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## ARTICULATING SPACE: THE FREE-COLORED MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT IN COLONIAL MEXICO FROM THE CONQUEST TO INDEPENDENCE

by Ben Vinson III

### Introduction:

#### Questioning the Question of Non-White Military Service in Colonial Mexico

At the close of the seventeenth century, even with Spain feeling the heat of war and with streams of pirate raids still punishing the coastlines of the crown's New World holdings, Spanish bureaucrats cringed when considering the prospect of using black troops to defend their possessions. Francisco de Seijas y Lobera, the former *alcalde mayor* (district governor) of Tacuba, a distinguished member of the Spanish gentry, a scientist, merchant, and a traveler, seemed to capture the spirit of the times in his fourteen-volume history of the Spanish kingdom. Written between 1702–1704 as a counseling guide for the new monarch, Philip V, Seijas dedicated an entire tome exclusively to Mexican affairs. Within, he described in detail the existing military landscape, the scope of enemy threats, the parameters of existing defenses, and most importantly, he offered a series of recommendations for improving the mechanisms for protecting the crown's borders. During times of emergency, Seijas suggested that Mexico could probably count upon the military services of 200,000 coastal and frontier defenders. His estimates tallied that a full 175,000 of these would be drawn from the *negro*, *mulatto*, *pardo*, Indian, and *mestizo* racial classes.

But in his enthusiasm for advocating the expansion of the military to include non-whites, Seijas also revealed certain prejudices that seemed characteristic of his times. Sure, *negros* and *mulattos* (i.e. free-colored) could be called upon to serve; however, the terms of their service had to be constricted:

With respect to the formation of the two companies, considering (as one should) that the said *negros* and *mulatos* cannot be allowed to use swords and daggers, sharp weapons, or firearms of any type . . . it is not convenient or safe for the service of the king that the tremendous number of *negro* and *mulatto* rabble that

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exist (sic) in the Indies use such weapons. This is because they could use these arms to revolt. Moreover, there is no just or political reason why these people, who are of the same species as slaves (being their offspring), should enjoy the same privileges (*preeminencias*) as Spaniards. For these reasons, and because [*negros* and *mulattos*] have already been involved in many uprisings and tumults in the Indies, it is best for the crown that free *negros* and *mulattos* not be permitted to use offensive or defensive weapons.<sup>1</sup>

Seijas proceeded to state that only salaried, full-time free-colored soldiers should be allowed to carry such armament. By contrast, the bulk of his proposed *negro* and *mulatto* militia forces, including mounted lancers, were to wield long spears and machetes, weapons that were light, easy to handle, and that could inflict harm on the enemy while minimizing the threat to the colony itself. Junior and senior officers within these militia units might be permitted to carry daggers, swords, and pistols, but mainly to demarcate differences in rank and to inspire their loyalty to the Spanish crown.

I provide Seijas' comments here because they are emblematic of larger trends that permeated the colonial world. They reveal, in stark terms, the predicament of partial citizenship experienced by colonials of color. On the one hand, from as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *mulattos*, *negros*, and *pardos* were processed in the colonial social framework as *gente de razón* (rational people). They were distinguishable from Indians in this respect and placed on par with Spaniards in that they were considered "responsible" for their own actions in ways that could be upheld in colonial courts. In other words, whites, *mestizos*, and free-colored participated in the same colonial legal sphere, one that was, in many ways, distinct from Indians.<sup>2</sup> But on the other hand, the shadow of slavery followed the *mulatto* and *negro* population into freedom. Their heritage caused them to be described simultaneously as *gente de razón* and *gente vil* (base folk), which referenced a supposedly innate set of vices that were inextricably linked to their African bloodlines. Miscegenation with white colonists theoretically extended the possibility of "improving" these "malicious" traits by blending them with the benefits of Spanish "whiteness." However, more often than not, racial mixture was believed to accentuate the worst racial qualities. Hence, under the rubric of the caste system that gradually evolved over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, free-colored were routinely described as haughty, cruel, shiftless, prone to licentiousness, and malevolent.<sup>3</sup> Partly in an effort to contain these vices and to prevent them from "contaminating" the indigenous population, restrictive legislation was decreed, resulting in a deeper, formal articulation of the Spanish colonial caste system.

As the differences between black and white, free-colored, and *mestizo* began to sediment, at the same time the distinctions between them began to blur.<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon of partial citizenship rested on the ambiguity produced by questions over the proper station of peoples of color. The military was one arena where the seemingly contradictory elements of caste clarity and caste doubt played themselves out. Beginning in medieval times and extending into the sixteenth century, military service, particularly mounted duty, was construed as a marker of nobility.<sup>5</sup> On a more

abstract level, bearing arms in the name of the king was one of the greatest tangible expressions of Spanishness that one could project. Implicit in the act of dressing for combat was expressing interest in defending the colonial order. That meant upholding the principles of conquest, supporting the caste framework of racial dominance with its inherent favoring of white privilege, and sanctioning colonial modes of exploitative labor (including slavery). Yet at the same time, the act of having non-whites participating in the military establishment threw these issues into question. To what extent were free-colored actions reflective of their commitment to the colonial regime, and to what extent were they not? Did their fragmented, partial citizenship produce fragmented and partial loyalties? How did their participation in the military alter its mission and objectives? How did their participation affect and shape the policies of the colonial state? What were the types of interactions that existed between the state and free-colored military actors?

This article takes these concerns as a point of departure for examining the way free-colored became integrated into the colonial Mexican military establishment. But it is important to point out that the focus here is on militia duty, not regular army service. This is a significant distinction. Militias represented localized, provincial expressions of a broader military apparatus. In other words, some of the objectives of imperial service that existed within the regular army, and that often went unquestioned by regular soldiers, became re-worked, filtered, and re-articulated at the local level. Militiamen brought to the military specific understandings of the functioning of the state that emanated from their provincial experiences. As militiamen, they projected their local worlds unto imperial affairs. Regular troops, arguably, represented more concrete instruments of imperial control. As a consequence, the militia probably wielded more social power. Through its chain of command, the militiamen held the attention of high officials such as the viceroy, the *auditor de guerra* (senior military justice official), and top administrators in the treasury department. Militiamen, even those at the lowest levels, could utilize both the symbolic and material support they acquired from senior crown bureaucrats to frontally contest the policies of local and regional officials. They could also use their political capital to fortify patron-client relationships, to secure privileges for their townships (such as fishing and land rights), to cement racial and regional identities, and even to undermine the structures of racial privilege by challenging the meaning of caste legislation. For instance, matters such as tribute policy could be re-examined in context of the services that free-colored rendered in uniform. In more dramatic instances (as occurred in seventeenth and eighteenth century Cuba), militia service could transform the meaning of slavery itself, providing access for people in bondage to become office-holding *vecinos* (landed citizens or residents) and therefore, eligible for participation in the political life of colonial affairs.<sup>6</sup> The history offered below provides some flashpoints of duty, tracing a number of the key moments in the evolution of the colonial Mexican free-colored militia institution, while examining some of its concrete effects on the colony's *pardos*, *mulattos*, and *negros*. At various points throughout the article, the interplay between the militiamen's local (sometimes racialized) understanding of service and the broader imperial perspective of duty will be highlighted.

