

George reid andrews afro latin america

Countries



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GEORGE REID ANDREWS: AFRO-LATIN AMERICA In this paper, I would argue that the history of USA is intertwined with the issue of Blacks – their enslavement and freedom but it has not as yet been focused that this subject has far greater impact in Central and Latin America, thus the greater impact of blacks in Central and Latin America would be the main theme or argument of this paper. This book, Afro-Latin America by George Reid, is the first attempt to focus on this side of the African Diaspora. With remarkable skill George Reid Andrews has woven the history of people who came from Africa to South America – broadly speaking.

He traces their path from slavery to freedom and how this in turn left its stamp on the politics, economics and culture of this region. As individuals and as groups they pursued the path towards freedom, equality and acquirement of citizenship by being part of the military, political movements, civic bodies, unions, religious activities and in various cultural streams. The book travels through two centuries and should be of interest in all interested in the past, present and future of Latin America. It is one of the best anthropological accounts of this region.

The style is gripping with detailed statement of experiences, of the people of African origin in the former colonies of Spain and Portugal and the stamp of their influence on these parts on all walks of life – society, economics and culture. While the history of the Blacks is well researched and ably presented in USA, it is not so with Latin America where there is still an air of mystery and vacuum. It is ironical that it should be so considering the fact that it has the highest number of Africans residing here outside the African continent (Fagundes 68-78).

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The book starts with the stunning statement – “ New Census Shows Hipics now Even with Blacks, the headline proclaimed. Documenting a profound shift in the racial and ethnic composition of American Society, the 2000 census of the United States showed that, as a result of the continuingimmigrationfrom Latin America during the 1990s the national Hipic population had grown by more than 60%. For the first time ever the country’s 35. 3 million Hipic residents slightly exceeded the black population of 34. million” (Andrews 3). The Blacks and Hipics are not always distinct groups as is generally thought of. In Latin America blacks comprise a quarter of the population. The “ heart of the New World African Diaspora” (Andrews 3) lies not in the north of the border in USA but in South America. During the slave period ten times more Africans came to Spanish and Portuguese America than to USA. By the close of 1900 the former outnumbered the latter by 3: 1 – 22% of the population in Latin America while it was 12% in USA.

With immigration, commerce and tourism ties are getting stronger and hence it is necessary to sketch a history of the Latin American African Diaspora as distinct from USA African Diaspora. In this book such an attempt has been made. The term Afro-Latin-American made its debut sometime during the 70s. Hitherto it was Afro-Venezuelans, Afro-Cubans etc. Latin America is the cluster of American countries under the rule of Spain or Portugal from 1500 to 1800 (Madrigal 99-108). There are many other people living in this region – not only those who have come from Africa; there are Indians, Whites, Asians etc.

But whether as a minority or majority the Black presence is strong in the field of agriculture and slavery. Blackness has become synonymous with a lower social status leading to a popular mass culture. The proportion of Blacks fell because of neglect disease and death. Also there was more mobility and mixing in the south unlike the rigidity of the north. Black tended to become whiter with material success; the Black became the Pardo or Mulatto. The idea was to bar them from European ancestry privileges (Aguiar 299-308). The book is not about the race as defined scientifically but as used socially.

It looks at the issue from two angles - it delves on the multi racial society of Afro-Latin-America and also as the single largest group of Africans who had been uprooted from their original homeland. Whatever the shade of black the author uses the term to refer to that group whose African ancestry is known and recognized. The previous plantation regions of Latin America were shaped irrevocably " by the presence of Africans and their descendants" (Andrews 284). Hence to understand what it is like today one has to know about the people who carved it to be what it is now.

In reacting to the constraints of slavery on the one hand there were the obvious violent actions like running away, revolt, theft and attack while on the other there was a slower but more lasting response like negotiating with the masters, taking into hand speed of work, appealing to courts, forming families and keeping alive African practices (Aguiar 299). Runaway slaves formed communities, black militias and mutual aid societies were formed and the people expressed their feeling through formation of athletic, social and cultural clubs.

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Soon civic organizations, political parties and newspapers made their debut. It all rolled into the formation of civil rights movement. By the end of 1800 slavery had been abolished in Latin America (Halperin 489-495). Chapter one covers the first years of slavery while in chapters four and five the author tries to explain how the colored communities tried to whiten and blacken themselves in trying to find their identity that would be acceptable to their own community as well as to the Whites against the background of a growing mixed population. Here, there arose a problem.

In USA there was a clear cut line dividing the Blacks and Whites. But in Latin America the Afro-Latin people penetrated different layers of society and economy with politics having an influence. Many of the Blacks were free and could not be bracketed with the slaves. Europeans, Native Americans and people from the Asia added to the cocktail to make a mixing of blood rarely seen elsewhere. Thus the concept of race no longer remained a scientific issue but related to socio-economic factors (Bizumic 871-899). The biggest influence was felt in the sphere of culture - in dancing, music and religion.

Andrew goes into detail saying how initially they were termed as barbaric by the Europeans and then in the 20th century there began a change of attitude when the idea of nationhood took roots. Capoeira, Candomble and Carnaval are three of the significant cultural expressions that have their roots in the tradition of Africa. There is an underlying belief that Africa is very much throbbing and alive in these modern cultural renditions. Ironically the Europeans have also taken these on and absorbed them in their psyche. The book focuses on these aspects and at the end the reader is left with a feeling that more could have been said.

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Instead of devoting separate chapters on these themes he has scattered these all through the book. He has focused more on economics and politics. After reading the book there is the feeling that the problems of race are going to be more complex in Latin America than what is going on in USA (Shrestha 113-139). In this sense this book is a good introduction to understand the present to gauge the future. The book however would be rather heavy for the casual reader but it is great for serious thinkers and scholars. The author details the relationship and effect of the coming of the people of Africa to Latin America.

There are detailed notes and bibliography to guide the students. It is ideal for all interested in the race factor and the trans-Atlantic slave trade that happened in this part of the world as distinct from USA. Slavery is stressed in USA but the fact is that it existed much earlier in places like Brazil. The book reveals new facts that have so far remained unknown. It will enlighten the reader about the birth of the countries of the western world and the large part the people of African descent had played for it to become what we see today.

This book introduces the reader to the history of the Blacks connected with Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela, Puerto Rica etc. and supports the thesis that the influence of blacks in the South America is far more greater than that of mainland United States. Works cited Aguiar, Gilberto. Effects of demographic and ethnohistorical factors on average heterozygosities of South Amerindians. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 88. 3, (2000): 299-308. Andrews, George Reid. *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000*. NY: Oxford

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