

9-1-1992

Price, Richard and Sally Price, eds., Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society

Jerry Gurule

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr>

Recommended Citation

Gurule, Jerry. "Price, Richard and Sally Price, eds., Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 1, 1 (1992): 121. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol1/iss1/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colonial Latin American Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

successful. Moreover, what sets Oviedo apart from all those who had gone before was his point of view. For Oviedo, the New World was only new in the sense that Europeans had recently learned of its existence. It was neither better nor worse than the Old World; rather it was different.

General readers may find Gerbi's exhaustive annotation daunting. Those unfamiliar with the texts under discussion may find themselves seeking out the original. Still, this volume belongs on the shelf of all serious Americanists.

Rick Hendricks
Vargas Project
University of New Mexico

Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society. Edited by Richard Price and Sally Price. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. lxxv + 350 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, references. \$19.95 paper, \$60.00 cloth).

This eyewitness account of an eighteenth-century slave society in a Dutch colony was popularized with the publication of twenty editions based on the 1796 *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* by John Gabriel Stedman. The book was also published in several different languages, making it an important work in the anti-slavery body of literature. Although Joseph Johnson, the original publisher, agreed to publish Stedman's work, the author was unhappy with the final product. He angrily depicted the book as "mard" and "full of lies and nonsense."

Richard and Sally Price, in their 1988 critical edition, revealed to what extent the 1796 edition was compromised. Their edition, along with this 1992 abridgment of the same and with the help of Stedman's original handwritten manuscript, demonstrates the numerous discrepancies between what Stedman actually wrote and the 1796 version that appeared in print.

Stedman's candid observations of the brutality toward the slave population exhibited by plantation owners and others in the colony are appalling, but serve us well in revealing the desensitized and decadent society of the eighteenth-century Dutch colony. The enriched modern edition of 1988 and this 1992 abridged edition go further, with the help of Richard and Sally Price, in expressing the true sentiment of John Gabriel Stedman.

It is not known to what extent Johnson was privy to the more than editorial changes William Thomson, the original editor, made to Stedman's manuscript, but the significance of the changes cannot be denied. Although Thomson deleted references to nudity, sex, and Stedman's contempt of his

superior officer, his real impact was in hiding Stedman's views on racial equality, the institution of slavery, and the fair treatment of slaves.

Stedman was also a keen observer when it came to his descriptions of flora and fauna. His drawings, when rendered well by the engravers, are as extraordinary today as they were in 1796. His simple and straightforward style of writing gave a power to the text that came from eyes opening wide each day to something astonishingly new.

This abridged edition includes about half of Stedman's original text and over a third of the original plates. The editors have tried to keep the overall societal observations intact, yet they delete dubious ethnological material, some flora and fauna descriptions, and some poetry written by Stedman himself. The text itself is made more readable by moderate editorial changes in spelling, punctuation, and word order. In the introduction to the book, Richard and Sally Price offer for scrutiny an example of the types of changes they made. Without a doubt it would have been of the type Stedman envisioned. This volume is a well-accomplished abridgment of the editors' own 1988 critical edition. Moreover, they have skillfully preserved John Gabriel Stedman's original comments and observations, which were censored and changed in the 1796 edition. The volume is insightful and includes extensive explanatory notes together with a list of important reference works cited in the text. This is a book for the shelf of the serious researcher and avid reader alike.

Jerry Gurulé
Spanish Colonial Research Center
University of New Mexico

The "Diario" of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492-1493. Abstracted by Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas. Edited and trans. by Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. The American Exploration and Travel Series. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. xii + 491 pp. Illustration, bibliography, index, concordance. \$24.95 cloth.)

Upon returning to Spain from his first voyage to the Western hemisphere in March 1493, Admiral of the Ocean Sea Cristóbal Colón, known to English speakers everywhere as Christopher Columbus, presented to his patrons, the Spanish monarchs, a journal of his historic trip which he began when he left the port of Palos the previous August. By the middle of the sixteenth century the journal and a lone copy which Queen Isabel ordered presented to the Admiral disappeared, and remain lost to this day, but not before the Dominican friar and chronicler Bartolomé de las Casas transcribed