



Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena de Indias

Margaret M. Olsen

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Jesuit priest Alonso de Sandoval's important 1627 missionary history, the only existing published document that deals with Africans in the Americas at such an early date, describes a means to salvation for Jesuits and Africans alike in the New World. Margaret Olsen's fascinating examination of the treatise creates a vivid picture of the Jesuit "slaves of Christ" as well as the Christianization of Africans brought to Cartagena de Indias, the primary port of entry of slaves bound for the colonies at the time.

Sandoval, who was critical of the slave trade in early Spanish America, was interested in African welfare and hoped to incorporate Africans as full participants in the Catholic Church. Olsen places Sandoval's work in a context of Jesuit self-promotion in the New World. She discusses his portrayal of Africanness and blackness in geographical, philosophical, and doctrinal terms and shows him to be a social innovator. While arguing for the power and the glory of the Jesuit mission, Sandoval redefined blackness, describing it as a source of redemption, and challenged the dominant attitudes that relegated Afro-Latin Americans to a position of inferiority and barbarism.

Sandoval's text, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute*, engages classical as well as modern writing regarding evangelization, the institution of slavery, and the burgeoning slave trade of the 17th century. It belongs to a tradition of innovative missionary endeavors by the members of his order.

In one of the most creative aspects of Olsen's analysis, she shows how Sandoval's writing allows African voices to speak through the text--expressing their own understanding of Christianity and colonization--and to resist classification even by Sandoval himself. As such, her treatment of the text provides a theoretical basis for understanding the speech of marginalized peoples embedded in historiographic sources.

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