Abstract of the Dissertation

This dissertation examines the relationship between the Mexican port city of Veracruz and Caribbean in the seventeenth century. Drawing evidence from archival research conducted primarily in Mexico and Spain, I argue that Veracruz was part of a coherent urban system in the early modern Caribbean. Its first chapter uses early chronicles and conquest narratives, archived correspondence of Veracruz’s town council (cabildo), hospital records, and traveler accounts to examine Veracruz’s environmental struggles from the city’s foundation in 1519 until the end of the seventeenth century. Chapter Two builds on a database of import and export tax duties assessed in the ports of Veracruz and Havana to argue that Veracruz was part of a discrete regional trading network that followed patterns that were independent of the transatlantic silver fleet. The third chapter reassesses Veracruz’s role in the transatlantic slave trade, showing that the African captives who arrived in the city were a larger and more diverse group than previous studies have acknowledged. A particular contribution is the use of previously unused Mexican archival sources for the transatlantic slave trade. Chapter Four evaluates the ethnic and religious acculturation of African and free-black communities in Veracruz using the lens of a religious borderland. The final chapter examines how Veracruz’s role in colonial defenses changed over the course of the seventeenth century. In particular, I cite the formalization of the free-black militia to argue that Veracruz was integrated into a military-strategic system in the Spanish Caribbean that evoked explicit invocations of regional consciousness. By applying an alternate regional lens in Veracruz, this
dissertation demonstrates how understandings of early Mexican history are enhanced by more thorough consideration of New Spain’s maritime borderlands.

Members of the Committee

Ben Vinson III, advisor
Franklin W. Knight, advisor
Gabriel Paquette, advisor
Sara Castro-Klarén
Eduardo Gonzalez, chair
Erin Rowe (alternate)
Sebastián Mazzuca (alternate)
For Emily
(and mom and dad)
Acknowledgements

Thanks to an odd accumulation of serendipity, I have had the rare benefit of three dedicated and generous mentors in my time at Johns Hopkins, each of whom have left their mark on this project. I was an awkward junior undergraduate at Boston University on the way to meet with my advisor in the Department of African American Studies when I first met Ben Vinson III. He was waiting in the adjacent office, making last-minute changes to a talk he would give later that afternoon. I knew vaguely that I was interested in pursuing a doctorate in history, but my wandering curiosity and thickheaded determination To Study Everything had prevented me from specializing—hence why I was meeting with my advisor that morning. In the few short moments we had together, Ben pitched me on Johns Hopkins and colonial Mexican history. I had never truly considered Mexican history, but within minutes I was sold. Less than two years later I was at Hopkins working with Ben. Since that first morning about eight years ago, he has been a constant source of wisdom and advice, and through his prodigious faculty he has opened doors for me to set my roots in Mexico and grow as a scholar.

In my first semester at Hopkins, I found a second mentor in Franklin W. Knight. Gregarious, witty, and slightly mischievous, he commanded a seminar room with the sort of effortless brilliance that us mere mortals can only dream of emulating. Above all, Franklin is an endlessly loyal and dedicated mentor to his graduate students. I am profoundly grateful that he took an interest in me and my work early on. When Ben moved down the road to George Washington University, Franklin slotted in seamlessly as the day-to-day mentor of this project. Over the years, he has been my most enthusiastic
and faithful supporter. In more ways than one, his scholarship inspired this project, his incisive wisdom refined it, and his unfailing encouragement propelled it through.

Finally, I have no greater gratitude and this project has no greater intellectual and emotional debt than to Gabriel Paquette. Gabe has been a friend and a mentor, and his dissertation-whispering has both made this a better project and, above all, made this a finished project. Gabe offered generously of his time and his wisdom when it was most needed, and his advice has always had that elusive quality most virtuous of a dissertation mentor: always focused on the next step that would advance the dissertation along the path to finishing. To him, I am endlessly grateful.

In addition to my three “principal” advisors, I have had the great fortune of being reared in the intellectual culture of the Hopkins History Department. Phil Morgan, Toby Ditz, François Furstenberg, María Portuondo, Erin Rowe, and Richard Kagan have all read various chapter drafts and project proposals over the years, as well as offering their guidance on stray issues like conference presentations, job talks, and the like. Pier Larson, Nate Connolly, and Mary Ryan all generously allowed me to sit in on their seminars as a passerby, which allowed me to ocassionally break out of my colonial Latin American mindset and think about key issues like race, slavery, space, and urban history from a different theoretical vantage. I was also fortunate to work as a teaching assistant for Sara Berry, Peter Jelavich, and Bill Rowe. All three set a fine example behind a podium or in class discussion. I would like to thank Bill in particular for being a great friend, whether on the basketball court or in The Seminar room. His dedication to The Seminar and to the Department is the evergreen image of collegiality that I aspire to. I
would finally like to thank Tobie Meyer-Fong, who has been a wonderful and deeply committed DGS during my years at Hopkins.

Beyond the History Department, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Sara Castro-Klarén, Eduardo Gonzalez, and Sebastián Mazzuca, who generously read the entire dissertation and crafted, thoughtful, probing questions of it that will help guide the next stages of the project. Among Hopkins faculty, I reserve a special mention from the brilliant, kind, and late Sidney Mintz. Rare, in the last fifty years, is the Caribbeanist who has not been inspired by Sid’s work. My encounter with his scholarship as an undergraduate in many ways propelled me to Caribbean history in the first place. I am beyond fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet Sid as a graduate student and discuss this project with him during its conceptual phase, and our subsequent correspondence via e-mail always sent a thrill down my spine as the project developed.

My graduate colleagues have meant the world to me, and among them none have been more important to my work and my sanity than my fellow Latin Americanists and Hispanists. I am continually awed by my own good fortune to have entered grad school at the same time as Lauren MacDonald and Katherine Boníl Gomez, two of the most brilliant, generous scholars—and greatest friends—anyone could ever hope to meet. They, along with the incomparable Guillermo García Montúfar, Norah Andrews, Dexnell Peters, Álvaro Caso Bello, Matthew Franco, Jonathan Greenwood, Yonaton Glazer-Eyatan, Carolyn Salomans, María Lumbrejas, and Brandi Waters, have made my time at Hopkins rich and happy, and pointed my work in directions that were unexpected and enlightening.
Some of my Latin Americanist compatriots and I made a second home for ourselves within Hopkins’s famed Atlantic Seminar, where folks of the non-Anglophonic persuasion are welcomed with open arms. There, my work gained the insights of my graduate colleagues Nick Radburn, Katherine Smoak, Jeremy Fradkin, Nathan Marvin, John Harris, Christopher Consolino, Claire Gherini, Will Brown, Alexey Kritchal, Steph Gamble, Steffi Cerato, Rachel Calvin-Whitehead, Meredith Gaffield, Joe Wallace, Daisy Ramsden, Jennie Williams, Sam Backer, and Michael Hatton.

Other graduate colleagues have read chapters, lending both substantive feedback and their sharp eyes for copyediting. Lauren MacDonald lent both on a number of chapters over the years as she has become one of my most trusted sounding boards. I must thank Lauren particularly for the last-minute copyedits she did for Chapters One and Five. Will Brown read an early draft of Chapter Three, offering a great deal of brilliant feedback. There is neither a sharper eye nor a sharper substantive-feedback-giver than Catherine Hinchliff, who read Chapter Three. Dexnell Peters and Jess Walker both offered very helpful proofs of their own. Ada Link has been a friend and ally at Hopkins since day one. Finally, I would like to thank Jennie Grayson and Christopher Consolino for being daily fixtures in the windowless graduate workroom, where much the writing of this dissertation took place, punctuated by shared conversation, commiseration, and coffee.

My work has benefitted greatly from insights, questions, and conversations with a number of scholars outside of Hopkins. First among them are my undergraduate mentors, John Thornton and Linda Heywood, without whom I would never have gotten myself into this mess. They are not alone in their culpability, having had conspirators in Arianne
Chernock, Bruce Schulman, and Jim Johnson, all three of whom share a fair amount of the blame. In all earnestness, I cannot describe how meaningful their encouragement and patience was to me as an undergraduate. At no point in my academic life can I claim to have been the greatest student, but none of my failings ever stopped the good professors of BU History from being unfailingly supportive and encouraging.

In conferences and seminars, I have had the pleasure of sharing early dissertation material with Jim Sweet, Tamara Walker, Barbara Tennenbaum, Cynthia Bouton, Adrian Finucane, Fabricio Prado, Kris Lane, Ida Altman, David Wheat, Norah Andrews, and Roberto Sánchez. I would like to thank especially Melisa Galván, an early conference ally with whom I have been fortunate to share a number of panels. In other contexts, I have received valuable feedback and spare wisdom in conversations both large and small with Wim Klooster, Henry Lovejoy, Amy Remensnyder, Neil Safier, Jim Sidbury, David Wheat, Zachary Morgan, William Blair, Karen Graubart, Bryan McCann, David Sartorius, Jesse Cromwell, Bill Beezley, Sylvia Frey, Herbert Klein, Molly Warsh, Sherwin Bryant, Roquinaldo Ferreira, Frank Guridy, Jane Landers, Natalie Zaceck, Jim Garrigus, Stuart King, Marcela Echeverría, Lou Peréz, Matt Childs, Daniel Rood, Trevor Burnard, and Fritz Schwaller. Alejandro de la Fuente provided early archival suggestions for Cuba. Bernard Moitt graciously invited me to present my research at Virginia Commonwealth University, which facilitated a number of valuable exchanges. Patrick Carroll offered me tips not only on local archives in Veracruz and Xalapa, but advice on where to stay, where to eat, which made my research in those cities exceedingly pleasant.

As I traveled for research, I had the good fortune of meeting many scholars who offered not only sage advice about archives, but also their friendship and generosity. Like
many young Mexicanists, Linda Arnold provided me with much needed guidance to the
catalog of the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City when I arrived as a
bewildered first year student and again two years later when I returned for my
dissertation field work. In my time at the AGN, I had the good fortune to meet and
befriend Inés Santos, my archive buddy both at the AGN and later in the Archivo General
de Indias in Seville. I would also like to thank Nancy Alvarez-Marquez and Christopher
Woolley, who were constant colleagues in the AGN as well as a loyal museum-going
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project in its research stages. I would like to also thank Johanna von Grafenstein and
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scholars I have had the fortune to meet. Intellectually, their work has been a major
touchstone for me and an early conversation with them one October morning in the
courtyard of the Instituto truly ignited my eagerness and enthusiasm for my topic.

My time in Seville was enhanced by a never-ending parade of brilliant scholars,
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Luis Miguel Glave Testino offered their friendship and provided valuable research advice
in the archive as well. I would especially like to thank Nelson Fernando González, who
aided me in the retrieval of some copies in a time of Great Need. It goes without saying that I owe a great deal to the archivists at the AGN and the AGI for their tireless dedication to fulfilling my pesty requests. At the AGI in particular, I would like to thank Luis Emilio Calenda and Francisco Javier Molinero Rodríguez. Finally, in Cuba, I must thank Belkis Quesada at the Instituto de Historia, as well as Marial Iglesias Utset, Arturo Soregui, and the staff of the Casa de Ortiz and Casa de Americas.

These acknowledgements could not be complete without my thanks to David Wheat, who I was in touch with early on in the planning of this project, and who has been an invaluable source of support from the beginning. He pointed me in the right direction in the AGI, shared generously of his own meticulously crafted research notes and transcriptions, introduced me to other scholars who have been a valuable resource for me, and read drafts of my work. Most of all, he was a kind and generous friend. For that I am extremely grateful.

Over the Years of Dissertating, my sanity has been enabled by the routine outlet of healthy amounts of scholarly angst on the basketball court, and for that I must thank my teammates on the inappropriately named intramural squad “Man-Strength”: Will Brown, Ian Beamish, Ke Ren, Gabe Klehr, Nate Connolly, Lester Spence, Sang Yoo Kim, Yuval Tal, Hanno Balz, Tony Wexler, and Jason Hoppe. Not to be forgotten, I would also thank my teammates on the exceedingly appropriately named library softball team, the Dewey Decimators, and though the members of the team, spread across three seasons, are too many to mention, I would reserve special thanks for Bonnie Wittstadt, Reid Sczerba, Cheryl Wagner, Liz Mengel, and, of course, David Reynolds—not least because, as ETD Coordinator, his approval is the final hurdle this dissertation needs to
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If you told me when I was a kid that I would stay in school pretty much as long as any one person can, I never would have believed it. School was always a drag. I never really grasped the concept of assignments. I always wanted to be doing my own work. I read on my own a lot. I undertook other projects, like the time I was seven and decided to write a newspaper for my elementary school on my own. This had two effects. One, I did not poorly, but not great in school. Two, I developed a sense of intellectual independence. I might have given up on the school part of things entirely had it not been for some very dedicated teachers that I encountered in high school, teachers who encouraged my curiosity and extracurricular academic pursuits. I will never forget them or the impact they had on my life. For that, I would like to thank Barry Gilmore, Marianne Leung, Alex Kaplan, Mavis Negroni, and Philip Stalls.

My friends and family have supported me longer and more consistently than anyone. When my sister Tully moved with her husband and son, Bennett and Henry, to Fairfax a few years ago, it gave our relationship a new closeness that was meaningful to me, especially in times of stress. My brother, Harry, is sometimes an enigmatic fellow, or some might say a hipster doofus, but he is a reliable sort of doofus and in our adulthood he has become one my closest friends. Like Tully, Bennett, and Harry, my non-sibling friends have stuck with me through my peripatetic travels and accompanying long
silences. Andrei Anghlescu is my oldest friend—we followed each other to college in Boston and then, like two dopes, into academia. Good luck finishing your own dissertation, Andrei. I win the race, though. I do not get to see my friends enough, but wherever we are in the world, I always know that I can rely on Jon Remple, Vanessa Montero, Richard Lopez, Michael Rabinowitz, and Lijo Chacko in the moments when friends are most needed.

