

Free African Americans of Maryland and Delaware from the Colonial Period to 1810 (#9406) (Hardcover)

Editorial Reviews

Product Description

As he did for free blacks in North Carolina and Virginia, Paul Heinegg has reconstructed the history of the free African American communities of Maryland and Delaware by looking at the history of their families.

Free African Americans of Maryland and Delaware is a new work that will intrigue genealogists and historians alike. First and foremost, Mr. Heinegg has assembled genealogical evidence on more than 300 Maryland and Delaware black families (naming nearly 6,000 individuals), with copious documentation from the federal censuses of 1790-1810 and colonial sources consulted at the Maryland Hall of Records, county archives, and other repositories. No work that we know of brings together so much information on colonial African Americans except Mr. Heinegg's earlier volume on Virginia and North Carolina. The author offers documentation proving that most of these free black families descended from mixed-race children who were the progeny of white women and African American men. While some of these families would claim Native American ancestry, Mr. Heinegg offers evidence to show that they were instead the direct descendants of mixed-race children.

Colonial Maryland laws relating to marriages between offspring of African American and white partners carried severe penalties. For example, one 18th-century statute threatened a white mother with seven years of servitude and promised to bind her mixed-race offspring until the age of thirty-one. Mr. Heinegg shows that, despite these harsh laws, several hundred child-bearing relationships in Delaware and Maryland took place over the colonial period as evidenced directly from the public record. Maryland families, in particular, which comprise the preponderance of those studied, also had closer relationships with the surrounding slave population than did their counterparts in Delaware, Virginia, or North Carolina. Mr. Heinegg recounts the circumstances under which a number of these freedmen were able to become landowners. Some Maryland families, however, including a number from Somerset County, chose to migrate to Delaware or Virginia, where the opportunities for land ownership were greater.

Free African Americans of Maryland and Delaware is a work that will be sought after for its commentary on social history as for its genealogical content and methodology. No collection of African American history or genealogy can be without it.