### Free-Colored Military Dynamics During the First Colonial Century

To understand the roots of the Mexican free-colored militia establishment, we must begin by assessing black military duties during the era of conquest of Mexico (1519–1521). As in numerous expeditions of exploration throughout the Caribbean and the mainland Americas, blacks served as both armed and unarmed auxiliaries to the units of white Spaniards.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the best known of these black fortune seekers in Mexico was Juan Garrido, the personal attendant to Hernán Cortés, a combatant in the siege of Tenochtitlán (Mexico City) and an explorer who traveled with the Spaniards to Baja California in search of gold.<sup>8</sup> There were others, of course. But apart from Francisco de Eguía (who allegedly introduced smallpox) and Juan Cortés (Hernán Cortés' personal slave), their names do not survive in the historical record, nor do we know their full number. What we can assert confidently is that there were probably more black auxiliaries involved in the secondary conquests that radiated outward from Mexico City than who participated in the initial victory over the Aztecs. Indeed, from the 1520s through the 1530s, blacks remained militarily active, especially in the northern regions. Matthew Restall has speculated that probably every notable campaign north of Mexico City relied upon a black contingent. Certainly, Francisco Ibarra counted upon their services in his forays northward in the 1520s, and nearly three hundred blacks joined Cortés in his mission to Baja California in the 1530s. From 1528–1536, Estebanillo, or "Black Stephen," accompanied Cabeza de Vaca in his journey from Florida to Mexico City and played an important role in the exploration of New Mexico. Still, other blacks sallied southward. Sebastian Toral, a slave, assisted Francisco Montejo in his futile attempts to take the Yucatan in the 1530s. By the 1540s, black auxiliaries were found in the Yucatan in larger proportions, rolling back the Maya with greater success.<sup>9</sup>

The responsibilities of blacks during the Conquest era did not readily translate into more formal military status and duties afterwards. Already, by the 1530s, serious resistance began to develop towards regularizing black military service. Much of this had to do with the outbreak of episodes of free-black belligerence and slave resistance. Runaway slaves had started joining rebellious indigenous communities as early as 1523. Between 1540–1580, scores of free-blacks and maroons deliberately united with *mestizo* vagabonds and Indians to launch a series of stifling highway raids throughout the mining communities of Guanajuato. Such raids also rocked the regions of New Galicia and San Miguel. But perhaps the most alarming insurgent moment was a furtive plot to overthrow the viceregal government, set for midnight on September 24, 1537. The conspiracy sought to take advantage of Spain's involvement in European conflicts. Blacks, both slave and free, had become aware of Spain's deep commitment to its wars in Europe and believed that if they precipitated a widespread revolt, the crown would only be able to respond with limited resources and personnel. What the instigators did not anticipate was having their plot discovered before it could be hatched. Fear and panic ensued in the aftermath. Repressive legislation was passed to limit the size and number of black gatherings. Nightly curfews were imposed for peoples of color. Walls were erected around Mexico City, and siege drills were practiced in case of emergency. By 1548, new and stiff legislation was passed that restricted black access to the use of arms.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the interest in black repression, which seemed ever more urgent after numerous additional slave insurrections erupted between 1540–1580,<sup>11</sup> the colony's demographic situation dictated that the crown would have to be flexible in designing its military establishment. This was a delicate proposition. Royal officials expressly preferred having Spaniards, born and raised on the Iberian peninsula, serving in the capacity of soldiers. But white immigration was insufficient to meet rising military demands. Throughout the colony, there may have been as few as 6,700 Europeans in residence by 1570, compared to nearly 23,000 free-coloreds and black slaves, as well as another 13,000 *mestizos*.<sup>12</sup> In 1540, the crown issued a *real cédula* (decree) that called for the creation of citizen militias that would be used to complement the small number of regular army troops who were already stationed in key strategic centers. The original idea of limiting enrollment to whites was quickly abandoned. By 1556, blacks could be found serving as auxiliaries in the militia units in the port of Veracruz.<sup>13</sup> They appeared in Mexico City shortly thereafter.

The number of black troops expanded by the early 1600s to encompass lesser townships, such as Puebla and the port of Campeche. Additionally, in both Mexico City and Veracruz, black auxiliaries were upgraded in status. In 1608, for instance, the first of a series of *reales cédulas* were written to sanction their legal rights, providing them access to firearms and protecting them from the abuses of corporeal punishment. These decrees laid the groundwork for transforming the auxiliaries into full-fledged militiamen. By 1612, free-colored soldiers in the capital possessed their own *compañías de pardos y morenos*, separate and distinct from the companies of whites and *mestizos*. The same held true in Veracruz and even Puebla, where both cities boasted their own free-colored captains by the 1630s.<sup>14</sup>

The first century of black militia service, extending from the 1550s until the 1660s, can be described as one of slow institutional maturity. In the earliest phase (sixteenth century), militia service seemed primarily concentrated in major urban centers, where white populations were larger and better able to manage and monitor black military conduct. These were also centers that tended to house regular army units, which could keep the militiamen in tow when necessary. Of course, ugly conflagrations could occur, as transpired in Veracruz in 1646, when an incensed group of *mulatto* and *moreno* soldiers lashed out against whites in the port battalion, killing two in the process.<sup>15</sup> But on the whole, these episodes were contained to a minimum. Indeed, as the militiamen gradually proved their loyalty over the course of the sixteenth century, the militia establishment expanded into rural areas.

Some of this can be seen in the composition of the counter-insurgency forces that were raised to quell maroons. From the 1570s through the opening decade of the seventeenth century, a protracted and brutal suppression effort was waged against the runaway slave settlement of Yanga, which operated in the region of Veracruz. In 1609, a coalition unit of 450 soldiers, including militiamen from as far away as Puebla, was sent to destroy the community. Of these, some 200 were reported to be *criollos*, *mestizos*, and *mulattos*, many of whom were probably drawn from the Veracruz hinterland.<sup>16</sup> While it is unclear if these men and others like them came to comprise part of a permanent militia, it is evident that when crown authorities saw the need, they resorted to raising temporary militia forces of color in rural areas, probably as early as the late sixteenth century.

Free-colored militiamen also served in semi-conquered frontier zones. Here, it is more likely that the units possessed greater longevity than did the temporarily mustered counterparts who fought against runaway slaves. The northern silver mining region of San Luis Potosí, for instance, was home to hostile Chichimecs<sup>17</sup> who continually threatened Spanish operations. The archival record leaves us a few isolated cases of black militia service. One of these, Francisco Lopez Cueta, was a uniformed militiaman who had been born in the African town of Cueta. Having been captured by Moors as a teenager, he was eventually brought to Seville, where he gained his freedom and traveled to Mexico in the 1560s or 1570s. Finally, he made his way to San Luis Potosí, where he became a cowboy, miner, and part-time soldier.<sup>18</sup> We do not know how many other free-coloreds served alongside him, but we do know that by the 1590s, the *mulatto* population was rather large and that frequent skirmishes along the frontier must have kept Francisco and others busy and mobilized. Francisco, however, was somewhat different from previous generations of black conquistadors. Quite simply, the region of San Luis Potosí was already in the process of being settled. The first Spaniards had arrived in the area in the 1550s; the mining town of San Luis Potosí itself was founded sometime between 1591–1592.<sup>19</sup> Francisco may not have been involved in the initial arduous campaigns to carve out a space for Spanish settlement. Yet the looming climate of native hostility made the community retain the air of a “conquest environment” for decades after its foundation.

This leads me to propose that in the northern and southern rural frontier zones of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a type of hybrid militia force came into being after the 1540s—one that was part conquest expeditionary army and part crown citizen militia. Those who served under these conditions combined their duties as black conquistadors with those of being formal “militiamen.” This is to say that they were more tightly aligned with the colonial state than were early adventurers like Juan Garrido, who were private expeditionaries attached to conquest armies. Precisely what the frontiersmen’s ties to the state meant is unclear, but it probably involved being held accountable to government authorities for their military activities and being able to use their connections with crown officials to influence certain aspects of their daily lives. Since frontier militia services were rendered regularly, the blacks serving here were atypical from those in other rural regions of colonial Mexico who were called to duty far less frequently.

The trend towards integrating free-coloreds into rural militia forces continued more vigorously throughout the seventeenth century. In particular, the Mexican Gulf Coast became a vibrant center for free-colored military service, with several companies being raised in rural townships such as Tamiagua, Papantla, and Acayucan. Interestingly, rural settlements that were once maroon communities also came to post militiamen of their own. The settlement of Yanga, for instance, became formally integrated into the colonial order and was renamed the township of San Lorenzo de los Negros between 1609–1635. Likewise, the rebel community under the leadership of Álvaro de Baena (located near Veracruz) was formalized as a Spanish township in 1607. In both instances, the runaway slaves and their armies became reprocessed as crown militiamen, with orders to quell future slave uprisings.<sup>20</sup>

By means of trial and error, and sometimes by means of crown decree, the basic outlines of the free-colored militia establishment took shape. Apart from those soldiers who served in the companies of former maroon communities, essentially two additional types of free-colored militia units came into being. The first is what I categorize as being companies of the "independent type." Primarily based in major cities, these units were distinguished from the rest in that their personnel, including all junior officers, tended to be drawn exclusively from the free-colored ranks. Additionally, these units became known in official and non-official contexts as *milicias de pardos y morenos*, signaling that race was a governing determinant to their composition. The units were frequently even divisible by color, as lighter skinned *pardos* could be found serving in companies apart from darker skinned *morenos*.

