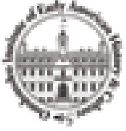

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The Black Blood of New Spain: *Limpieza de Sangre,* Racial Violence, and Gendered Power in Early Colonial Mexico

María Elena Martínez

ON the morning of May 2, 1612, a Wednesday, thirty-five blacks and mulattoes (twenty-eight men and seven women) were escorted by New Spain's authorities through the streets of Mexico City. They were being paraded on horseback, shamed before the residents of the viceregal capital, before all were summarily hanged in front of a large crowd in the central plaza facing the church and palace. The bodies of some of the victims remained suspended in the air through the next day, which happened to be the celebration of the Holy Cross, the *fiesta de Santa Cruz.* The horrible spectacle did not end with the hangings. After consulting with a group of doctors about the fate of the bodies, Mexico City's royal tribunal, the *Audiencia,* ordered twenty-nine to be decapitated and the heads left to rot on top of the nine gallows (eight of which had been made for the occasion). The other six were quartered, and the parts were placed on pikes on the city's main streets and roads. Serving as potent symbols of royal power and of the marginal place occupied by people of African ancestry within the Spanish colonial order, the body parts were left on display until their stench became both unbearable and insalubrious for the residents of the capital.

The thirty-five hangings were the tragic culmination of an investigation ordered by the royal Audiencia of rumors concerning an alleged conspiracy by blacks in central Mexico to rebel against their masters (slaveowners and employers) and to overthrow the government. After conducting a series of interrogations, colonial officials concluded that a

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rebellion was indeed being planned for Maundy Thursday. Not all scholars of colonial Mexico have been convinced that the allegations were sound.[1] However, whether or not the blacks and mulattoes whose bodies were savagely mutilated in 1612 had a plan to rebel, understanding the circumstances in which the hangings took place illuminates the nature of Mexico's racialized colonial order at the beginning of the seventeenth century. That historical moment was marked not only by the introduction of a growing number of African slaves into central New Spain, which was generating all sorts of social tensions, including a heightened preoccupation with policing sexuality, but also by the deployment of the Spanish concept of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) against colonial populations and an increasing association of blacks with disloyalty to the crown and the Catholic faith. All of these developments—the recasting of metropolitan notions of purity, the concern with controlling colonial sexual relations, and the connection of persons of African ancestry with political and religious infidelity—provided the crucial subtext of the 1612 black conspiracy in Mexico City.

An analysis of this alleged conspiracy reveals the strong connection between race, gender, and religion in early colonial Mexico as well as between discourses about Jews (and, to a lesser extent, Muslims) in the Iberian Peninsula and those that surfaced in New Spain about colonial populations, especially blacks. These discourses, which had been molded by Old World religious life and by the increasing obsession with safeguarding the boundaries of the Christian community in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain, marked persons of Jewish and African ancestry in similar, though by no means identical, ways. A close examination of the supposed black plot in Mexico City in 1612 also makes manifest the limitations that the colonial archive places on determining whether a conspiracy existed or not. The nature and relatively small number of primary sources available for studying the thirty-five convictions and hangings—namely, an account by the indigenous historian Chimalpahin, a report sent from New Spain to the Council of the Indies, and colonial correspondence—make it difficult to reconstruct, even partially, the events that preceded them. Furthermore, those contemporary sources leave no doubt that power shaped the construction of historical narratives of the plot, which only complicates the task of determining what exactly occurred.[2]

[1] See, for example, David M. Davidson, "Protest and Palenques: Black Resistance and Control in Colonial Mexico," in Ann M. Pescatello, ed., *The African in Latin America* (New York, 1975), 214; and Irving Leonard, *Baroque Times in Old Mexico: Seventeenth-Century Persons, Places, and Practices* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1959), 19–20.

[2] For an eloquent analysis of how the construction of historical narratives involves power (including the power to silence) at different stages, see Michel-Rolph

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Arriving at definitive conclusions about what transpired, however, is ultimately less important than comprehending the historical and cultural context that made certain crimes in early-seventeenth-century Mexico possible—at least in the eyes and imaginations of those who described them.

According to one of the most detailed accounts of the events that led to the 1612 hangings, written in Nahuatl by Chimalpahin in his Mexico City annals, the conspirators sought to rebel against the viceregal government, decimate the Spanish population, and establish a black kingdom in New Spain—a *monarquía africana*.[3] The purported plan went as follows. After killing their Spanish masters, the conspirators were going to crown one of their own as king and a *mulata morisca,* or light-skinned mulatto woman, as their queen.[4] Having previously assigned themselves nobility titles and royal administrative posts, the rebels would establish their own government and force the indigenous people to provide them with tribute. They would also kill all Spanish males except some members of the religious orders, whose main responsibility would be to train black children to become priests and government officials. To make it impossible for Spaniards to reproduce, however, the friars' sexual organs would be removed. Spanish women, for their part, would also be killed, but not those who were young and pretty; they would become the prop-

Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), esp. 1–30. For a discussion of how archives limit the historical study of crime, in particular, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, Calif., 1987).

[3] Chimalpahin's Mexico City text, written in the style of traditional indigenous annals, covers the period 1577–1615. A historian with some links to the pre-Hispanic (lesser) nobility of the Kingdom of Chalco, Chimalpahin was living in Mexico City at the time of the 1612 hangings and, hence, might have been an eyewitness (he claimed as much). For an introduction to his life and works, see Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco* (Tucson, Ariz., 1991), esp. 7–30. Chimalpahin's account of the 1612 conspiracy is reproduced and translated into Spanish in Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, "La conjuración de los negros de 1612," in Ernesto de la Torre Villar, ed., *Lecturas Históricas Mexicanas,* I (Mexico City, 1966), 521–525; and in Domingo Chimalpáhin, *Diario,* trans. Rafael Tena (Mexico City, 2001), 289–299. For the English translation, see Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Codex Chimalpahin: Annals of His Time,* III, trans. James Lockhart, Susan Schroeder, and Doris Namala (Norman, Okla., forthcoming). I thank Susan Schroeder for providing me with a copy of the English translation of the relevant portion of Chimalpahin's Mexico City annals.

[4] The term *morisca* in early-seventeenth-century Mexico referred to the daughter of a *mulata* and a Spaniard, or, loosely speaking, to someone with more Spanish than African blood. It was analogous to another colonial category, *castiza,* which referred to the child of a *mestiza/o* and a Spaniard. Both *morisca* and *castiza* had a number of different meanings in Spain.

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erty of black males. Black women, on the other hand, would be relegated to convents, thus becoming the chaste and secluded "guardians of God." With regard to the offspring of the black men and Spanish women, all those who were born male would be murdered to prevent them from growing up and avenging their mothers' ancestors; those born female would be raised, but for the sole purpose of serving black men. The same fate was to fall on subsequent generations, a process that would eventually produce more "blacks."[5]

Chimalpahin's account of the alleged plot is fascinating on various levels, but most striking is the explicit interconnections between colonial domination, sexual exploitation, and racial dispossession.[6] The plan, if there ever was one, was not just to kill Spaniards and take over New Spain's government; it also involved castrating any surviving Spanish males, making sexual slaves of white women, and gradually "blackening" the latter's descendants. Spanish women were to be kept alive, it seems, for no other reason than to allow blacks to confront whites in a relationship of master to servant. This relationship would be expressed primarily in sexual and gendered terms, in a continuing reproductive dynamic that would ultimately result in the triumph of "blackness" over "whiteness." In other words, in the imaginary Mexican black kingdom, the process of *mestizaje* (mixture) was an integral component of colonial power relations, one that sought to redeem whites by progressively infusing them with black blood. The favored unions for achieving this process of "blackening" consisted of black men and white women, it can be surmised, because this combination simultaneously made the male rulers more macho and emasculated subordinate men, thereby not disrupting either gender or racial hierarchies, but rather reinforcing each as well as the relationship between the two. As in Spanish colonial society generally, gender and sexuality were at the core of producing and reproducing a certain racial order.

Indeed, according to Chimalpahin's version of the black conspiracy, the rebels did not seek fundamentally to alter society; they sought to rule it and to appropriate the sexual and racial prerogatives of their mas-

[5] Chimalpahin, "La conjuración de los negros," in Villar, ed., *Lecturas,* I, 522.

[6] These connections have been analyzed in a number of works, including Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995); and Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia," in Micaela di Leonardo, ed., *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991), 51–101. As Hazel Carby has discussed, among the first to theorize the links between colonialism, patriarchal power, and racial and gender hierarchies were nineteenth-century black feminist intellectuals; see Carby, "'On the Threshold of a Women's Era': Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist History," *Critical Inquiry,* XII (1985), 310–316.

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ters. What they were essentially accused of plotting to create was their own version (or inversion) of the *sistema de castas,* the colonial hierarchical system of classification that was based on proportions of Spanish, native, and black blood. That system privileged whiteness and was accompanied by a whole sexual economy centered on the inaccessibility of most Spanish women to all but Spanish men.[7] The main difference was that, in the new order, blackness would function as the font of redemption and fulfill its mission in the bodies and wombs of white women.

As a number of scholars have written, New Spain's race, or caste, system was partly inspired by the Spanish concept of limpieza de sangre, which originally referred to the status or condition of having unsullied "Old Christian" ancestry, free of Jewish, Muslim, and heretical antecedents.[8] Used mainly against converted Jews and Muslims (*conversos* and *moriscos,* respectively) on the Iberian Peninsula, this concept began to be deployed against colonial categories at the end of the sixteenth century, a process that is reflected in *probanzas de limpieza de sangre* (purity certifications) made by certain colonial institutions, among them the Inquisition and the Franciscan Order.[9] Two aspects of this discursive

[7] Various scholars of colonial Latin America have discussed the relationship between the concept of purity of blood and Spanish women's sexuality. See, for example, Susan Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge, 2000), 7–9; Verena Stolcke, "Invaded Women: Gender, Race, and Class in the Formation of Colonial Society," in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds., *Women, 'Race,' and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London, 1994), 272–286; and Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821* (Stanford, Calif., 1988), esp. 146–150.

[8] María Elena Martínez, "The Spanish Concept of *Limpieza de Sangre* and the Emergence of the 'Race/Caste' System in the Viceroyalty of New Spain" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2002); L. N. McAlister, "Social Structure and Social Change in New Spain," *Hispanic American Historical Review,* XLIII (1963), 353–354; Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston, 1967), 54–55; Julio Caro Baroja, "Antecedentes españoles de algunos problemas sociales relativos al mestizaje," *Revista Histórica,* XXVIII (1965), 197–210; and R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison, Wis., 1994), 14–26. The classic work on purity of blood in Spain remains Albert A. Sicroff, *Los estatutos de limpieza de sangre: controversias entre los siglos XV y XVII,* trans. Mauro Armiño (Madrid, 1985), but in the past two decades scholars of early modern Spain have considerably enriched the literature on this subject. See, for example, Juan Hernández Franco, *Cultura y limpieza de sangre en la España moderna: puritate sanguinis* (Murcia, 1996); and Ruth Pike, *Linajudos and Conversos in Seville: Greed and Prejudice in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spain* (New York, 2000). For a more extensive discussion of the historiography, see Martínez, "The Spanish Concept of *Limpieza de Sangre,"* chap. 4.

[9] See, for instance, Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), México 121, Ramo 1: genealogical information of Pedro Serrano, 1600; and John Carter Brown Library, Rare Book Collection, Libro de Informaciones (Franciscan Records of Candidates for the Novitiate), I: genealogical certification of Bartolomé de Mancillas, 1594, fols. 3–13.

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shift are worth stressing here. First, at least initially, the concept of *limpieza* retained its metropolitan religious connotations for Spaniards in Mexico; its deployment against blacks and native people was tied to their status as "New Christians." Second, although colonial Spaniards increasingly marked both native and African ancestries as impure and generally saw mixture with either group in negative terms, it was black blood that was more frequently and systematically construed as a stain on a lineage.[10]

Since the early years of colonization, the Castilian crown considered the converted inhabitants of the Indies pure because they descended from Gentiles who had not mixed with "contaminated" or "condemned" sects.[11] Important Iberian theologians and jurists accordingly defended both native blood and Spanish-Indian mestizaje. In his early-seventeenth-century work on the origins of the Indians, for example, the friar Gregorio García stressed that, even if the then-popular theory that indigenous people descended from ancient Hebrews turned out to be true, they should still be regarded as pure because it was possible that they could have arrived in the New World before the death of Christ. The implication was that the Indians did not descend from deicides—an aspersion commonly cast on Jews in medieval and early modern Christian Europe—and thus their genealogies were not stained. García also emphasized that "Spaniards that descended from Indians" (note the early recognition of "Spanishness" for people with partial native ancestry) should not be considered inferior or denied any privileges because, when "uniting that part of the Indians that such Spaniards have with that of the Spanish Nation, said part loses whatever negative association it had, and gains much from the one that now accompanies it, from which, since it is better, and more honorable, the said descendants take the surname and name Spaniard, even if they are *mestizos,* and have the same [amount of Indian and Spanish blood] and as such are admitted into the Republic and its honorific posts and government, and to other honors and religious realms, and are not excluded from them for having Indian parts."[12]

[10] Leslie B. Rout, Jr., also stressed this point in *The African Experience in Spanish America: 1502 to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1976), 126–127.

