

Charles Mann, 1493: Uncovering
The New World Columbus Created
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Crazy Soup

JOHNNY GOOD-LOOKING

In the 1520s a solitary man constructed a small chapel on the western highway out of Mexico City, just beyond the causeway that led to the city's western gate. No description of the chapel survives, but it was probably just two whitewashed adobe rooms: one for the shrine itself, with an altar and cross; one for the man who built and maintained it. Nearby were a few small fields on which he grew crops. The structure was known as the Chapel of the Martyrs or, more impressively, the Chapel of the Eleven Thousand Martyrs. It may have been the first Christian church in mainland America.

The man in the chapel was named Juan Garrido. Little is known about his childhood except that he was not named Juan Garrido. According to his biographer, Ricardo E. Alegría, an anthropologist in Puerto Rico, he was born in West Africa, probably in the 1480s. His rich, powerful family desired to grow richer and more powerful by selling slaves to Europeans. Alegría suggests that Garrido's family sent the youth to Lisbon as an agent. Matthew Restall, a Pennsylvania State University historian who has also studied Garrido's life, is skeptical of this idea—very few Africans, he says, came voluntarily to Europe. Almost certainly Garrido arrived as a slave, Restall believes, one of the tens of thousands of African captives then in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal).

Whether Garrido came in chains or as a representative of his family, he refused to follow anyone else's plan. Rather than remaining in Portugal, he crossed the Spanish border and went to Seville. He spent seven years there, giving himself a European name along the way. Something of his personality is hinted at by the name he chose: Juan Garrido, which means, more or less, Johnny Good-looking.

Johnny Good-looking crossed the Atlantic early in the sixteenth century, landing in Hispaniola. As aggressive and ambitious as any other conquistador, a young man with his blood aboil, he quickly attached himself to a local sub-governor, Juan Ponce de León y Figueroa, accompanying him on a mission to take over the island of Puerto Rico. When Ponce de León sank his fortune into an off-kilter hunt for the Fountain of Youth, Garrido joined the futile quest. (Along the way, they became the first people from the opposite shore of the Atlantic to touch down on Florida.) When Spain launched punitive expeditions against Caribe Indians on half a dozen Caribbean islands, Garrido brought his gun. And when Hernán Cortés seized the Triple Alliance, Johnny Good-looking was at his side.

The alliance is more commonly known as the Aztec empire, but the term is a nineteenth-century invention, and historians increasingly avoid it. It was a consortium of three militarized city-states in the middle of Mexico: Texcoco, Tlacopan, and Tenochtitlan, the last by far the most powerful partner. When the Spaniards arrived, this Triple Alliance ruled central Mexico from ocean to ocean and Tenochtitlan was bigger and richer than any city in Spain.

As canny a politician as he was a fighter, Cortés was able to foment an assault on the empire by its many enemies and place himself at its head. But despite taking the Triple Alliance emperor hostage in his own palace—a paralyzing surprise to the enemy—the initial assault failed calamitously. Indeed, the Spaniards barely escaped from Tenochtitlan. When all seemed lost,



An African man, very possibly Juan Garrido, holds Hernán Cortés's horse as the conquistador, helmet in hand, approaches Motecuhzoma, paramount leader of the Triple Alliance. The drawing is from Diego Durán's renowned account of the conquest of Mexico, *The History of the Indies of New Spain* (c. 1581).

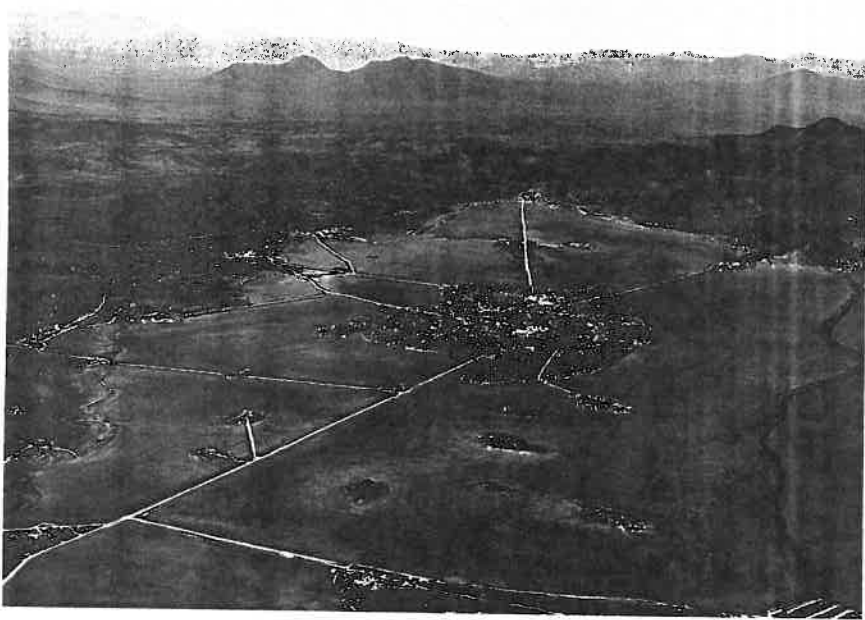
Cortés had a stroke of luck: the accidental introduction of the smallpox virus. Never before seen in the Americas, transmittable with horrific ease, the virus swept through densely packed central Mexico, killing a third or more of its population in a few months.*

As the Triple Alliance reeled from the epidemic, the Spanish-Indian army attacked the capital a second time in May 1521, with as many as 200,000 troops. Tenochtitlan occupied a Venice-like clump of islands, many of them human-made, on the west side of an eighty-mile-long, artificially recon-toured lake. Spiderwebbing from the metropolis was an intricate network of causeways, dikes, dams, baffles, and channels that both kept back floods during the wet season and funneled water around the city during the dry season.