I owe a great debt to my extended and adopted families as well, none greater than to my grandparents, John and Virginia Hopper. Growing up, my grandparents were always there for me and my siblings, every summer, during family trips and holidays, setting an example of love, kindness, and virtue that continues to inspire me. In the last several years, I have been exceedingly lucky to find a new family, too, in the gracious embrace of Peggy Carr, Arno and Hartmut Mokros, and Hester Coan.

I grew up in rooms filled with books. Although my dad had graduated college (the first in his family) he was in many ways a self-educated person. He revered books and he revered reading. I wouldn’t say that his devotion to the written word was denominational—he always left room for other pursuits—but there was rarely any doubt about what came first. In this, he fulfilled the first commandment of his great literary hero, William Faulkner: “Read, read, read. Read everything.” And so our house brimmed with works of fiction, history, pop science, poetry, and journalism. The collection was more or less an eclectic one. There was no canon, there were only things to read.

My dad, Mike Clark, taught me how to read, how to write, and how to be a mensch. My mom, Karen Hopper, taught me how to be not only calm and tranquil, but also intrepid and tenacious. They both made countless sacrifices for me and my siblings.
My dad gave up a career in journalism so that he be there for me and my sister and my brother when we were growing up. As I child, I never fully appreciated how uncommon the stay-at-home dad thing was, especially in the 1980s and 90s. I know now it can’t have been easy for him to give up his professional life, but it enriched my childhood in ways that I can’t describe and in ways that continue to serve me daily. In more ways than I would sometimes like to admit, I am following in his footsteps and living by his example. Though this sometimes irks my independent streak, I can’t but be proud to have such an example to follow. My mother, meanwhile, is the most quietly badass person I have ever known. She is powerful and strong and works tirelessly in a job that is endlessly demanding. The most she has ever complained in her entire life is that somebody or something “wasn’t doing right.” I have never been able to emulate her stoicis, but her example is one that I aspire to and of which I remain in awe.

My final thanks go to Emily Mokros, who is the most brilliant, determined, funniest, and kindest person I know. She has been my constant companion over the past six years, from neighbors to being separated by oceans and continents. I could not have finished this dissertation without her and to her it is dedicated, with love.
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### List of Abbreviations

#### Archives and Libraries

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<td>AGI</td>
<td>Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGN</td>
<td>Archivo General de Nación, Mexico City, Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGNDF</td>
<td>Archivo General de Notarias del Distrito Federal, Mexico City, Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHCV</td>
<td>Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad, Veracruz, Veracruz, Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHN</td>
<td>Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANUV</td>
<td>Archivo Notarial de la Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana, Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLAC</td>
<td>Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPL</td>
<td>The George Peabody Library, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA</td>
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#### Journals

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<th>Code</th>
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<td>AHR</td>
<td>The American Historical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAHR</td>
<td>The Hispanic American Historical Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Slavery and Abolition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAM</td>
<td>The Americas: A Quarterly Review of Latin American History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMQ</td>
<td>The William and Mary Quarterly</td>
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#### Foreign Presses

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIESAS</td>
<td>Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Mexico City, Mexico</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CSIC       Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, Spain
EHESS     École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France
EEHA       Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, Seville, Spain
FCE         Fondo Cultural Económica, Mexico City, Mexico
IIA       Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City, Mexico
IIH       Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City, Mexico
INAH      Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City, Mexico
UNAM      Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City, Mexico

Published Collections

Introduction

Veracruz is a city whose historical footprint is larger than the city itself would suggest. At no point prior to the nineteenth century did Veracruz’s resident population exceed ten thousand people. Throughout the colonial era, it was one of the smallest settlements in New Spain to be officially granted “city” status.\(^1\) Despite its small size, researchers who peruse the colonial era holdings of the Archivo General de Indias (AGI) in Seville or the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City will find a documentary record rife with references to Veracruz. Veracruz features prominently not only in archival documents related to trade—those of the casa de contratación (house of trade), contaduría (royal accountancy), and the consulado (merchant guild)—which we may expect of a major port, but also in inquisitorial proceedings and in documents related to war and colonial defense.\(^2\) Although the city was small, its official designation as New Spain’s primary Atlantic port made the city a religious borderland in a period when Spanish officials assiduously regulated the circulation religious thought. Similarly, as a hub of the transatlantic silver fleet, Veracruz was a prized target for corsairs, freebooters, and foreign enemies and was increasingly a focal point in Spain’s defensive strategy in the seventeenth-century Caribbean.

The city’s outsized archival presence is reflected in scholarship of the colonial era. In addition to a handful of detailed studies of the city itself—most of them published

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\(^2\) Both the casa de contratación and the contaduría records are held in the AGI. Consulado records are dispersed between the AGN in Mexico City (often found the the section titled Archivo Histórico de Hacienda) and in the AGI, as well as in other cities that had their own chapter of the consulado. Veracruz did not have such a chapter until the end of the eighteenth century.
in Mexico—Veracruz is a featured location in monographs on a number of aspects of colonial Mexican history.³ It has played a particularly prominent role in histories of African diaspora, of international trade, and of warfare and imperial competition.⁴ It has also featured in writing about the Mexico’s religious history, as the inquisition found Veracruz to be a potent site for crimes like bigamy and crypto-Judaism, as well as a key location for the censorship of books and paintings entering the colony.⁵

³ See: The most recent comprehensive history of Veracruz is Antonio García de León’s magisterial Teirra adentro, mar en fuera, a nearly one thousand-page tome that covers Veracruz’s history from 1519 to 1821. See: Antonio García de León, Tierra adentro, mar en fuera: el puerto de Veracruz y su litoral a Sotavento, 1519-1821 (Mexico City: FCE, Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, Universidad Veracruzana, 2011). See also: Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Apuntes historicos de la heroica ciudad de Vera-Cruz, precedidos de una noticia de los descubrimientos hechos en las islas y en el continente americano, y de las providencias dictadas por los reyes de España para el gobierno de sus nuevas posesiones, desde el primer viaje de Don Cristobal Colon, hasta que se emprendió la conquista de Mexico, 3 vols. (Mexico City: Cumplido, 1850-1858); Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, La fortaleza de San Juan de Ulúa (Mexico City: Citlaltépetl, 1961); Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, La ciudad de tablas (Veracruz: Instituto Veracruzano Cultura, 1999); Bernardo García Díaz, Puerto de Veracruz (Veracruz: Archivo General del Estado de Veracruz, 1992); Pablo Montero and Daniel Goeritz, San Juan de Ulúa: puerta de la historia (Mexico City: INAH, 1996).


Despite the enormous depth and breadth of this scholarship, historical coverage of Veracruz is not without a few noticeable gaps. For instance, writing on Veracruz—like writing on much of Spanish America—is tilted slightly toward the beginning and the end of the colonial era. As the first Spanish city on the American mainland and the last Spanish city to concede defeat in Mexico’s war of independence, Veracruz is ubiquitous in studies dedicated to the first and last stages of Spain’s colonial project in Mexico. A more important gap, however, and the one that this project addresses, is the tendency of studies of Veracruz to approach the city either from the perspective of the broader geographic construct called “Mexico” or “New Spain,” or the perspective of the larger Spanish imperial system. Writing from the former perspective, many scholars who address the city of Veracruz—either alone or within broader histories of colonial New Spain—do so with the de facto understanding that the city was subject to cycles

Neither of these perspectives are wrong. As the dominant geographic lens through which Veracruz’s diverse communities are understood, “New Spain” has been and will continue to be an indispensable historical concept, vital for the understanding of Veracruz’s communities, and one that has the distinct advantage of being rooted in strongly held contemporary understandings of jurisdiction and law.6 Similarly, Veracruz owes its existence and much else of its early history to its designation as a major transit point in the Spanish empire’s global commercial scheme. At the same time, however, in ascribing Veracruz’s early modern inhabitants with the default appellation of “New

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Spain,” or ascribing the city itself, historians who address Veracruz risk the elision of a vital regional perspective that heavily inflected its early history: the Caribbean.

As the first Spanish city on the American mainland, Veracruz is often portrayed as a breaking point with the Caribbean: the place where the story of conquest moved into new phases and new kingdoms. A better understanding might be that Veracruz was the place where Hernán Cortés and his men left the Caribbean docked at the island of San Juan de Ulúa. From the early stages of the conquest of Mexico, Veracruz retained distinct connections to its Caribbean predecessors, expressed in the forms of shared environments and environmental struggle, an intensity of commercial interactions, a common legacy of slavery and African diaspora, and, lastly, a vulnerability to foreign invasion. These connections provoked the development of an alternate spatial lens through which we can understand processes of community formation, cultural transformation, and corporate identity. Without diminishing the utility of “New Spain,” applying the Caribbean as an analytical frame can enhance our understanding of early Veracruzano society, allowing us to see patterns of development that are otherwise obscure.

As historians, our task is to take a severely limited documentary record and to organize that record into narrative that elucidates patterns of human interaction, social and cultural change, and political and economic development that are otherwise obscure. In most cases, this process requires the rigorous application of a contextualizing schema, whether that schema refers to region, gender, class, race or something else. In many cases, the most appropriate *regional* scheme aligns neatly with easily identifiable administrative categories that were commonly used and understood in the period of study. In some cases, however, regions are more obscure, such as in borderlands, where
political power is contested, or in isolated frontiers, where no decisive power has evidently asserted itself. There is another option, too, and it is this final option that I apply to Veracruz in the seventeenth century. In this case, there are multiple regional systems that operate parallel to one another in the same place, at the same time. They are not opposed to one another, as in the borderlands case, but neither do they work to the same ends.

In Veracruz, the two regional contexts that I see working side by side are “New Spain” and the “Caribbean.” As the chief administrative unit to which Veracruz belonged, New Spain held legal authority of the city and its residents. At the same time, Veracruz was engaged in material exchanges with ports in the Caribbean, the precise nature of which was often tangential to viceregal or imperial concerns. Highlighting these exchanges can offer new ways of thinking about Veracruz and its social and cultural development within a framework that challenges and refines the view from national and imperial vantage points. While we may expect a port city like Veracruz to be similar to other ports in its shipping occupation, the material links between Caribbean ports also produced informal networks and compatible local institutions like the free-black militia and confraternal organizations, which in turn mediated the production of ideas about race, nationality, and other social categories.

The Caribbean framework is particularly useful as a lens for understanding Veracruz’s African and Afro-descended residents. Throughout the seventeenth century, people of African descent constituted a majority of the city’s permanent inhabitants. For Veracruz’s African community, connection to other Caribbean ports where Africans also constituted a majority facilitated awareness and access to alternate means of self-
identification that may not have existed to the same degree in the Mexican interior. Drawing Veracruz into the Caribbean and Atlantic world allows us not only to compare different processes if diasporic identity production in disparate colonial contexts, but to better understand how Africans in Veracruz defined their relationship to the colonial state in a way that transcended colonial boundaries.

To their credit, scholars of Caribbean history have been ecumenical in the definition of the Caribbean region, and questions of the Caribbean’s geographic limits are often addressed explicitly and with great care. While there is no consensus as to whether the mainland Mexican littoral is a bona fide part of the Caribbean, Veracruz in particular is regularly included in histories of the early modern Caribbean. Although some of the more hardline islands-first Caribbeanists may object to my inclusion of Veracruz within the Caribbean, I doubt that many Caribbeanists will be surprised by the act itself. What I hope to offer to the field of Caribbean history, then, is an approach to the region that emphasizes the diachronic evolution of its component societies. Rather than a series of island-hopping snapshots of different Caribbean societies in similar chronological or thematic moments, this project focuses on a single Caribbean space, asking continually how it was connected to other Caribbean societies, and how its relationship to the Caribbean region changed over time. In this sense, in this project the history of Veracruz serves as a microcosm of the history of the Caribbean region writ large.

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7 See: Lane, Hoffman, Schwartz, McNeill, Wheat.

Early modern Caribbean societies are often summarily dismissed as “backwaters.” This characterization follows from the reality that the conquests of Mexico in 1521 and Peru in 1532 and the subsequent settlement of the mainland drained the populations of nascent Caribbean societies. “After the early years of plunder and ruthless exploitation were over,” John Elliott writes, “the Spanish Caribbean became something of an economic backwater. The more ambitious settlers moved on in search of richer prizes on the mainland, and with their departure the white population of the islands stagnated or declined.”

For most historians of Latin America and the Atlantic world, the Caribbean remained silent from the middle of the sixteenth century until the final decades of the seventeenth century. In 1654, shortly after the end of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), the Dutch West India Company was driven out of the Brazilian sugar growing region of Pernambuco, which they had occupied for more than two decades, taking with them the sugar technology that would soon take root in Barbados, Jamaica, and many other Caribbean islands. In the ensuing decades, Caribbean sugar came to be one of the

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most dominant commodities in the Atlantic world, driving demand for slaves, competition for land, and the rise of new plantocracies.\textsuperscript{13} The Caribbean’s emergence as what Sidney Mintz has called the “crucible of modernity” has also driven an intense—and intensely productive—scholarly interest in a variety of topics no smaller than the transatlantic slave trade, the “birth” of Afro-American cultures, the origins of capitalism, and the emergence of modern democratic and republican thought.\textsuperscript{14}

In the shadow of vast mainland kingdoms and a later world of slavery, sugar, and revolutions, the intervening years of Caribbean history can indeed feel a bit small. Recently, however, there have been renewed efforts to elucidate the Caribbean’s lost decades. Ida Altman, David Wheat, and a constellation of other scholars have made key contributions to our knowledge of the years between the conquests of the mainland and the ascendance of the plantation complex.\textsuperscript{15} Much of this work has built on the


innovations of Atlantic history, emphasizing the ways in which early Caribbean societies functioned as the “multiethnic” testing grounds from which later colonial undertakings would emerge. In this analysis, the Caribbean was the site of early experiments with slavery, plantation agriculture, the “Atlantic commons,” and creolization. In some cases, even the failure of certain Caribbean projects are understood to be as instructive as successes in understanding the events that would come later.

