

THE FLUIDITY OF RACE AND POWER
IN COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Departmental Honors in
the Department of History
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

November 30, 2020

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ABSTRACT

. During the colonization of New Spain by the Spanish, the use of race as a tool for Spanish imperialism continued to change with the introduction of new races. Through analysis of Spanish Inquisition cases and New Spain legislature, I argue that the Spanish attempted to maintain control of the colonies through the constant redefinition of race to account for the development of new social classes and failed. The mixing of Spanish, Indigenous, and Black peoples made it difficult for the Spanish to control their colonies. The definition of race and its implications for the traditional Spanish socio-racial hierarchical system continued to change throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Inconsistent legislature and court proceedings led to a fluid definition of race in which “lower classes” could manipulate their social standings through various loopholes and bypass Spanish and local government regulations to move up or down the social ladder dependent on the situation and circumstances.

In 1778 Mexico City, in the viceroyalty of New Spain, a man named Jerónimo Marini contested the marriage of his son, Juan Marini, to Bárbara Álvarez.¹ Accused of having African ancestry and unable to produce her baptism certificate, Álvarez's marriage to Juan Marini would be an unequal union under the *Real Pragmatica*, a royal decree which prohibited marriages between the different social classes in New Spain. Marini claimed his family could "boast purity of blood," having immigrated from Italy and possessing no documentation of any intermixing of different races within his family lineage.² Bárbara and her mother attacked the purity of Juan Marini, claiming that his family was Muslim or Turkish instead of devout Catholics. Furthermore, Bárbara and her mother believed that Marini's occupation as a director of a dancing company, an occupation not "regarded as honorable in the New World," indicated that the marriage would indeed be an equal union under the *Real Pragmatica*. Juan Marini attempted to break apart the marriage between his son and Bárbara on the "ground of racial inequality," while Bárbara attacked Marini's career and possible ties to religions outside of Catholicism to prove the marriage equal. Race, occupation, and religion all played equal and important roles in determining whether this marriage was an equal union.

Determined by a variety of factors, race in New Spain remained fluid throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The amalgamation of different social classes resulted in the emergence of new classes of mixed race peoples that transcended traditional colonial boundaries. The fluidity of race caused colonial anxiety as mixed race individuals were able to move fluidly across the social hierarchical boundaries and threatened the power dynamic between the Spanish elite and "lower classes." Race developed as a tool by the Spaniards to enforce a "system of

¹ Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 53.

² Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 53.

social control.”³ Encompassing a variety of different social, political, and religious factors, the Spaniards utilized race to create a clear distinction between themselves and the “lower classes” of Indigenous and Black peoples of New Spain. However, using race as a tool for control failed for the Spaniards, resulting in a continuous redefinition of race as the Spanish elite attempted to navigate the emergence of new social classes in New Spain.

In historian Douglas Cope’s analysis of race in colonial Latin America, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, he explains how the Spaniards separated themselves from the “lower classes” “based on easily recognizable physical, cultural, and religious differences.”⁴ For a helpful explanation of race during seventeenth and eighteenth-century New Spain, Ann Twinam uses a quilt analogy to explicate the complexities and complications of race: “The quilt, or constructionist approach, sees the concept of race as variously put together – it can have different shapes, varying colors, many patterns; it is a woven kaleidoscope that can alter and change depending on a complex of variables.”⁵ Like a kaleidoscope, the concept of race appeared differently to each individual, where one could use a variety of characteristics and social identity markers to make a decision about an individual’s race, thus assigning their place in society.

Race combined a multitude of aspects of an individual’s life such as their behaviors, mannerisms, dress, religious beliefs, and physical characteristics. In the Spanish world, the term *casta* could translate to “species, breed” and “lineage,” but the “classic” Spanish use of the term *casta* “referred to the three main colonial categories – Spaniards, Indians, and Blacks – and in

³ R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 4.

⁴ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 50.

⁵ Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 42.

particular to the people who were in between.”⁶ These social categories used by colonial Spaniards put Spanish descendants at the top as the elite and all others, such as the in-between *castas*, in the “lower classes.”

Indigenous peoples and mixed race peoples could manipulate their racial identity to fit the needs of an individual, whether to move up the established racial hierarchical scale in New Spain, marry outside of their class, or obtain elite occupations reserved specifically for Spaniards. Indigenous and mixed race peoples adapted to social changes and economic demands of Spanish colonialism by continuously developing, changing, and adapting their perceived race. To build on to Twinam’s definition of race, Joanne Rappaport notes:

People migrated in the course of everyday life from one category to another, depending upon the context of interaction and the status of an individual relative to other participants in a given scenario...the kinds of adjectives used to describe the person’s aspect were contingent upon the time and place of observation. ⁷

Depending on the time, place, and geographical location, an individual could manipulate their social and racial identity. While Spaniards hoped to maintain a clear and distinct social structure that placed themselves at the top, individuals on the lower end of the socio-racial hierarchical structure manipulated the fluidity of race to their betterment. According to Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, race acted as a colonial construct to “render fluid and confusing social and political relationships into categories sufficiently static and reified and thereby useful to colonial understanding and control.”⁸ In colonial Latin America, race acted as a “moving” category that

⁶ María Elena Martínez, “Religion, Caste, and Race in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires: Local and Global Dimensions,” in *Iberian Empires and the Roots of Globalization*, edited by Del Valle Ivonne, More Anna, and O’Toole Rachel Sarah, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2019): 82.

⁷ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 63.

⁸ Frederick Cooper and Anne Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World*, (University of California Press: 1997): 11.

led to the ability of the “lower classes” to fluidly move from one social category to another, depending on the circumstances.⁹

Whether used to influence the outcome of particular court cases, marriage licenses, or overall social status, manipulation of one’s race impacted their social mobility and their abilities to advance themselves in society. The Spanish development of race initially acted as a tool for colonization and oppression, the continuous redefinition of race and its implications on the New World socio-racial hierarchy inhibited total Spanish control. Race encompassed more than just phenotype, thus resulting in an easily manipulated form of social identification. The mixing of different races created issues for the Spanish and local governments as they attempted to navigate the emergence of new social classes while simultaneously trying to maintain a traditional Old-World Spanish hierarchical society.

When Don Francisco Cano Moctezuma was accused of witchcraft, his accuser María de Rodilla said he appeared to be an “Indian with Hispanic physical and cultural traits.”¹⁰ While the second accuser, Felipe Salazar, believed him to be white because of his physical traits, which would have made Moctezuma susceptible to Inquisition prosecution.¹¹ The court found Moctezuma to be a *Mestizo*, or a person of mixed descent with Indigenous and Spanish blood, due to his “dress and mode of speech.”¹² The determining factor was Moctezuma’s indigenous name, and his case was turned over to the *Provisor de los Indios*, the indigenous version of the Inquisition, in the Republica de Indios rather than the unforgiving Spanish Inquisition.¹³

⁹ Cooper and Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” 10.

