8

Crazy Soup

JOHNNY GOOD-LOOKING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

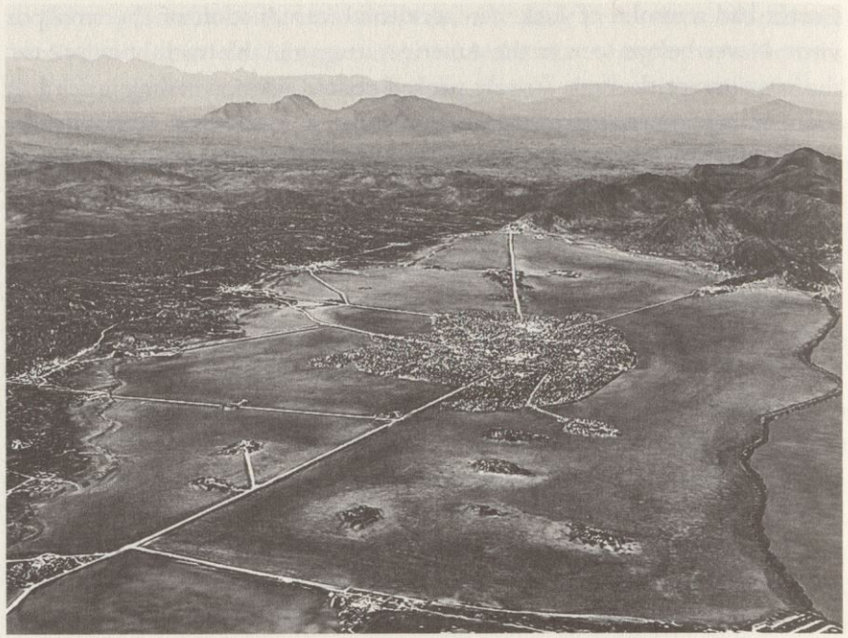
Cortés had a stroke of luck: the accidental introduction of the smallpox virus. Never before seen in the Americas, transmittable with horrific ease, the virus swept through densely packed central Mexico, killing a third or more of its population in a few months.*

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

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

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

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



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

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

Juan Garrido may have been at the ambush or known the sacrificed Spaniards or both. In any case, he was asked by Cortés to build the Chapel of the Martyrs, a monument and graveyard for fallen conquistadors, on the spot where the ambush took place. The assignment was but one of many, for Garrido soon became one of the conqueror's go-to men as he erected Spanish Mexico City literally atop the wreckage of Indian Tenochtitlan. Johnny Good-looking became a kind of majordomo for the new municipal government; protector of the trees that shaded the highways into town (the records give no reason for the position, but one can guess the trees were being cut for fuel); guardian of the main city water supply (Tenochtitlan, which had no water of its own, was supplied via aqueduct from mountain springs); and town crier—a position, Restall says, that could include the duties of a "constable, auctioneer, executioner, piper, master of weights [responsible for assaying silver and gold], and doorkeeper or guard." As lagniappe, Garrido accompanied Cortés in 1535 on the latter's ill-fated attempt to cross Mexico and sail to China—the ultimate goal of Spanish adventurers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BAD BEGINNINGS

It seems fair to observe that the planners of the war did not prepare for its consequences. Scholars argue over its origins, but the goal of the war as fought was to eject a Middle Eastern dictator whom many Western leaders viewed as a threat to civilization. After impassioned speeches, they formed a multinational coalition that marched toward the ancient city that was their central objective. After a surprisingly brief battle the allied forces seized control. Unfortunately, they had made no plans for what to do next. The coalition's military leadership simply declared the mission accomplished and left for home. Only a skeleton military crew was left to face a growing Muslim insurgency in the countryside.

This was in 1096 A.D., during the First Crusade. Godfrey of Bouillon, appointed to rule newly conquered Jerusalem, had to find some way to support his remaining army, the swarm of monks, priests, deacons, and bishops who had accompanied it, the pilgrims/cannon fodder who had accompanied the religious leaders, and the Venetian merchants who had provided invaluable logistical support. An obvious answer, from the Crusaders' point of view, was to seize Muslim property. European entities took ownership of entire urban neighborhoods and even cities; Venice fastened onto the port of Tyre, for example, and the Knights of Malta (as they are now known) acquired as much as a fifth of Jerusalem. In the countryside, Crusaders ultimately assembled more than two hundred grand estates, growing olives, wine, oranges, dates, figs, wheat, and barley. Most important in the long run, though, was a sticky, grainy product that the farms' new masters had never before encountered: *al-zucar,* as the locals called it, or sugar.

Sugarcane was initially domesticated in New Guinea about ten thousand years ago. As much as half of the plant by weight consists of sucrose, a white, powdery substance known to ordinary people as "table sugar" and to scientists as $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$. In a chemist's lexicon, "sugar" refers to a few dozen types of carbohydrate with similar chemical structures and properties. Sucrose is among the simpler members of the group: one molecule of glucose (the type of sugar that provides energy for most animal bodies) joined to one molecule of fructose (the main sugar in honey and fruit juice). Culturally, historically, psychologically, and perhaps even genetically, though, sucrose is anything but simple. A sweet tooth, unlike a taste for salt or spice, seems to be present in all cultures and places, as fundamental a part of the human condition as the search for love or spiritual transcendence. Scientists debate among themselves whether $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$ is actually an addictive substance, or if people just act like it is. Either way, it has been an amazingly powerful force in human affairs.

Sugarcane is easy to grow in tropical places but hard to transport far because the stalks ferment rapidly, turning into a smelly brown mass. People who wanted something sweet thus had to grow it themselves. The crop marched steadily north and west, infiltrating China and India. *Crops,* rather—the sugarcane in farm fields is a hodgepodge of hybrids from two species in the grass genus *Saccharum.* The spoilage problem was solved in India around 500 B.C. when unknown innovators discovered how to use simple horse- or cattle-powered mills to extract the juice from the stalks, then boil down the juice to produce a hard golden-brown cake of relatively pure $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$. In cake form, sugar could be stored in warehouses, shipped in chests and jars, and sold in faraway places. An industry of sweetness was born.

Almost all of the Middle East is too dry to grow sugarcane. Nonetheless,

people figured out how to do it anyway, irrigating river valleys in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. By about 800 A.D. cane had become particularly common on the Mediterranean coast of what are now Lebanon and Israel, which is where the Crusaders for the first time encountered "reeds filled with a kind of honey known as *Zucar*"—the description comes from the twelfth-century chronicler Albert of Aachen.

The writer Michael Pollan has recounted his son's inaugural experience of sugar: the icing on his first birthday cake.

> [H]e was beside himself with the pleasure of it, no longer here with me in space and time in quite the same way he had been just a moment before. Between bites Isaac gazed up at me in amazement (he was on my lap, and I was delivering the ambrosial forkfuls to his gaping mouth) as if to exclaim, "Your world contains *this*? From this day forward I shall dedicate my life to it."

Much the same thing happened to the Crusaders' army in Lebanon. Clerics, knights, and common soldiers alike drank *al-zucar* juice "with extreme pleasure," Albert of Aachen reported; the chance to sample sugar was, in and of itself, "some compensation for the sufferings they had endured." As with Pollan's son, a single, heavenly taste was enough to ensure a lifelong craving: "the pilgrims could not get enough of its sweetness."

In their new sugar estates the Crusaders saw an opportunity: exporting to Europe large quantities of $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$—"a most precious product," said the archbishop of Tyre, the new rulers' first sugar center, "very necessary for the use and health of mankind." Sugar was then a rarity in Europe; regarded as an exotic Asian spice like pepper or ginger, it was found only in the kitchens of a few princes and nobles. The Crusaders proceeded to stoke a hunger for sweetness in the continent's wealthy, and to make money by temporarily satisfying it.

