

LATIN AMERICA AND ITS PEOPLE

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A NEW PEOPLE AND THEIR WORLD

LATIN AMERICAN SOCIETY began with a handful of European sailors landing on the shores of tropical America from the Bahamas to Brazil. To them, the natives they encountered were simply *indios*. Within a short time—not much more than nine months in most places—the ethnic mix became more complicated as the first mestizos and mamelucos were born to native mothers and European fathers. Most early voyages also included a few African-born slaves, and Spanish and Portuguese colonists soon began importing large numbers of slaves to work their fields and perform household chores. New Christians (recent converts from Judaism) and a scattering of non-Iberian Europeans also made their way to the colonies despite official pronouncements aimed at excluding them. Along the west coasts of Mexico and South America, one could also find Asians who had crossed the Pacific on the Manila galleons. Meanwhile, more and more people of mixed African, Indian, and European ancestry appeared. Many terms were coined to describe them. In Spanish America they were often simply called *pardos*, meaning dark-skinned people, or *castas*, or people of *color quebrado* (“broken color”). Other labels included *lobos* (literally, wolves) and *coyotes* in the Spanish colonies and *cabras* (goats) in Brazil.

Colonial Latin America was, then, a racially diverse society, but not everyone enjoyed equal access to power and privilege. Spanish and Portuguese immigrants and their American-born descendants claimed the premier positions for themselves and attempted to impose formal and informal rules that would keep “inferior” people in their places. Ethnicity was not the only determinant of a person’s standing in colonial society, however. Wealth was important too, and while

the richest people in the colonies were usually white, ambitious mestizos and mulattos could sometimes advance their positions if they were successful in mining or trade. Another criterion was honor, measured by the degree to which individuals conformed, or at least appeared to conform, with written and unwritten standards governing personal behavior. These rules were highly gender-specific and relegated women, regardless of their wealth or ethnicity, to subordinate positions in colonial society.

Colonial Latin Americans lived in a hierarchical society where they were expected to defer to their social betters, command respect from those who ranked beneath them, and above all to adhere to the norms of conduct appropriate to their class, gender, and ethnicity. Yet many people found ingenious ways to flout the rules or bend them to their own advantage. In the process, they created a vibrant and ever changing society and culture.

The Making of Multi-Ethnic Societies

The first Europeans arrived in the Americas with a very clear sense of “us” and “them.” They believed that the natives of this new world were so different from themselves that some of them doubted whether these strange people even had souls. From the very beginning, authorities of church and state began dictating how Europeans and “Indians” should relate to one another. Some of these rules were intended to protect the natives from exploitation, and others stipulated taxes and labor obligations that they owed to their new masters, but all of them upheld the sharp distinction between indigenous Americans and European newcomers. Law and custom also set African slaves apart from people who were free.

Officially, then, the Iberian colonies in the Western Hemisphere began with the assumption that there were three sharply distinguished categories of people: Europeans, Indians, and African slaves. Social reality was far more complex. European immigrants did not always identify with those who came from a different region of Spain or Portugal, and they usually viewed themselves as socially

1570s
Establishment of Inquisition tribunals in Mexico City and Lima

1650
Importation of African slaves declines in much of Spanish America

1683
Black militia forces help repel pirate attack on Veracruz

1724
Founding of a convent for Indian women in Mexico

1735
Slave revolt in the Córdoba region of Mexico

1677
First convent in Brazil established

1692
Uprising of lower classes in Mexico City

superior to people of European stock who had been born in the Americas. Not everyone of African descent was a slave. The appearance of so many people of mixed ancestry further complicated the picture.

Spanish and Portuguese Immigrants

The influx of Spaniards and Portuguese continued throughout the colonial period and was especially strong whenever and wherever new mining bonanzas or other get-rich-quick opportunities appeared. These immigrants are often called *peninsulares* because they came from the Iberian Peninsula, but to their contemporaries they were *españoles europeos* (European Spaniards) or *españoles de los Reinos de Castilla* (Spaniards from the kingdom of Castile) in Spanish America, *europeus* (Europeans) or *reinóis* (from the kingdoms) in Brazil. A majority of these immigrants were male, especially during the early years. Between 1509 and 1519, for example, only about 10 percent of the European immigrants to the Spanish colonies were female. By 1600 that proportion had grown to more than 30 percent, but in the eighteenth century, a time of heavy immigration, women constituted only about 15 percent of those arriving in the Spanish colonies.

The ratio of women to men among Portuguese immigrants to Brazil was always significantly lower—so low, in fact, that in 1549 a leading Jesuit even suggested that the numbers of white women in the colony could be increased if prostitutes were allowed to emigrate from Portugal. Not until the late seventeenth century did Portuguese authorities permit the founding of a convent in Brazil, preferring that white women choose marriage and procreation rather than a life of celibacy.

Many of the Spanish and Portuguese immigrants were young bachelors eager to make their fortunes in the Indies, while others were married men whose wives remained behind in Europe, at least until their husbands established themselves in their new homes. While immigrant men often had casual sex and longer-term relationships with Indian, African, and mixed-race women, when it came to marriage they usually preferred women of European descent, often the daughters or nieces of previous newcomers. Spanish and Portuguese immigrants formed tightly knit communities, often settling near relatives or people from their own hometowns and choosing fellow Europeans to be the baptismal sponsors of their children.

Europeans never constituted more than a tiny minority in any given place—typically less than two percent of the population in major cities like Mexico City and even less in smaller towns and rural areas. Their economic, social, and political influence far outweighed their numbers, however. High-ranking positions in the church, the government, and the military typically belonged to *peninsulares*, and town councils were often top-heavy with Europeans. The most powerful merchant companies were headed by *peninsulares*, many of them New Christians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Europeans also figured heavily in the

landowning class. More than 60 percent of Bahia's sugar planters in the period from 1680 to 1725 were either Portuguese immigrants or the sons of immigrants.

Those born in Spain and Portugal based their claims to power and prestige on their presumed purity of blood, which in the colonies came to mean European ancestry untainted by African or Indian mixture. European immigrants could be found in many social ranks, however. Many were master artisans, government clerks, and itinerant merchants, but some were vagabonds and criminals. Whatever their place in society, they often displayed an arrogance toward those born in America. For their part, Americans of all racial groups mocked the immigrants for their speech and their unfamiliarity with the culture and terrain of the colonies. Mexicans called them *gachupines*, while Peruvians used the word *chapetones*.

Creoles

Far more numerous than the peninsular immigrants were those born in the colonies who claimed pure Spanish or Portuguese ancestry on both the paternal and maternal sides. Historians usually label these people "creoles," though in practice Spanish Americans usually just called themselves *españoles* (Spaniards). In Brazil, Americans of Portuguese descent were known as *americanos* or *brasileiros*. Some Americans of European stock became quite wealthy, as prosperous merchants and owners of mines, haciendas, and plantations. A select few attained high offices, serving as judges of the superior courts and occasionally even as viceroys. In Brazil, despite official regulations that supposedly denied such positions to those born in the colonies, between 1652 and 1752 ten Brazilians sat on the high court (*relação*) of Bahia. Other prominent creole families formed business partnerships or marriage alliances with high-ranking peninsular officials, even though both the Spanish and Portuguese crowns explicitly forbade such practices. Twenty-five judges of the high court in Bahia married the daughters of sugar planters and other well-placed members of local society.

Large numbers of creoles occupied less prestigious positions in the civil and ecclesiastical bureaucracies, while many others could be found in the ranks of artisans, petty merchants, and small landowners. Peninsular immigrants often scoffed at their pretensions to "pure" European descent. In fact, many people successfully hid their Indian and African ancestors and "passed" as whites. Those creoles who had little else going for them in the way of wealth or connections often proved the most touchy in defending their "whiteness," their sole claim to preferential status in colonial society.

Mestizos and Mamelucos

The first Spanish American mestizos and Brazilian mamelucos were the offspring of European men and native women. Virtually all of them bore the stigma of illegitimacy, and colonial authorities viewed their growing numbers with alarm. Young males in particular were seen as troublemakers. As time passed, however,

more and more mestizos and mamelucos were simply the children of racially mixed people. If their parents were married in the church, then they could claim legitimacy, an important marker of social standing in colonial Latin America.

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, large numbers of mestizos could be found in the cities and towns of Spanish America, and even in many "Indian" villages. Mestizos worked at many different kinds of jobs. In cities, many were skilled craftsmen, even though artisan guilds often tried to exclude them. Urban mestizos also worked as domestic servants, shopkeepers, and street vendors, while in rural areas they were small farmers, overseers of haciendas and plantations, cowboys, muleteers, and itinerant peddlers.

