

“Pure and Noble Indians, Untainted by Inferior Idolatrous Races”: Native Elites and the Discourse of Blood Purity in Late Colonial Mexico

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Abstract:

As sixteenth-century Spaniards constructed their global empire, they carried with them the racial-religious concept of “limpieza de sangre,” or blood purity, which restricted marginalized communities from exercising prestige and authority. However, the complex demographic arena of early modern America, so different from the late medieval Iberia that gave rise to the discourse, necessarily destabilized and complicated limpieza's meanings and modes of expression. This article explores a variety of ways by which indigenous elites in late colonial Mexico sought to take advantage of these ambiguities and describe themselves as “pure-blooded,” thereby reframing their local authority in terms recognized and respected by Spanish authorities. Specifically, savvy native lords naturalized the concept by portraying their own ancestors as the originators of “pure” bloodlines in America. In doing so, they reoriented the imagined metrics of purity so as to distinguish themselves from native commoners, mestizos, and the descendants of Africans. However, applying limpieza in native communities could backfire: after two centuries of extensive race mixing, many native lords found themselves vulnerable to accusations of uncleanness and ancestral shame. Yet successful or not, indigenous participation in the discourse of limpieza helped influence what it meant in New Spain to be “honorable” and “pure,” and therefore eligible for social mobility.

Article:

At the turn of the eighteenth century, don Pedro Ramírez Vázquez was a prominent resident of Santiago Tequixquiac, just north of Mexico City. Citing a royal decree bestowing favors upon those who could prove their quality, in 1699 he submitted a statement of merits and services (*probanza de méritos y servicios*) to the Spanish viceroy and his court.¹ In it, don Pedro claimed to be an “Old Christian.” His ancestors, he explained, were “clean” and “uninfected” by any “bad races” (*malas razas*), and completely “unstained [*sin mancha*] by idolatry, superstition, Judaism, sophism, or heresy.”² With such language, don Pedro participated in the famous Spanish discourse of “blood purity,” or *limpieza de sangre*. Though it referred variously to a number of ethnic, religious, and social qualities, limpieza is most commonly remembered as a discourse of religious exclusion that arose in late medieval Christian Iberia when, following the forced conversions of the Jewish population, persisting cultural differences aroused suspicions regarding the sincerity of the new converts. These anxieties were quickly racialized, as suspicions of infidelity transferred to the children of the “New Christians.”³ “Impurity” came to

indicate an ancestry (or “blood”) tainted by Jews, Muslims, or heretics. Meanwhile, the discourse romanticized the Visigoths — the Christian rulers of Iberia prior to the Muslim invasion of 711 CE — as the primordial “untainted” race from which all contemporary purity derived. Eventually, the discourse merged with other rhetorics of social exclusion such as nobility and lineage, honorific professions, and even place of origin. (Mountains, for example, were deemed more “pure” than cities, on the mistaken assumption that Jews and Muslims had never settled there.)⁴

As early as 1449, local municipalities and ecclesiastical communities began adopting a tapestry of purity requirements for membership. The crown officially endorsed such statutes in the 1560s, and they were subsequently translated to the New World. Higher education, elite guilds, and high bureaucratic offices were, in theory, restricted to those who could prove *limpieza*. Predictably, then, assertions of blood quality, Visigothic ancestry, and “Old Christian” status were central to the legal, political, and economic strategies of many upwardly mobile families on both sides of the Atlantic.

The case of don Pedro of Tequixquiac, however, is not as unremarkable as it may seem, for his ancestors had never participated in the Iberian backstory implied in *limpieza*’s metanarrative. He was a Nahua Indian: a native of central Mexico, and a proud heir to the indigenous lords (*caciques*) and governors of Tequixquiac. His ancestors, he boasted, were don Pedro Quauhilitziltzin and doña María Papan, “caciques during ancient times,” and the powerful, respected rulers who owned the lordly estate (in Nahuatl: *hueicalco*, “place of the big house”) where don Pedro’s family still lived. Accepting his *probanza*, the Mexico City Audiencia (the colonial appellate court, with the viceroy presiding) confirmed don Pedro’s family to be pure Old Christians, and therefore eligible for all consequent privileges and honors.⁵

The language by which don Pedro affirmed his ancestors’ purity reflects the typical interrogation process imposed upon aspirants to elite positions and status in New Spain.⁶ Nonetheless, the imagined spectrum between “clean” Visigothic and “unclean” Semitic blood was simply inapplicable among America’s native peoples. Therefore, by claiming Old Christian status, the Nahua lord necessarily articulated a novel understanding of purity, whether he meant to or not. That is, don Pedro was not disowning indigeneity or claiming Visigothic ancestry, nor was he responding to real suspicions of Judaism in pre-Columbian Tequixquiac.⁷ Rather, he was insisting that his own ancestors among the indigenous nobility of Mexico be remembered as the originators of an autochthonous, American strain of blood purity, equal in quality to its Iberian counterpart.

“After this realm received the Holy Gospel,” he asserted, “[all of my forebears] professed and continue to profess our Catholic religion, as Old Christians, without the race or stain of idolatry.”⁸ His purity, in other words, derived not from the Visigoths, but from the establishment of Christianity in the western hemisphere in the sixteenth century. This effectively detached the discourse from its peculiarly Iberian social context and evangelical chronology, asserting a parallel, American version of blood purity natural to the colonial world. Logically, by “Americanizing” purity in this way, don Pedro necessarily did likewise with impurity; stained blood, he implied, originated not only with Jews and Muslims but also the various “inferior races” of Spanish-American society. As we will see, he was referring to Africans and their

descendants, but also, perhaps, to mestizos (of mixed European and indigenous heritage), native commoners, and those who practiced manual labor.

The present article explores the various ways that ambitious native elites in Mexico, particularly in the eighteenth century, opportunistically adapted and naturalized the language of *limpieza de sangre* so as to claim its power for themselves. By highlighting the rhetorical tactics that allowed caciques to appropriate the concept of *limpieza* within the Spanish judicial sphere, I interpret the ideology of blood purity as similar to other foreign introductions that local peoples under Spanish colonialism found useful or necessary to master for themselves, from European legal processes, to beasts of burden, to metal cutlery.⁹

This is not to say that the discourse of *limpieza* always benefited Mexico's native leaders. By broadening purity to encompass their own racial, social, and religious condition, caciques necessarily expanded the scope of impurity as well, and therefore their vulnerability to rivals. After all, *limpieza* was determined by courts, judges, and disputation rather than any inherent, "objective" metrics.¹⁰ Legal savvy was critical, then, as ambitious Mexican caciques sought to insinuate themselves into the exclusive and prestigious ranks of the pure, the clean, the orthodox, and the noble.

PURITY AS POLITICS

My analysis benefits and proceeds from the intersection of two complementary, yet generally distinct developments in the historiography of early modern Spain and Spanish America, the first regarding the ideological substance of *limpieza* itself, and the second concerning the legal activities of America's native peoples under Spanish rule. Broadly speaking, the literature on *limpieza* has not elaborated how non-Spaniards appropriated it as a legal strategy, while scholarship on indigenous legal strategies has not detailed the role of *limpieza* therein. In exploring the intersections between these two issues, I hope to extend both into new areas.

As the notion of blood purity in late medieval and early modern Spain stands at the crossroads of race and religion, historians have justifiably lavished it with attention. *Limpieza* is most often understood as a mode of social exclusionism, another stark expression of early modern anti-Semitism.¹¹ More recently, however, scholars addressing praxis have revealed disconnects between the harsh letter of *limpieza* restrictions and their actual modes of application. Spain's learned establishment, it seems, enforced purity statutes only inconsistently, with political motives often trumping more ideological concerns. In this light, then, *limpieza* could sometimes function as opportunity as well as exclusionism: a practical means for social and economic strategizing, and a rhetorical weapon to be wielded (or sheathed) according to concerns more crudely material than the ethereal issue of ancestral purity. While opportunists often exploited the emotional power of *limpieza* when it was useful, they typically ignored it when it was not.¹²

Once exported across the ocean, *limpieza* retained its political character. Scholars have charted how, in America, the discourse took its place alongside the other conceits of Spanish hegemony, as Africans, natives, and mestizos were scorned as being of "obscure origins, bad customs, low condition, and bad race."¹³ Nonetheless, this cannot be the end of the story, as the case of don Pedro of Tequixquiac suggests. Helpfully, María Elena Martínez has recently broken new ground by demonstrating that blood purity in colonial Mexico was like "race" itself during that era —

that is to say, gradated rather than binary, to be measured along a broad but continuous spectrum of relative, intermediate degrees.¹⁴ However, Martínez's primary concern is to demonstrate how—philosophically, theologically, and institutionally—imperial agents addressed and applied the often confusing issue of blood purity in New Spain: *limpieza*, in other words, as a Spanish discourse about non-Spaniards.¹⁵ The story of how native nobles opportunistically appropriated and naturalized the terms of that discourse remains to be told.

This focus on the pragmatic engagement of native subjects with the people and values of the Spanish justice system follows recent scholarship that points to the myriad ways that indigenous individuals and communities creatively and tenaciously navigated the institutions of the colonizers for their own purposes.¹⁶ Indigenous legal and political activity at the local, regional, and viceregal levels was lively and energetic, belying stereotypes of passivity and homogeneity among those communities that could not or chose not to offer violent resistance.¹⁷ As Brian Owensby argues, “the Indians of early modern Mexico had every reason to develop a politics of engagement with their rulers, in order to lead power to address their concerns.”¹⁸ In other words, for native peoples facing Spanish colonialism, litigation *was* politics: in a nonrepresentational system of colonial subjugation, the imperial justice system was the primary arena in which native peoples could (nonviolently) assert rights and voice grievances, although the process was unavoidably tragic — to secure benefits from a colonial court, native litigants implicitly conceded the court's legitimacy.¹⁹ Significantly and inevitably, such legal engagement required native actors to learn and employ Spanish rhetorics of justice and rights, even as their goals and motivations remained their own, shaped by local concerns.