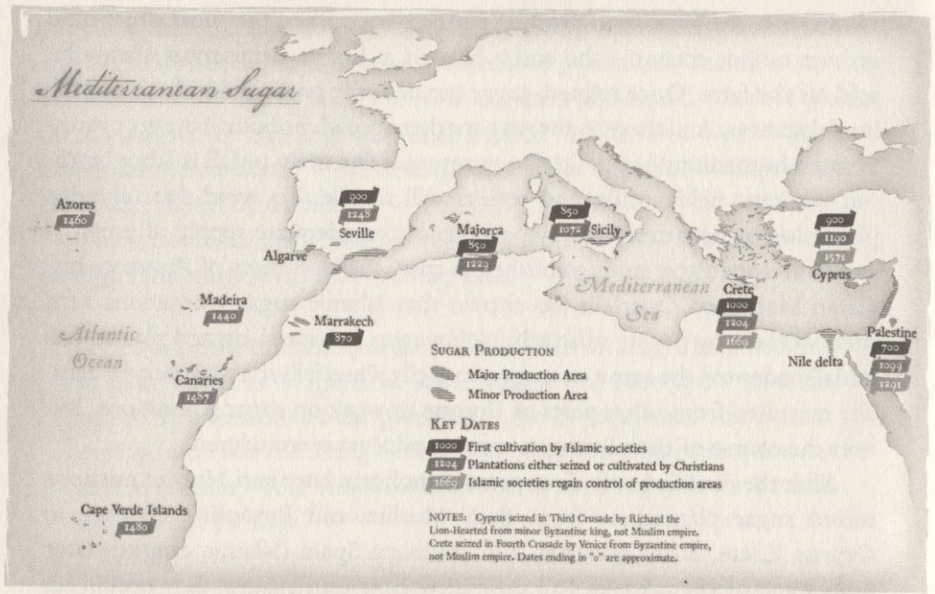
As important as sugar itself was its manner of production: plantation agriculture. A plantation is a big farm that sells its harvest in faraway places. To maximize output, plantations usually plant a single crop on big expanses of land. The big expanse requires a big labor force, especially during planting and harvesting. Because agricultural products spoil, plantations typically ship their crops in processed form: cured tobacco, pressed olive oil, heat-solidified latex rubber, fermented tea, and dried coffee. They must also have some way to transport their products. Thus plantations as a rule consist of a lot of land near a port or highway with an attached industrial facility and a pool of laborers.

Sugar is the plantation product *par excellence*. Even the most sugar-mad grower cannot consume the entire harvest at home; some must always be sold off the farm. Once refined, sugar can be easily packaged and shipped for long distances. And there is always a market abroad: nobody has ever overestimated humankind's appetite for sweetness. The main pitfall is labor: without workers, fields, mills, and boilers will sit idle. To avoid this calamity, plantation owners must take steps to ensure an adequate supply of employees. In an exhaustive study published in 2008, the University of Provence historian Mohamed Ouerfelli has shown that Islamic sugar plantations kept their workers by paying relatively high wages. European-owned plantations initially adopted the same strategy—in Sicily, Ouerfelli showed, people actually migrated from other parts of Europe to work on sugar plantations. But over the course of time Europe's sugar producers reconsidered.

After the First Crusade, European Catholics in later anti-Muslim missions seized sugar plantations from their Muslim and Byzantine creators in Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, Majorca, and southern Spain (Islamic empires later took some of them back). But no matter how much sugar they produced, Europeans wanted more. Eventually they ran out of areas warm and wet enough to grow sugar in the Mediterranean. Portugal looked overseas, to the Atlantic island chains: Madeira, the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands, and São Tomé (St. Thomas) and Príncipe. Spain went to another set, the Canary Islands.

Madeira was first and in some ways most important. It set precedents and established patterns. Located about six hundred miles off the Moroccan coast, the archipelago consists of more than a dozen islands, of which two are by far the largest: Porto Santo and Madeira itself. Both are the summits of extinct volcanoes, but Porto Santo is low and partly ringed by beaches whereas Madeira is high and bristles with cliffs.

Both islands were uninhabited until 1420, when they were visited by an expedition led by two squires in the Portuguese court and a Genoese navigator resident in Lisbon, Bartolomeu Perestrello. Two decades after his death, Perestrello became a footnote to history: his daughter married Colón, who may have lived on the islands and inherited his private navigational charts. While Perestrello was alive, he was best known as the man who brought rabbits to Madeira—or, more precisely, to Porto Santo, where the party initially disembarked. In Perestrello's luggage was a pregnant rabbit, which gave birth aboard ship. Upon arrival he released mother and offspring, presumably intending to hunt them later for stew. To the colonists' horror the animals "multiplied so much as to overspread the land," Gomes Eanes de Zurara, Portugal's royal archivist, recounted in 1453. Being rabbits, they ate every-



thing in sight, including the colonists' gardens. The Portuguese "killed a very great quantity of these rabbits," Zurara reported, but "there yet remained no lack of them . . . our men could sow nothing that was not destroyed by them." Starved out of Porto Santo by its own fecklessness, the expedition retreated to Madeira island.

So delicious is this ecological parable that one naturally doubts its veracity. But Zurara, generally regarded as a careful writer, had visited the island; rabbits still plagued it at the time he wrote. Adding to the plausibility of the tale, much the same occurred after Spain took the Canary Islands. Colonists brought donkeys to Fuerteventura, the chain's second-biggest island. Inevitably, the animals escaped. So many bands of donkeys rampaged through grain fields, reported a historian who lived there at the time, that the government "assemble[d] all the inhabitants and dogs in the island, to endeavor to destroy them." An orgy of asinine slaughter ensued.

Even if the Portuguese did not cause rabbit chaos on Porto Santo, they wreaked still worse ecological mayhem on Madeira. The island, unlike relatively open Porto Santo, was covered with deep forest (its name is the Portuguese word for "wood"). To plant crops, some portion of that forest had to be removed. The settlers chose the simplest method: fire. Predictably, the burn escaped control and engulfed much of the island. The settlers fled into the sea, where they stayed for two days in neck-deep water as flames roared overhead. Supposedly the fire continued, burning in roots underground, for

seven years. The settlers planted wheat on the burned land, exporting the harvest to Portugal. Not until the 1440s did they learn that the island's warm climate was better suited to another, more profitable crop: sugarcane.

Meteorologically, Madeira was a fine place to grow sugar. Geographically, it was a challenge. The island has little land level enough for agriculture, and most of that little is on three high, inaccessible "shoulders" around the island's two main volcanic peaks, the tallest more than six thousand feet. Elsewhere the terrain is so steep that in some parts cattle are kept in small, shed-like byres for their entire lives for fear they will tumble fatally down the slopes. (Tourist guides extol Madeira as "the island of sad cows.")

The first settlers parceled out most of the land among themselves. Late arrivals either had to lease fields as sharecroppers or hack terraces from unused land. In either case, they had to channel water from the wet peaks to their plots, which involved creating an octopoid network of tunnels and conduits that twisted every which way through the stony hills. Despite the obstacles, sugar boomed. According to Alberto Vieira, the islands' most prominent contemporary historian, between 1472 and 1493 production grew by a factor of more than a thousand. Prices fell, as one would expect. Planters who had been making huge profits suddenly saw those profits threatened. The only way to keep the money rolling in was to ramp up production: build new terraces, carve out new waterways, and construct new mills. They clamored for workers—wanted them *now*—to slash cane, extract juice, boil down sugar, and ship the crystallized results. With little evident reflection, some colonists made a fateful decision: they bought slaves.

In some sense this was nothing new; slavery had existed in the Iberian peninsula since at least Roman times. At first many slaves had been taken from Slavic countries (the origin of the word "slave") but in the intervening centuries the main source of bondsmen had become captured Muslim soldiers. As a rule, they worked as domestic servants and were treated in much the same way as other domestic servants; their main purpose, according to Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, a historian at the University of Granada, was to serve as "sumptuary articles"—status symbols. Slaves were living, breathing testaments to the wealth and rank of their owners. Being able to summon a captive Muslim or African to pour wine was proof that one was important enough to possess an exotic foreign human being. The system was not benevolent, but it had escape hatches big enough to avoid murder, insurrection, mutiny, and the other problems with slave labor identified by Adam Smith. Slaves often were allowed to earn their own money, for instance, with which they could rent their freedom on a monthly basis. Often enough, this led to emancipation. Domínguez Ortiz has speculated that Iberian slavery,

left to itself, would have evolved into a system in which owners had the right to extract money from slaves, rather than labor, and only for designated periods of time.

