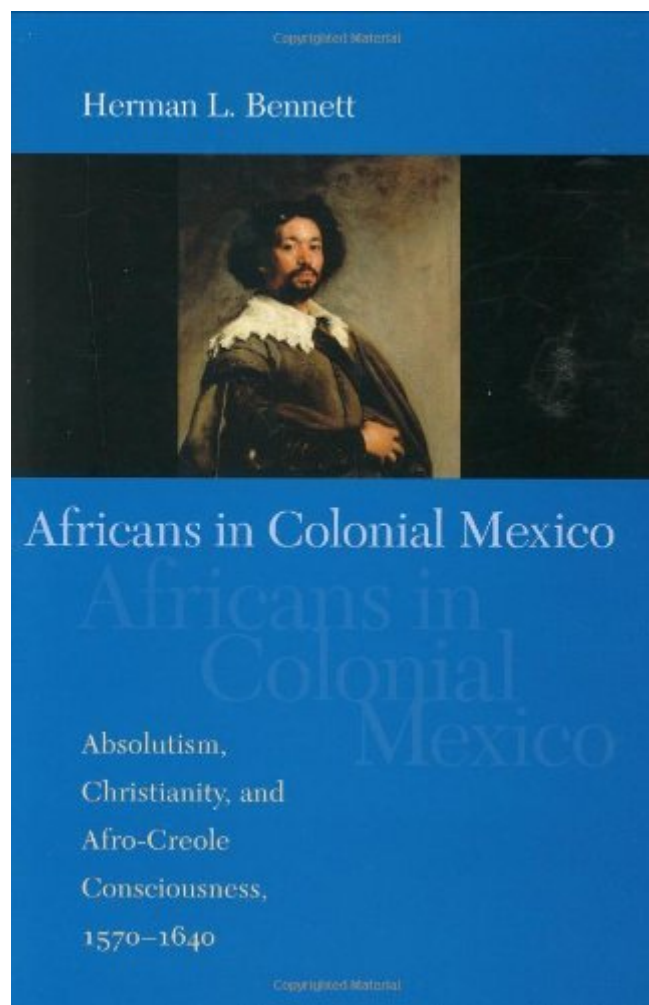


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# Africans In Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, And Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640 (Blacks In The Diaspo)



## Synopsis

Colonial Mexico was home to the largest population of free and slave Africans in the New World. *Africans in Colonial Mexico* explores how they learned to make their way in a culture of Spanish and Roman Catholic absolutism by using the legal institutions of church and state to create a semblance of cultural autonomy. From secular and ecclesiastical court records, Bennett reconstructs the lives of slave and free blacks, their regulation by the government and by the Church, the impact of the Inquisition, their legal status in marriage, and their rights and obligations as Christian subjects. His findings demonstrate the malleable nature of African identities in the Atlantic world, as well as the ability of Africans to deploy their own psychological resources to survive displacement and oppression.

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## Customer Reviews

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.

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.

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