

NEW WORLD ORDERS

Casta Painting and Colonial Latin America

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AMERICAS SOCIETY ART GALLERY

New York, 1996

This catalogue has been published on
the occasion of an exhibition organized
by the Americas Society.

Americas Society Art Gallery, New York,
September 26–December 22, 1996

Front Cover:

ARELLANO [Mexican]

Diceño de Mulata yja denegra y español en la Ciudad de Mexico. Cabeza de la America a 22 del mes de Agosto de 1701
Años (Rendering of a Mulatto, Daughter of a Black and a Spaniard in Mexico City, Capital of America on the 22 of the Month of August of 1711), 1711

Oil on canvas, 40 × 29¼ in. (101.6 × 74.3 cm)

Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer, Denver

Photo: James O. Milmo

Inside front and back cover:

Castes of New Spain, from Joachin Antonio de Bafarás's manuscript,
Origen, costumbres, y estado presente de mexicanos y philipinos
(1763), Hispanic Society of America, New York.

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Library of Congress Card Catalogue Number 96-086170

ISBN 1-879128-14-4 (pbk.)

Published by the Americas Society

680 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

Editors: John A. Farmer and Ilona Katzew

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Translators: Roberto Tejada and Miguel Falomir

Design and typography: Russell Hassell

Printing: The Studley Press, Dalton, Massachusetts

Photography Credits:

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Casta Painting

Identity and Social Stratification in Colonial Mexico

ILONA KATZEW

In 1770 Francisco Antonio Lorenzana, a Spanish prelate and archbishop of Mexico from 1766 to 1772, remarked on the diversity of Mexico's population as opposed to Spain's:

Two worlds God has placed in the hands of our Catholic Monarch, and the New does not resemble the Old, not in its climate, its customs, nor its inhabitants; it has another legislative body, another council for governing, yet always with the end of making them alike: In the Old Spain only a single caste of men is recognized, in the New many and different.¹

As Lorenzana observed, the social composition of Mexico during the eighteenth century was based on the existence of various castas or castes. This term was used in Mexico to refer to the different mixed races that comprised society; it also served to indicate socioeconomic class. The Spanish prelate's emphasis on social heterogeneity was not meant to imply a harmonious coexistence of the diverse races, but instead to remind both colonial subjects and the Spanish Crown that Mexico was still an ordered, hierarchical society in which each group occupied a specific socioeconomic niche defined largely by race. Throughout the colonial period Spanish civil and ecclesiastical authorities emphasized racial differences as a way of exerting their control over the population. But the blurring of social boundaries that resulted from race mixing precluded a de facto categorization of the population, which greatly concerned Spanish authorities. Anxiety over this loss of control permeated much of Mexico's reality during the eighteenth century and also accounts in part for the emergence of the distinct pictorial genre produced there known as casta painting. This essay will explore some of the reasons that might have led to the development of casta paintings, proposing that they be viewed within the larger context of identity-formation in Mexico during the eighteenth century.

The production of casta paintings spans the entire eighteenth century. These works portray the complex

note

process of *mestizaje* or race mixing among the three major groups that inhabited the colony: Indian, Spanish, and Black. Most of these paintings are comprised of sixteen scenes depicted on separate canvases, although occasionally the scenes are represented on a single, compartmentalized surface (pl. 7).² Each scene portrays a man and woman of different races with one or two of their progeny and is accompanied by an inscription that identifies the racial mix depicted. The series follow a specific taxonomic progression: at the beginning are scenes portraying figures of “pure” race (that is, Spaniards), lavishly attired or engaged in occupations that indicate their higher status. As the family groups become more racially mixed, their social status diminishes. In addition to presenting a typology of human races and their occupations, *casta* paintings also include a rich classificatory system within which objects, food products, flora, and fauna are clearly positioned and labeled.³

Since the sixteenth century, Spaniards had transposed their own social schema onto their colonies in the New World. The subordination of State to Church and the ideology of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood)—where the absence of Jewish or Muslim blood defined an honorable Old Christian—were factors contributing to Spain’s hierarchically organized society, whose members had clearly delineated social roles.⁴ When the Spanish colonized the New World, they brought with them this division of society into nobles and plebeians. By converting the Indians to the Christian faith, an imperative that gave justification to the colonial enterprise, Spaniards became the aristocracy of Mexico regardless of their origins or occupations. The supremacy of Spaniards (or whites) was remarked at the end of the colonial period by Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), a German natural scientist who traveled in the New World: “any white person, although he rides his horse barefoot, imagines himself to be of the nobility of the country.”⁵ Indians, who, with the exception of their own nobility, were associated with agricul-

ture, became the tribute-paying plebeians. Nevertheless, the Spanish system admitted the existence of an Indian Republic within the colony, which meant that the Spaniards recognized the existence of an internal hierarchy for Indian society. Because Indians were destined collectively to become “New Christians,” they merited the protection of the Spanish Crown. Blacks, on the other hand, were brought to the New World as slaves and were in theory situated at the lowest echelons of society; they worked as domestic servants for the Spaniards and as laborers on the sugar plantations, mines, and estates. Blacks were considered a homogeneous group with no rights and were redeemable only on an individual level, once they had proven their loyalty to the Church and their masters.⁶ In practice, however, Spaniards often preferred Blacks to Indians and employed them to oversee Indian labor. By their association with whites, many Blacks came to occupy a *de facto* position superior to that of Indians.

While intermarriage among the three groups did not become common until the second half of the seventeenth century, sexual contact among Spaniards, Indians, and Blacks occurred as early as the sixteenth century.⁷ This resulted in the growth of a large group of racially-mixed people known collectively as *castas*—the general term used by Spaniards and creoles (Spaniards born in the Americas) to distinguish themselves from the large masses of racially-mixed people. By the end of the eighteenth century, approximately one quarter (25.4 percent) of the total population of Mexico was racially mixed.⁸ From the sixteenth century on a variety of names served to designate the different *castas* of Mexico. The most widely used terms were those referring to the mixtures between the three main groups: *mestizo* (Spanish-Indian), *mulatto* (Spanish-Black), and *zambo* or *zambaigo* (Black-Indian). In the seventeenth century two additional terms appeared: *castizo* (a light-skinned mestizo) and *morisco* (a light-skinned mulatto).⁹ By the eighteenth century a whole array of fanciful

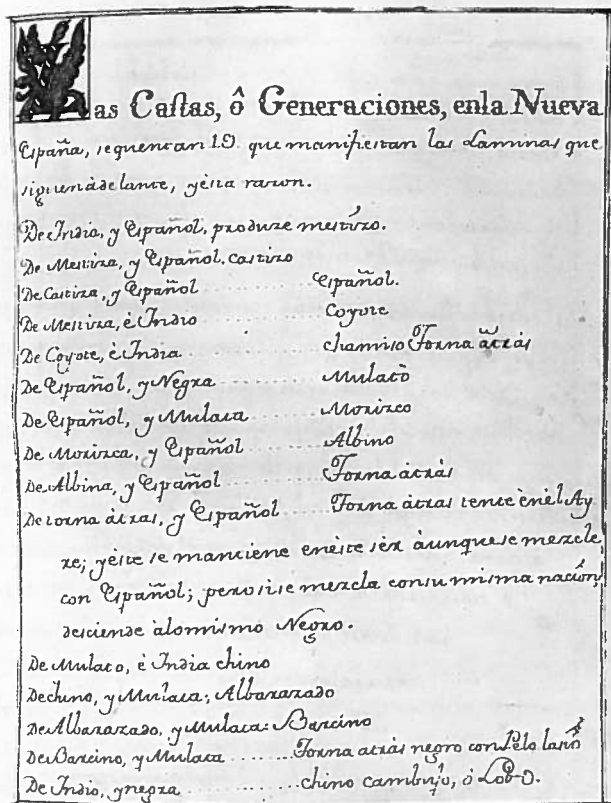


FIG. 1 "Las Castas, ó Generaciones, en la Nueva España . . ." (The Castes, or Generations of New Spain), from Joachin Antonio de Bafarás's manuscript, *Origen, costumbres, y estado presente de mexicanos y philipinos* (1763), Hispanic Society of America, New York.

terms had been devised to refer to the different castas and their offspring.¹⁰ Several documents record these artificially designed classifications, which include zoologically inspired terms such as *lobo* (wolf) and *coyote*, as well as names alluding to the racial indeterminacy of specific admixtures, including *tente en el aire* (hold-yourself-in-mid-air), and *no te entiendo* (I-don't-understand-you). While most racial taxonomies list sixteen mixtures, some enumerate fourteen, others nineteen or even twenty. These numerical differences point to the impossibility of definitively categorizing the racially mixed, impeding the creation of a fixed system of classification and representation.

