Barry M. Robinson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 111–46; Hoffman, *The Spanish Crown*; Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sea of Storms: A History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); John Robert McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

[14] See: Prasenjit Duara, "Postscript: The Methodological Limbo of Social History," in *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 261–8.

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