

Introduction



PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

This book charts the rise of categories of *limpieza de sangre* (“purity of blood”) in Spain and their journey from the Iberian Peninsula to the Americas, where they eventually took on a life of their own. Having originated in late medieval Castile, the concept of purity of blood and its underlying assumptions about inheritable characteristics had by the late seventeenth century produced a hierarchical system of classification in Spanish America that was ostensibly based on proportions of Spanish, indigenous, and African ancestry, the *sistema de castas* or “race/caste system.”¹ This use of the concept would probably have surprised the Spaniards who first deployed it against Jewish converts to Christianity, the *conversos*, or “New Christians.” They defined blood purity as the absence of Jewish and heretical antecedents and, as of the middle of the fifteenth century, they increasingly wielded the notion to deprive the conversos of access to certain institutions and public and ecclesiastical offices. The concept acquired greater force during the next one hundred years, as *limpieza de sangre* statutes—requirements of unsullied “Old Christian” ancestry—were adopted by numerous religious and secular establishments in Castile and Aragon, the Spanish Inquisition was founded to identify “secret Jews” and root out heresy, and the category of impurity was extended to the descendants of Muslims. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the ideology of purity of blood had produced a Spanish society obsessed with genealogy and in particular with the idea that having only Christian ancestors, and thus a “pure lineage,” was the critical sign of a person’s loyalty to the faith. Descent and religion—“blood” and faith—were the two foundations of that ideology, and the same would be true in Spanish America.

The transfer of the Castilian discourse of *limpieza de sangre* to Spanish America did not mean, however, that it remained the same in the new context. As much as Spaniards tried to recreate their society in “New Spain” (colonial Mexico), they had to face circumstances, peoples, and historical developments that inevitably altered their transplanted institutions, practices, and cultural-religious principles. The survival of native communities and part of the pre-Hispanic nobility, the importance of the conversion project to Spanish colonialism and to Castile’s titles to the Americas, the introduction of significant numbers of African slaves into the region, the rapid rise of a population of mixed ancestry, the influx of poor Spaniards seeking to better their lot if not ennoble themselves, and the establishment of a transatlantic economy based largely on racialized labor forces—these and other factors ensured that the Iberian concept of *limpieza de sangre* would be reformulated and have different implications than in Spain. In Castile, for example, it did not produce an elaborate system of classification based on blood proportions as it did in the colonies, though signs that such categories might develop appeared in the sixteenth century, particularly in the Inquisition’s genealogical investigations. Furthermore, in Spanish America, the notion of purity gradually came to be equated with Spanish ancestry, with “Spanishness,” an idea that had little significance in the metropolitan context. The language of blood and lineage also underwent modifications. Nonetheless, at the end of the colonial period, the concept of *limpieza de sangre* was still partly defined in religious terms. What were the implications of this religious dimension for colonial categories of identity, racial discourses, and communal ideologies? Answering this question is one of the central aims of this book.

More to the point, the book seeks to expose the connection between the concept of *limpieza de sangre* and the *sistema de castas*. Although a number of scholars of colonial Mexico have referred to this connection, they have not fully explained it.² They have not clarified how a concept that had strong religious connotations came to construct or promote classifications that presumably were based on modern notions of race. Exactly when, how, and why was the notion of purity of blood extended and adapted to the colonial context? This critical question has received little attention in the literature because, until recently, most historical studies of the *sistema de castas* have focused on the eighteenth century (when notions of race were starting to become secularized) and in particular on the problem of the saliency of “race” versus “class” as mercantile capitalism expanded.³ The privileging of the late colonial period in the historiography has meant that both the origins of the system and its relation to the concept of *limpieza* remain unclear. Works that do refer

to the system in the early colonial period generally link the concept of *purity of blood* to *race* without elaborating on what exactly either of these terms meant at that time. Furthermore, they normally describe its rise as a function of the displacement of main peninsular status categories (noble, commoner, and slave) onto the three primary colonial groups (respectively, Spaniards, Indians, and blacks) and explain the disruption of this tripartite order by the growth of populations of mixed ancestry.⁴ This rendition of the emergence of the *sistema de castas* is seductive because of its simplicity; but it is also deceptive because it deprives the process of its contingency, does not explain why more than one category of mixture was created, and obscures the religious dimension of *limpieza de sangre* and therefore also its implications.⁵

This book provides an analysis, first, of the linkages between the concept of *limpieza de sangre* and the *sistema de castas* with special consideration to the role of religion in the production of notions of purity and impurity, the historical specificity of Castilian categories such as *raza* (race) and *casta* (caste), the intertwined nature of peninsular and colonial discourses of purity, and the fluidity and ambiguities that characterized the system of classification throughout the colonial period. It is informed by critical race theory and in particular by scholarship that posits that race is not merely a consequence of material interests (an “effect” of class) but rather is linked in complex ways to economic, political, and ideological structures; social conditions; and systems of signification.⁶ Philosopher Cornel West has termed this approach “genealogical materialist.” He has stressed the importance of investigating the origins and trajectory of racial ideas within specific cultural and historical traditions and their dynamic interaction with both micro- and macrolevel processes, including those related to political economy (local and global), the reproduction and disruption of power (say, through particular languages, idioms, or representations), and the construction of notions of self. West chose Nietzsche’s concept of genealogy because he wanted to underscore the importance of undertaking deep and careful excavations of the meanings of race within the particular cultural-historical context in which it develops and of explaining its connections to different levels of existence.