Regarding caciques specifically, scholars note an ambivalence: their status and legitimacy derived from indigenous traditions, while their actual power and authority depended on continuous Spanish sanction and recognition. They were required to reconcile, as much as possible, the mostly conflicting imperatives of Spanish hegemony and local autonomy. This led to a complex set of sympathies and stratagems, as native leaders juggled the competing demands of Spanish colonialism and native traditions while nursing objectives of their own.²⁰

Thus the historiography teaches two things: first, native peoples negotiated with their colonial masters via colonial institutions, and second, blood purity was a negotiable (rather than intrinsic) quality. Combining these insights, this article examines the ways in which caciques brought the contested issue of native *limpieza* to the negotiation table. As we will see, in many cases this went beyond mimicry. By grafting the alien notion of blood purity onto the indigenous family trees of Mexico, native leaders did not merely master a foreign tool; they innovated.

NATIVE NOBLES AND BLOOD PURITY IN SPANISH-AMERICAN LAW

The question of indigenous blood purity lay outside the schema within which Spaniards first assessed such things in medieval Iberia. The ancestors of America's native peoples were clearly not “Jews” or “Muslims,” the original sources of impurity. Yet as recent converts, natives were analogous to the “New Christian” *conversos* (converts) of Castile, the original targets of the discourse.²¹ Early papal and royal rulings circumscribed the debate somewhat by confirming the Indians' full humanity and rationality, but they did not address or resolve the separate issue of blood purity.²² In theory, there were no reasons why Indians who had become good Christians should not have been considered pure. In practice, however, many Spanish officials were

reluctant to extend to native peoples — conquered, disinherited, and exotic — the same esteem and respect reserved for Spanish Old Christians.

Perhaps predictably, then, just as Christians in late medieval Iberia had ascribed racial aspects to “Jewishness,” describing it as something transmitted in the blood, many of their descendants in early modern America did the same with native religion. While this rather cynical assessment came close to violating at least two tenants of Catholic doctrine, free will and the Indians’ capacity for Christianity, in the absence of clear prescriptive guidelines it nonetheless became a mainstream view by the seventeenth century. For example, the Third Mexican Church Council of 1585 defined Indians, along with mestizos and the descendants of Africans, as people with “natural defects” that were to be excluded (except in extraordinary cases) from elite positions with the church.²³ This posture was partially challenged soon thereafter by a royal decree that affirmed the eligibility of mestizos, yet the underlying attitude survived.²⁴ As one influential theologian argued, “the bad seed” of idolatry had “spread such deep roots in the Indians that . . . although they [are] born with free will, they carry this vice in their blood, and drink it in their [mothers’] milk.”²⁵

However, in the final decades of the seventeenth century the crown took a marginally stronger position on the issue. It began when the ministers of Charles II (r. 1665 – 1700) began favoring measures to erase the enduring cultural distinctiveness and diversity of America’s far-flung native communities.²⁶ Beginning in the 1680s, they ordered new American seminaries, institutions reserved for the pure-blooded, to establish quotas for the children of caciques, who, once Hispanicized in customs and language, were to serve as “great example[s]” among their indigenous compatriots.²⁷ Given the exclusivity of such institutions, such policies implied a legal equivalence between American caciques and Spaniards of “honorable” station. This implication was made explicit in 1697 in an important decree: caciques, as “the descendants of noble Indians,” deserved the same special rights and privileges as Spanish hidalgos, provided they could prove their *limpieza de sangre*. Analogously, native commoners were to be considered as equal in purity to Spanish peasants, provided they had not tainted themselves with any forms of dishonor.²⁸ This posture solidified further under the Bourbon kings of the eighteenth century. A 1766 decree, for example, affirmed that anyone who could prove “quality” and nobility was eligible for elite stations, “without hindering those from the Americas who have descended from pagan times.”²⁹

Though intended to facilitate the cultural Hispanicization of native communities, by establishing a legal equivalence between caciques and Spanish hidalgos such laws encouraged native elites to master and deploy the language of *limpieza*. Even when uprooted from the Iberian sociohistorical context, *limpieza* preserved much of its rhetorical clout: purity, however derived, implied honor, thereby obliging the king and his representatives to favor those who could claim it. It aligned perfectly, then, with the objectives of native lords, who above all desired to have their elite status sanctioned, protected, and respected by both native commoners and Spanish officials.

With this context in mind, let us now turn to a variety of cases in which late colonial caciques successfully invoked *limpieza*. I will focus on three overlapping (and sometimes inconsistent) ways that they participated in the discourse. Some, like don Pedro Ramírez Vázquez of

Tequiquiac, drew implicit analogies between the evangelization of Iberia and Mexico, attributing to each the foundation of pure bloodlines. Others pushed for a more explicitly racial understanding of purity—as the complete absence of racial mixture—in order to prohibit mestizos and other *castas* (the vast mixed-race population of New Spain) from ascending hierarchies in native communities and institutions. Still others invoked it as a generic marker of high social status. According to the latter interpretation, *limpieza* had less to do with religion, history, and racial mixture, and more with lifestyle and reputation.

Once their family trees were placed under the microscope, several of the following litigants and petitioners were revealed to have nonindigenous ancestors, Spanish and African. Nonetheless, I continue to refer to them as “native lords” and “caciques,” not only because that is how they were received by imperial officials, but also because that is how they represented themselves publically. Whether these revelations were considered important can reveal much about the extent of their access to blood purity.

OLD CHRISTIANS IN A NEW WORLD: RELIGIOUS PURITY

Don Pedro of Tequiquiac derived purity from the fact that his ancestors had converted to Christianity at the earliest opportunity. Like those Iberians who linked themselves to the Visigoths — symbols of a primordial Christianity untainted by Jews and Muslims — the Nahuatl lord distinguished himself as a Christian of lineage rather than recent conversion, a vastly more authentic category. Logic dictated, of course, that this status was simply unavailable to America’s native peoples during the first postconquest generations, so recently converted. While sixteenth-century caciques quickly mastered the essential language of Catholic piety, they could not claim “ancient” Christian origins. Instead, with the frequent help of Spanish missionaries, they emphasized Pauline notions of the transformational grace of conversion to claim legitimacy through baptism rather than lineage.³⁰ However, toward the mid-seventeenth century, Spanish jurists became more inclined to detach native peoples from the “neophyte” label, especially those of noble birth.³¹ Caciques quickly capitalized by asserting the antiquity of their Christian lineages.

A very early and notable example of this naturalization, or “Americanization,” of *limpieza*’s implicit historical narrative comes from the heirs to the renowned war captain Motelchiuhtzin, who served (and was tortured) alongside Emperor Cuauhtémoc following the surrender of Mexico-Tenochtitlán in 1521. In 1623, Motelchiuhtzin’s great-grandson, don Francisco de Tapia y Barrera of Mexico City, reminded Spanish officials of his famous ancestor’s early conversion in order to proclaim his lineage to be “pure.” “Andrés de Tapia [Motelchiuhtzin], my great-grandfather, was the first in these realms to receive the water of baptism,” he began, “converting to our Holy Catholic Faith, and all of [my ancestors hence] have been known as people clean of all races of Moors and Jews.”³²

This kind of rhetoric, in which native leaders legitimated their claims by appealing to antiquity, became more common toward the end of the seventeenth century and after. It is a common component of the so-called *títulos primordiales*, “primordial titles,” in which native communities (or rather, their lords) “proved” communal and lordly land rights with deliberately archaized and falsely dated documents recording acts of land possession and town foundation in the early postconquest years. Echoing the heirs of Motelchiuhtzin, one of the titles’ primary languages of

legitimization was that of primordial piety, an emphasis on a community's rapid and complete embrace of the Catholic faith upon the first arrival of Spanish holy men.³³ During this same era, caciques began invoking primordial Christianity when seeking entry into the restricted domain of higher learning.³⁴ For example, in 1712, a nobleman from Tlaxcala named don Lucas de Zárate filed for a bachelor's degree (*bachillerato*) in the arts. To establish his right to such an honor, he brought witnesses who testified that his ancestors were all "descendants of kings, with very pure blood, not newly converted."³⁵ Similarly, a prominent resident (*vecino*) of Singuilucan (Hidalgo) traveled to Mexico City in 1723 to request privileges for his wife, the *cacica* doña Tomasa María. Her ancestors, he argued, were especially distinguished by having been the first in the region "to sacrifice their lives and embrace the Catholic Faith"; they had done so, moreover, "with blind obedience," and had remained faithful ever since.³⁶

As we have seen, such rhetoric reflected church protocols, which required evidence of ancestral purity from aspiring clergy, regardless of ethnic background. Printed forms from the 1770s for approval of entry to the subdiaconate, for example, included a fill-in-the-blank confirmation of blood purity; witnesses were asked to confirm that the aspirant, whose name was handwritten onto a blank line, was "Old Christian, of pure caste and heritage [*de limpia casta y generación*]," and that he was not descended from "Moors, Jews, or conversos." The form did not acknowledge that such considerations might be inapplicable or absurd with regard to native aspirants.³⁷

In the above examples, the rhetorical structure of *limpieza* remained largely intact as received from its Iberian origins, even as its external circumstances shifted in time and place. "Old Christians" were those whose ancestors had embraced Christian truth at the first opportunity, in contradistinction to "rejectionist" Jews (in Iberia) and stubborn "idolators" (presumably lurking somewhere in the vast American wilderness). Thus, while the above caciques transplanted the ideology of *limpieza* to the American historical and religious sphere, they did not significantly alter or reimagine the substance of the concept itself. Some, however, did take this rhetoric in a creative new direction, associating purity not only with Christian conversion, but also with the noble quality of their non-Christian ancestors. This, I argue, more fully naturalized the discourse: rather than interpreting the contingencies of New World history according to the Iberian ideology of *limpieza*, they inscribed a parallel, indigenous version of *limpieza* within that history.