[11] See the 1697 Spanish decree ordering colonial officials to recognize the descendants of the pre-Hispanic nobility as *hidalgos* and the native population as a whole as pure; the decree stressed that it was thereby upholding long-standing laws and policies of Castilian monarchs. It is reproduced in Richard Konetzke, *Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de Hispanoamérica, 1493–1810,* III (Madrid, 1962), 66–69.

[12] Gregorio García, *Origen de los indios del Nuevo Mundo* (Mexico City, 1981), 79–128. For a defense of the purity of native people and mestizos by a leading Spanish jurist, see Juan de Solórzano Pereira, *Política Indiana,* I (1648) (Madrid, 1930), 436–437.

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García's observations not only reveal his efforts to remove possible implications of impurity among the Indians and mestizos; also they show the construction of the Spanish-Indian mixture as a redemptive process, one in which "Spanish parts" redeemed the Indian ones. They reflect, in other words, the early stages of a religious-cum-racial Spanish colonial ideology that allowed for the redemption of the Indians through "whitening," conceived at this juncture as the progressive infusion of Spanish Old Christian blood.[13] Faintly echoing the notion that Jesus took on the sins of humanity in order to purify it, this ideology was reflected in the practices and policies of key colonial institutions, which recognized the purity, or, rather, potential purity, of mestizos. In the late sixteenth century, for example, the Mexican Inquisition decided to grant limpieza certification to those who had no more than a fourth of native ancestry (called *castizos*).[14] The decision implied that mestizos could achieve a social and spiritual status equivalent to that of Spaniards if in their veins Spanish (Old Christian) blood predominated.

By contrast, Spanish colonial ideology—not only in New Spain but also in the Spanish Atlantic world as a whole—seldom allowed black blood the possibility of full redemption. In his seventeenth-century chronicle of the life of King Charles V, for instance, fray Prudencio de Sandoval compared the supposed inability of the descendants of converted Jews to rid themselves of their Jewish "race" with that of the descendants of blacks to separate themselves (even with "thousands" of white ancestors) from "their negritude."[15] By that time, Iberians were regularly deploying the myth of the Curse of Ham against dark-skinned Africans, thereby linking them to a stained biblical genealogy that was condemned to perpetual servitude.[16] Not surprisingly, this linkage

[13] Colonial Mexico's sistema de castas, with its whitening logic and stress on reproduction as a means of redeeming certain colonial groups, to a certain extent anticipated the nineteenth-century ideas of the Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) on racial mixture. Basically, he endorsed moderate *metissage* because he believed that it was necessary for civilizations to grow more powerful and to remain dynamic. Characterizing the encounter between European (especially Aryan) and colonized groups as that between active and passive, respectively—and, by extension, between male and female—he cast "race-mixture" as a mechanism by which the stronger races met weaker ones in a dynamic of master and servant. See Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge, 1998), 63–64.

[14] This policy was formalized in 1624, when the Supreme Council of the Inquisition declared that having one-quarter native ancestry *(quarto de Indio)* was not an impediment to becoming a familiar (Inquisitorial informant) if the candidate was deemed to be otherwise qualified. Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de México, Libro 1057, fols. 125–126.

[15] Fray Prudencio de Sandoval, *Historia de la vida y hechos del Emperador Carlos V* (1606), Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, LXXXII (Madrid, 1955), 319. I am grateful to David B. Davis for alerting me to this passage in Sandoval's work.

[16] The Portuguese began to deploy the Curse of Ham against blacks to justify their enslavement practices as early as the mid-fifteenth century. Among the Spanish

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occurred as slavery was increasingly limited to blacks and as it became harder to insist that their enslavement was mainly taking place as part of a "just war," that is, as a struggle against infidels that resisted conversion.

The growing association between black blood, slavery, and impurity can in part be attributed to the Iberians' long history of linking blackness to both servitude and Islam (because of the presence of black slaves in Muslim parts of the peninsula) and in general of seeing black skin color in negative terms.[17] But these long-standing prejudices are not sufficient to explain why blacks were more systematically marked as impure in the colonial context, and they certainly do not explain the form that racial ideology took in Spanish America. Rather, differences in the purity status of native people and blacks in the Spanish colonial context derived, in the first instance, from the distinct forms in which the two groups were incorporated into the Spanish sociopolitical order and, in particular, from the Indians' privileged relationship, as vassals of the crown of Castile, to king and faith—and all the "symbolics of blood," to borrow Michel Foucault's expression, that implied.[18]

This relatively privileged relationship emerged gradually, as a result of sixteenth-century demographic, political, and legal developments. During the early decades of Spanish colonialism, the Castilian crown vacillated with regard to allowing the enslavement of native people, and many were, in fact, turned into slaves. But, as epidemics, wars, and sheer exploitation through labor institutions such as the *encomienda* devastated this population, as some friars (among them Bartolomé de Las

and the English, the myth began to be regularly applied to Africans in the last third of the sixteenth century. See A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "Before Columbus: Portugal's African Prelude to the Middle Passage and Contribution to Discourse on Race and Slavery," in Vera Lawrence and Rex Nettleford, eds., *Race, Discourse, and the Origins of the Americas: A New World View* (Washington, D.C., 1995), 54; Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570–1650* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 39; and Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., LIV (1997), 103–142.

[17] On Iberian notions of blackness and slavery before and during the expansion to the Americas, see James H. Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., LIV (1997), 143–166; and, for more general European trends, see Robin Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," ibid., 65–102.

[18] Claudio Lomnitz-Adler stresses this difference in his *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), 265–269. Michel Foucault suggested that the importance of blood in the early modern period stemmed primarily from its function as a central sign for a person's place within the largely birth-determined system of social hierarchies or estates as well as from its role as a symbol of the relationship between the king and his subjects, which at root was about the sovereign's power of life and death over the latter; see Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1990), 135–150.

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Casas) denounced the abuses perpetrated by lay Spaniards against the indigenous people, and as Spanish kings seized the opportunity to prevent the colonists from becoming a powerful feudal nobility, native slavery was officially abolished.[19] The most important legislative act in this area was the 1542 passage of the New Laws, which also targeted the encomienda for extinction. These laws were ostensibly meant to protect the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, but they also consolidated royal power by turning native people into direct vassals of the crown of Castile. The crown essentially suppressed the rise of a strong colonial aristocracy by transferring control of native laborers to royal officials and, more broadly, by making indigenous people into quasi citizens—subject to Spanish rule but also entitled to certain protections, rights, and privileges. Of these rights, the most precious was undoubtedly freedom. In truth, Spanish enslavement of indigenous Americans continued to occur, but most of it was illegal or took place in frontier regions among populations that rejected Christianity and Spanish rule. Some also continued to take place in central Mexico, but colonial authorities took measures to end the practice, and African slaves gradually replaced native ones. Indeed, as of the 1540s, just as blacks were increasingly being forcibly imported to the viceroyalty, a significant number of indigenous people successfully sued for their freedom, principally on the basis of their status as Christians and vassals of the crown of Castile.[20]

[19] *Encomiendas* were grants of native labor and tribute given to individual Spaniards. The grantee was supposed to ensure the protection and Christianization of his *encomienda* Indians and to help defend the Spanish population when it was under attack. See Silvio A. Zavala, *La encomienda indiana,* 3d ed., rev. (Mexico City, 1992); Robert Himmerich y Valencia, *The Encomenderos of New Spain, 1521–1555* (Austin, Tex., 1991); Hugo G. Nutini, *The Wages of Conquest: the Mexican Aristocracy in the Context of Western Aristocracies* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1995), esp. chap. 4; and Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810* (Stanford, Calif., 1964), 58–98. On the passage of the New Laws of 1542 and the debates by Spanish jurists and theologians over Spain's right to rule over the indigenous people, see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982), 27–56; D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge, 1991), 58–101; and Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb, Ill., 1974).

[20] Seville's AGI and Spanish American archives house a great number of such cases, mainly for the 1540s to the 1570s. To provide but a few examples, see AGI, Justicia 1013, N. 2, R. 4; AGI, Justicia 1019, N. 5, R. 1; AGI, Justicia 1021, N. 1, R. 2; AGI, Justicia 1022, N. 1, R. 1; and AGI, Justicia 1023, N. 1, R. 1. On native people's use of Spanish laws and courts in central Mexico and its complex implications, see Woodrow Borah, *Justice by Insurance: The General Indian Court of Colonial Mexico and the Legal Aides of the Half-Real* (Berkeley, Calif., 1983); and Susan Kellogg, *Law*

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In political terms, the native people's status as free vassals essentially meant that they were in a kind of contractual relationship with the Spanish crown. In return for a series of rights and privileges—namely, recognition of communal organization, internal hierarchies, and access to land—the Indians were to remain loyal to their new monarchs and the Catholic faith. To be sure, Spanish political ideology also allowed for the recognition of blacks as both vassals and Christians.[21] After all, one of the main initial justifications for slavery, which Castilian laws classified as an unnatural human condition, was to bring infidels into the Christian fold. For centuries, Christians had used this argument in their struggle against Islam, which resulted in their strong association of bondage not only with debasement but also with religious deviance or heterodoxy. Although many black Africans were not Muslims, Iberians nonetheless considered them infidels or pagans, and the papacy sanctioned their captivity on the basis that it could result in their conversion and salvation. Thus, African slaves were supposed to be baptized or at least exposed to some basic Catholic principles before they arrived in the Americas. It was also usually on the west coast of Africa that their new vassalage was first recognized. Since Portugal (Spanish America's main supplier of slaves until the mid-seventeenth century) in theory prohibited the enslavement of blacks that it recognized as vassals of African kings, slaves were presumed to have been stateless. Before being forced into the hellish ships of the Middle Passage, however, they were branded—the second of usually at least four marks on their bodies—with the coat of arms of the European king and country of the people to whom they now belonged.[22]

and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500–1700 (Norman, Okla., 1995). For Peru, see Ward Stavig, "Ambiguous Visions: Nature, Law, and Culture in Indigenous-Spanish Land Relations in Colonial Peru," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, LXXX (2000), 77–111; and Steve J. Stern, "The Social Significance of Judicial Institutions in an Exploitative Society: Huamanga, Peru, 1570–1640," in George Collier et al., eds., *The Inca and Aztec States, 1400–1800: Anthropology and History* (New York, 1982), 289–320.

[21] See Hermann L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington, Ind., 2003), which provides an important discussion of how some blacks in colonial Mexico were able to claim greater autonomy from their masters (in the case of slaves) and, more generally, to enhance their rights, particularly conjugal ones. Bennett, however, underestimates how slavery and its legacy complicated the status of Africans and their descendants as "Christian vassals" in the Spanish colonial world, especially when compared to native people. See, esp., 4, 47–78, 180–181, 192.

[22] Emilia Viotti da Costa, "The Portuguese-African Slave Trade: A Lesson in Colonialism," *Latin American Perspectives*, XII (1985), 45–47, 54–60; and Russell-Wood, "Before Columbus," in Lawrence and Nettleford, eds., *Race, Discourse, and the Origins of the Americas*, 150–152. For a late-eighteenth-century description of the Portuguese slave trade, including branding practices, see Robert Edgar Conrad,

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But, if Spanish political ideology admitted the possibility that black Africans could become good Christians and vassals, their status in the colonial world was complicated by their incorporation as slaves, which meant not only that they were the subjects of the subjects of Castilian kings but also that responsibility for their Christianization fell mainly on their owners rather than on missionaries. Equally important, it also implied that both their conversions and subjection to the Spanish crown had been involuntary. Castilian legal thought placed a great deal of weight on voluntarism; blacks had been forcibly integrated into the Hispanic world, thus essentially precluding the possibility that they could have a communal contractual relationship with Castilian monarchs. Hence, their redemption was possible, but only through individual meritorious deeds that demonstrated their deep loyalty to the Christian faith, their masters, and, by extension, the larger community of Old Christians. Likewise, their allegiance to the sovereign could only be established through individual acts of service (military, for instance), not through communal affiliation.[23] Another factor that made the status of blacks in the Spanish colonial world problematic was their foreignness, or, rather, their African ancestral origins, which within Spanish political theory meant that, unlike the "natives" *(naturales),* they had no natural love for the territories that now belonged to the crown of Castile and were therefore more likely to side with Spain's enemies. Secular authorities thus repeatedly stressed the "treacherous nature" of blacks and mulattoes, their propensity to be disloyal not only to their masters but also to the crown, whereas church officials tended to interpret the frequency with which they were tried by the Holy Office for blasphemy (for remarks they usually made while being beaten) as indications of their rejection of Catholicism.[24]

Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil (Princeton, N.J., 1983), 15–23. For how free and enslaved persons of African ancestry in colonial Brazil used their status as subjects of the Portuguese crown to make appeals for justice, see A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "'Acts of Grace': Portuguese Monarchs and Their Subjects of African Descent in Eighteenth-Century Brazil," *Journal of Latin American Studies,* XXXII (2000), 307–332.

