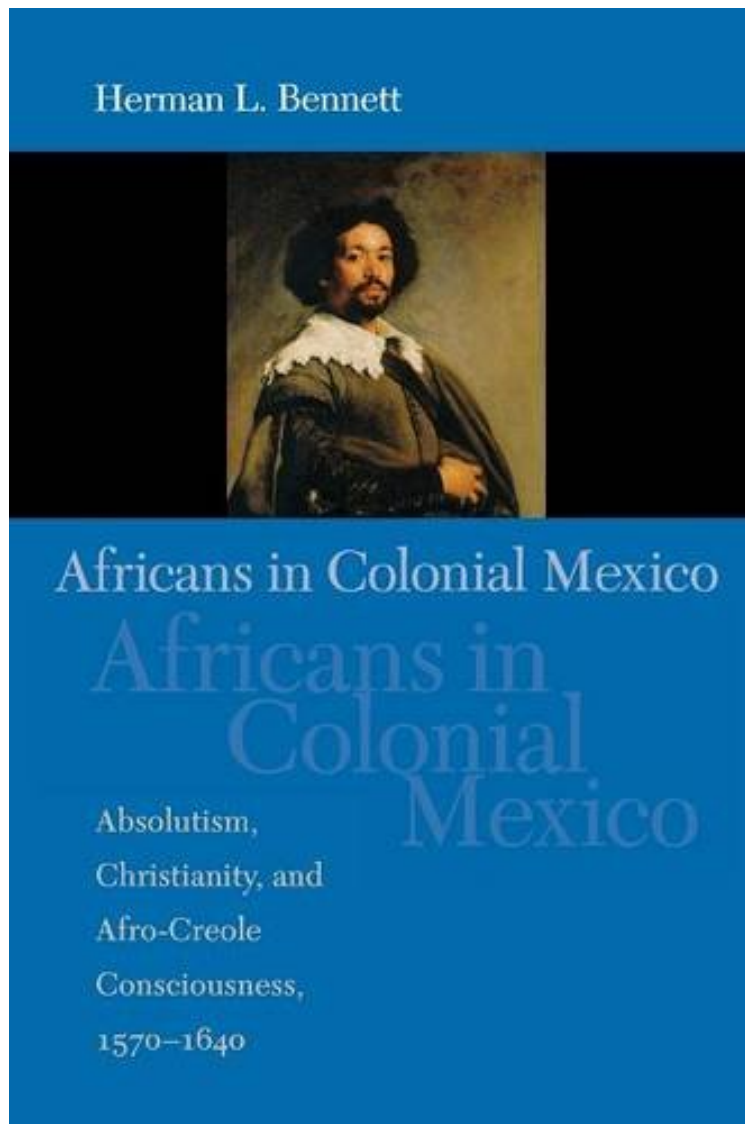


[Read ebook] Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640 (Blacks in the Diaspora)

Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640 (Blacks in the Diaspora)

Herman L. Bennett

*ePub | *DOC | audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF*



DOWNLOAD



+

READ ONLINE

#1327628 in Books Herman L Bennett 2005-02-23 2005-02-23Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.25 x .80 x 6.12l, .96 #File Name: 025321775X288 pagesAfricans in Colonial Mexico Absolutism Christianity and Afro Creole Consciousness 1570 1640 | File size: 43.Mb