In this study, the concept of genealogy is central both because it alludes to the process of historicizing race and because in the early modern Hispanic world it was ubiquitous and consequential, the foundation of a multitude of practices and identities that helped mold historical memory at both the individual and collective levels. It does not presuppose the automatic deployment of the concept of *limpieza de sangre* against colonial populations and simple displacement of peninsular status categories

onto them. Nor does it assume that the meanings of early modern notions of purity and race are self-evident, a mistake that can lead to the tautological argument that the system of classifying “blood mixture” arose because “race mixture” occurred, an argument that reproduces the idea of races as biological givens rather than challenging it by interrogating why categories arise, become reified, and get contested. Instead, this book prioritizes analyzing the discursive tradition that the concepts of *limpieza* and *raza* were part of and which, together with certain practices, those two notions helped to constitute.⁷ It begins by addressing the following questions. What exactly did the concepts of *limpieza de sangre* and *raza* mean in Spain, when and why did they first start to be deployed in Mexico, and how were they adapted to the colonial context? Was their growing usage related to events in the metropole, Spanish America, or both? Which institutions adopted purity-of-blood requirements and when did they begin to target people of mixed ancestry? Did definitions of *limpieza de sangre* change over time, and if so, how? And what practices and identities did the ideology of purity of blood promote? These are the questions that constitute the first of three main lines of inquiry in the book.

A second line of investigation pertains to the connections of the concept of *limpieza de sangre* to gender and sexuality.⁸ The book argues that these connections were strong not just because of the centrality of biological reproduction (and by extension, female sexuality) to the perpetuation of community boundaries and the hierarchical social order in general. They were also powerful because Spanish notions regarding sexual and reproductive relations between the three main populations reflected and interacted with other discourses of colonial power.⁹ Recurring ideas regarding blood purity and mixture, for example, construed native people—the transmission of their traits—as weak, thereby echoing paternalistic religious and government policies that depicted relations among Spaniards, indigenous people, and blacks in gendered forms. Political, religious, and genealogical discourses in fact mirrored, complemented, and reinforced each other through the use of notions of strength and weakness that by coding different colonial groups as male or female naturalized socially created hierarchies.

Only in the eighteenth century, however, would invocations of nature as the basis of difference between men and women as well as between human groups begin to emerge as a prominent discourse. A growing interest, particularly among natural philosophers, in questions about the origins of different populations and function of men and women in the generation of life influenced how the *sistema de castas* was represented. As scientific explanations to sexual and racial difference gained ground

over religious ones, colonial Mexico's population became subject, like the animals and plants in natural histories, to increasingly elaborate and visual taxonomic exercises that made the gendering of race and racing of gender as well as social hierarchies seem to be ordained by nature. This penchant for classification and naturalization was manifested in "casta paintings," a genre that illustrated and labeled the unions of different "castes" as well as their offspring and that betrayed both how some of Mexico's artists conceived of the appropriate relationship of gender, race, and class and the lingering importance of the discourse of *limpieza de sangre*.

A third main line of inquiry tracks the importance of the state-sponsored organization of colonial society into two separate commonwealths or "republics"—one Spanish, the other indigenous—to discourses of blood and lineage. Although strict segregation between the two populations was never achieved and some Spanish jurists and legislation allowed for the day when the native people would be fully incorporated into Hispanic colonial society, the dual model of social organization nevertheless had profound repercussions. At least in central Mexico, the *república de indios* ("Indian Republic") was not just an ideological device, and it continued to have practical significance well into the eighteenth century. It promoted the survival of *pueblos de indios* (native communities) with their own political hierarchies and citizenship regime, the creation of special legal and religious institutions for the indigenous people, and the official recognition of Indian purity. This recognition, which mainly pivoted on the argument that the original inhabitants of the Americas were unsullied by Judaism and Islam and had willingly accepted Christianity, made it possible for some of the descendants of pre-Hispanic dynasties to successfully claim the status of *limpieza de sangre*, in the long run altering some of their conceptions of blood and history. Their genealogical claims became more frequent in the last third of the seventeenth century, amid increasing efforts to preserve communal lands and histories.

But native nobles and rulers were not the only group to be influenced by the Spanish state's promotion of two polities and corresponding dual citizenship and purity regimes. All colonial identities, after all, were the results of complex colonial processes.¹⁰ Maintaining a system of "proving" purity in the "Spanish republic" necessitated the creation of birth records, classifications, and genealogies and obliged those who wanted access to the institutions or offices with *limpieza* requirements to submit lineages, produce witnesses, and keep records of their ancestors. Among creoles (Spaniards born and/or raised in the Americas), these administrative and archival practices helped foster a historical consciousness

that encouraged their identification with a broader Spanish community of blood even as they developed a strong attachment to the land. By the eighteenth century, they established their purity not so much by stressing their lack of Jewish and Muslim ancestors as by providing evidence of their Spanish descent. Yet this formulation of *limpieza de sangre* as Spanishness did not entirely undermine the idea that the indigenous people were pure and redeemable because of their acceptance of Christianity. Instead, it produced paradoxical attitudes toward reproduction or *mestizaje* (“mixture”) with Amerindians among creole elites,¹¹ particularly as their patriotism intensified and they began to imagine the merger of the two republics in reproductive and biological terms.