In Madeira, Iberian slavery was transformed. True, most of the Europeans there had only a little land and couldn't afford bondsmen. And even those who did buy slaves rarely had more than two or three, and often they didn't grow sugarcane. Initially the slaves themselves were not from the Gulf of Guinea, the great indentation along the west-central African coast that was the origin of the great majority of slaves in the Americas. Instead the first captive workers were a luckless, scattershot collection of convicts, Guanches (the original inhabitants of the Canary Islands), Berbers (the people of northwest Africa, long-term adversaries of the Portuguese), and, probably, conversos (Iberian Jews and Muslims who had been more or less forcibly converted to Christianity—many Portuguese and Spaniards viewed them as potential traitors). Nevertheless Madeira was where plantation agriculture was joined, however shakily, to African slavery. In time, Vieira says, the convicts, Guanches, Berbers, and conversos were replaced by west-central Africans. Africans grew and processed sugar, and their numbers rose and fell

Sugar mills were smoky, steamy places that required many workers, as shown in this engraving of a Sicilian mill around 1600 (it is based on a painting by Jan Van der Straet, a Flemish artist active in Florence).

with the fortunes of the sugar industry. The world of plantation slavery was coming, terribly, into existence. And Madeira was, in Vieira's phrase, its "social, political and economic starting point."

Two key elements, though, were missing: the organisms responsible for malaria and yellow fever. Both were abundant in São Tomé and Príncipe, two islands in the Gulf of Guinea that Portugal took over in 1486. Like Madeira, they were uninhabited, thickly forested places with a warm climate, good volcanic soil, and plenty of water—perfect for producing $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$. Like Madeira, they were settled by entrepreneurially minded petty nobles who hoped to cash in on Europe's sweet tooth. Unlike Madeira, though, São Tomé and Príncipe swarmed with *Anopheles gambiae,* Africa's worst malaria carrier; and *Aedes aegypti,* which transmits yellow fever. It was a bit like a natural scientific experiment: change one variable and see what happens.

The first two, small movements into São Tomé failed—killed off by disease. A third, larger attempt in 1493 succeeded, partly because it was accompanied by a mass of slave labor: convicts and undesirables, notable among the latter some two thousand Jewish children who had been taken forcibly from their parents. Sugar planters and sugar processors, criminals and children—all died in droves. After six years, only six hundred of the children were alive. Nonetheless the colony somehow kept going. A Dutch force landed in 1599 on Príncipe, the second island, intending to transform it, too, into a sugar center; the invaders departed after just four months, leaving more than 80 percent of their men beneath the ground. A year later the Dutch tried a different tactic: occupying São Tomé itself. Two weeks and 1,200 dead Dutchmen later, they bolted. Europeans perished with such routine dispatch on the islands that the Portuguese government took to exiling troublesome priests there, thus ensuring their deaths while technically avoiding the Vatican's ban on executing its functionaries. In 1554, six decades after colonization began, São Tomé had but 1,200 Europeans. By 1600 the figure had shrunk to about two hundred—slaves outnumbered masters by more than a hundred to one. In 1785 an official report claimed that just four people—four people!—of pure European stock lived on the island. Trying to build up the colonial population, the monarchy ordered that female African slaves be awarded to every new male European arrival, along with exhortations to breed. The ploy failed to boost the number of migrants—the risk was not worth it. Even the bishops the Vatican appointed to the island refused to come. After the post had been vacant for forty-three years, a new bishop finally had the courage to land in São Tomé in 1675. He was dead in two months. "In São Tomé, there's a door to come in," the Portuguese sang, "but there's no door to go out."

Despite the lack of colonists the colony flourished—for a while. At the height of the boom São Tomé exported four times as much sugar as Madeira. About a third of the island's surface had been converted to sugarcane; much of the forest had vanished to fuel sugar mills. Because few Europeans ventured there, the land was not sliced into small parcels, like Madeira. Instead São Tomé was divided into a few dozen big plantations, each with several hundred slaves. From a distance, the plantations looked like tiny cities, with the slave huts clustering like suburbs around the high-timbered "big house" for the plantation manager and his family, many of whom were the mixed-race results of the free-concubine system (the owners themselves remained in Portugal if they could). With their tiny, fever-ridden European populations brutally overseeing thousands of enchained workers, São Tomé and Príncipe were the progenitors of the extractive state.

An onslaught of sugar from big new plantations in Brazil knocked both Madeira and São Tomé out of the sugar market in the 1560s and 1570s. But what happened to the two islands was entirely different. Madeira's lack of malaria and yellow fever had long been noted, though only in the last century did scientists discover the cause: the island does not host the mosquito vectors for the diseases. In the absence of disease, wealthy Europeans, many of them not Portuguese, had moved to the warm island. Around their manors and palaces they erected cathedrals, hospitals, convents, schools, and customs houses—tourist attractions today, valuable investments then. And the farms themselves weren't monocultures, entirely devoted to a single crop, because they had to feed their owners and their owners' neighbors. When the sugar market crashed, sugar squires were reluctant to abandon the homes, fields, and neighborhoods into which they had sunk so much effort. Instead they switched to a newly invented product: the fortified, heat-treated wine today called Madeira.

Wine making, which typically emphasizes quality rather than quantity, is not well suited to plantation slavery. In 1552, the apex of the island's sugar era, three out of ten of its inhabitants were slaves; four decades later, with Brazilian sugar washing across the Atlantic like a white tide, the figure was one out of twenty. By and large, Madeirans freed their slaves; because they weren't working sugarcane anymore, it was cheaper than feeding them. The ex-slaves, having no way off the island, became tenant farmers and sharecroppers for their former masters, who were now building wine presses and cellars. Constantly eyeing famine, the freed slaves survived, like shack people in the Chinese mountains half a world away, mainly on sweet potatoes. But they did survive; Madeira remained a crowded place. At the end of the nineteenth century the island became a tourist destination, touted in guidebooks

as a mecca "for those convalescent and requiring rest after dangerous illnesses, malarial fever, etc."

No one has ever advertised São Tomé as a place to rest and recuperate from malaria. Its economy, too, crashed before the onslaught of Brazilian sugar. But São Tomé, unlike Madeira, did not adapt and recover—it simply marched on, though in ever-more-degraded form. Not having neighborhoods to protect, many of the island's offshore landowners contented themselves with watching from afar as their Afro-European managers in their rotting haciendas half-heartedly tried to continue operations by growing food to provision European slave ships. Other planters simply transferred their interests to Brazil, walking away from their property in São Tomé. Some former overseers acquired their own land and bought slaves to tend it. So did some former slaves. By the mid-eighteenth century, São Tomé's colonial masters had been replaced by a new elite of "Creoles" who traced their ancestry (or said they did) to the mixed-race children of the Portuguese and the first emancipated slaves. But the new management changed nothing about the plantations themselves. Even though there was little to sell and few customers, these zombie enterprises struggled on, slaves planting under the lash as the forest overran former sugar fields and colonial buildings crumbled into the harbor.

Resistance was a constant presence. It didn't matter to slaves whether they were owned by Portuguese, Afro-Portuguese, or Africans; they escaped when they could. Runaways joined together to form armed bands in the forest. To guard against their attacks, landowners built wooden forts staffed by gun-toting slaves. Judging by the frequency of successful assaults, the guards were rarely diligent. In a revolt in 1595 as many as five thousand slaves destroyed thirty sugar mills. The destruction was as understandable as it was pointless; the mills were going silent anyway. In a violent stasis, guerrilla warfare between plantations and runaways continued for almost two hundred years.