Although most of these terms were clearly not applicable in ordinary communication, they suggest a basic principle: Spanish or white blood is redeemable; Black is not. In other words, while the purity of Spanish blood was inextricably linked to the idea of "civi-



FIG. 2 Castes of New Spain, from Joachin Antonio de Bafarás's manuscript, *Origen, costumbres, y estado presente de mexicanos y philipinos* (1763), Hispanic Society of America, New York.

lization," Black blood, bearing the stigma of slavery, connoted atavism and degeneracy. This principle is explicitly stated in an illustrated manuscript by Joachin Antonio de Bafarás entitled *Origen, costumbres, y estado presente de mexicanos y philipinos* (1763).¹¹ The author, presumably a Spanish merchant living in Guanajuato, as inferred from the text, offers a description of the different aspects of the colony, including its history, government, industrial activities, forms of entertainment, military guilds, foodstuffs, population, and customs.¹² An important part of his manuscript is devoted to the description of the generations of Mexico (fig. 1), which are accompanied with illustrations that, in all likelihood, derive from the author's knowledge of the popular casta series (figs. 2–4). In his system of classification, Bafarás suggests that so long as Spaniards are mixed only with Indians, the blood can be purified. However, the mixture of Spanish or Indian with Black



FIG. 3 "De Mestiza I Español, sale Castiza" (Mestiza and Spaniard Make Castiza), from Joachin Antonio de Bafarás's manuscript, *Origen, costumbres, y estado presente de mexicanos y philipinos* (1763), Hispanic Society of America, New York.



FIG. 4 "De Mestiza I Indio sale Coyote" (Mestiza and Indian Make Coyote), from Joachin Antonio de Bafarás's manuscript, *Origen, costumbres, y estado presente de mexicanos y philipinos* (1763), Hispanic Society of America, New York.

can never again be purified back to Spanish or Indian. In this system of identity-formation, Bafarás emphasizes the supremacy of the white pole to the Black:

*These are, among the vast types of peoples of New Spain, the main castas or generations that it contains, originated from the introduction of Blacks. . . . If this Kingdom had freed itself from the mixture with that nation, it would by now be purely Spanish without any corruption. Since Indians belong to a pure nation, upon mixing with Spaniards they become perfectly Spanish on the third step.*¹⁵

In his *Idea compendiosa del Reyno de Nueva España* (1774), the native of Cádiz, Pedro Alonso O'Crouley, also provides a detailed description of the lineages of New Spain. In this account the author explains how Spanish blood as opposed to Black could be redeemed:

It is known that neither Indian nor Negro contends in dignity and esteem with the Spaniard; nor do any of the others envy the lot of the Negro, who is the "most dispirited and despised." . . . If the mixed-blood is the offspring of a Spaniard and an Indian, the stigma disappears at the third step in descent because it is held as systematic that a Spaniard and an Indian produce a mestizo; a mestizo and a Spaniard, a castizo; and a castizo and a Spaniard, a Spaniard. . . . Because it is agreed that from a Spaniard and a Negro a mulato is born; from a mulato and a Spaniard, a morisco; from a morisco and a Spaniard, a torna atrás [return-backwards]; and from a torna atrás and a Spaniard, a tente en el aire [hold-yourself-in-mid-air], which is the same as mulato, it is said, and with reason, that a mulato can never leave his condition of mixed blood, but rather it is the Spanish element that is lost and absorbed into the condition of a Negro. . . . The same

*thing happens from the union of a Negro and Indian, the descent begins as follows: Negro and Indian produce a lobo [wolf]; lobo and Indian, a chino; and chino and Indian, an albarazado [white spotted]; all of which incline towards the mulato.*¹⁴

The need to devise such an artificial classificatory system was intended, at least from an ideological point of view, to emphasize the supremacy of Spaniards. According to such a perspective, Blacks, who were thought to embody a regression to an earlier moment of racial development, served as a foil for Spanish superiority. In other words, imagining the “descent” or degeneration in which humanity could fall was a necessary part of imagining the exaltation to which it could aspire.¹⁵ This type of “scientific racism,” which attempted to give social ranking and social disability a biological basis, was symptomatic of the social disruption that permeated colonial society, or, to borrow Anne McClintock’s words, “the poetics of degeneration was a poetics of social crisis.”¹⁶ In fact, the term “race” was used in shifting and unstable ways during the colonial period, sometimes to denote “biological ethnicity,” sometimes cultural alliances. Moreover, the rhetoric of race throughout the eighteenth century was used to invent distinctions between what we now call classes.

The eighteenth century in Mexico saw the increasing blurring of social boundaries as the necessary consequence of racial mixing, but also of the change in the distribution of wealth. In addition to ^{*} the frequency of intermarriage, which legitimized interracial liaisons, Mexico’s society was marked by a more frequent “passing” of one racial/social category to another. The great economic expansion in Mexico during the eighteenth century allowed a number of families from lower social groups—descendants from Indians and slaves—to amass great wealth and buy their way into the elite by purchasing certificates of legal “whiteness” called *gracias al sacar* (thanks for letting out).¹⁷ Racial identities were

also often manipulated for purely practical reasons. Individuals who were racially mixed, but who identified themselves culturally with Indians, for example, would often choose to emphasize their mestizo origin to avoid paying tribute, using everything from clothing, hairstyle, language, and popular opinion to back their claims.¹⁸ The lack of internal cohesion for Blacks made individuals from this group particularly prone to manipulating their racial identity; some adopted Indian and Spanish customs in an attempt to escape the liminality of their status.¹⁹ Nevertheless, while at first race was used as an indicator of status, by the eighteenth century being Spanish no longer guaranteed exclusive superior social standing.²⁰

The increasing erosion of race as an indicator of socioeconomic class resulted in a greater insecurity about status among the elite. Spanish and creole anxiety over the loss of control of the population and of their privileged status was by no means imaginary. As early as June 1692, a group in Mexico City led by Indians, but soon joined by all elements of the populace, rioted, looted the market in the Zócalo (the main square), and invaded and set fire to the viceregal palace. In his accounts of these events, the creole intellectual Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora (1645–1700) traced the causes back to the floods of the preceding summer, which had caused the maize and wheat crops to rot, resulting in a poor harvest and high prices. When the mob of Indians and castas attacked the palace, they shouted: “Death to the Spaniards and Gachupines [Spaniards born on the Iberian Peninsula] . . . who eat our maize!” and alleged “Is this not our land? Why do Spaniards want it?”²¹ Throughout his account, Sigüenza y Góngora blames the Indians and castas’ habit of drinking for the revolt. Noteworthy is his thorough disdain for the Mexican populace, which he describes as “a common folk so very common . . . composed of Indians, of Blacks both locally born and of different nations in Africa, *chinos*, mulattos, *moriscos*, mestizos, *zambaios*, *lobos*, and even Spaniards . . . who are the worst

among such a vile mob.”²² He then adds: “We live among such a populace while we pride ourselves of greatness. If only this truth, very much to our detriment in the present situation, would have never materialized! . . .”²³ Soon after the riot of 1692, colonial authorities attempted to segregate the Indians from the Spaniards, and especially from the remaining castas who were thought to have prompted the Indians to rise in riot.²⁴ While these attempts met with little or no success, they nonetheless conveyed the elite’s fear of the populace and its desire to create a more rigorous social order.

The emergence of casta painting is in part related to the elite’s anxiety regarding the fallibility of this imperial order. For the colonial elite, the classificatory system purveyed in casta painting was devoid of negative connotations. It was a way of creating order out of an increasingly confusing society. Early examples of casta painting in particular—those produced in the first quarter of the eighteenth century—might have been intended as reminders to the Spanish Crown that Mexico was still a rigidly structured society. Moreover, the placement of Spaniards at the beginning of these classifications underscored the fact that Spaniards presided over society. [The deployment of the family trope created a sense of unity within hierarchy, and it promoted an image of domesticity that masked racial tensions. At the same time the image of the family served to “naturalize” the overall social hierarchy portrayed in casta paintings. Since the subordination of woman to man and child to woman were considered natural facts, other forms of social hierarchy could be

(*) depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature.²⁵ In this respect, casta paintings promoted an image of the colony that served to countervail the anxiety fostered by such events as the riot of 1692 and simultaneously demonstrated to Europeans precisely those aspects that distinguished Mexico from the Old World.

Although not much is known about who commis-

sioned the casta cycles, there is no doubt that they were produced for a predominantly Spanish and creole audience.²⁶ In this sense it is interesting to note that the paintings do not distinguish between Spaniards and creoles and that they use the general epithet of “Spanish” to refer to both groups. Among the only known contemporary references to these paintings is a letter of 1746 by Andrés Arce y Miranda to Juan José de Eguiara y Eguren (1696–1763), professor and rector of the university of Mexico. Eguiara y Eguren was compiling a vast bio-bibliography, entitled *Biblioteca mexicana*, ultimately published in 1775, of all known Mexican writers, the aim of which was to counteract European denigration of the peoples and cultures of the Americas. In the letter, Arce y Miranda suggests that Eguiara y Eguren deal in the *Biblioteca* with the subject of the mixture of lineages “to clarify the purity of blood of creole literati; because we must be wary that the preoccupation that they have in Europe that we are all mixed (or as we say, *champurros*), contributes not little to the indifference in which they hold the works and writing of the worthy.”²⁷ Arce y Miranda then mentions that Viceroy Fernando de Alencastre Noroña y Silva, Duke of Linares (1711–1716), had conceived the idea of presenting to the King of Spain and his court the different racial mixtures of the colony through a series of paintings by Juan Rodríguez Juárez (1675–1728), a renowned artist working in Mexico City. Arce y Miranda also mentions that Juan Francisco de Loaiza, auxiliary bishop of Puebla (1743–1746), having the same idea, commissioned from Luis Berrueco, a painter from Puebla, a canvas divided into sixteen compartments representing the different castas of Mexico, which he claims to have seen. Although this painting has not been located, another casta set by Berrueco comprised of sixteen separate canvases has been identified.²⁸ Most of the castas in this series are portrayed in full-length and are lavishly attired; a number of them are shown engaged in a trade (figs. 5–6; pls. 8–10).