The book, then, centers on three main issues: the relationship between the Spanish notion of *limpieza de sangre* and Mexico’s *sistema de castas*; the intersection of notions of purity, gender, and sexuality; and the linkages of religion, race, and patriotic discourses. Framing the exploration of these subjects is an emphasis on the role of the state, church, and archives in promoting a preoccupation with lineage in central Mexico, particularly among creole and native elites. In other words, one of the book’s thematic threads is how the routinization of genealogical requirements in the secular and religious hierarchies helped shape social practices, notions of self, and concepts of communal belonging. Which is not to say that the Spanish colonial state was powerful and that its laws were always or even frequently obeyed, only that it set guidelines for government and religious institutions and through them shaped the nature of social relations. The term *archival practices* thus generally refers to the record-keeping activities of the state, church, and Inquisition that produced and reproduced categories of identity based on ancestry linked to particular legal statuses (to certain responsibilities, rights, or privileges). These archival practices promoted genealogical ones, including official and unofficial investigations into a person’s ancestors—involving examinations of birth records, interrogations of town elders, inspections of tributary lists, and so forth—and the construction of family histories through, among other things, the maintenance, purchase, or falsification of written genealogies, certifications of purity of blood, and copies of baptismal and marriage records.

Another recurring theme in the book is the interaction of metropolitan and colonial notions of purity and, more broadly, discourses about the New Christians—which drew on anti-Semitic tropes—and the converted populations of the Americas. Special attention is drawn to the similarities and differences in Spanish attitudes toward the conversion potential of Jews and native people and especially to how stereotypes that were used to describe one group tended to be mapped onto the

other. Finally, the book underscores the instability of the *sistema de castas*. It stresses that, like all hegemonic projects, it was a process, powerful and pervasive because it was promoted by the state and the church but fluctuated and was subject to contestation.¹² The relative fluidity of the *sistema de castas* was partly due to inconsistencies in the discourse of *limpieza de sangre*, which, for example, characterized native people as pure and impure, as both perfect material for Christianization and incorrigible idolaters. Hegemonic discourses tend to derive power from their construction of subjects in a doubled way.

The *sistema*'s fluidity was also a by-product of the Spanish imperial structure, which incorporated Spanish America into the Crown of Castile but failed to clearly outline what that meant in terms of the rights and privileges of different populations. For example, despite the various compilations of laws for the "Indies" (*derecho indiano*) that Spain produced in the seventeenth century, it did not issue a legal code specifically for the *castas* and did not entirely clarify the status of *creoles* as "natives" of a particular jurisdiction. The political vagueness of imperial space and piecemeal nature of colonial legislation prompted individuals and groups to attempt to challenge or redefine statuses, policies, and classifications. These features also resulted in unexpected political imaginaries, ones that a rigid distinction between a metropolitan core and colonial periphery cannot begin to capture.

LIMPIEZA DE SANGRE, RACE, AND COLONIALISM IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Scholars of early modern Spain have not paid much attention to the relationship between the concept of *limpieza de sangre* and Spanish American racial ideology.¹³ Their disinterest in the problem can be blamed on the lamentably persistent tendency within the profession to treat the histories of the Iberian Peninsula and colonial Latin America as separate analytical fields. But it is also indicative of a broader Spanish denial about certain aspects of Spain's colonial past. I first encountered this denial when I arrived at the Archivo General de Indias (AGI) in Seville to conduct research for this book. After I explained the purpose of my visit, the director of the archive informed me that I would not find any sources on *limpieza de sangre* there. The response took me aback because I had a list of references for documents related to my topic that other historians had found at that archive. But after being in Spain for a few months, I realized that it was part of a general reluctance among contemporary Spaniards to recognize the importance that the concept of

purity of blood had in the Americas, namely because of what it implies for their national history, which has tended to minimize (if not deny) the role of processes of racialization in Castile's overseas territories. This reluctance cannot simply be attributed to ignorance, for even some Spanish historians of colonial Latin America tried to convince me, when at the onset of my research I presented at a reputable research institution in Seville, that the problem of purity of blood was one that never spilled out of the borders of the Iberian Peninsula and that the concept was used exclusively against converted Jews and Muslims. It soon became clear that the organization of archives—the way that many *limpieza de sangre* documents were classified or not classified, subsumed under other records, or mislabeled—was intimately connected to this national historical narrative.

That the same historians who tried to convince me of the irrelevance of the concept of *limpieza de sangre* outside of Spain were well acquainted with purity documents produced in Spanish America only added a surreal quality to the discussion that followed my presentation in Seville. But the strangeness of the experience did not end there. To bolster his case, a specialist in Andean history offered the observation that many Spanish colonists had reproduced with native women and, in cases where acquiring land was at stake, even married them! A people concerned with blood purity would not be willing to “mix” with the Amerindians was his point, one that clearly echoed the arguments made by some scholars in the first half of the twentieth century regarding Iberians' relatively benign attitudes toward native people and Africans.¹⁴ This current of thought, which had among its many flaws the propensity to see early colonial sexual relations not as acts of power but as signs of a more gentle or open approach to colonization (sometimes attributed to the history of Spanish and Portuguese “commingling” with Jews and Muslims) is part of the White Legend of Spanish history, an apologetic view of Spain's actions in the Americas. The view to some extent surfaced in reaction to the body of propagandistic literature that began to be produced by Spain's European rivals (especially the British and Dutch) in the late sixteenth century and which gave rise to the Black Legend. Seeking to discredit Castile's claims to the Americas, this legend focused attention on the conquerors' cruelty toward indigenous peoples, their unbridled greed, and their hypocritical use of religion as justification for their deeds.¹⁵

The Black Legend survived into the twentieth century and colored Anglophone scholarship on both Spain and Spanish America. Its influence is evident, for example, in the modernization studies of the 1950s that compared Latin America's apparent continuity in political, social, and economic forms—its history of authoritarianism, sharp inequali-

ties, and financial dependency—with the more democratic and capitalist trajectory of the United States.¹⁶ These studies tended to blame the “feudal” and “absolutist” foundations of Spanish colonial societies for the region’s troubled path to modernity. Many framed the problems associated with the *latifundia* (the absence of a yeomanry), the Inquisition (the suppression of freedom of political and religious thought), and the church’s collusion with the state (the clergy’s ongoing support of absolutism) as medieval holdovers that Castilians took to the Americas, where they obstructed economic entrepreneurship, individualism, and democratic ideals, among other things. The causes of Spain’s inability to modernize à la other parts of Western Europe and the United States also explained Latin America’s “backwardness.”

