Fracchia, Carmen. 'Black but Human': Slavery and Visual Arts in Hapsburg Spain, 1480–1700

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In *Black but Human*, Carmen Fracchia explores visual and material representations of Afro-Hispanics across imperial Spain from 1480 to the end of the Iberian Habsburg dynasty in 1700. Fracchia's book is the first monograph to analyze how discourses on slavery and race shaped visual regimes and artistic production that epitomized social and racial tensions in the Iberian society. She argues that visual representations of Afro-Hispanics codified their struggles and ambiguous experiences in the Spanish Empire, where Roman law declared slavery an unnatural state. The Christian notion of equality itself was opposed to the commercialization of human beings by royal and ecclesiastical authorities who commissioned much of the artwork analyzed, especially following the Council of Trent. Fracchia explores a wide range of material and cultural representations of slavery to resolve these contradictions, including painting, sculpture, songs, poems, and carols. Her multidisciplinary analysis offers a holistic history of Iberian Black literary, musical, and artistic expressions produced in the context of enslavement.

Fracchia's book is divided into six chapters that converge around the saying "Black but Human," an Afro-Hispanic oral proverb first recorded in Sebastián de Covarrubias's 1611 *Tesoro de la Lengua*. Fracchia employs this proverb "as a lens through which to explore the ways in which certain early modern visual representations of slavery both embody and reproduce hegemonic visions of subaltern groups" (1). The proverb emerged in early modern Black cultural expressions as a collective claim through which Black Africans defended their humanity and challenged normative social and political constructions. When visually represented, the "Black but Human" proverb provided "material for critical emancipatory practices in imperial Spain" (1).

Throughout the book, Fracchia dismantles the image of Black Africans as mere models and recipients of the dominant Iberian culture. She presents Afro-Iberians as cultural brokers and active participants in the creation of Iberian society. *Black but Human* interrogates the contradictory nature of slavery in the Iberian world, where legal regimes and ideology shaped a society in which Afro-Iberians were either integrated or marginalized depending on geopolitics. By highlighting the multivalent and ambiguous social position of Afro-Iberians in Imperial Spain, Fracchia's work contributes to the ongoing conversation on the pluralism of Black experiences in the Atlantic world.

Fracchia shows how Catholicism became an instrument for Afro-descendants to redefine their status in society, gain rights, and express their cultural identity. Her analysis of Black confraternities and the emergence of Black saints in the Iberian world demonstrates the post-Tridentine Church's need to receive the acceptance of a vast Black Afro-Iberian population. Expanded by the Council of Trent's decrees, confraternities flourished across the Iberian world following the model of the Sevillian confraternity of *Nuestra Señora de los Reyes*. Confraternities became an instrument for Afro-Hispanic parishioners to gain public respectability, assert their rights, and proclaim their sovereignty. For Fracchia, confraternities played a pivotal role in shaping Black Catholicism. The proverb "Black but Human" was articulated within these institutions through songs, carols, and Black sanctity that became a primary vehicle of resistance and cultural expression of the "Black nation." Through these acts of resistance, Black Africans crafted new understandings of Blackness itself and contested commonplace assumptions about Black skin color.

According to Fracchia, Iberia was the site of a distinct iconography of Blackness. This iconography was fundamentally crafted by Spanish artists whose vision of the African "Other" differed from the

experience and encounter of northern Europeans. Representations of Black Africans in Iberia were shaped by racial ideologies and the pivotal role that slavery and the commodification of African enslaved people played in Spanish society and imagination. Fracchia shows how slavery delayed the move from depicting a white King Balthazar to a Black magus in Spain, even though it had been common in northern Europe since the early fifteenth century. The eventual adoption of the Black magus coincided with Black confraternities' efforts to promote Balthazar's veneration, signaling how Black Iberians shaped devotional life.

In the fifth chapter, Fracchia analyzes the *Miracle of the Black Leg*. This miracle is based on the miraculous story of the Saints Cosmas and Damian recorded in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*. She demonstrates through her focus on this Christian tradition that distinct iconographies of enslaved Black Africans circulated throughout the Spanish Empire. When given material form, the miracle was refashioned by Iberian artist depictions, transformed from its typical iconography to an act of violence. The new morbid iconography portrayed a Black African man whose leg is amputated and transplanted onto a white person. Fracchia argues that this change in iconographic representation demonstrates a response to Spanish discrimination of Black Iberians. This torturous representation, she believes, encapsulated the violent nature of Iberian slavery. Fracchia is novel in her consideration of the profound impact of African slavery in Spain and the colonies on the Iberian visuals of this miracle following the passage of the New Laws (1542), which essentially limited the slave trade to African persons.

The book's most original contribution is its final chapter, in which Fracchia analyzes the emergence of the "emancipating Black subject" through a meticulous examination of Diego Velázquez's portrait of Juan de Pareja. Pareja was an enslaved Afro-Iberian in the service of Velázquez, who eventually became a renowned painter. Fracchia argues that Pareja's portrait "transcends the visual vocabulary available at the time" (161), as it depicts a humanized and virtuous slave. Unlike Afro-Iberian representations of the sixteenth century, Pareja emerges in this portrait as a "free subject even after his emancipation" (177) through representational conventions otherwise restricted to European aristocratic portraiture. For Fracchia, Pareja's portrayal embodies what she calls the "emancipatory subject," the self-construction of a free and dignified person who breaks with the objectification imposed by social norms and racial ideologies. In his examination of *The Calling of St. Matthew* (1661), Fracchia reveals how Pareja represented himself as a gentleman who embodied blood purity (*limpieza de sangre*) and *calidad* (status). Fracchia argues that Pareja placed himself behind St. Matthew, the apostle of Ethiopia, to visually attach himself to Christian Africa and claim his identity as an old Black Christian. She proposes that Pareja rendered his skin lighter in this self-portrait to convey his new status as a "subject of freedom" (184). Fracchia's analysis shows how people of African descent challenged normative perceptions based on skin color.

Fracchia's book distills a long and sophisticated knowledge of the intricate history of slavery and Blackness in Iberia. She convincingly contextualizes social, political, and economic events within Iberia in conversation with cultural expression, making her work appealing to many audiences. Significantly, Fracchia furthers the work of scholars who have begun to situate the Iberian Peninsula at the center of African diasporic studies. Historians of the Iberian world, art historians, scholars of Blackness, literature, music, and the history of ideas will find this book extremely useful. *Black but Human* is a welcome addition to the growing discussion on the prominent role of Afro-Iberians in early modern society and the Black intellectual history of the Atlantic.

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