What appears striking about the companies of the independent type is the theater of their service. By and large, they were found in the colony's most prominent cities and strategic ports. One might be surprised to find such a degree of black military autonomy in these settings. However, the situation was tolerated because significant numbers of white militia forces and regular army troops were also stationed in major urban centers, counterbalancing the influence of the free-colored corps and allowing the crown to keep a watchful eye on free-colored activities. We must also keep in mind that free-colored militia units of the independent type evolved gradually in these cities, only after their loyalties had been tested and proven over time. Despite their autonomy, the crown was not overly preoccupied that black soldiers would rebel against the colony. Lastly, the reason why so many units composed exclusively of free-colored operated in these centers can be partially credited to the disgust that some whites and *mestizos* displayed at serving alongside black soldiers. In the colony's principal cities, thanks to a larger and more diverse population base, whites and *mestizos* could create units of their own, allowing them to remain socially distant from the colony's blacks.<sup>21</sup>

Another major form of militia unit in which free-colored served was that of the "integrated type." Again, this classification refers to the units' racial composition. Integrated forces were those in which free-colored served jointly with whites and *mestizos*, who oftentimes held a monopoly over the commanding ranks. Indigenous populations, while numerous, were officially barred from formal duty and did not factor as a significant presence in the integrated companies.<sup>22</sup> Appearing most heavily in coastal zones, integrated forces were primarily rural or semi-rural in character. Servicemen tended to be drawn from the populations of major regional townships (*cabeceras*), or from some combination of satellite villages (*sujetos*) and their *cabeceras*. Because coastal populations were so heavily populated by free-colored, integrated units frequently tended to be mainly *pardo* and *moreno*. In Papantla, for instance, a muster compiled in 1749 revealed that nearly all of the region's 300 militiamen were free-colored, despite their units' "integrated" status. Papantla's forces had a long history of possessing *pardo* and *moreno* personnel. Founded in 1649, the region's commanding officers were all free-colored by 1684, save the senior ranking officer, who was the region's *alcalde mayor* (district governor) himself.<sup>23</sup>

### A Period of Autonomy and Change, 1670–1762

While the basic shape and structure of the free-colored militia was largely set by the middle of the seventeenth century, their services and obligations were erratic. Apart from the provincial frontiers, militias were mobilized infrequently and had little internal order and discipline. Training days were semi-annual occasions. Feast days and festivals might bring some additional duty—but those called to serve often proved more prone towards indulging in the pleasures of wine and women than tending to their posts or training regimens. Pirate incursions, more frequent along the coasts, did bring a greater degree of service and preparedness for select zones, especially in Veracruz, Tabasco, and the Yucatan. But on the whole, the free-colored militias throughout most of the seventeenth century were not an impressive military force, nor even a substantial social presence.

The period from 1670–1762 represented marked change from the previous era. The number of free-colored forces increased notably. The privilege structure of militia service was significantly enhanced. Lastly, the militiamen's duties were augmented and became more regularized. The net effect was that the militia institution grew more powerful in terms of its impact on society. Royal officials also came to view the militia as more valuable to the operation of empire. However, as the shifts and alterations were taking place, the militiamen were found maneuvering their personal and local interests into the agenda of change. The militia, therefore, became an operating voice for their expression of colonial citizenship.

I have argued elsewhere how the colonial militia, especially during this period, appeared to serve as an instrument for creating and fostering *pardo*, *moreno*, and *mulatto* racial identity.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, both corporate and racial identity formation seemed to be a by-product of the processes of intricate negotiation that took place between the colonial state and the free-colored forces. However, the focus of this article is on citizenship and loyalty.<sup>25</sup> To what extent did negotiations with the state translate into tangible expressions of free-colored citizenship, and just what did that mean?

A good place to begin is by looking at how the militia's privilege structure experienced change. Through contact with sailors, merchants, and itinerant free-colored travelers, free-colored living in Mexico's coastal regions became aware from a fairly early period that their peers abroad were obtaining specific privileges in exchange for their military duties. One of the most catalyzing of these was exemption from tribute. Beginning in the 1580s, the Spanish crown decreed that free-blacks living in the New World would have to pay tribute much in the same way that natives did.<sup>26</sup> While tribute was collected unevenly throughout various parts of the empire, even ignored altogether in some regions, it was collected with particular zeal in many parts of Mexico.<sup>27</sup> For the peasant and working classes, the payment of twelve to sixteen *reales* represented a significant material hardship, especially when combined with other taxes that free-colored had to pay. Tribute was further scorned because it served to constantly remind free-colored of their slave origins and their caste difference (inferiority) in relationship to the non-paying classes: *españoles* (whites) and *mestizos*. One of the earliest cities in the empire to grant tribute exemption to free-colored militiamen was Lima, which in 1624 rewarded its blacks for defending the city

in the face of Dutch attacks. Mérida (Yucatan) managed to secure release in 1644, while Costa Rica and Nicaragua exempted free-colored soldiers in the 1650s.<sup>28</sup>

As conversations about the mechanics of exemption were shared by free-coloreds across colonial boundaries, militiamen throughout the regions of Veracruz and Tabasco successfully started lobbying for relief in the 1670s. From the patterns and phrasing of their petitions, it is clear that militiamen in these areas were sharing legal knowledge, experiences, and strategies. Arguably, securing tribute immunity was a key component in developing the militiamen's loyalty to the crown and in re-defining the outlines of their citizenship and vassalage. Thanks to the militia, tribute exemption also became transformed from being an issue that was negotiated by individuals to an issue that free-coloreds collectively lobbied for on a regional basis. In the process, the militiamen petitioned for relief based on how they viewed and understood their local worlds. Militiamen from Guazacualco, for instance, were careful in their petition to describe the geography of their region, demonstrating to viceregal officials how the bays, rivers, and coastline could provide passage and safe harbor for enemy intruders. Similarly, thick descriptions were written in the pleas of the militiamen from Tabasco and Tamiagua.<sup>29</sup> The positioning of lagoons, cliffs, and coastline factored prominently into their writings. Hence, the petitions for tribute immunity should not just be understood as lobbying efforts generated by militia companies, but by geographically defined, racially conscious individuals who were challenging the structure of imperial power over their lives in a way that did not disturb the image of their loyalty to the colonial state.

What the militiamen further aimed to depict was how their provincial worlds translated into the broader project of maintaining an empire. Local geography became part and parcel, a feature of the militiamen's understanding of duty and their relationship to the crown. Foreign threats to their relatively isolated, indeed, backwater regions could jeopardize the safety of deeply cherished colonial structures. Contraband trade in Tabasco or Tamiagua could disrupt the crown's control over the colonial economy. Pirate depredations along the Guazacualco River could give easy entry into the heart of the colony, endangering haciendas, towns, and perhaps even Mexico City. The militiamen demonstrated that garnering tribute relief was pivotal towards keeping provincial and imperial ambitions in balance since protecting their regions could not be disaggregated from protecting the empire. On the other hand, the militiamen's locally articulated struggles to gain tribute immunity sometimes conflicted with the goals of local regional officials themselves. In Tabasco, an effort was launched in 1691 by two provincial authorities to make tribute exemption conditional. The levy should be lifted, they argued, only if large numbers of black militia families were moved to populate the city of Villahermosa, the former provincial capital that had experienced a mass white exodus after sustaining a bevy of pirate raids in the 1660s. In this instance, the militiamen's provincial outlook conflicted with that of regional bureaucrats. The soldiers wanted tribute relief on unconditional terms. They wanted to be able to continue living in their towns without being forced to leave. Interestingly, their arguments prevailed. The militiamen's position proved persuasive to the Mexican viceroy, who believed that the soldiers would be most useful to the colonial defense scheme if they remained attached to their villages instead of exposing broad areas of coastline to attack by being huddled into Villahermosa.<sup>30</sup>

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In 1683, the Dutch corsair Lorenzo de Graff, also known as Lorencillo, sailed into the port of Veracruz, dealing Mexico one of its most alarming raids of the century. Commanding a force of nine hundred men, he and his party were barely stalled by the defenses of one of Mexico's premier garrisoned cities. Although he chose not to make a foray into the interior, from Veracruz, the road to Mexico City was relatively short. A lightly armed force could reach the capital in days. Nervous crown bureaucrats were duly alarmed.

