



A review of *Comparative Perspectives on Afro-Latin America* by Kwame Dixon and John Burdick (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012. 382 pp., ISBN 978-0-8130-3756-1) reviewed by Eric R. Jackson (Book Review Editor, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*; jacksoner@nku.edu) Associate Professor, Department of History and Geography; Director – Black Studies Program; Northern Kentucky University.

The United States immigration system is outdated and in many ways almost completely broken. Thousands of employers have manipulated the system to hire thousands of undocumented workers from Latin America, particularly those of African descent. It is estimated that about eleven million illegal immigrants now call the United States their home. Also important to this situation is the various voices that emerged during and soon after the 2001 “World Conference Against Racism” that was held in Durban, South Africa that referenced the immigration problem of the United States. Thus, the one million dollar question is what can be done to resolve this dilemma in a fair and comprehensive fashion? One way to tactical this problem is to examine and understand the cultural heritage and countless histories of some of the major groups of Latin American migrants who seek employment and a better life in the United States. The editors of this volume, Kwame Dixon and John Burdick, members of the African American Studies and Anthropology Departments at Syracuse University respectively, seek to perform this task in the book under review here.

In *Comparative Perspectives of Afro-Latin America* Dixon and Burdick offers a powerful and original collection of fifteen essays by various prominent scholars who explore the topics of Blackness and cultural differences, Black political mobilization, and various Latin American countries’ responses to Afro-Latin activism throughout Latin America. More importantly, however, the overall goal of the editors was to create a volume that will “provide a range of disciplinary perspectives, in-depth regional coverage, and cutting-edge analysis of Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean” (1). Also important was the editors’ quest to investigate “how the region’s Afro-descendants are reconfiguring notions of citizenship, territory, race, gender, belonging, and nation” (1).

The volume is divided into three thematic sections titled “Blackness and Cultural Differences,” “Afro Social Movements and Mobilization,” and “State Responses” respectively. Each section discusses some aspect of either the cultural heritage or the potent contemporary realities of the numerous Afro-Latin American socio-economic, political, societal, and ethnic challenges and complexities of this region of the Western Hemisphere that has received little attention from most scholars, political leaders, and community activists.

Also included in this volume is a masterful balance of gender-focused essays that broadens the book far beyond any of its competitors. Finally, this book contains several essays that examine a wide-ranging of geographical locations and Afro-Latin American experiences from at least nine different countries.

*Comparative Perspectives of Afro-Latin America*, in general, contains numerous profound and powerful essays that rest on the use of an abundance of personal interviews from members of a variety of Afro-Latin American communities that rarely have had a voice outside of their specific location. The use of this type of research methodology greatly enhances the creditability and authenticity of each essay. Also crucial is that the use of this methodology helps the authors greatly analyze the subjects of race, gender, ethnicity, political activism, and geographical location with great ease. For instance, in the essay titled “The Black Movement’s Foot Soldiers: Black Women and Neighborhood Struggles for Land Rights in Brazil,” author Keisha-Klan Y. Perry provides the reader with a gender analysis of the history of urban displacement as she discusses the experiences of an Afro-Brazilian female civil rights activists who fought against various state and private interests entities that sought to forcefully remove her and her supporters from their homes (219). Furthermore, Perry’s article shows “the pervasiveness of the violence expulsion of black families from land and the resulting displacement they experience as well as the various methods black women use[d] to resist these events” (223).

Echoing Perry perspective, but in a different fashion, is Judith Morrison in her article titled “Social Movements in Latin America: The Power of Regional and National Networks” (243). In general, Morrison’s illustrates the “unique position of black women at the intersection of race and gender has given black women leaders the unique ability to negotiate space within both the black movement and the labor movement” in Latin America (250).

In Ernesto Sagas’ “Black but not Haitian: Color, Class, and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic,” Juliet Hooker’s “Negotiating Blackness within the Multicultural State: Creole Politics and Identity in Nicaragua, and Patricia de Santana Pinho’s “Nurturing Bantu Africanness in Bahia” the three authors turn to an examination of the complexities of race and ethnicity that exists throughout Latin America, especially in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Brazil. While Sagas states that “in spite of the major strides Dominicans have made toward a more egalitarian, racially inclusive society, major problems persist . . . [because] light-skinned Dominicans” still are the privileged class within the society” (324), Hooker contends that “while Creoles are the group most closely associated with African descent in Nicaragua, this is not the only or even the dominant way they have understood and described their own identity” (271) compared to Pinho, who claims that the Bantu cultural people in Brazil currently have reinvented themselves so that they can become an empowered “segment of the Afro-Brazilian population” (22). The authors of these three essays also places their studies within the larger political and legislative context of a particular Latin American nation, which gives the reader more valuable information on the history of a specific nation.

This volume also contains several chapters that provide unique insight into the historical and contemporary significance of artistic representation in Latin America, especially in countries such as Brazil, Cuba, Columbia, and Peru. For example, while Heidi Carolyn Feldman's "Strategic of the Black Pacific: Music and Diasporic Identity in Peru" (42) discusses the Afro-Peruvian identity formation of the Pacific coast compared to the Black identity formation that is often seen on the Atlantic coast of Central and South America, Sujatha Fernandes' "Maleandro Negro: Gangsta Rap and the Politics of Exclusion in Venezuela" explores the use of this genre of rap music to express the extent of the exclusion of the Black experience in the political, economic, and social pillars of Venezuela (72) Also crucial in the area are Angela N. Castaneda's "Performing the African Diaspora in Mexico" (93) and Elizabeth Moran's "Visions of a Nineteenth-Century Cuba: Images of Blacks in the Work of Victor Patricio de Landaluze" (114). Both of these essays call for a more realistic portrayal of women of color in the artistic world throughout Latin America.

In sum, *Comparative Perspectives on Afro-Latin America* sheds much needed light on a variety of subjects on the experiences of persons of color who live in both Central and South America that has received only scant treatment by most scholars. This carefully organized and cutting edge piece of scholarship is sure to become a standard reference for those individuals who are greatly interested in the cultural heritage and contemporary experiences of Afro-Latin Americans outside and inside the United States. The only slight shortcomings are the image used as the cover of the volume, which depicts a hyper-sexual woman with a bandana on her head, probably need to be changed for historical and cultural reasons, and the lack of a coherent essay on the education experience of Afro-Latin Americans in any of the countries that are examined in this volume. Despite these weaknesses, overall this volume provides much needed research and insight into the development of the Afro-Latin American human rights movement.