¹⁰ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 53.

¹¹ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 53.

¹² Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 53.

¹³ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 53.

Moctezuma's physical attributes held little importance to the court in the wake of his name, speech, and dress, his race encompassing more than just his phenotype and facial structure.

At the beginning of the Spanish conquest, the separation of the Indigenous and Spanish peoples revolved around the need to establish a social order in the New World. Using religion as a key differentiation, the Spanish viewed the Indigenous peoples as inferior because of their indigenous beliefs and behaviors. In 1590, Joseph de Acosta wrote to Elizabeth of Valois, the wife of Archduke Albert in the Spanish Netherlands, describing the "barbaric" and "vulgar" races he encountered.¹⁴ Acosta spoke of the barbaric people "deprived of the supernatural light," that is the light of Christianity, who believed in "thousands of superstitions."¹⁵ The barbarianism and uncivilized identity of indigenous peoples in Spanish eyes resulted from their belief system, not their skin color. The key distinction between the Spanish and the Indigenous was not their phenotype, but their behaviors and actions which did not align with what the Spanish viewed as civilized, modern, and appropriate for Christians. For example, Acosta describes the vulgar acts of "offering incense, in cutting their hair, tying small flowers about their necks, and strings with small bones of snakes," all associated with the "infinite number of witches, diviners, enchanters, and other false prophets," which made the Indigenous peoples barbaric. Even the way the Indigenous people wrote "not with continued line, but from top to bottom, or in circle-wise," led Acosta to describe the indigenous peoples as "barbaric."¹⁶ The lifestyle of some Indigenous groups "without a king, and without any certain place of abode," led to these negative descriptors

¹⁴ Joseph de Acosta, "To the Most Serene Infanta Dona Ysabela Clara Eugenia de Austria," *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, introduction.

¹⁵ Acosta, *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, 297, 367.

¹⁶ Acosta, *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, 408.

Acosta used.¹⁷ It was not the skin color of the indigenous peoples that made them barbaric, but rather their beliefs and their behaviors.

Even before the Spanish encountered some of the indigenous groups, their preconceived notions and understandings of the indigenous peoples reinforced the concept of Spanish superiority. The *requerimiento*, a document requiring the Spanish explorers to list their intentions and demands along the shores of the New World upon arrival, extensively describes how the Spanish justified their declaration of war on those who did not immediately surrender to the Old-World conquerors.¹⁸ The Spaniards read the *requerimiento* in Spanish upon encountering a new indigenous group, or even on empty shores, from the safety and distance of their ships. The purpose of the *requerimiento* served to justify the Spanish conquest of the New World and legitimize, at least in the eyes of the Pope, the domination of native groups. Spaniards viewed the land as a “donation to the Catholic kings of Spain” by God.¹⁹ According to historian Patricia Seed, the Spanish rights to the New World occurred “through conquest not consent,” and that to omit the ritualized protocol of the *Requerimiento* “would be to jeopardize the establishment of legitimate domination.”²⁰ The Indigenous people, having no experience or knowledge of the Spanish language, did not understand the declaration or its proceeding events. In the following declaration, the Spaniards use God as a justification for their actions. The declaration succinctly stated that if the indigenous people obeyed the Catholic Church and the Spaniards, then they would be spared the atrocities of what the Spanish considered a “just war.”²¹

¹⁷ Acosta, *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, 427.

¹⁸ Lewis Hanke, "The "Requerimiento" and Its Interpreters," *Revista De Historia De América*, no. 1 (1938): 19. Accessed October 6, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20529454>.

¹⁹ Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World: 1492-1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 69.

²⁰ Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World*, 70.

²¹ Hanke, "The "Requerimiento" and Its Interpreters," 4.

The *requerimiento* demanded indigenous people:

Acknowledge the Church as the Ruler and Superior of the whole world, and the high priest called Pope, and in his name the King and Queen Dona Juana our lords, in his place, as superiors and lords and kings of these islands and this mainland by virtue of said donation, and that you consent and give place that these religious fathers should declare and preach to you the aforesaid.²²

As historian Lewis Hanke stated, the *requerimiento* emphasized the “hypocritical religiosity in the Spanish character.”²³ Spaniards believed their way of life, their religion, and their king to be superior to that of the indigenous peoples they encountered. Spaniards found the indigenous practices to be “nauseating, savage, and diabolic.”²⁴ The understanding of race in the *requerimiento* illustrates that the superiority of the Spanish people did not come from Spanish skin color, but rather their union with God and their Christian blood lineage.

In their efforts to colonize the New World, Spaniards developed *trazas*, an urban grid pattern that emphasized the intentional separation of the indigenous and Spanish peoples of New Spain and Peru. The Viceroyalty of New Spain was built on the remnants of the Aztec Empire, including modern day Mexico while the Viceroyalty of Peru was built after the defeat of the Inca. The Spanish established these Viceroyalties to split up the newly colonized territories for easier governing and control. The *traza* acted as a physical manifestation of separation by placing the church and courthouse in the center of town, surrounded by outer layers of Spanish elite. The Spanish hoped to maintain control by creating a “rigid segregation policy whereby the Spaniards delineated residential areas for themselves and the Indian majority.”²⁵ Indigenous peoples often lived on the outskirts of town, or so the Spanish authorities intended. A Royal

²² Juan López Palacios, “The Requirement,” 1510, in *Readings on Latin America and Its People*, ed. Cheryle English Martin and Mark Wasserman (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011): 19.

²³ Hanke, “The “Requerimiento” and Its Interpreters,” 4.

²⁴ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 3.

²⁵ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.

decree in 1563 forbade Spaniards, mulattos, mestizos, and black peoples from living in Indigenous villages.²⁶ Spaniards feared losing control of the “lower classes,” who greatly outnumbered the *peninsulares*, individuals born in Spain but who lived in the New World. The mixing of the Spanish, Indigenous, and Black population threatened the Spaniard’s “privileged status” in the New World and created tension amongst the different classes. As segregation of the *trazas* did not stop the intermingling of the Spanish and “lower classes,” authorities created laws and regulations to reinforce the separation of classes in the Spanish colonies. In 1574, Viceroy Martín Enríquez de Almansa pleaded with the Spanish Crown to address the increase of the mixing of African slaves and other *castas*, or mixed raced peoples, as “it greatly endangered the colony’s stability.”²⁷ The Spaniards believed the stability of the colony relied on the traditional hierarchical system put in place by the Old World conquerors, fearing that the intermingling of classes would lead to uprisings and the overthrow of the Spanish colonizers.