The result of the raid was an intensification of the colony's militia arrangement and growth in the free-colored corps. Having been largely contained to coastal areas and prominent cities beforehand, the free-colored militia network now began expanding throughout the interior—sites like Queretaro, Cholula, Atrisco, Orizaba, and Teles were included for duty. The mobilization might have been short lived had not a succession of other emergencies taken place shortly thereafter. In 1685, Lorencillo struck again, this time in the southern port of Campeche. In 1692, severe grain riots shook Mexico City, sparking chaos. Finally, at the outset of the eighteenth century, the advent of the War of the Spanish Succession raised the military preparedness of the colony on a wide scale.

The precise dimensions of free-colored militia expansion are hard to quantify. What is clearer is that growth was accompanied by increased service responsibilities. In the late seventeenth century, not only were militiamen called upon to serve in military emergencies, but in the absence of a colonial police force, they were routinely asked to patrol city streets. They also rendered bodyguard services for royal officials and served as mail couriers, armed escorts, and even bailiffs. Slowly, and in a rather unplanned fashion, free-coloreds were becoming integral to the mechanisms of government and justice in the colonial landscape. In many cases, free-colored militiamen became the first instances of encounter that many colonial subjects had with the law.

As the soldiers' profile was raised in the colony, select militiamen began petitioning for added control over their units. The most prominent of these efforts took place in Mexico City as Sebastian Almaraz, described as a *negro*, successfully appealed to the king and viceroy to acquire the post of colonel. The move was a bold one. Along with the rank came the title of *maestre de campo* (field marshal), which placed Almaraz in command of all the free-colored forces in the colony, increasing their autonomy from white units. Not only was Almaraz granted the colonelcy in 1719, but in 1726, he became the inspector general for the colony's free-colored forces. As such, he was responsible for supervising the troops' training regimen and monitoring the affairs of Mexico's free-colored officer corps.

In the 1730s and 40s, the crown slowly started retracting some of the autonomy and benefits it had extended to the free-colored militias. Some of this had to do with Almaraz's death and retirement. When the colonelcy was moved to the city of Puebla in the 1740s, crown officials stipulated that the honors and authority they had granted to Almaraz should not be transferred. Nevertheless, the militiamen continued to retain a free-colored colonel in their ranks until almost the end of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, by the early 1760s, however, he had become little more than a figurehead with restricted powers that did not extend outside of his own city.

The militiamen still were able to maintain an array of other privileges into the middle of the eighteenth century, despite efforts to remove them. The opening decades of the 1700s had seen the soldiers acquire *fuero* rights, which gave select members of the corps access to the military court system instead of being prosecuted by civilian courts. This was deemed an advantage since the soldiers reasoned that they would receive better treatment if placed under a trial by members of their same profession. Meanwhile, the coverage of tribute exemption had also widened, encompassing not just militiamen, but their families, distant relatives, and occasionally their friends. In short, by the 1760s, the Mexican free-colored militias were a rather potent force in colonial society in terms of their privileges and their local duties. But the efforts that had developed in the 1740s to curb their power grew even stronger in the critical decade of the 1760s.

#### **A Contested Institution: The 1760s–1790s**

The British siege of Havana in 1762 has been accurately described as a watershed event in colonial Spanish military affairs.<sup>31</sup> Much like Lorencillo's 1683 strike in Veracruz, the loss of Havana signaled fundamental weaknesses in Spanish military planning and was followed by tremendous energy to rectify the situation. The multifaceted efforts of change, known collectively as the Bourbon reforms, eventually swept through the entire Spanish New World Empire. Of course, some reforms were more successful than others and varied regionally in their impact. In terms of military reforms, the army expanded over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. In places such as Chile, Mexico, Cuba, and New Granada, regular army and militia forces doubled and tripled in size. Ironically, however, as the crown sought to tighten its metropolitan grip on its colonies and strengthen its absolutism, it could not help but to rely greatly on the assistance of *criollos* (subjects born in the New World). In fact, within the ranks of the regular army, a strong creolization process took effect, such that by 1780, *criollos* overtook Spaniards as the army's majority for the first time.<sup>32</sup>

The combined expansion and creolization of the military had unanticipated consequences on the free-colored militias of Mexico. Quite simply, their units' worth became hotly debated and re-evaluated by crown bureaucrats. From the perspective of some administrators, one negative outcome produced by free-colored duty was the annual loss of a large number of black tribute payers. A few bureaucrats were inspired to ask if there was a way to compress and reorganize the composition of the black units so that they would not interfere so deeply with the crown's revenue stream. Another concern that arose after 1762 dealt with old, deeply rooted prejudices that dated back to the sixteenth century. Given that the crown's military was being completely re-assessed, a few administrators took the opportunity to ask if soldiers of African descent were even capable soldiers in the first place. Might it not be best to rely on a better "class" of servicemen, namely whites and perhaps even *mestizos*?

Some of these debates came to a head as military reformers traveled to Mexico in 1764 and began implementing what was known as the "provincial militia" plan. First

introduced in Spain in 1734, provincial militias differed from the previous “urban militias” in that a cadre of regular army officers was attached to their battalions to supervise troop training. Additionally, the composition of the provincial forces was more standardized, meaning that troop rosters were set at maximum levels, leaving little room for supernumeraries. Unit standardization brought significant reductions in the number of free-coloreds found serving in Mexico. In some locations along the Gulf Coast, company rosters fell by as much as fifty percent.<sup>33</sup> In the meantime, white and *mestizo* forces, which had been paltry for much of the colonial period, experienced unprecedented surges and gains. Free-coloreds protested vociferously about their losses. Drove of free-colored families were left exposed to paying tribute, and many individual servicemen lost the coveted protection of their *fuero*.<sup>34</sup> Especially with regard to tribute, ex-militiamen sent reams of petitions to the crown, demanding continued exemption. Their history of service, they argued, had transformed tribute immunity into an undeniable right. By custom, if not by law, they felt entitled to continued exclusion. Throughout the 1770s and 80s, jockeying by crown and militia officials took these debates in and out of the colonial courts. As Spain entered and exited European wars, and especially in its conflict against Britain (1779–83), the militiamen found their arguments favorably received by key crown administrators.

What was more difficult to negotiate was refusing to allow white regular army officers (the veteran cadre) into the free-colored militia companies.<sup>35</sup> Crown bureaucrats usually met this request with anathema and suspicion. It was enough for some units to deal with having *criollo* and *mestizo* officers within their ranks. Now they had to contend with Spanish troops who arrogantly wore the pride of the regular army badge and who hubristically lorded their European superiority over them. Free-colored officers from places as disparate as rural Oaxaca to Mexico City desperately pleaded for the removal of the veteran cadre. Since most major and minor decisions in the provincial forces now had to be cleared by the cadre, the free-colored officer corps lost enormous autonomy, as well as some of their status and influence in their local communities. No longer were they as able to dole out military patronage because now they had a network of white officers holding them accountable for their actions. In the best-case scenario, patronage’s power had to be shared with these whites.