Cortés's strategy was in part to avoid the heavily defended causeways into the city by draining and filling the moat-like channels around them, thus creating dry land from which he could assault less-protected areas of the perimeter. During the siege, the attackers repeatedly tore out dikes and piled up stones and earth during the day, and the Triple Alliance repeatedly reassembled the dikes and reflooded the channels at night. On June 30, the Alliance set a trap at the shore entrance to Tenochtitlan's western causeway, undermining a bridge that crossed a shallow, reed-thick waterway. When the attackers charged across the bridge, wrote the sixteenth-century chronicler Diego Durán, "the entire thing collapsed, together with the Spaniards and Indians who stood upon it." From hiding places in the reeds shot canoes loaded with men wielding bows, spears, and stolen Spanish swords. Flailing in the brackish water, the Spaniards and their horses were easy prey; Cortés himself was wounded and almost captured.

As the surviving attackers fled to safety, they heard the boom of an enormous drum—"so vast in its dimensions," the conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo later recalled, "that it could be heard from eight to twelve miles distance." The Spaniards spun on their heels. Across the water they could see Triple Alliance soldiers dragging Spanish prisoners, still dripping from the watery ambush, to the summit of a great, pyramidal temple. In an act meant to terrify and demoralize, Alliance soldiers and priests ripped open the captives' chests, tore out their hearts, and kicked the bodies down the temple steps. The next morning they marched another prisoner—"a handsome Sevillian," Durán wrote—to the edge of the channel and in full view of his

* This direst instance of the Columbian Exchange is often said to have been introduced in the body of an African slave named Francisco de Eguía or Bagaía. Other reports contend that the carriers were Cuban Indians brought as auxiliaries by the Spaniards. Restall suspects that "granting the role of patient zero" to Africans or Indians is "classic Spanish scapegoating." So horrific was the epidemic, he suggests, that Spaniards did not want to be seen as the cause.



Tenochtitlan, seen in a present-day artist's reconstruction, dazzled the Spaniards when they saw it—the city was grander than any in Spain. Protecting the city was an irregular, ten-mile-long dike (far right in image) that separated the brackish water of the main lake from a new, human-made freshwater lake that surrounded the city and provided water for a network of artificial wetland farms known as *chinampas*.

friends “ripped him to bits then and there.” When Tenochtitlan fell, Cortés had his revenge. He stood by as his troops and their native allies despoiled the shattered city, slaughtering the men and raping the women.

Juan Garrido may have been at the ambush or known the sacrificed Spaniards or both. In any case, he was asked by Cortés to build the Chapel of the Martyrs, a monument and graveyard for fallen conquistadors, on the spot where the ambush took place. The assignment was but one of many, for Garrido soon became one of the conqueror's go-to men as he erected Spanish Mexico City literally atop the wreckage of Indian Tenochtitlan. Johnny Good-looking became a kind of majordomo for the new municipal government; protector of the trees that shaded the highways into town (the records give no reason for the position, but one can guess the trees were being cut for fuel); guardian of the main city water supply (Tenochtitlan, which had no water of its own, was supplied via aqueduct from mountain springs); and town crier—a position, Restall says, that could include the duties of a “con-

stable, auctioneer, executioner, piper, master of weights [responsible for assaying silver and gold], and doorkeeper or guard.” As lagniappe, Garrido accompanied Cortés in 1535 on the latter's ill-fated attempt to cross Mexico and sail to China—the ultimate goal of Spanish adventurers.

Garrido's biggest contribution occurred after Cortés found three kernels of bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) in a sack of rice that had been sent from Spain. The conqueror asked his go-to man to plant them in a plot near the chapel that served as a kind of experimental farm. “Two of them grew,” the historian Francisco López de Gomara reported in 1552,

and one of them produced 180 kernels. They later turned around and planted those kernels, and little by little there was boundless wheat: one [kernel] yields a hundred, three hundred, and even more with irrigation and sowing by hand. . . . To a black man and slave is owed so much benefit!

Wheat was not only desired by roll-eating, cake-munching, beer-guzzling conquistadors, it was a necessity for the politically powerful clergy, who needed bread to celebrate Mass properly. Repeatedly Spaniards had tried to grow *T. aestivum* in Hispaniola, and repeatedly it had failed in the hot, humid climate. Garrido's wheat was greeted with joy—in a strange land, it was the taste of home. Soon the golden herringbone tassels of wheat spikelets waved across central Mexico, replacing thousands of acres of maize and woodland. More than that, Mexican smallholders say, Spaniards carried Garrido's *T. aestivum* to Texas, from where it spread up the Mississippi. If this is accurate, much or most of the wheat that by the nineteenth century had transformed the Midwest into an agricultural powerhouse came from an African roadside chapel in Mexico City.

In planting Cortés's wheat, Garrido was acting as an agent of the Columbian Exchange. More important, though, he himself was part of the exchange, as were Cortés and the other foreigners.

Previously in this book, I described researchers' evolving view of the Columbian Exchange. I first looked at the Atlantic (Chapters 2 and 3), where the most important effects were caused by microscopic imports to the Americas (initially the diseases that depopulated Indian societies, then malaria and yellow fever, which encouraged plantation slavery). Next I treated the Pacific (Chapters 4 and 5), where the major introductions were American food crops, which both helped sustain a population boom and led indirectly to massive environmental problems. In the next section (Chapters 6 and 7), I showed how environmental historians have increasingly come to believe that

the Columbian Exchange played a role in the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century and the industrial revolution of the nineteenth. Both occurred first in Europe, and so this ecological phenomenon had large-scale political and economic implications—it fostered the rise of the West. In all this discussion, I have acted as if humankind were in the director's chair, distributing other species at will, sometimes being surprised by the results. But to biologists *Homo sapiens* is a species that like any other has its own distribution and range. Not only did human beings cause the Columbian Exchange, they were buffeted by its currents—a convulsion within our own species that is the subject of this section of the book.