In *View of the City of Mexico* (Figure 1), a seventeenth-century folding screen known as a *biombo*, one can see the grid pattern that divided the City of Mexico. The center of town was intended for “Spanish occupancy,” while the surrounding area formed the indigenous communities called *barrios*.²⁸ Spanish policy forbade indigenous peoples from living in the center of town, while also banning Spanish and other *castas* from living in Indigenous villages.²⁹ *Trazas* consisted of a town center, made up of the church, court-houses, and marketplace. The marketplace and church being the center of town created an environment in which the poor could not be “tucked away into hidden slums,” as the Spanish would have preferred.³⁰ Instead,

²⁶ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.

²⁷ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.

²⁸ View of the City of Mexico (back), Mexico, late 17th century, collection of Vera Da Costa Autrey, Mexico. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. and Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 10.

²⁹ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.

³⁰ Esguerra, “New World, New Stars,” *The American Historical Review*, 34.

individuals of different races and castas were “inextricably woven into the fabric of daily [Spanish] life.”³¹ Indigenous servants and African slaves served in the *traza* and thus formed part of Spanish culture and life. The intermingling of classes threatened the control of the Spaniards because of the fear of muddying Spanish blood with the “lower classes.”

The Spanish government developed two individual republics, *Republica de Indios y Republica de Españoles*, to combat the confusion and mixing of social classes, adding yet another component to the Spanish understanding of race. Indigenous peoples had their own set of laws, regulations, and societal expectations which kept them separated from the Spanish. Historian Ilona Katzew points out that the “Spanish system recognized the existence of an internal hierarchy for Indian society,” and that the “social heterogeneity” of Mexico was “not meant to imply a harmonious coexistence of the diverse races,” but rather “to remind both colonial subjects and the Spanish Crown that Mexico was still an ordered, hierarchical society.”³² In this hierarchical society, “each group occupied a specific socioeconomic niche defined largely by race” as the Spanish attempted to maintain separation between themselves and the “lower classes.”³³ The concept of skin color as another tool when determining an individual’s race arose after years of intermingling between the different social groups. The Inquisition and Spanish courts required individuals to disclose their *casta* at the beginning of court cases to ensure they were being held accountable under the correct set of laws and regulations, whether for the *Republica de Indios* or *Republica de Españoles*.³⁴ Race developed to encompass skin color as yet another aspect of an individual’s identity and social marker.

³¹ Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination* 9.

³² Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 39.

³³ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 39.

³⁴ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 52.

The definition of race continued to change as a tool for imperialism, but there did not exist a clear definition of race. Individuals relied on the “commonly recognized traits” of each race as “rough guesses rather than sure identifications.”³⁵ Much of determining an individual’s race and *casta* came from their “dress and mode of speech,” as well as the origins of their name.³⁶ In a 1707 court case involving a debt of thirty pesos, a man named Miguel de la Cruz described himself as a *mestizo*, or a person of Indigenous and Spanish ancestry. While his creditor also identified him as such, the prison officer referred to him as a Spaniard based on his physical appearance.³⁷ The prison officer and the creditor both had different conceptions of what a Spaniard traditionally looked like, thus leading to discrepancies in the court files. The fluidity of race in court cases shows the different factors that contributed to the concept of race in colonial Latin America. A single definition of race did not exist, thus resulting in discrepancies and mislabeling of individuals.

According to R. Douglas Cope, there were “several criteria for racial identification” and “phenotype was not the sole guide to race.”³⁸ As the Inquisition could only investigate Spaniards, many individuals facing prosecution would attempt to manipulate their race and pass for a different *casta*, while other individuals might attempt to pass for Spanish in hopes of acquiring a more elite job, land, or marriage outside of their birth *casta*. The boundaries of race did not lie just within the physical appearance of a person, but their dress, their speech, and their behaviors greatly influenced their race as perceived by others.

³⁵ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 53.

³⁶ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 53.

³⁷ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 53.

³⁸ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 53.

Other laws and rules continued to emerge in hopes of maintaining the social order. In March of 1778, the Royal Pragmatic, Real Pragmática as discussed earlier, established by the Spanish Crown intended to protect families from “unequal” marriages, or marriages between different castas.³⁹ Children had to obtain permission from their families to marry. In one court case in April of 1784, a man named Manuel Valdivieso y Carrión wrote to the president of his *audiencia*, or Spanish court, that he was protesting the marriage of his daughter, Baltasara, to a man whom Valdivieso claimed was of lower social status, Juan Teodor Jaramillo. Throughout the court document, a majority of the witnesses to the case testified about Jaramillo’s lineage and perceived skin color of Jaramillo. A man named don José Vivanco testified that he “heard in public that Jaramillo was inferior in descent” and considered Jaramillo to be “a plebian man and of low birth.”⁴⁰ Jaramillo’s decency was determined primarily by his family lineage in this instance. However, his skin color played a role when Don José Murillo claimed to have believed Jaramillo to be “a white and decent man.”⁴¹ This was one of many instances where race was manipulated to benefit an individual. In this case, Jaramillo convinced people of his nobility based on his skin color in order to marry outside of his social standing. However, his case also illustrates the looming possibility of discovery by the Spanish courts of “impure” blood and the possibility that the Spanish authorities could question anyone about their nobility and blood lineage. The difficulty the Spanish authorities had identifying individuals and their prescribed social classes resulted in the passing of legislation that restricted rights of mixed race peoples in hopes to make it easier to categorize them. The fluidity of race amongst the social classes created

³⁹ Büschges, “Don Manuel Valdivieso y Carrión Protests the Marriage of His Daughter to Don Teodoro Jaramillo, a Person of Lower Social Standing,” in *Colonial Lives: Documents on Latin American History, 1550-1850*, ed. Richard Boyer and Geoffrey Spurling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 224.

⁴⁰ Büschges, “Don Manuel Valdivieso y Carrión,” 226.

⁴¹ Büschges, “Don Manuel Valdivieso y Carrión,” 227.

fear in the Spanish elite that individuals could transcend the boundaries placed on social categories and blur the lines between the Spanish and “lower classes.” The legislation passed primarily focused on where mixed race peoples could live, what they could wear, and what jobs they could perform.

The mixed races that developed as a result of the intermingling of Indigenous, Spanish, and black peoples did not fit into the system of *republicas* devised in earlier centuries. The physical traits of *mestizos* did not belong to Indigenous communities nor did they hold Spanish rights.⁴² The Spanish elite viewed these outliers of the traditional hierarchy as “low and wretched peoples,” who were “lazy persons,” “useless,” and often “vaga-bonds.”⁴³ No castas could receive *encomiendas*, a system of indentured servitude of Indigenous peoples given to conquistadors as rewards, nor could they “hold public office without a special royal license.”⁴⁴ These new laws prohibited “Spaniards, Blacks, mulattos, and mestizos” from living in Indigenous villages, further emphasizing the differences and segregation of the *Republica de Indios* and the *Republica de Españoles*.⁴⁵ However, the mixed castas did not fit into either of these established social orders. The Spanish were “obsessed with identifying and enforcing racial hierarchies,” and part of that enforcement lay in the segregation of Spaniards from the “lower classes” in the *trazas*.⁴⁶ The separation of the Spanish from the “lower classes” further emphasized the monopolization by the Spanish of “political power and [domination] of the elite occupations.”⁴⁷ Castas could not bear arms or wear Indigenous clothing, both indicators of Spanish and Indigenous race. The purpose of these restrictions was to ensure that castas could not pass for a

⁴² Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 15.

