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Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in
Colonial Mexico (review)

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Habsburgs offer striking and instructive parallels that are not explored here.

Though limited at times, this book nevertheless makes a useful contribution not only to seventeenth-century Swedish national history but also to the histories of the three Stuart kingdoms and to early modern migration studies. Clearly structured and well written, this book is worth reading, especially alongside the recent work of other historians of the Scottish, Irish and English—rather than “British”—military Diasporas.

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Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico. By Ben Vinson III. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001. ISBN 0-8047-4229-4. Maps. Tables. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xii, 304. \$60.00.

This well-researched and well-written institutional history by Ben Vinson III focuses on the origins, development, structure, and privileges of the free-colored (*mulatto*, *pardo*, or *moreno*) militias in Colonial Mexico. The author attempts to “uncover historical trends and discontinuities” involving the free-colored militias both before and after the Bourbon reforms of the 1760s (p. 2). Vinson uses a multi-regional approach, as New Spain’s free-colored population was highly dispersed and lived in both major cities and in rural coastal areas, in order to assess their participation in the military. He uses numerous primary sources, from the environs of Tamiagua, Puebla, Iguala, Veracruz, and Mexico City, to analyze what “race might have meant through the lens of a corporate institution” (p. 4). New Spain had one of the largest free-colored populations in Spanish America with around 370,000 persons in 1793 and the crown used thousands of free-colored militiamen to guard the colony and provide local ancillary defense to municipal and provincial authorities when needed (p. 1). Vinson illustrates how, from the 1550s on, free-colored forces “figured prominently in the colony’s military defense scheme” and how units of free-colored soldiers acquired increasing autonomy through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (p. 2). However, he points out that by the 1790s militia units were being disbanded and that the “corporate-based racial identity began to fragment” since the structure of privilege was being eliminated (p. 5). The author concludes, therefore, that the Bourbon reforms of the 1760s—which expanded the military establishment and the role of Spanish soldiers born in the New World (*creoles*)—came at the expense of free colored companies, which experienced a reduction in numbers and institutional privileges. Vinson’s discussion of free-colored participation in New Spain’s militias provides insight into social mobility, race relations, racial identity, and racial categorization during the colonial period. His comparison in Chapter 3 of members of the militia with their civilian free-colored counterparts with respect to

occupational and marriage patterns is particularly interesting and will be appreciated by social and military historians alike. The many anecdotal stories involving individual free colored militiamen mentioned throughout Vinson's work, not only provide for a captivating read but also give a nuanced view of freedom and society in New Spain. While studies of Colonial Mexico conducted over the past two decades have contributed enormously in analyzing the issue of race within colonial society and in reconstructing racial demographic profiles, relatively few have used the military as a means of evaluating this issue. Vinson does draw upon previous studies by Christon Archer and Lyle McAlister concerning New Spain's colonial militias. However, his work remains unique and groundbreaking as it focuses on previously understudied free-colored militias. Historians interested in the Bourbon reforms, Colonial Mexico, or social history (and do not mind the price) should certainly add this work to their libraries.

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George Washington: A Biographical Companion. By Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2002. ISBN 1-57607-082-4. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xix, 436. \$55.00.

Frank E. Grizzard, Jr., senior associate editor of the *Papers of George Washington* at the University of Virginia, has put students of American history and reference book addicts in his debt. Steeped in all things Washington, Grizzard has produced, in his own words, "the first encyclopedic work devoted exclusively to Washington" (p. xv). Covering all aspects of the great Virginian's life, personal and business as well as military and political, this excellent work is based for the most part on primary sources which are listed at the end of each entry, along with "Related entries." There are also cross references throughout the work. The alphabetical table of contents enables the user to quickly narrow a search. Following the two hundred entries are twenty-nine well selected writings from Washington's papers, arranged chronologically and including the little known "Recipe for Small Beer" (1757) and the famous "Farewell Address" (1796). A chronology is included, then a very helpful section entitled "Ties that Bind," that includes eight pages of "Familial Relationships"; "Revolutionary War Military Family"; and "Principal Executive Officers during Washington's Administrations."

Unfamiliar entries will pique the reader's interest. For example, "Balloons," which relates Washington's reaction to the French balloon craze that swept Europe in 1783. Or "Conotocarious," which was the Indian name, meaning "town taker" or "devourer of villages," given to Washington in 1753 by the Seneca chief, Half-King.

For the most part, however, the entries tread familiar ground, yet Grizzard's command of primary sources and the literature is such that we learn