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Esteban: The African Slave Who Explored America by Dennis Herrick (review)

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the concept of a Soviet people in the contexts of nation and empire. Anna Whittington explores the dialectic of national unity opposed with imperial diversity of peoples at play within the Soviet Union. She demonstrates how the experience of World War II connected disparate parts of the Soviet Union regarding the war effort and enhanced the notion of the existence of a Soviet people. Stephen Rapp Jr. discusses how the reimagining of the Georgian national identity occurred in the context of the Soviet Union's collapse. Under the influence of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgian nationhood was reaffirmed as ancient, European, and Christian, and tasked with a spiritual mission to resolve the East-West cultural dichotomy. Finally, Jeremy Smith examines how the vernacular map of what is commonly referred to as Central Asia has changed over time. Originally defined in relatively ethnic terms and its peoples never recognized as equal to the European population by the Soviets, the idea of Central Asia evolved into an idea unto itself. At the Soviet Union's breakup, the Central Asian republics held a stronger hand but were again considered secondary to the new European republics, which hastened Central Asia's exit process from the post-Soviet space.

Ronald Suny sums the book up concisely with a brilliant discussion of empire and nation that ties together the book's themes and demonstrates the insight and breadth of vision that he has gained over his remarkable career. Given the geopolitical events of today, the lessons learned from this body of research draw our attention to some of the more insidious things that often result for people living in the borderlands of great empires. If we are to avoid the mistakes of the past, we will pay attention to them.

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Esteban: The African Slave Who Explored America. Dennis Herrick. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018. Pp. 304, black & white maps, illustrations. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8263-5981-0.

Esteban: The African Slave Who Explored America is a fascinating biography of one of history's most extraordinary and underappreciated explorers. Author Dennis Herrick goes to great lengths to accurately portray Esteban, who is practically nonexistent in American history

literature despite being the first person from the Old World to travel across the North American continent and the first to enter the modern-day American Southwest in the sixteenth century. Due to his status as a Spanish slave, Esteban's feats have largely been downplayed or even completely ignored by historians and writers. Herrick writes Esteban back into the historical record, righting Esteban's reputation and helping secure his rightful place in American history.

The book begins by introducing the myths and mysteries that surround Esteban while offering the audience the most likely truths. This includes an unprecedented detailed account of Esteban's life, including his early years in Morocco before becoming enslaved by the Spanish and his trip across the Atlantic Ocean with his owner, Andrés Dorantes de Carranza, to the island of Hispaniola in 1527. Before Esteban arrives at Hispaniola, Herrick provides context by explaining the conquest mentality of the Spanish as their reasoning for invading the islands and surrounding lands of the Caribbean Sea in the sixteenth century. This context proves to be an excellent introduction to the planning and undertaking of the infamous Narváez expedition, and how Esteban found himself on a boat headed for Florida.

While it is well known that Esteban and the rest of the Spanish were headed toward disaster in Florida, Herrick gives readers plenty of insight into why the expedition was doomed to fail from the beginning. After wandering around Florida's Gulf Coast for several miles and weeks, starving for gold and for food, the feeble Spanish were no match for the tribes of native Florida. Herrick provides an exciting tale of escape that keeps the reader turning the pages as Esteban, his owner, and two other Spaniards flee into the Gulf in a small boat, stranding themselves at sea for weeks before finally making landfall near present-day Galveston, Texas.

Esteban's story continues with the natives of southern Texas and northern Mexico enslaving the group of four. This is a fascinating chapter describing how the three Spaniards suffered mightily while enslaved, while Esteban coped much better, having already experienced life as a slave. This experience, along with his ability to form strong relationships with their native captors, raised Esteban's rank to the leader of the group of four. Esteban's elevated status followed the group after they escaped their enslavement and made their way to the Spanish-controlled city of Tenochtitlan, where present-day Mexico City is located.

On reaching Tenochtitlan, Herrick does a brilliant job of capturing the fluidity of Esteban's status as he is once again reverted back to slavery. Fortunately, the reader sees Esteban get a second chance to experience freedom after being assigned to guide an expedition in search of the fabled Seven Cities of Gold. This expedition would result in Esteban becoming the first person from the Old World to enter the present-day southwestern United States, entering what would become Arizona and New Mexico. The search for the Seven Cities of Gold is not as well documented as the earlier failed Narváez expedition and escape from Florida, but Herrick does an outstanding job of working with multiple sources to create a solid timeline and entertaining narrative.

While many historians and writers have concluded that Esteban's life came to an end during this expedition, Herrick offers a detailed explanation of the alternate possibility that Esteban may have staged his death to gain his freedom from the Spanish. Both possibilities are explored in great detail in the book's later chapters, leading into a fascinating discussion on how myth has often become fact concerning Esteban's life. Herrick argues that because of these myths, Esteban has been cast in a negative light and therefore has never received the credit that he deserves. Herrick does an outstanding job at making the reader feel a deep appreciation for Esteban.

The book concludes with what isn't known about Esteban, which serves as a call to action for further research in not only correcting the facts and giving Esteban due credit but also restoring his reputation in the process. This book will certainly prove to be a much more accurate source for those who study Esteban than previous works on his life and the significance of his travels. An appendix is included after the conclusion, detailing the small number of statues, signs, namesakes, and other traces of Esteban's impact on American history. These traces, much like *Esteban: The African Slave Who Explored America*, are one of the few examples of tributes to one of history's greatest and most unrecognized explorers.

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