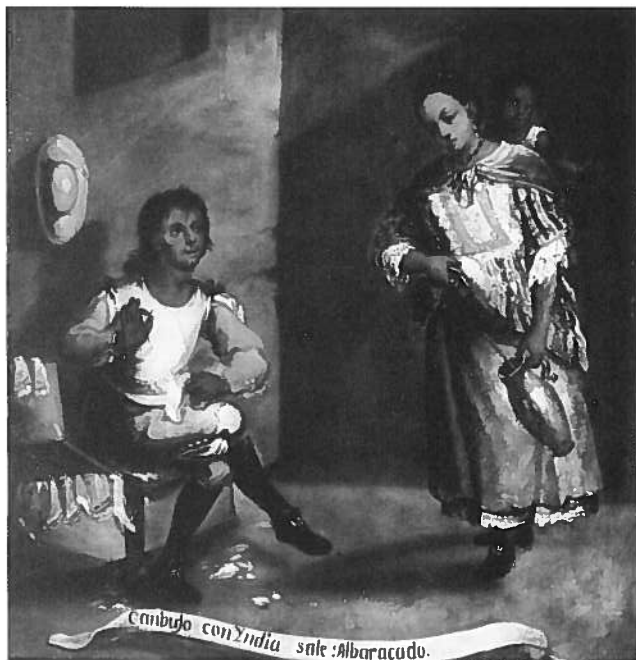


FIG. 5 Luis Berrueco, *Canbujo con Yndia sale: Alabaracado* (Cambujo with Indian Makes Alabarazado), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 39¼ × 39¼ in. (100 × 100 cm), Private Collection, Spain.

Instead of praising or even just approving of these works, Arce y Miranda viewed them with contempt and pointed out that what had been exported to Spain was an image of “the useful, not the noble minds,” a vision of “what harms us, not what benefits us, what dishonors us, not what ennobles us.”²⁹ As a creole intellectual, his concern was not with promoting an image of an industrious society that would perpetuate Mexico’s colonial status, but a favorable image of the enlightened creole elite at a time when it was being vehemently attacked in Europe as intellectually inferior.³⁰ Arce y Miranda’s disavowal of the casta pictorial genre is also related to the image he believed these works fostered: a society in which “pure” Spaniards got lost in the entanglement of race mixing, resulting in their discredited intellectual abilities abroad. This theory might have accounted for the subsequent inclusion of the Spanish literati at the beginning of numerous casta sets (pl. 19).

In addition to the information provided by Arce y Miranda regarding the commission of certain casta paintings, it is known that Archbishop Francisco Antonio Lorenzana brought back with him to Toledo a casta set signed by the Puebla artist José Joaquín



FIG. 6 Luis Berrueco, *Notentiendo con Yndia sale China* (I-Don't-Understand-You with Indian Makes China), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 39¼ × 39¼ in. (100 × 100 cm), Private Collection, Spain.

Magón in 1772.³¹ It is also known that Viceroy Antonio María Bucareli (1771–1779) remitted a casta set with Antonio de Ulloa to his niece Juana Antonia Bucareli y Baeza, Countess of Gerena.³² Other casta paintings were sent to the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural (Royal Natural History Collection) in Madrid, founded by Charles III in 1771.³³ Among these is the only known Peruvian cycle, sent by Viceroy Manuel Amat y Juniet (1761–1776) to Prince Charles IV in 1770 (pls. 63–64). In his letter to the Prince, Amat y Juniet explains why he commissioned the set:

My greatest wish being to contribute to the formation of the Natural History Collection in which our Most Serene Prince of Asturias has invested himself: I have thought it conducive to his enlightenment . . . to send a rare product of these domains, which is the notable mutation of appearance, figure, and color, that results from subsequent generations of the mixture of Indians and Blacks, which tends proportionally to be accompanied by certain proclivities and characteristics. With this idea I had the twenty canvases copied and shipped . . . and I will continue to refine these combinations until the end, if there is such. In hope that our Lord and Prince

*will accept this humble offering of my whole-hearted devotion, and to ease his understanding, the admixtures are ordered with numbers indicating that the son or daughter that appears in the first intermarriage, is, according to gender, father or mother in the next representation. . . .*³⁴

Amat y Juniet's idea for commissioning this anonymous series of twenty paintings surely stems from his knowledge of the well-known Mexican works that preceded this set.³⁵ The ordering of society in such paintings clearly underlines the role of classification as a way of rendering visible and stable an increasingly fluid society. It is a way of representing the unrepresentable; an attempt of quantifying, and thus controlling, the evanescence of colonial social rigor. At the same time, these works were intended both to "enlighten" and amuse their audience.

The Enlightenment is generally credited with fostering the acute observation and categorization of all manifestations of life, giving impetus to the exploration of other cultures and prompting the "logical" arrangement of these "discoveries." Yet, the fascination with "other" cultures ("other" in relation to Europe, that is), had a long tradition in Western thought. The Old World's hunger for the exotic resulted in its projection of chimerical traits onto the New. Prior to the "discovery" of America, the furthest confines of the world were thought to be inhabited by monstrous races—giants, pygmies, two-headed men, Amazons, and hermaphrodites—a European fancy that gave a place, albeit unknown, to the most feared human "aberrations." This fascination with the unknown contributed to Europe's long-lasting curiosity about the physical characteristics of the peoples of the New World, which is also evinced in the constant official requests for information on the different castas and their customs issued by the Spanish Crown beginning in the sixteenth century.³⁶

Significantly, in addition to the set commissioned by Amat y Juniet, other casta paintings found their

way into the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural in the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1776, the same year the Gabinete opened its doors to the public, an official decree was issued requesting viceroys and other functionaries to send natural products and artistic curiosities.³⁷ Casta paintings were displayed with a host of archaeological objects, rocks, minerals, fossils, and other "ethnographic" items. By entering the space of the Gabinete, casta paintings acquired a specific meaning related to their assumed "ethnographic" value. The Gabinete provided the ideal forum from which colonial *difference* could be contained and articulated as a category of nature. Thus, the inclusion of objects such as casta paintings, in addition to satisfying Europeans' curiosity for the exotic, points to their need to classify the peoples of the Americas as a way of gaining control of the unknown.

Numerous works of art in all media representing the peoples of the Americas began to be produced as early as the sixteenth century and continued throughout the Enlightenment period.³⁸ A large painting from the eighteenth century by the Portuguese artist José Conrado Roza entitled *The Wedding March* (1788) (figs. 7–8) portrays a group of eight dwarfed figures from Brazil who were shipped as gifts by the governors of different Brazilian provinces to King Pedro III of Portugal (1777–1786). Each figure bears an inscription explaining his or her origin. For instance, the inscription on the figure with skin discoloration states: "Siriatic, a native of Cotinginba, sent to Bahia to be presented to our Lord Prince and Captain General, Don Rodrigo Jose de Menezes e Noronha. He arrived in this court in July 1786, at the age of twelve. The famous accidents of this Black's skin are visible in his portrait."³⁹ The painting offers a visual spectacle of the "uncanny" human types meant to satisfy the curiosity of a European audience.

Another late example of the classification of the peoples of the Americas is provided by Luis Thiebaut's



FIG. 7 José Conrado Roza, *The Wedding March*, 1778, oil on canvas, 106 × 74 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (270 × 190.5 cm), Musée du Nouveau Monde, La Rochelle, France.



FIG. 8 José Conrado Roza, *The Wedding March* (detail).

Quadro de historia natural, civil y geográfica del Reyno de Perú (Picture of the Natural, Civil, and Geographic History of the Kingdom of Peru, 1799). This large painting was intended as an anthology of the flora, fauna, natural resources, and human inhabitants of the viceroyalty of Peru. In this system of representation, each motif is accompanied by an inscription describing its main characteristics. In the upper register of the painting are thirty-two representations of the different human “specimens” of Peru, which Thiebaut divides into “civilized” and “uncivilized” nations (figs. 9–10). The inscription states that “in order to speak with precision of the character of the inhabitants of Peru, it is convenient to divide them into three main classes: Indians, Spaniards, and Blacks, from whose union result other mixed castas.”⁴⁰ Thiebaut provides a description of the figures’ physical characteristics, temperaments, and occupations. While mulatto women are “those who mostly engage in domestic service, whose self-assurance and sharpness is imponderable . . . who eat poorly, yet live to dress well,” Limeños (Spaniards born in Lima), “have a beautiful disposition for the arts and sciences, yet lack the fire and spirit of the Spaniards; are discreet . . . and choose dignity over riches.” As for the Indians of the Ucayali River, Thiebaut describes them as “cannibals . . . convinced that there are no other men in the world beyond those they know.”⁴¹ These examples show how Thiebaut articulates and fixes society through a grid that emphasizes very specific traits. Although the purpose of his painting was to “enlighten” Spaniards about the diverse nature of Peru, it dissected reality into a compendium of immutable and stereotyped categories. This presentation of such select and specific categories results in a major feature of the purported Enlightenment: the subjective contrivance of reality through its ostensibly “objective” description and classification.

