

The Conceptualization
of Race
in Colonial
Puerto Rico,
1800–1850



KATHRYN R. DUNGY

With the growing interest in the history of peoples of African descent in the Americas, narratives addressing regions outside of the United States are becoming increasingly popular. *The Conceptualization of Race in Colonial Puerto Rico, 1800-1850* illuminates the role people of African descent played in the building of a Spanish Caribbean society during the social upheaval of the early nineteenth century. This examination of cultural tensions created by changing regional and national definitions and the fluidity of identity within these structures will appeal to those interested in colonial race issues, Africans in the Americas, and gender and race stratification. Kathryn R. Dungy uses gender, color, and class differences as lenses to understand a colonial society that was regulated by social relationships within Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the Americas. By examining slave and free status, color, gender, work, and immigration, she endeavors to stimulate current debate on issues of gender, color, nation, and empire, utilizing a unique population and culture in the Black Atlantic.

KATHRYN R. DUNGY is Assistant Professor of Caribbean and Latin American History at Saint Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont.



The Conceptualization of Race
in Colonial Puerto Rico,
1800–1850



Rochelle Brock and Richard Gregory Johnson III
Executive Editors

Vol. 47

The Black Studies and Critical Thinking series
is part of the Peter Lang Education list.
Every volume is peer reviewed and meets
the highest quality standards for content and production.



PETER LANG
New York • Bern • Frankfurt • Berlin
Brussels • Vienna • Oxford • Warsaw

KATHRYN R. DUNGY

*The Conceptualization of Race
in Colonial Puerto Rico,
1800–1850*



PETER LANG

New York • Bern • Frankfurt • Berlin
Brussels • Vienna • Oxford • Warsaw

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dungy, Kathryn.

The conceptualization of race in colonial Puerto Rico, 1800–1850 /
Kathryn R. Dungy.

pages cm. — (Black studies and critical thinking; volume 47)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Puerto Rico—Race relations—History—19th century.
2. Puerto Rico—Social conditions—19th century.
3. Social change—Puerto Rico—History—19th century.
4. Puerto Rico—Population—History—19th century. I. Title.

F1983.A1D86 305.80097295—dc23 2014016134

ISBN 978-1-4331-2043-5 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4331-2042-8 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-4539-1363-5 (e-book)

ISSN 1947-5985

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the “Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data are available
on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

Cover image: *El Velorio* by Francisco Oller

© 2015 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York
29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006
www.peterlang.com

All rights reserved.

Reprint or reproduction, even partially, in all forms such as microfilm,
xerography, microfiche, microcard, and offset strictly prohibited.

Table of Contents

<i>Preface: Fusing the Races</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
Map of the Atlantic World	xvii
Chapter One	
“People of Different Shades”: An Examination of the Nineteenth-Century Population of Puerto Rico	1
Chapter Two	
A Changing World: The Atlantic World through the Eyes of Free People of Color	13
Chapter Three	
Living in Color: Native and Immigrant Free People of Color in Their Communities	35
Chapter Four	
Til Death Do Us Part: Engagement, Elopement, Marriage, and Widowhood	67

Chapter Five

A Fusion of the Races:

Free People of Color and the Growth of Puerto Rican Society	85
---	----

Appendix

Maps

Caribbean Region	97
Puerto Rico	98

Tables

Populations of Free People of Color, Whites, and Slaves In the Caribbean at the End of the Eighteenth Century	99
Racial Proportions in Puerto Rico, 1779 to 1830	100
Free People of Color as a Percentage of the Total Population of the Country	101

<i>Glossary</i>	103
-----------------	-----

<i>Further Reading</i>	107
------------------------	-----

<i>Bibliography</i>	117
---------------------	-----

<i>Index</i>	127
--------------	-----

Preface: Fusing the Races

I began my studies of slave societies and free people of color in the Caribbean in an effort to better understand my own family history. My paternal ancestors were, variously, Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans, all of whom converged on Virginia shores in the late 1600s. My maternal ancestors, again a mixture of European, African and Native American peoples, forged a life of free status for themselves in the slave states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas. Both families share a history of mixed marriages, indentured servitude, migration, and generally working against the space that people of color were supposed to occupy, both during slavery and in its aftermath. I was looking for links to my seemingly unusual heritage of free people of color struggling against the historical tide. Was there a place where a free person of color could own property, land, and/or slaves, and not be an anomaly? Was there somewhere free people of color could live in an integrated community as social equals?