For millennia, almost all Europeans were found in Europe, few Africans existed outside Africa, and Asians lived, nearly without exception, in Asia alone. No one in the Eastern Hemisphere in 1492, so far as is known, had ever seen an American native. (Some researchers believe that English fishing vessels crossed the Atlantic a few decades before Colón, but the principle holds—one didn't find communities of Europeans or Africans in Asia or the Americas.) Colón's voyages inaugurated an unprecedented reshuffling of *Homo sapiens*: the human wing of the Columbian Exchange. People shot around the world like dice flung on a gaming table. Europeans became the majority in Argentina and Australia, Africans were found from São Paulo to Seattle, and Chinatowns sprang up all over the globe.

The movement was dominated by the African slave trade—dominated by Garrido, so to speak, rather than by Cortés. For a long time the scale of slavery in the Americas was not fully grasped. The first systematic attempt at a count, Philip Curtin's *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, did not appear until 1969, more than a century after its subject's extirpation. Partly stimulated by Curtin's study, David Eltis and Martin Halbert of Emory University, in Atlanta, led a remarkable effort in which scholars from a dozen nations pooled their work to create an online database of records from almost 35,000 separate slave voyages. Its most recent iteration, released in 2009, estimates that between 1500 and 1840, the heyday of the slave trade, 11.7 million captive Africans left for the Americas—a massive transfer of human flesh unlike anything before it. In that period, perhaps 3.4 million Europeans emigrated. Roughly speaking, for every European who came to the Americas, three Africans made the trip.

The implications of these figures are as staggering as their size. Textbooks commonly present American history in terms of Europeans moving into a lightly settled hemisphere. In fact, the hemisphere was full of Indians—tens of millions of them. And most of the movement into the Americas was by Africans, who soon became the majority population in

almost every place that wasn't controlled by Indians. Demographically speaking, Eltis has written, "America was an extension of Africa rather than Europe until late in the nineteenth century."*

In the three centuries after Colón, migrants from across the Atlantic created new cities and filled them with houses, churches, taverns, warehouses, and stables. They cleared forests, planted fields, laid out roads, and tended horses, cattle, and sheep—animals that had not walked the Americas before. They stripped forests to build boats and powered mills with rivers and waged war on other newcomers. Along the way, they collectively reworked and reshaped the American landscape, creating a new world that was an ecological and cultural mix of old and new and something else besides.

This great transformation, a turning point in the story of our species, was wrought largely by African hands. The crowds thronging the streets in the new cities were mainly African crowds. The farmers growing rice and wheat in the new farms were mainly African farmers. The people rowing boats on rivers, then the most important highways, were mainly African people. The men and women on the ships and in the battles and around the mills were mainly African men and women. Slavery was the foundational institution of the modern Americas.

The nineteenth century saw another, even larger, wave of migration, this one dominated by Europeans. It changed the demographic balance a second time, so that descendants of Europeans became the majority in most of the hemisphere. Surrounded by people like themselves, this second group of immigrants was rarely aware that it was following trails that had been set for more than three hundred years by Africans.

Two migrations from Africa were turning points in the spread of *Homo sapiens* around the globe. The first was humankind's original departure, seventy thousand years ago or more, from its homeland in Africa's eastern plains. The second was the transatlantic slave trade, the main focus of this section of the book. The first wave of the human Columbian Exchange, the slave trade was the biggest impetus to the migratory flood that broke through the long-standing geographic barriers that kept apart Africans, Americans, Asians, and Europeans. In this chapter, I focus on two related topics: first, the rise of plantation slavery, which largely drove the forced migration of Africans; and second, the extraordinary cultural mix that slavery inadvertently promoted. The next chapter focuses on the interactions of

* New England was an exception, but it was only a small fraction of English migration—the colonies to its south were much bigger. Until the end of the eighteenth century, African slaves outnumbered Europeans in England's American holdings by about two to one.

what became the Americas' two biggest populations, Indian and African. Largely conducted out of sight of Europeans, the meeting of red and black centered on their common resistance to the European presence in their lives—a rebellion that simmered across the hemisphere, and that had consequences that are felt to this day.

Johnny Good-looking lived with his family in the center of the whirlpool: teeming, polyethnic Mexico City. A giddy buzz and snarl of African slaves, Asian shopkeepers, Indian farmers and laborers, and European clerics, mercenaries, and second-tier aristocrats, it was a city of exiles and travelers, the first urban complex in which a majority of the inhabitants had their ancestry across an ocean. This was the social world created by the human wing of the Columbian Exchange; Garrido, an African turned European turned American, was a prototypical citizen.

He had a wife, surely native, surely converted (more or less willingly) to Christianity, and three children, a home in the rich inner city, and the knowledge that he had participated in a pivotal moment in history. Nonetheless, he was a disappointed, unsatisfied man. In 1538, when he was probably in his fifties, he petitioned the court, begging the king to "recompense me for my services and for the little favor your governors have done me, having served as I have served." His plea apparently went unheard. It says something about that chaotic time and place that this remarkable figure—a slave-turned-conquistador, an African who became a confidant of Cortés, a Muslim-born Christian who married an indigenous-born Christian—should be able to drop from sight. After the petition, no trace of his life has been found. According to *Alegría*, Garrido's biographer, he probably died in the next decade, forgotten in the hubbub and tumult of the new world he had helped to bring into existence.

empires whom they and their royal ancestors had fought for centuries. Muslim troops, in their view, could be legitimately enslaved—they had conquered most of Spain, exploited Spanish people, and, by embracing Islam, rejected Christianity. (For similar reasons, the Islamic empires freely enslaved Spanish POWs.) Most Indians, by contrast, had done no wrong to Spaniards. Because American natives had never heard of Christianity, they could not have turned away from it. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI resolved this dilemma of conscience. He awarded the sovereigns “full, free and complete power, authority, and jurisdiction” over the Taino of Hispaniola if they sent “prudent and God-fearing men, learned, skilled, and proven, to instruct [them] in the Catholic faith.” Conquest was acceptable if done for the purpose of bringing the conquered to salvation.