Don Manuel de los Santos y Salazar (d. 1715) was an educated nobleman from Tlaxcala and a priest in several local parishes.³⁸ As we might expect, in his interactions with church authorities don Manuel affirmed his family's early and rigid adherence to Catholic orthodoxy. Interestingly, however, he included as further evidence of his quality his ancestor Tlahuicole, renowned in Tlaxcala as a war hero of the pre-Hispanic era.³⁹ He was, he boasted, the descendant of "the valiant Tlahuicole, captain of the Tlaxcalan armies, whose descendants, after voluntarily receiving [the Holy Catholic Faith] and giving obedience to the Crown of Castile . . . [were] all of them Old Christians, untainted by any bad race, generation, and mix, [which proves] my legitimacy and *limpieza*."⁴⁰

According to a literal reading of don Manuel's claim, he derived his purity, like the above examples, from early Christian conversion. However, by including Tlahuicole, a non-Christian who died before the Spanish conquest, in his proof of *limpieza*, don Manuel indirectly associated

the fame and nobility of his pagan ancestors with blood purity. This is different from primordial Christianity: it equated *limpieza* with nobility and social esteem, regardless of religious background. A later section will examine a number of *caciques* who attributed purity to their pagan ancestors who lived and died well before the Spaniards had arrived to introduce such a concept.

THE AMBIGUITY OF MESTIZAJE: RACIAL PURITY

In Spanish as in English, “pure” has multiple meanings, one of which is “unadulterated.” While in Spain *limpieza* began as a qualitative distinction between the religiously pure and the religiously suspect, it quickly accumulated a highly racialized flavor as advocates tracked the “stain” of Jewishness across generations. In this way, *limpieza* acquired quantitative elements: purity as genealogical homogeneity, measured by the absence of disfavored groups in a family tree.

Understanding purity as racial uniformity held unpredictable implications for late colonial Spanish America, where in many areas the descendants of Spaniards, Africans, and native peoples had mixed intensively for generations. Did impurity result from mixture with Jews and Muslims specifically, or from race mixing itself? If the former, then by definition almost every non-Spaniard in America could claim purity more credibly than most Spaniards. If one could tout ancestral homogeneity as honorable, might “pure Indian” blood be a source of prestige, to the detriment of mestizos? Going further, could such cachet extend even to “pure Africans,” most of whom would have been lowly slaves? (The answer was certainly not, at least not in Spanish courts.) Clearly, the issue involved ambiguities, and where there were legal gray areas, there were shrewd *caciques* ready to exploit them by extending *limpieza* to encompass “pure Indianness.”

To characterize mestizos as impure would not have been a major stretch of rhetoric, as anti-mestizo sentiment already existed broadly. Spanish authorities consistently scorned mestizos as pernicious social elements, often using the words “mestizo” and “vagrant” interchangeably.⁴¹ Likewise, among colonial Nahuas, “mestizo” usually (though not always) connoted a negative stereotype.⁴² With Spanish blessing, native leaders throughout Mexico generally barred mestizos from municipal governments (although this rule was applied haphazardly).⁴³ Rivals for political offices frequently denounced one another for having mixed blood, often by highlighting how suspiciously “latinized” and familiar with Spanish language and culture they were.⁴⁴

It should not surprise us, then, that just as late colonial *caciques* intensified their emphasis on the relevance and importance of genealogical antiquity, they should also begin to inscribe the already reviled mestizos into the discourse of *limpieza* by adding “impure” to the list of their supposed defects.⁴⁵ For example, don Manuel de los Santos, the *cacique*-priest from Tlaxcala mentioned above, slurred mestizos as *champurros*—a pejorative roughly meaning “mish-mash”—and argued that their “bad blood . . . causes them to commit iniquities.”⁴⁶ Elsewhere, he accused noblewomen who consorted with mestizos and Spaniards of degrading the noble blood of Tlaxcala.⁴⁷

Perhaps the most complete and ideologically consistent example of native elites equating mestizaje with impurity comes from the Convent of Corpus Christi in Mexico City, established

in 1724 specifically for the daughters of caciques. As an institution exclusive to the indigenous nobility, it was uniquely susceptible to a racial interpretation of *limpieza*. At Corpus Christi, notes Ann Miriam Gallagher, *limpieza de sangre* acquired “the new meaning of pure indigenous ancestry,” and proving and maintaining full-bloodedness became an “obsession” among the nuns and their families.⁴⁸ (This was especially ironic, as for centuries creoles and Spaniards had used *limpieza* requirements to *exclude* native and mestiza women from entering the sacred spaces of the convents.)⁴⁹ The intensity of this emphasis on “pure Indianness” was in part a reaction to Spanish church authorities who violated the convent’s charter on several occasions by inserting nonnative women into the community.⁵⁰ Needless to say, the indigenous nuns always reacted with anger and frustration at these betrayals. With the aid of male sponsors, they argued that the convent should consist only of “pure Indians,” and that mestizas should be ineligible.⁵¹ This tactic did meet with some limited success; in 1745 the king expelled three women who could not prove they were “pure Indians.”⁵²

Conversely, paralleling the efforts of New Christians in Spain, aspiring families sought to cover up mixed genealogies, insisting they had “not one drop of other blood” (*ni una gota de otra sangre*).⁵³ In 1748, for example, responding to accusations of *mestizaje*, an alleged cacique from Tlatelolco (Mexico City) named don Antonio de los Santos Sandoval insisted that his daughter Sister Francisca Thomasa qualified for the sacred veil at Corpus Christi because she was descended entirely from “Indians, caciques and *principales* [lesser nobility], without mixture of any other blood.”⁵⁴ Note that, in contrast to others we have examined, don Antonio did not merely deny mixture with “tainted” or “inferior” races, but with *all* nonnative blood. This insistence on “pure Indianness” characterized other institutions established for native women during the eighteenth century.⁵⁵

However, Corpus Christi and the other indigenous convents seem to be exceptions that prove the rule. Notwithstanding widespread anti-mestizo sentiment, it was actually relatively uncommon for caciques to characterize mestizos as impure. We will notice that, in the above examples, caciques were policing membership in institutions (such as town councils or Corpus Christi) they saw as their own. However, we have many contemporaneous cases wherein caciques successfully petitioned for *limpieza* even as they were revealed to be mestizos. The most important variable, it seems, was the judge: when caciques were the gatekeepers, they were liable to invoke *limpieza* to justify the exclusion of mestizos. Spaniards, on the other hand, were less likely to interpret *mestizaje* as impurity.

Thus, while the list of “bad races” to be excluded from elite society grew during the seventeenth century, reflecting increasing demographic complexity, mestizos generally escaped being labeled impure in the realm of Spanish legal opinion. Authorities viewed them as perhaps prone to vagrancy, quarrelsome, and requiring extra suspicion, but not necessarily unclean. When Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, the bishop of Puebla, formulated the new statutes for the Royal University in 1645, he denied access to “blacks, mulattos, those commonly called *chinos morenos* (of the Philippines), [and] any type of slave.” However, he continued, “the Indians, as vassals of His Majesty, can and should be admitted.”⁵⁶

Thus, mixed-heritage caciques pointed out that if both full-blooded Spaniards and Indians were considered pure (absent other defects) then mestizos could not be automatically impure, as

neither parent transmitted any “infections.” Spanish gatekeepers generally accepted this reasoning; indeed, those who excluded mestizos from elite positions tended to cite their (presumed) illegitimacy rather than impurity.⁵⁷ For example, in 1701 the Spanish father of the *castizo* (one-fourth indigenous) Francisco Sánchez, who was encountering resistance in his bid to enter the Royal University, reminded officials that, as the descendant of Spaniards and caciques, his ancestry contained no “blacks, mulattos, or any similar caste, beyond those of me and my [mestiza] wife.” In response, the university official held that, “as the law expresses that both Spaniards and Indians are eligible for admission, so should the supplicant be, based on both lineages [*por ambos extremos*].”⁵⁸ Similarly, in 1770 the university accepted don José Antonio Ximénes Frías, a nobleman from Temazcalapa, Oaxaca, as a doctoral student (one of the most exclusive ranks in the Hispanic world). Some detractors objected because he was not a “pure Indian,” noting that his baptismal certificate listed him as mestizo. However, the faculty chair in charge of the case rejected this reasoning, declaring that “mestizos are a bit superior [*son algo más*] to those who are purely Indians, due to their mix with Spaniards.”⁵⁹