Spanish law, with its neat division of colonial society into separate "republics" of Spaniards and Indians, had no official place for mestizos, so by default they were considered part of the Spanish community. As such they were considered *gente de razón*, or "people of reason," and they were exempt from tribute and other obligations required of Indians. Mestizo men of legitimate birth could become priests, especially if they were fluent in an indigenous language. Higher positions in the church were closed to them, however, and they were most often assigned to poor parishes in the most remote rural locations.

The situation of mamelucos in Brazil differed somewhat from that of their counterparts in Spanish America. Most of colonial Brazil's principal cities were located along the coast, where the drastic decline of the native population left comparatively few Indian women available to mate with Portuguese men and give birth to the first generation of mamelucos. In frontier areas farther inland, however, people of mixed European and indigenous ancestry were more numerous. They served as cultural intermediaries between the Portuguese and the natives, and played a crucial role in the founding of the city of São Paulo.

African Slaves

Wherever sufficient numbers of dependable native workers could not be found, proprietors of plantations, mines, and haciendas relied on the slave labor of Africans or of their American-born, often racially mixed descendants. Slavery was especially common in Brazil, the Caribbean and coastal areas of Central and South America. With the important exceptions of Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, the importation of Africans into the Spanish colonies began to slow after 1650, as the developing British colonies in the Caribbean and eastern North America outbid Latin American buyers. In Mexico, the native population began to rebound ever so slightly in the mid-seventeenth century. They and the growing numbers of racially mixed people supplied more and more of the colony's labor needs, so that by the eighteenth century slavery had virtually disappeared in many parts of Mexico. In Brazil and Cuba, on the other hand, the importation of slaves and the institution of slavery remained viable until well into the nineteenth century.

Slaves occupied key positions in the colonial economies. Recent arrivals from Africa performed heavy unskilled labor, while American-born slaves often acquired valuable specialized skills. On plantations, for example, slave men often held the coveted post of sugar master, entrusted with overseeing the entire process of sugar manufacture. Slaves also worked in many of Mexico's textile factories. Master artisans such as shoemakers, blacksmiths, and tailors acquired slaves and employed them in their own shops. In urban areas, masters often found it profitable to hire out skilled slaves and pocket their earnings. These slaves might enjoy considerable control over their own time and living conditions. In sixteenth-century Havana, one observer noted that slaves "go about as if they were free, working at whatever they choose, and at the end of the week or the month they give the masters the *jornal* [wages] . . . some have houses in which they shelter and feed travelers, and have in those houses, slaves of their own."

Slaves in Brazil and Spanish America were usually baptized as Catholics, sometimes at their point of departure in Africa and sometimes on arrival in the colonies, but received very little formal religious instruction. In Brazil and other areas with high concentrations of slaves and a continued influx of new Africans, slaves managed to retain many elements of African culture, including religious practices and beliefs, diet, music, dance, and traditional medicine. African women played especially important roles in the transmission of their native culture to future generations of slaves and free blacks in the New World.

Slaves were permitted to marry in the church, although Brazilian sugar planters often discouraged their slaves from receiving the sacrament of matrimony, especially if it involved a partner who belonged to another master. Marriage between slaves and free persons was also permitted, with children of these unions taking the status of their mother, slave or free. Family ties could be ruptured, of course, when slaves were sold.

As Catholics, slaves were subject to prosecution by the Inquisition, and indeed the inquisitors often looked askance on their continued practice of African folkways and their incomplete grasp of orthodox Catholic teachings. Because there was no Inquisition tribunal in Brazil, slaves were sometimes taken to Portugal for trial and punishment by the Inquisition and then returned to the colony. Such was the fate of José, a mulatto slave who worked in a sugar mill in northeastern Brazil. In 1595 he was convicted of denouncing God and cursing the church when his master refused to give him enough to eat. His sentence included a public whipping in the streets of Lisbon. After he returned to Brazil, his blasphemous protests continued, so vehemently that local officials ordered him to serve four years on the king's galleys.

Slave Resistance

Slaves found various ways to resist or protest their condition. Many employed what scholars have called the "weapons of the weak," subtle acts of defiance that

included feigning illness and sabotaging work routines. Slaves could appeal to government authorities if they were mistreated, and they might persuade a judge to order them sold to a more lenient master. In extreme cases, women resorted to abortion and infanticide to save their children from a life of slavery. Slaves also used African spiritual practices, actions the Europeans called “witchcraft,” to assert some degree of power over their masters and other whites. Some Brazilian slaves became so well known for their powers of divination and casting spells that they were able to sell their services to other slaves and even to whites.

Collective slave rebellions also occurred from time to time. In the region around Córdoba in eastern Mexico, some 2000 slaves from several different sugar and tobacco plantations rose in revolt in June of 1735. The rebels killed plantation overseers, destroyed crops, and carried off equipment used in processing sugar. Property losses totaled an estimated 400,000 pesos. Only after five months of fighting did militia units succeed in quelling the rebellion, but six years later another slave upheaval again brought the local economy to a standstill.

Some people managed to escape slavery entirely. In contrast to the southern United States in the nineteenth century, Latin American society assumed a relatively permissive attitude toward manumission, the process whereby slaves could legally gain their freedom. In some cases, owners might free an especially favored slave, perhaps a female domestic servant, in their wills. Slave children fathered by masters frequently won manumission as well, especially if their fathers lacked legitimate heirs. Those trained as artisans could also accumulate funds to purchase their own freedom, and free blacks might buy the liberty of their kin. In the mining regions of Brazil, slaves were often required to deliver a stipulated quantity of gold to their masters each day but could keep anything over and above that amount. Female slaves who worked as street vendors could also pocket a portion of their receipts.

Still other slaves found freedom through escape, often to frontier areas where they might easily gain paid employment with no questions asked. In some cases, especially during the early years of European colonization, runaways joined Indian communities and helped the natives resist conquest. As early as 1503, Governor Nicolás de Ovando reported that some of Hispaniola’s slaves had escaped and were living with native rebels. Sometimes runaways (known as *cimarrones* in Spanish, maroons in English) formed their own settlements in remote jungle or mountain locations, where they supported themselves through subsistence agriculture and by raiding nearby haciendas and towns. In coastal areas, they traded with pirates of many nationalities who ventured into Iberian American waters and sometimes joined them in sacking towns and plundering treasure ships. Runaway communities could be found in eastern Mexico, the Isthmus of Panamá, and especially in Venezuela, where the runaway population reportedly reached 20,000 in the early eighteenth century. In Brazil, a runaway settlement known as Palmares survived for most of the

seventeenth century until a series of military campaigns finally routed the community and executed its leaders.

Free Blacks and Mulattos

Manumission, flight, and intermarriage between slaves and free persons all contributed to the growing numbers of free blacks in the colonies. Many of these people were racially mixed, with Native American and/or white ancestry. They were usually called mulattos, though a host of other terms existed. Colonial authorities everywhere viewed mulattos as a socially disruptive group, even more so than mestizos. A governor in Minas Gerais summed up this attitude: “Mulattos being unstable and rebellious are pernicious in all Brazil; in Minas they are far worse because they are rich, and experience shows us that wealth in these people leads them to commit grave errors, chief among them being disobedience to the laws.”

Free blacks and mulattos experienced multiple forms of discrimination. Often, they were mistaken for slaves, and they had to go to great lengths to assert their status as free men and women. In the Spanish colonies, they were required to pay tribute, just as Indians were. Although artisan guilds tried to exclude them, free black craftsmen played prominent roles in the colonial economy, and some managed to accumulate considerable wealth.

Free persons of African descent were vital to the defense of the Iberian colonies. Skilled black stonemasons helped construct the heavy fortifications that guarded Cartagena, Havana, St. Augustine, and other port cities. Some free blacks served in racially integrated militia units, but many more filled the ranks of black and mulatto militia companies. They fought alongside Spanish and Portuguese units in defending coastal regions against enemy attack and helped maintain order in major cities. In Mexico, black militia forces helped repel pirates from Veracruz in 1683. Military service gave free blacks important advantages, including pensions, certain legal rights, exemption from tribute in Spanish America, and a stake in colonial society.

Free people of color built a sense of group solidarity in their militia companies and in the many religious brotherhoods they established in cities and towns throughout Brazil and Spanish America. The brotherhoods often included slaves along with free blacks and mulattos. In the city of Salvador, Brazil, for example, there were six such organizations for blacks and five for mulattos at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Like the Indian *cofradías* of Spanish America, they sponsored religious celebrations and provided members with many social services, including funeral expenses, dowries for young women, and help in times of illness. In the Brazilian district of Minas Gerais, functions sponsored by these organizations provided the only opportunities for large numbers of blacks to assemble legally. Events sponsored by the brotherhoods often provided venues for the continued practice of African traditions.

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Image of Santo Antônio de Catagerona, venerated by members of a black brotherhood in northeastern Brazil. This saint was born in Africa and taken to Sicily as a slave. He won his freedom and later became a Franciscan.