São Tomé's plantations eventually did switch to other crops: cocoa (from Brazil) and coffee (from the other side of Africa). These became profitable enough to lure back several hundred Portuguese, who dispossessed the Creoles, taking their land and slaves. Cocoa and coffee covered almost every square inch of arable land by the beginning of the twentieth century. Slavery had long been abolished legally, but Portugal kept it going as a practical matter by instituting special taxes in its African colonies. People unable to pay the levies were shipped to São Tomé to work off their debts, de facto slaves locked at night into dilapidated barracks on the plantation. As other nations joined the chocolate industry and improved manufacturing methods, the

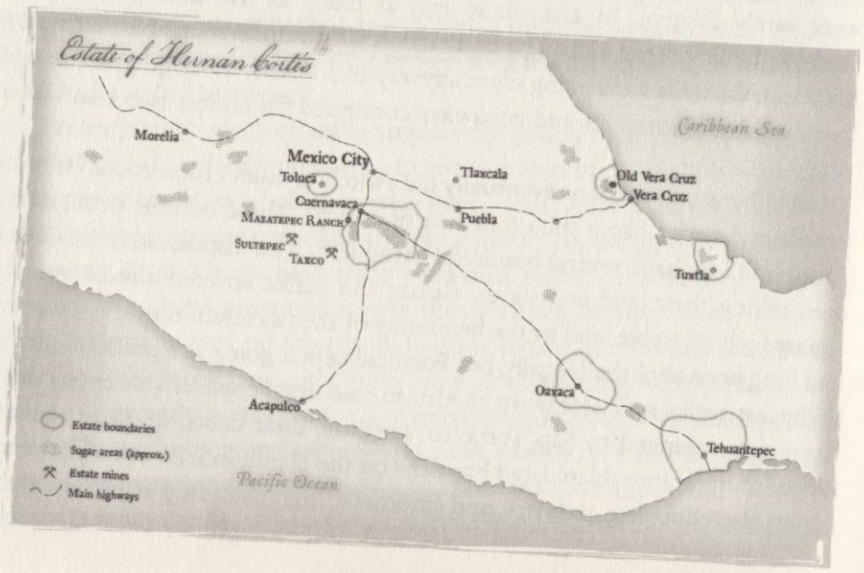
island's antique cocoa plantations became less and less viable. An independence movement sprang up in the 1950s, its primary goal to end the plantation system. When Portugal left in 1975, the country was one of the poorest on earth. The new government nationalized the plantations. It combined them into fifteen super-plantations, then ran them almost exactly as before.

This was the system that crossed the Atlantic to the Americas.

NEW WORLD BORN

Like Juan Garrido, Hernán Cortés died a disappointed man. After subjugating the Triple Alliance, he was awarded a title—Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca—and given his choice of real estate in the lands he had conquered. He chose six spreads in central and southern Mexico: 7,700 square miles in total, an expanse the size of Israel. The biggest chunk, 2,200 square miles of temperate plains south of Mexico City, was where he built his thick-walled, castle-like home. An opulent place, it had no less than twenty-two tapestries, each at least fifteen feet wide; the conqueror, something of a dandy, liked to roam about his tapestries in brocaded velvet jackets and pearl-studded dressing gowns.

Having acquired his property, Cortés threw himself with characteristic energy into a series of entrepreneurial ventures: digging silver mines; establishing cattle ranches and hog farms; panning for gold; opening a shipyard on the Pacific coast; creating a kind of shopping mall in central Mexico City;



growing maize, beans, and Garrido's wheat; lending money, goods, livestock, and slaves to entrepreneurs and adventurers in return for a share of the profits; importing silkworms (and mulberry trees to feed them); and raising big stone structures as monuments to himself. Sugarcane, which he began growing in 1523, was high on his list.

Cortés might have succeeded at these enterprises if he had paid attention to them. Instead he kept looking for new kingdoms to vanquish. He marched into Guatemala. He schemed to send ships to Peru. He went to the Pacific and nearly killed himself looking for a route to China. All the while, he flagrantly disobeyed orders. Eventually he ran out of his own money and other people's patience. He returned to Spain in 1540, hoping to obtain more royal favors and positions for himself and his friends. Cortés followed the king from place to place, seeking an audience. Carlos V refused to see him. The heartbroken conquistador was unable to fathom why the sovereign might worry about creating a powerful new aristocracy of unreliable, impulsive men of action. The story, told by Voltaire but surely apocryphal, is that at one point Cortés bulled his way onto the emperor's carriage. Carlos V, annoyed, asked who he was. "It is he," Cortés supposedly said, "who has given you more states than your ancestors left you cities."

His timing was dreadful. As he followed the court, the king was talking with Bartolomé de las Casas, a fiery Dominican priest who had just completed *Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies,* an indictment of Spanish conduct that remains a landmark both in the history of human-rights activism and in the literature of sustained invective. Reading his first draft before the shocked court, Las Casas branded the conquest of Mexico as "the climax of injustice and violence and tyranny committed against the Indians." He denounced Indian slavery as "torments even harder to endure and longer lasting than the torments of those who are put to the sword." Troubled by Las Casas's lurid descriptions of cruelties committed in the name of Spain, Carlos V had asked his council of advisors to investigate the nation's policies toward Indians.

As the king surely knew, the Spanish monarchy had been struggling to define its Indian policy since before he was born. His grandparents, King Fernando and Queen Isabel, had been stunned when Colón informed them that they now ruled over multitudes of people whose very existence had been previously unsuspected. The monarchs, devout Christians, worried that the conquest could not be justified in the eyes of God. Colón's new lands had the potential of enriching Spain, an outcome they of course viewed as highly desirable. But obtaining the wealth of the Americas would involve subjugating people who had committed no offense against Spain.

As Fernando and Isabel saw it, Indian lands were not like the Islamic

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

First colony, first slaves—San Miguel de Gualdape was also the site of the first slave revolt north of the Rio Grande. The insurrection burned down the colony within a few months of its founding, putting it to an end. It is widely thought that the slaves ran away and made their homes with the local Guale Indians. If so, they were the first long-term residents of North America from across the Atlantic since the Vikings.

By the seventeenth century, Africans were everywhere in the Spanish world. Six companies in Argentina were sending slaves up to the Andean silver town of Potosí; slightly more than half of the people in Lima, Peru, were African or of African descent; and African slaves were building boats on the Pacific coast of Panama. All the while more Africans were pouring into Cartagena, in what is now Colombia—ten to twelve thousand a year, the Jesuit Josef Fernández claimed in 1633. At the time the city held fewer than two thousand Europeans. Most of those people's livelihood depended on the slave trade. Bribes paid to land Africans illegally were a major source of income. Portuguese Brazil turned to Africans more slowly. Indians were so plentiful there that slaves weren't imported in any number until the end of the sixteenth century and slowly for a few decades after that. The colony's powerful Jesuit priests were partly responsible for the turn to Africans; enslaving Indians was a sin, they explained, whereas Africans were fair game. (The Jesuits practiced what they preached: in their sugar mills, Africans alone were in bondage.)

Cortés established what may have been the first cattle ranch in Mexico. To tend the animals, he did not select native workers—they had no experience with cows or horses. Africa has been a center of cattle-herding and horse-riding for thousands of years. Cortés's first ranch hand, possibly the first cowboy in the mainland Americas, was an African slave. Thousands of others followed. In Argentina Africans fled the restrictions of the cities and plantations to the grasslands of the pampas. Driving herds of stolen cattle with stolen horses, these roaming vagabonds reproduced a pastoral way of life that was familiar in the West African plains—"liv[ing] free / and without depending on anyone," as the classic Argentine poem *Martín Fierro* put it in the 1870s. Later called *gauchos,* they became symbols of Argentina in much the same way that North American cowboys became symbols of the U.S. West.

The paradigmatic example of the African diaspora may be the man known variously as Esteban, Estevan, Estevanico, or Estebanico de Dorantes, an Arabic-speaking Muslim/Christian raised in Azemmour, Morocco. Plagued by drought and civil war in the sixteenth century, Moroccans fled by the desperate tens of thousand to the Iberian Peninsula, glumly accepting slavery and Christianity as the price of survival. Many came from Azemmour, which Portugal, taking advantage of the region's instability, occupied during Esteban's childhood. He was bought, probably in Lisbon, by a minor Spanish noble named Andrés Dorantes de Carranza. Dreaming of repeating Cortés's feats of conquest, Dorantes, with Esteban in tow, joined an overseas expedition led by Pánfilo de Narváez, a fiercely ambitious Castilian duke with every quality required of a leader except good judgment and good luck.

More than four hundred men, an unknown number of them African, landed under Narváez's command in southern Florida on April 14, 1528. One catastrophe followed another as they moved up Florida's Gulf coast in search of gold. Narváez vanished at sea; Indians, disease, and starvation picked off most of the rest. After about a year, the survivors built ragtag boats and tried to escape for Hispaniola. They ran aground off the coast of Texas, losing most of their remaining supplies. Of the original four hundred men, just fourteen were still alive. Soon the tally was down to four, one of whom was Esteban. Another was Esteban's owner, Dorantes.

The four men trekked west, toward Mexico, in a passage of stunning hardship. They ate spiders, ant eggs, and prickly pear. They lost all their possessions and walked naked. They were enslaved and tortured and humiliated. As they passed from one Indian realm to the next, they began to be taken for spirit healers—as if native people believed their horrific journey of itself must have brought these strange, naked, bearded people close to the numinous. Perhaps the Indians were right, for Esteban and the Spaniards began curing diseases by chant and the sign of the cross. One of the Spaniards brought back a man from the dead, or said he did. They wore shells on their arms and feathers on their legs and carried flint scalpels. As wandering healers they acquired an entourage of followers, hundreds strong. Grateful patients handed them gifts: bountiful meals, precious stones, six hundred dried deer hearts.