The Royal Audiencia seems to have been inclined to agree, as a pair of examples suggests that the body was not likely to view Spanish ancestry as injurious to the purity of Indians. In Mexico City in 1751 the husband of doña Úrsula García Cortés y Moctezuma appeared before the Audiencia looking to substantiate her descent from Emperor Moctezuma. Doña Úrsula, however, had a Spanish mother. While this would have been a problem for the nuns of Corpus Christi, her husband represented her Spanish blood as ennobling: “[This proof demonstrates] the mestiza quality of doña Úrsula and the respective qualities of her ancestors free from mixture of infected blood, and it also proves that the aforementioned ancestors were, respectively, casiques and principales, Old Christians, and nobles, reputed as such, and descendants of conquistadors, none of whom were ever punished by the Tribunal of the Holy Office, along with other specifications that demonstrate their quality, nobility, limpieza, and legitimacy.” The *fiscal* (court attorney) assigned to the case opined in favor of doña Úrsula and don Manuel, accepting “their respective qualities as caciques and principales, Old Christians, nobles, and descendants of [Spanish conquistadors].”⁶⁰

Likewise, in 1774 the cacique don Joseph Mariano Sánchez Citlalpopoca de Salazar of Mexico City, a grand-nephew of don Manuel de los Santos y Salazar of Tlaxcala, sought membership in the exclusive gold-and silversmiths’ guild, which required blood purity. Don Joseph’s petition affirmed that his family tree contained no “stains,” and that none of his ancestors had ever been targeted by the Inquisition. Witnesses testified to his “good habits and customs,” his “distinguished family,” his exceptional character, virtue, and intelligence, and the impeccable reputation of his noble lineage.⁶¹ Tellingly, the Audiencia confirmed don Joseph as both a “cacique Indian, and the son of a mestiza” who had satisfactorily proven his “quality, legitimacy, and limpieza.”⁶² In this case, simple reputation trumped mestizaje. This indicates yet another version of blood purity.

POSITIONS OF HONOR, LABORS OF SHAME: SOCIAL PURITY

Perhaps the most common way that Mexican caciques invoked limpieza, especially after the 1690s, was as a social quality, measured in terms of local esteem. In this formulation, caciques bundled a variety of social markers — nobility and lineage, reputation, “good habits,” and honorable professions — and repackaged them all as distinct but complementary components of

a larger inheritable quality called blood purity. As we have seen, those who claimed religious and racial forms of purity certainly expanded its structure to encompass American lineages. Yet to equate purity in native communities with social esteem went even further, as it both broadened and inverted the exclusionary mode of the discourse: if, traditionally, petitioners claimed purity in order to be eligible for privileges of honor, now they pointed to privileges they already enjoyed as evidence of their purity. Unlike, for example, early Christian conversion, this kind of purity was directly observable in the here and now, something a family lived rather than remembered.

Most often, caciques simply translated their noble status into *limpieza*: as noblemen and -women, they asserted, they were inherently pure. As we have seen, given their Mesoamerican origins, this effectively detached *limpieza* from its close affiliation with Christian conversion, the basis of its entire exclusionary scheme against the descendants of Jews and Muslims. This tactic had an Iberian precedent, as fifteenth-century Jews and conversos—impure almost by definition—responded to (and, in some cases, anticipated) the rise of theories of *limpieza* with a genealogical tradition of their own, linking themselves to Old Testament heroes such as King David.⁶³ Unlike David, however, the rulers of ancient Mexico were hardly celebrated non-Christians in the Spanish theological tradition. Nonetheless, the strategy was perfectly tailored to the needs of native lords, as it converted autonomous, preconquest traditions into a rhetorical currency with value in Spanish courts.

Such rhetoric was also enabled and encouraged by crown policies toward the end of the seventeenth century, which, as we have seen, favored the Hispanicization of caciques. While the laws did not *equate* nobility with *limpieza*—indeed they accepted native commoners as analogous to the “uninfected” Spanish peasantry—colonial social conceits were such that commoners were regularly conflated with the “impure races.” In a somewhat bizarre but telling example, in 1697 the new seminary in Mexico City explicitly opened its doors to caciques, but only if they were “untainted by any stains or bad races of Moors, Indians, and heretics.” In other words, native nobles had somehow ceased to be (unclean) “Indians.”⁶⁴ By excluding commoners, cacique status became even more essential for those seeking upward mobility in the Spanish realm.

The new legal atmosphere simultaneously opened doors for caciques while requiring proof of “legitimacy and *limpieza*” to pass through them. Accordingly, in the 1690s the native nobility in central and southern Mexico began seeking professional careers within the church and royal bureaucracy in greater numbers, and blood purity became essential to their efforts. Margarita Menegus and Rodolfo Aguirre have helpfully documented over two hundred indigenous students in the colleges and seminaries of New Spain between 1692 and 1822 (a number they believe to be far less than the actual total), the vast majority of whom came from noble families.⁶⁵ During the official genealogical inquiries required of those who sought access to higher education, rather than delve into dubious issues of religious or racial purity, many aspirants elected merely to emphasize their local reputations as respected nobles as evidence of *limpieza*.

“I am a noble Indian,” began don Teodoro Xallallatzin Villegas, an art student from Puebla in 1711, “a descendant of the royal blood of the kings of Tlaxcala,” and therefore “pure” and eligible for a bachelor’s degree.⁶⁶ The same year, don Miguel Aparicio Santos de Salazar y

Quapiotzin, a nephew of don Manuel de los Santos of Tlaxcala, received a bachelor's in philosophy from the Jesuits in Puebla. Don Miguel also derived *limpieza* entirely from his elite lineage; as a cacique and nobleman, he asserted, his ancestry was "clean, not common."⁶⁷ In 1718, don Gregorio de la Corona, an Otomí cacique from Ixmiquilpan (Hidalgo), did not equate *limpieza* with nobility, but he packaged them together as part of the same overall quality. All of his ancestors, he affirmed, were "nobles, as evidenced by the public offices they obtained as governors, Old Christians, and clean of all bad races."⁶⁸

While the distinction between the purity of nobles and the impurity of commoners was nominally beneficial to caciques, it could also prove dangerous, as nobles were unstained only to the extent that they could prove a negative: their noninfection with common (and, for similar reasons, African) blood. This left caciques relatively vulnerable to rivals who, with their long and unforgiving memories, could derail pretensions to purity simply by identifying one less-than-noble ancestor. The most obvious marker of common blood was manual labor, the "vile and mechanical trades" (*oficios viles y mecánicos*) that contrasted so unfavorably with the "honorable" professions of respectable people, such as civic or ecclesiastical service, warfare, letters and the liberal arts, and landownership.⁶⁹ In colonial discourse, the notion of dishonor was often grafted onto *limpieza de sangre* and reframed as impurity; thus, native commoners—almost invariably laborers in the fields and mines of colonial masters—were reviled as impure by their labor, if not their race. Again, this was actually contrary to the letter of the law, but such distinctions were often overlooked, by caciques as well as Spanish officials.

One colorful example comes from Capula, north of Mexico City. In the 1740s the commoner-controlled *cabildo* (town council) demanded that the theretofore-exempted Hernández family pay tribute and satisfy communal labor obligations. Objecting to such "vile" and "vulgar" activities, don Nicolás Hernández and his brothers quickly appealed to the Spanish governor, proclaiming "the difference there is and has been . . . between the caciques Hernández and the [commoners], the inferiority of the latter and the superiority and rights of the former."⁷⁰ In response, the *cabildo* impugned the purity of the Hernández brothers: their ancestors, they alleged, had married "stained" women, among them the daughters of a butcher and an executioner. The father of another had served time in prison. Thus, the *cabildo* concluded, the Hernández brothers were utterly "disgraced [*envilecidos*]" and therefore ineligible for exemptions reserved for nobility.⁷¹

This case represents the contrapositive of the examples listed above: whereas many caciques translated their nobility into blood purity, the *cabildo* of Capula translated impurity into common, taxpaying status. Significantly, the Hernándezes did not challenge these accusations; they merely argued that blood quality was determined paternally rather than maternally (the viceroy agreed).⁷² The dishonor of manual labor, it seems, could be absorbed into the blood.

WHITHER PURITY? THE CASE OF THE CHANTRY ETLA

Shrewd native elites in Mexico, then, pragmatically "purified" themselves by invoking a variety of religious, racial, and social understandings of *limpieza* (and sometimes all three). However, the reader will notice that few of the cases we have examined thus far necessitated critical legal scrutiny of the precise meaning of *limpieza*. That is, in most of them, petitioners posited a particular understanding of blood purity that authorities accepted or rejected according to their own criteria. But which *limpieza* represented the best opportunity? Did full-bloodedness

outweigh ill social reputé? Could racial mixture disqualify somebody with an impeccable religious heritage?