In the past few decades, the Black Legend has taken on a new twist. Some of the scholarship on the history of race and racism has been casting early modern Iberia as the site of a precocious elaboration of racial concepts and practices. A recent historical overview of the problem, for example, begins by discussing developments in Spain, “the first great colonizing nation and a seedbed for Western attitudes toward race.”¹⁷ Iberia’s pioneering role in the development of racial ideologies is sometimes linked to its participation in the early stages of the transatlantic African slave trade and in the colonization of the Americas.¹⁸ But it is more often associated with the Spanish statutes of *limpieza de sangre*. Indeed, particularly in the literature that seeks to excavate the “origins” of race, it has become almost commonplace to postulate that the Castilian concept of blood purity was the first racial discourse produced by the West or at least an important precursor to modern notions of difference.¹⁹ Anti-Semitism was endemic in late medieval Europe, and in the two centuries preceding Spain’s 1492 expulsion of its Jews France and England had on repeated occasions tried to do the same with their Jewish populations, but it apparently makes for a much more satisfying narrative when race and racism can be given a single starting point and a linear trajectory. Thanks to its contribution to racism via the purity statutes and Inquisition, early modern Spain can finally make a claim to modernity. It was ahead of its time in something.

Whether the intention of its proponents or not, the argument that credits Spain with establishing the first modern system of discrimination fits neatly into the package of the Black Legend, which might help to explain why Spanish historians would be less than enthusiastic about studying the extension of the concept of *limpieza de sangre* to the other side of the Atlantic. To acknowledge that a discourse of purity of blood surfaced in the Americas would be to risk adding yet another dark chapter to a history that includes the expulsion of the Jews, the establishment of the Inquisition, the forced exile of Muslims *and* *moriscos* (Muslim

converts to Christianity), and the conquest and colonization of native peoples. Given that the concept of purity of blood was relevant in all of these developments, how does one approach the subject in ways that avoid presenting historical actors in terms of simplistic dichotomies and, more generally, the politicization of history? Perhaps, as the historian Steve Stern has stressed, the conquest and colonization of the Americas can never be disentangled from politics—from the politics of the past and the present, the history and historiography²⁰—but the point here is not to vilify Spaniards or suggest that they were worse, as the Black Legend would have it, than other colonial powers, or for that matter better, as the White Legend camp claimed. No expansionist European country could claim the moral high ground with respect to their attitudes toward and treatment of the peoples they colonized and/or enslaved, only some differences in timing, methods, and guiding principles. This book does not intend, therefore, to provide material for the perpetuation of the Black Legend (whether it is used as such is another matter) or to reinforce the tendency in recent studies on the origins of race and racism to single out early modern Iberia, as if those phenomena were unknown in other parts of Europe or somehow spread from the peninsula to the rest of the continent. Its main concern is not with the history of Spain but with that of New Spain, although the two are clearly interrelated, and that in itself is a point that the study tries to reiterate as it charts the transatlantic paths of the problem of *limpieza de sangre*.

If Spanish historians can be criticized for their failure to recognize the importance of *limpieza de sangre* in the colonial context, U.S. scholars of Spanish America can be accused of not having paid adequate attention to the complexity of the uses and meanings of the concept in Iberia, which has tended to result in oversimplified and at times anachronistic renditions of the ways in which it shaped racial discourses in the American context. For their part, Mexican and other Latin American academics can be taken to task for their general aversion to treating race as a legitimate subject of inquiry for understanding their region's history. It is fair to say that they tend to regard it as an issue that mainly has had relevance in the United States and other former slave societies (as opposed to "societies with slaves"), whereas they see class as much more salient for understanding the Iberian American past (even when it comes to regions in which slavery was extremely important, such as Brazil and Cuba). Thus, although some Mexican specialists of the colonial period might agree that the notion of *limpieza de sangre* was of some significance (it is hard to miss references to it in the archives), they commonly dismiss the problem of race by stressing that social organization was based on an estate model.²¹ If different groups had distinct rights, privileges, and obligations, it was because of the hierarchical na-

ture of Spanish society, which at the time of the conquest continued to consist of three main estates and numerous corporations with specific functions within the social body, not because of modern notions of biological difference.