The Spaniards who actually went to the new lands, though, had little interest in evangelization. Although often personally pious, they were more concerned with Indian labor than Indian souls. Colón was an example. Despite being fervently, passionately devout, he had appalled Isabel in 1495 by sending 550 captured Taino to Spain to sell as galley slaves. (Galleys were still common on the Mediterranean.) Colón argued that enslaving prisoners of war was justified—he was treating the Indians who had attacked La Isabela as Spaniards had long treated their military enemies. In addition, he said, the Indians’ fate would deter further rebellions. Isabel didn’t agree. Slowly growing angry, she watched shackled Taino trickle into the slave markets of Seville. In an outburst of fury in 1499 she ordered all Spaniards who had acquired Indians to send them back to the Americas. Death was the penalty for noncompliance.

The queen seems mainly to have been outraged by the presumption of the colonists—they were disobeying instructions and enslaving the wrong people. But she also must have known that the monarchs hadn’t addressed the fundamental problem. On the one hand, the pope had justified Spain’s conquest because it would allow missionaries to convert the Indians—a goal unlikely to be accomplished if they were enslaved in large numbers. On the other hand, the colonies were supposed to contribute to the glory of Spain, a task that could not be accomplished without acquiring a labor force. Spain, unlike England, did not have a well-developed system of indentured servitude. And unlike England it did not have mobs of unemployed to lure over the ocean. To profit from its colonies, the monarchs believed, Spain would have to rely on Indian labor.

In 1503 the monarchs provided their answer to the dilemma: the *encomienda* system. Individual Spaniards became trustees of indigenous groups, promising to ensure their safety, freedom, and religious instruction. In fine protection-racket style, Indians paid for Spanish “security” with their

labor. The *encomienda* can be thought of as an attempt to answer the objections to slavery raised by Adam Smith. By restricting the demands on Indians, the monarchs sought to reduce the incentive for revolt—a benefit to the Spaniards who employed them.

It didn’t work. Both Indians and conquistadors disliked the *encomienda* system. Legally, Hispaniola’s Indians were free people, their towns and villages still governed by their native leaders. In practice the rulers had little power and workers were often treated as slaves. *Encomenderos* (trustees) loathed negotiating with Taino leaders, which required more tact and delicacy than they typically wished to muster. When native workers didn’t feel like showing up—why *would* they, if they could avoid it?—they vanished into the countryside, where their whereabouts were concealed by relatives, friends, and sympathetic Indian leaders. For their part, the Taino came to view the system as little but a legal justification for slavery. Under the law, Indian Christians were entitled after baptism to be treated exactly like Spanish Christians, who could not be enslaved. But colonists argued the contrary; Indians were, in effect, less human than Europeans, and thus could be forced to work even after they converted.

Cortés, conqueror of Mexico, may have had more unfree Indians than anyone else in the world. In addition to owning three thousand or more indigenous slaves outright, his estate forced as many as twenty-four thousand laborers a year to work as tribute (they were sent by their home villages for a week at a time). Indian hands had unwillingly planted thousands of acres of sugarcane on his land and cut wood for the great boilers that crystallized the sugar in his cane juice and constructed his water-driven sugar mill, a two-story edifice made of stone and adobe bricks mortared with sand and lime. Always keenly aware of political currents, Cortés surely would have been following the regal hand-wringing over Indian policy. The council of deputies issued a memorandum in April 1542 begging Carlos V “to remedy the cruelties that are happening to the Indians in the Indies.” Seven months later, the king responded: he issued the so-called New Laws, which banned Indian slavery.

The New Laws had big loopholes. Indians still could be enslaved if they were captured while resisting Spanish authority. Because one could always claim that a given person or group was resisting authority, the loophole amounted to a license to enslave. Nonetheless the New Laws so angered the conquistadors that they decapitated the new viceroy of Peru when he tried to enforce them. The viceroy of New Spain (the empire’s holdings north of Panama) prudently suspended the laws before they came into effect. Nonetheless, the trend was clear: it was going to be harder for people like Cortés to force Indians to work for them.

A few weeks after the deputies' memorandum, the conqueror cut a deal with two Genoese merchants to bring in five hundred African slaves—the first big contract for Africans on the mainland, and one of the biggest to date. Two years later the initial shipment of a hundred captives arrived at Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico. It marked the arrival of the Atlantic slave trade.

Africans had been trickling into the Americas almost as long as Europeans. A U.S.-Mexican archaeological team announced in 2009 that three men in La Isabela's cemetery were probably of African descent (their teeth had the biochemical signatures of a diet rich in African plants). By 1501, seven years after La Isabela's founding, so many Africans had come to Hispaniola that the alarmed Spanish king and queen instructed the island's governor not to allow any more to land. (Also on the no-entry list: Jews and Jews who had converted to Christianity, "heretics" and heretics who had converted to orthodox Christianity.) The instructions made an exception for people of African descent born in Christendom. Slavers claimed their "pieces" were Spanish or Portuguese and sent them over anyway. Within a few months the governor was begging the king and queen to ban all Africans of any sort from Hispaniola. "They flee to the Indians, and they learn bad customs from them, and they cannot be captured." Nobody listened. The colonists saw that Africans appeared immune to disease, didn't have local social networks that would help them escape, and possessed useful skills—many African societies were well known for their ironworking and horsemanship. Slave ships bellied up to the docks of Santo Domingo in ever-greater numbers.