Race and Class in Colonial Latin America

Colonial Latin America was a racially stratified society, with what might seem to be a straightforward pecking order. Whites usually occupied the most prestigious ranks, followed in descending order by mestizos, free mulattos, Indians, and slaves. Social reality, however, was not that simple. Wealth, skills, and connections to powerful people could help an individual advance beyond the status held by others of his or her race. Enterprising mestizos could and did enjoy a social standing superior to that of their creole neighbors, and in fact they often came to be regarded as white, even when their physical features suggested otherwise.

Still, colonial Latin American society placed a high premium on whiteness, and people of mixed ancestry often took care to distance themselves as much as possible from their African and Indian origins. Consider, for example, Beatriz de Padilla, a woman accused of murdering her lover in Guadalajara, Mexico, in the mid-seventeenth century. She insisted that court records list her as a *morisca*, meaning that she was more white than black. Although her mother was a

mulatta, Padilla proclaimed that her father belonged to one of the city's leading white families. In similar fashion, lighter-skinned mestizos began calling themselves *castizos*, supposedly indicating that they were three parts white and only one part Indian. A sure way to insult someone was to cast doubt on his or her pretensions to whiteness.

Social and Cultural Definitions of Race

Beatriz de Padilla's claim to be a *morisca* shows that some people created sub-categories when defining their racial identity. By the mid-eighteenth century, artists were producing the so-called *castas* paintings, images that depicted a bewildering range of possibilities that could result when people of different categories produced offspring. In fact, very few of these fanciful terms were ever used in everyday conversation, and the paintings were curiosity pieces coveted by European art collectors rather than accurate representations of social reality in the colonies.

Few people could trace their lineage as precisely as the subjects in the *castas* paintings or even as well as Beatriz de Padilla. Members of the high elite proudly touted genealogies that spanned many generations and included conquistadors and peninsular *grandees*, but most people were lucky if they knew their family's history at all. Like most Indian commoners, many blacks, *mulattos*, and even mestizos lacked surnames. Migration, the death of parents, and the abandonment of children all worked to erase whatever memories might have existed. Because there was no civil registry of births, people could "prove" their ancestry only by obtaining a copy of their baptismal record or by producing witnesses who could attest to their parentage.

In any case, ethnic identities were fluid and highly subjective, depending on personal appearance, reputation, hearsay, occupation, and who was making the identification. If several different people were all asked to specify the race of an individual, they might all give different answers. Historians have discovered numerous cases in which the same individual might be listed as a *mestizo* in one document, an *español* in another, and a *mulatto* in yet another. Priests could be persuaded to go back and alter a baptismal record, and a person moving to a new place might be tempted to "whiten" his or her ancestry, especially in areas where there were few European immigrants who might contest their claims.

In fact, racial identity was often defined as much by behavior and culture as by biology. Someone called a *mestizo* might look very much like an Indian, but if he or she spoke Spanish and functioned as a member of the *república de españoles*, then he or she was not an Indian. "Indians" were people who lived in Indian communities, paid tribute, spoke indigenous languages, and dressed like Indians, regardless of their actual parentage. Indeed, mestizos residing in Indian villages sometimes found it advantageous to "pass" as Indians in order to gain access to community land or office. When factional disputes erupted within

How Historians UnderstandParish Registers and the Study
of Colonial Society

THE KINDS OF WRITTEN SOURCES most readily available to historians are heavily weighted in favor of the literate, the wealthy, and the powerful. The Catholic Church's insistence that everyone be baptized, however, assured virtually every person at least a cameo appearance in the documentary record. Priests were required to keep careful records of all the baptisms, marriages, and funeral rites they performed, regardless of the social standing of the individuals involved. The Genealogical Society of Utah in Salt Lake City has microfilmed many of these parish registers, and copies are available to researchers worldwide.

Parish registers are, of course, extremely valuable for people wishing to trace their own family genealogy, but historians have also used these records to learn a great deal about colonial Latin American society. Baptismal records give the infant's parents' names and ethnicities and note whether or not their parents were married. Some children, however, were listed as *hijos de padres no conocidos* ("children of unknown parents") or *espósitos* ("abandoned"). Still other records give one parent's name while omitting the other. From these notations, historians have been able to gather information about fluctuations in the rates of illegitimacy and abandonment.

Baptismal registers also name the child's godparents, offering important clues to patron–client relationships and other social networks. Even the names chosen for newborns indicate important trends in colonial society. For example, historians have traced the growing devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico by noting the increasing popularity of the name "Guadalupe" in eighteenth-century baptismal registers. Contrary to the popular belief that this cult arose first among Mexican Indians, they have found the name to initially have been much more popular with *españoles*.

Burial registers offer grim reminders of recurrent epidemics—page after page of hastily scribbled notations, with many of the deceased described as infants or small children. If time and energy permitted, priests might include the cause of death. Many women died in childbirth and were buried alongside their newborns. Priests in frontier areas might note that a person had been killed by hostile Indians. Often too, priests noted whether a person was buried with a simple ceremony or with more elaborate pomp—an indicator of wealth and social status.

Marriage documents have proven particularly useful to historians of colonial Latin American society. When a couple presented themselves to a priest asking to be married, they had to show what Spanish Americans called *diligencias matrimoniales*, documents proving that they were not close blood relatives of one another or already married to others. If they were not natives of

(continued on next page)

Parish Registers (continued from previous page)

the place where they were marrying, they had to prove where they had previously resided, which has enabled historians to track migration patterns. The frequency of marriage across racial lines offers important clues to social mobility.

There are limits to what we can learn from these documents, however, especially about specific people of lower social standing. Indian commoners, slaves, and many racially mixed people either had very common surnames or none at all, thus making it difficult to trace an individual from one record to another. Many people of limited means also spared themselves the expense of a church wedding. Still, our knowledge of colonial Latin American society is immeasurably richer thanks to these sources.

Questions for Discussion

Consider again the case of Juan and María, the hypothetical Mexican couple we thought about in the “How Historians Understand” section of Chapter 4. Using the church records from their home parish along with the documents we found in that imaginary “trunk,” how full a picture of their lives could we reconstruct?

Indian communities, a sure way of discrediting an adversary was to accuse him or her of being a mestizo or a mulatto.

An example from the province of Latacunga in the Ecuadorian Andes south of Quito shows how cultural artifacts served as markers of ethnic identity. Indians were supposed to belong under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Franciscans, while secular clerics ministered to españoles, but church officials quarreled over where mestizos should worship. In 1632 the bishop ordered that all mestizos who wore Indian-style clothing to go to the Franciscan church. Even this seemingly simple solution did not settle the issue, however, for many Indian and mestiza women favored a skirt known as a *faldellín*, a style that combined native and European elements. An arbiter finally decided that all women who wore a *lliclla*, a shawl widely used by indias and mestizas alike, should belong to the Franciscan parish.

Ethnicity, then, was imprecise and subject to modification throughout a person's lifetime. How much or how little an individual cared about his or her ethnic classification apparently varied considerably as well. People with tenuous claims to whiteness were often especially sensitive to any aspersions cast on their ancestry. Race also mattered to someone like Beatriz de Padilla, perhaps because she could better defend herself against criminal charges if the court regarded her as almost white. Many others, however, realistically perceived that they had little likelihood of moving up the social ladder, and thus no reason to quibble about their racial identity.

Class and Ethnicity

Great wealth could buy many status symbols in colonial Latin America—a spacious and well-furnished townhouse, a rural estate, fine clothing, jewelry, an elegant coach, and slaves. Such luxuries went a long way toward convincing one's neighbors that anyone who could afford them deserved an elevated standing in the community. Money could also buy other less tangible but perhaps more important markers of social distinction. Men could purchase a seat on the town council or even the governorship of an entire province. Wealthy parents could provide their daughters with sizable dowries and increase their chances of marrying into a prominent family. Those with fortunes to spare could greatly enhance their prestige by becoming patrons of a convent or hospital. In Spanish America even titles of nobility were for sale, although as we saw in the case of Antonio López de Quiroga in Chapter 4, not everyone who entered a bid actually got a title.

Further down the social ladder the benefits of financial success were more modest but still significant. The mulatto muleteer Miguel Hernández of Querétaro, Mexico, used his hard-won earnings to acquire rural property, a slave, and a membership in one of the city's most prestigious *cofradías*. Blacksmiths, tailors, jewelers, and other craftsmen who accumulated enough funds to acquire their own shop took a big step in advancing their standing in the community. A mestiza or a mulatta who possessed a modest dowry might hope to marry a respectable artisan or shopkeeper.