[23] Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth,* 267. Hence, royal and papal dispensations granted to people of African ancestry for their "defects of birth," a category that included slave origins and illegitimate birth, emphasized that they were "pardoned" because of their individual merits and virtues. See, for example, the papal dispensation granted in 1713 to Miguel Gaetano, AGI, México 709. On the participation of free persons of African ancestry in New Spain's militia units, see Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, Calif., 2001).

[24] See, for instance, AGI, México 22, no. 24: memorial of Viceroy don Villamanrique's government (included in the letters of his successor, Viceroy don Luis de Velasco, the younger), 1590. Colonial reports typically described the failure

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In short, a key difference between the native and black populations within the Spanish colonial order was that, whereas the former were integrated as communities, occupied their ancestral lands, and "willingly" accepted Catholicism and Spanish rule, the latter were incorporated as slaves, became Christians and vassals of the crown of Castile as individuals, and were forcibly imported to America. It is important to reiterate that the official status of converted Indians as "free" was not always consistent with their treatment and that they were subjected to different forms of coercive labor throughout the colonial period. Nonetheless, by the mid-sixteenth century, the institution of slavery started to become much more distinctly associated with people of African descent, and the religious and legal status of blacks and indigenous people began to differ in significant ways. These differences did not remain at the level of abstract political principles but had important and long-term implications for people of African and native ancestry in the Hispanic Atlantic world as well as for the development of Spanish colonial racial ideology. As Tamar Herzog has argued, religion and vassalage were central to the construction of early modern Spanish notions of *vecindad* (citizenship) and would ultimately help determine which groups in both the metropole and colonies would be granted automatic Spanish citizenship in the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz.[25] According to the Constitution, Spaniards (creoles), Indians, and mestizos living in the colonies were citizens of Spain, "Spaniards." People of African descent, however, had to be naturalized to become citizens. The jurists who favored denying automatic citizenship to blacks used different claims to make their case, but most emphasized that they should be designated as foreigners because their ancestors had been slaves and therefore had not become part of Spanish territories voluntarily. The forced arrival argument was significant because in legal terms it meant that Africans and their descendants had

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of blacks and mulattoes to pay tribute as a sign of disloyalty to the crown. Slaves tried for blasphemy by the Mexican Inquisition were sometimes able to avoid the Holy Office's harsh punishments by claiming that their remarks did not reflect a lack of adherence to Christianity but were desperate utterances made while they were being subjected to extreme brutality by their masters. See Javier Villa-Flores, "'To Lose One's Soul': Blasphemy and Slavery in New Spain, 1596–1669," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, LXXXII (2002), 435–468; Kathryn Joy McKnight, "Blasphemy as Resistance: An African Slave Woman before the Mexican Inquisition," in Mary E. Giles, ed., *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World* (Baltimore, 1999), 229–253; and Colin A. Palmer, "Religion and Magic in Mexican Slave Society, 1570–1650," in Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, N.J., 1975), 311–328.

[25] Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven, Conn., 2003), 140–163 (esp. 152–162).

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never pledged loyalty to the political community defined by the Spanish Constitution and thus could not be considered citizens.[26]

Religion and vassalage also strongly shaped the discourse of purity of blood because its central category, that of Old Christian, was premised on the notion that a person's ancestors, or "community of blood," had in the distant past *(tiempo immemorial)* formally accepted Christianity. Hence, limpieza documents produced by indigenous people and mestizos in New Spain frequently stressed the moment of acceptance of both Spanish rule and Christianity by their native ancestors or communities.[27] People of African ancestry, on the other hand, were generally not able to claim purity of blood because they could not establish through traditional Spanish legal formulas that they had Old Christian ancestry, that their progenitors had at some point freely accepted Catholicism.[28] As individuals, they might be able to purchase the status of purity from the crown (and some did), but not to prove it through their bloodlines.[29] In a sense, blacks were by definition impure because of their connection (real or imagined) to slavery, which by the early seventeenth century various Spanish colonial institutions treated as a permanent stain on lineage and which sought to deny the slave all sorts of rights and claims based on birth.[30] Christianity seems to have intensified

[26] Similar arguments about the foreignness of blacks were deployed in post-Revolutionary Massachusetts to deprive them of citizenship. See Kunal M. Parker, "Making Blacks Foreigners: The Legal Construction of Former Slaves in Post-Revolutionary Massachusetts" (paper presented at the American Bar Foundation, May 3, 2000, Chicago).

[27] The necessity of underscoring the voluntary nature of central Mexican native people's acceptance of Spanish rule and Christianity is even reflected in, and perhaps began with, book 12 of fray Bernardino de Sahagún's mid-sixteenth-century *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* . . . , which in one passage emphasizes Moctezuma's decision to welcome Cortés into Tenochtitlan. On the significance of the passage, see D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge, 1991), 123–124.

[28] As late as the eighteenth century, for example, documents explaining why people with African roots were denied access to the priesthood and other professions in New Spain frequently made allusions to their infidel origins *(origen de infieles)*. For example, see AGI, México 709. Blacks and mulattoes were also normally not allowed to serve as witnesses in civil or ecclesiastical tribunals (the Inquisition being an exception) because, it was argued, their descent from Old Christians could not be confirmed. I thank Javier Villa-Flores for sharing the latter observation with me.

[29] Needless to say, people of African ancestry did not necessarily accept Spanish definitions of purity of blood, and some even successfully challenged them. For a certification of purity in which the partially black candidate claimed he was free of any "bad race" *(mala raza)* and a good Christian, see John Carter Brown Library, Rare Book Collection, Libros de Informaciones (novitiate records of the Franciscan Order in colonial Puebla), XII.

[30] Orlando Patterson has argued that through a process of "natal alienation," African slaves were to relinquish their heritage as well as the possibility of bequeathing it to their descendants (Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*

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this process of "natal alienation," for one of the most disturbing aspects of the church's campaign to make Africans in the Americas into Christians was its effort to destroy their previous sense of selves, to negate their past.[31] Fears that these efforts had not been successful encouraged Spanish fantasies about blacks' power and potential to rebel, as the events surrounding the alleged 1612 plot would make clear.

The contours of the Spanish colonial discourse of limpieza—which recognized native purity but not that of blacks—were clearly beginning to emerge at the start of the seventeenth century. And, as the friar Gregorio García indicated when he discussed "Spaniards that descend from Indians," the crown's decision to grant native people and mestizos certain honors, privileges, and rights was central to shaping novo-Hispanic notions of limpieza. Remarkably, toward the end of the colonial period the relationship between the sovereign and the Indians was still cited as the main justification for the belief that indigenous blood was not stained. In his 1774 descriptive and illustrated history of New Spain, for example, Pedro Alonso O'Crouley (a Spaniard of Irish descent who spent time in Mexico), while describing the "racial mixtures" in the viceroyalty, wrote that an Indian was deemed "as untainted in blood as a Spaniard" and linked this condition to the legal privileges indigenous people had been granted by Spanish kings.[32] But, if the form that racial ideology took in New Spain was strongly influenced by the crown's decision to grant native people some political, religious, and economic claims within the republic while denying them to blacks, it was also determined by the social relations established after the conquest, which also promoted certain hierarchies of blood.

[Cambridge, Mass., 1982], esp. 6, 9). For a discussion of the link between "tainted" blood, dishonor, and "civil death" in the early modern Hispanic world, see Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford, Calif., 1999), 41–50 (esp. 44).

[31] Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico,* 13. The extent to which Spanish colonialism was able to accomplish this—the erasure of African lineage and memory—is, of course, debatable, varied by region, and depended on a number of factors. Furthermore, as the recent surge in studies on African Mexicans (not to mention Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán's pioneering work on the same subject, *La población negra de México: studio etnohistórico* [Mexico City, 1946]) has confirmed, no past is ever entirely dead. For a work that examines twentieth-century Mexico's efforts to deny the African origins of part of its population, see Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas, "The Erasure of the Afro Element of Mestizaje in Modern Mexico: The Coding of Visibly Black Mestizos according to a White Aesthetic in and through the Discourse on Nation during the Cultural Phase of the Mexican Revolution, 1920–1968" (Ph.D. diss., The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, 2001).

[32] García, *Origen,* 102; Pedro Alonso O'Crouley, *A Description of the Kingdom of New Spain* (1774), trans. Seán Galvin (Dublin, 1972), 20.

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Crucial to the consolidation of Spanish colonial rule in central Mexico were the unions, formal and otherwise, that the conquerors and early colonists forged with elite native women. These unions not only enabled Spaniards to acquire lands, tribute, and even rulerships *(cacicazgos)* but also to establish political and kinship links with important sectors of the indigenous population.[33] Furthermore, they quickly led to the rise of a mestizo population with blood ties to both communities, which the viceregal government tried to Hispanicize and turn, with mixed success, into a stabilizing force. Spanish colonialism also relied on the cooperation of native leaders, secured in part through the recognition of some of their traditional prerogatives and a series of new ones that were also based on blood. Thus, as of about the mid-sixteenth century, the titles of *cacique* (ruler) and *principal* (noble) were in theory to be granted only to those who could show that they descended from pre-Hispanic nobles or rulers. At the same time, the government actively promoted the construction of native dynastic histories, a genre that had already been prominent in central Mexico before the Europeans arrived and that was encouraged by Spanish officials.[34] New Spain's first viceroys even demanded proof of noble status in the form of historical texts. Don Antonio de Mendoza, for example, requested a history of the governing families of the province of Chalco-Amaquemecan. The result was an account written by the rulers and elders of the community that later became the main basis of a magisterial text written in early Nahuatl by Chimalpahin, the native historian of pre-Hispanic noble lineage who described the 1612 hangings of the thirty-five blacks and mulattoes.

At the time of the hangings, then, not only had many Spaniards in central New Spain established kinship and political ties with key sectors of the indigenous aristocracy, but also royal policies had contributed to making native noble genealogy important to the new social order

[33] For a recent treatment of the issue, see Pedro Carrasco, "Indian-Spanish Marriages in the First Century of the Colony," in Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett, eds., *Indian Women of Early Mexico* (Norman, Okla., 1997), 87–104.

[34] There is an extensive and growing body of works dealing with indigenous historical traditions and forms of writing before and after the conquest. For central Mexico, see Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (Austin, Tex., 2000); Enrique Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico: From the Aztecs to Independence,* trans. Albert G. Bork (Austin, Tex., 1994); James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, Calif., 1992), 326–373; Lockhart, *Nahuas and Spaniards: Postconquest Central Mexican History and Philology* (Los Angeles, 1991); Susan D. Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexican History* (Tucson, Ariz., 1989); and Xavier Noguez and Stephanie Wood, eds., *De tlacuilos y escribanos: estudios sobre documentos indígenas coloniales del centro de México* (Zamora and Zinacantepec, Mexico, 1998).

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(maybe even more than it had been in pre-Columbian times). Thus, Indian blood had, and would continue to have, a different place within colonial Mexican society's order of signs than black blood. It is important to stress, however, that, even though their (direct or indirect) links to slavery in theory relegated blacks to the lowest socioeconomic levels of Spanish colonial society, their position was much more ambiguous. By the start of the seventeenth century, enslaved and free people of African ancestry participated in crucial rural and urban economic activities.[35] Furthermore, they had a significant presence in Spanish households and were highly prized by their masters, not just as a source of labor and profit. According to various viceregal reports, even Spaniards of modest backgrounds made it a priority to purchase posts in local government for no other reason than to acquire black retinues and the symbolic capital that they embodied.[36] Indeed, in Mexico, where no separate planter class was created, many colonial officials had slaves, thus turning them into a part of the theater of domination.

In addition to being symbols of both servitude and prestige, blacks in central New Spain were relatively integrated into Spanish colonial society. In Mexico City and Puebla, many lived in proximity to the Spanish population and tended to be acculturated, especially those that had been raised in the Americas and worked in Spanish households. Spaniards referred to these blacks and mulattoes as either *criollos* (creoles) or *ladinos,* the latter term having been used in Spain to refer to Muslims and Jews who mastered the Castilian language or who were Hispanicized to the point that they could not be distinguished from "authentic Spaniards."[37] No matter how creolized persons of African

[35] Some blacks and mulattoes were employed in mining and agricultural enterprises (especially sugar), and many others provided skilled and unskilled labor in various cities. In Mexico City and Lima, which had the largest concentrations of blacks in the western hemisphere through most of the seventeenth century, they participated in a number of guilds and in industries such as shoemaking, ironware, and construction. See Frederick P. Bowser, "Africans in Spanish American Colonial Society," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge, 1984–), II, 366–367; Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford, Calif., 1974); and James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532–1560: A Colonial Society* (Madison, Wis., 1974), 171–198.