A unique controversy from eighteenth-century Oaxaca placed the various versions of purity in direct competition with one another. Specifically, in the following example, church officials were tasked with deciding which versions of *limpieza* outranked the others in the demographic context of a late colonial indigenous community. The case illustrates how *limpieza*, due to its broad and unstable spectrum of possible interpretations, was a double-edged sword: while it could be a ladder for ambitious caciques to ascend into higher segments of society, it could also provide rivals with ample opportunities to challenge such pretensions.⁷³

In 1722, don Diego González y Chavez was a Zapotec cacique of the village of San Juan Guelache, near the Villa de Etla in the eponymous northern arm of the Valley of Oaxaca. His wife, doña Josefa María de Zarate, was a Mixtec cacica from Cuilapan, about 12 miles to the south. Like most elites throughout history, don Diego and doña Josefa were keenly aware and jealous of their social position. With future generations in mind, the couple mortgaged properties worth two thousand silver pesos to establish a chantry (*capellanía de misas*), a popular type of pious donation; the endowment was to fund, in perpetuity, a chaplain charged with singing a specific number of annual masses on behalf of the souls of its benefactors.⁷⁴ To establish their rights and ability to provide for such a sacred benefice, the founders detailed their credentials and wealth in a *probanza* attached to the charter, invoking *limpieza de sangre* in doing so. Neither they nor any of their ancestors had ever practiced idolatry, performed manual labor, or mixed with those who had; they were, they concluded, “pure and noble Indians, untainted by inferior idolatrous races.”⁷⁵

The conditions of the Etla chantry were not unusual. As was common practice, the two caciques stipulated that their son Joseph be the first beneficiary; subsequent chaplains were to be drawn from their direct descendants.⁷⁶ However, don Diego and doña Josefa included a small and otherwise inconspicuous clause that would erupt into controversy long after their deaths. In the future event that there were no suitable candidates among their direct heirs, they ordered, the benefice was to open to all members of the various communities of Etla, on one condition: “we desire as a general rule that all who are called as chaplain be pure and noble Indians.”⁷⁷

With these words, “pure and noble Indians,” the two caciques unwittingly laid the foundations for a protracted dispute 50 years (and two chaplains) later, when no candidates could be found among Diego and Josefa’s direct descendants. The benefice was generous but not extravagant. With a principal worth two thousand pesos in land and property liens, the annual funds for such a chantry would have been 5 percent, or one hundred pesos a year—insufficient in itself to sustain a full-time chaplain.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, guaranteed income was hard to come by, and no fewer than three families approached ecclesiastical authorities in Antequera (Oaxaca City) to offer their sons as candidates (one of whom was barely six years old). The case as it proceeded hinged almost entirely on clause six: which of the three families best fit the criteria of “pure and noble Indians”? As an ecclesiastical matter, the case fell under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop and the diocesan Court of Chaplaincies and Pious Works (*Juzgado de Capellanías y Obras Pías*) and was handled by a local bishop (suffragan) and a *promotor fiscal*, or church attorney.⁷⁹ For three years, in a series of claims and counterclaims, the three families asserted

competing versions of purity and impurity, highlighting their own suitability while simultaneously impugning their rivals, often in what would today be scandalously libelous terms.

The first aspirant was don Lázaro López Pacheco, a minor municipal official, who argued on behalf of his son. In a semiliterate letter to the fiscal, don Lázaro compared his son's purity favorably to that of his first rival, don Joseph Cassiano Carrasco. Note that he conspicuously refused to use the respectful title of "don" while referring to his opponents in the case. "In the first place, my son meets . . . the quality of a pure and clean Indian, without stain; a quality absolutely lacking in Joseph Cassiano, since the mother of his father . . . was publicly and commonly known as a *mulata* [of mixed African descent]. And this quality is communicable, and is translated to all of her descendants." Don Lázaro continued, smearing his other rival, don Joseph Antonio Hernández, who was irredeemably tainted, he argued, because his father had sold pork in public — a most vulgar activity.

And his occupation . . . is so vilified that it not only degrades those who engage in it, but it excludes them and their descendants from all honorific offices, as is commonly known. And this position to which my opponents aspire, that of a priest, is among the most sublime and distinguished honors; it cannot be conferred upon the son of a public butcher. What a strange thing it would be . . . to see the son venerating the sacrosanct at the holy altar while the father is in the streets hawking meat and lard in public!

Finally, don Lázaro demanded that his own service in town government be interpreted as proof of blood purity, a quality bequeathed to his son Miguel Vicente upon birth. "In [my son] is found purity and *limpieza de sangre*," he argued, "that of nobility acquired through the obtaining and administering of honorable employment." The exercise of such "honorific charges," he concluded, placed him among the ranks of the "clean-blooded."⁸⁰

In both positive and negative terms, don Lázaro invoked blood purity according to both racial and social criteria. First, while asserting his own genealogical purity, he alluded to the "stain" of African blood in the Carrasco family. Second, he contrasted his proud participation in town government with the "vile" activities of the butcher Joseph Antonio Hernández.

For his part, don Joseph responded along similar lines. In a very poorly written statement, don Joseph admitted to selling meat in public, but questioned the heritability of such dishonor:

it has been established before Your Lordship that Francisco Xavier is the son of a public butcher, a seller of pork meat, whose occupation is incompatible with and diametrically opposed to any pretensions to an ecclesiastical benefice because of its humility and vileness. But should this flaw . . . also damage my son? I only set myself up [as a butcher] because of my notorious poverty, having no other means with which to feed my growing family.

Besides, he continued, Lázaro López Pacheco was hypocritical, as "it was common knowledge" that he had served alcohol in public. Next, he impugned the racial purity of Joseph Cassiano Carrasco, repeating the allegation that his grandmother had been of mixed African descent. Finally, don Joseph noted that his brother-in-law had been the previous chaplain; this, he argued,

clearly marked him and his family as “pure and noble Indians,” regardless of what he had done to earn a living in times of hardship.⁸¹

But it was the father of the third candidate, don Joseph Cassiano Carrasco, who ultimately compiled the most persuasive argument from the perspective of the Spaniards in charge of the case. First, in similarly rudimentary prose, he repeated the same charges against his two rivals—that they had irredeemably tainted their purity with vile labor. Next, he explained away the slurs directed against him—that his mother had been a mulata—by noting that she was in reality his stepmother, unrelated by blood. As for his actual birth mother, María del Carmen Badillo, she had been a foundling, raised in a Spanish home in Antequera, and her precise caste could not be verified by baptismal records. Just to be safe, however, he produced witnesses who testified that she had always been considered Spanish (which would have made him a mestizo, though nowhere in the proceedings did he acknowledge that label).

Unlike the López Pachecos and Hernándezes, however, the Carrascos had a trump card, one that would firmly establish (in the format Spanish officials considered the most authoritative) the family’s purity according to all three criteria—religious, racial, and social. They maintained a notarized proof, or *probanza ad perpetuam*, of the family’s nobility, awarded by the viceroy to Joseph Cassiano Carrasco’s great-grandfather in 1734 and meant to serve as *amparo*, or preemptive state protection and favor.⁸² Bound in red leather and lovingly beautified with amateur calligraphy, the probanza traced the Carrascos’ noble genealogy to a sixteenth-century Zapotec lord named Xsiqueguezagaba’a, who, upon the arrival of Hernando Cortés, quickly and eagerly accepted baptism under the name don Julián.⁸³ Driven by authentic religious zeal, he and his brother subsequently lent their own wealth and services to the Christian “conquest and pacification” of Oaxaca.⁸⁴ Having thus established Old Christian purity, the probanza then attested to the family’s social purity by documenting the extent of their local esteem and wealth. Witnesses confirmed that, as of 1734, the Carrascos were still living in the original *tecpan* (lord’s house) of San Gabriel de Etla. No Carrasco, moreover, had ever paid common taxes, nor practiced unclean labor. Finally, the probanza certified the family’s racial cleanliness: none “had ever mixed with plebeians, [and all were] untainted by the inferior idolatrous races of laborers, blacks, mulattos, and Hebrews.”⁸⁵

Thus did the three families structure their claims to the chaplaincy of Etla, and the promotor fiscal confronted the task of judging the relative eligibility of each based on these arguments. The López Pachecos were “pure Indians” in the quantitative sense and claimed the honor of having served in town government, but they had no historical lineage to speak of. The Hernándezes were likewise “pure Indians” and related to the pious founders of the chantry, but the father had sullied his honor by selling bacon and lard in public. The Carrascos boasted of an Old Christian lineage going back two centuries, but suspicions of African ancestors cast shadows on their family tree. How did these various factors—religious, racial, and social—weigh against one another?

The fiscal’s opinion is rich with information.⁸⁶ To begin, he accepted both the Hernándezes’ and the López Pachecos’ claims to being “pure Indians” on account of their racial status as full-blooded Zapotecs. However, he reasoned, this was not sufficient, because as manual laborers

both families exhibited the markers of low, and therefore impure, social status. Thus, while perhaps “pure Indians,” they were not “pure” Indians.

Next, the fiscal’s assessment of the Carrascos’ *limpieza* demands close attention, as it was highly nuanced, perhaps even contorted, in revealing ways. The most important issue was the racial status of Joseph Cassiano Carrasco’s grandmother, the (alleged) mulata María del Carmen Badillo. According to the fiscal, if the accusation were true it would have amounted to a perpetual “stain” (*mancha*) on the family, regardless of their long and storied Old Christian ancestry, nullifying their purity and disqualifying them for the chaplaincy. The Carrascos’ *probanza* could not resolve this suspicion, as it only attested to their ancestry to 1734. And as María del Carmen had been a foundling of unknown parentage, her “true” status remained a mystery.

Ultimately, this uncertainty benefitted the Carrascos. Citing legal precedent, the fiscal ruled that, absent proof to the contrary, he was forced to give her the benefit of the doubt.⁸⁷ While noting that he personally believed her to be a “white mulata,” he conceded that he was obliged to consider her “Spanish” for the purposes of the case. In this way, María del Carmen Badillo was posthumously declared “Spanish” in an ecclesiastical court.

Such a ruling, however, gave rise to yet another complication: if the woman had been Spanish, then Joseph Cassiano Carrasco’s father was mestizo by definition. While this perhaps would not be an issue in another context, the fiscal had already ruled the full-bloodedness of the other two “pure Indian” families as points in their favor. Would mestizaje disqualify the Carrascos’ candidacy on the grounds that they were not “pure Indians?” Or was quantitative racial purity less important than the qualitative Old Christian, religious purity indicated in the Carrascos’ *probanza*?