Interestingly, the inscriptions in these works serve to enhance the reality effect of the images; they are a way of rendering the “other” more real, of making the subjects more tangible. In this regard, the carefully labeled casta paintings, which exemplify the “notable mutation of appearance, figure, and color” that resulted from race mixing, as Amat y



FIG. 9 Luis Thiebaut, "Man and Woman from Lima," detail from *Quadro de historia natural, civil y geográfica del Reyno de Perú* (Picture of the Natural, Civil, and Geographic History of the Kingdom of Peru), 1799, oil on canvas, overall: 45 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 128 in. (115 × 326 cm), Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, Madrid.

Juniet so clearly put it, purvey an image of the exotic that feeds directly into European expectations. They provide an arrangement of the racial mixtures in a "table," an ordered structure that articulates, in visual terms, the multiple "racial permutations" that fascinated Europeans.⁴² In this respect, it is important to note that a key factor that distinguishes casta paintings from the works discussed above is the fact that they were produced by colonial artists instead of Europeans. Thus, while casta paintings fit within European concepts of the exotic, they also portray an image of the self. A number of visual strategies are employed to construct this self-image, including the emphasis on the luxury and abundance of the colony and the mediation of reality as conveyed by the careful selection of the scenes represented.

Early examples of casta paintings reveal a special concern with the construction of a particular self-image. In a manner similar to that of royal portraiture, these paintings provided a vision of reality destined to be scrutinized abroad, mainly by imperial authorities. The accordance of luxurious garb to the different castas in these paintings, for example, is intrinsically related to the desire to export an image that would underscore the colony's wealth. In the earliest known surviving casta painting, signed by a member of the Arellano family⁴³ (1711) (pl. 1), the

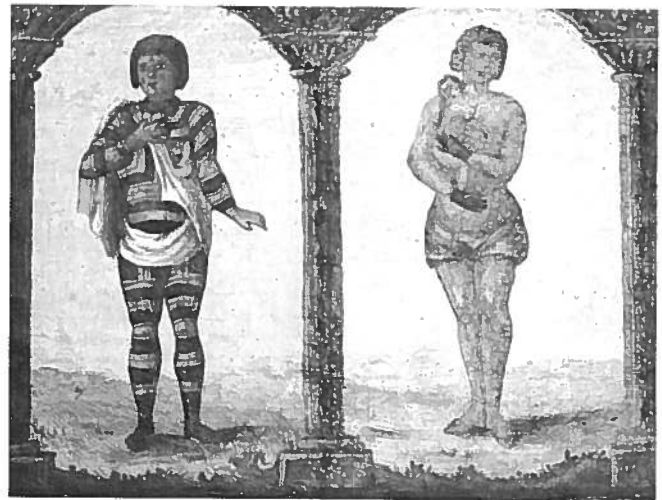


FIG. 10 Luis Thiebaut, "Ycaguate Indian of the Napo River and Payogüe Indian of San Miguel," detail from *Quadro de historia natural, civil y geográfica del Reyno de Perú* (Picture of the Natural, Civil, and Geographic History of the Kingdom of Peru), 1799, oil on canvas, overall: 45 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 128 in. (115 × 326 cm), Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, Madrid.

careful attention given to the figure's attire and jewelry, in addition to stressing the colony's wealth, reveals the artist's wish to bring the importance of the mulatto woman to the foreground. This is further corroborated by the work's inscription, which reads: "Diceño de Mulata yja denegra y español en la Ciudad de México. Cabeza de la America a 22 del mes de Agosto de 17011 Años" (Rendering of a Mulatto, Daughter of a Black and a Spaniard in Mexico City, Capital of America on the 22 of the Month of August of 1711). The inscription alludes to Mexico's prominent place in the New World. This form of pride in the local is also present in an earlier work by a member of the Arellano family, entitled *Traslado de la imagen y estreno del santuario de Guadalupe* (Procession of the Virgin of Guadalupe, 1709), executed for Viceroy Francisco Fernández de la Cueva, Duke of Albuquerque (1702–1711). In this painting the same interest in classification is evident from the cartouche in the lower right corner enumerating the different sites depicted. Moreover, the painter portrays New Spain's different social groups in lavish regalia as they congregate to honor the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's preeminent patron.⁴⁴

Another early casta cycle that stresses the luxury of the different castas is attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez. Although it is not known whether this is the



FIG. 11 Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De Español, y de India Produce Mestizo* (Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo), circa 1725, oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 41 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (80.7 × 105.4 cm), Sir Edward Hulse, Breamore House, Hampshire, England.



FIG. 12 Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De Mulato, y Mestiza Produce Mulato es Torna Atras* (Mulatto and Mestiza Produce a Mulatto Return-Backwards), circa 1725, oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 41 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (80.7 × 105.4 cm), Sir Edward Hulse, Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

series commissioned by Viceroy Alencastre Noroña y Silva, the set is without doubt one of the earliest extant. Each painting represents half-length figures wearing jewelry and Indian and European clothes (figs. 11–13). In *De Español, y de India Produce Mestizo* (Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo), the Spanish male is dressed in the fashionable French style of the period adopted after the arrival of the Bourbons to the Spanish throne in 1700; he wears a typical French coat and wig, while under his arm he holds the three-pointed hat or *tricornio*. In this painting equal attention is given to the representation of native garb: the Indian woman wears a lavishly ornamented *huipil* and a luxurious assortment of jewelry, including a pearl bracelet, necklace, and pendants. In another painting of the series, *De Castizo y Española Produce Español* (Castizo and Spaniard Produce a Spaniard) (pl. 2), the *castizo* figure is shown wearing the characteristic Spanish long cape and broad hat that signified *hidalguía*, or purity of blood and honorable status. Also from the first quarter of the century is an incomplete casta series signed by José de Bustos (figs. 14–15; pls. 5–6), in which the figures are represented in half-length and are also portrayed in lavish attire.⁴⁵

The portrayal of Spaniards and other castas in fashionable garb in these examples is intended to fore-

ground the colony's wealth and progressiveness. In fact, the emphasis on the grandeur of New Spain was typical of creole patriotic rhetoric. At the end of the seventeenth century, Agustín de Ventacourt (1620–1700) described the luxury of Mexico City as follows:

... the City's beauty lies in its inhabitants for the elegance and cleanliness that adorns them; there are over eight thousand Spaniards and more than twenty thousand women of all conditions, where neatness prevails and gracefulness abounds, and where even the poorest woman wears pearls and other jewels assembled for her. ... Great is the elegance and luster ... where rich and officials, including the most unimportant, sport a ruff and black cape, and ride on carriages and horses. Greatness it is, but whoever was to see them together, unable to distinguish between a rich noble or honorable man and an artisan, would think it impolitic; still this is the bizarreness of the country, which inspires majesty, aggrandizes humble hearts, and annihilates wretched conditions.⁴⁶

The “bizarreness of the country,” the excessive deployment of wealth, as Ventacourt observed, allowed the elite to ascertain its equal, if not superior, position in relation to the Iberian peninsula. Those who abandoned Spain wanted to surpass their coun-



FIG. 13 Attributed to Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De Lobo, y de India Produce Lobo. Que Es Torna Atras* (Wolf and Indian Produce a Wolf, Which Is a Return-Backwards), circa 1725, oil on canvas, $31\frac{3}{4} \times 41\frac{1}{2}$ in. (80.7 × 105.4 cm), Sir Edward Hulse, Breamore House, Hampshire, England.

try in wealth to justify their exile; those born in New Spain wanted to prove, through the extravagant display of wealth, that they were firmly rooted in their new country.⁴⁷ In fact, the uniform assignment of luxurious garb to the different castas in these early series is the most outstanding feature that distinguishes them from most casta cycles produced after 1750. Luxury, thus, becomes paradigmatic of the privileged social and economic reality of Mexico that the elite wanted so desperately to convey to Europe.

Dress, however, has more than one function in casta painting. While early examples emphasize the colony's wealth by according luxurious attire to all elements of society, casta series produced after 1750 use clothes to indicate a broader range of socioeconomic classes. In a set signed in 1763 by Miguel Cabrera (1695–1768), for instance, the first eight paintings portray race mixtures in which the dominant figure is the Spanish male (figs. 16–18; pl. 15).⁴⁸ These paintings form a coherent group in which every female and offspring, regardless of race, is lavishly dressed. Cabrera emphasizes the supremacy of Spaniards by portraying them with their families in sumptuous dress. In two instances the families are shown to be merchants—one of the most lucrative occupations during the colonial period—as they



FIG. 14 José de Bustos, *De Español y de Mulata Produce Morisco* (Spaniard and Mulatto Produce a Morisco), circa 1725, oil on canvas, $29\frac{3}{4} \times 36\frac{1}{2}$ in. (75.6 × 92.5 cm), Private Collection, Paris.



