



Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770

By James H. Sweet

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Exploring the cultural lives of African slaves in the early colonial Portuguese world, with an emphasis on the more than one million Central Africans who survived the journey to Brazil, James Sweet lifts a curtain on their lives as Africans rather than as incipient Brazilians. Focusing first on the cultures of Central Africa from which the slaves came--Ndembu, Imbangala, Kongo, and others--Sweet identifies specific cultural rites and beliefs that survived their transplantation to the African-Portuguese diaspora, arguing that they did not give way to immediate creolization in the New World but remained distinctly African for some time.

Slaves transferred many cultural practices from their homelands to Brazil, including kinship structures, divination rituals, judicial ordeals, ritual burials, dietary restrictions, and secret societies. Sweet demonstrates that the structures of many of these practices remained constant during this early period, although the meanings of the rituals were often transformed as slaves coped with their new environment and status. Religious rituals in particular became potent forms of protest against the institution of slavery and its hardships. In addition, Sweet examines how certain African beliefs and customs challenged and ultimately influenced Brazilian Catholicism.

Sweet's analysis sheds new light on African culture in Brazil's slave society while also enriching our understanding of the complex process of creolization and cultural survival.

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Editorial Review

Review

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"A fascinating book . . . of considerable importance. It not only contributes to a continuing debate about the nature of slavery, but is a powerful example of Atlantic history as it shows that the societies on both sides of the South Atlantic lived in a kind of spiritual intimacy that was not severed by the infamous middle passage."
-- "History"

"A fascinating collection of evidence."

-- "The Americas"

Sweet has mined an incredibly rich source of information in the Inquisition archives and produced an engaging study of the inner lives of Africans suffering under slavery in Brazil. His book will be a landmark in bringing Africa into the mix in Brazilian history.(John Thornton, Millersville University, author of "Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800".)

Review

Given its scope, conceptual claims, and the depth of archival research, this project warrants the broadest conceivable audience. . . . After reading this richly layered study, the critical importance of Central Africans in Latin America and the African diaspora will be more clear.--*American Historical Review*

Among the best of the recent works on Africans in the Atlantic.--*International Journal of African Historical Studies*

Sweet has uncovered rich gems from the Inquisition records of the Luso-Atlantic world that are essential to historical reconstructions of Central African religious traditions in Brazil before 1770. He also creates vivid portraits of individual Africans living in Angola, Portugal, and Brazil. This important book includes outstanding narratives of slave religious practices in colonial Brazil that I have seen nowhere else. They are especially significant because they enable historians to document continuities over time with contemporary Afro-Brazilian religions. Highly recommended to all students of the African diaspora.--Mary Karasch, Oakland University

A fascinating book . . . of considerable importance. It not only contributes to a continuing debate about the nature of slavery, but is a powerful example of Atlantic history as it shows that the societies on both sides of the South Atlantic lived in a kind of spiritual intimacy that was not severed by the infamous middle passage.-

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Sweet has mined an incredibly rich source of information in the Inquisition archives and produced an engaging study of the inner lives of Africans suffering under slavery in Brazil. His book will be a landmark in bringing Africa into the mix in Brazilian history.--John Thornton, Millersville University

[Sweet] examines his material from an original point of view--perceptive, sensitive, and supported by a solid bibliographic discussion. The result is a fine book.--*African Studies Review*

A fascinating collection of evidence.--*The Americas*

About the Author

James H. Sweet is assistant professor of history at the University of Wisconsin.

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