The slaves were not as easily controlled as the colonists had hoped. Exactly as Adam Smith would have predicted, they were dreadful employees. Faking sickness, working with deliberate lassitude, losing supplies, sabotaging equipment, pilfering valuables, maiming the animals that hauled the cane, purposefully ruining the finished sugar—all were part of the furniture of plantation slavery. "Weapons of the weak," political scientist James Scott called them in a classic study of the same name. The slaves were not so weak when they escaped to the heights. Hidden by the forest from European eyes, they made it their business to wreck the industry that had enchained them. For more than a century, African irregulars ranged unhindered over most of Hispaniola, funding their activities by covertly exchanging gold panned from mountain rivers with Spanish merchants for clothing, liquor, and iron (ex-slave blacksmiths made arrow points and swords). Little wonder that the island's sugar producers moved to the mainland! Not only did Mexico have more land and lots of Indian labor, it was not plagued by thousands of anti-sugar guerrillas. (I will further discuss slave rebellions in the next chapter.)

Among the sugar men who relocated was Hernán Cortés, who as a

teenage newcomer to Hispaniola had watched the industry rise in the settlement of Azúa de Compostela. Sugar mills were a primary focus at his new estates in Mexico, though his penchant for adventuring delayed their completion for a decade. Other mills at other *encomiendas* came online too, as sugar plantations spread along the Gulf coast, clustering around the warm, wet port of Veracruz.

Between 1550 and 1600, production soared even as the price tripled. Economists would say this phenomenon—rising prices despite increasing supplies—indicates surging demand. They would be correct. Spain's conquest of the Triple Alliance had introduced its citizens to the delights of $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$. Like Europeans, the peoples of central Mexico turned out to have an insatiable yen for sweetness. "It is a crazy thing how much sugar and conserves are consumed in the Indies," marveled historian José de Acosta in the 1580s.

No longer were Africans slipped into the Americas by the handful. The rise of sugar production in Mexico and the concurrent rise in Brazil opened the floodgates. Between 1550 and 1650—the century after Cortés's contract, roughly speaking—slave ships ferried across about 650,000 Africans, with the total split more or less equally between Spanish and Portuguese America. (England, France, and other European nations as yet played little role in the slave trade.) In these places, the number of African immigrants outnumbered European immigrants by more than two to one. Everywhere Spaniards and Portuguese went, Africans accompanied them. Soon they were more ubiquitous in the Americas than Europeans, with results the latter never expected.

Africans walked with Spanish conquistadors—some as soldiers, some as servants and slaves—as they assailed Guatemala and Panama. They poured by the thousands into Peru and Ecuador—Francisco Pizarro, conqueror of the Inka, and his family received more than 250 licenses to import slaves in the first years of conquest. On the Rio Grande, Africans assimilated into Indian groups, even participating in attacks on their former masters. Luring them to native life, according to one appalled report, was peyote, "which stirs up the reason in the manner of drunkenness." (Some Spaniards joined the Indians, too.) Juan Valiente, born in Africa, enslaved in Mexico, joined conquistador Pedro de Valdivia's foray into Chile in 1540 as a full partner and was rewarded after its success with an estate and his own Indian slaves. He was in the midst of buying his freedom from his owner in Mexico when he died alongside Valdivia in the native uprising of 1553. African slaves were part of the first European colony in what is now the United States, San Miguel de Gualdape, established by Spain in 1526, probably on the coast of Georgia.

Tenochtitlan fell on August 13, 1521, in a welter of massacre and chaos. In the waterways outside the disintegrating city Spanish troops discovered a small flotilla of canoes. Spanish writings say their occupants were hiding in the reeds and found only by determined search. Native accounts say they sought out the invaders to surrender. Historians today tend toward the latter interpretation. In the tumult of the disintegrating city, concealment would have been so easy that it seems likely that the people in the canoes were not even trying to avoid discovery.

In one boat was Cuauhtemoc, last leader of the Triple Alliance; others contained his wife and family. Tenochtitlan rulers, like their European counterparts, had long consolidated power by marrying within a select group of other elite families. As in Europe, men in authority had children by multiple women. The imperial family tree hence was complicated. It was about to become even more complicated.

Cuauhtemoc, then in his early twenties, was the nephew of Motecuhzoma II, the famous "Montezuma," who had been held hostage by Cortés in his own palace during the Spaniards' first assault on the capital city. Motecuhzoma was killed—exactly how is in dispute—during the counterattack that drove Cortés's force from the city. His successor reigned for barely two months before dying of smallpox. To bolster his legitimacy, the successor had married Motecuhzoma's daughter, Tecuichpotzin, who had been widowed during the first assault. The successor died as the Spanish-Indian alliance began its second assault on Tenochtitlan. Cuauhtemoc, then eighteen, took the throne. He quickly married Tecuichpotzin for the same reason as his predecessor. She was in the canoes with him.

As a captive, Motecuhzoma had asked Cortés to protect his family. This was a big job: the emperor had nineteen children. The conquistador failed—smallpox and war killed all but three of the nineteen. One of the survivors was Tecuichpotzin. (The Spaniards gave her a European name that they could pronounce: Isabel.) Tecuichpotzin was the daughter of the emperor's principal wife, whereas the other two surviving children were from wives of lesser value. All were then adolescents. Tecuichpotzin, twice a widow, was about twelve.

Cortés regarded them as the legitimate rulers of the Triple Alliance,

Tecuichpotzin the most important. The conqueror's task, as he saw it, was to graft Spanish authority onto native roots. Europeans would rule through Indian institutions. To do this, he made the straight-faced claim that while held hostage Motecuhzoma had voluntarily given sovereignty over the Alliance to Carlos V. Because Indian elites therefore were now good Spanish subjects, they had to be treated as equivalent to Spanish elites. The two groups would have to mingle on equal terms. Cortés gently nudged this accommodation forward by impregnating Tecuichpotzin.