By the eighteenth century, class—a person's access to wealth—was becoming an increasingly important criterion of social status in many parts of Latin America. Yet there were clear limits to the upward mobility of Indians, mestizos, blacks, and mulattos, and limits also to the downward mobility of people who could plausibly claim pure European ancestry. Lighter-skinned people had more chances to marry “up” and found it easier to get loans to finance a daughter's dowry or the purchase of a shop.

Wealth and ethnicity also played a role in the so-called “patron–client relationships” that operated at virtually all levels of colonial society. A person's patron was someone of higher social standing who provided help of many kinds. A peninsular immigrant seeking an appointment in the colonial bureaucracy, a journeyman carpenter hoping to set up shop for himself, a free black seamstress or cook trying to round up enough money to buy a loved one's freedom—all of these people would look to someone a rung or two higher on the social ladder to assist them in achieving their goals. The higher up one stood to begin with, the more powerful patron he or she could summon and the more generous favors he or she could expect. Both class and ethnicity were crucial in setting the upper and lower boundaries of a person's social mobility.

Honor, Gender, and Patriarchy

If class and ethnicity set the parameters of social mobility, a person's reputation could raise or lower his or her standing within those parameters. Reputation depended in large part on how much one adhered to a comprehensive code of honor that prescribed rules of proper behavior for males and females at all stages of their lives. The rules covered just about every aspect of a person's life, from marriage and sexuality to honesty in business dealings. People had plenty of opportunities to become familiar with these rules. Priests expounded on them from the pulpit and in the privacy of the confessional, and civil officials echoed the same message as they carried out their duties.

The frequency and consistency with which authorities of both church and state invoked the rules did not guarantee that everyone observed them. For many people, a strict adherence to all of the norms was impractical given the circumstances of their lives. Others simply went their own way. Those who enjoyed relatively high social standing might try to conceal their transgressions, but men and women who had little to lose had less reason to cover them up. Still, people at even the humblest ranks of society often cared very much about their personal reputations. For many, it was the only way they could gain a measure of respect in the eyes of their neighbors and perhaps the support of a patron.

Honor and the Patriarchal Family

Central to the notion of honor was the principle of patriarchy, the idea that all authority in society rested in the hands of fathers or father-like figures. The patriarchal nuclear family, headed by a male with all women, children, and servants subject to his governance, was considered both the building block and the prototype of a stable society. The king and his appointees were supposed to rule their jurisdictions in paternal fashion—firmly but benevolently. In theory, each male head of household acted as the king's deputy, charged with controlling the behavior of everyone living under his roof. His prerogatives included administering corporal punishment, within certain limits, to errant family members and servants.

Priests and civil officials stressed how important it was that men monitor and discipline their wives, daughters, and female servants, paying special attention to their sexual behavior. As daughters of Eve, women were seen as morally inferior to men—dangerous temptresses who, if left unsupervised, could easily lead men to “the precipice of perdition,” as one observer in eighteenth-century Mexico put it. Ideally, wives and unmarried daughters were expected to observe what Spanish Americans called *recogimiento*, or seclusion within the walls of their homes, leaving only to attend mass or family gatherings, and then only when chaperoned by a male guardian. Widows and women who never married were urged to join the household of some male relative—father, uncle, brother, even an adult son.

Unseemly conduct by a man's wife, daughters, servants, or other female relatives reflected negatively on his honor and therefore on his standing in the community. Spanish Americans used the phrase *hombre de bien*, literally, man of good, to describe the honorable head of household. Such a man was fair and honest in his business dealings, loyal to the king, and conscientious in fulfilling his civic obligations. He was also expected to support his family as best he could. Most of all, he effectively "governed" his household. The surest way to insult a man was to suggest that he was a cuckold, unable even to control the sexual behavior of his own wife. A man who caught his wife in an adulterous affair could kill her or her lover with little fear of prosecution. In short, a man's honor depended on his family's conduct and reputation, while a woman's honor was contingent on her submission to her father or other adult male relative.

Marriage and the Family

Because the nuclear family was considered so important to the stability of society, both church and state paid careful attention to marriage as the means through which families came into being. For a marriage to be considered valid, it had to be witnessed by the church, which involved a number of formalities. Both parties presented documents showing that they were not currently married to anyone else and that they were not close relatives of one another. Then the couple's intention to marry was publicly announced in church so that anyone with information to the contrary could come forward. In theory, men and women were free to marry whomever they chose, but in practice, parents—especially those with great wealth and or even slight pretensions to elevated social status—often exerted powerful pressure on their children to make matches advantageous to the family's honor. In their efforts to ensure that their sons and daughters chose "proper" spouses, they often petitioned the church for exemptions to customary bans on marriages between first cousins or other relatives.

Families of means provided their daughters with a dowry in money or other property. This endowment might consist of a few animals, furniture, dishes, and other household items, but the wealthiest brides brought to their marriages huge fortunes, including haciendas or plantations, slaves, and abundant silverware and jewelry. The daughter of the Bolivian silver magnate Antonio López de Quiroga received a dowry valued at 100,000 pesos when she married in 1676. In general, the more lavish the dowry, the better the woman's chances of marrying someone of high social standing.

Almost without exception, once the marriage ceremony was performed, the union was for life. It was possible, however, to secure an annulment if one could prove that the marriage had been invalid in the first place, in the case, for example, that one party proved physically incapable of performing the conjugal act or was found to have another spouse living somewhere else. It was also possible for a husband or wife to secure an ecclesiastical divorce, which permitted one to

live apart from an abusive spouse but did not include freedom to remarry as long as the spouse survived.

Such concessions were quite rare, however. Priests and civil officials alike generally concurred that their duty was to see that couples stayed together for the greater good of society. Colonial archives are full of complaints of domestic violence, almost always from women, who sought recourse when their husbands exceeded what society considered appropriate levels of physical “correction.” More often than not, authorities of both church and state summoned the husband and exhorted him to use more “gentle” means of persuasion in governing his household. They would then urge the wife to return home and take special care in performing her domestic and conjugal duties. The authorities reasoned that a woman allowed to live apart from her husband would have no means of support for herself and her children and would become a burden to the community.

Honor and Sexuality

The church forbade all sexual activity outside of marriage or not intended for procreation. Women were expected to be virgins at the time of marriage, although it was assumed that men would have had prior sexual experience. An honorable man was permitted, indeed expected, to break an engagement if he learned that his fiancée was not a virgin. In practice, however, many couples saw nothing wrong with having sex once they had become engaged by exchanging a *palabra de casamiento* (“word of marriage”).

When a pregnancy resulted before a marriage ceremony actually took place, what happened next depended a great deal on the relative social status of the man and the woman. If both parties held similar standing in the community and their families approved the match, the marriage proceeded as planned, with few consequences for anyone’s reputation, and the child was considered legitimate. If the woman’s parents considered her fiancé socially inferior, they faced a dilemma: Which would do greater damage to the family’s honor—to have their daughter bear a child out of wedlock or to accept a man of questionable status as a son-in-law? When the man’s social rank was notably higher than the woman’s, his family might well pressure him into breaking the engagement and leaving her to fend for herself. She could, however, sue him for breach of contract, and force him to marry her or at least provide her with a dowry to enhance her chances of marrying someone else.

Women who bore children out of wedlock suffered great dishonor, and those with pretensions to some standing in the community often went to great lengths to conceal their pregnancies. Abortion and even infanticide were not unknown, but it is difficult to determine how frequently these practices were employed by desperate women—certainly often enough to prompt repeated comment from the clergy. Much more commonly, a woman who could manage to do so kept

hidden from view throughout the pregnancy, and then either “adopted” the child as if it had been born to another woman, gave the baby to someone else to raise, or left it on the doorstep of a church or convent. Colonial baptismal books typically contain numerous entries for “children of unknown parents.” Most major cities had foundling hospitals for abandoned infants. Mortality rates in these institutions often ranged as high as 90 percent.

Even the more fortunate of children born out of wedlock bore a social stigma that greatly hampered their own claims to social standing. The priesthood and other prestigious careers were usually closed to men of illegitimate birth, while women might find fewer chances of marrying into an elite family. It was possible, however, for a person to gain legitimacy after the fact, if the biological parents subsequently married. Those who could afford the long paper trail involved could also obtain an official certification from the Spanish crown declaring them legitimate, regardless of the circumstances of their birth.

Men’s sexual activities were far more difficult to monitor than women’s, of course, and even men who openly acknowledged that they had fathered children out of wedlock suffered few consequences, as long as they provided for their offspring’s care. In some cases, fathers took their illegitimate children into their own homes and never publicly revealed the identity of the mother. Respectable bachelors could preside over their own patriarchal households, exercising control over servants and others who lived under their roof. This double standard did not mean that men’s sexual indiscretions went completely unpunished. Rape was prosecuted, but the rigor of the prosecution varied according to the social standing of the victim and her male relatives. The victim usually bore the burden of proof, and her past sexual history weighed heavily in determining the guilt or innocence of the accused. Authorities of church and state were especially concerned with the problem of bigamy, which most often involved married men who migrated across the ocean or to a new part of the Americas and took new wives, passing themselves off as widowers or bachelors.