By inserting Veracruz into this emerging narrative of early Caribbean history, we can open yet new ways of understanding how the early Caribbean, long ignored, influenced the course of colonial projects in the American mainland. While earlier characterizations of Caribbean societies as backwaters have suggested that Caribbean cities were only aroused from long seasonal slumbers by the annual passage of the silver fleets and their connections to more important events in the mainland, connecting Veracruz and the Caribbean can offer a model of how events in the Caribbean became vital issues of concern for both mainland administrators and residents of the mainland littoral.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

This manuscript examines colonial Mexican history through the lens of the early modern Caribbean, drawing the largest European colony in North America into the

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historiographical traditions of the Atlantic world. It does this through the insertion of Mexico’s coastal perimeter into the port city network of the Caribbean—a space that I term the “Mexican-Caribbean urban system.” This new theoretical framework embraces legacies of environmental instability, imperial competition, economic exchange, and above all, slavery and African diaspora in order to demonstrate the profound social and cultural bond that linked the islands of the Caribbean to the Mexican littoral in the seventeenth century. As I describe it, the Mexican-Caribbean urban system not only transcends the political borders of the colonial era, but also subverts the anachronism of later nationalist historiographies that map modern political geography onto early modern societies.

This revision is made possible through an analysis of the Mexican port city of Veracruz. Drawing on research primarily from Mexican and Spanish archives, I argue that the African captives who arrived to Veracruz were a far larger and more diverse group than any previous study has adduced. In chapters on the city’s environmental, religious, and military history, I show how Spaniards, Africans, free-blacks, and others understood Veracruz as an intrinsically Caribbean city. While some of cases draw deliberate contrast between Veracruz and the cities of the Mexican interior, others make explicit connections between Veracruz and the Caribbean ports with which it was most strongly affiliated: Havana, Campeche, and Cartagena.

The first chapter of this manuscript is an examination of the environmental history of Veracruz from its foundation to the end of the seventeenth century. Almost from the outset of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Veracruz’s founders made a self-conscious effort to distinguish Mesoamerica from earlier conquests in the Caribbean. Their
chronicles and letters represented Veracruz as the gateway from the barbaric tropics of the Caribbean to temperate kingdom of New Spain. In Veracruz, ensuing decades of abandonment, natural disaster, disease, and poverty would give lie to their assertion. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the city was uprooted and relocated from one bad location to the next on at least three occasions, often against the will of its own residents. When it finally came to rest on the Ulúaican coast in 1599, the city had already begun to acquire a reputation for ill health and poverty as the “tomb of the Spaniards,” the “city of death,” and the “city of wood.”

It had also begun to gain a reputation, in the words of one traveler, as a land “where the negros reign, because of all the people they are the greatest in number.” In the seventeenth century, visitors to Veracruz often aligned the city’s poor health with its large African population. Historians now cite such comments as evocative descriptions of daily life. In Chapter One, I argue that these observations, along with nearly two centuries of environmental struggle, actually tell us quite a bit more. In the early modern period, cities were believed to be tied to innate airs, waters, and tempers that interacted with the body to produce physical and social traits. For Europeans, increasing awareness of new lands in Asia, Africa, and the Americas required the qualification of previous

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17 See: AGI-Mapas y Planos, Bulas Breves, leg. 20, “Bula de Clemente VII ordenando el cumplimiento de otra inserta de la misma fecha, por la que establece la fundación de los Hospitales en San Juan de Ulúa y Veracruz, en Nueva España, a cargo de Fray Juan de Paredes (O.F.M.) y otros monjes de su orden nombrados por el Arzobispo de México y el Provincial de su religión, de la provincia del Santo Ángel,” Rome, 20 February 1534; Alain Musset, Ciudades nómadas del nuevo mundo (Mexico City: FCE, 2012), 67; Alonso de la Mota y Escobar, Alba González Jácome, ed., Memoriales del obispo de Tlaxcala: un recorrido por el centro de México a principios del siglo XVII (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1987), 53. “Es esta ciudad toda de vecinos españoles, tienen muchos negros y negras esclavos y otros muchos libres. Es el temple cálido enfermo tienen mosquitos, está sitiada en la marina…es todo el edificio de tablas, viven con gran recelo y sobresalto del fuego porque ya se ha abrasado una gran parte de ella.”

18 Antonio de Ciudad Real, Josefina García Quintana and Victorio M. Castillo, eds. Tratado Curioso y Docto de las Grandezas de La Nueva España, vol. I (Mexico City: UNAM, IIH, 1976), 116-118
understandings of how the interaction between geographic places and individual bodies took place. In linking Veracruz’s poor environment to the presence of black bodies, early modern writers distinguished the city from other Mexican regions, which were considered to be more temperate and where African populations were less proportionally dominant, and instead grouped it with the physical spaces of the Caribbean. In this sense, Chapter One shows how Veracruz’s environment not only demonstrated similar characteristics to other Caribbean ports, but how European and white creole writers understood those characteristics to be representative of the broader social and cultural commonalities of a discrete space that was fundamentally separate from the mainland interior.

From classifications of environmental and social space that implicitly grouped Veracruz with the Caribbean, Chapter Two turns to relationships of regional trade that connected Veracruz to Caribbean ports in a material sense. Based on data collected from twelve years of import and export tax duties in Veracruz and forty-eight years of shipping tax in Havana, Chapter Two highlights the ports, routes, frequency, seasonality, vessel types, and monetary volume of two distinct circuits of trade: the transatlantic and the Caribbean. Although most studies focus on transatlantic shipping, which was the larger of the two circuits by most measures, I suggest alternate ways of thinking about material exchanges to elucidate a regional network of port cities in Mexico and the Caribbean that operated parallel to imperial designs.

My study shows that Veracruz interacted more frequently with ports in the Gulf-Caribbean region than it did with transatlantic hubs in Castile, the African coast, or the Canary Islands. Contrary to common thought, regional shipping traffic also does not
appear to be a byproduct of transatlantic trade, but a distinct circuit that followed its own seasonal patterns. These and other findings point to the existence of a discrete regional construct that I call the “Mexican-Caribbean urban system.” Concentrated principally in the ports of Veracruz, Havana, Cartagena, Campeche, Tabasco, Santo Domingo, San Juan de Puerto Rico and, later, Caracas and Portobelo, the Mexican-Caribbean urban system connected disparate Caribbean cities in relationships of trade that became the basis for later expressions of a regional consciousness.

Chapter Three studies Veracruz in its role as a major hub of the early transatlantic slave trade. Breaking the slave trade into three chronological periods—pre-1595, 1595-1640, and post-1640—first that the slave trade to Veracruz was larger and more diverse than earlier studies have assumed and second that it followed the same chronological trajectory as the slave trade to other Spanish Caribbean regions in terms of volume, provenance zones of arriving captives, and overall mechanics. Drawing on new data from the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TASTD) and my own research, I argue that Veracruz imported at least 45,000 more captives than most earlier studies have suggested. Similarly, while African captives from West Central Africa constituted the large majority of slaves who entered Veracruz during the colonial period, my research indicates that the overall proportion of West Central Africans is lower than is often assumed. This follows and builds on recent revisions in the quantitative study of the slave trade to the early Spanish Americas.19 An important contribution is the inclusion of slave trade data from Mexican Inquisition records and other sources held in Mexican archives than have not

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been included in previous studies of the slave trade. In particular, Chapter Three uses Mexican sources to add detail to earlier understandings of the slave trade in the period before 1595 and the period after 1640, which have not been studied as intensively as the 1595-1640 period.

By showing that the Veracruz slave trade followed much the same trajectory as the slave trades to Cartagena and to the Spanish Caribbean islands, Chapter Three argues that the seventeenth-century slave trade to Spanish America should be understood as a unitary whole, rather than a composite of discrete branches. Since African diaspora played an important role in the social and cultural life of early Spanish Caribbean port cities, demonstrating that the slave trade followed similar chronological patterns across the Caribbean with regard to volume and provenance allows us to place those cities within the similar cycles of social and cultural development.

Chapter Four turns from the provenance zones of the slave trade to questions of ethnic categories and caste during the decline phase of the slave trade (1640-1700). Once in the Americas, the ethnonyms and toponyms used to describe African-born individuals (and occasionally their offspring) could become muddled, as colonial records used a select handful of “representative” ethnic categories to identify individuals from a wide diversity of African regions and ethnolinguistic backgrounds. The flattening of ethnic differences in American records has led to two main interpretations: one that argues that such broad categories represent the first stage in a process of acculturation to New World categories of caste and race, and a second that argues that broad ethnic categories functioned as refuges of African cultural signifiers, as captives from different regions formed bonds over the mutually intelligible aspects of their ethnolinguistic backgrounds.
In Chapter Four, I introduce a new wrinkle to these arguments, suggesting that the meaning and application of broad categories varied by region. Specifically, I argue that Veracruz’s integration into Caribbean networks allowed its African and Afro-descended residents access to alternate … In making this argument, Chapter Four draws from three cases. First, it examines 1681 padrónes (census registers) of three of Veracruz’s outlying towns: Tlacotalpan, Tlalixcoyan, and Medellín. These census records demonstrate the large proportional majority of the Afro-descended population in Veracruz’s jurisdiction (comarca), as well as a proportionally large number of enslaved individuals. More importantly for my purpose, the padrónes give evidence of specific African ethnonyms that were still in use in Veracruz even as similar ethnonyms had become less commonly used elsewhere. The second case comes from an account book detailing the expenses of a Corpus Christi procession that took place in Veracruz in 1667. The account includes payments to seven distinct corporate groups for the performance of a “dance of [their] nation” (danza de nación). Of the seven dance troupes, five used distinct African ethnonyms, one other was identified as “negro criollo,” and the last was Portuguese. I argue that these dance troupes likely corresponded to corporate groups—possibly confraternities—that may have been similar to African cabildos de nación that were common in the Caribbean, especially in Havana. The final case in Chapter Four involves the inquisitorial proceedings initiated by a free-black woman named Ana María Vazquez, who claimed to be a part of a circum-Caribbean network of free-black and Spanish women who practiced a kind of witchcraft. As she described it, the witchcraft in question

bears distinct similarities to both European and African forms of divination. Though the Inquisition found her testimony to be false, I argue that her story highlights the ways in which individuals understood Veracruz as a religious borderland where mobility was accessible and overlapping systems of power created spaces to articulate ideologies—real and imagined—that built on the city’s multiethnic m.

The final chapter investigates Veracruz’s role as a military-strategic bulwark of the Spanish Caribbean commercial system, focusing in particular on the role of the free-black militia in the defense of the port. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Spain faced increasing threats to its Caribbean territories from its European imperial competitors. Territorial losses in Jamaica, Hispaniola, and frequent attacks on its ships and most heavily fortified ports forced Spain to reconsider its military-strategic priorities in the Americas. While the early colonial period had been marked by concerted efforts to expand further and further into the American continent, the threat to commercial and administrative trunk links called Spanish attention back to the Caribbean. There, they faced a problem of manpower, as relatively underpopulated Caribbean port cities were too disease-ridden to maintain full garrisons of soldiers from Spain or the American mainland interior who did not have immunity to yellow fever and other tropical diseases. Setting aside earlier fears of arming men of African descent, Spanish port cities increasingly turned to free-black militias to fulfill the duties of defense. The formalization of militia service at the end of the seventeenth century manifested the explicit articulations of a Mexican-Caribbean regional identity, when Veracruz’s free-black militia petitioned the Spanish crown for tribute relief, citing precedents in Havana, Cartagena, Santo Domingo, and Campeche.
Chapter One

The Making of a Caribbean Port, 1519-1697

When the English Catholic priest Thomas Gage arrived in Veracruz on September 12, 1625, he noted a contradiction between the city’s prosperity and the humility of its appearance. As the only legal port of trade on Mexico’s east coast Veracruz was an essential node in trade routes that connected five continents. “The great Trading by Mexico,” Gage wrote, “from the East Indies, from Spain, from Cuba, Sto Domingo, Yucatan… and by Portobello from Peru, from Cartagena… maketh this little Town very rich, and to abound with all the Commodities of the Continent Land, and of all the East and West India’s treasures.” The city’s priory was “richly dressed” with “many Pictures, and… Hangings, some made of Cotton-Wooll, others with various coloured Feathers of Mechoacan… Tables covered with carpets of Silk; Cupboards adorned with several sorts of China Cups and Dishes.” Its most elite inhabitants were “extraordinarily rich” and his host, one of the city’s Dominican friars, displayed his material wealth with an enthusiasm that Gage considered to be “nothing but vain boasting.”

This ostentation was lost on the city itself: “Of the Buildings little we observed, for they are all, both Houses, Churches and Cloisters, built with Boards and Timbers, the Walls of the richest man’s house being made but of boards.” At night the “impetuous winds” became so harsh that Gage and his companions were certain that their lodgings

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21 Thomas Gage, A New Survey of the West Indies (London, 1699), 48-53; Gage estimated the city’s wealthiest merchants to be worth as much as four hundred thousand ducats—a sum that would have made them among the richest in the New World. By comparison, a well-paid colonial official might have made twelve thousand ducats in a year. See: Priscilla Connolly and Roberto Mayer, “Vingboons, Trasmonte and Boot: European Cartography of Mexican Cities in the Early Seventeenth Century,” Imagio Mundi 61.1 (2009): 59.
were on the verge of collapse and were “caused to flie from our rest… and with our bare feet, to seek the dirty Yard for safer shelter.” The next morning “the Friers of the Cloister, who were acquainted with the whole Winds and Storms, laughed at our fearfulness; assuring us, that they never slept better.”

Walking the city’s streets, Gage and his compatriots “found the situation of it to be sandy, except on the south-west side, where it is moorish ground, and full of standing bogs, which, with the great heats… cause it to be a very unhealthy place.” The ill health of the city Gage regarded to be a particular blight. He estimated that the city’s population numbered no more than three thousand and opined that a plethora of disease had caused the city to remain smaller than its trading might suggest. The cause of disease lay in the fruits and water of the city, which, he found, “causeth dangerous fluxes, and hasteneth death to those that newly come from Spain to those parts… for want of temperance.” It was a similar want of temperance that caused another member of Gage’s party, friar Antonio Calvo, to insist that they depart Veracruz only one day after their arrival “for his fear [of] eating too much the fruits of that country, and drinking… too greedily of the water.”

