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Review of: Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition in Latin America and the Atlantic World*

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Schmidt-Nowara, Christopher. *Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition in Latin America and the Atlantic World*. Diálogos. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2011. xiii + 204. Illustrations, maps, and tables.

Anyone looking for a model of how to write a short but incisive survey of a broad and complex subject could well start with Christopher Schmidt-Nowara's *Slavery, Freedom, And Abolition in Latin America and the Atlantic World*. In 163 pages of text, that include several illustrations and photographs, and another 23 pages of notes, Schmidt-Nowara manages to cover the major aspects of slavery and abolition in Latin America as well as make references to slavery elsewhere in the Americas and its European and African connections to justify including "the Atlantic world" in the title. His book serves as a valuable introduction to the topic as well as an incentive to pursue the subject further. To that end, his notes and bibliography provide numerous places where one can find additional information.

In his four chapters, Schmidt-Nowara discusses the principal developments in the history of Latin American slavery while providing geographically specific examples to illustrate his points and indicate some of the differences of the institution in the region. Each chapter ends with a separate "Portrait" that elaborates upon the lives of a few of the figures involved in the events just described. He begins with the European background, the ubiquity of slavery in the late fifteenth century, the Portuguese voyages along the African coast that led to their tapping into the existing slavery system, and the early link between African slaves and plantation labor. This sets the stage for Columbus's voyages, the first Spanish settlements in the western hemisphere, the exploitation of the indigenous population, their rapid and massive decline that prompted the banning of native enslavement, and the shift to African slaves. The flow from Africa to Spanish America remained constant throughout much of the colonial period, although in limited numbers, largely because of Spanish mercantilist concerns. The Brazilian situation, on the other hand, was markedly different. The relatively small number of natives, the Portuguese access to African slaves, and the focus on the sugar industry in the north-east of Brazil meant that by the late sixteenth century the colony had become a committed importer of slaves, which it remained until 1850. Brazil's growing demands provided a stimulus to the expansion of the trade and with it the horrors of the middle passage as experienced by its millions of victims.

One of Schmidt-Nowara's particular interests is the slaves' response to their situation, a topic that constitutes a part of each chapter. For example, he notes the efforts of some slaves from an early date to recreate their African culture in an unfamiliar and forbidding environment, while others sought to develop a new culture, as evident in their acceptance and modifications of Christianity. Their response also involved more confrontational forms of resistance, notably maroonage, which in some instances won them concessions from their exploiters, occasionally even freedom. In both Spanish America and Brazil slaves had access to different routes to freedom, leading to the appearance and growth of a free black population who became an increasingly important group as time passed, but in both areas a group that had to cope with numerous restrictions imposed upon them because of their slave heritage.

From the seventeenth century the presence of other European nations in the area intensified the emphasis and dependence upon African slaves. The British and French first turned to indentured servants to meet the labor needs of their American colonies, but in areas that developed plantation economies, African slaves quickly supplanted them and their owners acquired significant political clout. In the case of Brazil, the Dutch invasions of the sugar-producing region of the north-east in the early seventeenth century led to closer ties between Brazil and Angola to ensure adequate supplies of slaves. In subsequent decades the elimination of the indigenous population, the opening up of the interior, and the discovery of deposits of gold and diamonds further stimulated Brazil's commitment to slaves and the capacity to purchase them. Yet, that same expansion and the imperial confrontations of the eighteenth century were marked by growing opposition, as individuals began to question both slavery and the slave trade.

The age of revolution produced even stronger attacks on the institution and the first victories in the long struggle for abolition. While noting the centrality of English pressures in the process, Schmidt-Nowara traces how slave participation in the national liberation movements in the hemisphere assisted in and often promoted it. Yet he notes, as have others, that the burgeoning crusade did little to undermine the institution, at least initially. The American Revolution may have been a factor in stimulating British abolitionism, but it was followed by the expansion of slavery in the American south. Similarly, the Haitian Revolution may have provided a symbol of hope to slaves in the Americas, but it was followed by a profound increase in the slave trade to Cuba and Brazil and an explosion in the number of slaves in those two areas. The Spanish American wars for independence, in which slaves played a vital military role, were marked by the passage of free womb laws and laws ending the African slave trade, but slavery survived in most of the new nations for another generation.

Brazil and Cuba held out even longer, as Schmidt-Nowara discusses in his final chapter. He describes the nineteenth-century expansion of slavery in both areas, the continuation of the slave trade despite international condemnation until its termination in mid-century, and, finally, the ending of slavery in Cuba in 1886 and Brazil in 1888.

There is nothing particularly new or provocative in this overview. Schmidt-Nowara sets out the known details, frequently drawing examples from his specific areas of research interest in the Spanish Caribbean. But throughout he is generous with his recognition of other authors and his incorporation of their details and arguments into his study. Critics may begrudge him for not including more on their particular area of specialization; Colombianists, for example, may feel a bit shortchanged. But in such a brief overview, this is inevitable. Rather, we should be impressed by how much he has managed to include and how useful this is as an introduction to the subject.

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