Herman L. Bennett : Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640 (Blacks in the Diaspora) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640 (Blacks in the Diaspora):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A giant improvement in the direction of true history By Dr Jacques COULARDEAU This book is fundamental. Everyone would say that Blacks are not part of the ethnic landscape of Mexico. So it is very important to explore the real presence of Blacks in Mexico as soon as New Spain, since that was its name then, was established in the 16th century, in Cortez's times. This book is full of real data about the arrival of Blacks and their importance for the future of Mexico. Slave trade stopped in 1640, as for Mexico, when new arrivals of slaves were banned in Spanish America. But what was the situation before? Let's start with the situation in 1646. There were then a total of 151,618 Africans and descendants of Africans, in other words Blacks in all possible shades. 116,520 were free and only 35,098 were slaves, hence only 23% of the total black population. But this domination of free Blacks was already reached at the end of the 16th century, but what's more, at this time Africans and their descendants were more numerous than Spaniards in many cities, particularly Mexico. That's one original fact about Africans in New Spain. The slaves arrived first of all along with the Spaniards from Spain where they had lived for many years. These slaves were called *ladinos*, they could speak Spanish and knew all the intricacies of the Spanish system and institutions. These black servants, slaves or non-slaves later on, were an element of social status for the masters who paraded these slaves or non-slaves in all occasions. That leads to the simple fact that New Spain had the second largest population of enslaved Africans and the greatest number of free blacks in the Americas at the end of the 16th century onward for quite a while. They were brought into Mexico as servants of any sort of the Spanish elite, then as slaves this time from Africa to work in the mines, along with Indians, especially silver and gold mines, and finally to work on the sugar plantations (Cortez started the first sugar mill in Mexico and his fourth sugar mill was water-powered, meaning that in his mind slave labor was not the essential not final solution) and the tobacco plantations that the book totally ignores. Spain will have the monopoly of tobacco in Europe up to 1616 when John Rolfs and Princess Pocahontas, aka Rebecca Rolfe, brought to the English court the first batch of good Virginian tobacco produced by them on their Virginian plantation (note Black slaves will only arrive in Virginia in 1619 brought by some Dutch slave-dealer). The question here is where are these Black people, what have these Black people become? The answer is simple: they got genetically integrated but then the question is how since this fact is unique in the Americas, except for what we call Black Indians in the USA, though no complete study and counting has so far been done. The general procedure is simple to understand. Slaves arriving from Spain with Spaniards (*Ladinos*) or imported from Africa (*Bozals*) are supposed to respect some rules edicted by Charles V and Philip II, the essential Spanish kings of that period, and of course the tradition of the Catholic Church, its various councils and what is called Canon Law. Three logics have to be identified and there is a contradiction within these three logics. For the slave owners, the slaves are nothing but chattel, property, a possession of some sort that he thinks is and wants to be under his absolute authority. That's the logic of slavery later on in English colonies in the USA, both Anglican and Puritan of any affiliation. It will produce the famous one-drop-of-blood theory that produced in its turn the racial purity approach so dear to both the Ku Klux Klan and Marcus Garvey. In New Spain the Spanish Crown imposes royal absolutism which implies any human being is a subject of the King and as such is a man of reason, or vice versa, since the Blacks are men of reason they are subjects of the king. That implies they are under the jurisdiction of royal courts and first of all the Royal Inquisition that is installed in New Spain, in Mexico City in 1571 with the Edict of Faith and the two *auto de Fes* of February 28, 1574 and then March 6, 1575. For the king the blacks represent some possible or potential disruption, hence they have to be controlled, and Charles V edicted that this control has to be done through marriage, the Grand Remedy. But marriage is a Christian sacrament. Note here the natives, the Indians are not considered as men of reason, hence are not concerned by the Inquisition. They are beyond royal justice. They are only controlled through violence. They are in no way royal subjects. But this insistence on marriage comes from canon law that states a man and a woman have to be married to be full Christians. In fact a Christian is supposed to go through five sacraments: baptism, confirmation, yearly confession, marriage and last rites. Note burying is not one of these rites, hence the way the body of a dead Christian is dealt with does not concern the Church. The king had imposed the rule that all Africans brought to America have to be Christians when stepping down from the ships. Hence they must have been baptized before landing. Then to be proper Christians they have to come to marriage. Extra-marital sex is unholy and sex can only be holy if it is within matrimony that has to be monogamous and faithful. This matrimony and the sacrament of marriage have to be entered freely by both future spouses and under no duress from anyone. Christians are persons with souls and all baptized people, hence all Africans arriving from Africa, are such persons with souls with all Christian obligations. These rights and obligations are listed in the Spanish *Siete Partidas* (that was reasserted in 1571 in the Edict of Faith read from the pulpit within Sunday mass in 1971 when the Inquisition was installed) and the French Code Noir. Note the Indians are considered as pagans and as such are considered as being "Extra Ecclesiam" that tolerates these pagan or infidel populations but on the margin of the Christians themselves. This concept goes back a long time before the colonization of the Americas, was already active during the Crusades and even before. Those people cannot know the "state of grace" that only Christianity can bring, but this concept clearly states that there cannot be any forced conversion. Note in Spain when the Christian Kings expelled the Jews, they were given the choice between leaving or converting and that should have been considered as some kind of duress. Note the enormous massacres of Indians in New Spain were done in the name of Christianity and could have been seen as a