[36] A number of laws at the turn of the century tried to curb the trend. In 1601, for example, Viceroy don Gaspar de Zuñiga y Azevedo limited the number of blacks and mulattoes that could accompany any Spaniard to three. AGI, México 270: decree regarding accompaniments of blacks and mulattoes, 1601. Of course, the economic function of slaves, including urban ones, should not be underestimated. Some Spaniards in colonial cities, for instance, profited from renting their slaves to other Spaniards. For the case of Jalapa, see Patrick J. Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development,* 2d ed. (Austin, Tex., 2001), 64–67.

[37] Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua Castellana o Española* (1611) (Madrid, 1984), 747. Eventually, the term was applied mainly to Jews (*ladino*

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ancestry in central Mexico were, however, their strong presence in the dominant culture's intimate, familial sphere made whites anxious and distrustful, constantly on guard that at any moment their male slaves and servants would try to kill them, usurp power, and take white women. Slavery as a system of absolute control thus had its limits, for it created a culture of terror that not only victimized blacks but also had deep psychological consequences for whites as well. That is not to say that the latter were victims too but that they were imprisoned in a mental world that helped to produce and reproduce violent behavior. Like their counterparts elsewhere, slaveowners in Mexico existed in a constant state of fear of a social war that gave rise to racial fantasies similar to those that emerged in other New World societies sharing the dubious distinction of allowing racial slavery.[38]

As Joel Kovel has discussed, racist fantasies (recurring expressions of internal desires and fears) have tended to involve imaginings of aggression toward sexual rivals and to feature castration as a central theme. Approaching the study of race and racism primarily from a psychoanalytic perspective, he linked the fear of castration expressed in these imaginings to "the entire historical progression of patriarchal power," to competition between different groups of males over women.[39] Although Kovel's suggestion that the phallus in racist fantasies is ultimately a symbol for patriarchal authority is illuminating, his stress on unresolved and supposedly universal childhood development traumas (for example,

coming to designate the language spoken by Sephardic Jews) and, in the colonial context, depending on the region, to Hispanicized native people, mestizos, or blacks. In parts of southern Mexico and Central America, for example, the word was used to refer to Spanish-speaking Mayas and, in time, simply to nonnative people. See Nancy M. Farriss, *Mayas Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), 97, 122.

[38] On the psychological effects of slavery on white masters, see, for instance, Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1990), 15–75 (esp. 66–67); and Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (New York, 1997), 12–13. Racial fantasies also appeared, and became even more prominent, in some post-slavery societies, such as in the Jim Crow South, where thousands of people (most of them black men accused of raping or intending to assault white women) were lynched between 1880 and 1930. See W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana, Ill., 1993). Recent studies of the lynching of nonblacks in the U.S. South include Sarah Gualtieri, "Strange Fruit? Syrian Immigrants, Extralegal Violence, and Racial Formation in the Jim Crow South," *Arab Studies Quarterly* (forthcoming); and Jeffrey Melnick, *Black-Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South* (Jackson, Miss., 2000).

[39] Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York, 1970), 49. For Kovel, the fear of castration derives from the "anal-oedipal phase" of childhood development, during which the (male) child learns that the mother is forbidden and belongs to the father, who represents authority.

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those centered on dirt, excrement, and sexual taboos) that somehow get projected onto people with dark skin is problematic for a number of reasons, at least as an explanation for racism.[40] In the case of early-seventeenth-century Mexico, Spanish fantasies of racial and sexual violence expressed fears of castration, but these were rooted, not so much in the lingering effects of traumatic growing phases, as Kovel's psychological paradigm might suggest, but in a social order that enslaved and sometimes castrated black men, denied them patriarchal rights over their women, and essentially prevented them from reproducing themselves.[41] Not only did the emerging system of classification and its creation of categories of mixture not favor the growth of a community of blacks, but also the relatively small number of black women who were in central New Spain for the most part belonged to Spaniards who claimed their bodies and children as well as their labor.

According to one scholar of colonial Veracruz, male slaves' inadequate access to women in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was a main cause of unrest in the region and often led those that escaped bondage to conduct raids to capture native females.[42] Although it is dangerous to accept Spanish colonial accounts of maroons (runaway slaves) harassing, abducting, and raping indigenous women without closely scrutinizing them and to focus on this aspect of marronage instead of, say, on slaves' consciousness of their right to freedom, the sex ratios of the African population—generally three male slaves to every female one at this time—must have created an extremely difficult situation for black men. To make matters worse, the government tried to prevent the latter from reproducing with other groups, not only because it sought to protect native women but also because it wanted to curb the rise of a free population of partial African descent. This population grew in part owing to the principle of the "free womb" *(vientre libre),* which derived from the thirteenth-century Castilian law code known as the *Siete Partidas* and which the Spanish crown decided to extend to its American possessions, much to the dismay of some colonial officials. The principle stipulated that a child was determined to be free or enslaved based on the status of the mother (by the sev-

[40] See Thomas C. Holt's discussion of the problems with the "psychological paradigm" for the study of race and racism, in which he points out, among other things, that it generally fails to explain how individual mental processes deriving from childhood experiences or traumas become social ones—how individual psychology translates into racism at the collective level. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review,* C (1995), 5.

[41] Castration was at times used by colonial authorities to punish runaway slaves. It was common enough that in 1540 Charles V ordered a stop to it, but in 1579 New Spain's viceroy issued a decree that sanctioned it and other forms of bodily mutilation. See Palmer, *Slaves of the White God,* 123–125.

[42] Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz,* 90–92.

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enteenth century, the *casta* system of classification was based on both maternal and paternal descent).[43] Because the offspring of black slaves and indigenous women were entitled to freedom, colonial officials and slave-owners tried to encourage black men to have sexual and marital relations with only black females. Clearly, this was an unrealistic expectation given not only slave sex ratios but also the way in which the institution of slavery turned the bodies (and children) of black women into the property of Spanish men.

The racial fantasies that surfaced in connection to the alleged conspiracy in early-seventeenth-century Mexico took the particular form that they did for reasons rooted in the social relations of this colonial society. They were dreams or nightmares about a world turned upside down, in which it was no longer the labor and the sexual and reproductive powers of black women that were being appropriated and transferred to the dominant group but those of white women, in which it was not blackness but whiteness that was targeted for extinction, and in which blacks were not stateless but had their own kingdom and hierarchies. Was this fantasy world mainly concocted by male imaginations, or was it also produced by Spanish women's fear of being ruled and raped by black men? The question is important, in particular because, in the late seventeenth century, Iberian women were increasingly migrating to New Spain and other parts of Spanish America. Chimalpahin wrote that on Holy Wednesday all Spanish women wept, terrified by the prospect that their husbands would be killed and that they would be forced to wed the rebels, but in general the sources do not allow for much speculation about the role that they might have played in sexualized constructions of black men.[44] Their growing presence, though, probably heightened Spanish men's fears of a black rebellion.

[43] For a discussion of the more fluid nature of Spanish colonial categories in the Americas during the first century of colonialism, particularly about the role of gender in determining racial categorizations, see Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, "Ethnic and Gender Influences on 'Spanish' Creole Society in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review,* IV (1995), 153–176, and the responses to her arguments by Stuart B. Schwartz, "Colonial Identities and the *Sociedad de Castas,*" 185–201, and Sara Poot-Herrera, "Los criollos: nota sobre su identidad y cultura," 177–183. Also refer to Kuznesof, "More Conversation on Race, Class, and Gender," ibid., V (1996), 129–133.

[44] The topic has received less scholarly attention from scholars of colonial Mexico than the eroticization of women of African descent. See, for example, Estela Roselló Soberón, "Entre la luz y la sombra: la sensualidad de las mujeres de origen africano en la Nueva España," *Cuaderno Mexicanos,* XCV (2002), 171–186; Solange Alberro, "Beatriz de Padilla, Mulatta Mistress and Mother," in Kenneth Mills and William B. Taylor, eds., *Colonial Spanish America: A Documentary History* (Wilmington, Del., 1998), 178–184; and Martínez, "The Spanish Concept of *Limpieza de Sangre,*" 8–33.

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A series of developments that took place in the capital during and after Christmas Eve of 1608 animated colonial Mexican society's phantasmagoria of a monarquía africana, with black men enjoying patriarchal, economic, and political rights. According to a report written by the viceroy don Luis de Velasco (the son), on that day a group of blacks and mulattoes had staged a coronation.[45] They had gathered at the home of free black or mulatto women, where colonial authorities believed gambling, drinking, and parties were frequent affairs. On this occasion, however, the group evidently made no effort to be discreet and even left open the doors of the house that was hosting the jubilee. Disturbed by the participants' overt defiance of the laws that barred them from such meetings, the viceroy ordered Dr. Luis López de Azoca, a criminal judge *(alcalde del crimen)* in Mexico City's Audiencia, to investigate.[46] During an initial phase of questionings entailing forty-five witnesses, López de Azoca uncovered that the gathering had been composed of dozens of blacks and mulattoes, free and enslaved, and featured an elaborate simulacrum of a coronation involving fake crowns, chairs decorated as thrones, velvet cushions, and a solemn ritual culminating with shouts of *"¡viva el rey!"* After they had selected a king and queen and assigned themselves royal and noble titles (prince, duke, marquis, duchess, "Prince of Portugal," "Don Juan of Austria," "Transylvanian king," and so forth), the participants celebrated with a great dance, a feast, and another dance that lasted through the night.[47]

Although he found no tangible proof that a rebellion was being planned, López de Azoca concluded that the mock coronation had not been a harmless, carnivalesque inversion arising spontaneously amid the Christmas Eve celebration. He therefore decided to continue the investigation. In his report, he indicated that he wanted to punish the partici-

[45] AGI, México 27, no. 63: letters of Viceroy don Luis de Velasco, the younger, Feb. 13, 1609.

[46] Spanish American Audiencias did not simply have judicial functions; they had administrative and executive powers as well. The Mexico City one normally consisted of a president ex-officio (the viceroy), eight to ten magistrates *(oidores)*, four criminal judges *(alcaldes del crimen)*, one or two prosecutors *(fiscal de lo civil* and *fiscal de lo criminal)*, one high sheriff *(alguacil mayor)*, one lieutenant chancellor *(teniente de gran chanciller)*, and other lesser officials. On Spanish colonial legal institutions and culture, see Charles R. Cutter, *The Legal Culture of Northern New Spain, 1700–1810* (Albuquerque, N.M., 1995).

[47] See AGI, México 73, R. 1, no. 4: López de Azoca to the king and his Council of the Indies, 1609. In the early 1730s, French colonial authorities in Louisiana claimed to have uncovered a plot by African slaves to topple the government that involved black appropriations of aristocratic and ruling titles similar to those in 1608 Mexico City. See Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, "The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture," in Arnold R. Hirsh and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge, La., 1992), 74–76.

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pants to set an example for the rest of the black and mulatto population and, in particular, to discourage the growing number of maroons who were fleeing to regions near the ports of Veracruz and Acapulco from even thinking about creating alliances with other groups in the viceroyalty or siding with the British pirates who were occasionally making raids on the coast of Mexico (see Figure I). The alcalde also expressed concerns about the sexual threat that black men, especially maroons, represented to native women. His desire to continue the investigation, however, was initially frustrated because the participants in the mock coronation were protected by some of their rich and powerful masters.[48] Upset that some of these figures minimized the importance of the incident (probably because they did not want to lose their main sources of prestige), López de Azoca complained to the Council of the Indies that individuals of "low status" continued to buy offices or posts in local government simply to obtain permission to have companies of armed blacks.

Besides being resentful that men of presumably humble backgrounds were trying to ennoble themselves through their slaves, the alcalde was perhaps also angry that the crown continued to allow the introduction of Africans into the viceroyalty.[49] For, though many secular and religious officials owned blacks, not all colonial authorities agreed about the appropriate size of the population of slaves and the roles that they should be playing in colonial society. Since at least the mid-sixteenth century, viceroys concerned about security had been asking the crown to limit the importation of slaves and to send more arms and reinforcements to New Spain. But, because they profited handsomely from their monopoly over the sale of slaves in their territories (through the *asiento* system or sale of contracts to commercial houses) and because of the shortage of labor for colonial enterprises owing to the decline of

[48] AGI, México 73, R. 1, no. 4: López de Azoca to the king, 1609. This group of masters even included Viceroy don Luis de Velasco, whose pastry cook, a free *mulato,* performed the coronation. Among the other participants in the event were a *"mulata,"* who was named princess, and her daughter (called "the Moorish Queen"), both of whom were slaves of one of the Royal Audiencia's top officials (its alguacil mayor). The crowned king, named Martín, belonged to Baltasar Rodríguez, "the wealthiest man in Mexico City." Others either belonged or provided services to top secular and religious officials. A list of the participants in the mock coronation, their titles, and the names of their owners or employers is included at the end of the prosecutor's report (AGI, México 73, R. 1, no. 4). Note that the list includes a few Spaniards as well as a black woman who is described as being "dressed as a man" from the waist up.