Esteban was the scout and ambassador, the front man who contacted each new culture in turn as they walked thousands of miles across the Southwest, along the Gulf of California and into the mountains of central Mexico. By some measures, Esteban was the leader of the group. He certainly held the Spaniards' lives in his hands every time he encountered a new group and, rattling his shaman's gourd, explained who they were.

Eight years after their departure, the four Narváez survivors entered Mexico City. The three Spaniards were feted and honored. Esteban was reenslaved and sold. His new owner was Antonio de Mendoza, viceroy of New Spain. Mendoza soon assigned him as the guide to a reconnaissance party going north—Esteban was back on the road. The party was searching for the Seven Cities of Gold. Supposedly these had been established in the eighth century by Portuguese clerics escaping from Muslim invasions. For decades,

people from Spain and Portugal had been hunting for them—the Seven Cities were an Iberian version of the Sasquatch or Yeti. Why anyone should imagine these cities were in the U.S. Southwest is unexplained and perhaps unexplainable. Somehow the tales of the Narváez survivors reignited this passion, and Mendoza had succumbed.

Leading the expedition was Marcos de Niza, a Franciscan missionary who has never been charged with insufficient zeal. Mendoza's instructions took pains to command Esteban to obey him. But Esteban had no interest in following orders. As they moved north he encountered Indians who recalled him from his previous journey. He shed his Spanish garb, wore bells, feathers, and chunks of turquoise, and shook a rattle in a spiritual fashion. He again acquired several hundred followers. He ignored Niza's demand that he stop performing ritual cures and refuse his patients' gifts of alcohol and women.

In a decision that the missionary claimed was his own, Esteban and his followers went ahead of the rest of the party after crossing what is now the U.S. border. Quickly they gained a lead of many miles. Once again, Esteban was moving into an area never before seen by someone from across the ocean. Days after the separation, Niza encountered some of Esteban's entourage, wounded and bleeding. In the mountains at the Arizona–New Mexico border, they told him, the group had come across the Zuni town of Hawikuh, a collection of two- and three-story sandstone homes that climbed like white steps up a hill. Its ruler angrily refused entrance. They barricaded Esteban and his cohort into a big hut outside town without food or water. Esteban was slain when he tried to escape Hawikuh the next day, along with most of the people accompanying him.

The Zuni themselves have a different story—*stories,* I should say, because many have been recounted. In one version told to me, Esteban is not refused entry, but welcomed into Hawikuh. The people have heard of this man and his extraordinary journey. They want to keep him there—want this very badly, at least in the story. He is a man like no other they have encountered, an incredible physical specimen with his skin and hair, a man whose spirit holds a great wealth of knowledge and perhaps more, a valuable possession they have no desire to lose.

To prevent his departure, they cut off his lower legs, lay him gently on his back, and bathe themselves in his supernatural presence. Esteban lives in this way for many years, the story goes, always treated with the respect due to such uncommon figures, always on his back, legs stretched out, with the wrappings on his stumps carefully tended.

All versions of his end are based on stories that people have told to themselves. His actual fate may never be known with certainty. What seems clear is that in the end this man who crossed so many bridges fell into the same

delusion that possessed so many Spaniards. He thought that he understood the shook-up world he was creating and that he was in control. He forgot that under bridges is only air.

FAMILY VALUES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

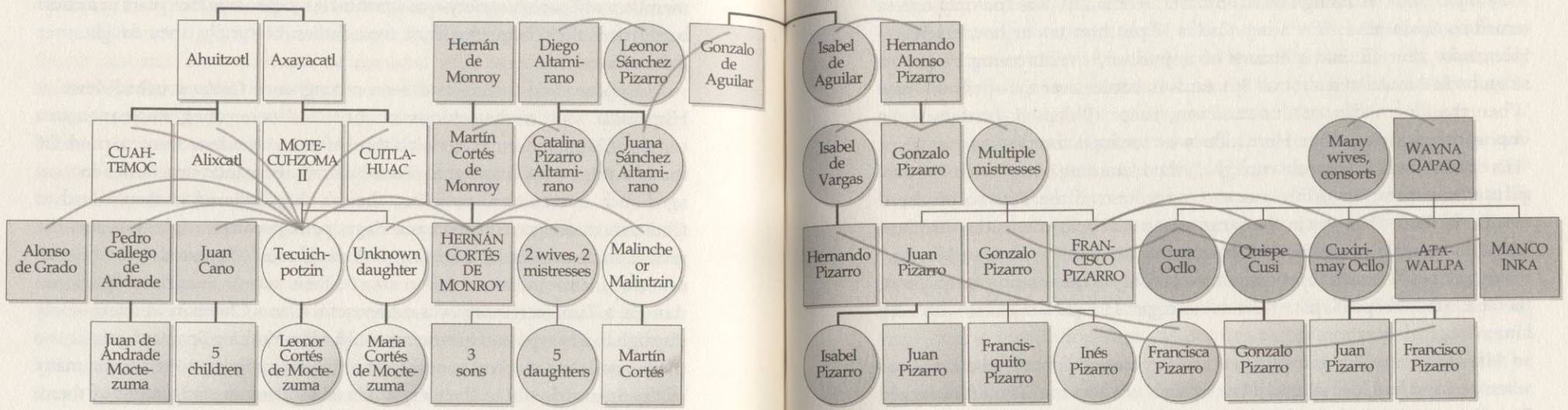
* "Motecuhzoma" is the most common scholarly Romanization of the emperor's name today. At the time, Spaniards usually called him "Moctezuma," which became the name of his grandchildren.

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

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

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

American Imperial Families of the 15th and 16th Century



Mexica (EMPEROR)

Spaniard (CONQUEROR)

Inka (EMPEROR)

Mixed Mexica-Spanish

Mixed Inka-Spanish

Spouse or mate

| or | Lineal descent

Full sibling (shared parents)

Sibling (shared father, mother uncertain)

To bolster the legitimacy of their rule, conquistadors often married into or took consorts from the elite of the peoples they conquered, Cortés and Pizarro being among the leading examples. They created a generation of mixed-culture children who became some of the new colonies' most powerful citizens. Because many of the conquistadors were from Extremadura, a mountainous region dominated by a few interrelated families, they were often as tightly related as Indian nobility. The result was a multicultural family web unlike any other.

legitimize by royal decree. Pizarro often said that Quispe Cusi was his wife, but he didn't actually marry her. Nor did he let this "marriage" interfere with his liaisons with two other royal Inka sisters, one of whom bore him another two children. An illegitimate child himself, Pizarro did not turn his back on his half-Inka offspring. Francisca, his daughter by Quispe Cusi, became his principal heir. (Her brother Gonzalo died at the age of nine.)

The conqueror came to Peru with three brothers. One took an Inka princess as a mistress. Another took an actual Inka queen—he stole the wife of the puppet emperor whom Francisco Pizarro had installed after killing Atawallpa. The remaining Pizarro brother, Hernando, was the only one to return to Spain alive. The wary Carlos V put him under house arrest—Hernando, after all, had a history of impulsively overthrowing kings. Besides, he had murdered a lot of Spaniards in battles over the spoils of Peru. When the king abdicated, his successor, Felipe (Philip) II, continued the imprisonment. Altogether Hernando was confined for twenty-one years. "His confinement was gentle enough," John Hemming observed in *The Conquest of the Incas* (1970), his marvelous account of the Pizarro brothers' assault on Peru. "He was in the same prison and apartments that had harbored [French] King Francis I after his capture [in a battle with Spain] in 1525." Rising at noon, Hernando ate and drank lavishly in his sumptuous quarters, then entertained Spain's elite far into the night. He had a mistress who bore him a daughter in prison.

Hernando met Francisca for the first time since infancy when she was seventeen and had just inherited her father's vast fortune. The fifty-year-old Pizarro married her almost on the spot, Hemming wrote, "unperturbed by consanguinity, the thirty-three-year difference in age, or his own imprisonment." When Hernando was at last released from house arrest, the couple built a massive Renaissance-style palace on the main plaza of Trujillo, the city where the Pizarros had been born. In a kind of colonial fantasy, they dined on gold plates with Peruvian food and imported a squadron of Inka servants to wait on them.