⁴³ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 15.

⁴⁴ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 16.

⁴⁵ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 17.

⁴⁶ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 10.

⁴⁷ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 4.

different social identity. These new regulations contributed to the redefinition of race to hold even more social implications than in previous centuries. The Spanish distinguished castas through their cultural and religious affiliations as well as their physical and behavioral attributes.

As Spaniards struggled to maintain power over the colonies, new ideas arose to enforce Spanish superiority and the separation of the lower castas. Explanations for biological differences between the Spaniards and other castas developed as yet another tool of control and separation. Spaniards believed those born in the New World to be racially and physiologically inferior. In Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra's "New World, New Stars," he explains the ways Spaniards utilized scientific racism, pseudoscience developed to enforce and justify racist ideologies, to explain the physical and behavioral differences between Indigenous and Spanish peoples. In 1606, a Spanish Dominican Friar named Gregorio García wrote *Origen de los Indios del Nuevo Mundo*, he blamed the position of the stars over the New World for the "passive, stupid, and slothful" nature of the Indigenous peoples.⁴⁸ Spaniards looked for any explanation that supported their superiority over Indigenous peoples and "lower classes" to justify their established social structure in the New World and their treatment of the lower castas.

In Rebecca Earle's "If You Eat Their Food...", Earle discusses the ways in which Spaniards believed food could also alter the physical and behavioral characteristics of an individual, and how Columbus and other settlers believed they had to keep a European diet in order to avoid sickness in the New World.⁴⁹ Spaniards feared that living in the New World led to a devolution of otherwise honorable and noble peninsulares. This theory helped the Spaniards

⁴⁸ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999): 47.

⁴⁹ Rebecca Earle, "If You Eat Their Food...": Diets and Bodies in Early Colonial Spanish America," *American Historical Review* 115, no. 3 (2010): 690.

understand why some *peninsulares* did so poorly in the conditions of the New World while simultaneously reinforcing and justifying the separation of *peninsulares* from the new castas. As these different classes continued to mix, the development of different castas consisted of “dual ladders” of race and class, both simultaneously “parallel and reinforcing.”⁵⁰ In other words, race did not exist outside of the concept of class and vice versa. Esguerra and Earle both illustrate the complexity of race and to what degree the Spaniards went to find justifications and understandings of the newly emerging castas while attempting to maintain their control over New Spain.

In *Genealogical Fictions*, María Elena Martínez analyzed blood purity and its connection to “inheritable characteristics” that helped “produce a hierarchical system of classification in Spanish America.”⁵¹ Spaniards emphasized the importance of having a “pure lineage” to combine both “descent and religion, blood and faith.”⁵² Race in New Spain continued to evolve to encompass the importance of what degree of Spanish blood an individual possessed and their faithfulness to Old World Catholicism. Religious idolatry was believed to be a “behavior passed down over generations through corrupted blood,” which meant Spanish blood that had mixed with either Indigenous or African blood posed a threat to the Church and the Spanish empire.⁵³ Race grew to not only encompass cultural, religious, and physical attributes, but also *limpieza de Sangre*, or the cleanliness of blood, and one’s family history to determine eligibility for higher social status in New Spain. In a bigamy case tried by the Inquisition, a man named Bernabé de la Cruz was accused of marrying a second person, and confusion of his race resulted from his

⁵⁰ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 55.

⁵¹ María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza De Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008): 1.

⁵² Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 1.

⁵³ Esguerra, “New World, New Stars,” 67.

“facial features, his hair, possibly his dress” as appearing Indian and “his life-style” as he spoke Spanish and was a painter who worked in the *traza*, or city-center of Spanish cities intended to be reserved for upper-class Spaniards.⁵⁴ However, his blood lineage led the courts to charge him as an Indian once they discovered he was the “nephew of a *mestizo prieto*, one with mixed Spanish, Indian, and African ancestry.”⁵⁵ Bernabé’s first marriage to an Indian woman, having taken place in an Indian parish, and his physical appearance as a Indian saved Bernabé from prosecution by the Inquisition.⁵⁶ Despite his cultural attributes as living in the center of the *traza* and speaking Spanish, Bernabé was tried as an Indigenous person because of his blood lineage and physical appearance. Spanish courts had difficulty in maintaining consistency as to who they considered Spanish, Indigenous, Black, or a mixed *casta*. Depending on the court, the geographic area, and the witnesses, there lacked any consistency in determining an individual’s place within the traditional Spanish hierarchy.

Spaniards looked to enforce the idea of innately biological differences between Spaniards and the lower *castas* by focusing on blood purity in the late eighteenth century. The mixing of *castas* made distinguishing individuals by their phenotypes difficult; therefore, proof of blood lineage and *limpieza de sangre* represented a more effective way to accurately determine an individual’s place within society. Blood lineage and *limpieza de sangre* emphasized the importance of Spanish blood, not just their physical appearance or their religious affiliations. In 1768, the Inquisition called Mauricia Josefa de Apelo’s faith into question in New Spain.⁵⁷ Mauricia claimed that only “priests, nuns, and Spaniards” received “glory in the afterlife,” while

⁵⁴ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 54.

⁵⁵ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 54.

⁵⁶ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 54.

⁵⁷ Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain* (University of Texas Press, 2003): 25.

“*color quebrado*,” or “broken color,” such as castas could not be saved.⁵⁸ Even though Mauricia claimed to have three-fourths Spanish heritage, the court documents classified her differently in the separate court cases ranging from 1768-1785 as both a *mestiza*, a mixture between a Spaniard and Indigenous person, and *castiza*, a mixture between a Spaniard and a mestiza. Mauricia was an “illiterate servant who lived in a non-elite area of Mexico city,” and even though witnesses attested to her Spanish heritage, her “judgement, appearance, and circumstance” landed her the label of mestiza.⁵⁹ Mauricia’s *limpieza de sangre* meant little to the Spanish Inquisition when combined with her social circumstances. To be considered Spanish, an individual not only had to claim and appear to be Spanish, but had to carry themselves as a Spaniard through appropriate dress, speech, circumstances, and manners. The definition of race continued to evolve and change as a mechanism for Spanish imperialism and control over the Latin American colonies. Race was not only defined by phenotype but, more importantly, culture, lineage, and religious affiliations. An individual’s circumstances, as seen in Mauricia’s case, also played a large role in determining a person’s place within the traditional Spanish hierarchy. Part of the idealized image of a Spaniard relied on their wealth, occupation, and perceived social identity markers. A poor Spaniard, as seen with Mauricia, could be labeled as an Indigenous person if they did not possess the wealth or education the Spaniards associated with the elite and upper classes.