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In the seventeenth century, Veracruz was one of the most important ports in the New World. It was the first Spanish city on the American mainland, founded by Hernán Cortés and his compatriots at the outset of the conquest of Mexico in 1519. As early as

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22 Gage, 48-53.

23 “Moorish” in this sense refers to a marsh or bog and is derived from the English word “morass,” not from the “Moors” of Spain.

24 Gage, 48-53.
1571, the mule trains of the *camino real* linked Veracruz to Mexico City, the Pacific port of Acapulco, the Manila galleons, and transpacific markets in silk, spice, and porcelain.\(^\text{25}\) When silver production in New Spain began to outpace its South American counterparts at the end of the sixteenth century, Veracruz became the primary distributor of metal wealth in the Atlantic basin.\(^\text{26}\) It was the port of entry for the majority of European migrants to the North American continent, and between 1580 and 1640, it was the second-largest disembarkation point of African slaves in all of the Americas.\(^\text{27}\)

In the seventeenth century, Veracruz was a sparsely populated tropical miasma. Its trade was managed by merchants in Mexico City and Seville, and even their agents often chose to live in the coastal highlands near Xalapa or Orizaba rather than in the city itself.\(^\text{28}\) As early as 1572, those same merchants colluded with New Spain’s viceroy to undermine Veracruz’s *cabildo* and force the city to move to a new location that was more favorable to commerce, but where the city’s own residents would be deprived of potable

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water and arable land.\textsuperscript{29} Built atop sand and standing bogs, the new city of Veracruz remained a wooden city throughout the seventeenth century, with few stone-built building even as the volume of the silver trade swelled.\textsuperscript{30} Its resident population fluctuated between six and eight thousand people, making it only the seventeenth most populous city in the diocese of Tlaxcala, to say nothing of the dioceses of Antequera (Oaxaca) and Mexico.\textsuperscript{31} Few arriving migrants remained in the city long, and, according to some accounts, many moved on within hours of arriving.\textsuperscript{32}

How did Veracruz become at once the most important port in one of the wealthiest colonies in the New World and an underpopulated, impoverished, and widely disparaged colonial outpost? In answering this question, this chapter focuses on climate, disease, and natural disaster. Not only did these physical burdens stunt the city’s growth in real terms, they contributed to the development of Veracruz’s reputation as a “backwater.” In their writing, European travelers like Gage coded Veracruz’s environmental shortcomings to its social and cultural milieu, suggesting that the city’s geographic place was intertwined with the character of its inhabitants. In particular, accounts of the city often linked its black and African population with its heat, humidity, and disease climate, following the early modern logic that black bodies were more conducive to thriving in harsh tropical environments than white bodies. These

\textsuperscript{29} AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 259, r. 41, “Mudanza de la población de Veracruz a San Juan de Ulúa, etc.,” 1572; Boyer, “Mexico in the Seventeenth Century,” 465.


observations ultimately led European writers to classify the city in a way that made it distinct from the cities and towns of the Mexican interior, as they determined that Veracruz’s natural and human world fit more neatly in the Caribbean.

Veracruz’s natural world bore a similarity to other Caribbean locales, whether measured in average temperature, rainfall, natural disaster, soil type, or other metrics. The ascription of common geographies and environments has long undergirded historical constructions of the Caribbean as a discrete “region.” It was precisely these qualities that Sidney Mintz cited first among nine “major features” that constituted Caribbean “regional commonality.”

As environmental history has become more popular, subsequent historians have focused on disease, hurricanes, and deforestation as common environmental experiences that link Caribbean societies. “From Charleston to Cartagena or Veracruz to Bridgetown,” Stuart Schwartz writes in his regional history of hurricanes, “similar vegetation, similar landscapes, similar rhythms of life, and similar products had made the Caribbean societies sisters in experience.” Above all, Schwartz averred, “shared environmental conditions and hazards… have created a certain ‘transnational’ unity of experience.”

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35 Schwartz, Sea of Storms, x-xi.
In this chapter, what I find more significant than environmental “similarity” is the way in which people in the early modern world classified Veracruz not only as part of the Caribbean’s socio-environmental system, but did so in such a way as to distinguish Mexico’s Gulf coast from its interior. While similarities themselves are evocative of regionality, regions do not spring forth from environment without a modicum of human interpretation. This chapter argues that Veracruz and the Caribbean not only had features in common, but that those features were amalgamated into a regional construction that placed Veracruz alongside Havana, Santo Domingo, Cartagena, and other early modern Caribbean settlements.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Its first section examines the physical and human geography of Veracruz’s coast prior to Spanish settlement. It begins with a description of the ocean currents, climate, and terrain that typify and regulate the physical environment of the coast. My description of Veracruz’s natural world provides a baseline for interpreting the environmental conditions that its inhabitants had to contend with during the period of our study. More importantly, it allows us to locate Veracruz’s physical environment within that of the Gulf-Caribbean system. The Mexican coast occupied a physical space that was linked to the Caribbean via the interchange of currents, weather systems, disease pathogens, and gene flow, suggesting a geophysical unity that predates political and economic integration.

The physical relationship that connected the Mexican coast to the Caribbean islands did not portend a human relationship in the pre-Iberian period. Shifting focus from physical geography to patterns of indigenous settlement in Veracruz’s coastal lowlands, I argue that the coastal climate inhibited waterside settlement and in turn
discouraged maritime exploitation, commerce, and exploration. As a result, there is almost no evidence of intentional seaborne contact between the Olmec and Totonac people of the Veracruz coast and indigenous populations of the Caribbean islands. Since human interaction between the coast and the islands had no precedent in the pre-Iberian period, the development of the Gulf-Caribbean area as a discrete socio-cultural space only began in the aftermath of Spanish settlement.

Section two examines the first eighty years of the city’s development. From the moment that the Cortés expedition founded Veracruz’s first cabildo, Spanish settlers in Mexico made a conscious effort to disassociate their conquest of Mesoamerica from earlier Spanish conquests in the Caribbean. If Columbus had found a “New World” in the Caribbean, then Cortés boasted to have found a “New Spain” within it—a land that he described as prosperous, temperate, and civilized, in stark contrast to the tropical barbarity of the Caribbean. Despite this protestation, Veracruz’s early struggles with its natural environment betray a pattern of development that was in sync with the early Spanish Caribbean. Like Santo Domingo, Havana, Santiago de Cuba, San Juan de Puerto Rico, and a host of smaller Caribbean ports, Veracruz was relocated and rebuilt several times during the sixteenth century, often in service of metropolitan commerce, and over the objections of city’s own residents. While Cortés and his compatriots insisted that Mesoamerican climates and societies set it apart from the Caribbean, Veracruz’s many changes in the sixteenth century—and the forces that drove them—demonstrate that it was a part of the Caribbean world.

The final section of this chapter turns to the seventeenth century and the fallout of the decision, in 1599, to relocate the city to a site that was more or less universally
acknowledged to be deadly. While Veracruz’s final relocation initially led to rapid population growth, that growth soon tapered and the size of city’s population remained relatively static throughout the seventeenth century. In large part, its slow growth could be attributed to the same natural disasters, disease epidemics, and resource scarcity that had plagued the earlier iterations of the city. These did not disappear when the city came to rest on the Ulúacan coast and in some cases may even have gotten worse.

The persistence of the city’s environmental problems combined with relative poverty and a small population struck many seventeenth-century travelers and writers, like Gage, as anomalous. The most famous port city of one of the wealthiest New World colonies, the gem of the Spanish empire, was a putrid backwater. While Gage focused his disdain on the “vanity” of the city’s friars—a shrewd political choice in the context of the English Civil War, when his narrative was first published—these dismissals are often conditioned with reference to the presence of black and African bodies. Over the course of the seventeenth century, European writers who visited the city repeatedly described its black population using metaphors of disease and climate. On their own, these descriptions added to the city’s reputation as backwater settlement whose appearance was at odds with its privileged position in the Spanish American empire. In the context of early modern European thought, they were part of a growing body of literature that assigned cities and regions to innate climates and in turn held climate to be predictive of human physical traits—including phenotype—as well as individual temperament and collective social and cultural character. By connecting Veracruz’s physical geography with the physical and behavioral makeup of its inhabitants, early modern writers entered
the city into a transatlantic catalog of cities that were, in their own logic, united across political boundaries by shared climate, demography, and culture.

Veracruz is a city whose early existence was plagued by extreme heat, pestilence, hurricanes, floods, and fires. In this, it is a city that fits neatly within a pattern of the contemporaneous development of port cities and towns throughout the Spanish Caribbean. As Ida Altman has described, “Caribbean ports had a dual character, simultaneously provincial in their humble appearance, limited development, and lack of wealth… but also part of a much larger context that fostered novel connections [across] the Atlantic world.” From its foundation, Veracruz has been portrayed as a breaking point—the end of the first phase of Spanish colonization in the New World, and the beginning of a new one. Its persistent environmental struggles, however, shaped the course of its development and gave it a similar “dual character”— a maligned “way station,” but one that fostered novel connections between Mexico and the Caribbean, and through the Caribbean, across the Atlantic world.

Before Cortés: Human Settlement and Veracruz-Caribbean Interaction to 1518

Two hundred million years ago, there was no Caribbean Sea, but the Gulf of Mexico had already begun to form. As North America separated from the European and African land masses, water poured into the breach from the north, creating what is now the Atlantic Ocean. Over the next 25 million years, North America slowly drifted apart from its southern counterpart, creating a second breach to the continent’s south. The force of the rift between North and South America spun the North American continent counter-

clockwise. The Yucatán peninsula uncoiled away from the Louisiana coast and seafloor began to spread in a widening opening between the two. At roughly the same time, the submerged Florida peninsula rotated around the “Trinidad corner” of South America, creating an eastern continental boundary for the newly formed gulf. Thus it was that 140 million years ago, with the Yucatán and Mesoamerica to south and west and Louisiana and Florida to the north and east, the basin that humans would later know as the Gulf of Mexico was formed.³⁷

The origin of the Caribbean basin is less well understood. What is known is that about ten million years before the Gulf of Mexico was complete, North and South America began to separate from one another. Eventually, the two landmasses pulled apart completely, connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans together via a channel south of the Yucatán. According to a long-dominant theory, the Caribbean plate originated in the Pacific Ocean, drifting eastward into the Atlantic when the continents were separated. The larger Caribbean islands of Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico were a part of this drift, all but Puerto Rico arriving in the Atlantic as “continental fragments.”³⁸ These islands were later followed by other continental fragments, which settled to form the northern part of Central America. Meanwhile, the Caribbean plate collided with the South American plate in the east. As the South American plate slid under the Caribbean


³⁸ Unlike the other Greater Antillean islands, Puerto Rico is a volcanic arc island that formed in the Pacific Ocean approximately 190 million years ago, when the Pacific plate subducted below South America’s west coast. It is thus distinct from the volcanic arc islands that form the Lesser Antilles. See: James L. Pindell and Stephen F. Barrett, “Geological Evolution of the Caribbean Region: A Plate Tectonic Perspective,” in Gabriel Dengo and James E. Case, eds., The Caribbean Region (Boulder: Geological Society of America, 1990), 405-432.
plate, the collision gave rise, forty million years ago, to a chain of volcanic islands that would form the eastern boundary of the Caribbean: the Lesser Antilles. Finally, ten million years ago, a final continental fragment—the isthmus of Panama—settled into place in Central America, severing the channel that connected the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and forming the western border of the Caribbean Sea. 39

The continental movements that created the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean basins drastically influenced the course of human activity in the Gulf-Caribbean region. By the time the first humans arrived in Mesoamerica, ocean currents, soil and mineral deposits, and climate and weather patterns in the region had long been in place. Together, these elements can help us understand regional patterns of human mobility, settlement, and economic development. In the pre-Hispanic period, coastal climates inhibited indigenous settlement of the coast itself, even as the near interior was one of the most densely populated regions of Mesoamerica. Meanwhile, the loop current of the gulf limited regular contact between Mesoamerica and the Caribbean islands. 40 Later, when Europeans arrived in the Americas in the late fifteenth century, a search for mineral wealth in the form of specie drove early settlement efforts. It was the larger, older islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Hispaniola that held most profitable gold deposits, and these in turn became the focus of early Spanish settlement. 41 Finally, in the aftermath of mainland


conquest, Spanish conquistadors reshaped Mesoamerican commercial landscape to suit their extractive priorities, severely mediating local environments in the process.

**Gulf Currents and the Veracruz Harbor**

Mesoamerica is insulated from the open ocean by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. Because of this, the system of currents that it relies upon is not as imperious as the system that reigns in the Caribbean islands, where a prevailing wind from the Atlantic Ocean might direct landfall to one part of an island, but not another. Instead, in the Gulf of Mexico, a series of clockwise eddies link together to create a current that sweeps from south to north along the mainland coast, from the northern tip of the Yucatán peninsula to the southern tip of Texas—an area called the Bay of Campeche.