I never found a utopia. In fact, I found places where my relatives, had they ended up there, might actually have found a crueler trajectory in the social and cultural sphere. However, one location I found

piqued my interest. Puerto Rico glimmered in the Caribbean Sea with an unusual history surrounding its free people of color. In fact, there was a point in the nineteenth century when the island's population of free people of color actually outnumbered both the European *and* slave populations. What did this mean for civil rights? Economic possibilities? Social interactions? Curiosity grabbed me and I was hooked.

I began to consider the issue of people of African descent in the Americas, the connections between colonial Latin American historiography and the scholarship on the Atlantic World, finding both continuities as well as disjunctures between the two fields of study. The current research on free people of color in the colonial Atlantic World diaspora tends to focus on the United States, the British and French Caribbean, Cuba, and Brazil. Analysis of other regions such as Puerto Rico, Central America, and the Andes offers historical examples of community formation that incorporated legal strategies in secular and ecclesiastical institutions, as well as articulations of multiple African identities. Therefore, it is critically important to expand the framework of the Atlantic World diaspora that has come to shape so much of the recent scholarship on Africans in the Americas.

The rise of Atlantic World history yields a broad geographic scope that challenges concepts of regionality and nationality, focuses on the movement of people and commodities around the Atlantic basin, and brings greater attention to the centrality of the effects of slavery in the culture and the historiography. The field has generated a good deal of scholarship. One of the benefactors of this new attentiveness has been the Caribbean basin, with its myriad nationalities and cultures.

Scholars continue to have difficulty recognizing the links between islands, colonial powers, and nationalities beyond our familiar regionalization of the British Caribbean, the Spanish Caribbean, the French Caribbean, and so on. However, the Caribbean region is bound by a shared history, common characteristics, and complex cultural elements. The island societies were the center of the Atlantic economy of the European powers. This work attempts to expand the regionality and demonstrate how Puerto Rico is a microcosm of the Caribbean at large.

Our knowledge of free people of color, as well as the geographic origin and ethnicity of slaves introduced into peripheral areas of the Americas, such as the former Spanish colony of Puerto Rico, is limited. Information contained in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century census records and in baptismal, marriage, and death registers enables us to locate and identify free people of color in a number of island communities. Drawing upon data culled from archival registers, this study seeks to broaden our understanding of the free people of color in Puerto Rico between the years of 1790 and 1850.

The Conceptualization of Race in Colonial Puerto Rico shows a different perspective as it looks outside of the large municipality of San Juan (the seat of government and the largest city on the island) to view smaller communities on other parts of the island. The perspective on interactions between white and black, free and enslaved, is altered when viewed beyond the cramped quarters of the walled capital, out among the small towns and villages.

This work looks at the population of free people of color in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico by analyzing the ways in which free people of color made choices regarding work, marriage, and the prevailing legal system to construct an island community. This study provides a wider profile of the country's class and social structure, while linking the broader historiography of Atlantic World and Latin American social history and various studies of Puerto Rican urban and rural centers.

The Conceptualization of Race in Colonial Puerto Rico is comprised of five chapters. Chapter one introduces the island and the people to the reader, explains terminology, and begins to focus the lens on the nineteenth century. It illuminates the unique demographics that set this island nation apart from other plantation economies in the Atlantic World.

Chapter two is an examination of the evolving population and politics of early nineteenth-century Puerto Rico within a wider Caribbean and Atlantic context. It considers how cultures in the Caribbean region evolved in different times and places and unfolded in disparate ways. These diverse societies varied in their demographic profiles, the products they exported, their political institutions and practices, and their

interactions with the metropole, among other characteristics. The complex interactions found in these disparate locales shaped the societies in which free people of color found themselves living. The chapter also illustrates how cultural influences flowed across Europe and Africa to the Caribbean colonies and affected their political, economic, and cultural growth.

Chapter three utilizes case studies to demonstrate how the construction of identity in Puerto Rico intersects with ongoing debates in African diasporic scholarship regarding the models of continuity and creolization in the Americas. There was considerable diversity in the geographic origins and professions of immigrant free people of color and their counterparts on the island. Few slaves were brought in to Puerto Rico from Africa or from elsewhere in the Americas, and the supply of these was erratic and limited. For the most part, outside of San Juan, there were no endogamous living patterns or professions for immigrant or native free people of color. Commonalities with their white counterparts facilitated integration and promoted social cohesion among the newly arrived free people of color, as well as those already present in the population. It also facilitated their integration into what was emerging as a unified Afro–Puerto Rican community, as well as into the Puerto Rican community at large.