The argument that using the notion of race to study the period prior to the nineteenth century is anachronistic has of course not been made exclusively by Latin Americans. Indeed, the standard chronology (and teleology) of the concept is that it had not yet crystallized—assumed its full essentializing potential—in the early modern period because attitudes regarding phenotype usually combined or competed with ideas of cultural or religious difference. According to this account, race did not appear until the nineteenth century, when pseudoscience anchored it in biology, or rather, when biology anchored it in the body much more effectively than natural philosophy and natural history ever did. It is true that the concept of race generally became more biologicistic in that period, and it is of course important not to project its modern connotations to previous eras. But arguing that racial discourses took a particular form in the nineteenth century is one thing; contending that they did not operate in the early modern period, quite another. In the past three decades, a number of scholars have demonstrated that the meanings and uses of the concept of race have varied across time, space, and cultures and that even in modern times, it has not relied exclusively on biological notions of difference but rather has often been intertwined with culture and/or class. To elevate “race as biology” to an ideal type is to set up a false dichotomy—to ignore that racial discourses have proven to be remarkably flexible, invoking nature or biology more at one point, culture more at another.²² The shifting meanings and uses of race simultaneously underscore its social constructedness and suggest that there is no single, transhistorical racism but rather different types of *racisms*, each produced by specific social and historical conditions.²³ The historian’s task is precisely to excavate its valences within particular cultural and temporal contexts, study the processes that enable its reproduction, and analyze how it rearticulates or is “reconstructed as social regimes change and histories unfold.”²⁴

Several historians of colonial Latin America have argued that it is necessary to keep *limpieza de sangre* and race analytically distinct for the sake of historical specificity and in particular to attempt to be faithful to the ways in which people of that time and place understood their social identities. Some scholars fear that equating notions of lineage, blood, and descent with race would mean characterizing all premodern societies, and those studied by anthropologists, as racially structured.²⁵ The argument is compelling, and it is certainly difficult to dispute the point that there is a significant difference between the racial discourses that European

colonialism unleashed and indigenous kinship systems. But attempting to draw a rigid analytical line between purity of blood and race is tricky, first, because the two concepts gained currency at about the same time and appear side by side in virtually all *probanzas* (certificates) of *limpieza de sangre*, and second, because the former influenced the latter in no small ways. Indeed, there was no neat transition from early modern notions of lineage to race. In the Hispanic Atlantic world, Iberian notions of genealogy and purity of blood—both of which involved a complex of ideas regarding descent and inheritance (biological and otherwise)—gave way to particular understandings of racial difference.²⁶

There is nothing original about asserting that there was a link between European genealogical notions and racial discourses. As the anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has observed, both Michel Foucault and Benedict Anderson alluded to this link, albeit in different ways. Foucault, who viewed the problem of race mainly as part of Europe's "internal and permanent war with itself" and therefore did not consider colonialism's relevance to it, implied that a discourse of class had emerged from the "racism" of the European aristocracy. For his part, Anderson suggested that race had its origins in ideologies of "class" sprung from the landed nobility.²⁷ Thus, for one scholar, the aristocracy's racism informed class; for the other, its elitism shaped race. To some extent, these two different formulations stem from confusion over how to characterize the nobility's obsession with "blood," which more often than not was accompanied by concerns with biological inheritance, anxieties about reproduction outside the group, and a series of insidious assumptions about the inferiority and impurity of members of the commoner estate. Medieval representations of peasants, for example, rendered them as a lower order of humanity and associated them with animals, dirt, and excrement.²⁸ The bestialization of the peasantry could reach such extremes that a historian of slavery has suggested that it was an important precursor to the early modern racialization of Jews and blacks.²⁹

Whether medieval and early modern concerns with blood and lineage—in Europe and elsewhere—can be classified as racism will most likely continue to be debated, especially by those who favor using a loose definition of race that makes it applicable to most naturalizing or essentializing discourses and those who opt for a narrow one that basically limits its use to the nineteenth century and beyond. The debate is important but frankly less pressing than analyzing the historical significance of those concerns—the social tensions that produced them, the terms people used to express them, and the ways in which they were reproduced or rearticulated over time and across geocultural contexts. This book therefore uses the word *race* in relation to the discourse of

limpieza de sangre but does so with caution, stressing that both concepts were strongly connected to lineage and intersected with religion. Through much of the early modern period, they remained part of a grid of knowledge constituted not by scientific (biologicistic) discourses but by religious ones and operated through an “episteme of resemblance” in which similitude dominated the organization of symbols and interpretations and representations of the universe.³⁰ The book also emphasizes that concepts of blood purity and race were neither contained in Europe nor simply a consequence of the continent’s “internal war with itself.” They operated in a transatlantic context, and their continued salience and fluctuating meanings over the centuries were partly, if not greatly, determined by colonialism.

In sum, by underscoring the interrelated nature of discourses of purity of blood in Iberia and the Americas, this study undermines the view (especially prominent among Spanish historians) that the problem of *limpieza de sangre* was primarily an Iberian phenomenon as well as the contention (made by some scholars of Spanish America) that it can be separated from that of race. Furthermore, it problematizes the conceptual division that the literature on race sometimes makes between colonial racism and anti-Semitism. Some studies have argued that the two types of discriminatory regimes are manifestly different: that whereas the former has been characterized by the construction and maintenance of (colonial) hierarchies, the latter has typically promoted exclusion or outright extermination (as in the case of Nazi Germany). But as Étienne Balibar has stressed, a stark distinction between an “inclusive” colonial racism and an “exclusive” (usually anti-Semitic) one is untenable because historically, the two forms have not only exhibited similar characteristics but have depended on each other; rather than having separate genealogies, they have a “joint descent.”³¹ Few historical phenomena demonstrate this close relationship between anti-Semitic and colonial discourses of difference better than the ideology of purity of blood, which spread while Spain was forging its overseas empire. Like the ships, people, and merchandise moving to and from Europe, Africa, and the Americas, the ideas and practices associated with the notion of *limpieza de sangre* circulated within, and helped forge, the Hispanic Atlantic world.

