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Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803. By Kimberly S. Hanger. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997. xiii + 248 pp. Illustrations, charts, tables, appendix, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)

Kimberly S. Hanger's *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places* is a multidimensional study of *libres* ("free blacks") in New Orleans during three-and-a-half decades of Spanish rule. *Libres* were not slaves but neither were they fully free because, due to their non-white status, they were restricted by both laws and customs aimed at keeping them in the lowest echelons of society. Female *libres*, in particular, fought for their identity as well as their rights in a patriarchal society that denigrated them for both their color and their gender, using the former to deny them the protections generally afforded "the weaker sex." Using documentary evidence, Hanger demonstrates that because of opportunities available to slaves and *libres* under Spanish rule—opportunities that were not available under the earlier French or later United States rule—the proportion of *libres* in New Orleans rose from 7.1 percent of the overall population to 33.5 percent (p. 12), creating a "critical mass" (p. 1) that allowed them to develop a rising sense of group consciousness and cohesiveness.

Delving deeply into the era's birth, baptismal, marriage, and death records (which were categorized as either "Black Records" or "White Records," despite the mixtures between the two "races"), as well as into military files, records of business transactions, censuses, wills, correspondence, travel accounts, and a wide variety of civil, ecclesiastical, and military court cases, Hanger answers the following questions: How and why did most *libres* gain their freedom? Once free, where and how did they live? Who did they associate with, and why? How did they accumulate property (including slaves) and what did they do with it? What other options did they seize upon to improve their social and/or economic status? How did military service, as one of those options, both help them and hinder them from achieving their goals?

Hanger presents hundreds of descriptions of individuals contesting manumissions, property sales and rentals, prenuptial and marriage contracts, apprenticeship and partnership agreements, and wills. At times, the reader becomes lost in a whirlwind of names, dates and incidents as Hanger relates the colorful, often intimate, details of the closely intertwined lives of New Orleans' slaves, slave owners, and *libres*. The chapters about the militia officers are the best in the book, for they are projected upon the focused background of Pedro Bailey's trials, a successful *libre* businessman and militia officer accused of treason—he admired the French revolutionaries who promoted equality for all men, regardless of color.

Throughout the book, Hanger intersperses individual cases with

general analyses and tables of statistical trends. In the end, the mounds of documentary evidence presented convince the reader that Hanger is right. Exercising legal, religious, economic, military and cultural options, many of which were unique to the Spanish period, not only did the *libre* population of New Orleans grow exponentially between 1769 and 1803, but *libres* were also able to define and to improve their socio-economic status in this period. Many did not opt to "pass as white." Instead, they manipulated fluid definitions of race and class to create a new position for themselves and their progeny, a position that they would solidify during the U.S. antebellum period as a "third caste," the "Creoles of Color" (pp. 163-64). Hanger's study, however, goes far beyond explaining the origins of New Orleans' Creoles of Color. *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places* builds upon and amplifies studies of other marginalized groups, both in the past and in the present, strengthening our faith in human ingenuity and persistence and our hopes for a better future for all.

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