The Pizarros were wealthier than their fellow conquistadors but in other ways not exceptional. Historians have tracked the lives of ninety-seven of the 150 men who founded Santiago, Chile, in 1541. They had 392 children and grandchildren, of whom 226 (57 percent) were of Indian descent. One conquistador in Chile proudly told the Inquisition in 1569 he had produced fifty children with non-European mothers.*

* Such mingled relationships were not restricted to Spanish and Portuguese America. As time passed, the Princeton historian Linda Colley has written, Britain "evolved a more hybrid construction of its empire" as a balance of different, rapidly mixing groups. The conception was embraced by some early U.S. leaders, including President Thomas Jefferson, who argued that Europeans and Indians should "meet and blend together, to intermix, and become one people." A classic example of this mixing was Sam Houston, first president of Texas and later its governor, who ran away from his childhood home and was adopted by a Cherokee family. He returned to the society of his birth and launched a violent, alcohol-fueled political career. At thirty-six, his marriage having ended, he returned to the Cherokee, married a half-Cherokee woman, became the Cherokee ambassador to Washington, and took to wearing native garb. Angered by his constant drinking, the Cherokee ejected him from his job and threw him out of the group. Houston became president of Texas after it seceded from Mexico. In office, he tried to forge an alliance with local Cherokees to invade northern Mexico and create a bicultural state. Jefferson, too, helped create a mixed society. As demonstrated by DNA tests in 1998, he was the likely father of one or more children by his part-African slave, Sally Hemings, who may have been his wife's half sister. Jefferson freed all six of Hemings's children—the only slaves he emancipated—and three went on as adults to live as "whites."

Few of those children had African blood. That would change—rapidly. As plantation slavery spread, the percentage of Africans in the hemisphere rose, and with it the number of Afro-Indians, Afro-Europeans, and Afro-Euro-Indians. By 1570 there were three times as many Africans as Europeans in Mexico and twice as many people of mixed parentage. (Both were outnumbered by Indians, of course.) Seventy years later there were still three times as many Africans as Europeans—and *twenty-eight* times as many mixed people, most of them free Afro-Europeans.

On the one hand, Spaniards in some ways easily accepted the hybrid world they were making. Europeans then did not have the same concept of "race" as later generations and thus did not see themselves as being different from Africans or Indians on a biological level. They did not fear what today would be called genetic contamination. On the other hand, the blending of native and newcomer led to enormous fear about *moral* contamination.

Spain justified its conquest, one recalls, by promising to convert the Indians. Spaniards' consistent mistreatment of native people impeded this mission. The Franciscan friars who held sway over New Spain's religious life proposed an apartheid solution: turning the colony into two "republics," one for Indians, one for Europeans. Untroubled by European demands, Indians would focus on conversion in all-Indian neighborhoods and towns; Spaniards would focus on growing rich from the fruits of conquest in an all-Spanish setting. Thus in 1538 Bishop Vasco de Quiroga began to group thirty thousand Indians in the mountains west of Mexico City into reservation towns that he intended to make into an American utopia—literally, for Quiroga laid out the settlements according to the prescription in Thomas More's novel *Utopia,* which had been published twenty-one years before.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

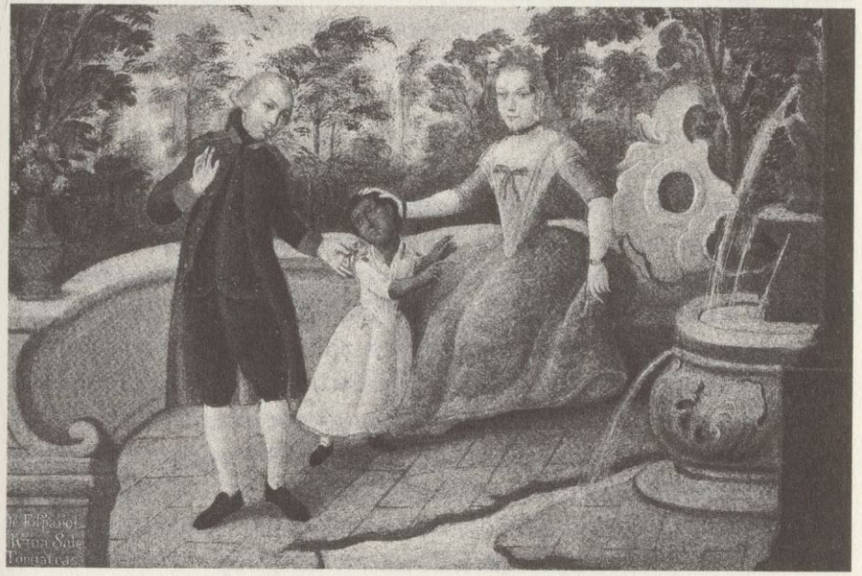
"Mestizo" and "mulatto" became key concepts in the elaborate classificatory scheme known as the *casta* system. Never formally codified on an empire-wide level but recognized in hundreds of separate local, ecclesiastical, and trade-guild rules, the *casta* system was an attempt to categorize the peoples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

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

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

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

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



Casta paintings, bizarre versions of the natural-history paintings then becoming popular in Europe, were intended to instruct outsiders about the cultural mixes in Spain's American colonies. Laying out a complex racial scheme that parceled out European, Indian, and African ancestry, they were pictorial anthropological treatises, the racial types neatly labeled. Sometimes they warned of the dire consequences of certain ethnic combinations: spouses murdering each other, children who don't resemble their parents. Clockwise from lower left: *Negro and Indian Makes Wolf* (José de Ibarra, ca. 1725); *Spaniard and Negro Makes Mulato* (attrib. José de Alcibar, 1760–70); *Chamizo and Indian Makes Cambuja* (Unknown, ca. 1780); *Spaniard and Albino Makes Return-Backwards* (Ramón Torres, 1770–80).

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

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

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

From Black Man and Indian Woman, Wolf
From Spanish Man and Moorish Woman, Albino
From Mulatto Man and Mestiza Woman, Wolf-Suspended-in-Air
From Indian Woman and Male Wolf-Return-Backwards, Wolf Again

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

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

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

SHOOK-UP CITY

In January 1688 crowds of the faithful forced their way into the chapel of Holy Innocents in the Jesuit church of the Holy Spirit, in Puebla de los Ángeles. Resting inside was the body of Catarina de San Juan, a renowned local holy woman who had died in her eighties. Officers at the city cathedral and the local religious orders had taken turns carrying her elaborately carved coffin into the chapel, where it rested on a bier bedecked with art and manuscript poetry. In an ecstasy of faith, worshippers tore at the shroud covering the body, trying to cut off fingers, ears, or other gobbets of flesh as relics. To protect Catarina's corpse from her fans, ecclesiastical authorities emplaced a team of armed soldiers.

Leading members of the city council and Puebla's religious establishment attended the interment, then walked to the cathedral for a memorial mass. The sermon was given by the Jesuit Francisco de Aguilera, who recounted Catarina's life in elaborate, fanciful detail. Although Catarina spent most of her day praying, Aguilera told the assembled dignitaries, she was in fact voyaging spiritually across the planet. Indeed, she was responsible for Christian victories over Muslim armadas in the Mediterranean. Later supporters would learn that she had joined the Virgin Mary to save the Spanish treasure fleet from a demonic hurricane; helped Spanish ships beat back English and French pirates; flown over Japan and China to spread Christianity; and personally witnessed the martyrdom of Franciscan missionaries in New Mexico.

These feats were unusual in number but not in type for people who went on to become saints in that period. Not unusual, too, were the hagiographic biographies written after her death by churchmen who knew Catarina, though it was remarkable for three to appear, one of them almost a thousand pages long. What was peculiar was Aguilera's claim about her birth: Catarina de San Juan, an obscure visionary in the mountains of Mexico, was the

granddaughter of an Asian emperor. More peculiar still, this claim was probably accurate, or mostly so.

Named Mirra at birth, she was born around 1605 into an aristocratic family in a city in the Mughal empire, probably Lahore, in modern Pakistan, or Agra, later famous for the Taj Mahal. The Mughal empire was a Muslim dynasty, and Mirra's family, which seems to have been distantly related to the imperial family, was Muslim as well. Mirra / Catarina's biographers claim that she lived in a palace beside a river with the rest of the emperor's extended family and that her family had Christian sympathies. The latter claim is not preposterous. Akbar, emperor at the time, was celebrated for tolerance; Jesuits, welcomed at his court, converted some high-ranking courtiers to Christ. Images of Christian saints were common in courtly gardens, statuary, and tombs—they were taken as symbols of Akbar's divinely guided reign.