Honor and Homosexuality

Homosexual behavior was punished in the civil and church courts, and sometimes those found guilty were even executed. Men reputed to be homosexuals also became targets of gossip and ridicule. The social standing of the accused and the amount of discretion he exercised definitely played a role in determining his fate, however. Doctor Gaspar González was a priest in La Plata (today the city of Sucre, Bolivia) prosecuted for sodomy in 1595 and again in 1608. The jobs he held during his long and distinguished ecclesiastical career included the conduct of a general *visita*, or inspection, of the entire diocese of La Plata. His open affair with a young man named Diego Mexía caused quite a scandal. The two men lived in the same house, shared sleeping quarters, and publicly displayed their affection for one another. Mexía accompanied González on his

inspection tour, and the priest later purchased him a seat on the city council of La Plata as well as numerous expensive gifts.

Had González been more circumspect about his personal life, his education and occupation might have spared him from the consequences of his actions. Indeed, some witnesses hesitated to come forward with evidence against him because of his standing in the community. Ecclesiastical authorities normally preferred to handle such matters quietly in order to protect the church's reputation, but González's outright defiance of accepted standards left them little choice but to prosecute. When the church court in La Plata found him guilty of sodomy and ordered him defrocked and turned over to secular authorities for punishment, González used his connections to appeal the sentence before a superior tribunal in Lima. That court ruled that there was insufficient evidence to convict him of sodomy, but because he had scandalized the community, he should be banished from the diocese of La Plata. He did not, however, lose his claim to the privileges and benefits accorded to priests.

As for Diego Mexía, his lower social rank and prior legal troubles brought him stiffer penalties. He had been a prisoner in the Potosí jail before González befriended him and secured his release. As a layman, Mexía faced prosecution in the stricter civil courts rather than the ecclesiastical tribunals that handled González's case. During the course of the investigation, authorities tortured him, hoping to convince him to admit his transgressions. The procedure left him permanently disabled in both arms. Although he refused to confess, the court found him guilty, and sentenced him to six years' unpaid service on the galleys. He also lost his city council position. The man with whom González had been involved at the time of his earlier trial, a twenty-year-old apothecary's assistant, fared even less well. He was convicted and publicly executed. Attributes such as wealth, occupation, and education, then, influenced the kind of treatment a person might receive if he or she violated society's sexual norms.

The Limits of Patriarchy

However much the clergy, civil officials, and families might stress the importance of observing the norms of honor and patriarchy, many people found these rules impractical or irrelevant. Often, couples ignored the teachings of the church and never formally married, even though they lived together for many years and had several children. A church wedding cost money, including fees for the priest who performed the ceremony and the expense of getting certified copies of documents required to prove eligibility for the sacrament. Many people decided that they would rather spend their scant resources on other things. In many communities, between one-fourth and one-half of all children baptized were listed as illegitimate. Ironically, it was only at the highest and lowest rungs of the social ladder where formal marriage was close to universal—among the elites and among Indians living in missions or villages under the strict control of the clergy.

The demands of daily life meant that most women simply could not remain secluded in their homes, even if they did live with a husband or other male relative. Women who lacked servants left the home several times a day just to perform their domestic chores. They walked to the market and hauled water from nearby streams or from public fountains in larger cities. They gathered at the rivers to do their laundry as well. Those who lived in crowded urban tenements, where an entire family might share a single room, spent much of their time in the streets and plazas of their neighborhoods. Women in rural areas did most of their work outside as well.

Many women, wives as well as widows and single women, also had to go out and earn a living. Rural women took produce from their gardens and fields to markets in town. Women also operated businesses, such as bakeries, taverns, inns, and retail stores, bringing them into contact with many people. Many others worked as midwives and healers, seamstresses and cooks. Elite families hired young mothers as wet nurses. Wives of shopkeepers and artisans worked alongside their husbands and often carried on the business themselves if their husbands died. A few women even became members of artisan guilds. In Lima, for example, the potters' guild counted 1 woman among its 14 members in 1596, and another woman was an active member of the hatters' guild. By the late colonial period, a few cities even had guilds comprised entirely of female artisans. In 1788, Mexico City's guild of women silk spinners included 23 masters, 200 journeymen, and 21 apprentices. The port of Cartagena in present-day Colombia had a guild of female brandy producers.

Working women could not easily conceal an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and in general they had a harder time defending their honor and reputation than women who remained secluded. Even women who stayed home and supported themselves by taking in laundry or mending might be accused of having illicit relationships with their male clients. Some women did resort to prostitution, in brothels in the larger cities and on a more freelance basis elsewhere, perhaps because they could earn much more by selling sexual favors than they could in other occupations. Ana Maria Villaverde, for example, was a young widow who worked in Mexico City's tobacco factory in the late eighteenth century. When she was laid off from her job, she turned to prostitution, tripling her earnings. Despite the social stigma they suffered, prostitutes seldom ran the risk of prosecution by civil or church authorities.

If they survived the dangerous childbearing years, women usually outlived men, especially because wives were often much younger than their husbands. Iberian inheritance laws provided widows with half the property that the couple had accumulated during the marriage, with the other half divided equally among all children, sons and daughters alike. A woman also retained full rights to any goods she had brought to the marriage as a dowry. Wealthy widows lived comfortably and sometimes wielded enormous economic influence as owners

of mines, haciendas, and plantations, although the norms of patriarchy strongly urged them to live with an adult son or other male relative. If they cared to marry again, they usually did not lack for willing prospects.

For poor women, however, these generous inheritance laws meant nothing, and their relatives were often unable to take them in. Unmarried women, including many single mothers and wives who had been abandoned by their husbands, often lived on their own as well. By choice or necessity, then, large numbers of women lived in households headed by females, especially in urban areas where it was easier for women to find work to support themselves. Often, two or more women might pool their meager resources to form a single household. Eighteenth-century censuses taken in the cities of Mexico show that women headed as many as one-third of the households. In the Brazilian mining town of Ouro Prêto, women were in charge of 45 percent of all households as of 1804, and 83 percent of these women had never been married.

Women who headed their own households could still not escape the fact that they lived in a patriarchal society. While widows certainly enjoyed somewhat greater respectability than unmarried women, any woman not under some kind of male supervision had to overcome public suspicions that she lived dishonorably. Still, many women had no choice but to live with this stigma and concerned themselves more with the practical necessity of supporting themselves and their children than with what their gossipy neighbors had to say about them.

Convents: "Islands of Women"

Life in a convent provided some women with a respectable alternative to living in a male-dominated household. In fact, convents amounted to what one historian has called "islands of women," with populations as high as 1000 in some of the larger establishments in Mexico City and Lima. These women had little or no contact with men other than the priests who administered the sacraments or perhaps members of their immediate families. Nuns took perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to their superiors. Cloistered nuns were supposed to spend their time almost exclusively in prayer and contemplation. Contact with outsiders occurred in the convent's *locutorio*, a meeting room where an iron grille separated the cloistered nun from physical contact with visitors. The public might also attend mass at a convent chapel, but here too the nuns remained sequestered behind a grille.

Life in the convents, however, was not always as austere as these rules might suggest. Nuns' failure to observe proper decorum and their refusal to live in strict accord with their vows of poverty was a frequent subject of concern for church officials. Many nuns, especially those who came from wealthy families, eschewed communal dormitories and lived in comfortably furnished private rooms or even small apartments, some complete with private patios and gardens, within the convent. In her quarters, a nun could create what amounted to a matriarchal

LATIN AMERICAN LIVES

JUANA DE COBOS, BAKER IN CHIHUAHUA

ON THE EVENING of September 3, 1752, Mariana Muñoz de Olvera went for a walk through the streets of the northern Mexican mining town of Chihuahua. Passing by the home of a prosperous widow named Josefa García de Noriega, she caught the eye of Miguel Rico de Cuesta, a peninsular Spanish merchant and García de Noriega's fiancé. He called out to Mariana, taunting her with questions about how she could afford the new clothes she was wearing and insinuating that she had traded sexual favors for the money to buy them. She responded with a couple of choice insults aimed at the arrogant Spaniard. A few hours later her mother, Juana de Cobos, heard about the incident and confronted Josefa García de Noriega about her fiancé's rude remarks and questioned the widow's own sexual conduct.

The next morning, García de Noriega filed criminal charges against the "troublesome and scandalous" Cobos and her daughter. Thus began a legal battle that would last for several months and eventually result in their being ordered to move their home and business to the other side of town, where they would be less likely to have further altercations with Rico de Cuesta and García de Noriega. The local authorities were clearly biased against Juana de Cobos. Indeed, the official who first heard García de Noriega's complaint served as a witness when she and her fiancé married a few months later!