This current of interconnected eddies allows sailing ships to travel almost the entire extent of Mexico’s gulf coast rather than directing traffic to a single landfall. Traveling west from Cuba toward the mainland, a ship would catch the east winds of the Yucatán channel to sail across the northern coast of the Yucatán peninsula, gradually steering south and then back north along the Tabasco coast. Returning eastward, a ship would continue to sail north along the coast until reaching the mouth of the Pánuco River (present-day Tampico) at which point the ship would come to the northern extent of a clockwise eddy and the winds would turn eastward with the Florida current, bringing the ship back toward the Caribbean and the Atlantic. Since the gyres are relatively small in their circumference, vessels could easily sail north or south along the coast without ever venturing far from the shore. Northward sailing vessels would remain within sight of the coast for their entire journey, and southward sailing vessels would never be far from it.
Veracruz’s harbor includes four coral islands of considerable size: San Juan de Ulúa, Sacrificios, Pajaros, and Verde. Sacrificios was the site of an indigenous temple at the time of Spanish contact, and probably had been for centuries before that, though it was never inhabited and has not been inhabited since.\(^42\) In the colonial period, the most important of the four islands was San Juan de Ulúa, which housed the actual port facilities—shipyards, docks, and handful of warehouses—and the city’s primary fortress. Ulúa was favored over the mainland as a port for three reasons: its harbor depth of thirteen meters; the lee of the island provided ships insulation against the northern gales; and the underwater shoals and reefs that made navigation to the mainland difficult for large vessels. The same shoals also provided the harbor a natural defense, which may also have encouraged the selection of the site as a port.

The Ulúacan Coast and its Lowland Interior

Once on land, the Ulúacan coast can be described primarily as a sandy marshland.\(^43\) Within a short distance of the shore, there are several hundred small lakes, but the water filling them is brackish and undrinkable. During the sixteenth and much of the seventeenth century, there was also river called the Tenoya on the southern extent of the harbor. In the seventeenth century, the city straddled the river. On the south bank were warehouses, a Dominican convent, Jesuit residences, a post office, and a bullfighting ring. The north bank was home to most of the city’s residences and


\(^43\) What I refer to as the “Ulúacan coast” is the shore of the mainland directly across from the island of San Juan de Ulúa. This is the space where the city of Veracruz was originally founded in 1519, and the space where it would be permanently established in 1599. The total extent of the coast is only about two miles, from the southern bank of the Tenoya River to the reefs just north of the island itself.
government buildings, including the town council building and the customs house.

Veracruz’s main plaza and cathedral were also located north of the river, as was the city’s dock. Three wooden bridges were built over the river to connect the two sides.

**Figure 1.1.** View of Nueva Veracruz and San Juan de Ulúa, ca. 1640.

![Image of Nueva Veracruz and San Juan de Ulúa, ca. 1640](image)

Source: BNF-Gaignières, 6468, Adrian Boot, “Puerto de la Vera-Cruz nueva con la fuerça de San Juº de Ulua, en el reino de la nueva España en el mar de norte,” 17e siècle.

The river was always too small and shallow for boats larger than canoes to enter, and some years the river bed would dry completely during the winter months. Today, the river no longer exists at all, having been built over at some point in the late colonial or early republican period. Further to the south (about 12 km) is another river, the Jamapa, which was slightly larger than the Tenoya though still too small for large vessels to navigate. Unlike the water of the Tenoya River, which was often stagnant and filled with
sediment, the Jamapa had what one seventeenth-century writer claimed was “the best water that there is in all the world.”44 For this reason, there were multiple attempts—all unsuccessful—to divert the Jamapa River to the city during the colonial period.45

Although there was an abundance of broadleaf greenery in the interior, the Ulúa can coast itself was more or less an arid plain, bare of all vegetation except a small amount of brushwood. The soil of the coast was too sandy for routine planting or large crops, although there were several attempts at small farming and gardening within the city and in its vicinity during the colonial period. Likewise, the coast had no pastureland for livestock, although the higher lands of the near interior sported dozens of cattle ranches from the middle of the sixteenth century onward.46 According to Alexander von Humboldt, who described Veracruz’s climate in the eighteenth century, the coast was so sandy and the winds off the shore so strong that sand dunes of eight to twelve meters in height formed on all sides of the city during the dry winter months. When the weather turned warm again in the summer, the dunes would “contribute very much to the reverberation of the sun’s rays… to increase the suffocating heat of the air.”47

The coastal climate varies slightly from north to south. The portion of the coast stretching from Alvarado to Tampico, which includes the Ulúa can coast, has a tropical


45 AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Mandamiento referente a la introducción del agua del río Jamapa,” 1652, fs. 403r-422v.


climate with an average annual temperature between 22° C (71° F) and 28° C (82° F). It has slightly less rainfall than the coastal area to its north and south—about 1,564 mm (62 in) per year—with a longer dry season during the winter months. From November to May, the same coastal stretch averages just over an inch of rain per month, going up to twelve inches per month from June to October. Since the ground water was considered undrinkable during the colonial period, the city relied on rainwater collected in cisterns for its drinking water. Particularly long dry seasons sometimes resulted in periods of water shortage during which the city’s residents turned to dirty ground water for washing.48

The lack of potable water undoubtedly contributed to Veracruz’s reputation for poor health, but it was the stagnancy of the marshlands and ground water—and not the water’s drinkability—that contributed to the city’s particularly bad disease climate. As virtually every published description of the Ulúacan coast in the colonial era attests, the city was a breeding ground for mosquitoes and was regularly beset by a disease that was often described in the colonial period as vómito prieto, later known as yellow fever. There were at least three yellow fever epidemics in Veracruz before the eighteenth century, the earliest of which was in 1556.49 While epidemic disease ravaged indigenous populations throughout the Americas in the conquest and post-conquest period, Veracruz stood out as a city where even Spanish residents seemed to be chronically ill. It gained a reputation as a death trap as early as 1531, when it was described as “the tomb of the

48 von Humboldt, 217-220.
Spaniards.” As the historian of medicine Andrew Knaut has described, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the cause of disease was believed to derive from the innate quality of the land, air, and water of the city itself. Consequently, prevention of outbreaks was secondary to treatment of the ill. It was not until the Bourbon reforms of the late eighteenth century that officials in Veracruz began to more effectively identify the causes of yellow fever outbreaks and promoted a public health response that focused on prevention.

Moving inland from the coast, there is a gradual rise in altitude for approximately eighty kilometers before a steep rise at the foothills of the Sierra Madre Oriental. It was in the cooler coastal highland plains—insulated from waterside heat, mosquitoes, and hurricanes—where altitude is usually between thirty and fifty meters, that many indigenous communities concentrated prior to the Spanish period, and where wealthier Spaniards resided during the colonial period. Further inland, mountain-based urban centers like Xalapa, Orizaba, Huatusco, and Córdoba—which were describe by Alexander von Humboldt as a “cool and agreeable retreats, while the coast is almost uninhabitable from the mosquitos, the great heats, and the yellow fever”—stood between eight hundred and fifteen hundred meters. Orizaba is situated at the base of Mexico’s

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50 See: AGI-Mapas y Planos, Bulas Breves, leg. 20, “Bula de Clemente VII ordenando el cumplimiento de otra inserta de la misma fecha, por la que establece la fundación de los Hospitales en San Juan de Ulúa y Veracruz, en Nueva España, a cargo de Fray Juan de Paredes (O.F.M.) y otros monjes de su orden nombrados por el Arzobispo de México y el Provincial de su religión, de la provincia del Santo Ángel,” Rome, 20 February 1534.


52 von Humboldt, 269.
highest mountain, a volcanic peak called Citlaltépetl, which stands at an elevation of 5,636 meters.

Settlement and the Myth of Veracruz-Caribbean Contact in the Pre-Hispanic Era

For millennia, complex and technologically sophisticated societies, from the Olmec (ca. 1200-400 BCE) to Totonac (present at time of conquest), inhabited the coastal region that is now Veracruz. Famous for their giant stone sculptures and jadework, the Olmec heartland covered the coastal lowland region south of the later city of Veracruz, along the Bay of Campeche. Its northernmost center, Tres Zapotes, is about 85 miles (140 km) to Veracruz’s south in the Tuxtla mountains. The Olmec practiced large-scale agriculture, exploited nearby freshwater sources for fish, turtles, and mollusks, and drew crab and other shellfish from the gulf, but did not practice open sea fishing. Around 400 BCE, the Olmec underwent relatively rapid depopulation, particularly in eastern, coast-adjacent territories, likely due to the silting of rivers, which made coastal regions largely uninhabitable. The Totonacs, meanwhile, inhabited the coastal regions to Veracruz’s north, including the southernmost city of Cempoala. Like the Olmec, the Totonac practiced freshwater fishing, but did not rely heavily on saltwater resources or inhabit the coast, opting instead for higher regions insulated from hurricanes.53

There are only the faintest traces of interaction between Veracruz and the Caribbean islands in the pre-Hispanic period.54 Perhaps the most concrete evidence of


Veracruzano cultural dispersion in the Caribbean is the presence in many pre-Hispanic Caribbean societies of the famed Mesoamerican ballgame, which was likely developed originally by the Olmec. There may have been some contact between the Maya of the Yucatán and the Caribbean, but most Mesoamerican goods, plants, and animals that made their way to the Caribbean did so only by first passing overland to the Caribbean coast of South America. While it is possible that more extensive contact may have occurred at one time, it is unlikely that there was ever sustained contact or commerce between the regions. There were two main factors that limited Veracruz-Caribbean contact. First, Veracruz’s coastal environment discouraged waterside settlement, which in turn minimized indigenous exploitation of the gulf for trade and resource allocation. Second, while the loop current in the Gulf of Mexico made maritime travel along the coast relatively easy, it inhibited the development of methods for longer, open ocean voyages.55

Despite a lack of evidence, there have been persistent attempts to link the indigenous societies of Veracruz—particularly the Olmecs—to a variety of non-Mesoamerican “origin” societies in the Caribbean, in West Africa, and even in East Asia.56 The most common of these loosely documented theories contends that a group of West African migrants crossed the Atlantic centuries before Columbus and landed in Veracruz, founding the Olmec civilization. This theory originated as early as 1869 with

55 For a detailed examination of the patterns of contact between the Caribbean islands and the mainland, see: L. Antonio Curet and Mark W. Hauser, eds., Islands at the Crossroads: Migration, Seafaring, and Interaction in the Caribbean (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011).

the Mexican traveler and writer José María Melgar y Serrano, but it gained wider traction in the political moment of the 1960s and 70s, as Afrocentric scholars chased long-lost African “monument” societies.\textsuperscript{57} It has survived in some corners of academia even in the twenty-first century, as some scholars have begun to acknowledge and embrace the long-ignored reality of Mexico’s actual connection to African diaspora in the colonial period only to push through the factual and into the mythical.\textsuperscript{58}

Although this spurious origin story is long discredited in most scholarly communities, it informed much of the early ethnographic and historical work on Veracruz. In two ways that I find particularly revealing, the theory of African-Olmec connections has helped to shape modes of scholarly discourse beyond the lifespan of the theory itself. First, the original debate about Olmec origins coincided with the 1964 inauguration of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City. Acting under the auspices of the Mexican federal government, the museum promoted a curatorial narrative that embraced the Aztec and Maya civilizations as the foremost “mother cultures” of Mesoamerica.\textsuperscript{59} As archaeologists working in Veracruz began to identify stylistic continuities between Olmec sculpture and subsequent Mesoamerican traditions, it


challenged this long-held view, suggesting that the Aztec and Maya both may have owed a cultural debt to the earlier Olmec.60 Second, the Olmec origins debate came at a moment when the field of Mexican anthropology was experiencing a realignment.61 After decades of scholarship on mestizaje, younger scholars like Arturo Warman and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla began to push back against “acculturationist” scholarship that, they argued, erased the cultural contributions that indigenous and African communities had made to Mexican society.62 Although the mainstream of Afro-Mexicanist response to this critique explicitly rejected Olmec-African links, the movement to recover identifiable “African” heritage emboldened some scholars and popular writers on the ethnonationalist fringe to perpetuate an otherwise long-debunked theory.63

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60 Stirling was himself a proponent of this theory, though it likely originated in conversation with the famed caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias, whom Stirling had invited to examine the colossal sculptures. Today, some archaeologists continue to debate whether the Olmec’s constituted a Mesoamerican “mother” culture or rather a roughly co-temporal “sister” culture. See: Castañeda, 6; Miguel Covarrubias, “Origen y desarrollo del estilo artístico ‘Olmeca,’” in Mayas y Olmecas: Segunda Reunión de Mesa Redonda sobre Problemas Antropológicos de México y Centro América (Mexico City: Talleres de la Editorial Stylo, 1942), 46-49; Alfonso Caso, “Definición y extension del complejo ‘Olmeca,’” in Mayas y Olmecas, 43-46; Román Piña Chan, The Olmec: Mother Culture of Mesoamerica (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1982).

61 For an overview of this realignment, see: Theodore Cohen, “In Black and Brown: Intellectuals, Blackness, and Inter-Americanism in Mexico after 1910” (PhD Dissertation, University of Maryland—College Park, 2013), 232-316.

62 The critique of acculturationism was deeper than the issue of Olmec origins, and, in fact, scholarship in general, as many of the principal figures on either side of the issue held prominent posts in the INAH and in the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, which played a major role in the development of indigenous policy. The scholarly debate about indigenous contributions to Mexican culture and identity was thus a proxy battle in a larger and potentially more importance struggle over the federal government’s policies regarding indigenous assimilation and social welfare. See: Arturo Warman, et. al., De eso que llaman Antropología Mexicana (Mexico City: Ediciones Nuestro Tiempo, 1970); José Luis Anta Félez, José Palacios Ramirez, “Guillermo Bonfil a debate,” Gazeta de Antropología, no. 21 (2005): artículo 19.

63 For mainstream scholars of Afro-Mexico who responded to this critique by more thoroughly adducing African presence in the Mexican present, see: Gerónimo Baquiero Fóster, La canción popular de Yucatán (Mexico City: Editorial del Magisterio, 1970); Francisco Rivera, Veracruz en la historia y la cumbancha: con una selección de poemas jarochos, updated edition (Mexico City, 1970); Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, La población negra de México: estudio etnohistórico, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: FCE, 1972); Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, Obra polémica, in Obra antropológica, vol. XI (Mexico City: FCE, 1976).
Though lacking evidentiary foundation, the theory of Olmec-African links can help us understand the way in which Veracruz’s pre-Hispanic past has been constructed to mimic the historiographical debates that grow out of the post-conquest period. For the past 150 years, scholars have continued to engage the question of whether Veracruz was an “African” space long before the first “Africans” arrived to the Americas. Meanwhile, more mainstream scholars continue to entertain the question of whether Olmec civilization represented an authentic “ingredient” of Mexicanidad—a “mother culture”—or whether it was too distant, in time and space, to assume this mantle.64 Both questions highlight Veracruz’s ambiguous position within Mexico’s national narrative, as historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists wonder aloud whether Veracruz—even before it is called by that name—truly belongs to Mexico, or whether it does not truly belong somewhere else.