situation of duress for them to convert, though the Catholic Church did not insist - at least too much - on that. The contradiction here is between the simple property or possession a slave was for the slave-owner on one hand and the fact that the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church provided these slaves with the status of royal subjects (people of reason) and Christians (people with souls). This has tremendous consequences. Before entering the consequences - mostly concerning marriage - we have to understand the slaves and non slaves, from Spain or from Africa, and their descendants are in a situation of total cultural immersion and that they are keen and able to go through it to their own advantage. The first thing they learn is Spanish. As soon as they know Spanish they can integrate the institutions and particularly the church that speaks Spanish on a day to day basis for non ritualistic activities (these are performed in Latin of course) and the various courts, both royal and clerical, that are controlling them all the time. They learn all these procedures and they take from them what can serve their interest and their interest is to become free. This desire to be free is so strong that their cultural immersion and integration is achieved in a few years. Recent African slaves (Bozals) can navigate in the juridical and institutional channels within years because of the other aspects of this integrative procedure. They are living within a geographical - and social - community. They have to provide witnesses in order to be married and that forces them to define themselves as part of such a geographical community that works, from the records we have from various court proceedings, across and over the other elements of this integration: ethnic status, social status, social stratification and racial hierarchy. Free white people can witness the marriage of one black slave and one Christianized Indian woman and the witnesses are supposed to be chosen by each future spouse, at least two witnesses each. This integration defines the social status of each member with all the rights and duties of each status. Note to be a Christian is part of this social status. It has rights and obligations as we have seen and will develop later. Social stratification comes then and there is a great difference between the countryside and the cities, Mexico City first of all. In the countryside, within the *encomiendas* system (*haciendas* and farms given to the Spaniards for their services in the Conquest), the stratification is: 1- The Spanish elite at the beginning, and then these move back to the cities and leave behind distant relatives, illegitimate offspring and impoverished Spaniards to take care of the business; 2- Free people of color, if any; 3- Enslaved Africans of any shade or ethnic definition; 4- Indians (who are mostly non-persons). In the cities the stratification is slightly different. 1- The Spanish elite; 2- The Spanish non-elite: distant relatives, illegitimate children, impoverished Spaniards (soldiers, crafts people, servants of any sort); 3- Free people of color; 4- Enslaved Africans with a hierarchy between *Ladinos* (Slaves from Africa but having lived in Spain before), *Criollos* (Africans slaves born in New Spain) and *Bozals* (African slaves just arrived, hence born in Africa); 5- Indians (who are mostly non-persons). This sense of community creates an ethnic or racial hierarchy within the Blacks. On top and over them are the whites. Then you have the pure black people: *Ladinos*, *Creoles*, and *Bozals*. Then you have what the Spaniards call the people of *Mestizaje*, the mixing of blood that is called *mtissage* in the French tradition. The list is long and the book does not always define them all: *Coyote* (African + Indian), *Mestizo* (Spaniard + Indian), *Mulatto* (African + Spaniard), *Afromestizo* (African + Indian), *Castizo* (Spaniard + *Mestizo*), *Lobo* (not defined), *Pardo* (African + Indian). This is capital to understand what we are trying to explore: why have Blacks more or less disappeared in Mexico? And again outside and beyond, if not under, two ethnic groups: *indio/a* and *chino/a* (the latter, natives from the Philippines). The point is here that Mexico is the locale of a metamorphosis of race into culture because of the *Creoles*, the people of color born in Mexico, from the very start and after the end of slave imports from Africa to Mexico as soon as 1640. From 1570 to 1646 the *Creole* population multiplied by fifty from 2,437 to 116,529. Most of them are *mulattos* says the book, in fact we can state they probably are mixed blood people from various types of mixing, not only *mulattos*, the term being easily used to cover the diversity. What I say here comes from a set of facts that are essential. The sexual ratio within the African population and their descendants is 3 men for 1 woman at the end of the 16th century and is 1 to 1 only in the last part of the 17th century. Still around 1650 it is only "nearly" balanced. The enormous increase of people of color born in New Spain (*Creoles*) has to be explained by the fact that African men procreate these *Creoles* with available women (and keep in mind the rules of marriage: no polygamy of any type, stable and faithful unions, etc.) and these women cannot be, except very very marginally Spanish women, hence they have to be Indians. When there is one African woman for there African men, two of these African men have to get married to Indian women. This aspect is not studied in this book. Two thirds of the people of color born in New Spain are *Coyotes*, *Afromestizos* or *Pardos*. Three words for one type of union. That shows the range of the phenomenon and the embarrassment of Spanish authorities in front of it, especially since the kings have repeatedly asked the various vice-regal authorities to discourage it. That would explain the use of the word *Mulatto* instead to cover what is not supposed to be seen. This produces a simple fact: in the 18th century the core of the labor force is *mulattos* (of any type) and indigenous people, and that will continue the *mestizaje*. This goes along, always because of marriage, with the fast increase of free people of color who manage to benefit from any manumission (note the word and concept are not used in this book, but it is essential in *Siete Partidas* and *Code Noir*, both being essential to understand the Catholic Church that does not try to terminate slavery, but to control people of color and to integrate them in the church, in Christianity via baptism and marriage. The next consequence is that two thirds of Black males having to marry with Indian women, it creates a vast movement of integration of Indians in the Church via baptism, matrimony and child birth. But this marriage seen as the Grand Remedy by Charles V has tremendous consequences

