Castleman, Bruce A. Building the King's Highway. Labor, Society, and Family on Mexico's Caminos Reales 1757–1804. University of Arizona Press, Tucson 2005. xii, 163 pp. $39.95; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859007032865

Despite its distinction as the wealthiest and most populated colony of the Spanish empire, Mexico remained poorly developed, suffering from inadequate infrastructure even as late as the end of the colonial period. For decades Mexico's mercantile elite complained about the poverty of the colony's system of transportation, especially the lack of an easily navigable road between Mexico City and the principle port of Veracruz. While construction occurred in fits and starts, colonial officials truly embraced the goal of constructing an improved road only in the final decade of the eighteenth century. By the end of Spanish rule, the road was still incomplete.

In this interesting study, Bruce Castleman examines the social and economic history of the construction of the Camino Real, the "King's Highway". The work is largely based on two types of rich archival materials which Castleman skillfully employs. In the first several chapters Castleman analyzes highly suggestive employment records which provide a window into the region's labor history. A later chapter profits from Castleman's statistical comparison of censuses taken for the city of Orizaba in the years 1777 and 1793. Along the way, the author makes many interesting arguments.

Following an introduction, Chapter 2 presents an overview of the politics surrounding the road's construction. Building of the highway between Mexico City and Veracruz actually entailed numerous individual localized projects which the viceregal government hoped would eventually connect to one another. Portions of the highway were especially important to certain social and economic sectors. Merchants of the Mexico City *consulado* had obvious interests in seeing the entire highway completed and played an active role in the rapid completion of the stretch from Mexico City to Toluca. Their counterparts in Veracruz pushed for the road to pass through Xalapa rather than the southern route through Orizaba favored by the Mexico City *consulado*. Even local groups took interest in the road; the largely indigenous population of Ameca petitioned the Viceroy to divert the Mexico City–Puebla leg through their village. For Castleman these regional concerns reflected "the continuing importance of local and regional markets" (p. 32). Chapter 1 also provides considerable details about how the colonial government financed construction. Efforts to build the highway were unsurprisingly hampered by financial obstacles. These were extraordinarily expensive projects and the tolls designated to cover costs were regularly inadequate.

In Chapters 3 and 4 Castleman examines in close detail the laborers who built the *camino real*. Obtaining a work force was generally difficult. In the early years of construction during the 1750s, the colonial government acquired workers through the *repartimiento*, a colonial system of *corvée* labor. Obtaining an adequate and dedicated workforce through the *repartimiento*, however, proved difficult, leading some officials to petition for its replacement. By the 1760s the road construction labor force was gradually shifting to volunteer laborers who were paid a daily wage. The payment of wages did not result in the emergence of a permanent labor force; workers typically signed up for a week or two before disappearing from the highway project. The willingness of crown officials to pay a wage, however, undoubtedly facilitated the acquisition of labor. *Repartimiento* draftees had been paid a meager 1 real per day. Free laborers commanded a wage of 2 reales per day, although this wage seems to have decreased in the later years. Castleman's claim that this represented "the transition from draft labor to free-wage labor in central Mexico"

(p. 125) seems overstated. For one, it was nothing new for Mexican seasonal laborers to be paid wages. Second, free and coerced labor regimes had often coexisted in Mexico. As Castleman acknowledges, wage labor worked more effectively as a system of recruitment because the employers paid road workers a more attractive wage. Even then employees remained temporary. Castleman rounds out his discussion of the road workers by examining the better-paid artisans.

In Chapter 5, the book's most impressive, Castleman compares two censuses conducted for Orizaba for the years 1777 and 1791. As Orizaba was one of the centers of labor recruitment for a principle stretch of the *camino real*, this analysis provides a glimpse into the social world of the road workers. While the colonial caste system theoretically froze at birth the *calidad,* the ethnic classification of individuals, Castleman finds considerable "whitening" of the Orizabeño population from the earlier to the later census. In part this social mobility merely reflected the use of different ethnic categories in the two censuses, but Castleman also attributes changes in *calidad* to the deliberate efforts of "social climbers". Interestingly, Castleman finds little correlation between class and ethic mobility: "men who moved upward in the sistema de castas between 1777 and 1791 appear to have come from all walks of life" (p. 120). Castleman's analysis of the censuses is very convincing.

Bruce Castleman's study of the King's Highway demonstrates the value of employing statistical analysis to colonial data. Through the cautious and perceptive manipulation of his rich data source, Castleman brings to life the social and economic world surrounding the construction of the *camino real.* This book is recommended to all historians of colonial Latin America.

Jeremy Baskes

Scott, Rebecca J. Degrees of Freedom. Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) [etc.] 2005. 365 pp. Ill. Maps $29.95; £18.95; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859007042861

Rebecca Scott's *Degrees of Freedom* examines the end and aftermath of slavery in Cuba and Louisiana. It distinguishes itself from earlier comparative works by taking "the construction of postemancipation society, rather than slavery and race relations, as the subject of comparison"(p. 5). It is solidly grounded in primary sources from a variety of archival sites, and its methodological approach and general style also distance Scott's book from earlier comparative studies. The book raises important issues for debate, and even those differing from the author's conclusions or emphases would recognize that it is a groundbreaking study and a remarkable piece of historical research and analysis.

The introduction and Chapter 1 set the scene. The nineteenth-century sugar landscapes of the "two worlds of cane" are described, having "comparably brutal systems of slavery" (p. 16), yet with significant demographic differences. While Louisiana's free people of color were a (diminishing) minority, in central Cuba the large free colored population and the different socio-historical formation created a society in which "every enslaved person would have occasion to encounter many other people of color who were free, often living close by and performing similar work"(p. 20).

Chapters 2 and 3 center on Louisiana. Scott examines the immediate aftermath of the Civil War and the concerns about controlling labor in the plantations. While social