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JOURNAL OF EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY  
XX (2025) 1–3

JOURNAL  
OF EARLY  
AMERICAN  
HISTORY  
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## *Book Review*



Matteo Lazzari, *I Colori della Malafede: Afromessicani, Inquisizione e Razza in Nuova Spagna (1570–1650)*, Roma: Viella, 2023, 227pp. Price: 25,00 €

The presence of enslaved Africans and people of African descent in the Americas during the colonial period remains one of the most compelling and debated issues in contemporary historiography. Employing various historiographical approaches and methodologies, historians are uncovering key aspects that contribute to a deeper understanding of the origins of racism and social inequalities in the Atlantic world. In his study of Colonial Mexico from the 16th to the mid-17th centuries, Matteo Lazzari offers fresh insights adopting an interdisciplinary approach to conceptualize the evolving patterns of racial relations from the onset of Spanish colonization, as well as the transposition and adaptation of Iberian dynamics to the New World.

Divided into two parts and five chapters, Lazzari begins his book with a thorough analysis of the formation of the colonial society in New Spain, pinpointing the conflicting interactions between the different social groups and highlighting the distinct denominations used for each, emphasizing how these denominations reflected ongoing social practices that resulted in a high degree of miscegenation from its inception. In the second chapter, the author shifts his focus to the statutes of purity of blood in Iberia from the Late Middle Ages up to its adjustment to New Spain's colonial society, scrutinizing its application to people of Jewish and Muslim origins and then to enslaved Africans and their descendants in the colonial world. The most important contribution of this chapter to the whole book is that Lazzari avoids adopting an essentialist definition of race or defining a precise moment when phenotypical traits became decisive for social and racial dynamics in the Iberian world, specifically in colonial Mexico.

In chapter three, Lazzari examines the establishment of the Inquisition in New Spain, highlighting the challenges the Tribunal faced due to the vast geographical expanse of its jurisdiction. Engaging in a rich historiographical

discussion—which, as will be noted later, could benefit from further elaboration without diminishing the author's contributions—Lazzari also outlines his methodological approach for the subsequent chapters and discusses the types of sources used in his investigation. By integrating insights from historical anthropology and microhistory, he aims to analyze the process of racialization of individuals of African origin in the 16th and 17th centuries, drawing upon inquisitorial records as his primary source material.

Chapters four and five are devoted to analyzing case studies that span the period under examination by the author. The primary achievement of these chapters lies in demonstrating how, through the adopted methodology and avoiding the common pitfall encountered by many historians who use the microhistorical approach, the detailed narrative of the daily lives and setbacks faced by individuals of African origin in colonial Mexico helps to illuminate the ongoing process of racialization. By weaving together diverse situations that were part of this larger process and combining the specificities and complexities of the sources with a thorough conceptual analysis, Lazzari's work distinguishes itself through its methodological rigor. It is essential to emphasize that the study of marginalized individuals and groups must not exclude a comprehensive conceptual framework nor overlook the importance of social structures and social change.

Matteo Lazzari's book, thus, makes an outstanding contribution to the historiography of race and racism in the colonial Iberian world. However, in some parts, it could benefit from greater contextualization. One such aspect is a broader outlook for the analysis of the role played by the Portuguese in New Spain, given their importance for the slave trade and racial relations in the Spanish empire in the period covered by the book, as well as the persecution from the Spanish American tribunals suffered by individuals from Portuguese origins. For instance, Nathan Wachtel's *La Foi du Souvenir* (2001) and Daviken Studinicki-Gizbert's *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea* (2007) would provide valuable context for some of the important case studies Lazzari presents in his final two chapters, as well as for the historiographical discussions in chapter three.

Moreover, a broader Iberian framework, specifically the inclusion of scholarship on the Portuguese world, could enhance the analysis of practices that have been widespread in Portugal since the late 15th century, with sources extending beyond inquisitorial records. For instance, in chapter four, Lazzari examines the mocking tone of a priest in Querétaro toward a woman of African descent following her confession. As shown by A. C. De C. M. Saunders in *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal* (1982) and Diogo Ramada Curto in *Imperial Culture and Colonial Projects* (2020), many freed

Blacks in Portugal spoke a form of Portuguese influenced by African languages, with a mixed sonority and vocabulary. The response to this linguistic blending in Portugal mirrored the reaction of the men described by Lazzari in New Spain during the second decade of the 17th century. Integrating these works could help to situate the linguistic and social dynamics Lazzari explores in a far-reaching perspective.

Considering all aspects, *I Colori della Malafede* is a significant contribution to the historiography of race and racism in the Colonial Iberian world, particularly in the case of Mexico. The gaps mentioned above do not undermine the central argument of Lazzari's work, and his methodological approach deserves further recognition for successfully incorporating the description of social structures within a microscale analysis. When placed in context with recent scholarship, Matteo Lazzari's work is poised to become, in the coming years, one of the key references for the study of race and racism during the first centuries of Spanish colonization in Mexico.

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NO QUERIES