Needless to say, not all members of the veteran cadre were the same. Some did not enjoy being placed in charge of black troops and hated their position. They despised being jeered at and labeled inferior when deployed jointly on missions with white units.<sup>36</sup> In response, a number of veterans executed a *laissez-faire* form of authority. Others were micro-managers and exercised their posts tenaciously. Men like Puebla’s Subinspector Camuñez, invested a lot of personal energy and resources in the 1770s and 80s towards building up a network of free-colored allies through closely influencing the free-colored officer promotion process. In 1779, he tried to shape the militiamen’s legal appeals process by attempting to hire scribes and legal aides. In 1781, he tried to impact the militiamen’s *fuero* rights by having the courts reassess its applicability in illegal commercial transaction cases.<sup>37</sup>

The 1790s witnessed the culmination of the disruptive policies to the free-colored militia that had been underway since the 1760s. The arrival of Viceroy Revillagigedo to the helm of Mexican political affairs in 1789 in many ways signaled the beginning

of the end. Whereas previous viceroys and administrations may have demonstrated concern over incorporating *pardos* and *morenos* into the military order, they were at least somewhat flexible and open to compromise. Consequently, the militiamen experienced some successes in their post-1760s appeals, despite their losses. On occasion, militia units were cut, but sometimes they made gains. Sometimes their units and privileges were augmented illegally. At other times, military reforms were phased in quickly in certain places, while being introduced slowly in others. What all of this meant was that there was a lack of a consistent free-colored militia policy after the 1760s, producing a situation that looked somewhat chaotic. However, the uneven articulation of the reforms came to an abrupt halt in 1792.

Upon the recommendation of Sub-inspector General Pedro Gorostiza, Viceroy Revillagigedo proceeded to disband the free-colored militia companies of the colony's interior. Gorostiza had noted that these units had not been living up to expectations. Despite being reformed into provincial companies, they seemed incapable of supporting the regular army during times of need. Likewise, Gorostiza felt that they were ineffective in providing their police duties in urban areas. Instead, during their night patrols, he cited instances where the militiamen incited crimes of their own rather than preventing them. Moreover, the soldiers represented a strain on the royal treasury. Mexico City and Puebla alone cost the crown nearly 16,000 pesos annually on free-colored militia upkeep. As if this were not enough, Gorostiza lamented that the soldiers were disorderly and unruly during mobilizations. The colony would be much better off if black men wore no uniforms.<sup>38</sup>

That Gorostiza personally disliked dark-skinned people was no secret, and in his letters to the viceroy, he noted that there were many members of the "clean castes" who could replace the wretched *pardos* and *morenos* more effectively. Revillagigedo agreed. Less than three weeks after Gorostiza submitted his report, Revillagigedo signed a letter approving the extermination of free-colored militia units in Mexico City and Puebla, soon to be followed by more sweeping cuts throughout the interior. The moves were met with protest from angry *pardo* and *moreno* troops. In Mexico City and Puebla, the militiamen chose the legal route of protest, writing letters to the king demanding a reassessment. In rural zones along the Pacific, such as Xicayan, change to the structure of their companies was met with the potential threat of insurrection.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Revillagigedo's decree had a lasting impact upon the shape of black military duty in New Spain.

Military necessity did, however, compel the viceroy to retain the services of several free-colored coastal units. Yet these were not left unaffected. Although there were well over 7,000 *pardos* and *morenos* still in uniform along the eastern and western shores of New Spain by the late 1790s, records from 1793 demonstrate that Revillagigedo had already managed to cut the number of coastal companies by nearly half.<sup>40</sup> This was followed by other changes. In Veracruz, as in Mexico City and Puebla, many servicemen who were released from duty lost access to *fuero* rights and tribute immunity. In other areas, determined efforts were made to integrate white officers into units and to replace black footsoldiers with whites and *mestizos*.<sup>41</sup>

In 1794, the new incoming viceroy, the Marqués de Branciforte, took stock of the social disturbances that were brewing in Mexico and reevaluated his predecessor's

militia policies. He wanted to be sure that the discontent being triggered over the free-colored disbandments was not becoming a serious and widespread problem. Unfortunately, Gorostiza was a member of the assessment team. He remained scathing in his observations of the corps, continuing to label them a useless lot. Swayed by such arguments, Branciforte decided to uphold Revillagigedo's plan. Just over a century after Lorencillo's raid had precipitated widespread black service in the interior, the free-colored forces in Mexico's heartland became virtually defunct.<sup>42</sup>

### Colonial Aftershocks—Free-Colored Militiamen on the Brink of Independence

Not enough research has been conducted on black participation in Mexico's Independence wars to make hard claims regarding their duties' impact on their social profile and their sense of loyalty to either the king or the emerging nation. To begin to address these issues, what I offer here is a brief overview of what is known about coastal free-colored activities during the outbreak of the Independence struggle. I also explore some of the links that existed between the *pardo* colonial militias and the royalist/insurgent armies. This helps understand how the late colonial militia heritage intersected with local/regional experiences to affect the shape of loyalty and duty.

The coastal regions of Mexico proved to be among the most active areas of insurgency during the wars of Independence. Along the Gulf, the years between 1811–1817 witnessed numerous slave uprisings on haciendas and plantations in the region of Cordoba, near Veracruz. The agents of rebel leaders played instrumental roles in instigating some of these revolts, such as the *mulatto* Juan Bautista who was commissioned to incite slaves in the curate of La Punta.<sup>43</sup> However, slaves seeking freedom were not the only blacks to rebel. Greater numbers of free-colored joined the revolutionary cause in Veracruz. Many were inspired by the opportunity to seize property from absentee landowners.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the encompassing moves towards insurgency, a number of towns along the Gulf remained staunchly loyal in their support of the royalist cause. These included Jalapa, Tampico, and Veracruz itself.<sup>45</sup> Arguably these were among the most important centers of colonial commerce in the region and, particularly in the case of Veracruz, harbored strong numbers of regular army troops. It would almost seem natural that these locales would be important sites of loyalty. The substantial number of artisans among the free-colored militia ranks in each town helped deepen the gravity of their loyalty, tilting it towards the royalist side.<sup>46</sup> Artisans were less dependent upon land for their livelihoods than were the coast's agricultural laborers. Therefore, the possibilities for acquiring property during the upheaval were less attractive. Nevertheless, even in these cities, royalist troop rosters were not easy to maintain. There were frequent desertions as soldiers switched sides or reconsidered the dangers of duty. Even towards the end of the Independence wars, there were 179 vacancies out of 240 slots in the *pardo* and *moreno* militia companies of Veracruz.<sup>47</sup> Loyalty, while present, was not lightly had.

Understanding the historical underpinnings to the patterns of insurgency and loyalty is perhaps better achieved for Mexico's western coastal provinces. Shortly after Father Hidalgo made the initial cry for national sovereignty, José María Morelos, a parish priest from Michoacán, led a small group of twenty men to the Costa Grande (along the Pacific coast) in early November, 1810. Barely a month later, he had attracted nearly 3,000 recruits to the rebel cause.<sup>48</sup> Although lightly populated, *pardos* and *morenos* proliferated in the region. In the late eighteenth century, for instance, the free-colored population in the province of Acapulco alone outnumbered whites and *mestizos* by a figure of twenty to one.<sup>49</sup> Unsurprisingly, therefore, it was free-coloredes who flocked to Morelos' side. Many of them were already enrolled in the regional *pardo* and *moreno* militia units. It is likely that up to five provincial militia companies may have switched sides in the early period of struggle.<sup>50</sup> By 1813, Morelos' forces had exerted firm control over most of the Pacific lowland territory.

One notable exception was the Costa Chica, located in the modern states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. Here, free-coloredes remained stubbornly loyal into the 1820s and fought tenaciously against the rebels even when cut off from aid from the capital. Thanks to support from Costa Chica loyalists, Acapulco's garrison was able to withstand siege by Morelos' forces. After Morelos died in 1815, black royalists in the region managed to re-take the territory that had fallen into rebel hands. Fighting as guerrillas and sometimes in formal units, they continued demonstrating their loyalty to the point of protesting the compromised peace that was signed between the royalists and revolutionaries in 1821.<sup>51</sup>

What produced resilient loyalty on the one hand and ready capitulation to the rebel cause on the other? On an ideological level, many blacks in the region were attracted to the message of liberty and sovereignty that was outlined by men like Hidalgo and Morelos. The rhetoric of independence quite explicitly included declarations for the abolition of slavery and the eradication of the caste system.<sup>52</sup> For many free-coloredes, the elimination of caste distinctions was especially attractive since it would finally remove the dreaded tribute burden. The crown understood this, too, and attempted to steal the thunder from the revolutionaries by abolishing tribute for Indians and blacks in 1812 and again in 1815.<sup>53</sup>