Geography and Colonial Priorities, 1518-1600

Including its foundation, Veracruz’s location changed four times during the sixteenth century. It was founded in 1519, at the outset of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, on the mainland coast opposite the island of San Juan de Ulúa (which I refer to as the Ulúaean coast). Within months the city’s cabildo moved more than fifty miles to the north to the outskirts of a Totonac city called Quiahuiztlán. There, with Quiahuiztlán’s patronage and material support, Veracruz served as a staging ground for Cortés’s march inland to the Aztec capital of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.65 In 1526, Veracruz

64 For a recent discussion of the “mother culture” debate, see: John Wilford Noble, “Mother Culture, or Only a Sister?,” The New York Times, 15 March 2005, F1.

65 The precise date of the city’s move to Quiahuiztlán is unknown. Peter Gerhard has suggested that the city may have moved as early as May 18, 1519—just three days after the proclamation of the city’s founding, though I believe the more likely date is much later, after the withdraw of the Aztec emissaries who had
moved thirty miles south—most of the distance back to the Ulúacan coast—to the mouth of the Antigua River. At Antigua, the city was closer and more accessible to its port, which had remained at San Juan de Ulúa, while also gaining estuary access to the hinterland.

Its final move came more than seventy years later in 1599, following a prolonged dispute over the city’s location that pitted Veracruz’s cabildo against imperial officials and mercantile elites in Seville, Mexico City, and Puebla de los Ángeles. After a devastating hurricane in 1552, city officials requested that Veracruz be relocated into the interior. Meanwhile, metropolitan authorities insisted that the city should return to its original location on the Ulúacan coast, citing the logistical difficulties arising from maintaining a port that was more than a dozen miles removed from the city that was ostensibly its host. At the prompting of merchants in Puebla, from 1572 to 1599, New Spain’s viceroys undertook a series of actions intended to undermine Veracruz’s position in the colony’s commercial infrastructure. This aggression culminated with the construction of an overland road that connected Mexico City to the Ulúacan coast, bypassing Antigua Veracruz. When the road was completed in 1595, Veracruz’s residents began relocating in large numbers to the Ulúacan coast until the city was officially relocated in 1599 and renamed “Nueva Ciudad de la Veracruz.”

These many relocations not only entailed de facto changes to the city’s environment, they are also indicative of the peripatetic nature of the early colonial

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Miguel M. Lerdo de Tejada, *Apuntes Historicos de la Heróica Ciudad de Vera-Cruz* (Mexico City: Impresos Ignacio Cumplido, 1850), 250.
project. In each move, it is possible to read political and economic motives that are evocative of the shifting priorities of metropolitan officials, colonial elites, and local settlers. At its original founding in 1519, Veracruz was intended simply to serve the immediate goals of military and political conquest of the Mexican interior. By the end of the sixteenth century, its ideal role within the colony was the facilitation of maritime commerce and strategic defense against Spain’s European enemies. While the needs of empire had changed throughout the century, large-scale political and economic concerns remained a constant force in the dictation of the city’s physical location.

This section examines the economic and political factors that informed Veracruz’s sixteenth-century relocations. It draws on early conquest narratives, descriptions of the coastal environment, imperial land grants (merceds), and viceregal and cabildo records detailing the decades-long effort to relocate the city from Antigua Veracruz back to the Ulúa can coast. Through these documents, this section not only tracks the city’s movements, it also examines the geographical and climatological language and reasoning that inflected discourse over the city’s location and places them into the context of the early Spanish Caribbean.

Port of Refuge, Land of Conquest, 1518-1526

The first Spaniards to land on the Ulúa can coast arrived with the expedition of Juan de Grijalva in June 1518.67 The expedition spent one week exploring the coastal

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67 The 1517 expedition of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba to the Yucatán did not reach the Ulúa can coast, though, as we shall see, when Veracruz was founded two years later, its cabildo would use the earlier example of Córdoba—and Grijalva—as a foil against which they justified their settlement. On the Córdoba expedition, see: Bernal Díaz del Castillo, with introduction and notes by Joaquín Ramírez Cabañas, Historia de la conquista de la Nueva España (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1976), 5-19. In 1502, Columbus made the first Spanish contact with Mesoamerican society during his fourth voyage, sailing from the northern coast of Honduras to the istmus of Panama. See: Samuel Eliot Morrison, Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1942), 605-632.
territory, producing two of the earliest written assessments of its environment, one by the Spanish chronicler Pedro Martír de Anglería, the other by expedition member Bernal Díaz del Castillo. According to both accounts, the Spaniards were initially attracted to the island of Sacrificios when they observed smoke rising from two multi-story built structures on the island. They later learned that these were temples devoted to the Aztec deity Tezcatlipoca, god of hurricanes and night winds.

Shortly after arriving at Sacrificios, a small group of indigenous traders approached the Spaniards, who responded by decamping to the neighboring island of San Juan de Ulúa. In his first description of the island that would later become New Spain’s primary entrepôt, Bernal Díaz drew a contrast between the deficiency of the land and the superiority of the port: “We built huts atop the highest crests of sand to escape the mosquitoes, of which there are many, and with our boats (bateles) we made a thorough sounding of the port, finding that the island provides good shelter against the northern gales and has a good harbor.”

The Spaniards named the island “San Juan” after their leader, Juan de Grijalva, and after Saint John the Baptist—whose feast day, June 24, they

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68 There are two early accounts of that expedition that describe the coast: one left by the sixteenth-century historian Pedro Mártir de Anglería, the other by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who was a member of the Grijalva expedition before taking part in Hernán Cortés’s conquest a year later. Although Juan de Grijalva also left a four-part Crónica of his expedition, it does not include a specific description of the Ulúa coast. See: Pedro Mártir de Anglería, Décadas del Nuevo Mundo… vol. I (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1945), 405-410, 415-416, 419-23; Ibid., vol. II, 440; Díaz, 67-73.

69 It is important to note that what the Spaniards at this time would have identified as a “temple” at the time of their encounter on the Ulúa coast would have been heavily influenced by their experience in the Caribbean, where built structures, including temples, where often small, ad hoc constructions. Since the temple is not mentioned in later sources, including accounts of the Cortés expedition only a year later, it is likely that it was a similarly small construction, perhaps akin to an altar, and not a “temple” at all—at least not in a way that would conform to Mesoamerican religious understandings of the term. See: Setha M. Low, “Indigenous Architecture and the Spanish American Plaza in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean,” American Anthropologist, vol. 97, no. 4 (1995), 748-762. On Tezcatlipoca, see: Guilhem Olivier, Mockeries and Metamorphoses of an Aztec God: Tezcatlipoca, Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2003.

70 Díaz, 67.
had celebrated earlier that week—and appended the suffix “Ulúa” for what they
incorrectly understood to be the island’s indigenous name.\footnote{There are two theories as to the origin of the suffix “Ulúa.” The first originates with Diaz. In his account of the Grijalva expedition, he describes an indigenous captive from the “Bandera” region (Tabasco), who, when questioned by sign language as to a description of the land, responded by pointing westward and repeatedly saying the words “Culúa, Culúa, Mejico, Mejico.” As a result of this interaction, the Spaniards inferred that “Culúa” was the name of the land onto which they had arrived. Though it is unclear at what point the name was truncated from “Culúa” to “Ulúa,” this is likely the origin of the island’s suffix. It was only later, however, that the Spaniards would learn that the word “Culúa” referred to an indigenous polity that was based in the city-state of Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico. Despite the misnomer, the conflation of Veracruz and “Culúa” persist today. Although “Culúa” is often transliterated as “Acolhua,” headier readers will also recognize it as the nominal origin of the popular Veracruzano coffee liqueur, Kahlúa. On this origin, see: Diaz, 69. The second etymological theory comes from nineteenth-century historians. Although they accept Diaz’s account, these historians also suggest that both the names “Culúa” and “Ulúa” were etymologically linked to the toponym “Chalchiuhuecan,” which is the Nahautl word for Veracruz. The earliest source for the name “Chalchiuhuecan,” however, is the 1598 \textit{Cronica Mexicáyotl} by the Nahua noble Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, which describes the word (written variously in the original manuscript as “Chalchiuqueecam” or “Chalchiuqueecan”) as the contemporary (i.e. late sixteenth-century) indigenous name for the City of Veracruz. Meanwhile, the nineteenth-century scholar Angel Núñez Ortega argued in 1883 in his \textit{Varios papeles sobre cosas de México} that “Chalchiuhuecan” originally referred to the names of two islands to Veracruz’s south, which the Spanish later named “Sacrificios” and “Tenoyan.” Finally, in his three-volume history of Veracruz in 1947, Manuel B. Trens suggests that the name “Chalchiuhuecan” should instead apply to the coast generally, as it in fact does today—the “Playa de Chalchiuhuecan” being a popular tourist beach to the city’s north. The word itself is sometimes said to mean “land of beautiful skirts,” though that appears to be an anachronistic definition. See: El Mosaico mexicano, \textit{ó colección de amenidades curiosas é instructivas} (Mexico City: Impresos Ignacio Cumplido, 1837), vol. II, 119; Lerdo de Tejada, \textit{Apuntes Historicos}, 102-103; Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc and Adrian León, trans., \textit{Cronica Mexicáyotl} (Mexico City: Impresos Universitaria, 1949), 39, 159; Angel Núñez Ortega, \textit{El primativo asiento de Veracruz} (Mexico City: Editorial Citaltepetl, 1969) 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. [1883], 48; Manuel B. Trens, \textit{Historia de Veracruz} (Xalapa-Enríquez: Talleres Gráficos del Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, 1947), vol. II, 22-23.}

On the mainland, the Spaniards made contact with indigenous traders from
“neighboring towns,” but the two temples on Sacrificios were the only sign of long-term indigenous presence of the immediate area. Although there were other indications of sustained indigenous usage of the land—a real \textit{cédula} issued in 1532 indicates that the indigenous inhabitants of Oaxaca may have used the Ulúa can coast for the allocation of “vines and other plants” prior to the conquest—the Spaniards reported no settlements on the coast itself.\footnote{For the \textit{cédula}, see: AGI-México, leg. 1088, l. 2, fs. 76v-77r, “Transporte de plantas desde Veracruz a Antequera,” 25 April 1532. As we have seen, archaeological evidence sometimes demonstrates that coastal areas that were vacant at Spanish arrival had hosted indigenous populations in the near past, either as settlers or as sites of resource allocation. In this particular case, however, the salient point is not whether...}
the Ulúacan coast had no indigenous population prior to Spanish arrival. Although the original document has been lost, accounts of it suggest that the coast was notorious among indigenous people for its mosquito infestations and poor climate.\footnote{According to Peter Gerhard, that document has been lost, though is described in some early chronicles. See: Gerhard, \textit{A Guide}, 362.}

It was precisely the lack of large indigenous settlements on the coast that Grijalva cited when he expressed a desire to leave a small detachment of men there to establish a Spanish outpost. He reasoned that a small detachment of a dozen or so soldiers could persist as the rest of the expedition returned to Cuba for reinforcements. In essence, Grijalva proposed to turn the coast’s deficiency—its poor climate and large population of mosquitoes—into a Spanish advantage: because indigenous communities had rejected the coast as a site of settlement, it was practicable as a site of Spanish encampment. He was opposed, however, by two of his chief lieutenants, Francisco de Montejo and Alonso de Avila. Not trusting the viability of such a small camp, Montejo and Avila pointed out that although there were no indigenous communities on the coast itself, there was evidence of several large settlements lurking beyond Spanish sight. If any of these decided to engage in hostilities, they argued, a camp of only a dozen soldiers could not resist. Capitulating to the objections of his allies, the expedition returned to Cuba instead.\footnote{Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas and Andrés González de Barcia Carballido y Záñiga, ed. \textit{Historia General De Los Hechos De Los Castellanos En Las Islas i Tierra Firme Del Mar Oceano} (Madrid: Imprenta real de Nicolas Rodriguez Franco, 1730), 4\textsuperscript{th} década, 236.}

Although the first Spanish expedition to the Ulúacan coast did not establish a permanent settlement, it laid the necessary groundwork off of which Hernán Cortés would build his colonizing expedition in the following year. Not only did the Grijalva
expedition supply Cortés with a wealth of information on the physical and human
geography of the coast, several of its members also joined Cortés, including Díaz,
Montejo, Avila, and Pedro de Alvarado, all four of whom proved essential to Cortés’s
successful efforts. In fact, although they had opposed Grijalva’s settlement wishes a mere
eleven months earlier, Montejo and Avila were two of the key architects behind the
foundation of La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz in May 1519, Montejo serving as one of the
city’s first aldermen (alcalde), Avila as its first treasurer (tesorero).75

In the time since Grijalva’s return to Cuba, word of Spanish presence had filtered
back to Tenochtitlan. Aztec emperor Moctezuma II dispatched a coterie from the town of
Cotaxtla—approximately ten leagues into the interior—to the coast to meet the foreign
landing party, to assess their origins and intentions, and, according to most
understandings, to invite them to the Aztec capital. Absent a settlement of its own, but
with the presence of an Aztec embassy, the Ulúacan coast became a neutral zone.
Docking their ships at the island of San Juan de Ulúa, Cortés and his men could receive
provisions and support from the Aztecs while the two sides kept a cautious distance from
one another.76

The physical descriptions of the coast that emanated from the Cortés expedition
differed little from their Spanish predecessor. Once again, mosquitoes featured