He didn't do this immediately—she was still married to Cuauhtemoc. Claiming that the Triple Alliance leader was plotting against Spain, Cortés executed him in 1525. He then arranged for Tecuichpotzin to marry her fourth husband, a conquistador he regarded with especial fondness. This man died a few months later. Cortés considerably moved the widow, now sixteen or seventeen, into his own spacious home, which is where she became pregnant, and where he arranged for her fifth marriage, to another favored conquistador. Leonor Cortés Moctezuma was born in 1528, four or five months after the wedding.*

Leonor was not the conqueror's only illegitimate child—he had at least four others. Nor was she his only half-Indian child. Throughout the assault on the Triple Alliance, Cortés traveled with a guide and interpreter: a woman whose name has come down to the present as, variously, Malinche, Marina, or Malintzin. Born to a noble family in a neutral zone between the Triple Alliance and the Maya, she was sold to the Maya after she became an impediment to her stepfather's family. Because Malinche had learned the language of the Triple Alliance as a child, the Maya gave her to Cortés, who was bound in that direction. A sexual relationship began quickly. The conqueror's son Martín came into the world in May or June 1522, which means he was conceived in August or September, in the celebratory aftermath of the empire's fall. (Another half-native daughter, María, is referred to in Cortés's will, but nothing else is known about her except that her mother, too, was one of Motecuhzoma's daughters. One assumes María was conceived during the months when Cortés held Motecuhzoma hostage and that her mother died in the war.)

Cortés did not hide his illegitimate, hybrid children. Leonor was raised by her father's cousin, the administrator of his vast estate. Sugar profits provided a dowry big enough for her to attract the hand of Juan de Tolosa, dis-

* "Motecuhzoma" is the most common scholarly Romanization of the emperor's name today. At the time, Spaniards usually called him "Moctezuma," which became the name of his grandchildren.

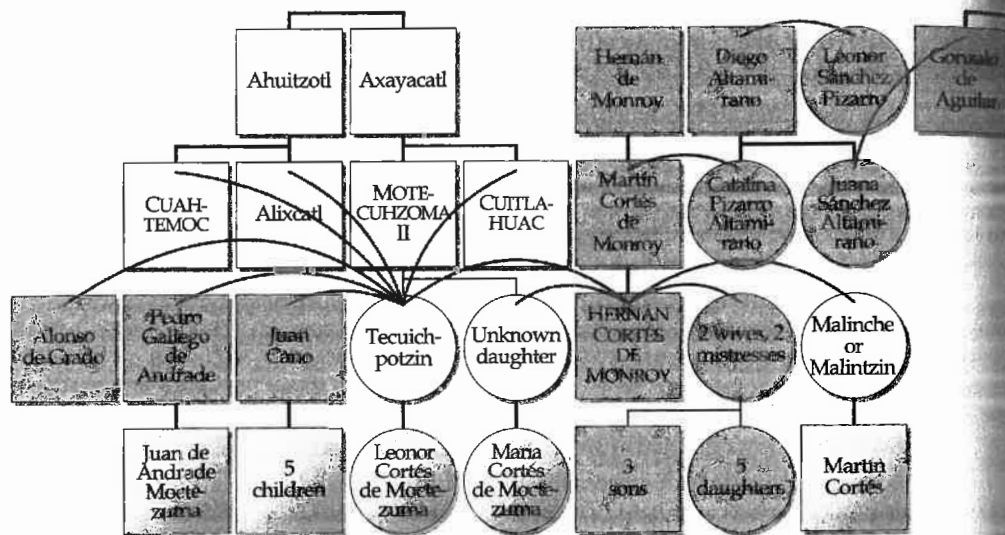
coverer of Mexico's biggest silver mine. Cortés took more dramatic action for Martín: he sent the boy to the Spanish court to serve as a page and hired a Roman lawyer to petition Pope Clement VII to legitimize him. The pope, born as Giulio de' Medici, had every reason to sympathize. Not only was he himself illegitimate, he had his own illegitimate, hybrid child—Alessandro de' Medici, whose mother was a freed African slave—and had tried to ensure his future by appointing him duke of Florence. The pope did indeed legitimize Martín Cortés. Along with Cortés's oldest legitimate son, also named Martín Cortés, he was a principal heir in the conqueror's will. Both were full members of Spanish society—and proved it by spending five years in a court battle over their bequests from their father. Naturally, they fought over Indian slaves.










Europeans and Indians had been mixing since Colón touched down at Hispaniola. Most of the colonists on the island were young, single men; in a census of Hispaniola in 1514, only a third of its *encomenderos* were married. Of these, a third were married to Taino women. Fernando and Isabel encouraged such intercultural coupling, though they believed it should lead to Christian marriage. Christian marriage, perhaps surprisingly, was also the goal of some natives: by marrying their daughters to Spaniards in a Christian ceremony, elite Indians could reinforce their status. For many Spaniards, though, a Taino ceremony was more useful than a Christian wedding—only through marrying a native woman could a low-ranking Spaniard gain access to the goods and workers controlled by high-status Indians. As a result, many of the Spaniards whom the clergy viewed as living in sin thought of themselves as married.

A hybrid society was coming into existence, first in the Caribbean, then everywhere else in the Americas. The mixing began at the top—Cortés was an example. Like many members of the first generation of conquistadors, Cortés came from Extremadura, a poor, mountainous area controlled by powerful families who had been marrying into each other for generations. His distant cousin was Francisco Pizarro, conqueror of the Inka empire—Pizarro's great-uncle was married to Cortés's aunt. When the intertwined conquistador families married into the equally intertwined families of noble native societies, they produced the kind of baroque, multibranch family trees that wake up genealogists at 3:00 a.m.—Cortés's relations with the Mexica (Tenochtitlan's people) were prototypical.