The socio-economic situation along the coast produced another motive for insurgency. Scores of free-coloredes were employed as sharecroppers, peasants, and small-scale cotton farmers. Others worked cacao plantations and served as muleteers, fishermen, and cowboys. A much smaller portion of the population labored as artisans. Cotton, however, was notably prominent in the regional economy. The large group of cotton growers was heavily dependent upon the international market for their livelihoods. When prices were good, there were tremendous fortunes to be made. Sharecroppers and farmers alike were able to engage in quite lavish conspicuous consumption, dressing in fine Asian silk and eating from refined Pueblan pottery. On the other hand, when times were hard, these individuals blamed the Spaniards for their predicament. From their perspective, it was Spain's shifting alliances and involvement in European wars that were responsible for tremendous market fluctuations and for altering the demand for cotton exports. Even more damaging was how Spanish merchants interfered directly in fixing prices. As Peter

Guardino has recently argued, Spanish merchants probably had a much greater role in financing cotton production and structuring market prices than historians have previously realized. But the rural peasantry fully understood the power this clique wielded. They also understood how their plight could be worsened when merchants collaborated with regional government agents in managing the economy. Over the course of the colonial period, peasants had become accustomed to taking merchants and government functionaries to court or bursting into periodic episodes of rebellion. In this sense, they constructed a regional, moral economy along the west coast, and when they found merchants and bureaucrats engaged in excess, they retaliated in the name of the king. During the early Independence period, with the king in captivity and with certain sectors of the elite trying to forge alliances with the peasantry, the free-colored sharecropper class found themselves in unusual circumstances. Their long-held animosity towards the Spanish merchant sector morphed into insurgent ideology. Rebel leaders further coaxed the peasants by enticing them to enact revenge against the greed-ridden “monopolists.”<sup>54</sup>

The militia experience of the colonial period, entwined as it often was with the local economic livelihood of free-colored populations, sometimes fed the insurrectionary cause. In Zacatula, a critical province along the Costa Grande that gave Morelos tremendous military support, free-colored soldiers had been utilizing the militia to try and enhance their local economic power for over a century. Apart from seeking tribute relief, the militiamen sought exemption from *alcabala* (sales tax), and in the 1770s, they attempted to use their militia status to leverage control over select *tierras realengas* (vacant crown land) for farming and settlement.<sup>55</sup> Their efforts were not always met with success. In the 1760s, not only did the soldiers fail to acquire *alcabala* relief, but they were also pressured into paying tribute, despite receiving a special viceregal dispensation. Those refusing to oblige were threatened by the local authorities with two hundred lashes and had their property confiscated. With regard to their designs on the *tierras realengas*, local officials scared the militiamen into believing that the crown would bring harsh retribution on their scheme if they did not abandon their cause. Overall, the mixed record of the militia’s success in articulating the local concerns of Zacatula’s free-colored did not seem to inspire confidence in the colonial government or firm allegiance. The shocks sustained to the structure of the corps in the 1790s did not help matters either. We can imagine that as Morelos traveled through the territory between 1810–1811, his speeches on eradicating oppression must have sounded interesting to the rural population he encountered.

Zacatula’s experience can be compared and contrasted with the Costa Chica. To begin with, in the late eighteenth century, the provinces of Igualepa and Xicayan (core regions of the Costa Chica) were among the most militarized areas of the Pacific, containing nearly one quarter of all the coast’s militia forces.<sup>56</sup> The large number of militiamen meant that the ratio of military service was high amongst the free-colored populace. In Igualepa alone, over half of the adult male population of *pardos* and *morenos* were soldiers at the outset of the 1790s. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, this number had dropped to about one third, but it still represented substantial mobilization when compared to the military ratios of the colony as a whole.<sup>57</sup> Importantly, the tradition of militia service held positive overtones for many, espe-

cially during the critical decades before the struggle for Independence. The soldiers, of course, were not left untouched by many of the disturbing challenges that affected the free-colored militias of other areas. Angry petitions and letters from the 1770s and 80s reveal that they were being charged tribute in places like Xicayan with impunity. Every five years, when a new treasury official arrived in the province, he forced soldiers to pay the levy, causing them to continually re-negotiate their exemption. The 1770s also brought to the scene a manipulative and controlling provincial governor who used his political influence to harness Xicayan's militiamen into performing labor services on his properties. Furthermore, he forced troops to sell him the crops grown on their own farms at devalued prices.<sup>58</sup> Visitations by crown officials in the 1780s did not ameliorate the problems. Military inspector Francisco Martí burdened militiamen throughout the lower Pacific coast with new taxes and responsibilities. Conducted in the name of military efficiency, Martí proposed reopening the militia ranch that had once been operational in Xicayan during the 1760s. *Pardo* and *moreno* soldiers were supposed to dedicate time here raising cattle in addition to working in their regular professions. The proceeds would go to the militia's coffers to help pay for uniforms, weapons, barracks, and other items. Martí also proposed opening maize farms with the same goals in mind and levying taxes on locally produced liquor (*mezcal*), cacao, cotton, and on imported products such as wine and *aguardiente* (cane-liquor).<sup>59</sup>

While tribute and tax pressure was applied unevenly throughout the Pacific region in the 1780s, by the 1790s, on the heels of a series of poor harvests, the Costa Chica's militiamen had found some champions to their cause. A few were reluctant champions at best. Confronting the utter inability to collect tribute, several subdelegates and their subordinates simply gave up trying. One of these, Don Antonio Gonzalez de Mesa, wrote an exasperated letter to his superiors in 1791, saying that despite his most engaged efforts, he had only been able to collect the paltry sum of six pesos over the past year and a half. Not even free-colored militia captains could successfully collect the fee, he argued. Desiring to "get away from so much trauma," Mesa renounced his post in 1792, under heavy pressure from treasury officials in Oaxaca who hounded him and held him responsible for paying the difference in missing tribute revenues.<sup>60</sup>

It was also during the early 1790s that the militiamen found an unlikely ally in Don Benito Pérez, who was selected by Viceroy Revillagigedo to analyze the Costa Chica's tribute situation. A man of military pedigree who had spent considerable time inspecting units from Acapulco to Guatemala, Pérez proceeded to validate the military merit of the region's soldiers and supported their cries for tribute immunity. Unlike the forces of Mexico's interior, with which he also had familiarity, Pérez found the coast's soldiers valuable and capable of protecting the colony in times of need. The militiamen had not lived "vice-filled lives" like those of Puebla and Mexico City, he noted. Moreover, in the curate of Guajolotitlan, where perhaps the largest, "fiercest and most insubordinate" contingent of blacks lived, the troops still showed "proof of love to the sovereign" when, despite living in squalid poverty, they did whatever they could to gather money for the king. In the process, though, the free-colored "pleaded in tears" for tribute relief.<sup>61</sup>

Pérez felt exemption was justifiable not just because of the value of the militiamen's services or their poverty, but because relief offered tangible material benefits for the

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region's agricultural development. Freed from tribute, blacks would live happier lives, which in turn meant that the population would remain rooted and committed towards developing the coast's crops. If they were charged tribute, however, Pérez believed that blacks would flee to other areas of the colony, thereby hurting the Pacific coast's labor pool. Already, nearly 100,000 pounds of cotton were being produced annually in the curate of Guajolotitlan alone. The region's soil was fertile, typically generating three harvests of maize a year. A network of rivers opened up to the ocean, along the banks of which some of the best cotton in the kingdom was grown, competitive even with the finest oriental grades. Given the coast's natural richness, who knew how much more cotton and maize could be yielded?

But in order for this to happen, some changes needed to take place, not just with the tribute system, but also with the structure of the regional economy as a whole. Pérez noted that free-coloreds had constricted access to land, which contributed greatly towards their poverty, making them among the "most unhappy individuals in the kingdom." Their lands were typically rented from indigenous communities, nearby haciendas, or from the more successful *vecinos* (townfolk) who tended to be whites and *mestizos*. Instead of taking goods to market themselves, which was prohibitively expensive, the region's *mulattos* and *negros* were accustomed to handing over their crops to provincial governors (*alcaldes mayores*) who, in turn, determined the prices at extortionist rates. In many locations, free-coloreds were barely earning four *reales* per *arroba* (twenty-five pounds) of cotton. This is when they were even fortunate enough to receive cash for their products. When they bartered, more was lost in the exchange.