Everything changed when Mirra was seven. Portuguese pirates seized a ship of Mughal pilgrims on their way to Mecca. Interpreting the attack as a deliberate religious insult, Akbar booted out the Jesuits and turned to persecuting Christians. Mirra's parents were implicated in the crackdown and moved to the coast—possibly Surat, on the Arabian Sea, which had a big European community. Surat also had, alas, a big piracy problem. As recounted by one of Mirra's biographers, who claimed to have heard the story from her own lips, pirates disguised as Portuguese merchants abducted her on the beach and transported her to Kochi (Cochin), near the southern tip of India. Jesuits there baptized her. Christians were not supposed to be enslaved by other Christians, but the pirates took the young girl back from the Jesuits. On the seas she was repeatedly degraded before being deposited in Manila, where she was acquired by a ship captain from Puebla.

In Mexico the girl now known as Catarina became ever more fervent and ascetic in her beliefs, retreating to a cell, drinking little and eating less, twisting straps with sharp metal studs around her limbs, and rejecting any hint of sexual contact—she once told the naked Christ, whom she saw in a vision, to put his clothes on. Shuttered in a bare, tiny room, she battled the assault of devils on a nightly basis, arming herself with holy water, reliquaries, and the cross. Visions possessed her, according to her most determined chronicler, Alonso Ramos, a Jesuit whom Catarina had selected as her confessor. She saw the communion host transfigured into a star that shot magical rays into her mouth, Ramos said. She saw the soul of the Queen of Heaven rise in a splash of brilliance and fire, twelve lights upon her head like a diadem. She saw the vaults of the church explode and the roof crack open to reveal a floating, magical table covered with flowers and sparkling gold and a great feast attended by the Savior himself. She saw a staircase made of "delicate and shimmering clouds" with souls climbing it to heaven and her own

prayers turning into angels and flowers raining down on everything and everyone.

Ramos narrated these events in three jumbo-sized volumes released in 1689, 1690, and 1692—the longest work ever published in New Spain. Four years later the Inquisition condemned all three as "useless, improbable, full of contradictions and . . . rash doctrines." Ramos was removed from his position as rector of the Puebla Jesuit college and confined to a cell. Already an alcoholic, he seems to have gone mad in captivity. He escaped, tried to murder his successor as rector, and died a forgotten man.

Catarina de San Juan, too, was almost forgotten. Forgotten as well were the Asians who preceded and followed her to the Americas—fifty to a hundred thousand of them, according to Edward R. Slack, a historian at Eastern Washington University. They came via the galleon trade: sailors, servants, and slaves disembarking in Acapulco and scattering across New Spain. By the early seventeenth century, Asians—Filipinos, Fujianese, and Filipino-Fujianese—were building Spanish ships in Manila Bay. When Spaniards proved reluctant to make the long and arduous trip across the ocean, Asians took their place. Some may have shipped to Mexico as early as 1565, when Urdaneta made the first successful crossing of the Pacific from west to east. (On that voyage, Legazpi sent Asian slaves to his hacienda in Coyuca, northwest of Acapulco.) Slack estimates that 60 to 80 percent of the crew on the great ships and their accompanying vessels were Asian. Many never went back to Manila. One example is the seventy-five Asian sailors known to have landed in Acapulco in 1618 on the galleon *Espiritu Sancto.* Only five were aboard for the return trip. Over the decades thousands of sailors jumped ship in the Americas, taking jobs in the city's shipyards or building forts and other public works.*

Sometimes Asian sailors worked side by side with Asian slaves like Catarina de San Juan, who trickled in despite the disapproval of the colonial government. They came from India, Malaysia, Burma, and Sri Lanka to Manila, transported by Portuguese slavers; Chinese junks brought others from Vietnam and Borneo. From Manila they were shipped in the great galleons with the silk and porcelain. In 1672 Manila banned Asian slavery. The ban was rarely effective. Almost a century later, the municipal council of Veracruz forced a company of Jesuits from Manila to get rid of the twenty Asian servants whom they were taking to Madrid. They were too much like slaves.

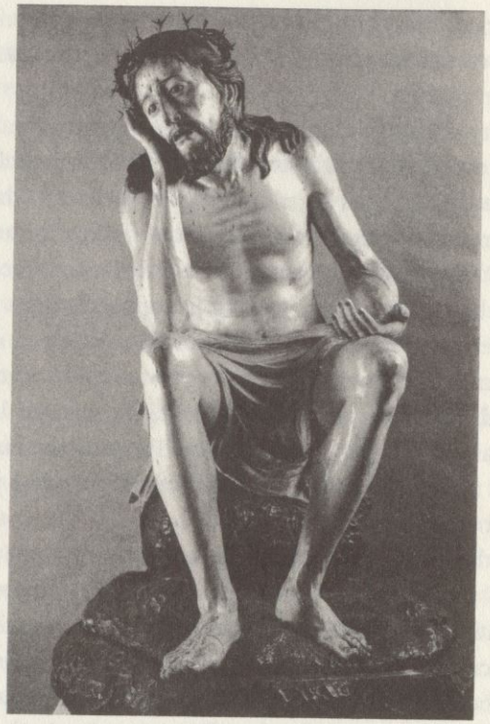
Known collectively as *chinos,* Asian migrants spread slowly along the sil-

* Not all went to Mexico. A census of Lima, Peru, in 1613 found 114 Asians living there, almost half of them women. Presumably the actual tally was bigger, because Asians would have tried to avoid the census takers. Many were "ruff openers" (*abridores de cuellos*), fixing the mechanisms on the stiff ruffs wealthy men then wore about their necks.

ver highway from Acapulco to Mexico City, Puebla, and Veracruz. Indeed, the road was patrolled by them—Japanese samurai perhaps in particular. Katana-swinging Japanese had helped suppress Chinese rebellions in Manila in 1603 and 1609. When Japan closed its borders to foreigners in the 1630s, Japanese expatriates were stranded wherever they were. Scores, perhaps hundreds, migrated to Mexico. Initially the viceroy had forbidden mestizos, mullatos, negros, *zambaigos,* and *chinos* to carry weapons. The Spaniards made an exception for samurai, allowing them to wield their katanas and tantos to protect the silver shipments against the escaped-slaves-turned-highwaymen in the hills. The results were so encouraging that the authorities reversed course and drafted mixed-race people into the militias. By the eighteenth century Afro-Indo-Asian paramilitary units on Mexico's Pacific coast were protecting mail deliveries, patrolling for bandits, and repelling attacks by British ships. Acapulco, terminus of the silver trade, was guarded by a force of *morenos, pardos,* Spaniards, and *chinos,* the latter mostly Filipinos and Fujianese. When the British admiral/pirate George Anson invaded western Mexico in 1741, the multicultural force played a major role in his defeat.

Puebla was bigger than Acapulco and had a more tight-knit Asian community. Indeed, Catarina's owner found another Asian slave there for her to marry. (The marriage did not take. It may have been doomed from the wedding night, when Catarina told her new spouse that St. Peter and St. Paul had appeared at the bedside to deny him from exercising his conjugal rights.) One of the city's most important industries was ceramics—Puebla clay is of exceptional quality. Working with eye-straining attention to detail, skilled potters created pieces that imitated blue-and-white Ming dynasty porcelain. Guild regulations specified that "the coloring should be in imitation of Chinese ware, very blue, finished in the same style." Edward Slack, the Eastern Washington historian, points out that the manufacturers would hardly have ignored the skilled Asian craftspeople in their midst. More than likely, Puebla's fake Chinese pottery was created in part by real Chinese potters. If so, they did a splendid job: talavera ware, as it is known today, is now so highly prized that when I visited Puebla shopkeepers complained that the country was fighting an invasion of counterfeits from China—a Chinese imitation of a Chinese-made Mexican imitation of a Chinese original.

Larger still was the Asian community in Mexico City. The first real Chinatown in the Americas, it was centered around an outdoor Asian marketplace under a tent-like roof in the Plaza Mayor, the city's grand central square, built atop the city center of old Tenochtitlan. The marketplace was called the Parián, after the Asian ghetto in Manila. In a cacophony of languages, Chinese tailors, cobblers, butchers, embroiderers, musicians, and scribes competed with African, Indian, and Spanish shopkeepers for business.



