



The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba (Asian American History & Cultu)

Lisa Yun

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Introducing radical counter-visions of race and slavery, and probing the legal and philosophical questions raised by indenture, *The Coolie Speaks* offers the first critical reading of a massive testimony case from Cuba in 1874. From this case, Yun traces the emergence of a "coolie narrative" that forms a counterpart to the "slave narrative." The written and oral testimonies of nearly 3,000 Chinese laborers in Cuba, who toiled alongside African slaves, offer a rare glimpse into the nature of bondage and the tortuous transition to freedom. Trapped in one of the last standing systems of slavery in the Americas, the Chinese described their hopes and struggles, and their unrelenting quest for freedom.

Yun argues that the testimonies from this case suggest radical critiques of the "contract" institution, the basis for free modern society. The example of Cuba, she suggests, constitutes the early experiment and forerunner of new contract slavery, in which the contract itself, taken to its extreme, was wielded as a most potent form of enslavement and complicity. Yun further considers the communal biography of a next-generation Afro-Chinese Cuban author and raises timely theoretical questions regarding race, diaspora, transnationalism, and globalization.

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