Cortés was only the beginning. Like his Extremaduran cousin, Pizarro set up shop with a noble native woman: Quispe Cusi, the sister or half sister of Atawallpa, the Inka emperor whom Pizarro overthrew. Quispe Cusi bore Pizarro two children, Francisca and Gonzalo, whom he asked the king to

AMERICAN IMPERIAL FAMILIES OF THE 15TH AND 16TH CENTURY



- | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|---|
|  | Mexica (EMPEROR) |  | Spouse or mate |
|  | Spaniard (CONQUEROR) |  | Lineal descent |
|  | Inka (EMPEROR) |  | Full sibling (shared parents) |
|  | Mixed Mexica-Spanish |  | Sibling (shared father, mother uncertain) |
|  | Mixed Inka-Spanish | | |



The cultural and ethnic jumble in the streets of Spain's American colonies was often reflected in its art—as in this anonymous eighteenth-century oil, which depicts the Virgin Mary embedded in the great silver mountain of Potosí, visually uniting Christianity with the Andean tradition that mountains are the embodiment of a deity.

Exemplifying the pitfalls of the two-republic scheme was the Franciscans' near-simultaneous founding of an all-European town, Puebla de los Ángeles, on the road between Mexico City and Veracruz. The goal was to solve a problem: Spanish lowlives were living as parasites in native villages, their constant demands for food, shelter, and women interfering with the crucial work of orderly conversion. The Franciscans' solution: forcibly collecting the vagabonds and planting them in a city of their own under church supervision. Half of Puebla's first inhabitants abandoned the project when they discovered that they were not going to be presented with their own personal contingent of Indian laborers. To build the city, its architects ended up relying on *encomienda* labor. Spaniards kept leaving, and the clerics had to sweeten the pot. Ultimately, each Pueblan household received the services of

forty to fifty Indian workers every week. The city created to protect Indians from Spanish calls for forced Indian labor thus was wholly based on forced Indian labor. And Indians and Spaniards were again completely intermingled. Even when the authorities were able to keep them separate, free Africans acted as arbitrageurs, taking advantage of price differences between native and Spanish neighborhoods to buy goods in one and sell them in the other.

The inexorably rising number of people with mixed descent made a mockery of the two republics—what group did they belong to? Mexican churches kept separate baptismal, marriage, and death registers for Indians and Spaniards. Did they have to begin a third set of records? Worse, the growing number of mixed people aroused fears for the purity of the colonists' blood.

At the time many Spaniards believed that parents passed on their ideas and moral characters to their children, with the effect amplified by the atmosphere of the home. A mother who was born Jewish or Muslim somehow would instill the essence of Judaism or Islam in her offspring, even if she never exposed them to the religion. If the children lived in a family with Jewish or Muslim customs like not eating pork or frequent bathing, the inner stain would be darker and more ineradicable. Conversely, the stain was reduced, though not eliminated, if the child had a Christian parent and ate Christian food and learned Christian habits. In this view, Africans were to be feared not because of their African genes, but because their ancestors had embraced the immoral heresy of Islam, which would lodge in their descendants' hearts.

Initially Indians were not seen as dangerous in this way. Because the Gospel had never come to the Americas before Colón, their ancestors had never rejected the Savior. Their heathen beliefs were mistakes born of ignorance, not of evil. As innocents, they could not pass the brand of heresy to their children. Over time, though, it became clear that many Indians were resisting full evangelization, and they became suspect as a class. Meanwhile, the number of Africans and mixed people rose inexorably. Surrounded in the seventeenth century by an ever-larger population of untrustworthy groups, the elites who had embraced mixed unions in the sixteenth century felt themselves losing control. With this loss of control went their previous tolerance for the populace's freewheeling ways.

Views on race are a complicated subject that scholars have devoted careers to elucidating. The issue has a charged history that prompts suspicion and defensiveness. As one might imagine, there is considerable dispute. My brief discussion above is an attempt to summarize part of what seems to me

a persuasive analysis by María Elena Martínez, a historian at the University of Southern California. Some scholars surely would roll their eyes at her views, or at least my truncated version of them. But few doubt that as colonial society grew more diverse, colonial authorities tried to put the genie back into the bottle.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Spanish governments began restricting mixed people, forbidding them from carrying weapons, becoming priests, practicing prestigious trades (silk making, glove making, needle making), and serving in most governmental positions. A Spanish butcher who used fraudulent scales to cheat customers was to be fined twenty pesos. A butcher with Indian blood who did the same thing was to receive a hundred lashes. Men and women with African blood could not be seen in public after 8:00 p.m. or congregate in groups of more than four. In addition, they had to pay special assessments every year—a sort of original-sin tax. Indo-European women were not allowed to wear Indian clothes. Afro-European women were not allowed to wear Spanish-style gold jewelry or the elegant embroidered cloaks called *mantas*. And so on—scores of petty regulations, issued in uncoordinated bouts of malice and anxiety, a quibbling, bureaucratic assault by Spain against its unruly offspring.

As the restrictions increased, so did the fear of the restricted, which led to more restrictions and more fear. Clerics took to arguing that Indians were not innocent—that, like Jews, they bore the stain of their previous un-Christian beliefs. Maybe they actually *had* descended from Jews—the lost tribes of Israel! Maybe some of them, like some of the ex-Jews in the Iberian Peninsula, hadn't *really* converted to Christianity. Maybe they were jointly plotting with Africans to attack Christians. New Spain, the Augustinian monk Nicolás de Witte stated in 1552,

is full of mestizos, who are [born] badly inclined. It is full of black men and women who are descended from slaves. It is full of black men who marry Indian women, from which derive mulattoes. And it is full of mestizos who marry Indian women, from which derive a diverse *casta* [caste] of infinite number, and from all of these mixtures derive other diverse and not very good mixtures.