[49] This resentment might have been brewing for some time. At the start of the seventeenth century, López de Azoca had had various clashes with the aldermen of Mexico City, in particular Jerónimo López, whose arrest, which the alcalde had ordered, scandalized the rest of the town council.

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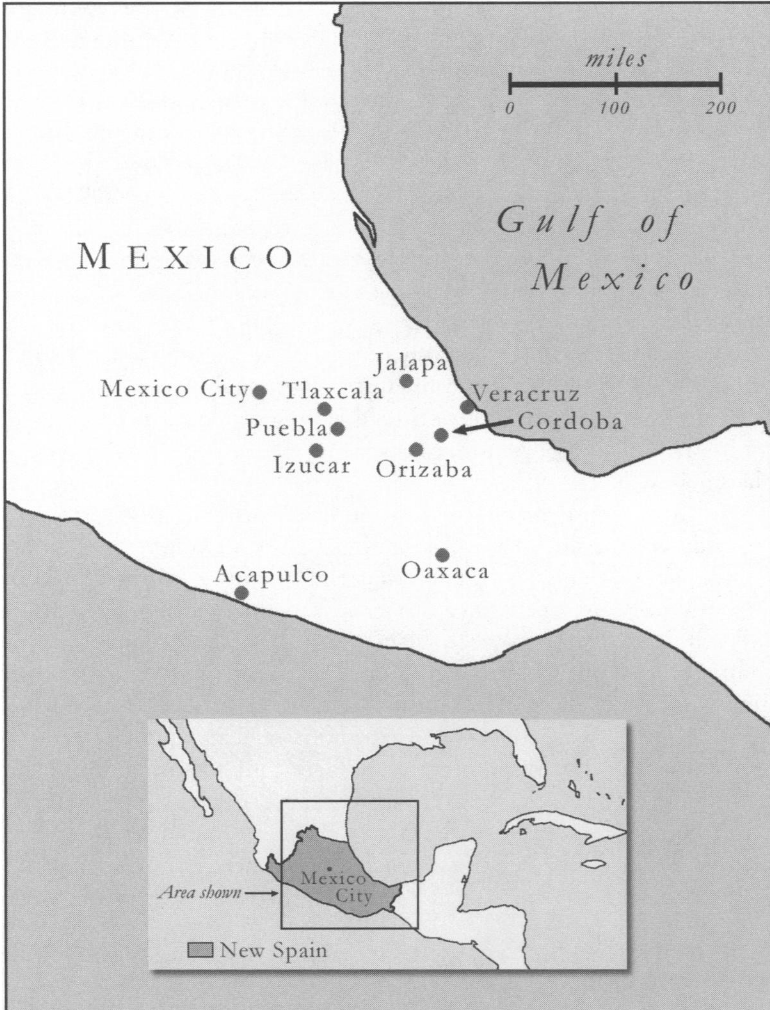

FIGURE I

Central New Spain. After Benjamin Keen, *A History of Latin America,* 5th ed. (Boston, 1996), 25. Drawn by María Elena Martínez and Rebecca L. Wrenn.

both the indigenous population and the encomienda system, Castilian kings were reluctant to heed such petitions. The slave trade in Mexico thus continued and by the late sixteenth century was producing one of the largest populations of enslaved and free blacks in the Americas. Already by 1570, New Spain had about twenty thousand blacks, concen-

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trated in four main regions. The population of African ancestry was most numerous in the capital, which in that year was home to about sixty thousand Nahuas (most of whom resided in the city's *barrios*) but also to approximately eight thousand Spanish males, one thousand mulattoes, two thousand mestizos, and eight thousand black slaves.[50]

The steady influx of slaves into colonial Mexico, the relative shortage of arms, and the small Spanish population in relation to everyone else produced strong critics of the crown's decision to continue to import Africans, among them López de Azoca. Thus, one of the reasons he might have wanted to punish the blacks involved in the mock coronation was to send an indirect message to the king. (Tellingly, the Council of the Indies' reaction to López de Azoca's report, handwritten on the margins of the document, was: "We don't have to respond to this.") Whatever his real motive, after threatening some of the slaveowners with suspension of their offices and royal salaries if they did not cooperate with his investigation, López de Azoca was able to imprison and question about thirty-one blacks and mulattoes, including seven women. The interrogations lasted about a month and yielded more details regarding the participants in the mock coronation, among them that the group included several *"white mulatas"* and *"mulatas moriscas,"* who, like others at the party, belonged to Mexico City's wealthiest *vecinos.* Most, if not all, were probably products of sexual unions between Spanish men and their female slaves, and, indeed, one was rumored to be the daughter of the Audiencia's high sheriff *(alguacil mayor de corte).* López de Azoca's report also emphasized that all of those present at the celebration were criollos. All, that is, except for Martín, the man whom the participants had chosen as their king and who had been born in "Guinea."[51] That the celebration included mainly criollos explains why

[50] See Davidson, "Protest and Palenques," in Pescatello, ed., *The African in Latin America,* 208–209; AGI, Indiferente, 1529, N. 41: "Relación de todos los pueblos de castellanos de Nueva España." For Puebla, the "Relación" (a report sent to the crown) listed 800 Spanish males, 500 black slaves, 100 mulattoes, and 100 mestizos. Atlixco was said to have 40 Spaniards and 25 slaves, and Veracruz, 300 Spaniards and 500 slaves. The report also estimated that in the bishopric of Tlaxcala (east of Mexico City) there were about 200 rural estates *(estancias),* with a total population of approximately 300 Spaniards and 400 slaves. Also refer to Palmer, *Slaves of the White God,* 14–17, 28; and Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico,* 21–22.

[51] Martín, too, was basically a creole, for he had arrived in New Spain as a child and had for the most part been raised there. Nonetheless, it is significant that the participants chose as king the one person among them who had been born in Africa, perhaps because he retained some knowledge of African social and religious traditions, which, as various scholars have noted, tended to be a source of great respect in slave communities. See Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Cambridge, 1986), 167.

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the participants might not have been able to conceive of a political structure different from that of their masters and why their titles even mimicked those of the main slaving nation at the time, Portugal, whose culture had a significant impact on the first generations of Atlantic creoles.[52]

Indeed, among the aspects of African social structure that slave communities in the Americas had most difficulty preserving were those related to their state apparatuses and political classes, especially vis-à-vis aesthetics and religion.[53] Elements of African political organization sometimes survived the transatlantic journey, particularly in institutions that blacks formed along African national or ethnic origins, which in New Spain included some of the lay religious brotherhoods *(cofradías).* According to John Thornton, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was not rare for these "national institutions" to hold annual elections to choose a king and a queen as well as to have coronation ceremonies. These elections and ceremonies were sometimes partly shaped by African political traditions, but for the most part they were inspired by European forms—a direct result of "disembedding," or uprooting Africans and violently inserting them into new social relations that Atlantic slavery represented, which in Spanish America was perhaps best captured by the term criollo.[54] Thus, despite their preference for an African-born leader, the participants in the 1608 mock coronation, some of whom appear to have been members of black confraternities, primarily assigned themselves European royal and noble titles.

But did this appropriation of European titles mean that the participants were planning a rebellion? Not necessarily. African national organizations sometimes provided the structure for planning rebellions, and mainly for that reason Spanish public opinion tended to oppose the creation of black confraternities.[55] But they did not always serve that purpose, certainly not as often as colonial officials implied they did. In the end, López de Azoca was unable to demonstrate that the Christmas Eve

[52] Creole Portuguese, for example, was the first *lingua franca* in coastal Africa, and some slaves took it to the New World; see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800,* 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1998), 214–216. For more on Atlantic creoles during the height of Portuguese involvement in the slave trade, see Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., LIII (1996), 254–264.

[53] See, for example, Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America,* 14; and Thornton, *Africa and Africans,* 206–234.

[54] On Atlantic slavery and the concept of disembedding, see Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery,* 5.

[55] See, for instance, AGI, México 19, N. 74: letters of Viceroy don Martín Enríquez, 1572.

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celebration had involved any kind of a plot and had to find comfort in the viceroy's ordering the public flogging of some of the participants in order to calm the Spanish population, which had quickly become convinced that a rebellion was planned for the day of the Epiphany. Historians, for their part, don't agree on whether the mock coronation had involved plans to rebel or not.[56] What is clear is that the incident was still fresh in the minds of the residents of the capital when rumors about another black conspiracy began to spread two years later, this time with much graver consequences for those who were implicated in the plot.

While discussing the hangings of the thirty-five blacks and mulattoes in Mexico City, Irving Leonard observed that colonial Spaniards suffered from a deep "neurosis," from a kind of "irrational" fear that their subjected populations would unite and rise up against them. Certainly, from a demographic perspective, Spaniards in central New Spain had reason to be afraid. At the turn of the sixteenth century, they were still vastly outnumbered by native people (despite the latter's demographic decline), and all of the main cities had growing populations of black slaves and free people of African ancestry.[57] The figures in different colonial sources do not always concur, but they all nonetheless indicate that, in main urban areas and some rural ones as well, the black population was not tremendously smaller than the Spanish one and that, in

[56] For example, Davidson stresses that it is not clear from the evidence whether so-called black conspiracies, during the 1608 mock coronation and otherwise, had existed in central Mexico (Davidson, "Protest and Palenques," in Pescatello, ed., *The African in Latin America,* 214). Palmer also contends that there is not enough evidence to determine whether the participants in the coronation were planning to rebel, but he believes that, because Francisco de Loya (the viceroy's pastry cook) told his employer about the incident and because a large number of people were involved in the festivities, they probably were. See Palmer, *Slaves of the White God,* 137.

[57] Leonard, *Baroque Times,* 19–20. Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah estimated that the native population declined from about 27,650,000 in 1519 to approximately 1,075,000 in 1605 (the figures are cited in Palmer, *Slaves of the White God,* 2). A report sent by Pedro de Vega to the Supreme Council of the Inquisition in 1595 estimated the total nonnative population of Mexico City to be 60,000, including 40,000 Spaniards, 10,000 slaves, and 1,500 free blacks and mulattoes. For Puebla, Vega estimated the total nonindigenous population to be 20,100, including 14,400 Spaniards, 2,500 black and mulatto slaves, and 3,000 workers in the *obrajes,* or textile mills, among which were Spaniards and "many mestizos, mulattoes, and free blacks." The report was based on a census taken in New Spain in 1592. Vega probably overestimated the Spanish population, which he determined by multiplying the number of Spanish heads of household (5,000 in Mexico City, 1,800 in Puebla) by 8, supposedly the average number of people in Spanish homes. See AHN, Inquisición de México, Libro 1049, fols. 54r–57v: report from Pedro de Vega regarding the population of Mexico City, Puebla, and other cities, 1595.

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some places, such as Veracruz, it was larger. This population's most rapid increase occurred between 1595 and 1622, when Mexico received almost half of the estimated 104,205 slaves who were imported to the Americas during those years, mainly from Angola and the Congo. The years prior to the hangings witnessed some of the largest importations: approximately 2,970 slaves in 1608; 6,271 in 1609; and 3,020 in 1610.[58] Alliances between this rapidly expanding population, native Americans, and persons of mixed descent clearly would have represented a significant threat to Spanish rule, and this knowledge no doubt contributed to the climate of deep suspicion and fear among colonials.

Furthermore, during the early seventeenth century, marronage and other forms of resistance by blacks and mulattoes were on the increase in New Spain. The eastern slopes and lowlands between Orizaba and Veracruz, a sugar-producing region, were the sites of chronic disturbances by roaming bands of runaway slaves who periodically raided plantations and towns, as well as of various small maroon settlements. Prompted in part by the rumors that spread after the December 1608 mock coronation, the viceregal government commissioned Captain Pedro González de Herrera, a resident of the city of Puebla de los Ángeles, to pacify the area. He was to begin by subduing a maroon community *(palenque)* founded by Yanga, an African-born slave who claimed to be from the nation of Bram (in modern-day Ghana) and of royal blood.[59] For months, González de Herrera's troops tried to suppress the palenque, but their efforts were largely unsuccessful, and the viceregal government was eventually forced to recognize it as a town.[60]

[58] For Veracruz's slave populations, see the above report by Pedro de Vega, and Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz,* 21–39, 80. The numbers dropped from 1611 to 1615, only to increase sharply again from 1616 to 1621; see Palmer, *Slaves of the White God,* 14–17.