Pérez laid much of the blame of the mismanaged economy on the *alcaldes mayores* themselves, who he accused of having hurt the region through their greedy activities. It was no secret that in addition to setting unjust prices on agricultural products, they also impressed free-coloreds onto their estates, using them almost as slaves. The *alcaldes mayores* had also been heavily responsible for the failing tribute system. According to Pérez, many *alcaldes mayores* offered tribute relief as a means to coax free-coloreds into working on their haciendas and plantations. When the crown began inquiring as to why tribute collections hadn't been made, the *alcaldes mayores* responded by saying that the levy had been too difficult to collect. In reality, though, the attempt had never been made. While not all *alcaldes mayores* were guilty of such practices, Pérez believed that it happened frequently enough that free-coloreds began feeling entitled to being tribute exempt regardless of whether they were militiamen or not.

Pérez believed that the misery of the coastal free-colored population could be alleviated and that regional government could be greatly improved. To this effect, he proposed creating a network of free-colored *pueblos* that had their own community property. Here, free-coloreds would have access to farmland without facing many of the barriers they had been thrown by the *alcaldes mayores*, sub-delegates, and hacienda owners. These same free-colored communities would also double as military settlements, ready to defend the colony during times of war. Interestingly, Pérez envisioned that the economies of each community would be differentiated according to geography. Black towns along the coasts would be primarily agriculturally based, whereas those located deeper into the interior would mainly be dedicated to pastoral

activities. To further eradicate the economic problems facing blacks in the Costa Chica, Pérez advocated completely eliminating tribute along the coasts but retaining the levy in colony's interior provinces. Through such a policy, he believed that Mexico could greatly reduce its supposedly large black vagrant community, particularly in areas such as Mexico City. Enticed by tribute relief, they would migrate to the Pacific and Gulf coasts, where they would take up a profession and contribute positively to the overall colonial economy.

Pérez's radical and somewhat progressive proposals were contemplated by the Costa Chica's sub-delegates, the most notable of whom was Francisco Paris. Assuming his position in the 1790s, it is unclear to what extent he actually incorporated Pérez's suggestions, but it is evident from the archival record that his tribute policy was very favorable towards the militiamen. Indeed, he seems to have enjoyed a close and amicable relationship with the free-colored soldiers. Similarly, he appears to have been an atypical district official in that he curtailed his involvement in illicit trade activities and did not widely implement the detested *repartimiento de mercancías* (forced sale of goods). Consequently, when Pérez was entrusted with the post of commander of the royalist forces in the Costa Chica in the early 1800s, the recent history of the region helped foster loyalty amongst the free-colored troops.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, as the war of Independence began to emerge, the Spaniards and royal government were not as extensively demonized as they were a bit further north along the Pacific coast. Pockets of loyalty, with militiamen at the core, were quickly built, as free-colored felt more enfranchised about their citizenship to the colonial regime and in their vassalage to the crown. However, as the wars of Independence unfolded, many of these blacks would soon find themselves fighting not just against other colonial subjects but against fellow blacks who harbored as much hate against the Spanish as the people from the Costa Chica harbored faith in certain positive aspects of the regime.

#### NOTES

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2. Laura Lewis, "Colonialism and its Contradictions: Indians, Blacks and Social Power in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Mexico," *Journal of Historical Sociology* vol. 9, no. 4 (1996), 414–416.
3. J.I. Israel, *Race, Class and Politics in Colonial Mexico, 1610–1670* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), 64, 73–74; Robert Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 17.
4. R. Douglas Cope, *Limits of Racial Domination*, does a good job showing the distinctions and differences in Chapter 1, particularly pg. 19. While the *castas* could be seen as an amorphous group, keep in mind that in Mexico City (and elsewhere), the *mestizos* could be described as a *casta* elite, partially based upon the socio-economic opportunities they enjoyed because of their parentage and racial privilege.
5. James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America, A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 4.
6. Maria Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 89–94. Please note that her argument is not contained to these pages, but is eloquently developed throughout the book.

7. Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993), 11–19; Matthew Restall, “Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America,” *The Americas (TAM)* 57, no.2 (2000), 167–205.
8. Peter Gerhard, “A Black Conquistador in Mexico,” *Hispanic American Historical Review (HAHR)* 58, no. 3 (1978): 451–459; Restall, “Black Conquistadors,” 177–181, 188–196 (contains biographical overview of black conquistadors).
9. Restall, “Black Conquistadors,” 181–183.
10. D.M Davidson, “Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519–1650,” *HAHR* 46, no. 3 (1966): 244; Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico 1570–1650* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), 119–144; Edgar F. Love, “Negro Resistance to Spanish Rule in Colonial Mexico,” *Journal of Negro History (JNH)* 52, no. 2 (1967): 89–103.
11. Aguirre Beltrán lists the areas of rebellion in Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México: Estudio Etnohistórico* 3d ed., (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989), 207.
12. *Ibid.*, 210,
13. Jackie Booker, “Needed but Unwanted: Black Militiamen in Veracruz, Mexico 1760–1810,” *The Historian* 55 (Winter, 1993): 260.
14. Christon Archer, “Pardos, Indians, and the Army of New Spain: Inter-Relationships and Conflicts, 1780–1810,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 6, no. 2 (Nov. 1974): 237; Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Civil Libros, vol. 1789, Autos fechos a instancia del sargento mayor y demas capitanes del tercio de pardos y morenos libres de la Puebla, sobre haber preso el alcalde mayor de aquella ciudad al capitan Agustin Rodriguez, 1744, fs. 1–2v.
15. Israel, *Race, Class and Politics*, 72.
16. Adriana Naveda Chávez, *Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Cordoba Veracruz, 1690–1830* (Jalapa, Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1996), 126.
17. Chichimec was a generic term employed to describe northern indigenous groups.
18. AGN, *Inquisición*, vol. 146, exp. 1, fol. 21v.
19. Peter Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain* (Norman and London: The Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 234–237.
20. Naveda Chávez, *Esclavos*, 127; AGN, Reales Cédulas Duplicadas, vol. 5, exp. 803, fol. 197, June 13, 1607.
21. One rarely found specific militia units for *mestizos*. They tended to serve alongside Spaniards.
22. There were exceptions, especially in the frontier regions. See Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall, “Black Soldiers, Native Soldiers: Meanings of Military Service in the Spanish American Colonies,” unpublished book chapter, forthcoming in *Black and Red*, Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2004.
23. AGN, I.G., vol. 488–A, Ildefonso Arias de Saavedra to Pedro Mendinueta, January 15, 1788, Papantla.
24. See: Vinson, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), especially chapter 6; and Idem., “Free-Colored Voices: Issues of Representation and Racial Identity in the Colonial Mexican Militia,” *JNH* 80, no. 4 (Fall, 1995): 170–182.
25. Loyalty’s importance to free-colored militiamen in the Cuban Independence movement has been recently addressed by David Sartorius, “Race and the Limits of Loyalty in Late Colonial Cuba,” Unpublished paper presented at the 117th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, Chicago, January 2–5, 2003, 1–18. This recent discussion has influenced my thinking on Mexican free-colored loyalty.
26. Cynthia Milton and Ben Vinson III, “Counting Heads: Race and Non-Native Tribute Policy in Colonial Spanish America,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 3, no.3 (2002): 1–18.
27. Vinson, *Bearing Arms*, especially chpt. 4.
28. Paul Lokken, “Transforming Mulatto Identity in Colonial Guatemala, 1670–1720,” Unpublished paper presented at the 116th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, San Francisco, Jan. 3–6, 2002, 12; Rina Cáceres, *Negros mulatos esclavos y libertos en la Costa Rica del siglo XVII* (Mexico City: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 2000), 100; Ronald Escobedo Mansilla, “El tributo de los zambaigos, negros y mulatos en el virreinato peruano,” *Revista de Indias XLI*, no. 163–164 (1981): 50–52.
29. AGN, I.G. vol. 492–A, exp. 3, Testimonio de las diligencias practicadas en el superior gobierno por representcion que hicieron a su ex. A los pardos y demas milicianos de la provincia de Goazacoalcos sobre la reelevacion de pasa al puerto de Veracruz cada que haiga novedad, 1767; AGN, Tributos, vol. 40, exp. 11, fs. 182–92v; for *vigía* duty see AGN, I.G., vol. 492–A, exp. 3, Juan