Religious lineage played a large role in determining an individual’s *casta*. Spaniards placed an emphasis on long Christian bloodlines as requirements for belonging to the elite Spanish class. In 1492, Spain expelled all Moors and Jews from the peninsula in the *Reconquista*, or reconquest. Christian blood proved to be an important component of Spanish

⁵⁸ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 25.

⁵⁹ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 25.

blood purity. Blood purity reflected the emphasis on biology as a crucial element for “determining religious and behavioral dispositions.”⁶⁰ Spaniards viewed blood as a vehicle through which different “characteristics and religious proclivities were transmitted.”⁶¹ In 1555, Juan Martínez Silíceo asked the Pope and King Philip II to require blood purity documents for ecclesiastical positions for the Church of Toledo, and this occurred around the same time the Inquisition of Spain began to focus on the importance of Old Christian blood in interrogations.⁶² Diego Gonzales Monjarrés applied to be a familiar in the early 1600s in Valladolid, where the Spanish courts questioned his maternal bloodline for descending from a “New Christian.”⁶³ After submitting the genealogy of both himself and his wife, the Inquisition found that Monjarrés’s “New Christian” connection resulted from his great-grandfather having married the daughter of the “New Christian,” thus Monjarrés himself was related by “traversal” and not a “direct” bloodline.⁶⁴ Old Christian versus New Christian concepts of blood acted as a dividing factor between Spaniards, Indigenous peoples, and the new castas. If religious tendencies, beliefs, characteristics, attitudes, and personalities could be transferred through an individual’s bloodline, the Spaniards believed that individuals with long lines of obedient Christian familial blood to be the most worthy, honorable, and noble.

As confusion over *limpieza de sangre* and castas continued in New Spain, the Inquisition developed a means of interrogating individual’s on their lineage and purity. As more *peninsulares* traveled to New Spain, difficulties arose in obtaining and verifying an individual’s race and blood lineage. Question seven of the purity investigation asks “whether the said

⁶⁰ Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 48.

⁶¹ Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 26.

⁶² Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 44.

⁶³ Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 72.

⁶⁴ Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 73.

person's father and paternal grandparents, and all other ancestors by the paternal line, all and each and every one of them were and are Old Christians, of clean blood, without the race, stain, or descent from Jews, Moors, or conversos, or from any other recently converted sect."⁶⁵ The Inquisition's emphasis placed on the blood purity of the individual did not rely solely on their Spanish blood, but of their Old Christian blood and descendance from a long lineage of Christians. Spaniards believed the paternal line carried the most hereditary information, including racial and religious characteristics. While the mother's lineage still maintained a degree of importance for determining blood purity, the father's line held more weight in determining an individual's purity.

Social status was "less tethered to a fixed and knowable past in late eighteenth-century native pueblos."⁶⁶ The mixing of different castas resulted in the blurring of lines between the Republica de Indios and the Republica de Españoles, muddying the colonial understanding of race and power in New Spain. Both of these Republicas developed as a tool for Spaniards to maintain control over their new colonies, but as classes, races, and cultures continued to mix, the *sistema de casta* developed as a "social recognition" of a "third major sector of society" outside of both Republicas.⁶⁷ Artists in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries portrayed the mixing of different races seen in a genre known as casta paintings. In Figure 2, the image of sixteen vignettes in a single canvas shows the different "costume, accouterments, activities, [and] settings" associated with the labeling of each individual casta.⁶⁸ Each painting displays a father, a

⁶⁵ Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 67.

⁶⁶ Bianca Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial: Ordinary Litigants and Colonialism in the Spanish Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 185.

⁶⁷ Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination*, 50.

⁶⁸ "Casta Paintings: Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo," Khan Academy, accessed September 24, 2020, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/colonial-americas/a/spaniard-and-indian-produce-a-mestizo-attributed-to-juan-rodriguez>.

mother, and a child, utilizing each individual's casta as a source of understanding the resulting offspring. The mixing of classes developed new racial identities and thus new societal roles for these mixed race individuals. Painted by José Joaquín Magón, these eighteenth-century illustrations show "enlightenment concerns" in the Spaniard's attempt to "rationally categorize" individuals based on their blood lineage and appearance.⁶⁹ Magón inscribed the painting, stating "In America, people are born in diverse colors, customs, temperaments and languages. From the Spaniard and the Indian is born the mestizo, usually humble, quiet, and simple."⁷⁰ Castas paintings acted as guides to understanding and categorizing individuals, while also attempting to develop a method of predicting how an individual behaved based on their blood lineage and physical appearance.

While the casta paintings themselves may have been physical representations of the Spanish ideal of separation and organization of the classes, it is doubtful that the "lower classes" adhered to the strictness of the separation. New Spain by the end of the eighteenth century was comprised of a population which was a quarter racially mixed.⁷¹ The elite in New Spain developed the Sistema de Castas to replicate the European concept of the "natural hierarchy of man," and as a way to distinguish the elite from the "tainted blood" of the lower castas and to "reinforce exclusivity" of the Spanish class.⁷² Art historian Magali Carrera best describes the castas paintings as "conceptually cross-referencing each other and inextricably bound to the specific colonial circumstances and discourses of late eighteenth century New Spain."⁷³ In other

⁶⁹ "Casta Paintings: Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo," Khan Academy, Accessed November 3, 2020, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/colonial-americas/a/spaniard-and-indian-produce-a-mestizo-attributed-to-juan-rodriguez>.

⁷⁰ "Casta Paintings: Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo," Khan Academy, Accessed November 3, 2020.

⁷¹ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 40.

⁷² Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 43.

⁷³ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 32.

words, the castas paintings relied on the Spanish idealized separation of classes rather than representing true reality for the castas in New Spain. The castas developed as an attempt to understand the hybridity and the “resulting ambiguity of an individual’s identity” following the cultural and racial mixing of the castas.⁷⁴ The castas paintings acted as a guide for Spaniards to categorize individuals based on their race, cultural behaviors, and perceived identities in an effort to neutralize the effects of the mixing of castas to maintain Spanish control over the colonies.

Castas paintings reflected not only a person’s skin tone, but their *calidad*. Carrera describes a person’s *calidad* as a representation of “one’s social body as a whole, which included references to skin color but also often encompassed, more importantly, occupation, wealth, purity of blood, honor, integrity, and place of origin.”⁷⁵ *Calidad* measured an individual’s worth in society relying on a multitude of different factors, including occupation, skin color, and religious lineage, which determined the quality of that individual. Much like race, an individual’s *calidad* reflected not only their physical characteristics but also embodied their social identity. In Figure 3, *De español e india, produce mestiza* (Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestiza) by José de Bustos from 1725 illustrates common Spanish understandings of the *calidades* of both Spanish, Indian and *Mezstizas*.⁷⁶ In the painting, the Spanish man wears a white wig, indicative of a successful and elite career while dressed in elaborate and colorful clothing. The wife, an Indigenous woman, is decorated in jewelry and a cross necklace, illustrating her conversion to Christianity. Their child, a *mestiza*, is clothed in an elaborate dress and jewelry similar to her mother’s while her father is gifting her a ring. The social identity of this family was determined not only by the color of their skins, but by their perceived place within Spanish colonial society.