[59] Until about 1700, most leaders of maroon movements in the Americas were African-born, and some, like Yanga, claimed to have royal blood. See Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore, 1979), 20.

[60] For more on this maroon community, see Davidson, "Protest and Palenques," in Pescatello, ed., *The African in Latin America,* 212–213; J. I. Israel, *Race, Class, and Politics in Colonial Mexico, 1610–1670* (London, 1975), 70–71; and Palmer, *Slaves of the White God,* 53. Another important maroon community surfaced in northeastern Oaxaca. It survived throughout the seventeenth century and in 1769 was formally recognized by the viceregal government after its members helped to defend the port of Veracruz from attacks by the British. Consistent with colonial Mexico's reluctance to allow blacks communal existence, this recognition came only after the maroons provided crucial military assistance to the government and after years of insisting that they should be rewarded for their services. Also in consonance with Mexican constructions of blackness, the priest who wrote a history of the town describes blacks as the source of the "various castes that perverted the purity of the Indians." See "The Foundation of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Morenos de Amapa, Mexico," in Mills and Taylor, eds., *Colonial Spanish America,* 274–281.

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Given the demographic inferiority of the European population in central Mexico, the surge in imports of slaves, and the endemic problem of marronage, it is not surprising that Spaniards expressed concerns about colonial rebellions, but their fears were often exaggerated. As Viceroy don Martín Enríquez had explained to the Council of the Indies in 1572, Spanish fears of revolts were for the most part unfounded; for the previous three decades, however, they had always intensified during Lent, resulting in the proliferation of rumors about black conspiracies and in the militarization of the main viceregal centers. Every year before the procession of Holy Thursday, he added, Mexico City's *regidores* (aldermen) assumed responsibility for monitoring different sections of the capital. Mounted on horseback and brandishing their spears, they took to the streets to reclaim the city for the Spanish population. This annual militarization of central Mexican urban centers and the increase in Spanish anxieties around Easter are interesting because they evoke the rise in tensions between Christians and Jews during Holy Week in late-medieval Spain, a time when "the sacred was physically experienced, relations of power criticized, the past became the present, and urban space was transformed." As David Nirenberg has discussed in his work on religious communities in the crown of Aragón, violence against Jews tended to escalate as plays recreating the Passion of Christ stressed their supposed central role in the Crucifixion. By dramatizing the foundational links and troubled historical relationship between Judaism and Christianity, these plays together with Holy Week rituals and violence simultaneously recognized and challenged the integral place that Jews occupied in Iberian society and, indeed, in Christian history in general.[61]

The place that blacks occupied in early modern Hispanic society certainly was not identical to that held by Jews in late-medieval Iberia. The histories of Spaniards and blacks did not intersect at a key past reference point, at least not one as symbolic as the Crucifixion was for Christians. Furthermore, although Jews in medieval Spain were considered the king's "slaves," they were not, nor had they been, incorporated into Christian societies as such. By contrast, blacks in the New World had mainly been introduced as human property, and by the early seven-

[61] AGI, México 19, N. 74: letters of Viceroy don Martín Enríquez, Feb. 28, 1572; David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), 200–230 (esp. 201, 214–218). Note that Nirenberg's definition of violence includes the use not only of weapons but words as well and that, though clerics were often involved, attacks against Jews during Holy Week were mainly undertaken by people not officially acting on behalf of either the state or the church (202 n. 8). The hangings of blacks in Mexico in 1612 were different, since they were ordered and executed by viceregal authorities.

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teenth century most of those who were free had at some point been associated, whether directly or through their parents, with the institution of slavery. Indeed, one of the factors that distinguished early modern essentializing discourses from medieval ones was their strong relationship to global, or at least transatlantic, systems of racialized exploitation. Nonetheless, the recurrent anxieties that Spaniards in Mexico expressed over the presence of persons of African ancestry in their communities, particularly during the profoundly religious period of Holy Week, were reminiscent of those they had manifested in Iberia, first over Jews, then over Jewish and Muslim converts to Christianity.[62] Though the meanings of those anxieties were clearly complex and no doubt differed across time and context, similarities in the form and period in which they were expressed can be partly attributed to the importance of religion in late-medieval and early modern Hispanic societies and, more concretely, to the growing significance of both Christianity and blood (descent) to Spanishness.

As discussed earlier, in the early seventeenth century Spaniards were not only beginning to mark blacks as impure but also were linking their enslavement to the Curse of Ham, that is, to a stained biblical genealogy—thus discursively connecting them with Jews, Muslims, and the "New Christians" of the Iberian Peninsula. Spanish thinkers such as fray Prudencio de Sandoval explicitly associated blacks with Jews and basically warned Old Christians about the dangers of reproducing with members of either group when he described blackness and Jewishness as ineffaceable stains on a lineage. To a lesser extent, Spaniards also linked people of African ancestry to Muslim converts to Christianity, a connection that is revealed in the colonial use of terms such as *mulata morisca* and that was particularly incendiary at the start of the seventeenth century, when the moriscos were being expelled from the Iberian Peninsula because of their alleged infidelity to both the crown and Catholic faith.[63] Their expulsion took place between 1609 and 1614, precisely the years during which anxieties over black conspiracies and rebellions in

[62] Just as they did in the metropole, Spaniards in New Spain used plays to convey religious messages. The genre became popular among different colonial populations. For a work that examines a Spanish Holy Week play that was performed in Nahuatl, see Louise M. Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday: A Nahua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico* (Philadelphia, 1996). Also see Inga Clendinnen, "Ways to the Sacred: Reconstructing 'Religion' in Sixteenth Century Mexico," *History and Anthropology,* V (1990), 105–141.

[63] Noting the association that Spaniards in Peru made between blacks and *moriscos,* Lockhart speculated that the latter, who were usually called or described as "white," were either Muslim Spaniards or slaves from Morocco; see Lockhart, *Spanish Peru,* 196. In sources from early-seventeenth-century Mexico, however, the term *morisco* more often than not refers to the child of a "mulatto" and a Spaniard.

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New Spain were at an all-time high, which suggests that dynamics in the metropole and colony were somehow influencing each other. At the very least, Spain's concerns about external enemies—in Europe mainly the Ottoman Empire and in Mexico British pirates—exacerbated anxieties on both sides of the Atlantic about perceived internal ones. Hence, just as Castile and Aragón were expelling their moriscos and accusing them of being untrustworthy converts who were willing to act as a fifth column, New Spain's viceregal officials were describing the alleged conspirators of 1612, and all blacks and mulattoes in general, as "enemies of the republic," as an element that had to be excised from the body politic.[64]

The exclusion of conversos and moriscos from public and religious posts (and the latter eventually from the Iberian Peninsula) coincided with the development of racial discourses in the Spanish colonies and explains some of the striking parallels between anti-Semitic and antiblack discourses in the early modern Hispanic Atlantic world. These parallels are particularly evident in the events surrounding the 1612 hangings in New Spain, which clearly involved multiple and complex layers of meaning. Those events, however, are extremely difficult to reconstruct, even partially, not only because the sources were mainly written by Spanish officials who had an interest in justifying their actions before the king but also because the main account of the alleged plot was produced by an anonymous source. This account—which various historians have relied on to explain developments prior to the hangings and which thus has been taken at face value—was completed twenty-three days after the executions and sent and dedicated to don Luis de Velasco, who by then had ended his tenure as New Spain's viceroy and was serving as president of the Council of the Indies. In the 1930s, Querol y Roso transcribed and published the report, and, noting that the author alludes to his involvement in the investigation, arrest, and punishment of the supposed culprits, he concluded that it had been written by a member of the Audiencia.[65] Because this document provides a sense of the ways in which the blacks and mulattoes implicated in the 1612 conspiracy were perceived by some of those in power and because, by making it into the colonial archive, it strongly influenced subsequent historical reconstructions of the thirty-five convictions and hangings, it is worthwhile to examine in some detail what exactly it claims occurred.

According to the anonymous report, at the end of 1611 rumors about a potential black conspiracy began to circulate after fifteen hundred persons of African descent marched through the center of Mexico City to

[64] See Luis Querol y Roso, "Negros y mulatos de Nueva España," *Anales de la Universidad de Valencia,* XII, no. 9 (1931–1932), 141.

[65] Ibid. The anonymous report is included on 141–153.

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protest the death of a female slave. Carrying her body as they took possession of the streets, they accused her owner, Luis Moreno de Monroy, one of New Spain's most affluent residents, of routinely beating her and being ultimately responsible for her death. In what seems to have been a demonstration of collective outrage against the symbols of secular and religious power, the protesters stopped in front of the palace and the headquarters of the Inquisition (the institution that frequently punished blacks and mulattoes tried for blasphemy) and ended their march at the house of Moreno de Monroy, where they threatened him and the other occupants with rocks and insults. Yet, instead of prompting an investigation of the death of the black slave, the protest, which apparently was organized by members of the Cofradía de Negros del Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Merced, led the colonial government to decree that its leaders were to be lashed in public and that their owners were to sell them outside New Spain. Clearly disapproving because the latter order was not carried out, the anonymous source noted that the punishments further enraged the protesters. It was at that point, he claimed, that they began to plan a rebellion for Christmas Eve of that year and elected two Angolan slaves, Pablo and María, as their king and queen (the pair was married but belonged to separate owners, one to the clergyman Juan Carvajal, the other to the merchant Cristóbal Henríquez). When infantry companies going to the Philippines arrived in New Spain toward the end of the year, however, the plan was postponed until April 19, Holy Thursday.

The anonymous report also explained that in the early months of 1612 a number of unexpected developments once again frustrated the conspiracy, including the deaths of Pablo (the would-be king) and, on February 22, of the archbishop don fray García Guerra, who since the previous June had been serving as viceroy until the king's new representative arrived. The passing of the archbishop-viceroy made the colonists feel especially vulnerable. Although the royal Audiencia assumed control of the government, the absence of figureheads in both the political and religious hierarchies exacerbated their fears of a colonial rebellion.[66] For the anonymous author, these fears were well founded. He claimed that, after the death of Pablo, the leaders of the Cofradía de Negros del Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Merced held a series of meetings to work out the details of rebellion. At those meetings, he added, they

[66] As Leonard observed, after the death of García Guerra made the Spanish population so convinced that an attack by the runaway slaves hiding near the Pico de Orizaba (or *citlaltépec* volcano) was imminent and that blacks and mulattoes in Mexico City and Puebla would cooperate, even the sound of hogs squealing made them imagine themselves the targets of colonial uprisings; see Leonard, *Baroque Times,* 20. Chimalpahin also refers to the escalation of Spanish fears, which he claimed reached a climax on April 18, Holy Wednesday.

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chose a new king and queen (Pablo's brother and widow) and promised the members of other black sodalities that, in return for their cooperation, they would later be allowed to select the next monarchs from their ranks.[67]

It was also in the tense period following the death of don García Guerra that rumors of black subversion ignited and that the Audiencia received several warnings about the plot. According to the anonymous account, the first warning was from two Portuguese slave traders (also anonymous) who, on one of the first days of Lent, claimed to have overheard a black woman utter, in the Angolan language, that the Spaniards would be killed during Holy Week and that all slaves would be liberated.[68] The two mysterious Portuguese supposedly also stated that the woman had made her remarks after a black man was punished for beating an Indian.[69] The second warning was from Juan de Tobar, a friar attached to the convent of la Merced. He reportedly told the head Audiencia judge, Pedro de Otalora, that members of the Cofradía de Negros del Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Merced were using their meetings to plan an uprising that they had originally scheduled for Christmas Eve. After this alert, the Audiencia suspended all Holy Week activities, including the processions, ordered that churches be closed on Holy Thursday, and advised the city of Puebla to take similar precautions. It also summoned the leaders of the various black confraternities under the pretense that they were being asked to participate in the upcoming funeral rites of Queen Margaret of Austria, wife of Phillip III. When two did not obey, the Audiencia imprisoned those who had presented themselves and placed Spanish spies among them.

Occurring on the first days of April, the arrests, together with the Audiencia's failure to provide the population with a reason for them, only encouraged the circulation of ever-more elaborate theories about a black conspiracy.[70] In this context of rumor, fear, and speculation, the

[67] Apparently, the Cofradía de Negros del Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Merced was primarily for *bozales* (blacks born in Africa), whereas the others were composed mainly of *ladinos,* or creoles. See Querol y Roso, "Negros y mulatos," *Anales,* XII, no. 9 (1931–1932), 147.

[68] According to Thornton, when Europeans referred to the Angolan language, they were probably speaking about Kimbundu, or perhaps Kikongo, both part of the Bantu group of African languages; see Thornton, *Africa and Africans,* 191.

