



Slave Families and the Hato Economy in Puerto Rico

David M. Stark

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“Deftly uses the available parish registers to document the stages of the coming of African men and women to Puerto Rico in the eighteenth century and reveals patterns of family formation and bonds of solidarity among the African slaves and with the rest of society.”—

Fernando Pico, author of *Puerto Rico Remembered*

“An exceptionally well researched, highly original, cogently argued and engagingly written work.”—Franklin W. Knight, coeditor of *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context*

“A welcome contribution to the history of eighteenth-century Puerto Rico and an important model for anyone using sacramental records to study slave life in colonial Latin America.”—David Wheat, Michigan State University

Scholarship on slavery in the Caribbean frequently emphasizes sugar and tobacco production, but this unique work illustrates the importance of the region’s hato economy—a combination of livestock ranching, foodstuff cultivation, and timber harvesting—on the living patterns among slave communities.

David Stark makes use of extensive Catholic parish records to provide a comprehensive examination of slavery in Puerto Rico and across the Spanish Caribbean. He reconstructs slave families to examine incidences of marriage, as well as birth and death rates. The result are never-before-analyzed details on how many enslaved Africans came to Puerto Rico, where they came from, and how their populations grew through natural increase.

Stark convincingly argues that when animal husbandry drove much of the island’s economy, slavery was less harsh than in better-known plantation regimes geared toward crop cultivation. Slaves in the hato economy experienced more favorable conditions for family formation, relatively relaxed work regimes, higher fertility rates, and lower mortality rates.

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