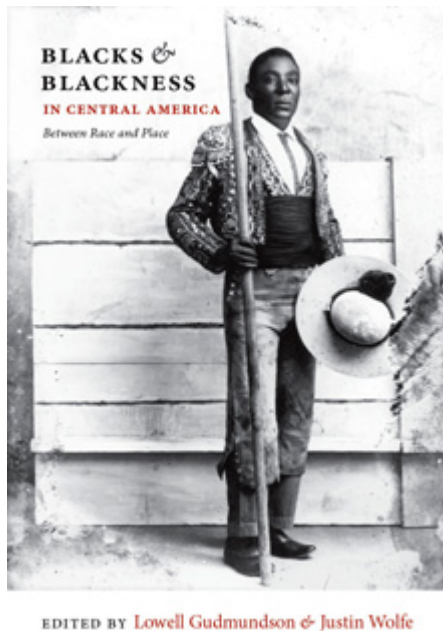


Race and Place

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Studying the history of a region without the inclusion of race may leave unanswered questions about its political and social evolution. To address what he considered a less-than-holistic view of Central America, Justin Wolfe, Tulane associate professor of history, has spent much of his career studying the dynamics of race in 19th-century Nicaragua.



This book emerged from a 2004 conference held at Tulane for international scholars interested in the African diaspora to Central America. (Photo from the Guerra Collection, Latin American Library, Tulane)

“I became involved with this subject matter through what I call a serendipity of research,” says Wolfe. “At the time I began my research the prevailing scholarship said there was very little ethnic element to the history of Nicaragua in the last two centuries, so that’s where I jumped in.”

Wolfe has traveled to Nicaragua nearly every year since 1994.

"I'm interested in how people and communities of African descent lived through and around questions of race during the colonial and postcolonial periods," says [Wolfe](#).

In 2010, Wolfe served as an editor of [*Blacks & Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place*](#), a collection of essays that contemplate the history of blacks in Central America. In addition, he contributed the chapter "The Cruel Whip."

In his chapter, Wolfe explores the presence of Afro Nicaraguans in Central America and their tactics to subvert discrimination in the aftermath of independence from Spain. While Wolfe found evidence of elite desires for a "whitening" of Nicaraguan society, he also discovered a generation of Afro descendants who achieved seemingly unheard of academic, professional and political success, including ascent to the presidency of the Nicaragua.

According to Wolfe, these Afro Nicaraguan leaders emerged out of a racially segregated community, but they consciously avoided the language of race in their politics. Instead, they championed a social equality that would help them and their brethren escape the limits of racial discrimination.

"I want to know what happened," says Wolfe, "and how they imagined their lives after independence when the colonial system of race no longer functioned the way it had in the past."