Carried across the Pacific from Manila by the galleon trade, the Chinese artist Esteban Sampzon became one of Buenos Aires's leading sculptors at the end of the eighteenth century. The sensitively rendered features of his *Christ of Humility and Patience* (ca. 1790) still adorn the city's Basílica de Nuestra Señora de la Merced.

Alarming to colonial authorities, Chinese goldsmiths drove European goldsmiths out of business—"the people of China that have been made Christians and every year come thither, have perfected the Spaniards at that trade," a Dominican monk lamented in the 1620s.

Spanish goldsmiths evidently took the loss of business calmly. Spanish barbers did not. In those days a barber was both a hair and beard trimmer and a low-ranking medical provider who performed dental surgery. About two hundred *chino* barbers set up shop in the Plaza Mayor, treating maladies with a combination of Eastern and Western techniques: cauterization and acupuncture, bloodletting and Chinese herbal medicine. Wealthy women flocked to their kiosks. It was not just a New Age fad—Chinese dentistry was then the most sophisticated in the world. In the Tang dynasty the savants of Beijing had realized that periodontal disease could be prevented by scraping

away dental plaque. They treated the bleeding with pastes made with roots and herbs that recent research has shown to have antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.

In 1635 the city's Spanish barbers petitioned the municipal council to stop the *chinos'* "excesses" and "inconveniences." The complaint was artfully worded, but one detects the real cause of grievance: the Chinese were willing to pay higher rents for space in the center of town, even at the risk of lowering their profits, because that brought them closer to their customers. And they spent long hours on the job, forcing European barbers to work equally hard to compete. To Spaniards, the solution was obvious: expel the Chinese from the city center and restrict hair-cutting hours so that they wouldn't have to work so hard and accept such low profits. Six months later the viceroy banned Asian barbers from the Plaza Mayor. Twisting the knife, he restricted the number of razors they could possess, thus ensuring that their shops couldn't grow too large.

Despite the ban, the government kept approving applications for *chino* barbershops in the Playa Mayor—perhaps, one is tempted to speculate, because influential customers didn't want to have to travel long distances to have their hair cut and their teeth cleaned. European businesses again complained about the competition. In 1650 the government created a barbershop czar, empowered to extract hefty fines from bootleg hair salons. The post was ineffective: Chinese barbers proliferated by the score. An especially zealous Spanish barber won the czarship in 1670. Slack, whose account I am following here, found no indication of success.

The city's raucous mix of peoples was nowhere better expressed than its festivals, such as the Easter processions. Organized by the lay religious groups called confraternities, they were ostensibly intended as public acts of penitence but functioned as ethnically based civic celebrations. Asians helped found the Confraternity of the Holy Christ in the mid-sixteenth century; aligned with the Franciscans, its members were allowed to construct a chapel in the monastery and decorate it with imported ivory gewgaws. The Italian traveler Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri watched them march in an Easter parade in Mexico City in April 1697. Carrying statues and torches, three costumed confraternities went out from city hall that day: the brotherhood of the Holy Trinity, the Jesuits of the Church of San Gregorio, and the Franciscans. The march of the Franciscans, Gemelli Careri noted, was called "the Procession of the Chinese," because the marchers were all from the Philippines. Each procession, he wrote, was walked with

> a company of soldiers . . . on horseback, and was preceded by mournful horn-players. When the procession came to the royal palace, the Chinese and the [Franciscans] fought to be at the head of the line; they beat each other over the shoulders with clubs, and with their Crosses; and many were wounded.

The big Chinese population reflected the city's status as the clearinghouse for information about the East. In 1585 Juan González de Mendoza, a Dominican there, compiled sources from the galleon trade into a *History of the Most Notable Things, Rituals and Customs of the Great Kingdom of China.* Published in dozens of editions in many languages, it became the standard text on China for educated Europeans. Not only did the China trade fascinate Mexico City's civil government, it preoccupied many of the clerics in the city's many churches, who begged their superiors for the chance to get on a galleon and save Chinese souls. Much of their fascination was fueled by a miscalculation—they believed Mexico to be much closer to China than it actually is. (In fact, as the Canadian historian Luke Clossey has pointed out, Beijing is closer to Rome than to Mexico City.) The Dominican Martín de Valencia spent months on Mexico's west coast waiting for Cortés's ships to take him to China on the conqueror's failed expedition to the Pacific. The ships never appeared. Lying on his deathbed in Mexico City, Valencia said, "I have been cheated of my desire."

Scuffling in the streets, struggling to pull strings in the government, uneasily cooperating in the military, Mexico City's multitude of poorly defined ethnic groups from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas made it the world's first truly global city—the Homogenocene for *Homo sapiens.* A showpiece for the human branch of the Columbian Exchange, it was the place where East met West under an African and Indian gaze. Its inhabitants were ashamed of the genetic mix even as they were proud of their cosmopolitan culture, perhaps none more so than the poet Bernardo de Balbuena, whose *Grandeza Mexicana* is a two-hundred-page love letter to his adopted home. "In thee," he wrote, addressing Mexico City,

> *Spain is joined with China,*
> *Italy with Japan, and finally*
> *an entire world in trade and order.*
> *In thee, we enjoy the best of the treasures*
> *of the West; in thee, the cream*
> *of all luster created in the East.*

Balbuena wrote his panegyric while the city he extolled was under water. Cortés's siege wrecked the intricate network of dikes and baffles that kept the island from flooding every spring; now the city was inundated for months

at a time. (Repairing the damage took almost four centuries and in some ways left the city worse off than before.) Balbuena seemed not to mind. It was evidently worth the inconvenience of wading through the flood to live in an urban dream of chanting religious processions, swishing silk dresses, groaning carriages of silver and gold, and great clanging church bells, a city where people drifted in canoes down canals lined with flowers as sunlight gleamed from the mountains. But it was both more and less than that. Menaced by environmental problems, torn by struggles between the tiny coterie of wealthy Spaniards at the center and a teeming, fractious polyglot periphery, battered by a corrupt and inept civic and religious establishment, troubled by a past that it barely understood—to the contemporary eye, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mexico City looks oddly familiar. In its dystopic way, it was an amazingly contemporary place, unlike any other then on the planet. It was the first twenty-first-century city, the first of today's modern, globalized megalopolises.

It may seem foolish to use terms like *modern* and *globalized* to describe a time and place in which there were no means of mass communication and most people had no way of buying goods or services from overseas. But even today billions of people on our networked planet have no telephones. Even today the reach of goods and services from high-tech places like the United States, Europe, and Japan is limited. Modernity is a patchy thing, a matter of shifting light and dark upon the globe. Here was one of the spots where it touched first.

9

Forest of Fugitives

IN CALABAR

Christian de Jesus Santana could see the secret city from his window. Known as Calabar, it was at the edge of Salvador da Bahia, in northeast Brazil, on the inland side of a ridge that paralleled the coastline. On the shore side of the ridge, invisible from Calabar, was the great Bay of All Saints, the second-biggest slave harbor in the world, the first glimpse of the Americas for more than 1.5 million captive Africans. The slaves were supposed to spend the rest of their days in Brazil's sugar plantations and mills. Most did, but countless thousands escaped their bondage, and many of these established fugitive communities—*quilombos,* as Brazilians called them—in the nation's forests. Almost always they were joined by Indians, who were also targeted by European slavers. Protected by steep terrain, thickly packed trees, treacherous rivers, and lethal booby traps, these illicit hybrid settlements endured for decades, even centuries. The great majority were small, but some grew to amazing size. Calabar, where Christian grew up, swelled to as many as twenty thousand inhabitants. (The name Calabar comes from a slave port in what is now Nigeria.) A few miles away, another Salvador *quilombo,* Liberdade (Liberty), today has a population of 600,000 and is said to be the biggest Afro-American community in the Western Hemisphere.

Good records do not exist, but Calabar and Liberdade were certainly going concerns by 1650. In Liberdade I met a local historian who told me the city actually originated decades earlier, when slaves had escaped from Salvador down a native path in the forest. The Bay of All Saints is bordered by high, forested bluffs; escapees climbed the bluffs and took over land on the other side, creating a ring of encampments between the colonial port and the indigenous interior. Sometimes their homes were just a few hundred yards