The fiscal’s (somewhat contorted) resolution split the difference between racial and religious *limpieza*. Conceding that don Diego and doña Josefa’s purity clause probably referred to full-blooded Indianness, he nonetheless rejected that as the ultimate metric of *limpieza*:

[We should] consider [Joseph Cassiano Carrasco’s father] as a noble and *hidalgo* mestizo. . . . And although [the law] explicitly prevents mestizos from being caciques . . . this does not extend to . . . the [broader] quality of nobility. . . .

A cacique simply cannot lower his condition by marrying a Spanish woman . . . [and therefore mestizos] do not lose their denomination and reputation as caciques. . . .

[Don Joseph having proved his nobility], the only thing that remains is the stipulation [that the chaplains be] pure Indians—but read in context, the founders demanded this purity to exclude the other castas that would effectively stain the blood of an Indian, but we cannot believe that they wished to exclude the blood of Spaniards, which does not transmit such a stain.⁸⁸

In the end, Joseph Cassiano Carrasco was awarded the chaplaincy. Nonetheless, while accepting that the Carrascos had proven their Old Christian ancestry, the fiscal could only label them

“pure” through tangled reasoning and a legal technicality. The family’s purity, it seems, hinged not on any definable, intrinsic quality but rather on the ability of an ecclesiastical judge to retroactively declare a long-deceased orphan to be functionally “Spanish,” as well as to arbitrarily apply and ignore certain criteria differently among the various litigants. That is, while the fiscal had considered the López Pachecos and the Hernándezes “pure” as full-blooded Indians, the bishop argued that the Carrascos, while effectively mestizos, were nonetheless pure, simply because their ancestry remained unsullied by Africans.

CONCLUSION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Considering its many guises, *limpieza* in New Spain may have been like pornography: whether or not you could define it, you knew it when you saw it. Yet regardless of its eclecticism, the discourse remained one of exclusion. Purity was not available to just anybody, and its instability favored the shrewd rather than the most “deserving.” The discourse of blood purity most often operated in the negative, as claimants sought to prove not necessarily purity but their lack of impurities. The strongest of impurities was clearly the presence of African ancestors, the taint of which was one of the few consistent disqualifiers in the ideological universe of *limpieza* in America. There were racial, social, and theological reasons for this. As the influential Jesuit of Puebla Andrés de Arce y Miranda argued in 1766, “blacks and mulattos” were “vastly inferior to [the Indians] in purity of blood [because they] fall under the curse of the children of Ham.”⁸⁹ Thus, in the American sphere, Africans replaced Jews as the archetypal “unclean race”: those whose inferiority had biblical origins and therefore whose presence in one’s family tree justified exclusion and discrimination.⁹⁰

A second disqualifier was the generic stain of social “infamy.” While infamy initially indicated those whose ancestors had been targeted by the Inquisition, it eventually came to encompass any number of dishonorable social qualities.⁹¹ The most prominent, of course, was the shame of “vulgar and vile” labor, such as pork vending. While the letter of the law did not regard commonness as impurity, officials nonetheless frequently interpreted it as such, and native litigants often conflated the two in their disputes.

Finally, a third (and most contingent) disqualifier was the anti-mestizo, quantitative concern with racial purity, as asserted, for example, by the nuns of Corpus Christi. Unlike social and religious purity, however, this version of *limpieza* arose less from the vagaries of Spanish laws and more from late colonial efforts among native elites to “re-Indianize” their own institutions.⁹² Part of this effort involved constructing and enforcing parallel hierarchies of purity and authenticity, mirroring those of the Spanish realm, which privileged native elites vis-à-vis “outsiders” such as commoners and mestizos. Thus, while Spaniards generally did not equate *mestizaje* with impurity, caciques sometimes advocated standards of racial purity when policing their own institutions. For this reason, one suspects that when doña Josefa and don Diego called for “pure and noble Indians” to administer their chantry, they did not have mestizos in mind. However, once Spanish authorities assumed responsibility for the chantry, they applied a different metric of purity: in the opinion of the (Spanish) fiscal, Spanish blood simply could not lower the condition of an Indian.⁹³

In conclusion, the discourse of blood purity offered native nobles in New Spain a blunt and inexact, yet often powerful rhetorical weapon. As *limpieza* connoted many of the cultural, racial,

and social conceits of the early modern Spanish world, it operated as a mostly empty vessel into which caciques—but generally not Africans, mulattos, or native commoners—could pour convenient, advantageous meanings. It also allowed nobles, in the mixed-race environment of late colonial Mexico, to deflect Spanish suspicions of idolatry and inferiority onto other groups. By declaring themselves Old Christians with unstained ancestries, they exploited the timeless rhetorical gambit of neutralizing one prejudice by appealing to another. The pitfalls were numerous, however. While some savvy lords, such as don Pedro of Tequixquiac or the Carrascos of Etla, successfully harnessed the discourse, the breadth and vagueness of its American incarnation left others relatively more vulnerable to charges of impurity. But regardless of success or failure, by appropriating the language of *limpieza*, Mexico's native nobility helped shape the meaning of purity itself.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Probanzas reenacted, in a bureaucratic-textual form, the medieval ritual wherein a vassal proclaimed his usefulness to his lord in return for titles and favors. See Woodrow Borah, *Justice by Insurance: The General Indian Court of Colonial Mexico and the Legal Aides of the Half-Real* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), 443; and John F. Chuchiak IV, "Toward a Regional Definition of Idolatry: Reexamining Idolatry Trials in the '*Relaciones de méritos*' and Their Role in Defining the Concept of '*Idolatría*' in Colonial Yucatán, 1570–1780," *Journal of Early Modern History* 6, no. 2 (2002): 142–49.
2. Honors and privileges of Pedro Ramírez Vázquez of Tequixquiac, Mexico City, 1699, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter cited as AGN), Indios 34, exp. 126, ff. 129 – 30. This and all subsequent translations from the Spanish are my own.
3. David Nirenberg points to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries as the moment when Iberian Christians began regularly emphasizing the notion that Christian legitimacy could be "natural," something inherent to blood and lineage. This contrasted with the older antitribalism of St. Paul, who negated genealogy by understanding conversion as a spiritual transformation in which the neophyte was "born again" in Christ. Thus, while there are significant differences between the modern understanding of "race" and the religious distinctions of the era, I agree with María Elena Martínez, who argues that race is nonetheless the most useful way to conceptualize the operating principles of *limpieza*. "The categories of Old and New Christian," she writes, "were built on binaries, including purity/impurity, beauty/ugliness (*crístianos lindos*), and rationality/sensuality, that are all-too-familiar tropes of racial discourse." See Nirenberg, "Enmity and Assimilation: Jews, Christians, and Converts in Medieval Spain," *Common Knowledge* 9, no. 1 (2003): 137–55;

- and Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008), quote p. 59; see also 142–70.
4. See Teofilo Ruiz, “Discourses of Blood and Kinship in Late Medieval and Early Modern Castile,” article forthcoming in the proceedings of the Conference on Kinship and Blood (Frankfurt, 16–18 Apr. 2009).
 5. Honors and privileges of Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, ff. 129–30.
 6. See Stafford Poole, “The Politics of *Limpieza de Sangre*: Juan de Ovando and His Circle in the Reign of Philip II,” *The Americas* 55, no. 3 (1999): 359 – 89; Francisco Morales, *Ethnic and Social Background of the Franciscan Friars in Seventeenth-Century Mexico* (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1973).
 7. It is true that one theory held that America’s native peoples had descended from the ancient Hebrews. This notion survived in both Spanish and British America well into the nineteenth century. And while some did try to reify this imagined Hebrew-Indian connection, for example, by referring to indigenous religious leaders as “rabbis,” this discourse addressed tribal ancestry rather than theology and is mostly unrelated to the question of blood purity. If the Indians were Israelites, they had long since forgotten that religion, and in any event, they had never had the opportunity to accept or reject the Christian gospel prior to the Spanish conquest. See David Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), esp. 195–203; Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 208 – 14; and Rochelle Raineri Zuck, “‘There Was Power in His Words’: Samson Occom, William Apess, and the Development of the American Indian Jeremiad” (delivered at the annual conference of the American Society for Ethnohistory, New Orleans, LA, 3 Oct. 2009).
 8. Honors and privileges of Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, ff. 129–30.
 9. James Lockhart suggests “receptivity” as another way to measure the extent to which, absent direct force, colonized native peoples adopted or rejected European practices and material culture. Broadly speaking, locals were more “receptive” to those things that were clearly and immediately useful within local economic and political contexts. See Lockhart, *Of Things of the Indies: Essays Old and New in Early Latin American History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), 304–32.
 10. In early modern Castile, argues Teofilo Ruiz, “social mobility and a self-fashioning of one’s lineage were possible if one had wealth, determination, and a good lawyer.” Ruiz, “Discourses of Blood and Kinship,” 25.
 11. The classic legal history of limpieza is Albert A. Sicroff, *Los estatutos de limpieza de sangre: Controversias entre los siglos XV y XVII*, trans. Mauro Armiño (Madrid: Taurus, 1985).
 12. See Henry Kamen, *Philip of Spain* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), 33–34, 83–84; Poole, “The Politics of *Limpieza de Sangre*,” 364 – 68; and John Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469–1716* (London: Penguin, 2002), 221–22.
 13. See Guillermo Figuera, *La formación del clero indígena en la historia eclesiástica de América, 1500 – 1810* (Caracas: Archivo General de la Nación, 1965), 311–59, quote from 354. Similarly, according to Richard Konetzke, “limpieza de sangre [in America] became a means for maintaining and ensuring the privileges of the dominant European class.” Konetzke, “El mestizaje y su influencia en el desarrollo de la población hispano-americana durante la época colonial,” *Revista de Indias* 7, nos. 23–24 (1946): 229. See also Norma Angélica Castillo Palma, “Los estatutos de ‘pureza de sangre’ como medio de acceso a los

