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Adriana Chira, Emory University:

Patchwork Freedoms: Law and Slavery beyond Cuba's Plantations

Abstract:

In nineteenth-century Santiago de Cuba, the island of Cuba's radical cradle, Afro-descendant peasants forged freedom and devised their own formative path to emancipation. Drawing on understudied archives, this talk explores a new history of Black rural geography and popular legalism, and offers a new framework for thinking about nineteenth-century Black freedom. Santiago de Cuba's Afro-descendant peasantries did not rely on liberal-abolitionist ideologies as a primary reference point in their struggle for rights. Instead, they negotiated their freedom and land piecemeal, through colonial legal frameworks that allowed for local custom and manumission. They gradually wore down the institution of slavery through litigation and self-purchase. Long before residents of Cuba protested for national independence and island-wide emancipation in 1868, it was Santiago's Afro-descendant peasants who, gradually and invisibly, laid the groundwork for emancipation.

Bio:

Dr. Adriana Chira is an assistant professor of Atlantic World history at Emory University, with affiliations in Latin American and Caribbean Studies and in African Studies. Her work focuses on emancipation and post-emancipation era rural populations in the Spanish Caribbean. She explores Afro-descendant peasantries' struggles to gain freedom, land access, and political rights through the judicial system. Her first book, *Patchwork Freedoms: Law, Slavery, and Race beyond Cuba's Plantations*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2022. You can also find her work in *The American Historical Review* and in *The Law and History Review*. She has received awards and fellowships from, among others, Harvard University, Yale University, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Conference on Latin American History, and the Latin American Studies Association.