⁷⁴ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 37.

⁷⁵ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 6.

⁷⁶ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 90.

This casta painting serves to illustrate where a Spanish and Indigenous union stood within society, clearly still in good graces of the Spaniards by producing a light-skinned child while the family remained respectable and wealthy.

As castas continued to develop and grow in New Spain, different concepts of *limpieza de sangre* continued to develop as well. Franciscan friar Juan de Pineda wrote *Diálogos Familiares de la Agricultura Cristiana* around 1578 discussing how the mixing of castas should be avoided, but in the event that it did occur, he recommended that the individuals involved ensure that the father was of a higher casta.⁷⁷ Spaniards believed the father's traits to be stronger than the mothers, therefore blood purity increased with paternal purity rather than maternal purity. In *Idea Compendiosa del Reyno de Nueva España*, Pedro Alonso O'Crouley, a wealthy Spanish merchant from Cadiz, wrote on the importance of avoiding the intermingling with black blood because those "contaminated with the Negro strain ... even the most effective chemistry cannot purify."⁷⁸ The Spanish understanding of blood was that blood acted as transportation of different physical, behavioral, and religious characteristics. For O'Crouley, the mixing of African blood with Spanish blood led to permanent impurities that could not be reversed, thus threatening the status of Spanish elite. Once a Spaniard reproduced with a casta or African, their lineage no longer held the same Spanish nobility it once had and could not be cleansed of the impure characteristics the blood transported.

Not only did Spaniards fear that the intermixing of Spanish blood with Black blood would result in an irreversible contamination, Europeans believed that Black blood held a violent temperament that could be passed down to each generation. For example, an English observer

⁷⁷ Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 49.

⁷⁸ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 13.

named Edward Long warned that the “the Spanish American dominions” held “vicious, brutal and degenerate breed of mongrels” produced by “Spaniards, Blacks, Indians, and their mixed Progeny,” warning other Englishmen to “abate their infatuated attachments to Black women.”⁷⁹

The negative association of Black women with aggressive behavior is seen in a casta painting by an unknown artist (Figure 4) titled *De español y negra, nace mulata* (From Spaniard and Black, Mulatta is Born) from 1785.⁸⁰ In the painting, the African woman is beating her Spanish husband over the head with a wooden spoon while their child, the mulata, attempts to break up the fight. The depiction of race in this painting, simply meant to illustrate what a union between a Spanish and African would produce, acts as a visual warning for Spanish men to avoid relations with African women because of their temperaments. As discussed earlier, race involved not only skin color but perceived behaviors. The Spanish associated dark skin with violence and incivility, indicated in this unknown artists work.

Spaniards believed individuals living in New Spain, despite their blood lineage, to be inferior to *peninsulares* and incapable of returning to the full glory of pure Spanish blood. Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, a Spanish friar with Enlightenment ideologies, argued in *Color Ethiopico*, Feijoo’s book about where Ethiopians received their dark complexion from, that individuals transplanted to different continents could change color within a few years, thus devolving.⁸¹ Feijoo studied two Mexican children, when transplanted back to Europe, the youngest began “whitening,” which, for Feijoo and other Spanish Enlightenment scientists, proved that inferiority and superiority could result from where an individual was born or lived.⁸² However, as castas continued to grow and gain attention, individuals with mostly Spanish lineage looked

⁷⁹ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 49.

⁸⁰ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 138.

⁸¹ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 48.

⁸² Katzew, *Casta Painting*: 48.

for ways to disassociate themselves from the lower castas and prove their worthiness of Spanish nobility. The Spanish Jesuit missionary José Gumilla believed that while the first people were white and therefore superior, Indigenous peoples and castas could whiten if they followed a specific marriage pattern.⁸³

In his book *El Orinoco Ilustrado, y Defindido, historia Natural, Civil, y Geographica de este gran rio y de sus Caudalosas Vertients* in 1741, Gumilla stated “the intermixing of whites, Blacks, and Indians has generated several different castas, which have all their proper denominations invented by the Spaniards, who make this a kind of science among them.”⁸⁴ To the Spaniards, organizing the castas in castas paintings acted as a form of social organization they hoped would reflect the socio-racial hierarchy within New Spain. The *sistema de castas* acted as a form of “scientific racism” which acted as a “conceptual stratagem with which to blame the castas’ appearance, rather than society, for their inferior social status.”⁸⁵ The castas paintings must be understood as developing from a need to structure society based on Spanish understandings and beliefs regarding non-elites, not as strict societal organization in which the lower castas actually participated in. The fluidity of race of the “lower classes” moved beyond the Spanish categories placed on them. The castas did not adhere to the strict organized categories that the Spanish colonizers attempted to place them in. This led to the continuous redefinition of race and the use of scientific racism by the Spanish to reinvent colonial boundaries in an attempt to control the castas.

Castas paintings provide a visual representation of the result of the intermixing between classes. Spaniards utilized castas paintings as a tool to structure society in light of these new

⁸³ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 49.

⁸⁴ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 52.

⁸⁵ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 51

racas. Much of the terminology invented to describe the new castas got progressively negative as the blood moves further away from pure Spanish or Indigenous *limpieza de sangre*. For example, in Andrés de Islas's collection of castas paintings in 1774 (Figure 5), an indigenous person and Black person have a *lobo*, or "wolf," while an Indian and mestiza have a "coyote," and from a "wolf" and a Black person produce a *Chino*.⁸⁶ As the source progresses and the different castas are represented, one can see the clear and distinct socially constructed understanding of where each of these castas and calidades belong on the social scale in New Spain. The indigenous couple at the end of the Islas' series entitled *Indios mecos bárbaros* (Barbarian Meco Indians) are represented without clothing or housing.⁸⁷ Andrés de Islas's paintings illustrate the devolution of individuals, from honorable and respectable Spaniards down the Spanish-invented social scale to uncivilized barbarians. The Spanish authorities hoped that the invention of castas and castas paintings would create another system of control by which Spaniards could identify and categorize the "lower classes" in their efforts maintain their elite status and privileges. These privileges reserved for the Spaniards operated on a system of honor that determined the social order of New Spain alongside the concept of race.

Elites felt that systems of honor and defamation of character through slander only applied to them. Honor tied to blood lineage and castas proved an integral part of their colonial lives. However, plebeians also believed themselves to be part of this system of honor. Distinguishing between those of pure Spanish blood and the lower castas proved necessary to determine the honor and privileges afforded to the elite. Honor acted as an important part of their everyday dealings and interactions with others in New Spain.