- élites: El caso de la región de Puebla,” in *Círculos de poder en la Nueva España*, ed. Carmen Castañeda (Mexico: CIESAS, 1998), 105–29.
14. Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*; and Martínez, “Interrogating Blood Lines: ‘Purity of Blood,’ the Inquisition, and Casta Categories,” in *Religion in New Spain*, ed. Susan Schroeder and Stafford Poole (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2007), 196–217.
 15. Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 91–102.
 16. “Indigenous groups,” argues James Lockhart, “were free to litigate in their own interest like any other individuals or groups,” and gained much legal expertise in the process. Lockhart, *Of Things of the Indies*, 318.
 17. Many scholars have addressed the legal efforts of indigenous individuals and communities as political and social strategies. See for example (in alphabetical order) R. Jovita Baber, “Categories, Self-Representation, and the Construction of the *Indios*,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (2009): 1, 27–41; Borah, *Justice by Insurance*; Susan Kellogg and Matthew Restall, eds., *Dead Giveaways: Indigenous Testaments of Colonial Mesoamerica and the Andes* (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 1998); Brian P. Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008); and Stephanie Wood, *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2003). For the legal engagement of Peru’s native peoples, see Steve J. Stern, *Peru’s Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 114–37; and José Carlos de la Puente Luna, *Los curacas hechiceros de Jauja: Batallas mágicas y legales en el Perú colonial* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica, 2007).
 18. Owensby, *Empire of Law*, 302.
 19. This is part of what Steve Stern calls (regarding colonial Peru) “the tragedy of success,” in which the relative success (in Hispanic terms) of a small indigenous elite helped consolidate the psychosocial grip of colonialism: “the Indians’ struggle for Spanish justice . . . weakened their capacity to mount a radical challenge to the colonial structure, and thereby contributed to the dominance of the colonial elite.” Stern, *Peru’s Indian Peoples*, 115, 158–85.
 20. See Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2008); Barbara Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 68–76; Jeremy Mumford, “Aristocracy on the Auction Block: Race, Lords, and the Perpetuity Controversy of Sixteenth-Century Peru,” in *Imperial Subjects: Race and Identity in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Andrew B. Fisher and Matthew D. O’Hara (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2009), 39–59 (quote p. 54); Robert Haskett, “Living in Two Worlds: Continuity and Change among Cuernavaca’s Colonial Indigenous Ruling Elite,” *Ethnohistory* 35, no. 1 (1988): 34–59; Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1991); and Haskett, “Paper Shields: The Ideology of Coats of Arms in Colonial Mexican Primordial Titles,” *Ethnohistory* 43, no. 1 (1996): 99–126.
 21. Some seventeenth-century theologians distinguished between ex-pagans and converts from Judaism and Islam: after three generations, the former could be pure, while the latter could not. See Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 203–4; and Morales, *Ethnic and Social Background of the Franciscan Friars*, 15–17.
 22. According to the testament of Queen Isabel (1504) and subsequent laws in the 1520s and 1530s, Indians retained their “natural liberty” under Spanish rule and could not be enslaved

- without just cause. Meanwhile, the papal bull *Sublimus Dei* (1537) denied that America's native peoples were irrational, subhuman, or otherwise incapable of becoming Christians. See the *Recopilación de las leyes de las Indias*, in the Archivo Digital de la Legislación en el Perú, Congreso de la República del Perú, <http://www.congreso.gob.pe/ntley/LeyIndiaP.htm> (accessed 10 June 2010), Book VI, Title X, Laws 1–2, and Book VI, Title II, Law 1; and Pope Paul III, *Sublimus Dei*, 2 June 1537, Papal Encyclicals Online, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul03/p3subli.htm> (accessed 10 June 2010).
23. Tercer Concilio Mexicano, 1585 (CD-ROM, Seminario de Historia Política y Económica de la Iglesia en México, 2004), Book I, Title IV, Law 3.
 24. *Recopilación de las leyes de las Indias*, Book I, Title I, Law 7.
 25. Alonso de Peña Montenegro, *Itinerario para parochos de indios*, vol. 2 (Amberes: Henrico y Cornelio Verdussen, 1698), 221. Peña Montenegro (1597–1688) was a Jesuit from Galicia and a bishop of Quito.
 26. See Figuera, *La formación del clero indígena*, 366; and Margarita Menegus Bornemann and Rodolfo Aguirre Salvador, *Los indios, el sacerdocio, y la universidad en la Nueva España, siglos XVI – XVIII* (Mexico: Plaza y Valdés, 2006), 103 – 7; Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 204–6; and Matthew O'Hara, *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion, and Politics in Mexico, 1749–1857* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2010), 57–71.
 27. Richard Konetzke, ed., *Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de Hispanoamérica*, vol. 2, tom. 2 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1958), 759 – 64, and vol. 3, tom. 1 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1962), 15.
 28. Royal decree of Charles II, 26 Mar. 1697, AGN, Reales Cédulas 27, exp. 114. Previously, the crown had favored maintaining strict distinctions between hidalgos and caciques; in 1538, for example, Charles V prohibited native lords from assuming any titles beyond *caciques* and *principales*. *Recopilación de las leyes de las Indias*, Book VI, Title VII, Law 5.
 29. Royal decree of Charles III, 11 Sept. 1766, AGN, Reales Cédulas 89, exp. 42.
 30. An extensive compilation of the early legal efforts of the first postconquest generations of central Mexico's high nobility (between roughly 1530 and 1570) is Emma Pérez-Rocha and Rafael Tena, eds., *La nobleza indígena del centro de México después de la conquista* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2000).
 31. Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 204–5; Morales, *Ethnic and Social Background*, 38–40. Morales notes that native families with strong business and social connections, almost always nobles, could frequently circumvent the restrictions on native participation in the elite Spanish realm.
 32. "Tula," in *Cacicazgos y nobiliario indígena de la Nueva España*, ed. Guillermo S. Fernández de Recas (Mexico City: Instituto Bibliográfico Mexicano, 1961), 232–33. On page 232, the date is given as 18 Feb. 1723, but this is a typographical error, as elsewhere in the transcription it is clear that the petition was submitted on 18 Feb. 1623.
 33. See Paula López Caballero, *Los títulos primordiales del centro de México* (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2003); Enrique Florescano, *La historia de las historias de la nación mexicana* (Mexico: Taurus, 2002), 215; Stephanie Wood, "The Social vs. Legal Context of Nahuatl *Títulos*," in *Native Traditions in the Postconquest World*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone and Tom Cummins (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998), 201–32; Robert Haskett, *Visions of Paradise: Primordial Titles and Mesoamerican History in Cuernavaca*

- (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2005); and James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), 410–18.
34. Two published collections of probanzas by native students and clerics are Celia Medina M. de Martínez, “Indios caciques graduados de bachiller en la universidad,” *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 10, nos. 1–2 (1969): 5 – 50; and Menegus and Aguirre, *Los indios, el sacerdocio, y la universidad*, 233–93.
 35. “Indios caciques graduados de bachiller en la universidad,” 29.
 36. “Cacicazgo de Singuilucan,” in *Cacicazgos y nobiliario de la Nueva España*, 251–52.
 37. See for example Information on the Life and Habits of don Pablo Eusebio de Luna, Mexico City, 1772, AGN, Bienes Nacionales (hereafter cited as BN) 320, exp. 18; and Information on the Life and Habits of don José Antonio Canuto Hernández, Mexico City, 1773, AGN, BN 467, exp. 15.
 38. “Salazar Family Papers,” Manuscript Collections, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, f. 74.
 39. According to the seventeenth-century Tlaxcalan annalist don Juan Buenaventura Zapata y Mendoza, Tlahuicole was captured and sacrificed in Mexico in 1517. Zapata y Mendoza, *Historia cronológica de la noble ciudad de Tlaxcala*, trans. Luis Reyes García and Andrea Martínez Baracs (Tlaxcala: Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, 1995), 131. See also Lewis Spence, *The Myths of Mexico and Peru* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1995), 136–38.
 40. “Salazar Family Papers,” f. 47.
 41. See Magnus Mörner and Charles Gibson, “Diego Muñoz Camargo and the Segregation Policy of the Spanish Crown,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 42, no. 4 (1962): 558–68.
 42. Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest*, 384 – 85; and James D. Riley, “Priests and the Provincial Social Order in Tlaxcala, 1650–1792,” in *Religion in New Spain*, ed. Susan Schroeder and Stafford Poole (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2007), 317–19.
 43. *Recopilación de las leyes de las Indias*, Book VI, Title VII, Law 6.
 44. Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 4, 145 – 57; Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest*, 384. Kevin Terraciano, *The Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca: Ñudzahui History, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), 195 – 96.
 45. Haskett, “Living in Two Worlds,” 40–42.
 46. Zapata y Mendoza, *Historia cronológica de la noble ciudad de Tlaxcala*, 623.
 47. *Ibid.*, 211. For more on don Manuel’s treatment of mestizaje, see David Edward Webb, “‘Historia Chronológica de la Noble Ciudad de Tlaxcala’: A Study of Juan Buenaventura Zapata y Mendoza’s Nahua Annals from Seventeenth-Century Mexico” (PhD diss., UCLA, 2005), 81; and Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest*, 384. Such anti-mestizo sentiment among caciques was often colored by frustration over the sexual contact between Spanish men and native women. Perhaps the most famous and impassioned example is that of don Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, a Quechua nobleman from Peru at the turn of the seventeenth century. Guaman Poma decried Spanish sexual exploitation of native women, as they subsequently “became great whores (*putas*),” unsuitable for marriage to native men. “And this way,” he lamented, “the Indians do not multiply in this realm, only mestizos and mestizas, and there is no remedy.” See Guaman Poma, *Nueva crónica y buen gobierno*, 1615, Royal Library of Denmark, <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/titlepage/en/text/?open=id2971047> (accessed 21 Feb. 2010), 579.