75 Bartolomé Juan Leonardo de Argensola, eds. Fernán Pérez de Oliva, Joaquín Ramírez Cabañas, and
Gonzalo de Illescas, *Conquista de México* (Mexico City: Editorial Robredo, 1940), 103.
76 According to some accounts, the lack of a settled population on the coast played more into Cortés’s
intentions than the presence of an Aztec embassy. For instance, in an article examining Veracruz’s
sixteenth-century relocations, J. Omar Ruiz Gordillo argues that the Ulúacan coast was “one of the most
inhospitable areas that the Spaniards had contemplated [for a settlement], but they had not encountered an
unpopulated area on the Yucatan Peninsula nor on the coast of Tabasco.” See: J. Omar Ruiz Gordillo,
Social y Estudios Regionales*, vol. 5, no. 6 (2012).
prominently. This did not stop Cortés and his men from proclaiming the establishment of a town council at “La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz” on May 15, 1519, one month after their initial landing at Ulúa. Cortés’s decision to establish a settlement on the Ulúacan was the result of a political calculation on two fronts. The first is well-known and repeated in most conquest narratives. Shortly before Cortés departed from Santiago de Cuba, Cuba’s governor, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, revoked the license authorizing the expedition. Cortés determined to undertake his expedition anyway, opening him to accusations of insubordination. The establishment of a town council with Cortés as its titular head (*alcalde mayor*) gave Cortés legal grounds to take executive action toward conquest, circumventing Velázquez’s authority and safeguarding against charges of treason.77

The second calculation was related to the first but is less often explicated. It is also more important in understanding Veracruz’s relationship to the Caribbean. In claiming autonomy from Velázquez, both Cortés himself and Veracruz’s *cabildo* self-consciously portrayed the “the rich land of Vera Cruz, where we are now” as a territory that was distinct from the islands of the Caribbean.78 In the city’s founding document, its *cabildo* suggested that the original purpose of their mission, “*rescatar*” (a form of forced barter) would be wasteful in this new territory.79 Elaborating in his first *Carta de*

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79 Schaller and Nader, *The First Letter from New Spain*, “Facsimile, Transcription, and Translation,” 71. In Schaller and Nader’s translation and throughout the text, they refer to “rescatar” as simply “trade.” I have chosen a more specific translation, as the context of its use seems to support the understanding of its meaning as “forced barter.” On the word and its meanings, see: James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz,
Relación, Cortés accused the earlier expedition of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, which explored the Yucatán coast in 1517, of slave raiding and inciting hostility with indigenous communities—activities that only succeeded in raising the ire of an indigenous population that was larger and more powerful than any in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{80} To continue this approach—while it might result in specie, jewels, and slaves—would be to jeopardize the future of Spanish ambitions in what promised to be a much more profitable colonial undertaking.

While earlier explorations of the Mesoamerican coast were motivated largely by a desire to find passage to the Pacific, Cortés understood that the land to which he had arrived differed greatly from the islands of the Caribbean. This land was larger and more densely populated, even if the Ulúacan coast itself was not. The people who the Spaniards encountered on the coast and traded with also revealed traits that Cortés associated with larger, wealthier, and more complex societies than those he had encountered in the Caribbean. Together, these observations pointed to a vast hinterland civilization, the conquest of which would require a different approach than raiding and rescatar. Rather than continuing the conquest as it had occurred in the islands, Cortés reasoned that “it seemed better… that a town should be founded and peopled.”\textsuperscript{81}

Cortés could have made his legal gambit anywhere. In this sense, Veracruz’s first location was less the result of careful consideration than of large-scale political happenstance. Cortés followed Grijalva’s year-old footsteps to the Ulúacan coast, where

\begin{flushright}
\textit{Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 75-76.
\end{flushright}
his expedition received material support from an Aztec coterie that was similarly attracted to the location by following Grijalva’s trail. After spending one month on the mainland, Cortés made the politically expedient choice to establish a town council. Although Cortés may not have intended to leave a long-term settlement on the Ulúaican coast, in this action, Veracruz became the first Spanish city on the American mainland—a foothold through which future mainland ambitions could be exercised.

While the original Veracruz served as a safe harbor and beachhead, it was not long before the location’s incidental utility gave way to more pressing Spanish needs. Less than a week before founding Veracruz, Cortés declined an invitation from the Aztec embassy to visit Tenochtitlan. On May 12, the embassy decamped. The Spaniards had relied on the Aztecs for their primary source of food and potable water since landing on the coast on April 22. Once the embassy was gone, Cortés and his men were forced to locate these resources on their own, and neither could be easily found on the Ulúaican coast in 1519. With the departure of the Aztec embassy and no viable way to source food and water independently, the Spaniards began to look beyond the Ulúaican coast for an alternate indigenous sponsor. The coast’s lack of a large settlement, which on April 22 had been an asset, quickly became a liability as Spanish priorities shifted from gaining a foothold on the mainland to gaining a local source of provisions to sustain the future of their expedition—and, eventually, a staging ground for further incursions into the interior. They found both their local sponsor and their staging ground in the Totonac village of Quiahuiztlán, about thirteen leagues (75 km) north of the Ulúaican coast.82

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82 There is a lag between the time when the Spaniards decamped the Ulúaican coast and when they settled Veracruz’s ayuntamiento in Quiahuiztlán. They departed as early as May 18, spending time in the Totonac city of Cempoala, but did not officially move Veracruz’s town council until mid-August. See: Schwaller and Nader, 15-16. Quiahuiztlán, which is sometimes written as “Chianhuitzlan” in primary documents and
Sources differ on how the Spaniards came to be associated with Quiahuiztlán. The early chroniclers Antonio de Herrera attributed the “discovery” of the village to Cortés’s ingenuity. According to Herrera and the chroniclers who copied him, the discovery of Quiahuiztlán had taken place before the Aztecs withdrew, making Cortés appear prescient and resourceful. While Cortés did send two ships to explore the coast, recent assessments have adduced the Spanish move to Quiahuiztlán to indigenous invitation rather than Spanish resourcefulness, noting the likelihood that the Totonacs would have seen the Spanish as potential allies against their Aztec foes. Indeed, Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, in his 1560 chronicle of the conquest—which remained unpublished until the nineteenth century—asserts that the famed Nahua translator Doña Marina (more commonly known as “La Malinche”) related to Cortés the fact of Totonac opposition to the Aztec, saying that “they speak different tongues and have different customs, and although they are subjects of Moctezuma in one manner, they recognize

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83 In Herrera’s telling, Cortés recognized early on that the Ulúaan coast would not provide the “riches” that he had promised his men. Fearing a revolt of Velázquez sympathizers, Cortés sent his two smallest ships—one captained by Francisco de Montejo, the other by Rodrigo Alvarez—to explore the coast in search of a better harbor. Sailing north, Montejo ventured as far as the mouth of the Pánuco River before rough seas, rainstorms, and a strong seaward current forced him to return to San Juan de Ulúa. Upon his arrival, Montejo announced to his companions that, in the midst of his harrowing return voyage, he had discovered a town—later identified as Quiahuiztlán—that appeared to be “fortified” and seemed to his pilot, Anton de Alaminos, to have a harbor that was insulated from the rough northern winds. When the Aztecs decamped from the Ulúaan coast, Cortés recognized that he and his men were “lacking in supplies, with their stores of bread [Caçabí] diminished and molding,” and also that “the land was hot [calurosa], discomforting, and filled with mosquitoes [cancudos], the worst of which attack and fatigue the men.” He therefore resolved to move the Spanish encampment to the town that Montejo had already discovered. Herrera and González, ed. Historia General De Los Hechos De Los Castellanos, 4th década, 119-120.

84 See: Hassig, Mexico and the Spanish Conquest, 71-80.
another Lord who they currently have… and that is enough to cause discord and little friendship."\(^85\)

Whether Spanish resourcefulness or Mesoamerican political divisions provoked the relocation to Quiahuiztlán, the act itself was indicative of the geographic and logistical limitations of the Ulúacan coast. Safe harbor or not, Cortés’s intention to make a foray into the interior necessitated provisions and hinterland access that were not available on at Ulúa. In a tactical move that is symbolic of the city’s revolving landward- and seaward-orientations, after arriving in Quiahuiztlán, Cortés ordered his ships destroyed—save for the anchors and riggings—thus removing the possibility of a return to Cuba and forcing his companions to focus their attention deeper into the Mexican mainland. From Quiahuiztlán, the Cortés expedition soon advanced further inland to the larger Totonac town of Cempoala, and from there to Tlaxcala and, eventually, into the valley of Mexico, reaching Tenochtitlan on November 8, 1519.

Within two years, Cortés and his indigenous allies had seized political control of Tenochtitlan and large swathes of land from the gulf coast to the valley of Mexico. Even as the conquest continued in Mexico’s western, northern, and southern provinces, the Spanish conquerors began the long process of reorganizing Mesoamerica’s political and economic landscape in the territories that they controlled.\(^86\) While the prerogatives of conquest saw Veracruz move to Quiahuiztlán, the island of San Juan de Ulúa remained the functional port of call for ships arriving to the gulf coast, beginning with the arrival of

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Pánfilo de Narváez—sent to apprehend Cortés on Velázquez’s behalf—one year after Cortés’s landing.

In fact, despite Herrera’s protestations of Cortés’s “ingenuity” in finding a “superior” port in Quiahuiztlán, there is no evidence that any oceangoing vessels ever docked there. Instead, arriving ships docked at Ulúa, taking advantage of its natural seawall and the depth of its harbor, both of which Bernal Díaz had referred to in his original account of the island. There, passengers and goods were off-loaded and ferried up the coast to the Quiahuiztlán harbor, which the Spaniards had begun calling “Medellín.”\(^87\) Returning ferries brought goods for re-export throughout the Caribbean and across the Atlantic. Much of this trade was relatively small-scale, particularly in the early years of colonization, and in many cases consisted of individual colonists requesting particular items to be brought from the islands of the Caribbean. These included the regular exchange of clothes, metal tools for mining, and the small-scale exchange of African and indigenous slaves.\(^88\)

While the settlement at Quiahuiztlán had been expedient in the early phase of conquest, it was not long before post-conquest administrators began to identify the location’s weaknesses. First, the coastal ferrying process proved inefficient and, at times, costly. Rough weather sometimes resulted in the loss or damage of some goods as they were ferried along the coast. Second, in the immediate aftermath of the conquest, the indigenous population of Quiahuiztlán declined rapidly, as it did elsewhere in

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\(^{87}\) AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 20, n. 5, r. 21, “Relación de pueblos de Nueva España y Perú,” 1527. This is a different Medellín than the town of Medellín del Bravo, to Veracruz’s south.

\(^{88}\) Many of these items of trade between Medellín and the Caribbean are recorded in the notarial archives of Mexico City. See, for instance: AGNDF, libro I, n. 29-34, “Protocolos Notariales,” 20-27 August 1525, f. 30r.-36v.
Mesoamerica, eliminating one of the principal advantages of keeping the Spanish settlement nearby. Third, the post-conquest reordering of the Mesoamerican commercial landscape altered overland paths into the hinterland, as Spaniards forewent old overland routes in search of faster pathways from the coast to new centers of wealth and production in the interior.

Although the colonial project to build new overland routes would gain greater urgency after the first silver strikes in central Mexico in 1530 and in Zacatecas in 1548, these three limitations proved enough to prompt Spanish administrators to move the city for the second time as early as 1526. The new location, at the nexus of the Antigua (Huitzilapan) and San Juan (Actopan) rivers, addressed each of the three concerns.

“As Antigua Veracruz,” as it would come to be known, was more than ten leagues (61 km) south of Quiahuiztlán and therefore only three leagues north of San Juan de Ulúa, cutting ferry time significantly. It was also only four leagues (22 km) south of the indigenous city of Cempoala, a much larger population center at the time of conquest than Quiahuiztlán. Equally important, the Antigua and San Juan rivers were larger than the Tenoyan River on the Ulúacan coast, and they provided estuary access to the interior more than half of the way to Xalapa.

89 The literature on disease-related indigenous demographic decline in the decades following conquest is voluminous. For a general overview of the history and historiographic controversies of this literature, see: Robert McCaa, “Spanish and Nahuatl Views on Smallpox and Demographic Catastrophe in Mexico,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 23, no. 3 (Winter, 1995): 397-431.

90 Some historians have cited the final months of 1524 or the first months of 1525 as the time of Veracruz’s move to Antigua. This dating is derived from a 1580 report of Veracruz’s alcalde mayor, Álvaro Patiño, to New Spain’s viceroy, Martín Enríquez, in which Patiño recounts the early history of the city. I have used the date of 1526 in accordance with the more contemporaneous 1527 document “Relación de pueblos de Nueva España y Perú,” cited above. See: J. Omar Ruiz Gordillo, “Fundaciones urbanas en México.”
Veracruz is often described as the first European settlement on the American mainland. This description is made more salient by the fact that the present-day city occupies the same coastal space as its original. As we have seen, however, the Ulúacan coast was chosen at the outset of conquest not as the ideal site of a new settlement, but as a port of refuge. Beset by mosquitoes, lacking fresh water and resources, and isolated from overland access, the city’s founders sought a more advantageous landscape for their new city almost immediately, moving it to Quiahuiztlán, where they would stage their conquest. In both moves, the city’s founders acted in accordance to the single-minded goals of conquest. At Veracruz’s original founding, that meant shoring up legal claims of autonomy within the Spanish empire. When Veracruz moved to Quiahuiztlán, it meant negotiating indigenous politics to secure a local sponsor to stage expeditions into the interior. In one move, Cortés looked back towards Cuba and, by extension, across the Atlantic to Spain; in the other, he and his men focused on the Mexican interior.