⁸⁶ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 117.

⁸⁷ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 118.

In New Spain, race contributed to an individual's *calidad* within the colonial social structure and determined their place within the established system of honor. In San Juan Teotihuacán, near Mexico city, in 1782, Jose de Alfaro and his wife, Josefa Cadena, were insulted by another woman, Doña Theresa, and her husband.⁸⁸ The court documents accused Dona Theresa of calling Josefa Cadena a “black whore,” insulting her fidelity and *calidad* outside of the church in front of their friends and acquaintances.⁸⁹ The insult of calling Cadena a “black whore” did not mean that Cadena had a dark complexion, but rather insulted Cadena's honor, purity, and behavior. In Andrés de Islas, *No. 4. De español y negra, nace mulato* (Figure 6), the *casta* painting illustrates the common Spanish conception of Black women.⁹⁰ The Black woman depicted attacked her Spanish husband with a cooking utensil, while their mulatta child attempted to break up the fight. This painting is strikingly similar, if not a direct copy, of Figure 4 discussed earlier. The paintings indicate that Spaniards commonly characterized Black women as having a violent nature, and as Doña Theresa pointed out, were viewed as sexually promiscuous. A Spanish witness, don Manuel Delfin stated that he saw Cadena attempted to punch Doña Theresa after they “insulted her with words” while she sat outside of her church service.⁹¹ Delfin stated that Doña Theresa called Cadena a “black whore” and that “no one found a friend in Josefa's bed,” and a fight ensued.⁹² The importance of Josefa Cadena's honor resulted in her husband fighting in court to defend his wife's *casta* and *calidad* and to clear up the

⁸⁸ Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, “Scandal at the Church: José de Alfaro Accuses Dona Theresa Bravo and Others of Insulting and Beating his Castia Wife, Josefa Cadena,” *Colonial Lives: Documents on Latin American History, 1550-1850* (Oxford Univ. Press, New York, NY, 2000): 216.

⁸⁹ Sonya Lipsett-Rivera “Scandal at the Church,” 218.

⁹⁰ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 116.

⁹¹ Sonya Lipsett-Rivera “Scandal at the Church,” 221.

⁹² Sonya Lipsett-Rivera “Scandal at the Church,” 218.

accusation. Alfaro argued that Cadena's casta was a Castiza and therefore, based on common social ideologies prescribed to each individual casta, deserved more respect.

In another portion of the case, Alfaro described how Doña Theresa and her friends beat Cadena to the point that she bled, resulting in the miscarriage of the child of Jose de Alfaro and Josefa Cadena.⁹³ The accusation of belonging to a lower casta resulted in a fight amongst the women and the loss of an unborn child, yet José de Alfaro's main concern in court did not revolve around punishment for his wife's miscarriage, but rather that the questioning of her honor needed resolution. The embarrassment of being attacked outside of mass in front of their friends and acquaintances, damaging their honor and social status, took priority over the miscarriage. This indicates that honor meant a great deal in the context of New Spain, where the threat of an individual's honor superseded the loss of a child. The Spanish hoped that this system of honor combined with the traditional racial hierarchy would create an effective system to limit the power and authority that the "lower classes" found through their manipulation of race and fluid social identities.

Individuals began to rely on their perceived appearance to climb up the socio-hierarchical scale, marry outside of their casta, hold positions of power, or, as seen in the previously discussed case of Moctezuma, have their cases removed from the Inquisition and placed into the lower courts for Indigenous peoples. In 1728, José Sevilla applied to be an apothecary in Mexico City, and as such needed to provide documentation of his baptism.⁹⁴ However, Sevilla discovered that his baptism was filed under the mulatto and mestizo baptisms rather than the Spanish documentation. Sevilla immediately appealed the courts to prove his Spanish

⁹³ Sonya Lipsett-Rivera "Scandal at the Church," 216-222.

⁹⁴ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 45.

classification. Despite having been adopted by a prestigious and noble Spaniard, Don Miguel Sevilla, the court relied on Spanish witnesses to attest to Sevilla's character, as well as his marriage to a noble Spanish woman and his "white and blond" physical characteristics.⁹⁵

Wealthy individuals, despite their blood lineage and phenotype, could use their wealth to convey a false appearance of elitism or Spanish blood. The fluidity of race meant individuals possessed the ability of social mobility either up or down the socio-racial hierarchical scale. The possibility of manipulating race created issues for the Spaniards, who hoped to maintain control over their colonies and feared that the lack of structure might give too much power to the lower classes. Individuals hoped to escape the lower classes associated with "darker phenotypes" to avoid paying the "heavy tributes of Indians, Africans, and Mulattos," and as in Sevilla's case, acquire both secular and ecclesiastic jobs reserved for the Spanish elite.⁹⁶

As seen in Sevilla's case, his marriage to a well-known Spanish noble woman helped his case to prove his own Spanish *calidad*. Marriage provided an opportunity for individuals to move up the social scale, provided both individuals "dressed, spoke, and behaved in accordance with patterns which could be accepted as white."⁹⁷ Sevilla's association with Spanish elite and the Spanish witnesses which attested to his behaviors and *calidad* eventually convinced the court to allow him to apply as an apothecary. Even though Sevilla was an orphan and his true blood lineage remained unclear, his behaviors and upbringing proved his worthiness of the position of apothecary and helped maintain his place within Spanish society.

As individuals continued to try to navigate through the confusing and complex socioracial hierarchy of New Spain, new ways of overcoming the oppressive system arose. In

⁹⁵ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 46.

⁹⁶ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 45.

⁹⁷ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 40.

1795, the Council of the Indies issued *gracias al sacar*, translated as “thanks for the exclusion, which was an institutionalized process to purchase “whiteness” and move up the social ladder in New Spain.⁹⁸ Whether buying land, applying for a position reserved for the Spanish elite, or marrying an individual of a higher castas, different petitions were necessary for proving *limpieza de sangre* and *gracias al sacar*. If a person hoped to purchase their whiteness, courts required “genealogies, baptismal certificates, marriage records, and witness testimony.”⁹⁹ Witness testimony proved to be perhaps the most influential of these files as Spanish courts trusted the word of elite Spanish families to testify on behalf of an individual’s behavior and customs, both of which contributed to an individual’s race. Individuals could petition and pay to have their impurities and “defects” erased from their history, provided they had money and witnesses to attest to their whiteness.¹⁰⁰ Whiteness in this sense did not pertain to skin color, but rather the association with whiteness and elite social status. If an individual had the money, despite their appearance, whiteness and elite status could be purchased through *gracias al sacar*. *Gracias al sacar* acted as a remedy by the Spanish government to account for the emergence of different castas by providing a way in which individuals could overcome their pre-established social status. As castas continued to mix, Spanish elite families wanted to save their family names and reputations despite their mixed race offspring. The invention of *gracias al sacar* enabled the Spanish elite to choose who belonged to the “upper classes,” despite their *limpieza de sangre*. As time went on, the mixing of castas affected more and more Spanish elite families, meaning that the Spanish authorities attempt to classify individuals based on the traditional social hierarchy of Spain had failed.