FIG. 15 José de Bustos, *De Mulato y Mestiza Produce Mulata* (Mulatto and Mestiza Produce a Mulatto), circa 1725, oil on canvas, $29\frac{3}{4} \times 36\frac{1}{2}$ in. (75.6 × 92.5 cm), Private Collection, Paris.



FIG. 16 Miguel Cabrera, 1. *De Español, y d India, Mestiza* (From Spaniard and Indian, Mestiza), 1763, oil on canvas, 52 × 39¾ in. (132 × 101 cm), Private Collection.



FIG. 17 Miguel Cabrera, 2. *De Español, y Mestiza; Castiza* (From Spaniard and Mestiza, Castiza), 1763, oil on canvas, 52 × 39¾ in. (132 × 101 cm), Museo de América, Madrid.

stand in front of their stalls at the Parián (the main marketplace in the Zócalo). The members of the lower castas, however, are portrayed wearing tattered clothes, and mostly engaged in trades. In 13. *De Indio, y Barsina; Zambayga* (From Indian and Barcina, Zambaiga) (pl. 17), for instance, the large ceramic jug in the lower right corner points to the Indian's occupation as an *aguador* (water carrier), while in 14. *De Castiso, y Mestisa, Chamiso* (From Castizo and Mestiza, Chamizo) (fig. 19), the family group is shown manufacturing cigars.

The differences between early casta sets and those produced after 1750, such as Cabrera's, seem to respond to the elite's increasing concern over the impossibility of discerning the different social groups in the colony, due partly to the fact that clothes were often used to obliterate identity. In 1679, the Bishop of Michoacán complained about "the notable disorder . . . in dress, both for its scant honesty and for the

indiscriminate use of silks and precious materials, as well as gold, silver, and pearls, by nobles and plebeians alike."⁴⁹ Although expressed in more patriotic terms, Juan de Viera also mentions the use of dress as a way of masking identity when he describes Mexico City's women: "It is wonderful to see them in churches and promenades, often without knowing which is the wife of a count, which of a tailor."⁵⁰ In fact, the increasing blurring of boundaries between the different classes was also the cause of much concern in Spain:

It is virtually impossible today to distinguish the noble from the plebeian, the rich from the poor, the honorable from the low; and from here originate vanity, arrogance, the abandonment of agriculture and of all work; and ultimately evil altogether. My Lord [King Philip V] provide that each dress according to his class, so that his dress bespeak his profession, and nobles not be confused with plebeians, nor rich with poor.⁵¹



FIG. 18 Miguel Cabrera, 7. *De Español, y Albina; Torna atras* (From Spaniard and Albino, Return-Backwards), 1763, oil on canvas, 52 × 39³/₄ in. (132 × 101 cm), Private Collection.



FIG. 19 Miguel Cabrera, 14. *De Castizo, y Mestiza, Chamiso* (From Castizo and Mestiza, Chamizo), 1763, oil on canvas, 52 × 39³/₄ in. (132 × 101 cm), Museo de América, Madrid.

The fact that Cabrera, as well as many other artists who painted casta cycles, used clothing as an indicator of socioeconomic class echoes the pervasive concern in Mexico and Spain regarding the loss of social boundaries. Social stratification is thus rendered clear in these paintings through the differentiation of clothes.

In addition to clothes, the difference between early casta paintings and those produced in the second half of the eighteenth century is marked by the latter's inclusion of objects, food products, flora, and fauna signifying the natural abundance of the Americas. This representation of disparate elements typical of the colony is clearly exemplified in Cabrera's set. The first work, 1. *De Español, y d India, Mestiza* (From Spaniard and Indian, Mestiza) (fig. 16), depicts a pineapple with the word "Piña" inscribed on it. The pineapple was one of the fruits that aroused the most interest among the Spaniards. It is known that a

consignment of this fruit was sent to Spain in the early sixteenth century, and reputedly King Ferdinand found it superior in taste to all other fruits.⁵² The painting also includes an assortment of native textiles, as indicated by the inscription of the word "Xilotepeque" and the condensed form "Xilo." on the rolls of fabric heaped in the stall. The black dot on the woman's temple in 5. *De Español, y Mulata; Morisca* (From Spaniard and Mulatto, Morisca) (pl. 15) is a fashionable adornment worn by women in Mexico known as a *chiqueador*—a cut piece of velvet glued onto the person's face to simulate a mole, a sign of beauty. The parrot in 7. *De Español, y Albina; Torna atras* (From Spaniard and Albino, Return-Backwards) (fig. 18) is also typical of Mexico. Of all living creatures, parrots particularly appealed to Spaniards, for they were both larger and more colorful than the African species they knew.⁵³ Finally, the food depicted in 13. *De Indio, y Barsina; Zambayga*

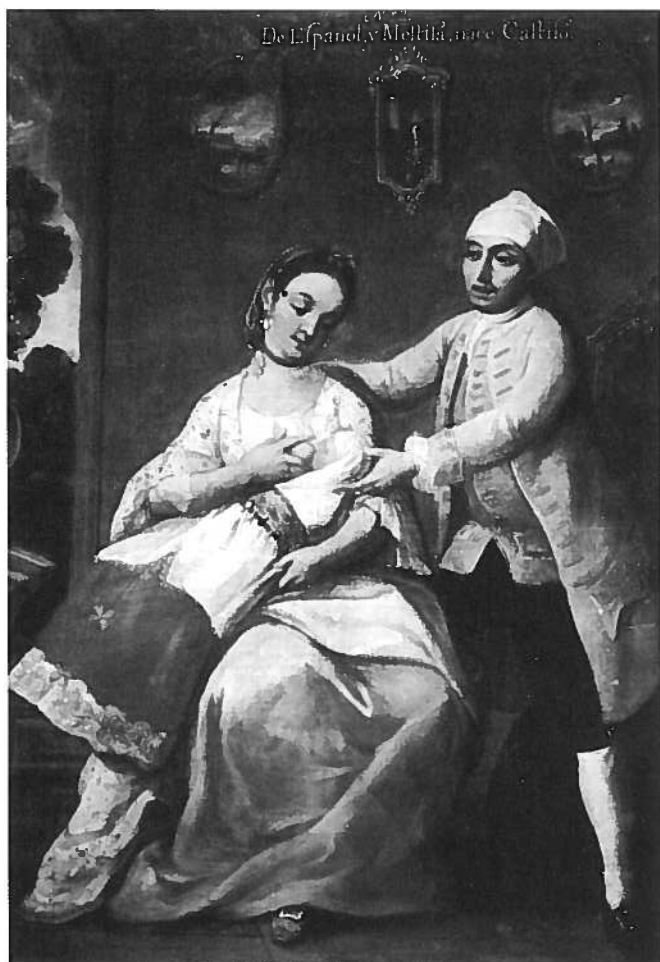


FIG. 20 Andrés de Islas, *Nº 2. De Español y Mestiza, nace Castizo* (From Spaniard and Mestiza, a Castizo Is Born), 1774, oil on canvas, 29½ × 21¼ in. (75 × 54 cm), Museo de América, Madrid.

(From Indian and Barcina, Zambaiga) (pl. 17) is a characteristic Mexican dish made of filled corn husks known as *tamales*.

On one level the representation of these “typical” objects of the colony was meant to satisfy Europe’s desire for the exotic. On another level, however, the depiction of these variegated articles can be interpreted as proud renditions of the local. In fact, these samplings of colonial life form the core of a number of creole patriotic chronicles of the period. In *Breve compendiosa narración de la ciudad de México, corte y cabeza de toda la América septentrional* (1777), for example, Juan de Viera states his motives for writing his account:

... convinced by the request of a few European friends, who, not blinded by the passion of national spirit, are anxious to divulge in their homeland the greatness of this court, if not unknown there, at least denied, because it is true that the sole mention of the Americas triggers in them the idea of an uncultivated land, filled with errors and superstition, spells and sorcery. This is why they supply travelers to the Americas with all sorts of relics to defend them from imaginary incantations, and for mourning them as though they were never to see them again, without realizing that their interest is motivated by the exaltation of the abundance of gold and silver, posts and work, and that this is what causes them to forget their own homeland, their parents and relatives, and never, or very rarely, to return to their place of birth. I write for these reasons, so that the entire world will know that such rapture stems from the abundance, wealth, and beauty of this hemisphere.⁵⁴

In his account, Viera offers a detailed description of the most outstanding secular and religious buildings of Mexico, its forms of entertainment, markets, foodstuffs, crafts, customs, etc. In other words, he emphasizes precisely those aspects that are frequently represented in casta paintings. Viera’s narrative, like Cabrera’s paintings, was intended to provide to Spain a vision of the “abundance, wealth, and beauty” of the American hemisphere. The author’s description of the colony’s trades fostered an image of an industrious and prolific society; it was a way of countervailing the ill-founded assumptions in Europe that Mexico’s population was predominantly idle and culturally inert.⁵⁵ Both Viera and Cabrera thus mediate reality with the purpose of promoting a favorable view of the colony abroad.