[69] The anonymous report stated that the two Portuguese sent an anonymous warning to the alcalde of the Audencia (Dr. Antonio de Morga), but it does not explain how their identities (as Portuguese) were determined.

[70] The anonymous report is vague about the date of the arrests, but Chimalpahin claimed that they began to take place on the first of April, while the implicated were receiving religious instruction in the hospital of Nuestra Señora in Huitzillan. See Chimalpahin, *Codex,* trans. Lockhart, Schroeder, and Namala; and Chimalpáhin, *Diario,* trans. Tena, 279.

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tribunal received its third warning, a note from an elderly and *"ladina"* female slave. The anonymous report contended that the woman, who presumably was not literate herself, accused Sebastián, an old black slave who had cured her of an illness, of being a "witch" and "sorcerer," having many followers ("disciples") and using the "black arts" to attempt to kill the Spaniards and to poison their food and water. It also claimed that on the twelfth of April, the Audiencia received a fourth warning, this time from a Spanish widow and her daughter who declared that early that morning they had overheard two blacks discussing the rebellion and whether it was still possible to mount it now that their leaders were in prison. The tribunal's alcalde arrested and interrogated the two individuals in question and confirmed what the two women had testified. On the following day, he received the fifth warning, a declaration by a Spanish couple who learned of the alleged plot from their slave, a criolla. More arrests ensued. These took place around the middle of April, amid the passage of decrees that reinforced the ban on blacks carrying arms and wearing certain types of Spanish clothing. On the twenty-first of that month, the day after Good Friday, the Audiencia examined the case and ordered that the prisoners be tortured. According to the anonymous report, the tortures quickly resulted in many confessions, accusations, and information about hidden caches of arms. It also stated that, when authorities located some of these weapons, the tribunal convicted the prisoners and sentenced them to be hanged and quartered on the second of May.

The anonymous report contained two additional key bits of information, the first of which pertained to the sexual designs of the alleged conspirators. These designs, the author contended, were expressed after a mulata slave named Isabel, owned by an alderman, and a free *mulato,* who served as coachman to an Audiencia official (the *alcalde de corte*), rallied many people to the cause. Having believed the promises that the leaders of the conspiracy had made to them of allowing other confraternities to select future candidates for the throne, Isabel and her accomplice became consumed by dreams of being in power. The anonymous report also claimed that their excitement and ambition infected their followers, who were unable to keep silent about their intentions to kill Spanish males and make Spanish women the sexual slaves of black men.[71] The author does not specify whether the women implicated in the plot agreed with the second part of this plan. He describes Isabel as obsessed with the prospect of becoming queen but is not clear about how she felt, or how he thought she felt, regarding the fate of Spanish women once the rebellion was consummated. Presuming that there was

[71] Querol y Roso, "Negros y mulatos," *Anales,* XII, no. 9 (1931–1932), 148.

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a plot to begin with, it is thus entirely unclear whether the black women involved in it wished for a world in which their white counterparts experienced the sexual abuse and intimidation that was all too familiar to them or whether that part of the fantasy was invented by their menfolk. Since the so-called conspirators left no records of their own, it is impossible to know for certain.

Significantly, the anonymous report also features references to the religious heterodoxy of the alleged conspirators. Not only did the author express great contempt for the "Gentile" and "barbaric" burial services "deriving from their nation" that the blacks and mulattoes had given Pablo, but, as noted earlier, he also contended that one of the written warnings sent to the Audiencia was from a slave woman who accused an old black man of plotting to kill the Spaniards with "evil" spells and potions. This linkage of persons of African ancestry with occult practices and in particular with the Devil was one of the main tropes of Spanish colonial racial ideology.[72] Interestingly, however, those implicated in the plot were cast as traitors to both the crown and the faith, as bad vassals and Christians. Colonial correspondence confirms that rumors about their "deviant" religious practices played a role in the handling of their case. On April 15, for example, the royal Audiencia sent a letter to Puebla's town council stating that viceregal authorities had discovered caches of arms belonging to the alleged conspirators as well as "many black sorcerers and sorceresses" *(muchas negras y negros hechiceros)* with "wicked" designs.[73] Religious heterodoxy, conspiracies, poisonings, pacts

[72] Interestingly, the author suggested that the burial involved African-based dances and songs as well as the practice of sprinkling both the body and grave with wine and oil; see Querol y Roso, "Negros y mulatos," *Anales,* XII, no. 9 (1931–1932), 146. Colonial Spaniards strongly associated not just blacks but persons of native and mixed descent with witchcraft, idolatry, and the Devil. The literature on this topic is too extensive to cite in its entirety here, but for New Spain it includes Laura A. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham, N.C., 2003); Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain* (New Haven, Conn., 1994); Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries,* trans. Eileen Corrigan (Cambridge, 1993), 146–183; Solange Alberro, "Templando destemplanzas: hechiceras veracruzanas ante el Santo Oficio de la Inquisición, siglos XVI–XVII," in Antonio Guzmán Vázquez and Lourdes Martínez O., *Del dicho al hecho: transgresiones y pautas culturales en la Nueva España* (Mexico City, 1989), 77–89; Nora Reyes Costilla and Martín González de la Vara, "El demonio entre los marginales: la población negra y el pacto con el demonio en el norte de Nueva España, siglos XVII y XVIII," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review,* X (2001), 199–221; and Ruth Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil in Late-Colonial Mexico," *American Ethnologist,* XIV (1987), 34–54.

[73] Archivo del Ayuntamiento de Puebla, Actas de Cabildo, Libro 14, fols. 222v–224: minutes from the town council meeting on the "black rebellion," Apr. 18, 1612. The minutes include the letter sent from Mexico City's Audiencia on Apr. 15, 1612.

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with the Devil, and sexual excesses or depravities—these accusations were all common in Iberian (and, more broadly, European) anti-Semitic discourses and were frequently deployed before pogroms or other forms of religious, anti-Jewish, or anti-Muslim violence.

As a whole, the anonymous report provides a great deal of information about events leading up to the hangings, the highly charged sociopolitical climate in which rumors about the plot spread, and some of the sexual and religious issues that accompanied the construction of narratives of racial violence in the early months of 1612. But how reliable is it? Developments such as the large protest by blacks at the end of 1611, the death of don García Guerra, the ensuing escalation of anxieties in central Mexico, and the arrests and torture of black confraternity leaders are mentioned in other sources (among them town council records from the capital and Puebla), but details regarding the alleged conspiracy are more difficult to substantiate. Furthermore, several factors complicate the use of the anonymous report as historical evidence for the existence of such a conspiracy, the first being its mysterious authorship. As Querol y Roso observed, the writer's participation in the investigation suggests that he was a member of the Audiencia. Given that he also praises don Luis de Velasco's efforts to deal with the problem of "restless" blacks and mulattoes when he was viceroy of New Spain and makes several references to the many "ladinos" who participated in the 1608 mock coronation, it is possible that he was none other than López de Azoca, which would clearly raise even more questions about the trustworthiness of the report.[74] Perhaps he wrote it because, as president of the Council of the Indies, don Luis de Velasco was now in a position to persuade the king to curb the importation of slaves into New Spain.

Whether the anonymous author was López de Azoca or not, the possibility that it could have been produced by an Audiencia member implies that the writer had an interest in embellishing the rumors of a conspiracy. After all, the tribunal had to justify its actions while it was left in charge of governing, a fact that also renders the alleged confessions—made while the prisoners were being tortured—suspect. An equally serious problem with the account is the extent to which it

[74] Note, however, that whether López de Azoca was still a member of the Audiencia at the time of the hangings is not clear. Chimalpahin provides a list of the members of the tribunal in his account but does not include him. Of course, even if López de Azoca was no longer an alcalde for the Audiencia, he still could have been the author of the report. He might have been retired (the author of the document asked for a reward for his extensive services to the crown) and decided not to sign it because of fears that some of his adversaries might seize it. López de Azoca had a history of poor relations with Mexico City's town council, and in his 1609 report regarding the mock coronation he mentioned that he had many enemies.

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assumed that the rumors about the conspiracy, most of them spread by Spaniards or Portuguese who claimed to have overheard certain conversations, were true. Some or even all of these rumors could have been true, but they also seem to have acquired a life of their own in the highly charged context that followed the massive protest by blacks in the heart of Mexico City, especially after the death of don García Guerra. As Ann Stoler has argued in her discussion of narratives of violence in late-nineteenth-century Sumatra, rumors are a form of cultural knowledge; they not only reveal but also create a certain reality, shaping "what people thought they knew, blurring the boundaries between events 'witnessed' and those envisioned, between performed brutality and the potentiality for it." Given the prominent role of rumor in the production of the narratives of racial violence that circulated in Mexico in early 1612, it is simply impossible to distinguish fact from fiction and how the two might have influenced each other.[75]

On April 19, 1612, Spaniards in central Mexico were supposed to have marched in a procession as penitents, as they traditionally did on Maundy Thursday. Instead, most probably spent the day worrying about becoming targets of anti-Spanish violence, a concern that had been growing since scores of blacks and mulattoes had protested the death of Moreno de Monroy's slave, thereby not only contesting his ownership claims over her body but also demonstrating a unity that Spaniards found extremely threatening. It was that unity that the sistema de castas, already operating on various social and physical levels (witness the attention to skin color and gradations of Spanish and African blood in descriptions of the alleged conspirators), was partly trying to prevent, clearly not always successfully. One can only speculate what the actions of the protesters meant. Perhaps they marched not just to condemn the brutality of slavery but also to express their frustrations at the particular vulnerability experienced by female slaves at the hands of their masters and the powerlessness of black men to protect them. Perhaps, too, they sought to critique crown and church officials for not doing more to prevent brutal violence against slaves and the quotidian beatings and degradations that facilitated them.

[75] Ann Laura Stoler, "'In Cold Blood': Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives," in *Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories,* special issue of *Representations,* XXXVII (1992), 154. I thank Nancy Lutkehaus for drawing my attention to this article. A rigid distinction between fact and fiction does not exist. As scholars such as Natalie Zemon Davis have noted, history is a form of fiction, not in the sense that it tells lies, but because it relies on narratives, which almost by definition have plots in ways that life does not (Davis, *Fiction in the Archives,* 2–3). Also see Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth," in Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 37–53.

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In the months that followed the protest, a series of social and political developments combined with a proliferation of rumors made whites feel increasingly vulnerable and unleashed suspicions of what was possibly their worst fear: a colonial rebellion leading to the emasculation of Spanish males, the subjection of white women to black men, and the eventual domination of blackness. Such troubling imaginings of sexual violence and racial dispossession might have been encouraged by blacks and mulattoes seeking to manipulate the fears of their oppressors. But they were also largely the result of a racialized order in which the labor and reproductive power of black women were shamelessly and systematically appropriated by their Spanish masters, many of them top secular and religious officials, and in which black men were denied patriarchal privileges and, indeed, their own reproduction. Colonial records do not reveal whether these were primarily male fantasies—whether Spanish women feared becoming the sexual victims of black men and whether the black women implicated in the plot wanted them to suffer precisely that fate. All that can be said with certainty is that, from the point of view of certain Spanish sources, the men and women who were accused of plotting the rebellion did not have substantially different visions of the form that their vengeance and postrebellion society would take.

As symbols of power for men and vehicles of their reproduction, women's bodies—their wombs, really—were at the center of the racialized order and, in particular, of the struggle between blackness and whiteness. The narratives of racial violence circulating in Mexico City in early 1612 made that clear. By making black men into the protagonists of the new political, economic, and reproductive order, those narratives not only turned the sistema de castas on its head but also demonstrated the extent to which Spanish American mestizaje, occasionally still romanticized in current scholarship, was a function of a number of overlapping power relations.[76] The narratives revealed that gender, sexuality, class, and race were, as they have been elsewhere, absolutely intertwined in the Spanish colonial world.

In the early seventeenth century, that world was witnessing the consolidation of the transatlantic slave system, the rise of significant populations of blacks and mulattoes, and the extension of the metropolitan discourse of limpieza de sangre to colonial groups.[77] The full implica-

[76] See, for instance, Gary B. Nash, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America," in Martha Hodes, ed., *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York, 1999), 17–18.

[77] Martínez, "The Spanish Concept of *Limpieza de Sangre*"; and María Elena Martínez, "Religion, Purity and 'Race': The Spanish Concept of *Limpieza de Sangre* in Seventeenth Century Mexico and the Broader Atlantic World," Working Paper no. 00–02 of the International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, 1500–1800, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 2000.

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tions of Iberian notions of purity of blood were in a sense only realized in the colonial context, for it was there that systems of classification based on degrees of African, native, and European blood were produced to perpetuate the political and economic subordination of blacks, indigenous people, and the population of mixed ancestry.[78] Yet the discourse of limpieza de sangre marked the native and black populations differently, for, at least in New Spain, the latter was classified as impure more frequently and systematically. Blacks were the quintessential foreign element that, like "Jewishness," could not be fully assimilated into Spanish colonial society or into Spanish Old Christian blood itself.[79] They were the element even deemed to be a threat to the purity of the Indians.