⁹⁸ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 48.

⁹⁹ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 125.

¹⁰⁰ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 81.

In 1795, a man named Don Domino Lucian purchased a position at the local office in San Salvador, but the other members objected to his position because of his mulatta great-great grandmother.¹⁰¹ Despite the fact that Lucian appeared white and came from a wealthy family, his adversaries considered his blood tainted with mulatto blood, thus not eligible for the position. However, Lucian produced five witnesses to testify on his behalf. In the end, despite his grandmother's "defect," Lucian's request for whitening was approved because "the distance in which the dubious defect occurred" and his "good circumstances" proved to be enough for the court to permit him to fill the government position.¹⁰² Lucian navigated through life as part of the "white elite" without having his *limpieza de sangre* questioned due to his white appearance.¹⁰³ Had he not attempted to purchase a position in the local government, his blood purity might never had been questioned. Enemies and potential competition used the issue of race and blood purity as a means of disqualifying others from the positions. Lucian, being wealthy and appearing white, successfully purchased his whiteness even though his blood could technically have been considered "impure" and "defective," his outer appearance as well as testimony from five Spanish witnesses to his character allowed him to move up the social ladder and attain a government position. The courts inconsistency in determining who they considered worthy of purchasing whiteness and joining the elite class contributed to the racial mislabeling of castas. An individual's physical appearance and their particular circumstances, including behaviors, education, familial connections, and honor, could determine their social status within New Spain despite their *limpieza de sangre* and phenotype.

¹⁰¹ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 81.

¹⁰² Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 81.

¹⁰³ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 81.

Lucian's use of five Spanish witnesses indicates the importance of witnesses in these trials. As discussed, Spanish and local authorities had difficulties in keeping track of baptism records, genealogical records, and other forms of *limpieza de sangre* proof because of the transition from Spain to the New World. Utilizing the word of proven Spaniards permitted an individual to attest to their credibility as well as provide the court with some sort of evidence, despite whether that evidence were true or not. The use of witnesses to attest to an individual's Spanish-ness allowed for possible fraudulence and the issue of "passing," meaning an individual could pretend or manipulate their circumstances to move up the social scale. Witness testimony made passing for another race or *casta* easier, especially if the individual lacked other forms of proof like baptismal or genealogical records. Not only could using witnesses lead to fraudulent findings, but other forms of fraud in efforts to pass for a different race also occurred. In the story about Jerónimo Marini, who protested his son's marriage to Bárbara Álvarez, he hired a private investigator to find out more information about Álvarez and her family.¹⁰⁴ Upon arriving in her village, the private investigator could not find Álvarez's baptismal certificate, but they did find her mother's name written on a piece of paper which had been slipped into the back of the Spanish baptism records. Marini proclaimed that the slip of paper had been secretly slipped into the Spanish records in order for Álvarez to pass for a Spaniard to marry his son. Individual's ability to manipulate the system and pass for different castas created issues for the Spanish government as well as the elite who wished to maintain their own superiority over the lower castas. Seen in Marini's case, the use of written records to prove a person's *casta* was unreliable. The Spanish attempts to find new ways to enforce their colonial boundaries on the "lower classes" failed in this instance, forcing the courts to determine the outcomes of each *casta* case

¹⁰⁴ Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 53.

on an individual basis. These case-by-case court decisions resulted in inconsistencies and contributed to the manipulation and fluidity of race in New Spain.

In 1796, the Valenzuela brothers from Antiquia applied for *gracias al sacar*.¹⁰⁵ The application gained attention because the brothers “even though whites, are reputed to be *pardos*,” or individuals with mixed African blood.¹⁰⁶ The local royal officials reported that the brothers had *pardo* ancestry despite their claims to whiteness. However, the court approved the brother’s application after reviewing their case and determining that besides their ancestry, “they are not considered [*pardos*], given their absolutely white color, their manners as men of education, their virtue and good customs.”¹⁰⁷ The brothers were successful in purchasing their whiteness because of their societal connections and their upbringing. While in everyday life people treated them as white elites because of their “intimate and familial connections,” their blood purity still posed a problem. Because the brothers had connections to other elite families, education that was attributed to white elite families, and participated in customs attributed to elite families, the local authorities approved their application for whitening.

The emergence of new castas led to the constant redefinition of race and the ever-changing implications of race on New Spain. The Spaniards kept redefining and adding to the concept of race in hopes to maintain control over their colonies and establish Spanish superiority in the New World. However, the abundance of characteristics attributed to race led to inconsistencies. The Old-World hierarchical system established in Spain could not translate to the New World because of the mixing of the Spanish, Indigenous, and Black peoples and emergence of castas. The constant redefinitions and understandings of race, and all that race encompassed

¹⁰⁵ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 124.

¹⁰⁶ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 124.

¹⁰⁷ Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness*, 124.

including behavioral, cultural, and religious ideologies, resulted in racial fluidity that the new castas could manipulate and undermine Spanish authority. While the Spaniards hoped that their understanding of race and Spanish superiority would be accepted and practiced by the “lower classes” through conceptual practices like castas paintings and *limpieza de sangre*, “lower classes” utilized the inconsistencies in the definition of race to overcome the established social order. Racial fluidity arose as the castas transcended the established social boundaries put in place by the Spaniards. The fluidity of race created colonial anxieties as Spanish authorities consistently redefined the concept of race in hopes to maintain elite control. Whether it was to move up or down the social scale, the fluidity of race lied within the easily manipulated definitions which made up the socio-racial hierarchical order of New Spain. No matter how hard the Spaniards tried to maintain control, their constant redefinitions failed to control the “lower classes” by creating inconsistencies which permitted the “lower classes” to manipulate their social identities, thus breaking apart the traditional Old-World Spanish hierarchy in New Spain.

Images:



Figure 1

View of the City of Mexico (back), Mexico, late 17th century, collection of Vera Da Costa Autrey, Mexico. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Figure 2

Casta Painting, 18th century, oil on canvas, 148 x 104 cm (Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Mexico).



Figure 3

José de Bustos, *De Espanol e india, produce mestiza* (Spaniard and Indian Produce as Mestiza), ca. 1725, oil on canvas, 75.6 x 92.5 cm. Private collection Paris.



Figure 4

Unknown artist, *De Español y Negra, Nace Mulata* (From Spaniard and Black, a Mulatta is Born), ca. 1785-90, oil on canvas, 62.6 x 83.2 cm. Private collection.



Figure 5

Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 117.

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