Juana de Cobos and Mariana Muñoz de Olvera were easy targets for the scorn of a man like Miguel Rico de Cuesta and his allies on the town's cabildo, for they lived outside the confines of patriarchal households. Though both were married, both lived apart from their husbands without official church permission. Juana, born in a farming community south of Chihuahua in 1706, had migrated to the town with her husband Juan Muñoz de Olvera during its silver boom of the late 1720s. Sometime thereafter, she and Juan separated, and for the remainder of her long life she supported herself, her children, and several grandchildren by operating a bakery. Like so many other women of her time, she never learned to read or write, but one of her adult sons took care of the necessary paperwork. Mariana married in 1746, when she was twenty-one, but within a few years, she too left her husband and she and her two young children went to live with her mother.

By refusing to live in patriarchal households, Cobos and Muñoz de Olvera forfeited a good measure of their claims to honor and respectability. Their frequent quarrels with other people in town did not help their reputations any, and Juana's rivals in the bread trade did not appreciate her periodic attempts to undercut prices set by the town's cabildo. She found it hard to compete with male bakers, many of whom were well-placed peninsular Spaniards who ran larger operations and profited from economies of scale.

(continued on next page)

JUANA DE COBOS *(continued from previous page)*

Her competitors routinely asked her to contribute to activities of the town's loosely organized bakers' guild, but allowed her and other female bakers no say in the proceedings. Not surprisingly, Cobos often refused to help. In 1748, for example, she declined to help underwrite a comedy that the guild sponsored during festivities belatedly marking King Ferdinand VI's accession to the Spanish throne.

Despite her many difficulties, Juana de Cobos managed to win a certain standing in her community. Most people took her for an *española*, although a few documents refer to her as a *mestiza*, and Josefa García de Noriega called her a *mulatta* during their protracted feud. At least some of the time, people addressed her using the honorific title of "Doña." Perhaps the greatest measure of her social standing came when city officers decided that she was sufficiently respectable that they could use her bakery as a place where young women accused of sexual misconduct might be disciplined while learning a useful trade. When she died in 1797, at the age of ninety-one, she was buried "de cruz alta" ("with a large cross"), an honor reserved for those of sufficient means to afford a deluxe funeral.

Questions for Discussion

Did Juana de Cobos and Mariana Muñoz de Olvera violate all of the gender norms of their society, or only some of them? What mattered most in determining their social position in Chihuahua: class, ethnicity, or gender?

household that might include several servants or slaves, one or more orphan girls whom she personally raised, and perhaps a female relative or two.

The *locutorios* of major convents often witnessed lively social events featuring spirited conversation, music, and other entertainment. Visitors at these gatherings were treated to fine delicacies from the convents' kitchens. Popular legend maintains that the famous Mexican mole—a flavorful sauce combining American ingredients such as chiles, chocolate, and tomatoes with cloves, cinnamon, peppercorns, coriander, and other Old World spices—originated in one of Puebla's principal convents.

Not everyone who lived inside a convent was a nun. In seventeenth-century Cuzco, for example, the city's two convents together housed more than 500 women, and fewer than half of them were nuns. In addition to servants, slaves, and orphans, one could find young girls from respectable families who were there to learn reading, writing, arithmetic, needlework, and other basic skills in a society that offered few other formal educational opportunities for females. Victims of domestic violence, widows, and other women on their own might find temporary or permanent shelter within the convents' walls, sometimes of their own accord and sometimes "deposited" by their male relatives. Church author-

ities might also remand a woman to a convent as punishment for sexual improprieties or other wrongdoing.

Within the convents' walls nuns had certain opportunities not customarily available to them in the outside world. Convents as institutions typically controlled substantial wealth. As "brides of Christ," novices brought dowries when they entered religious life, and these became the property of the convent. Through bequests and other donations, nunneries also acquired assets in the form of real estate, both rural and urban, and they also figured among the most important sources of credit in the colonial economy, making loans to merchants and landowners and garnering an annual interest rate of 5 percent.

Women who headed the convents exercised considerable leverage in managing these assets, along with power over the internal operation of the nunneries. These positions thus provided leadership opportunities available nowhere else to women in colonial society. Abbesses and other convent officers were chosen in periodic elections by the highest-ranking nuns themselves, and elections were sometimes hotly contested. Powerful creole families took an active interest in convent elections because of the prestige and economic benefits that might accrue to them if a family member were elected abbess of a wealthy convent.

Convents also afforded a select few women a chance to pursue intellectual interests. The most famous colonial nun was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648–1695) of Mexico. Although universities and other institutions of higher learning were closed to women, she studied on her own. Her interests ranged from music, physics, and mathematics to theology and philosophy. She corresponded with leading intellectuals of her time and wrote poetry, drama, and essays, often with a decidedly feminist spin. One of her most widely quoted verses, for example, posed the question of the relative morality of prostitutes and their male clients. Who sins more, Sor Juana asked, she who sins for pay or he who pays for sin? Hundreds of other nuns also left numerous writings, including poetry, plays, histories of their convents, and lengthy spiritual autobiographies written at the suggestion of their confessors. Still others became expert musicians, singers, and composers.

Convents and Colonial Society

No matter how much economic power or intellectual distinction these favored nuns received, they could not escape the fact that they lived in both a patriarchal and hierarchical society. They always remained subordinate to male church authorities, from their personal confessors to the bishops of their dioceses. Toward the end of her life, Juana Inés de la Cruz renounced her intellectual pursuits, giving away her books and scientific instruments, in part because a bishop had warned her that these activities put her soul at risk. Cloistered nuns also had to rely on male majordomos, who were often close relatives of the abbesses, to take care of their business affairs.

Portrait of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, at work in her library.

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Convents also reflected the class and ethnic divisions of colonial society. Only women able to provide a dowry could become professed nuns. The entrance fee in Lima in the early seventeenth century was 6000 pesos, and double that if a nun wanted her own private quarters. In addition, her family usually had to provide an annual stipend to cover her living expenses. Smaller towns, especially in frontier areas, usually lacked convents, thus restricting the options of many women. In Brazil, the religious life was out of reach for all but the most affluent women. Until 1677, when Salvador's first convent opened, wealthy families sent their daughters to convents in Portugal.

Inside the convents, there were numerous social distinctions. The most prestigious nuns were those who wore the black veil. They came from respectable and often wealthy families of Spanish or Portuguese descent. Only they were eligible to vote and hold office, and they were exempt from all menial work. Next came the sisters of the white veil. Their dowries were lower and their social backgrounds less distinguished than those of black-veiled nuns. To them fell many of the housekeeping duties inside the convent. The convents also housed many Indian, mestiza, and black women known as *donadas*. They took informal vows of chastity and performed the most onerous chores.

A few convents were specially created for Indians and mestizas, but these institutions did not escape the strictures of a racially stratified society either. As we saw in Chapter 3, even though Cuzco's convent of Santa Clara had been founded originally for mestizas, within a few decades nuns of Spanish origins had captured control of the convent's leadership and relegated mestiza sisters to second-class status. Mexico City's convent of Corpus Christi, founded in 1724 for Indian women, was reserved for the legitimate daughters of caciques and other Indian nobles. It owned no property. The nuns survived exclusively on alms they gathered and were not permitted to have private quarters or servants.

Women unable to enter a convent but still wishing to pursue a religious life might find shelter in a *beatario*, an informal institution that resembled a nunnery but had no recognized standing in the church and none of the prestige associated with convents. The Catholic Church eventually conferred sainthood on two colonial *beatas*, Rosa of Lima and Mariana de Jesús of Quito. In general, however, church authorities distrusted these women for seeking spiritual enlightenment outside of official ecclesiastical channels. Many *beatas* found themselves accused of heresy and brought before the Inquisition.

Conformity and Defiance in Colonial Society

Colonial Latin Americans received constant reminders that they lived in a society that made fine distinctions of ethnicity, honor, class, and gender. Whenever they appeared in court, whether as defendant, plaintiff, or witness, a notary carefully

noted their ethnicity, or at least what he perceived it to be. Church records also stipulated the race of persons baptized, married, or buried. Class differences were clearly visible to anyone who walked the streets of Mexico City, Salvador, Cuzco, or any other Latin American city. The wealthy could be seen parading about in elegant coaches and dressed in fine clothing while the poor were lucky if they had a roof over their head. And while class and ethnic identification could sometimes change, gender distinctions were the most obvious and enduring. Outside of convents, women held no official positions in the church, nor were they eligible for public office or admission to higher education or the professions. Men and women alike were repeatedly exhorted by priests and civil officials to behave in ways appropriate to their gender.