Reality is also negotiated in casta paintings through the selection of particular scenes. Among the most significant aspects of the configuration of this self-image is the inclusion of Spaniards at the beginning of the cycles as a way of stressing their superior status. In these scenes Spaniards are mostly portrayed as the possessors of culture, reading or sitting next to their writing implements; as merchants or bearers of arms; or as partaking in leisure activities that include playing cards, playing music, and eating (pls. 3, 4, 19, 36, 48). They are also shown in scenes standing next

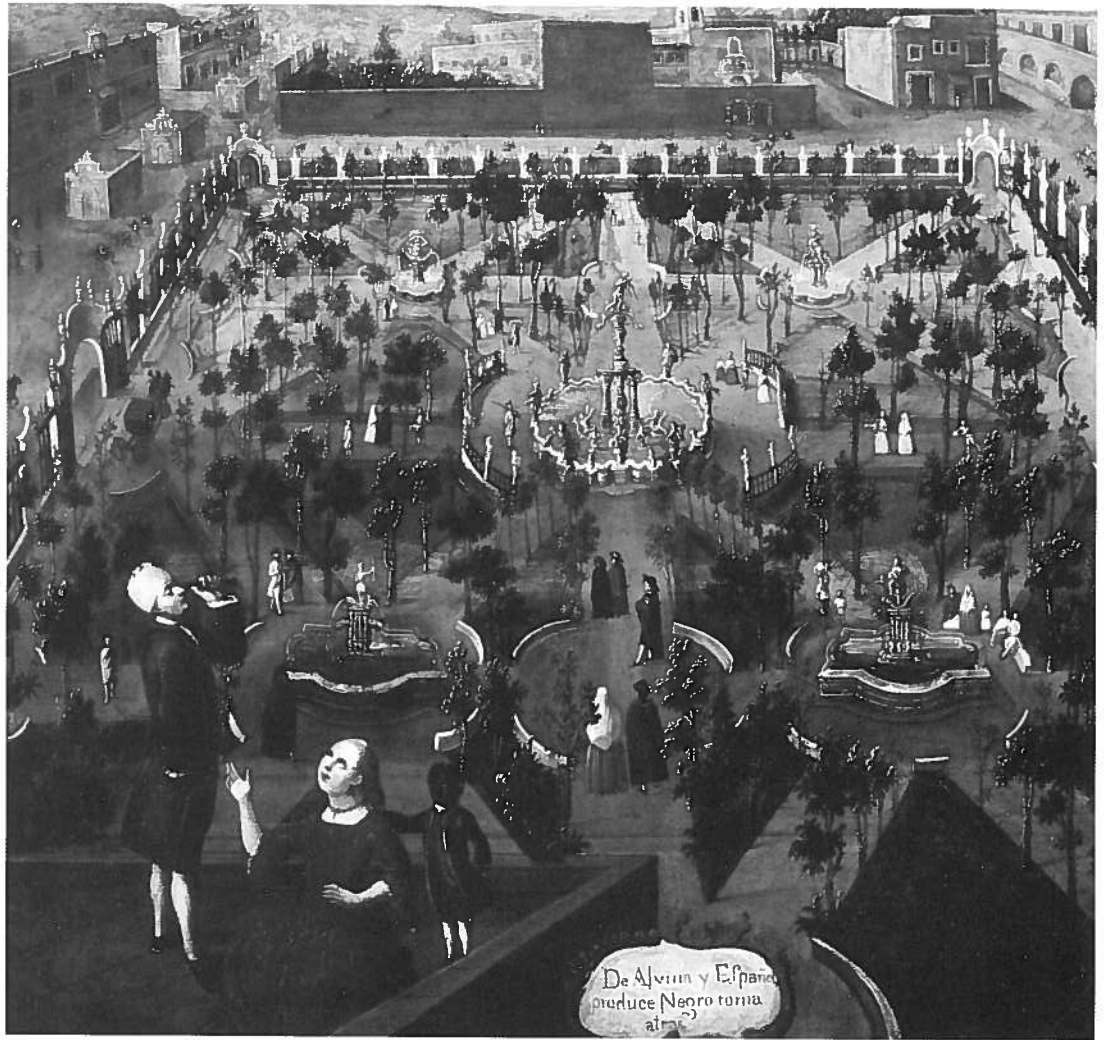


FIG. 21 Unknown artist, *De Alvin y Español, produce Negro torna atras* (Albino and Spaniard Produce a Black-Return-Backwards), circa 1775, oil on copper, 18 × 21³/₄ in. (46 × 55 cm), Banco Nacional de México, Mexico City.

to their nursing wives (fig. 20; pl. 27). In other words, Spaniards are featured as the controllers of women's sexuality. The exaltation of maternity and the breeding of a virile race of empire-builders were widely perceived as paramount for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body politic.⁵⁶ In this sense, it is interesting to note that the nursing scenes are mostly confined to those mixtures that include the Spanish male. Another striking representation of the Spanish male as the dominant figure is provided by a small painting of an incomplete casta set (fig. 21). Here the family group is depicted in a literal space of superiority—atop a roof—from which the standing Spanish man beholds the entire Alameda (the main park) and part of the city

through his telescope. The albino woman sits with her back against the city, while the child stands immediately behind her. The composition stresses the subordination of child to woman, and of woman to man, while the last is featured as the controlling agent. The erect standing male is not only portrayed in a position of mastery over female and child, but through his gaze, as possessor of the city itself.

In stark contrast to the former depictions are scenes representing the mixture of a Spanish man and a Black woman (pl. 49). In this example the couple is shown in the interior of a kitchen; the woman is about to strike her husband with a kitchen implement while their child tries to stop her. If the previous scenes exemplified domestic bliss and featured



FIG. 22 Unknown artist, 15. *De Albarázado, y Muláta. Barcino* (From *Albarazado and Mulatto, Barcino*), circa 1780, oil on canvas, 23 x 29 1/2 in. (58 x 75 cm), Private Collection, Spain.

the Spanish male as controller of his family and his environs, here the iconography has been reversed to that of domestic degeneracy. Other similarly violent scenes show the mixtures of Indians with admixtures of Blacks. In a painting from an anonymous casta set, the *chamizo* male is actually shown stabbing his Indian wife (pl. 42), while in a painting from another set a mulatto woman is shown attacking an *albarazado* man (fig. 22). The message is clear: certain mixtures—particularly those of Spaniards or Indians with Blacks—could only lead to the contraction of debased sentiments, immoral proclivities, and extreme susceptibility to a decivilized state. The incorporation of this type of scene in a number of casta sets serves to highlight the positive traits associated with mixtures that excluded Blacks, which bore the promise of a return to a pure racial pole.

Despite these images of violence, the majority of casta sets offer a vision of colonial society, in which members of the lower castas are usually shown at work or enjoying themselves in a moderate fashion. This is even noticeable in scenes showing the selling of *pulque*—the Indian's favored intoxicating drink extracted from the maguey plant. Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the consumption of *pulque* was mainly associated with religious ceremonies; by the sixteenth century the consumption of this fermented drink was widespread among Indians and castas.

Numerous colonial documents attest to the aggravations caused by the indiscriminate consumption of *pulque*. In fact, this beverage was blamed for causing the famous riot of 1692.⁵⁷ *Pulque* was often mentioned as a cause of random acts of violence and sexual crimes, and this is precisely what is often represented in the literature and in numerous illustrations. Viceroy and other colonial authorities complained repeatedly about the noxious effects of the beverage and attempted to ban its consumption. Their efforts met with no success, as its dispensation provided great revenues for the Spanish Crown.⁵⁸

While some casta paintings offer a type of "ethnographic" representation of the *tlachiquero* Indian extracting *pulque* from the maguey plant (fig. 23), most commonly they present the consumption of this beverage by the different castas. In José de Páez's 11. *De Cambujo, é India, produce Sambaigo* (Cambujo and Indian Produce a Zambaigo) (fig. 24), the con-



FIG. 23 Unknown artist, 13. *Yndio* 14. *Tente en el aire* 15. *Canbuja* 16. *Alvarrazado* 17. *Barnillo* 18. *Yndia* (13. Indian; 14. Hold-Yourself-in-Mid-Air; 15. Cambuja; 16. Albarazado; 17. Barnillo; 18. Indian), circa 1770, oil on canvas, 40 1/4 x 43 1/2 in. (102 x 110 cm), Banco Nacional de México, Mexico City.



FIG. 24 José de Páez, *11. De Cambujo, e India, produce Sambaigo* (Cambujo and Indian Produce a Zambaigo), circa 1780, oil on canvas, 33 × 41 in. (84.5 × 104 cm), Private Collection.

sumption of *pulque* at the *almuercería* (food stall) takes place in a controlled environment, as the child drinks quietly out of a *jícara* (bowl). Another example is provided by Ramón Torres, who shows a family peacefully congregated around a barrel of *pulque* (fig. 25). Quite the opposite is represented in a set by the Spanish artist Francisco Clapera.⁵⁹ In *15. De Genizaro, y Mulata Gibaro* (From Genizaro and Mulatto, Gibaro) (fig. 26) the *genizaro* man, who has returned home drunk, lies on the floor half-naked as his wife and child try to lift his inert body. The scene recalls Humboldt's description of the pernicious effects of drinking in Mexico:

*The police in Mexico City provide cars to pick up the the drunks who lie on the streets like corpses. They bring them to the central police station, and on the next day they place a large ring on their ankle to compel them to work for three days cleaning the streets. They are released on the fourth day, with the certainty that many will be apprehended again within the same week.*⁶⁰

It is worth noticing that it is a Spanish artist, not a Mexican one, who presents such an indecorous scene of drunkenness in the colony.