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- Francisco Ramirez de Castro to Pedro Madraso Escalera, April 20, 1697, Acayucan, and AGN, *Tributos*, vol. 34, exp. 3, fs. 71–72.
30. AGN, *Tributos*, vol. 40, exp. 9, fs. 115–119.
  31. Allan J. Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society in New Granada, 1773–1808* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1978); Idem., *Cuba, 1753–1815: Crown, Military, and Society* (Knoxville: The Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1986); Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico, 1760–1810*, (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1977).
  32. Jorge I. Domínguez, “International War and Government Modernization: The Military—A Case Study,” in *Rank and Privilege, The Military and Society in Latin America* ed. Linda Alexander Rodríguez, (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1994), 2–3, 7. Domínguez shows that in 1766, the total Mexican militia forces stood at between 9,000–11,000 persons. In 1784, this number ranged between 17,000–34,000. By 1800, the number fell substantially, but was still higher than the 1766 figures, numbering between 23,000–30,000 persons. Domínguez has noted that the increase in figures was accompanied by an increase in the black military presence. Whereas in 1766, the percentage of black militiamen was just over 17%, between 1784–1800 the figure fluctuated between 33–34%. In light of my own research, I believe that these figures need to be re-analyzed, re-calculated, and compared to the number/percentage of free-colored militiamen who were in the military prior to 1766. For some reassessments see: Vinson, *Bearing Arms*, 24–25, 42–43
  33. Vinson, *Bearing Arms*, 41.
  34. While many servicemen lost their *fuero*, the evidence shows that others, particularly footsoldiers, gained access to the *fuero* during this period. Some mention of *fuero* loss can be found in Booker, “Needed but Unwanted,” 267–269.
  35. Only in selected isolated rural areas that had small white populations did the veteran cadre not take firm hold. Tehuantepec was one such region.
  36. AGN, I.G., vol. 306–A, exp. 4, Expediente promovido por Don Pedro Camuñez, subinspector del batallón de pardos de Puebla sobre las dificultades que pulsa a cerca del *fuero* y privilegios que debe gozar dicho batallón, 1782, Puebla and Mexico City.
  37. AGN, I.G., vol. 79–B, Mayorga to Camuñez, August 29, 1781, Mexico City; AGN, I.G., vol. 306–A, Camuñez to Valcarcel, May 16, 1781, Puebla; and AGN, I.G. vol. 42–B, Sobre milicianos pardos de Puebla que soliciten vender sombreros en el baratillo, January 1778, Puebla and Mexico City.
  38. AGN, I.G., vol. 197–B, Gorostiza to Revillagigedo, January 2, 1792, Mexico City; AGN, I.G., vol. 197–B, Revillagigedo, January 21, 1792, Mexico City.
  39. AGN, Criminal, vol. 542, exp. 6, fols. 160–225v. The Xicayan episode dealt with the implementation of white officers into their units, c.a. 1794.
  40. The original number of companies was 142. The cuts represented a 49% decline in units. See Vinson, *Bearing Arms*, 234–235.
  41. AGN, Criminal, vol. 542, exp. 6, fols. 160–225v, and Booker, 269–270.
  42. Archer, “Pardos,” 238–239, but see also AGN, I.G. 197–B, Expediente a propuesta del Señor Subinspector General D. Pedro Gorostiza sobre la extinción y reforma de los dos batallones de Mexico y Puebla, 1792.
  43. José María Miquel i Vergés, *Diccionario de Insurgentes* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1969), 233, 315; Patrick Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity and Regional Development* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1991), 100–101. Severiano Gómez also participated in inciting slave uprisings here.
  44. Archer, “‘La Causa Buena’: The Counterinsurgency Army of New Spain and the Ten Years’ War,” in *Rank and Privilege*, 23.
  45. Ted Vincent, “The Blacks Who Freed Mexico,” *JNH* 79, no. 3 (1994): 264.
  46. Tampico was the exception, having a large number of fishermen, pastoral, and agricultural workers. See the 1780 militia census: AGN, I.G. vol. 53–A, Thomas Serrada, August 16, 1780, Tampico.
  47. Archivo Historico de Veracruz, Caja 139, vol. 184, 1822, fol. 44.
  48. Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico’s National State, Guerrero, 1800–1857* (Palo Alto: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996), 50. More information on Morelos’ recruitment efforts can be found in Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico’s First Black Indian President*, (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 2001), 82–100. To give some significance to what Morelos’ 3000 recruits represented, the entire province of Acapulco had less than 5500 blacks, including all men, women and children in 1793. Neighboring Zacatula had just 572 mulatto tributaries in 1803. See: Gerhard, *New Spain*, 41, 396.

49. Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra*, 226. Statistics drawn from the 1793 Revillagigedo census.
50. Information on potential militia units that switched sides is drawn from: AGN, *Bandos*, vol. 17, exp. 50, *Reglamento provisional para el regimen, gobierno y nueva planta de las compañías de milicias de la costa del sur del reyno de Nueva España desde la jurisdicción de Acaponeta hasta Tehuantepec*, October 22, 1793, fs. 216–218. The number of troops in the 5 companies of Acapulco and Zacatula numbered roughly 550 men.
51. Guardino, *Peasants*, 53–54. On troops from Jamiltepec fighting in Acapulco see Vincent, *Vicente Guerrero*, 88.
52. For example, Morelos decreed: “Que la esclavitud se proscriba para siempre, y lo mismo la distinción de castas, quedando todos iguales, y solo distinguiría a un americano de otros el vicio, y la virtud.” See: Manuel Arellano Z., *Morelos, Documentos compilados, anotados y precedidos de una introduccion* (Morelia, Michoacán: Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán, 1965), XXIV
53. Guardino, *Peasants*, 65. Librado Silva Galeana and Ignacio Silva Cruz, trans., “Exención de tributos a los indios y castas,” *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación, México Nueva Época* vol. 2, (Jun.–Jul., 2001): 83–92.
54. Guardino, *Peasants*, 40–43, 63–64.
55. AGN, *Tierras*, vol. 973, exp. 2, fs. 1-24v; AGN, *General de Parte*, vol. 47, exp. 50, fs. 30-32v; AGN, *General de Parte*, vol. 35, exp. 180, fs. 141-142.
56. This amounted to just over 1000 soldiers in 1793. Apart from Igualapa and Xicayan, Colima was the other most prominent center of free-colored militia service, followed by Acapulco, Tehuantepec, and Tepic. See: AGN, *Bandos*, vol. 17, exp. 50, *Reglamento provisional para el regimen, gobierno y nueva planta de las compañías de milicias de la costa del sur del reyno de Nueva España desde la jurisdicción de Acaponeta hasta Tehuantepec*, October 22, 1793, fs. 216-218. See also: Vinson, *Bearing Arms*, 234.
57. Note that Jorge Domínguez shows the military participation ratio for the colony to have been 7 men per 1000 individuals in 1800. Chile and Cuba, two of the highest military ratios, numbered 32–36 men per 1000. Hence, Igualapa probably possessed a free-colored military ratio of somewhere in the vicinity of 330 per 1000. I estimate the adult, military eligible, free-colored male population to have been between 1,500–1,600 by 1800. I base this on the 1791 census, AGN, *Padrones*, vol. 18, fs. 209-305v. But I emphasize that my calculations are estimates only. See also: Domínguez, “The Military,” 7.
58. AGN, *Californias*, vol. 58, 1780, Expediente formado a Msta. de Don Phelipe Izusquiza, gefe de las compañías de caballería de Xicayan sobre que no matriculen en los tributarios los que son soldados.
59. AGN, I.G. vol. 483-A, Francisco Marti to Dn. Francisco Antonio Crespo, May 29, 1784, Oaxaca, Carpeta #2, fs. 39-48.
60. AGN, *Tributos*, vol. 34, fs. 149-149v.
61. *Ibid.*, 164.
62. Furthermore, the Spanish merchant class probably exerted less control over the cotton industry in the Costa Chica than they did in the Costa Grande, which meant that Spaniards were perhaps not seen as being as oppressive here. See: Guardino, *Peasants*, 54.