"Mestizo" and "mulatto" became key concepts in the elaborate classificatory scheme known as the *casta* system. Never formally codified on an empire-wide level but recognized in hundreds of separate local, ecclesiastical, and trade-guild rules, the *casta* system was an attempt to categorize the peoples of New Spain according to moral and spiritual worth, which was

linked to descent. Each group had a fundamental, unalterable nature that combined in distinct, predictable ways with people outside that group. A mulatto (Afro-European) was different from a mestizo (Indo-European) was different from a zambo (Afro-Indian—the term comes, unflatteringly, from *zambaigo*, knock-kneed). When a Spaniard produced a child with a mestizo, the offspring was a *castizo*; with a mulatto, a morisco (the name, oddly, means "Moor"). Over time the classifications grew more baroque, refined, and absurd: coyote, *lobo* (wolf), albino, *cambujo* (swarthy), *albarazado* (white-spotted), *barcino* (the opposite—color-spotted, so to speak), *tente en el aire* (suspended in air), *no te entiendo* (I don't understand you).*

None of it worked quite as the government intended. Rather than being confined to their allocated social slots, people used the categories as tools to better their condition, shopping for the identity that most suited them. The half-Indian son of the conquistador Diego Muñoz married a native noblewoman; his son, who would theoretically be classed a coyote, was declared an Indian, and this grandson of a Spaniard became the "Indian governor" in Tlaxcala, east of Mexico City. Meanwhile, other Indians claimed to be Africans—slaves paid fewer taxes, and the Indians didn't see why they should pay them, either. Local officials were supposed to police the categories; strapped for cash, they were in fact ready to sell people whatever identity they wanted to assume. When Spaniards in the Caribbean died before producing legitimate offspring, their mestizo and mulatto offspring were promoted to "Spaniards" and pressed into duty as heirs—a transformation that occurred so often that the bishop of Puerto Rico sniffed in 1738 that the islands had "very few white families without mixture of all the bad races." Later that century a traveler sardonically noted that although "many whites are listed" in Hispaniola's official census, local parish registers listed the same people as "mixtures of whites and Indians and these with zambos, mulattos, and blacks."

The New Laws that banned indigenous slavery added to the ethnic jumble. Because the Spanish legal code known as the *Siete Partidas* declared that children inherited the status of their mother, the offspring of European and Indian women had to be free, at least in theory. In consequence, African men sought out non-African women (in any case, the colonies didn't have enough African women for them—three-quarters of the slaves were male). Madrid demanded that Africans only marry Africans, but the colony's powerful

* Spaniards weren't alone in this preoccupation. The eighteenth-century French polymath Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry tried to split Haiti's jumbled population into 128 minutely differentiated groups ("the twelve combinations of Mulatto range from 56 to 70 parts white").

clergy pushed slaves in illicit relationships to get church marriages—it was a way of bringing pagan Africans into the Christian fold. Half or more of all Africans ended up with non-African spouses. Colonial authorities proclaimed that the Siete Partidas didn't apply and tried to enslave Afro-Indian and Afro-European children anyway. In an act of collective defiance, many of them simply moved away and with their relatively light complexions told their new neighbors that they were Indians or Spaniards.

Human beliefs and actions about ethnic and racial differences rarely withstand logical scrutiny, and Mexico was no exception. From a geneticist's point of view, the population blended increasingly over time. By the end of the eighteenth century "pure" Africans were disappearing, disease and intermarriage were reducing the number of "pure" Indians at a tremendous rate, and even the remaining "pure" Spaniards—a tiny group that in Mexico City consisted of less than 5 percent of the populace—were marrying outside their category at such a rate that they soon would no longer exist as a separate entity. Yet as it became ever more difficult to distinguish one individual from another, colonial authorities tried ever harder to separate them, a peculiar dynamic perhaps best exemplified in one of the world's odder artistic genres: *casta* paintings.

Casta paintings are sets of images, usually but not always sixteen in number, that purport to depict the categories of people in New Spain. Painted or engraved in the colony itself, they portray the mestizos, mulattos, coyotes, lobos, and *tente en el aires* of Spanish America with the frozen exactitude of Audubon birds. Several sets, in fact, were displayed at Madrid's natural history museum, the strains of *Homo sapiens* in Spain's American colonies side by side with exhibits of fossils and exotic plants. Almost all the paintings present the viewer with a family group: a man of one category, a woman of another, and their offspring. Gilt labels, painted directly on the canvas, act as explanatory captions:

From Black Man and Indian Woman, Wolf

From Spanish Man and Moorish Woman, Albino

From Mulatto Man and Mestiza Woman, Wolf-Suspended-in-Air

From Indian Woman and Male Wolf-Return-Backwards, Wolf Again

More than a hundred sets of *casta* paintings are known. Many are beautifully crafted. Some were painted by mixed people themselves.

Looking at these images today, it is hard to imagine what their creators were thinking at the time. They must have known that Europeans were fascinated and repulsed by New Spain's exotic inhabitants. The portraits were

intended to parade their fellows like specimens in a zoo. Yet at the same time most show the *castizos*, mestizos, and mulattos dressed sumptuously, moving happily about their daily business, tall and robustly healthy each and every one. Looking at the smooth, smiling faces now, one would never know that on the streets of the cities where they were painted these people were scorned for their very diversity. One would also never know that the *casta* paintings were not diverse enough—not a single one portrayed New Spain's Asian population, by far the biggest outside Asia.