Equally significant is the inclusion of an Indian couple at the end of most casta cycles, who are labeled *Indios Bárbaros* (Barbarian Indians), *Indios Gentiles* (Heathen Indians), *Indios Apaches* (Apache

Indians), and most commonly *Indios Mecos* (pls. 7, 24). The term *meco*—a contraction of *chichimeca*, from the Nahuatl *chichi* (dog) and *mecatl* (lineage)—was the generic appellation used to refer to the “uncivilized,” warrior-like Indians that inhabited the colony. From a formal point of view, the *meco* Indians depicted in casta paintings derive from a long European tradition of representing the natives of America and have little to do with their real appearance. It is well-known that throughout the colonial period unassimilated groups of Indians, mostly inhabiting northern Mexico, aroused great fear among the population; their conversion to the Christian faith was a constant preoccupation of colonial authorities. Descriptions of the “callous” nature of the Indians abound in the literature of the period. Bafarás, for example, states:

These Indians are always nomads; they live in Mountains and the countryside even when they have dwelling. They go around naked, except for their private parts, which they cover with textiles made of cotton. . . . Their usual food is meat, of deer or other animals; the



FIG. 25 Ramón Torres, *De Albarazado y Mulata sale Barsina*. 10. (Albarazado and Mulatto Make Barsina), circa 1780, oil on canvas, 12¾ × 17¼ in. (32.5 × 43.5 cm), Museo Oriental, Real Colegio Agustinos Filipinos, Valladolid, Spain.

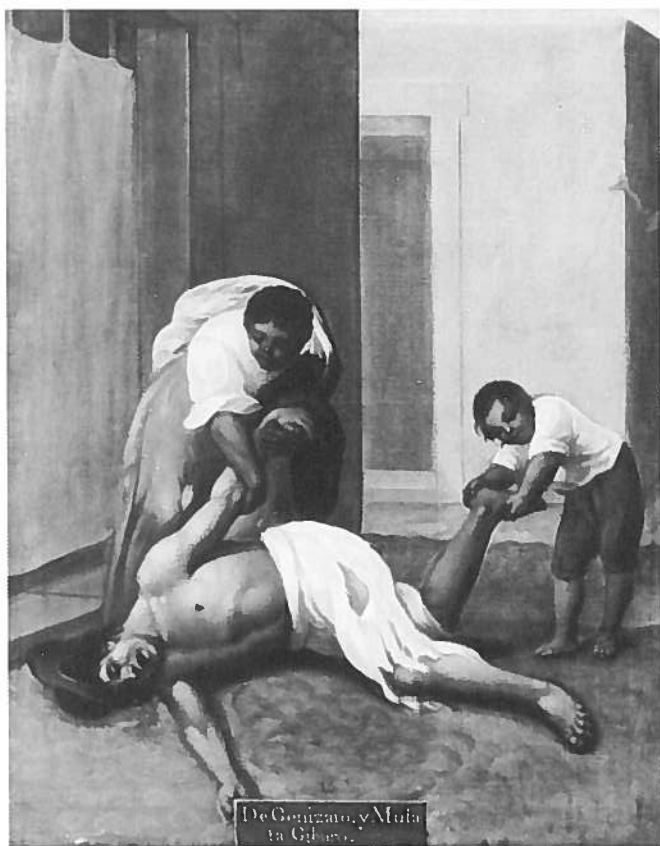


FIG. 26 Francisco Clapera, 15. *De Genizaro, y Mulata Gibaro* (From Genizaro and Mulatto, Gibaro), oil on canvas, 21¼ × 16 in. (54 × 40.5 cm), Collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer, Denver.

*most valued being that of horse or humans whose head they use as a cup or jug to drink water. As soon as they are born their faces are inscribed with various markings and signs with a flint, to distinguish themselves from the different nations amongst them. . . . On their back they carry a case or quiver filled with arrows with a sharpened flint, and they are so dexterous in shooting them that they hit the birds as they fly.*⁶¹

An interesting case related to the fear prompted by these Indians and the desire to pacify them is provided by the advocacy of the Virgin of the Macana. Legend has it that after the Indians of New Mexico had been pacified in 1660, they rose in riot and killed numerous Spaniards, including twenty-one Franciscans. In addition to destroying the mission's churches, it is said that an Indian chief, instigated by the devil, struck a sculpture of the Virgin on the forehead with his *macana*—a wooden club with sharpened blades used by the Indians and known as a *maquahuatl*—but

was unable to destroy it. The devil then repaid the Indian chief by hanging him from a tree. After the Indians were pacified again, attempts were made to restore the Virgin's sculpture, but as the mark on her forehead would not disappear, it became a sign of her miraculous preservation. This sculpture, which became known as the Virgin of the Macana, was transferred in 1756 to the church of San Francisco in Mexico City.⁶² In a rare painting of this legend (fig. 27), the sculpture of the Virgin of the Macana is depicted in the foreground while she holds a *macana* between her hands. She is flanked to the left by a group of Franciscans being slain by an Indian, and to the right by a pacified Indian and the Spanish officials. The wound on her forehead serves as a reminder of her invincibility. In the far left a group of Indians is shown throwing stones at the Spaniards; the inscription reads: "Aqui los soldados apedriaron los mecos" (Here the *mecos* threw stones at the Spaniards). Immediately beneath this scene the Spaniards are shown firing at the Indians. On the far right the Indian chief appears hanging from a tree by the devil, as the Virgin appears before the two fighting bands.

Both legend and painting make reference to a real event, the famous rebellion of the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico in 1680, in which twenty-one of the thirty-two Franciscans, and over 380 Spanish colonists and officials were killed. What is startling about the legend of the Virgin of the Macana is the fact that it disregards the specificity of the Pueblo rebellion; likewise, the painting identifies the Indians simply as *mecos*. The word *meco* thus becomes the generic term for referring to the unchristened Indians living in the colony. The incorporation of the *meco* Indians in casta painting is symbolically controlled by representing them at the bottom of the classificatory system. It is their positioning, more than the way they are represented, that determines the place they occupied within colonial society.



FIG. 27 Unknown artist, *Virgen de la Macana* (Virgin of the Macana), 18th century, oil on canvas, 19½ × 15 in. (49.5 × 37.5 cm), Collection Felipe Siegel, Anna and Andrés Siegel, Mexico City.

Although I have limited myself to only a few examples, these scenes are nonetheless paradigmatic of the ways in which self-image is constructed in casta painting. The strategies of self-representation in the casta pictorial genre can be summarized as follows: first, the emphasis on the overall stratification of society through the metaphor of race; second, the highlighting of the wealth and abundance of the colony as a way of proving to Spain that Mexico did not lag behind Europe; third, the deliberate mediation of reality evinced through the scenes selected for representation. The idea of racial hierarchy is clearly at the heart of these works. In this sense, they provide an image of society that might not seem, at first glance, to be entirely sympathetic, especially for the modern viewer. But if we accept that casta paintings were commissioned by the Spanish and creole elite, we understand why hierarchy, as a necessary condition for the subsistence of any imperial order,

becomes the main subject of these works. In fact, the desire to preserve a hierarchical society is what led Archbishop Lorenzana to stress to incoming priests the importance of keeping a rigorous classification of the population. He recommended that Indians marry pure Indians, Spaniards, or *castizos*, and that they not mix with the different castas “that disturb the peace of the people.”⁶³ The threat to the white Spanish imperial body politic embodied by the emergence of the castas accounted for the ideological need to systematize society; this in turn brought about the inevitable purveyance of racial stereotypes. Casta paintings are remarkable works that open a window onto colonial society and customs. They nonetheless present a mediated vision of reality that should not be taken at face value, but analyzed in terms of how identity was formed within the colonial contest. 🌿

Notes

I wish to thank my friend and colleague John A. Farmer for his suggestions in writing this essay.

- 1 Francisco Antonio Lorenzana, *Historia de la Nueva España escrita por su esclarecido conquistador Hernán Cortés* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Hogal, 1770), introduction, n.p. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 A small number of casta paintings are also painted on copper plates.
- 3 For the vast corpus of casta painting see María Concepción García Sáiz, *Las castas mexicanas: Un género pictórico americano* (Milan: Olivetti, 1989). This book is the first attempt to assemble the large body of casta paintings. Since its publication, numerous other series have been identified in public and private collections throughout the world; a number of these are published for the first time in this catalogue. Casta series to date number well over one hundred.
- 4 For a more thorough and nuanced discussion of the much debated subject of the social composition of Mexico, see Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967); John Chance, *Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1978); Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), chap. 16.