Yet, for all the anxieties about sexual relations between black men and native women, it was the possibility of the former having access to Spanish women that troubled colonials the most. Historians of early-seventeenth-century Mexico have yet to uncover evidence that unions, licit or illicit, between black men and white women were taking place in any significant number.[80] Therefore, one can only surmise that such unions were at the center of racial fantasies because of the potential threat that they posed for the colonial social order. Because the status of limpieza de sangre was generally determined by the paternal and maternal lines of descent, Spanish men had to enjoy exclusive, or near exclusive, access to Spanish women; allowing black men to introduce their blood into Spanish lineages would have jeopardized the reproduction of their purity. Moreover, it would have undermined one of the main psychological premises of colonialism, that of the sexual (and reproductive) prerogatives enjoyed by white men. In short, unions between black men and Spanish women, especially if they led to marriage, would have threatened colonial hierarchies of rule, and, for this reason, they figured prominently in narratives of racial violence.

Spanish deployments of notions of impurity against blacks and mulattoes also help to account for why these groups became the source

[78] Thomas C. Holt briefly addresses this issue and its relationship to early modern notions of race and nation in *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 41–49.

[79] Blacks' "otherness," however, did not prevent Spanish males from continuing to have illicit relations with women of African ancestry. In the last third of the seventeenth century, the Mexican church intensified its battle against concubinage and forced some Spaniards, under threat of excommunication, to legalize their unions with black and mulatto women, including slaves. See Beltrán, *La población negra de México,* 247–248.

[80] The historiography of the U.S. South is a different case. See Martha E. Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, Conn., 1997).

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of great anxieties during Holy Week, a period of intense religious activity centered precisely on the question of membership in the (Christian) community. In early-seventeenth-century New Spain, just who was part of that community was by no means clear, even among the colonists. These included New Christians (some from Portugal) and many Old Christians who were not at all well versed in basic Christian theology.[81] Easter, a time when Iberians expressed their devotion to Christ and affirmed the temporal depth of their loyalty to Christianity, mitigated some of the tensions stemming from these and other differences (such as class) within the Spanish community.[82] But it also made Old Christians palpably uneasy about the recent converts among them, especially those who had access to their households and a great deal of knowledge about their social and political lives. The sharp increase in Spanish suspicions of potential betrayal, religious and political, by the New Christians closest to them—whether conversos in Spain or blacks in early colonial Mexico City—heightened the threat of physical violence. In New Spain, however, that threat was normally not actualized and subsided once Holy Week had passed. What made Easter of 1612 different was a combination of domestic and international developments (including the political vacuum, the influx of slaves, and the perceived threats of external and internal enemies) that made colonials feel especially vulnerable. Certain colonial officials might have exploited such vulnerability to make examples of a group of unruly blacks and mulattoes, thereby also

[81] By the turn of the sixteenth century, Old Christians in both Spain and the New World were increasingly becoming the focus of Inquisitorial activities, mainly for blasphemy and sexual or moral transgressions such as bigamy. Furthermore, the church was undertaking a massive campaign to instruct rural Spanish communities on Christian matters such as the sacraments. See, for example, Jean Pierre Dedieu, *L'administration de la foi. L'inquisition de Tolède XVIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Madrid, 1989), 240–241; Richard E. Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century* (Albuquerque, N.M., 1960); Solange Alberro, *Inquisición y Sociedad en México, 1571–1700* (Mexico City, 1988), esp. 149–151; and Jean Pierre Dedieu, "'Christianization' in New Castile: Catechism, Communion, Mass, and Confirmation in the Toledo Archbishopric, 1450–1650," in Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry, eds., *Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1992), 1–24.

[82] The number of poor Spaniards migrating to New Spain increased in the early seventeenth century, and they were not as able to share in the spoils of conquest as earlier generations. Many colonial documents refer to these poor Spaniards as "vagabonds" and lump them with other "problem" populations such as blacks and "castas." Interestingly, the 1608 mock coronation festivities included a few Spaniards, and Chimalpahin noted that some lay Spaniards helped the religious carry some bodies of the thirty-five blacks and mulattoes to the cemetery. Although no evidence exists, it is temping to contemplate the possibility that some of these Spaniards had different views about blacks, or slavery itself, from the rest of their community.

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indirectly critiquing the Spanish crown's policy of introducing more Africans into the viceroyalty.

Either because there was no conspiracy or because it was effectively aborted by colonial authorities, when Maundy Thursday arrived neither Mexico City nor Puebla had to face a rebellion. The thirty-five blacks and mulattoes who were identified by the Audiencia as leaders of the conspiracy were tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged and quartered. According to Chimalpahin, when the day of the executions arrived, only six were butchered because doctors declared that distributing the parts of any more bodies around Mexico City would jeopardize the health of the population.[83] The remaining torsos were simply dumped next to the royal accounting building (Contaduría) as some Spaniards left to prepare for the celebration of the Holy Cross. In the evening, when the celebration was taking place, a group of blacks and mulattoes rushed to shroud the twenty-nine bodies, determined to grant them a somewhat more dignified ending than the other six had been given. They placed the dead, or what was left of them, on *petates* (palm mats) and, with the help of some native people and a handful of lay Spaniards, carried them to a cemetery. The group was accompanied by religious who provided a chorus of songs as the procession made its way to the Hospital of Our Lady of Misericordia, where the twenty-nine bodies received a Christian burial. With regard to the other blacks who were implicated in the plot, Chimalpahin wrote that one who was identified as the main leader of the movement was hanged on the fourteenth of May and that many others were shipped to Spain to testify before the king.

The anonymous account of the hangings claimed that many people witnessed the executions and that they had a strong impact on the population of slaves, which subsequently became much more submissive to their masters. What the author neglected to mention is that they probably also had a great effect on the Spanish population itself. The hangings were ordered by the government and hence did not constitute lynchings; rather, they were manifestations of state power. As such, they conveyed the message that royal authority (embodied in the Audiencia) extended to all bodies in the viceroyalty, even those that were deemed private property. Furthermore, the dramatic display of state-sanctioned violence against thirty-five people—an extreme form of the brutality that was being routinely inflicted on men and women of African ancestry—undoubtedly assuaged, at least temporarily, the fears that the demo-

[83] He also reported that "Cristóbal Tranpipitl," a "mulato" (which here most likely refers to partial African and native descent), and his son were in charge of the hangings.

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graphically inferior whites had of colonial rebellions and restored their confidence in the viceregal government's ability to maintain order and exert power over the more populous non-Spanish groups. By lessening the possibility that their fantasy of being obliterated would become a reality, the hangings also served to affirm their existence, and, indeed, the continuation of a racial order premised on the superiority of whiteness. Finally, the public display of the treachery of persons of African ancestry helped to legitimate slavery, an institution that early modern Iberians related to the Curse of Ham and that, ironically, was to help turn blacks into good Christians and vassals.

Did a plan for rebelling and forging a new sexual-racial-political order exist, or was it simply a fiction, a product of the phantasmagoria of central Mexican Spanish society in which blacks often played a dominant role? Given their position in the Iberian colonial world, black men might have fantasized about appropriating Spanish males' political, patriarchal, and reproductive privileges. Frantz Fanon has powerfully described this inversion fantasy and its sexual component in his discussion of the psychological effects that living in a racist society can have on black men.[84] Stated differently, colonial and any other societies structured by race generate certain forms of desire and—as the 1608 staged coronation in Mexico City suggests—mimicry. It is also possible that some black women might have shared the inversion fantasy, at least the part that involved ending their enslavement and regular subjection to violence. As viceregal reports consistently reveal, physical violence against blacks was endemic in New Spain, which should contribute to dispelling any lingering assumptions about slavery in Spanish America being less brutal than elsewhere. Many men and women of African ancestry, including those who were free, creolized, and partly integrated into Spanish communities, did not seem to lack motives for wanting to rebel. Perhaps for that reason, Spaniards became extremely anxious when ladino blacks showed signs of identifying with African-born slaves, potential sources of knowledge about a world that had been violently taken from them and that, though now distant, some might have longed to recreate. After all, in a society that strongly privileged lineage and history, what could be worse than not having a past and living in a state of natal alienation?

In short, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that a black conspiracy existed at the end of 1611 or that it surfaced in the tense months that followed, perhaps as a response to the increasingly hostile actions of viceregal officials. But, interestingly, at least one source, Chimalpahin, expressed some doubts about the whole conspiracy narra-

[84] See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, 1967), 63–82.

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tive, even as he reconstructed it from the rumors that circulated in the capital before and after the hangings. "These then are all the things that were said and told about the blacks," he explained, "for *they were accused of very much that maybe they truly were going to do or maybe not,* for only our lord God himself knows whether it is so, because some [of the blacks] did not acknowledge the full truth of it."[85] According to the native historian, all that they had done while they awaited death on the hanging trees facing the Palace and the Cathedral was to express resignation, invoke the Savior, the redeemer, and insist that they did not know why they were paying with their lives.

Did Chimalpahin have a different perspective on the hangings? Was he more skeptical about the validity of the rumors because of his own ambivalent place in colonial society? Or did he simply reproduce Spanish views about blacks?[86] It would, of course, be foolish to conclude that, because the native historian was writing at the start of the seventeenth century, when the devastating effects of colonial exploitation on the indigenous population of central Mexico were abundantly clear, he somehow identified with the thirty-five blacks and mulattoes who were hanged. Spanish colonialism encouraged tensions between native people and blacks, and they certainly did exist.[87] Both the anonymous report and Chimalpahin's account suggested that these tensions were active before the hangings. The former claimed that some of the alleged conspirators resented the way that Spaniards treated them vis-à-vis the Indians, and the latter made references to rumors that they intended, upon assuming power, to brand the faces of the indigenous inhabitants of New Spain and to turn them into their vassals. The native historian

[85] Chimalpahin, *Codex,* trans. Lockhart, Schroeder, and Namala (emphasis added).

[86] Doris Mathilde Namala came to this conclusion in her "Chimalpahin in His Time: An Analysis of the Writings of a Nahua Annalist of Seventeenth-Century Mexico concerning His Own Lifetime" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2002), 79–81.

[87] Following Spanish sources, scholars of colonial Spanish America have tended to underscore these tensions. For example, see Lockhart, *Spanish Peru,* 171–172, 198; and Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz,* 85, who goes as far as to suggest that native people were more "ethnocentric" than the Spaniards. But it is important to remember that Spaniards were always eager to exploit and exaggerate frictions between blacks and indigenous people and that there were instances of cooperation between the two populations in Mexico and other parts of the Americas. The problem is that, as bell hooks has pointed out, these instances are not easy to recover from conventional historical records; see hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, 1992), 180–183. For an interesting discussion of how certain native groups have identified blackness, not with slavery, but with liberation, see Norman Whitten and Rachel Corr, "Contesting the Images of Oppression: Indigenous Views of Blackness in the Americas," *NACLA: Report on the Americas,* XXXIV, no. 6 (2001), 24–28.

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also noted, however, that on the eve of Holy Thursday he and the rest of the native population were not at all scared by the prospect of a black rebellion but rather marveled at "how the Spaniards were destroyed by their fear and didn't appear as such great warriors."[88]

Equally significant, not all aspects of Chimalpahin's account of the hangings conformed to what was reported in Spanish sources, and he was not as quick to condemn the thirty-five who were hanged. For instance, his version of the conspiracy depicted those implicated as fully committed to Christianity, so much so that they were supposedly planning to spare the lives of friars in order to have them prepare some blacks to become church officials—a remarkable statement that hints at the possibility of competing views about who were the true Christians in New Spain.[89] Furthermore, by casting doubts on the rumors about the existence of a plot as well on the reports of the alleged conspirators' confessions, Chimalpahin did not simply reproduce Spanish views. He seems to have been fully conscious that a seemingly straightforward incident such as the convictions of the thirty-five blacks and mulattoes was the result of a complex set of events that were investigated by persons with specific interests, shaped by rumors, and reconstructed by authorities invested in justifying their actions—in sum, that power plays a central role in the various stages of historical production.

[88] Chimalpahin, *Codex,* trans. Lockhart, Schroeder, and Namala.

[89] For instance, if it was true that the so-called conspirators hoped to create a black Christian kingdom, did they consider the Spanish colonists bad Christians, as the participants in the Túpac Amaru rebellion in the central Andes would a century and a half later? See Jan Szemiński, "Why Kill the Spaniard: New Perspectives on Andean Insurrectionary Ideology in the Eighteenth Century," in Steve Stern, ed., *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (Madison, Wis., 1987), 166–192.

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