If the area to which this book most directly contributes is the study of race in Spanish America, it also has implications for a number of other topics, including ones related to periodization, nationalism, and comparative colonialisms. For one, the centrality of the seventeenth century to the development of the *sistema de castas* places the focus on a period that historians of colonial Latin America have tended to understudy. Perhaps unduly influenced by anthropologist George Foster’s characterization of

colonial Latin American culture as having “crystallized” or acquired its basic social institutions by 1580, the historiography has generally regarded the years between that decade and 1750 as largely uneventful.³² Neglect of this “long seventeenth century” or middle phase of Spanish colonialism might also be explained by its shortage of events as dramatic as those of the conquest and its aftermath. How can the period compete, for example, with the years that witnessed the early evangelizing campaigns and their inspiration in biblical, messianic, and eschatological interpretations of history; the Spanish “debates” about the humanity of the Amerindians; and the civil war that erupted among some of Peru’s conquerors? It may also be that the seventeenth-century’s difficult paleography and less extensive secondary literature have made studying other eras more appealing.

Whatever the case, the period was anything but static. Seventeenth-century Spanish America not only had strong connections with Spain but underwent crucial social and cultural transformations. Included among these changes was the rise of creole patriotism, a topic that has been explored by David Brading, Bernard Lavallé, and others and which is analyzed in the present study in relation to the ideology of *limpieza de sangre*. By interrogating the complex relationship of patriotic, religious, and blood discourses, the book makes an intervention in discussions of nationalism in Latin America. Nationalism, however, is not an explicit subject of inquiry, in part because it did not appear until the end of the colonial period, if then. The region’s independence movements were primarily triggered by Napoleon’s invasion of Spain in 1808 and imposition of his brother Joseph as the new king, which on both sides of the Atlantic led to political assemblies and discussions that quickly became much more than about the restitution of Ferdinand VII to the throne. Thus, Latin American nationalism seems to have been the result, not the cause, of the independence movements, and to speak of eighteenth-century “creole nationalism” is to walk on shaky argumentative ground.³³ Furthermore, as a number of historians who responded to Benedict Anderson’s thesis about its rise in Spanish America have pointed out, not only was creole patriotism compatible with continued loyalty to the Spanish Crown, but the early modern notion of “nation” (*nación*) was exceedingly ambiguous with regard to territory and bloodlines.³⁴

That a strong identification with the local community existed prior to independence does not mean that there was a causal connection between the two or between *criollismo* (creolism) and nationalism. Assuming such a connection amounts to “doing history backwards,” that is, projecting modern categories onto a world in which those forms of thinking

had not yet come about.³⁵ It also forecloses the possibility of studying creole patriotism on its own terms—its meanings, motivations, and political effects at different points in time. But if patriotism and nationalism should not be conflated, examinations of colonial political ideology, social developments, and cultural movements are necessary to understand the form that Mexican nationalism took after independence. By exploring the relationship between the religiously inflected concept of *limpieza de sangre* and notions of citizenship (*vecindad*) in New Spain, this study seeks to provide a basis for further discussions about how the particularities of colonialism in Mexico shaped its postindependence political projects, gendered and racialized imaginings of the nation, and legal formulations of the citizen.³⁶

It also aims to highlight some of the specificities of Spanish colonialism. Although there are continuities and similarities between different colonial projects, colonialism cannot be reduced to a single model; it has multiple historicities.³⁷ The Spanish colonial project, the earliest in the Americas, was driven by historically and culturally specific forces, and its course was determined by early modern dynamics on both sides of the Atlantic. It differed most from modern imperial projects. For example, unlike Britain and France when they launched the second major phase of European colonialism starting in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Spain invaded the Americas, it was not an industrial power seeking raw materials and markets for its manufactured goods. Its expansion west was initially propelled by the search for gold (increasingly important as a medium of exchange in international commerce), and its economic project came to be based primarily on the exploitation of mineral wealth and on state-controlled systems of extracting labor and tribute from native populations that had few parallels.

Furthermore, Spanish colonialism began long before the emergence of the politics of nationhood, liberalism, and Enlightenment-inspired universalist concepts of freedom, equality, rights, progress, and citizenship. Together with the expansion of capitalist relations, these modern developments generated new ideological frameworks for justifying colonial rule as well as a deep tension between the particularism of colonialism (predicated on the creation and perpetuation of colonial hierarchies) and the universalism of western European political theory.³⁸ Spanish colonialism in the Americas, based more on the concept of status than on the notion of rights, did not have to contend with this tension, at least not at first. During its first two centuries, its main ideological contradiction stemmed from, on one hand, universalist Christian doctrines that touted the redemptive powers of baptism and the equality of all members of

the church and, on the other, the construction of different categories of Christians. The extent to which religion played a role in justifying expansion and colonial rule was another aspect of the early modern Spanish colonial project that distinguished it from modern ones.