- 5 Alexander von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre el reino de la Nueva España (1807-11)* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1966), bk. 2, chap. 7, p. 90.
- 6 Lomnitz-Adler, pp. 260-270. For the Black population in Mexico, see Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México, 1519-1810: Estudio etnohistórico* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972).
- 7 Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 24.
- 8 Ibid., p. 25.
- 9 For the etymology of these words, see Manuel Alvar, *Léxico del mestizaje en Hispanoamérica* (Madrid: Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, 1987).
- 10 Patricia Seed, "Social Dimensions of Race: Mexico City, 1753," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 62, no. 4 (November 1982), pp. 572-573.
- 11 This hitherto unpublished original manuscript consists of two volumes—one devoted to text, the other to illustrations. Hispanic Society of America, New York, MS. HC: 363-940-1, 2.
- 12 The anthological nature of this manuscript is akin to the one by the native of Cádiz, Pedro Alonso O'Crouley, *A Description of the Kingdom of New Spain* (1774), trans. and ed. Seán Galvin (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1972).

While O'Crouley's manuscript appears to be the result of the author's own initiative, the way Bafarás presents his information, often as answers to specific questions, suggests that he responded to a specific request. From the sixteenth century on the Spanish Crown issued numerous questionnaires requesting detailed information about the colony to govern it better. See *Cuestionarios para la formación de Relaciones Geográficas de Indias: Siglos XVI/XIX*, ed. Francisco de Solano (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1988). Bafarás's manuscript might be the response to one of these questionnaires. However, the emphasis on the nature of the Indians, whom Bafarás viewed unsympathetically, and the illustrations of the military guilds of Mexico, also suggest that this manuscript was produced at the request of a military official in Spain who perhaps intended to travel to the colony.
- 13 Joachin Antonio de Bafarás, *Origen, costumbres, y estado presente de mexicanos y philipinos* (1763), vol. 2, p. B50.
- 14 O'Crouley, p. 20.
- 15 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 46.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Lyle N. McAlister, "Social Structure and Social Change in New Spain," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (August 1963), p. 355.
- 18 Stuart B. Schwartz, "Colonial Identities and the *Sociedad de Castas*," *Colonial Latin American Review* 4, no. 1 (1995), p. 186.
- 19 Solange Alberro, *Del gachupín al criollo o de cómo los españoles de México dejaron de serlo* (Mexico City: Jornadas 122/El Colegio de México, 1992), pp. 170-171.
- 20 Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey*, p. 25.
- 21 Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, "Alboroto y Motín de los indios de México" (1692), in *Seis obras*, ed. William G. Bryant (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1984), p. 123.
- 22 Ibid., p. 113. Also cited in David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 371.
- 23 Sigüenza y Góngora, pp. 119-120.
- 24 Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, *¿Relajados o reprimidos? Diversiones públicas y vida social en la ciudad de México durante el siglo de las Luces* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), p. 32.
- 25 This idea was first suggested in reference to Victorian Britain by McClintock, p. 45.
- 26 Most casta paintings have surfaced in Spain.
- 27 Cited in Efraín Castro Morales, "Los cuadros de castas de la Nueva España," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, no. 20 (1983), pp. 679-680.
- 28 The set is reproduced in its entirety in María Concepción García Sáiz, "Nuevas precisiones sobre la pintura de castas," *Cuadernos de arte colonial* (Madrid), no. 8 (May 1992), pp. 77-104.
- 29 Castro Morales, p. 680.
- 30 For the emergence of creole patriotism in Latin America, see Brading.
- 31 This series now belongs to the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Madrid. It is published in its entirety in García Sáiz, *Las castas mexicanas*, pp. 90-101.
- 32 Francisco de Solano, *Antonio de Ulloa y la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1979), p. 370.
- 33 See Paz Cabello, "Coleccionismo americano y expediciones científicas del siglo XVIII en la museología española," *Archivo per l'antropologia e la etnologia* (Florence), no. 113 (1983), pp. 115-135; María Angeles Calatayud, *Pedro Franco Dávila: Primer Director del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural fundado por Carlos III* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1988); *Historia de las colecciones americanas del Museo de América* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1994).
- 34 Cited in Francisco de las Barras de Aragón, "Documentos referentes al envío de cuadros representando mestizajes humanos y varios productos naturales del Perú, hallados en el Archivo de Indias de Sevilla," *Actas y memorias de la Sociedad de Antropología, Etnografía y Prehistoria*,

- (Madrid) 9 (1930), pp. 78–81.
- 35 The set is reproduced in its entirety in García Sáiz, *Las castas mexicanas*, pp. 114–121, although the author does not ascertain its origin.
 - 36 See *Cuestionarios para la formación de las Relaciones Geográficas de Indias*.
 - 37 Calatayud, p. 95.
 - 38 For the European tradition of representing America, see Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York: Pantheon, 1975); William C. Sturtevant, "First Visual Images of Native America," in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 417–454. For the representation of America in maps, see Walter D. Mignolo, "Putting the Americas on the Map (Geography and the Colonization of Space)," *Colonial Latin American Review* 1, nos. 1–2 (1992), pp. 25–63.
 - 39 "Siriaco natural de Cotinginba donde passou a Bahia edahi o mandou deprezente ao Principe N.S. o Governador e Captaõ General q entaõ era D. Rodrigo Jose de Menezes e Noronha Tem 12 anos deidade echegou aesta corte en Julho de 1786 os varos e celebres accidentes deste preto se descobrem no seu retrato."
 - 40 Francisco de las Barras de Aragón, "Una historia del Perú contenida en un cuadro al óleo de 1799," *Boletín de la Real Sociedad Española* (Madrid) 12, no. 5 (1912), pp. 224–284. In this article the author transcribes all of the painting's inscriptions.
 - 41 Ibid., pp. 259–260.
 - 42 For a discussion of classification during the Enlightenment, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), chap. 5.
 - 43 Three members of this family who often sign their work only with their surname have been identified. The first two are Manuel and Antonio Arellano; the third signs his works as "el mudo Arellano." See Manuel Toussaint, *Pintura colonial en México*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1965), p. 145; *México en el mundo de las colecciones de arte: Nueva España*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Grupo Azabache, 1994), pp. 236–237.
 - 44 Reproduced in *México en el mundo de las colecciones del arte*, vol. 1, pp. 236–237.
 - 45 There is almost no information on this artist. He is mentioned in *Historia de la pintura en Puebla* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1963) by Francisco Pérez Salazar as working in Puebla around 1724 and is again listed in Abelardo Carrillo y Gariel, *Autógrafos de pintores coloniales* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1972), p. 151, and in Toussaint, p. 150. He has also been identified as the possible author of an apostolate in the Altar de la Divina Providencia (altar of the Holy Providence) in the tabernacle of Mexico City's Cathedral. See Nelly Sigaut, "Altar de la Divina Providencia," in *Catedral de México: Patrimonio artístico y cultural* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología y Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1986), pp. 45–55.
 - 46 Fray Agustín de Ventacourt, "Tratado de la Ciudad de México y las grandezas que la ilustran despues que la fundaron los españoles (1698)," in *La ciudad de México en el siglo XVIII (1690–1780): Tres crónicas* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990), pp. 46–47.
 - 47 Solange Alberro, p. 179.
 - 48 For other reproductions of this set, see García Sáiz, *Las castas mexicanas*, pp. 81–87.
 - 49 Viqueira, p. 30.
 - 50 Juan de Viera, "Breve compendiosa narración de la ciudad de México, corte y cabeza de toda la América septentrional (1777)," in *La ciudad de México*, p. 257.
 - 51 Cited in Juan Semepere y Guarinos, *Historia del luxo, y de las leyes suntuarias en España* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1788), pp. 159–161.
 - 52 Honour, p. 46.
 - 53 Ibid., p. 35.
 - 54 Viera, p. 189.
 - 55 See Brading, chap. 14.
 - 56 McClintock, p. 47.
 - 57 Sigüenza y Góngora.
 - 58 For drinking in the colony, see William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1979), and Viqueira, pp. 169–219.
 - 59 Very little is known about Francisco Clapera. He was born in Barcelona in 1746. On March 6, 1768, he became "Académico Supernumerario" at the Academia de San Fernando in Madrid. While the exact date of Clapera's arrival in Mexico, via Peru, is unknown, by 1790 he was already teaching at the Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City. See Clara Bargellini, "Dos series de pinturas de Francisco Clapera," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* (Mexico City), no. 65 (1994), pp. 159–178.
 - 60 Cited in Viqueira, pp. 207–208.
 - 61 Bafarás, vol. 1, p. 75.
 - 62 Vicente De P. Andrade, *Compilación de datos históricos sobre algunas advocaciones con que es venerada la Sma. Virgen María en la Iglesia Mexicana* (Mexico City: El Tiempo, 1904). This advocacy was recorded in 1746 in a *novena* by Fray Felipe Montalvo.
 - 63 Francisco Antonio Lorenzana, "Avisos para la acertada conducta de un párraco en América," in *Concilios Provinciales primero y segundo celebrados en la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de México (1555 y 1565)* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Hoyal, 1769), p. 394.