Chapter four explores how free people of color claimed categories of inclusion based on legal and cultural concepts of marriage. By delineating how free people of color negotiated courtship, marriage, and widowhood, one can witness burgeoning group self-awareness. Parental opposition to marriage uncovered conflict over allegedly unequal partnerships within the seemingly endogamous community of free people of color. They utilized parental and state control of sexuality and marriage to safeguard social hierarchy both within their community and on the island at large, revealing heterogeneity previously unaccounted for in Puerto Rico.

Chapter five shows how free people employed their rights as citizens of both Puerto Rico and the Spanish Empire to present themselves as civilized subjects and loyal Spaniards. The growing sense of class

and nationality on the island fostered acceptance for free people of color and recognized them as integral members of the society.

The nuances found in Puerto Rico's community of free people of color reflect the development of a racial national consciousness toward an ideology of racial mixture. The white and free people of color on this "island of perfect tranquility" were truly striving to "work together, without regard to color, only to education and social position."¹ The island's unusual demographics allowed its inhabitants the opportunity to approach race relations differently. Free people of color and whites found a way to co-exist without the degree of fear or antagonism found in other plantation societies.

The early nineteenth century saw many changes both in the region and on the island, but the white and free colored inhabitants of Puerto Rico worked steadily toward a previously unrealized compatibility. The manner by which free people of color fit into Puerto Rican society validates the notion of a country striving steadily toward a goal of a "fusion of the races."

Notes

1. (AHN Ultramar 5103, exp. 64, 3 January 1874 at CIH, UPR, roll 164 n.d.).

Acknowledgments

I have accumulated many debts in researching and writing this book about free people of color in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico. They are debts I can never discharge, but here I have the opportunity to acknowledge those who have been so generous in their support of me and of my work.

To my Spelman family who believed from the beginning that I had potential in the historical field. That initial encouragement came from professors Dalila de Sousa Sheppard, Margery Ganz, Jim Gillam, and Michael Gomez. Further molding occurred at Duke University under the guidance of a myriad of knowledgeable and talented people. Thanks to professors Jan Ewald, Ray Gavins, Nancy Hewitt, John Hope Franklin, Karla Holloway, Sydney Nathans, Richard Powell, Anne Firor Scott, John TePaske, Peter Wood, and Dean Jackie Looney. And I would surely have lost my sanity without the encouragement from the wonderful, nurturing cohorts in the Duke Graduate Studies program: Herman Bennett, Leslie Brown, Vincent Brown, Alex Byrd, Rod Clare, Charles McKinney, Jennifer Morgan, Celia Naylor, Peter (Quaku) Pletcher, Stephanie Smallwood, Nikki Taylor, Annie Valk, and others.

As a dissertation in progress and later as a book manuscript, this project benefited from fellowship assistance that allowed me to concentrate on research and writing. I thank the generous support from the Graduate School at Duke University, the Ford Foundation, the New England Board of Higher Education Dissertation Scholars-in-Residence Program at the University of Vermont, the Women's Studies Travel grant at the University of Vermont, the Provost's Faculty Development Fund at New College of Florida, and the Faculty Development Fund at Saint Michael's College.

I am indebted to the librarians and archivists at all the repositories listed in my bibliography, and am especially grateful to the staff at the Archivo General de Indies, Sevilla, Spain; the Archivo General de Puerto Rico; the Centro de Investigaciones Históricas at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras; Biblioteca Lázaro, Colección Puertorriqueña, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras; and Durick Library at Saint Michael's College.

The three maps were drawn by the Cartographic Laboratory, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin.

I finished the manuscript as a member of the department of history at Saint Michael's College. George Dameron, Susan Ouellette, Jen Purcell, Doug Slaybaugh, and Ke-Wen Wang gave moral support and generous feedback during the long process. Others in the Saint Michael's community who deserve special recognition are students in my upper-level seminars who read and critiqued chapter drafts, Traci Griffith, Denise Groll, Lorrie Smith, Karen Talentino, Jeff Trumbower, and Jane Veins. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and I thank the community for their support.

Special recognition goes to my student helper, Monica McClure, and my daughter, Sarah Voigt, who saved me an inordinate amount of time with their data and bibliographic work. Soror Pam White was an amazing copyeditor. Thank you for the enormous amount of time and energy you put into reading and editing. You've truly got my back. And a huge thanks to Emily Magowan who read drafts and offered much needed support.