that I have hinted at but not specified. The two future spouses have to apply for a license from the Church and have to bring two witnesses on each side. The procedure has to be based on free will. The very ceremony is based on each one of the two future spouses having to publicly declare that it is his or her free choice and will. The witnesses are there to prove no duress has been imposed onto one or the other. If you are free then, why not in plain everyday life? The mental consequence for the enslaved people, and more generally the people of color in New Spain is that all Christians are equal, hence all Christians should be free. But marriage imposes some duties on the couple: they have to perform by having some common marital life and by procreating. How is it possible for a couple who are working for two different masters? The church is clear: the couple has the right this time and not only the duty, to perform their marriage by being able to have a shared marital life and by being able to procreate children that remain under their control. The book examines some court cases in which the masters were forced, willy nilly and in spite of their grumbling or resisting, to provide the married couple with one day of reunion per week for one example of the obligations that befall the slave owners, and that negate of course their absolute property right, especially over the children who are the parents' and not the parents' master's. What's more the spouse of any Black person, slave or not, has to be respected as the married spouse of this Black person, and since two thirds of these spouses are Indian women, you can imagine the enormous dynamic created by this implementation of canon law concerning the sacrament (and I should say holy here) of marriage. As such the book is essential. It has two shortcomings though. 1- It only takes crown and clerical court sources into account and no DNA approach. Today such an approach is possible and has been used recently by researchers in Stanford and Miami: the genetic history of a person can be totally disentangled by the study of his or her genome and the comparison with "standard" genomes of reference populations. Here is one quotation about this new research from the Stanford School of Medicine: "The approach allowed the researchers to categorize regions of DNA as not just European, for example, but Iberian. Or not just African, but West African. They could also estimate when each mixing event occurred by assuming longer segments had been incorporated more recently than shorter segments. That's because, over time, our chromosomes randomly swap regions during cell division, breaking apart and mixing up formerly long, contiguous stretches of DNA. The more time that passes, the greater the likelihood that any one piece will be disrupted by this recombination process." They are dealing with the population of the West Indies. Imagine what could be done in Mexico. More at [...]