For most people the routines of daily life entailed interaction with people who ranked above them or beneath them socially, and elaborate rules of etiquette supposedly governed these encounters. On special occasions, the pecking order of colonial society went on public display as high dignitaries of church and state marched in procession through city streets, followed by representatives of other groups, all lined up according to rank. Men, women, and children also regularly witnessed what happened to those judged to be social outcasts. Executions and whippings were carried out in public, as were the punishments of nonconformists condemned by the Inquisition, to provide an object lesson for all. Despite all these rules and lessons, however, people found ways to defy the conventions of their society, sometimes in full view of their presumed social betters, more often in safer, more private settings.

The Social Etiquette of Everyday Life

Colonial rules of etiquette began with the forms of address used in everyday conversation but also included grammar and general demeanor. “Remember to whom you are speaking” was a frequent admonition to people of lower social standing whenever they found themselves in contact with people who ranked above them. In Spanish America, men and women who possessed a certain measure of social standing presumed that the title “Don” or “Doña” would precede their names whenever anyone talked to them or about them. Government officials expected to be approached in even loftier terms, such as “Your Excellency” or “My Most Excellent Lord,” and those who held academic titles used them as well. Both Spanish and Portuguese have two different words for the pronoun “you,” one connoting respect, or at least social distance between the speaker and listener, and the other used among equals or when the speaker considers himself or herself superior in rank to the listener. Men were also expected to doff their hats in the presence of their social betters.

As clear as these guidelines might seem, situations might arise, particularly in the world of petty commerce, where the rules were not at all straightforward. Peninsulares or creoles often owned tiny retail shops that sold a wide variety of mer-

chandise to people of many different ethnic backgrounds. By virtue of their own rank in society, shopkeepers expected deferential behavior from Indians and mulattos, but their livelihoods depended on treating their customers with a certain amount of respect. The merchants' clientele often understood that spare cash in their pockets gave them the leverage necessary to defy customary social conventions.

One such encounter took place in the shop of the Spaniard Martín de Echaquibel in the mining town of Chihuahua in northern Mexico in 1753. A mulatto came into the store, asked to see some merchandise, and then turned to leave without buying anything. Insulted, Echaquibel exclaimed, "Look, dog, you are a mulatto and I am very much a Spaniard," using the familiar second person pronoun. The customer could hardly dispute the difference in their racial identities but defiantly pointed out that he was not the shopkeeper's slave and that he would do as he pleased.

Other people were less open but just as disrespectful as Echaquibel's customer. In the privacy of their homes and in other protected spaces, they surely mocked the pretensions of those who claimed to be their social betters. They found safety in numbers, too. The lower classes in late colonial Buenos Aires, for example, often gathered to watch the creole militia drill, and laughed whenever these weekend warriors made a mistake. And, as we shall see, public celebrations offered ideal opportunities to mock any and all symbols of rank and authority in colonial society.

The Administration of Justice

Authorities of church and state in colonial Latin America found plenty of occasions to remind everyone who was in charge and how those in subordinate positions should behave. The administration of justice, vested in city councils, in local officials serving in rural districts, and in the viceroys and high courts of Lima, Mexico City, Salvador, and other major cities provided numerous such opportunities. In the sixteenth century, the central square of every newly founded Spanish American town had a *picota*, a stone or wooden pillar that symbolized the king's authority. Whenever local officials set out to arrest someone, they carried with them a special baton that signified their right to mete out justice.

Punishments for crime varied according to the social standing of those convicted. Whites were usually spared corporal punishment and ordered to pay a fine instead. Whippings and executions were usually carried out in the central plaza of town. Petty criminals such as thieves and those found guilty of assault might be given dozens or even hundreds of lashes. Convicted murderers were often executed, but only after they were paraded through the streets of town, accompanied by members of the clergy, representatives of the civil authorities, and a town crier who publicly announced their crimes. Their corpses were then left on display for the presumed edification of those who had not witnessed the actual execution.

A picota in the central plaza of Chucuito, Peru, now converted into a sundial.

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Civil and church officials were certainly concerned with impressing people with the long arm of the law, but they also had to convince the public that they were wise and just rulers. For this reason they tempered the administration of justice with a fair amount of leniency and attention to prescribed procedures. Although there was no such thing as trial by jury, the accused were usually provided with a defender who summoned witnesses to testify on the defendant's behalf and argued in favor of leniency when guilt was not in doubt. Civil authorities and inquisitors resorted to the death penalty only occasionally. Serious

crimes were often punished by banishment from the community or a term of forced labor in a textile factory, silver refinery, bakery, or sugar mill. Men might also be sent to serve in a remote military post for ten or more years.

The Inquisition and Deviant Behavior

In addition to the civil government, the Holy Office of the Inquisition played a role in enforcing many of society's rules. The formal establishment of tribunals in Lima and Mexico City came in the early 1570s, although monastic orders and bishops had previously conducted inquisitorial proceedings, particularly against Indian converts accused of backsliding into their old ways. After the 1570s, Indians were exempt from the Inquisition's jurisdiction, but the church found other ways to prosecute native "idolaters." Every other baptized Catholic, from the most prestigious ranks of the Spanish nobility to mestizos, slaves, and free people of color, was fair game for Inquisition scrutiny, however. Brazil never had a formal tribunal, but Inquisition authorities from

Portugal paid occasional visits to the colony, and sometimes the accused were sent to Portugal for trial.

The Inquisition's official charge was to root out deviant beliefs and behavior, including heresy, blasphemy, bigamy, witchcraft, superstition, and the secret practice of Jewish rites. Powerful New Christian merchant families were rounded up in a series of trials held in Lima and Mexico City in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Women, especially those who claimed to have special spiritual or magical powers, were often subject to prosecution. Scores of English pirates captured at Veracruz, Cartagena, and other ports were brought to trial as "Lutheran corsairs."

In fact, however, the Inquisition proved less oppressive in the colonies than in Spain and Portugal. Given the huge territorial expanse of Spanish America and Brazil, it could reach only a small number of people. The tribunals of Mexico City and Lima, as well as a third one set up at Cartagena in 1610, covered huge territories, with agents in principal cities who were supposed to report offenses to their superiors. The inquisitors followed regular procedures, carefully questioning witnesses, punishing those who falsely accused others, and dismissing many charges for want of sufficient evidence. Those found guilty faced penalties that ranged from wearing penitential garb in public for those who reconciled themselves to the faith to confiscation of their property and even execution for those who stubbornly refused to recant their errors. Executions were rare—about fifty were ordered by the Mexico City tribunal in the 250 years of its existence, another thirty in Lima, and probably not more than one hundred in all of Spanish America. According to one estimate, not more than 1 percent of all persons prosecuted by the Inquisition received death sentences. Others, however, died in Inquisition jails while awaiting trial. Sentences were carried out in public ceremonies so that all could see the consequences of violating religious and behavioral norms.

Rituals of Rule

Public executions and whippings offered gruesome reminders of the power of the church and state, but on other occasions colonial Latin Americans witnessed more pleasing portrayals of the social and political order in which they lived. Throughout the year there were numerous religious holidays when the pecking order of society went on public view in the colorful processions that passed through the streets and plazas of all major towns. These occasions also provided good opportunities to portray the teachings of the church in brilliant visual fashion to the assembled crowds. Reenactments of the medieval battles between Christians and Muslims underscored the message that the church had triumphed over its enemies.

In many cities, the feast of Corpus Christi was the most spectacular of these religious holidays. Celebrated in late May or early June, this holy day honored the sacrament of the Eucharist. A solemn procession carried the consecrated host, displayed in a golden and bejeweled monstrance, through the streets and

Caption TK



plazas, accompanied by representatives of many different segments of society—all male, of course. Participants included the viceroy in capital cities, the bishop and the rest of the secular clergy, the city council, members of male religious orders, Inquisitors, *cofradías*, trade guilds, Indians, blacks, and mulattos, all carefully arranged according to their rank in society, with places closest to the Eucharist considered the most prestigious. The Mexico City procession was often more than a mile long, and even included students from the school of San Juan de Letrán. City governments went to great expense to mark the occasion. In 1621, for example, Mexico City spent 21 percent of its budget on the Corpus Christi celebration.

Other occasions provided opportunities to reinforce the allegiance of the people to their king. The death of a monarch and the coronation of his successor called for solemn funeral rites, followed by public demonstrations of loyalty

Slice of Life **Corpus Christi in Cuzco**

THE FEAST of Corpus Christi in early modern Europe and Latin America was a celebration of Catholicism's victories over its enemies. Everywhere the processions included figures representing Muslims, Turks, and others vanquished by militant Christians. In South America, the Spanish city of Cuzco, built literally on the foundations of the Inca capital, provided an ideal platform on which to stage this annual tribute to the faith triumphant. The immense fortunes generated by silver mining permitted local elites to put on a lavish show, and the willing participation of native Andeans seemed to signify that Spanish hegemony and the Catholic Church rested on firm foundations in Peru.