Readily distinguishable in certain respects from nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperialism, Spanish colonialism becomes less distinctive when it is compared to other formative or early colonial projects in the Americas. Contrary to what the Black Legend would have us believe, during the initial phase of European expansion, Spaniards did not have a monopoly on the unbridled use of violence against native peoples. The British and Dutch amply demonstrated their capacity for barbarity. Furthermore, Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French colonial projects shared a number of features, including expansion through settlement; efforts to recreate European ways of life; and religious utopias, Catholic and Protestant alike.³⁹ But similarities among these “settler-type” colonialisms can be overstated, among other reasons because each power had its own economic, political, and religious agendas, even if at certain historical moments some of these overlapped. The Spanish state’s control over some systems of labor, its transformation of large indigenous populations into tributaries, and its collective incorporation of native people as Christian vassals of the Crown of Castile were exceptional, especially when compared to British policies in Anglo North America. And although efforts to convert native people to Christianity were by no means exclusive to Spaniards, no other European colonial power, not even the other Catholic ones of Portugal and France, relied on the church to spread the faith, support the government, and structure colonial society as much as Castile. The historical moment and cultural context were both crucial. That religion was integral to Spanish colonialism was due in large measure to its importance in sixteenth-century Spain itself, where Catholicism was the only religion allowed, where the church and state had developed an extraordinarily strong relationship, and where the twin notions of “Old Christian blood” and genealogical purity had emerged as powerful cultural principles and exclusionary weapons. Religion, lineage, and blood would in turn be used to organize the Spanish colonial world.

In conclusion, Spanish colonialism was shaped by particular economic, political, and religious goals; by historical circumstances in early modern Spain and Spanish America; and by distinctive principles of social organization. As a result, its categories of discourse, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and forms of establishing the boundaries of the Spanish community were unique or, at the very least, substantially different from modern colonial projects in Africa and Asia. Some of the main

differences and reasons for them will be apparent in the chapters that follow, which discuss religious and social developments in early modern Castile, Spanish political ideology in the Americas, and the organization of colonial Mexican society. Before describing the book's content in more detail, a word on sources and methodology is in order.

ARCHIVES, SOURCES, AND CHAPTER DESCRIPTION

Research for this book entailed trips to various Mexican, Spanish, and United States archives in search of documents pertaining to the issue of purity of blood, the most obvious types being the *información de limpieza de sangre* ("information of purity of blood") and the *probanza de limpieza de sangre* ("certification [or proof] of purity of blood"). The former normally consisted of genealogical information that a person (hereafter referred to as either "petitioner" or "candidate") seeking to access an institution or post with purity requirements would provide. The latter generally contained documents from the actual investigation process through which *limpieza de sangre* was "proven" and certified. Although the *informaciones* were usually placed in the *probanza* dossier, it is not rare to find copies of the first without the second, perhaps because at some point they became misplaced or because, for some reason or another, the investigation did not take place. It is also not rare to find documents in which *probanzas* are called *informaciones*, which suggests that the two words became somewhat interchangeable. In general, however, an *información* functioned as a kind of affidavit and did not in and of itself constitute the "proof" of *limpieza de sangre*, which in theory required a formal investigation into the petitioner's ancestral and religious history. If the results of the investigation were positive, the person received certified copies of the *probanza*.

Rather abundant in archives with colonial Latin American holdings, *probanzas de limpieza de sangre* tend to be quite uniform in language and in procedure. Some variations do occur, especially when the officials conducting the investigation suspected "impure" ancestry, but for the most part, the task of reading documents from this genre is repetitive and tedious, which might account for the lack of systematic studies of the problem of *limpieza de sangre* beyond a particular case or institution. Such studies are made even more difficult by the scattered nature of the sources and the way some have been classified. At times labeled simply "genealogies" or subsumed under other types of documents (such as *probanzas de méritos y servicios*, or "proofs of merits and services"), *limpieza*-related documents are currently dispersed in archives across

Latin America, Spain, and the United States, and on occasion, tracking a single case can involve research not only in various archives but in several countries. For example, I found several references to and parts of a probanza in Mexico's Archivo General de la Nación and Spain's Archivo Histórico Nacional, but I did not find the actual genealogical investigation until I examined the Mexican Inquisition Collection of the Huntington Library, in San Marino, California. Given that thousands of probanzas were generated in the course of the colonial period (and beyond) and their scattered nature, scholars studying the problem might be tempted to look at the records of one institution, for example, those of the Mexican or Peruvian Inquisition or those of a single guild or convent.

Like studies of specific groups of people (bureaucrats, merchants, women, slaves, and so forth) and of particular places for short periods of time, works on *limpieza* in one institution might result in important findings but in general do not promise to generate conclusions regarding the workings and evolution of colonial society. The observation that the historian William Taylor made of social historians—that their challenge is to explain how the small picture fits into the bigger one and thus to put “more history into social history”—applies to institutional ones as well.⁴⁰ To be sure, documents produced by institutions such as the Inquisition are important, and more than a thousand were analyzed for the present study in order to provide a careful reading of the concept of purity of blood, the language that accompanied it, and changes in its definitions over time.⁴¹ But the issue of *limpieza de sangre* transcended the establishments that had purity requirements and, whether in New Spain or elsewhere, is therefore not found exclusively in probanzas. Furthermore, the definitions contained in such documents do not tell the whole story. As historians know fully well, the rules, meanings, and prescriptions offered in laws, decrees, institutional constitutions, and other normative instruments cannot be taken at face value, certainly not in a society like that of colonial Spanish America, where the breach between theory and practice was widened by the legally and socially sanctioned distinction between private and public life.⁴²

Research for this book therefore involved studying sources produced by the Inquisition and other institutions, but it also entailed mining a wider array of sources that refer to the problem of *limpieza de sangre*, directly or indirectly. These include inquisitorial correspondence, memorials by theologians and jurists, juridical texts, licenses granted to Iberians to go to the Americas, spatial regulations, land petitions and grants, nobility documents, inheritance records, criminal and civil cases, minutes from town council meetings, indigenous histories, marriage legislation,

and in the late colonial period, paintings. Purity information is likely to be provided in applications by Spaniards or creoles wanting an inquisitorial or religious post, but it can also be found in a high-ranking military officer's petition to marry a woman from the colonies, or in legal cases like that of a widow of an eighteenth-century miner from Guanajuato who wished to prove her *limpieza* status in order to strengthen her claims over certain lands. It might also be found in documents in which a native ruler tried to prove his noble and pure ancestry to defend his right to public office in his town or, indirectly, in portraits of creole or native elites that included genealogies. And so forth. As the eclectic quality of the sources indicates, the problem of *limpieza de sangre* cut across socio-economic, religious, and cultural domains and constituted a discourse, a knowledge-producing instrument that promoted certain practices, social relationships, and identities and that was inextricably linked to operations of power.⁴³