48. Ann Miriam Gallagher, M.S.M, "The Indian Nuns of Mexico City's *Monasterio* of Corpus Christi, 1724–1821," in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1978), 154–58.
49. Ibid., 152; see also Monica Díaz, "The Indigenous Nuns of Corpus Christi: Race and Spirituality," in *Religion in New Spain*, ed. Susan Schroeder and Stafford Poole (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2007), 179–92.
50. See Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008), 256 – 64.
51. Gallagher, "Indian Nuns," 155, 158 – 59.
52. Royal decree of 12 Oct, 1745, Madrid, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain (hereafter AGI), Mexico 685, ff. 37–40.
53. Gallagher, "Indian Nuns," 155. Teo Ruiz tells lively stories of conversos in early modern Spain who "purified" their ancestries with deft and tenacious legal action. Ruiz, "Discourses of Blood and Kinship."
54. Information of don Antonio de Sandoval, Mexico, 1748, AGI, Mexico 685, f. 90.
55. Whereas eighteenth-century church officials sometimes allowed for indigenous nuns, who were not responsible for keeping the doctrine, they were less open to male religious due to lingering doubts about intellectual aptitude and religious backsliding. See O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*, 58–59, 80–87.
56. *Constituciones de la Real y Pontificia Universidad de México*, 2nd ed. (Mexico: Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1775), 132.
57. See Figuera, *La formación del clero indígena*, 324–53.
58. Probanza of Leandro Sánchez, Mexico, 1701, transcribed in Menegus and Aguirre, *Los indios, el sacerdocio, y la universidad*, 78–79 n. 62.
59. Judgment of Doctor Nuño Núñez de Villavicencio Regarding the Social Quality of the Family of Bachelor in Canons José Antonio Jiménez Frías, Indian, Mexico City, 1770, transcribed in Menegus and Aguirre, *Los indios, el sacerdocio, y la universidad*, 260.
60. Exemptions and Privileges of doña Úrsula García Cortés y Moctezuma, Puebla, 1751, AGN, General de Parte 37, exp. 71, ff. 92–92v.
61. "Salazar Family Papers," f. 83.
62. Ibid., ff. 87–88.
63. David Niremberg, "Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *Past and Present* 174 (2002): 3–41.
64. Menegus and Aguirre, *Los indios, el sacerdocio, y la universidad*, 119.
65. Ibid., 86, 123 – 24.
66. Information of Teodoro Xallallatzin de Villegas, 1711, "Indios caciques graduados de bachiller en la universidad," 38–42, quote p. 39.
67. Information of Miguel Aparicio Santos y Salazar, 1711, "Indios caciques graduados de bachiller," 36.
68. Merits and Services of Gregorio de la Corona, Mexico, 1718, transcribed in Menegus and Aguirre, *Los indios, el sacerdocio, y la universidad*, 288.
69. See Teofilo Ruiz, *Spanish Society, 1400 – 1600* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 68 – 75.
70. Petition and Probanza of Nicolás Hernández and Consort, Mexico City, 1752, AGN, Vínculos y Mayorazgos 241, exp. 1, ff. 8–13, ff. 21–22; quote f. 18.
71. Ibid., f. 26.

72. Ibid., ff. 20, 38.
73. In his study of cacique intrigue in the colonial Andes, José Carlos de la Puente Luna tells of rival lords who, seeking to consolidate local authority, harnessed the power of the Spanish state with strategic accusations of witchcraft, idolatry, and sexual improprieties. However, as the author argues, “accusations with political ends . . . were powerful weapons, but were double-edged.” See de la Puente Luna, *Los curacas hechiceros de Jauja*, esp. 167–96, quote p. 196.
74. Chantries flourished in Spanish America in part because secular and ecclesiastical authorities saw them as a means to both expand the tax base (by obviating the need for priests to extract income from parishioners) as well as provide revenue for the church. William Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996), 126–30; and Asunción Lavrin, “The Role of Nunneries in the Economy of New Spain in the Eighteenth Century,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no. 4 (1966): 376–77. For the medieval origins of chantries, see Teofilo Ruiz, *From Heaven to Earth: The Reordering of Castillian Society, 1150 – 1350* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), 44 – 57.
75. Founding Charter of the Chantry of Etlá, Oaxaca, 1722, AGN BN 553, exp. 8, ff. 2–2v.
76. Beneficiaries were usually the sons or heirs of chantry founders, who established them to preserve wealth within the family. While the more prestigious chaplaincies were confirmed and regulated by the diocese, most were laic, wherein the founders stipulated who was eligible to be chaplain. See Gisela von Wobeser, *Vida eterna y preocupaciones terrenales: Las capellanías de misas en la Nueva España, 1700 – 1821* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1999); Wobeser, “La función social y económica de las capellanías de misas en la Nueva España del siglo XVIII,” *Estudios de historia novohispana* 16 (1996): 120–22, 133–35.
77. Founding Charter of the Chantry of Etlá, Oaxaca, 1722, AGN BN 553, exp. 8, ff. 34–35v.
78. Wobeser, “La función social y económica de las capellanías,” 123. Wobeser cites a contemporaneous chaplaincy of the same amount. The caciques of San Juan Guelache pledged the proceeds from nine small wheat fields and a share of a mill to the chantry. This would have amounted to well under half of their overall estate at the time, which William Taylor estimates at over two hundred acres, including three houses, five house plots, a one-half interest in a mill, and 32 pieces of arable land scattered to the east and northeast of the Villa de Etlá. Most of these lands were valuable, fertile, and irrigated, of varying sizes ranging from very small to modestly large (around nine acres). These amounts, moreover, do not include *cacicazgo* rights, which doña Josefa may have maintained back in Cuilapan. William Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1972), 63, 168.
79. Wobeser, “La función social y económica de las capellanías,” 124.
80. Statement of don Lázaro López Pacheco, Oaxaca, 1772, AGN, BN 553, exp. 8, ff. 53–53v.
81. Statement of don Joseph Antonio Hernández, Oaxaca, 1772, AGI, BN 553, exp. 8, ff. 83–84v.
82. See Owensby, *Empire of Law*, 51 – 72; and Borah, *Justice by Insurance*, 144–48.
83. Probanza of don Julián Carrasco, Oaxaca, 1734, AGN, BN 553, exp. 8, f. 77.
84. Ibid., 75. The probanza tells of how, in 1525 – 26, don Julián Xsiqueguezagaba’a and his brother, don Clemente, personally funded and led one thousand warriors from Etlá in support of the Spanish conquest of Suchitepec.

85. Ibid., 70–71.
86. Judgment of the Promotor Fiscal of Oaxaca, Oaxaca, 1775, AGN, BN 553, exp. 8, ff. 156v–63v.
87. Spanish law extended a “presumption of innocence” in determining where foundlings and orphans of unknown parentage (*expósitos*) fit in social hierarchies normally determined by birth. For example, a decree of 1794 confirmed that, absent other information, foundlings were to be presumed pure and unstained, as common vassals of the Spanish Crown in good standing (*hombres buenos del estado llano general*), but also that Christian charity required that they be spared, like *hidalgos*, from “common” punishments such as public shaming. If there was a chance that the child had been born to a noble family, they were to be given the benefit of the doubt and presumed to be *hidalgos*. Royal decree of 19 Feb. 1794, Aranjuez, AGN, Tributos 55, exp. 12, 332–34. See also Guillermo Floris Margadant, “La familia en el derecho novohispano,” in *Familias novohispanas, siglo XVI a XIX*, ed. Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpurú (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1991), 51.
88. Judgment of the Promotor Fiscal of Oaxaca, Oaxaca, 1775, AGN, BN 553, exp. 8, ff. 161–63.
89. “Parecer del Sr. Dr. D. Andrés de Arze y Miranda,” in *El ayudante de cura, instruido en el porte a que le obliga su dignidad . . .* (Puebla: Colegio Real de San Ignacio de la Puebla, 1766).
90. Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 167–70, 242–62.
91. Stafford Poole, *Juan de Ovando: Governing the Spanish Empire in the Reign of Philip II* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 19; see also Poole, “The Politics of *Limpieza de Sangre*,” 369, 388.
92. Matthew O’Hara describes “re-Indianization,” broadly, as one reaction against late colonial Spanish efforts to dismantle Indian-only institutions (such as parishes and confraternities), which they thought of as their own. O’Hara, *A Flock Divided*, esp. 57–88.
93. This situation is perhaps analogous to that described by Mark Thurner among the indigenous “republicans” of nineteenth-century Peru, who repackaged colonial-era rights and privileges in liberal guises so as to appeal to postcolonial creole authorities. In both cases, native leaders spoke in the dominant contemporary languages of power, a semantic parallel that can mask the reality of their highly localized, idiosyncratic concerns. See Thurner, *From Two Republics to One Divided: Contradictions of Postcolonial Nationmaking in Andean Peru* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), 42–44, 149–50.