The bishop, city council, and other dignitaries who presided over the Corpus Christi rituals had definite ideas about which native people should play an active role in the solemn procession of the Eucharist. Like the representatives of Spanish society who took part, those chosen to march were all male. They were also presumed to be direct descendants of the pre-hispanic Andean nobility. Conspicuously absent were those related to Incas who had resisted the imposition of Spanish rule and held out at Vilcabamba for more than thirty years after Pizarro's conquest (see Chapter 3).

Spanish authorities intended that the procession display the social, political, and religious order that had prevailed in Peru ever since the 1530s, but Cuzco's Andean leaders added their own messages to the script. Even though they usually wore Spanish style clothing as they went about their daily lives, on festive occasions they put on costumes that invoked their glorious past. They dressed as specific rulers, such as the legendary first Inca Manco Capac and his descendant Huayna Capac, the last to occupy the throne at Cuzco before the Spaniards arrived in Peru. On their foreheads the marchers wore red-fringed headbands once reserved for the exclusive use of the Inca ruler himself, but in colonial times these headbands were the ultimate status symbol for native Andeans. Those who claimed the right to wear them carefully guarded their privilege. Each year they elected 24 men whose duties included making sure that no one "illegally" donned the fringe.

Corpus Christi and other public celebrations permitted native Andeans many other ways of publicly reenacting what they understood to be their history. Among Cuzco's native population were descendants of Cañaris from southern Ecuador who had been forcibly relocated to the Inca capital in the late fifteenth century. They had sided with the Spaniards during the conquest and from then on had cited that alliance in claiming special status in the new colonial order. Cañaris served as armed guards to Spanish authorities, and on Corpus Christi and other special days they marched in the processions as military companies, armed with arquebuses and pikes, not just in Cuzco but in Lima as well. They figured prominently, for example, in ceremonies held in the capital to welcome a new viceroy in 1667.

(continued on next page)

Corpus Christi in Cuzco *(continued from previous page)*

Those who called themselves descendants of the Incas often disputed the Cañaris' exalted position in official ceremonies. Ritual celebrations thus provided natives as well as Spaniards the opportunity to display their own special standing in society. Although the Corpus Christi procession was supposed to symbolize the unity of all Christians in submission to the body of Christ in the Eucharist, the feast also mirrored and perpetuated the many divisions in the social and political order.

Questions for Discussion

Suppose that Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (see Chapter 5) had witnessed one of the Corpus Christi celebrations in Cuzco. What would he have thought? Would he have approved of the role given to the descendants of the Incas? Why or why not?

to the new king. Lavish and costly spectacles marked the arrival of a new viceroy, or a marriage or birth in the royal family. Others heralded Spanish successes in warfare, such as the celebrations held throughout the empire following the defeat of a British assault at Cartagena in 1741. In Mexico City, an annual observance was held on the anniversary of Cortés's victory at Tenochtitlan in 1521. All of these rituals were designed to teach the king's subjects that they lived in a great empire. To symbolize the benevolent, paternal generosity of their sovereign, those who marched in the processions often tossed coins or other trinkets to the crowds.

Scatological Songs and Dances of Defiance

Solemn processions were only part of the festivities that marked special religious and civic occasions. There was plenty of popular entertainment, including fireworks, theatrical pieces, cockfights, and bullfights. Many festivals gave people the opportunity to dance in the streets, drink heavily, and ridicule the powerful and pretentious. Their songs and dances often had explicit sexual content. In the streets of eighteenth-century Mexico, men and women favored a lascivious dance called the *chuchumbé*, performed while singing suggestive verses, such as this one: "A monk is standing on the corner, lifting his habit and showing the chuchumbé." Holidays also allowed people to don costumes and act out ritual inversions of the social order. Men dressed as women, and laymen disguised as members of the clergy pretended to bless the crowds. The pre-Lenten carnival season was especially noted for such excesses.

Authorities worried that these large gatherings might spill over into popular riot. In June of 1692, such fears materialized when an angry crowd stormed the viceroy's palace and set the building on fire during the Corpus Christi celebration in Mexico City. People were angry because food prices had skyrocketed and the viceroy had failed to provide the relief they expected. Their protests

soon gave way to generalized looting of shops throughout the central district of the city. The authorities responded by rounding up alleged ringleaders and ordering several of them to be executed. They also attempted to ban the sale of the popular intoxicating beverage known as *pulque*.

Religious and civil festivals certainly brought large numbers of people together and allowed them a temporary escape from the drudgery of their daily routines, and a chance to play at turning the social order upside down, with plenty of all-around carousing. The potential for disturbances like the 1692 Mexico City riot were appreciable. These “time out” settings may also have served to reinforce rather than destabilize existing social and political hierarchies. Those who witnessed the lavishly staged processions of Corpus Christi and other holidays may well have come away convinced that the existing order of things was inevitable, even if they entertained questions about its legitimacy. Then too, the opportunity to “let off steam” at festival time may have served as a useful safety valve in keeping the lower classes in their subordinate places. When the party was over, they went back to work and their accustomed outward show of deference to those who ranked above them.

Conclusion

Colonial Latin Americans lived in a hierarchical society that assigned privileges and obligations according to ethnicity, class, honor, and gender and attempted to fix everyone in a specific niche based on these criteria. Priests and officers of the law tried to get people to pay proper respect to authority within their households and in society at large, and they seemed constantly on the lookout for violations of the boundaries that separated one group from another. Some authorities even experimented with sumptuary laws that forbade Indians and blacks from wearing clothing supposedly reserved for Europeans and their American-born descendants, but people persisted in wearing whatever they could buy or otherwise acquire.

Other rules proved somewhat easier to enforce, but everywhere people of all social classes got away with far more than laws, sermons, court rulings, or Inquisition proceedings might imply. Racial labels were attached to people whenever they appeared in the official records of church or state, and whiteness counted for a lot, but in fact all ethnic identities were quite flexible, especially for those who were economically successful. Many slaves found ways to escape their bondage. Often out of practical necessity and sometimes out of personal choice, women disregarded the strict standards that theoretically placed them firmly under the thumbs of husbands and fathers. People of the lower classes found periodic release from their workaday routines and occasions when they could safely mock or even challenge those who claimed precedence over them. However rigid and specific the rules of social interaction might seem to have been, they were everywhere subject to constant renegotiation.

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Latin America is a region of the world that spans two continents, North America (including Central America and the Caribbean) and South America. It includes 19 sovereign nations and one non-independent territory, Puerto Rico. Most people in the region speak Spanish or Portuguese, although French, English, Dutch, and Kreyol are also spoken in parts of the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Latin America's population has a high proportion of mixed-race people due to its colonial history and encounters between Europeans, indigenous people, and Africans. In addition, its population is a result of an unprecedented history of transcontinental migration: after 1492, 60 million Europeans, 11 million Africans, and 5 million Asians arrived in the Americas. The overseas tradition. Early Latin America. Spanish America. The Caribbean phase. The city. All Iberia's coastal peoples had maritime experience. Yet farther inland the occupation of mariner was despised; expansion was deemed a matter of conquering and occupying contiguous territory rather than of far-flung commerce. It was the Italians, above all the Genoese, who brought the lore of overseas activity to the Iberians. From the eastern Mediterranean they carried the sugar industry, the use of foreign slaves in it, and the trinket trade with distant peoples first to Spain and Portugal and then on out into the Atlantic, where they were involved together with the Portuguese on the West A Here are the Latin American countries that are also part of North America This Latin American country is made up of a total of 1,056,641 square miles, so over forty-five million people find a way to somehow share barely more than one million square miles. Although at first glance it sounds as though Argentina is a crowded country, calculating the population density shows that it is not the case after all. Dividing the population by the total area equates to about forty-three people per square mile. The Latin American country of Argentina has experienced a very steady, albeit quite slow, increase in population size. Every year since as far back as 1955, Argentina's Latin American countries are multi-ethnic, home to people of different ethnic and national backgrounds. As a result, some Latin Americans do not take their nationality as an ethnicity, but identify themselves with both their nationality and their ancestral origins.[18] Aside from the indigenous Amerindian population, all Latin Americans or their ancestors immigrated since 1492. Latin America has the largest diasporas of Spaniards, Portuguese, Black Africans, Italians, Lebanese and Japanese in the world.[19] [20][21] The region also has large German (second largest after the United States),[22] Latin America is a group of countries and dependencies in the Western Hemisphere where Romance languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, and French are predominantly spoken. Some territories such as Quebec, where French is spoken, or areas of the United States where Spanish is predominantly spoken are not included due to the country being a part of Anglo America. The term is broader than categories such as Hispanic America which specifically refers to Spanish-speaking countries or Ibero-America which