To provide a history of this key concept, its relationship to colonial Mexican racial ideology, and its imbrication with religion, the book begins not in America but in the Iberian Peninsula. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the social and political circumstances that in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain helped to produce the statutes of *limpieza de sangre* and a concept of race intimately tied to lineage, culture, and religion. Chapter 2 underscores the importance of the Inquisition in exacerbating genealogical concerns in early modern Hispanic society and the related emergence of a model of classifying purity that was based on paternal and maternal bloodlines. This dual-descent model heightened Old Christian anxieties over reproduction and marriage with the descendants of Jews and Muslims and also over controlling the sexuality of "pure" women. Chapter 3 focuses on the procedures that, as of about the mid-sixteenth century, many Spanish institutions with purity statutes devised to examine the genealogies of potential members and their creation of a new genre of documents: the *probanza de limpieza de sangre*. An exclusionary device that was transferred to the Americas by the state, church, and Inquisition, the genre merits close attention because it mobilized a series of archival and social practices that not only made the status of *limpieza de sangre* highly unstable but helped foster genealogical mentalities in the broader Hispanic Atlantic world.

Shifting the discussion to developments in central New Spain, Chapter 4 focuses on the rise of an Indian republic—separate from but subordinate to the Spanish one—the creation of a special juridico-theological status for the native people, and the production of a discourse of indigenous purity. It argues that lineage became a key reproductive strategy in the "Indian republic," where it was first used by the descendants of

pre-Hispanic dynasties to prove their noble status and where the concept of purity, which acquired force in the eighteenth century, was used not just by individuals but also by groups or communities to make certain political and economic claims. Chapter 5 discusses the initial importance of genealogy in Spanish cities. Specifically, it focuses on the rise of a creole aristocracy in central Mexico, its development of local interests, and its increasing preoccupation with ancestry and purity at the end of the sixteenth century. This preoccupation with lineage was encouraged by royal policies pertaining to immigration, by the dispensation of grants for the descendants of conquerors and first colonists, and by the requirements for some religious and public offices. It was also nourished by creoles' belief in their right, as patrimonial sons of the land, to monopolize positions of power and influence and by their willingness to use the concept of purity to curb the political and economic claims of the growing population of mixed ancestry.

Chapter 6 examines New Spain's *sistema de castas*; its origins, language, and sociocultural logic. It explains its emergence as a function of processes of sociopolitical exclusion as well as of Spanish anxieties about the results of the Christianization project. These anxieties, which increased from the 1560s onward because of the continuation of "idolatry," facilitated the extension of Iberian notions of impurity to colonial populations. The notion of *limpieza de sangre*, closely tied to the concept of heresy in Spain, essentially entered into the colonial space through the back door of idolatry, generating acute contradictions in the status of the native peoples and their descendants. The chapter also underscores the crucial role that slavery played in shaping the classification of Africans and their descendants and more generally in determining the form that the *sistema de castas* took. Unlike native people, blacks were not recognized as a community or republic, were not collectively incorporated into the Crown of Castile as free Christian vassals, and were not officially declared pure of blood, all of which affected their ability to make genealogical claims.

Chapter 7 elaborates on the procedures that colonial institutions used for proving purity of blood, their transatlantic dimensions, and their implications for part of the creole population. Initially the products of the Christianization project and *anticonverso* policies, these procedures served to create the fiction of New Spain's lack of Jewish and Muslim antecedents and, as in Spain, turned the *probanza de limpieza de sangre* into a part of the public domain and culture of honor. The purity requirements also reproduced archival practices that fostered a genealogical and historical consciousness among elite creoles that throughout the colonial period reinforced their identification with a Spanish Old

Christian community of blood, even as their attachment to the land of their birth intensified and even as they began to forge a nativeness (*naturaleza*) separate from Castile. Chapter 8 closely examines the extension of the discourse of *limpieza de sangre* to colonial populations and contradictions between how the concept was officially defined and how it operated. It argues that these contradictions emerged not only because prescription and practice were frequently not in harmony, but also because of the ambiguous religious standing of native people and blacks, the elusiveness of the category of Old Christian, and the appropriation of the concept by people of native and African ancestry.

Chapter 9 outlines some of the changes that *limpieza de sangre* underwent in the second half of the colonial period, including its identification of more sources of contamination (of more “stains”) and the gradual association of purity with Spanishness. It also discusses how this secularization of the concept—made visual in *casta* paintings—gradually came to link *limpieza* to white skin color and thus mapped it onto the body. The last section deals with creole patriotic discourses during the period of the Bourbon reforms, a time of greater state intervention in the institutions of marriage and family and in colonial society in general. It argues that the form that these discourses took reflected the weight of the concept of *limpieza de sangre* in Mexican society and the complex attitudes toward indigenous and black blood it had helped to generate among Spanish elites. Late colonial patriotic vindications and imaginaries were informed by traditional Castilian definitions of political rights, but they were also deeply influenced by religion and race.