2- It only concerns court records, hence cases that have come to these courts. These courts do not recognize Indians who are Extra Ecclesiam, except when they one spouse of a married couple, or a witness of one of the two spouses or, in the case of slaves, of the masters. That's what is valid for the Inquisition court, but for clerical courts every person concerned has to be a Christian. This creates a rich and powerful dynamic towards the Christianization of the people concerned. But what about the people who are not concerned, who do not come to courts? That brings me to my conclusion. Mexico is a special case and a lot of work is needed still. The Black population originally the most important or second most important in the Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries seems to have disappeared. This is of course an illusion. Due to the early and then constant policy of both the Spanish Crown and the Spanish Catholic Church, the Black population was totally merged into essentially the Indian population; and that has had a direct result in the integration, of Indians into Mexican society. The merging is so advanced that it has become quasi invisible.

Dr Jacques COULARDEAU⁴ of 4 people found the following review helpful. Africans in Colonial Mexico By Publius

The concept of identity in the Atlantic world is fraught with paradoxical layering, divided sensibilities, and downright compartmentalization. As such, how and in what ways Atlantic folk created identities is an exercise in constant motion. It is never a fixed process, as Rutgers' Herman Bennett argues, but one that is always undergoing redefinition. In early New Spain (colonial Mexico), a highly complex racial society attempted to balance the needs of absolutism with Catholicism's unending devotion and the highly sensitive demands of master and slave. In the process, a very typical Atlantic creolization process blended race and culture thoroughly. And this, Bennett suggests, created a significant population adept at navigating the complex nuances of colonial slave society with a great deal of ease. In plain terms, 'Africans in Colonial Mexico' attempts to demonstrate African and Afro-Creole agency. The fourth and most successful chapter ("Christian Matrimony and the Boundaries of African Self-Fashioning"), for example, rather brilliantly demonstrates the complex kinship ties that Africans and Afro-Creoles used in the matrimonial process. Additionally, and more importantly, the author unpacks the overlapping and often opportunistic identities seized by the African petitioners to complete the formal process of Catholic marriage. Bennett finds, somewhat surprisingly, that they actively sought out other members of their own ethnic (or perceived ethnic) group. Even more, the same said Africans relied on these kinship connections that frequently extended over a significant time period, despite the many obstacles that slavery posed. Those familiar with the pioneering work of Ira Berlin will recognize some of Bennett's terminology as well as an immediate point of contention. For Bennett, colonial Mexico's cultural "need" for slaves qualifies it as a slave society (p. 30). In 'Many Thousands Gone' and again in his 'Generations of Captivity,' Berlin (building, as Bennett does as well, from the work of Frank Tannenbaum) gave a clear definition of the process in which "societies with slaves" became "slave societies". "The transformation generally turned upon the discovery of some commodity...that could command an international market." In addition, as Berlin suggests, the slaveholding class then attained nearly total mastery over the socioeconomic process. The question of colonial Mexico's categorization is,

at least in Bennett's somewhat ambiguous presentation of the region, somewhat amiss. Part of the ambiguity results from the author's treatment of colonial Mexico as a unified whole. The urban-rural landscape, for all purposes, seems to blend almost neatly without much distinction. One is left with the distinct impression that all of colonial Mexico functioned in identical manners, regardless of locale. The reliance on the Matrimonios at Mexico City's Archivo General de la Nacion, of course, likely privileged urban applicants over their rural counterparts. Even still, it is not altogether clear from Bennett's evidence what key commodity transformed New Spain's economy and effectively strangled the post-charter generations in a distinctly "slave society". Despite any weaknesses in presentation, 'Africans in Colonial Mexico' is illuminating and powerful for its portrayal of cultural fluidity. In terms of the African Diaspora, it goes a long way in addressing the complicated juggling of multiple identities. Far too often scholarly portrayals take for granted the external modifiers that determined slave identities. This one-sided portrayal does not allow for the ongoing process that an identity undergoes amidst the pull of various cultures and contexts. In other words, it is fixed in time and place. Bennett's real contribution is in understanding identity as a process and that Africans and Afro-Creoles necessarily assumed any number of identities given the peculiarities of his or her context (demonstrates agency). The fluid quality that the identities collectively assumed greatly advances the scholarly portrait of the labyrinth that is the Atlantic world mentality.⁷ of 19 people found the following review helpful. Some reservations... otherwise interesting

By Pamela H. Long Bennett takes on a formidable task of combing the dispersed Mexican archives for information about Blacks in the first century after Cortes' conquest and the structuring of "New Spain." His use of secondary sources is laudable, but I'm having trouble with his definition of the term "creole." This is not a Spanish term, but rather an English one, and I suppose I should give him a "by" on that. I'm troubled however that he defines the term as "Africans born in New Spain, as creoles were known." By whom? The Spanish term "Criollo" (from which I'm assuming he has taken "creole") NEVER meant Africans exclusively, but rather SPANISH people born in the New World. I am troubled that he never gives any citation for this, which is clearly at odds with everything else I've read for 25 years. Such a novel use of a term should have been more carefully explained. Although I'm impressed by his otherwise wide-spectrum knowledge of colonial Mexico, I'm wondering how much this misinterpretation of terminology impacts his conclusions. I would like to know of other Colonialists who use the term this way--certainly no one living in Mexico in the seventeenth century used the term as Bennett does.

This book charts new directions in thinking about the construction of new world identities.... Bennett does a masterful job." Judith A. Byfield, Dartmouth

In this study of the largest population of free and slave Africans in the New World, Herman L. Bennett has uncovered much new information about the lives of slave and free blacks, the ways that their lives were regulated by the government and the Church, the impact upon them of the Inquisition, their legal status in marriage, and their rights and obligations as Christian subjects.

Africans in Colonial Mexico by Herman Bennett marks a major advance in the still underdeveloped field of Afro-Mexican history by using Inquisition records to investigate Afro-Creole consciousness in the mature colonial period.^{40.3} 2005 (Latin American Research) Bennett (Rutgers Univ.) relies on church records, especially marriage licenses and Inquisition prosecutions, to reveal aspects of the social and legal lives of Africans and their descendants, slave and free, in colonial Mexico. He begins by establishing the scale of the African presence, saying that Africans outnumbered Spaniards and that early New Spain's black population was larger than Brazil's. He notes, as others have, that Africans participated in the conquest and often served in an intermediary role, supervising indigenous labor and Hispanicizing the Indians. Bennett focuses not on work or living conditions, but on Africans' ability to manipulate power through their understanding of the law. Blacks, being Christians and thus considered persons with souls, enjoyed certain rights. For example, the church granted them the right of conjugality, which superceded their masters' property rights. Africans, Bennett argues, took advantage of these limited rights to make lives for themselves. By manipulating the interstices between canon and property law, Africans carved out niches for themselves and made their lives better. This thorough study informs on a number of historical fields, including the history of slavery, diaspora studies, identity, Spanish imperial history, church history, creolization, and the Hispanicization of Indians. Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate students and faculty. February 2004 (S. A. Harmon Pittsburg State University)

. . . a remarkable feat in reconstituting the lives of New Spains early African population . . . and in offering a new vantage point from which to study this important component of the African Diaspora. (net).. Bennetts book represents a significant contribution to the scholarship on the African experience in colonial Mexico and to our understanding of the interface between the public domain of church and state and the private one of personal lives. (net)

About the Author Herman L. Bennett is Associate Professor of History at The Graduate Center, CUNY.