When Quiahuiztlán proved too distant from the island of San Juan de Ulúa, which continued to serve as the new colony’s primary port, the city’s early residents resolved to move the city again. In relocating to Antigua, however, they made a conscious choice to maintain a separation from the port itself, despite the material advantages of trade that greater proximity would offer. Although the city remained at Antigua for the next seventy years, it was only a few of decades before mercantile elites and imperial officials in Seville, Mexico City, and Puebla de los Ángeles began calling for it to be moved closer to the port, as to hasten the pace of trade. The city’s cabildo resisted the admonitions of the imperial center for much of the sixteenth century, citing the ill health of the Ulúacan coast and advocating instead for the city to be moved further into the interior. In the
section that follows, I examine this dispute, demonstrating how the economic motives of the empire gradually began to outweigh the concerns of Veracruz’s residents, just as the earlier motives of conquest dictated the terms of the city’s early foundations.

**Metropolitan Priorities and Local Preferences, 1526-1600**

On Friday evening, the second day of September, 1552, residents in the city of Veracruz began to notice “very great winds” arriving in the city from the north and from “other points of the compass, blowing in such a way that it was understood to be a hurricane.”⁹¹ The next morning, Bartolomé Romero, one of the city’s priests, woke early as usual and prepared to give mass, but he was prevented from leaving his quarters due to the “water that fell from the heavens and the wind that accompanied it.” Trees began to split and fall under the pressure of the wind and houses soon followed—first those of wood and palms, and eventually even houses made of stone began to falter. The city’s alcaldes mounted horses and raced through the streets and squares, warning residents to take shelter in a “strong house” (casa fuerte) that could sustain the wind. Other residents, “men and women, and children and slaves,” evacuated to the hills of the interior.⁹²

As evacuations began, the San Juan and Antigua rivers, which bordered the city to the north and south, began to rise, flooding streets and houses in the flatlands. Some residents with canoes and small boats braved the storm in an attempt to rescue people

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⁹¹ The same hurricane swept through portions of the Yucatan Peninsula the day before, crossing the Bay of Campeche before making its final landfall at Veracruz. See: Tomás López Medel, *De los tres elementos: tratado sobre naturaleza y el hombre del Nuevo Mundo* (Madrid: Alianza, 1990), 33. See also: García Acosta, et al., *Desastres agrícolas en México: catálogo histórico*, 109-110.

⁹² AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 181 r. 25, “Estragos causados por una tormenta y huracán en Veracuz,” 27 September 1552. The same report appears with additional testimony in AGI-México, leg. 351, n. 5, “Información que se tomo en la Veracruz sobre el huracan y tenpestas que ubo en ella,” f. 51r-66r, 27 September 1552. Some of these documents are transcribed in Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, *ENE*, t. VI, 1550-1552 (Mexico City: Antigua Librería Robredo, de José Porrúa e Hijos, 1939), 181-206.
trapped by the flood. One of these responders, Juan Romero, was later honored for his bravery. Not honored—and scarcely mentioned in later testimony—were the two African men who accompanied him in his rescue efforts.\footnote{Paso y Troncoso, \textit{ENE}, t. VI, “Testigo de Bartolomé Romero,” 183; Paso y Troncoso, \textit{ENE}, t. VI, “Testigo de Francisco de Torre,” 189.} Over the next several days, as news of the cyclone circulated inland, two residents of the interior, Alonso Nunez and Alonso de Buiza, were given commissions to commandeer supplies from nearby stores and warehouses to aid refugees who were left “very sick and weak” in the storm’s wake.\footnote{García Acosta, et al., \textit{Desastres agrícolas en México}, 109-110. Original manuscripts in the Ayer Collection at the Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.}

In the weeks that followed, rescue efforts gradually gave way to assessments of the damage. The wind had destroyed a number of private homes and \textit{solars} completely, including buildings of tabby concrete, adobe, and even some stone structures. Buildings that were not demolished in the torment were flooded, including several merchant warehouses and \textit{bodegas}. Thousands of pesos-worth of textiles, wine, olive oil, and vinegar were damaged or destroyed, while cases of silver, gold, and other precious commodities were swept out to sea in the receding storm surge and lost. At the island of San Juan de Ulúa, dozens of small merchant vessels from coastal and regional trading circuits—identified as “\textit{carabelas de Tabasco}”—were demolished, five transatlantic vessels sank, and four others sustained extensive damage. Four of the island’s dockyards (\textit{atarazanas}) were also swept to sea, taking four or five dock workers with them. Many sailors and dock workers took refuge on the island, but dozens of others drowned when their entire shelter was swept to sea. Only a few of their bodies were recovered.\footnote{Stuart Schwartz gives a dramatic retelling of the storm and its fallout in the opening anecdote of his book on hurricanes. See: Schwartz, \textit{Sea of Storms}, 1-5.}  

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\footnote{94} García Acosta, et al., \textit{Desastres agrícolas en México}, 109-110. Original manuscripts in the Ayer Collection at the Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.  
In the storm’s aftermath, Veracruz’s *alcalde mayor*, García de Escalante Alvarado, traveled the coastal highlands on horseback, surveying possible locations to which the city could be moved in order to prevent future disasters. On 12 May 1553, Escalante formally petitioned the crown and the viceroy to move the city, recommending an area called the “Hato de Doña María.” According to the historical geographer Andrew Sluyter, the “*hato,*” or cattle ranch, that Escalante suggested was almost certainly owned by a woman named María del Rincón, who held several titles to land dispersed throughout the plain and highlands of Veracruz’s interior—including three *encomiendas* inherited from three deceased husbands and an *estancia* that she ran independently.96 According to Escalante, the Hato de Doña María was northwest of Antigua Veracruz and inland from the coast “one league more towards Mexico.”97

In his petition Escalante cited a number of benefits of relocating the city to the interior. Hato de Doña María was on higher ground than the coast, so it would not flood as easily as Antigua Veracruz. It was on a plain, with good pastures for raising livestock, and the ground underneath was limestone that would make for stouter building foundation than the sands of the coast. He also claimed that the water was cleaner and, above all, that the new location would offer “healthier” airs than the coastal lowlands. Antigua Veracruz, Escalante averred, was “sickly” and suffered from oppressive

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humidity and a brackish river that flooded in rainy seasons, turning the entire city into a marshy breeding ground for mosquitoes.\textsuperscript{98}

Escalante was hardly the first Spanish official to address the crown on the topic of Veracruz’s ill health. One of the earliest administrative responses to Veracruz’s health came from New Spain’s first bishop, Juan de Zumárraga. After arriving to the port in 1528, Zumárraga petitioned both the Spanish crown and Pope Clement VII for support to build two hospitals: one at the island of San Juan de Ulúa (Hospital Real de San Juan de Ulúa) to treat gravely ill passengers and sailors arriving from Spain or from other Caribbean locations, and one at Antigua Veracruz (Hospital de San Martín).\textsuperscript{99} In a 1533 letter to the pope, the Spanish crown supplemented Zumárraga’s request, saying that a hospital at San Juan de Ulúa would engender the “good reception” of the ill, emphasizing that the value of sacrament to greet arriving migrants into a Catholic realm.\textsuperscript{100}

Although we might expect that travelers arriving to any port after weeks or even months at sea would often be in need of immediate medical care, early modern officials did not ascribe the apparently high rate of illness in Veracruz to long voyages and closed quarters but to the general climate of the Gulf-Caribbean region and to the Ulúacan coast itself. A real cédula responding to Zumárraga’s request suggested that “many who disembark [in San Juan de Ulúa] fall ill due to the great indisposition and extremity of


\textsuperscript{99} María Luisa Rodríguez-Silva and Verónica Ramirez, \textit{Los cirjuanos de hospitales de la Nueva España (siglos XVI y XVII): miembros de un estamento profesional o de una comunidad científica?} (Mexico City: UNAM, 2005), 102-104.

\textsuperscript{100} AGI-Indiferente, leg. 422, l. 16, “Cartas del rey a Su Santidad, al Cardenal de Santa Cruz, y al Conde de Cifuentes, embajador en la Corte Pontifica,” 1533, f. 25r-26v.
that land.” Implicit in the cédula’s reasoning is the notion that illness was linked not to the transience of a long journey or the confined quarters of a ship, but to a fixed physical space—the Ulúacan coast—that was inherently unhealthy.

Such thinking conforms with the dominant understanding of health in early modern European thought. Based largely on the ancient treatises of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen, early modern medical thought held that fixed physical places and climates caused to specific kinds of disease. Although many early modern medical writers believed that individuals who traveled between climate zones were more disease-prone than those who remained in their native environment, it was still the particularity of place—and not travel itself—that led to illness.102 In the case of sixteenth-century Veracruz, it is not clear whether Spanish officials believed that the locus of ill health was limited to the city itself, to the coastal lowlands, or to the Caribbean torrid zone more generally. What is clear, however, is that within years of the conquest, both civil and

101 AGI-Indiferente General, leg. 1962, l. 6, f. 50v-51r, 1533. As quoted in María Luisa Rodríguez-Silva and Verónica Ramírez, Los cirujanos de hospitales de la Nueva España (siglos XVI y XVII, 104. See also: AGI-Mapas y Planos, Bulas Breves, leg. 20, “Bula de Clemente VII ordenando el cumplimiento de otra inserta de la misma fecha, por la que establece la fundación de los Hospitales en San Juan de Ulúa y Veracruz, en Nueva España, a cargo de Fray Juan de Paredes (O.F.M.) y otros monjes de su orden nombrados por el Arzobispo de México y el Provincial de su religión, de la provincia del Santo Ángel,” Rome, 20 February 1534.

church officials understood Veracruz to be a distinctly unhealthy city, and one that required administrative action.

In the decades after receiving royal approval and papal support for the building of two hospitals on the coast, Veracruz’s struggles with public health continued to dominate administrative discourse about the city. Much of this discourse focused, as it did elsewhere in Mexico, on the smallpox epidemics that ravaged indigenous populations throughout the sixteenth century. Veracruz was uncommon among early Spanish cities in New Spain for its relatively small indigenous population (the earliest censuses of the city, a 1571 relación geográfica, identified no indigenous or mestizo residents at all among a population of 1,100 residents). The death toll in the surrounding districts, however, attracted the attention of local officials. As early as 1539, the city passed an ordinance banning the disposal of indigenous corpses in the city’s rivers, declaring that “those [indios] who were Christians” should be buried in the Catholic cemetery, while those who were not should be buried elsewhere. The penalty for those who did dispose of an indigenous corpse in the river, regardless of religion, was to be a fine of fifteen pesos de oro, one-third of which would go to funding the city’s public works, the other two-thirds to the judge who passed the sentence and the person who denounced the offender.

103 AGI-Indiferente, leg. 1529, n. 5, “Relación sobre Veracruz,” 11 March 1571, f. 4v.
The extirpation of Amerindians in the greater Veracruz region again elicited comment from city officials in 1580. In this case, the official in question was a licendado and trained physician named Alonso Hernández Diosdado. In a relación geográfica (different from the one cited above), Hernández noted the “very remarkable decline of the indios of this region,” expressing concern that if the epidemic continued apace, it would surely lead to the “total ruin and extermination” (“total ruina y acabamiento”) of the indigenous population. Hernández claimed that the massive death toll “could not be explained but by the bad temperance and inclemency of this land in general, and the miserable plague of mosquitoes that it has.”

Even though Hernández explicitly recognized that the epidemic decimation of Mesoamerica had precipitated from the moment of Spanish conquest, he followed earlier Spanish assessments in tying that decimation not to external factors but to the intrinsic febricity the coastal lowlands.

While it is clear that illness and public health were central concerns of sixteenth-century officials—both locally and in the viceregal and metropolitan centers—there was no consensus either on the severity of the problem or what should be done about it. Writing in the aftermath of a devastating hurricane, Escalante had used the city’s ill health in an attempt to provoke a move to a healthier location. Five years before the 1552 hurricane, Escalante’s predecessor as alcalde mayor, Alonso de Herrera, wrote that Veracruz was “an unhealthy city but the key to New Spain nonetheless.” Seeking royal privilege and “provisions” (bastimentos), he characterized Veracruz’s residents as

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resilient and “loyal vassals” who provided essential security to New Spain and its supply
route, guarding against foreign corsairs and maroons alike, in spite of the city’s
pestilential environment.\textsuperscript{106}

Unlike Escalante, who represented Veracruz’s climate as a debilitating weakness,
Herrera drew on perceptions of the city’s ill health in an attempt to demonstrate how
essential its residents were to the functioning of the empire. In Herrera’s telling,
Veracruz’s vecinos willingly assumed great personal risk to their health in order to
provide essential services to imperial and commercial order. As we shall see, the Spanish
crown and New Spain’s viceroy would later use this same reasoning, which in 1547 was
intended to elicit royal support, against Veracruz’s own cabildo, as tangible evidence of
the danger inherent in further removing the city from its port.

Official anxiety that Antigua Veracruz was located too far from San Juan de Ulúa
to effectively service the port’s needs is evident, if inchoate, as early as the 1533 cédula
requesting papal support for a hospital. San Juan de Ulúa needed a hospital of its own, the
crown reasoned, because “the closest population is that of the city of Veracruz, which is
five leagues [away],” suggesting Antigua Veracruz was too far to play an active role in
the public health of the port.\textsuperscript{107} That anxiety seemed to allay by 1550, with the
appointment of Luís de Velasco (the elder) to the office of viceroy in Mexico City.
Shortly after arriving in Mexico, Velasco appeared to support a movement among local
civil and church authorities to relocate the city to an area that was “healthier, richer, and

\textsuperscript{106} AGI-México, leg. 350, n. 2 “Alonso de Herrera, en nombre de la ciudad del puerto de la Veracruz, sobre
que se provean las cosas contenidas en este memorial que presenta,” 15 June 1547, f. 11r-13v.

\textsuperscript{107} It is notable, too, that both Zumárraga’s original request in 1528 and the pope’s official response in 1534
indicated a need for two hospitals—one on San Juan de Ulúa, the other at Antigua Veracruz—but in three
letters and cédulas responding to the matter, the Spanish crown only ever referred to a need for a hospital at
San Juan de Ulúa.
more secure.”

Although some historians have speculated that the area under consideration for such a move was the aforementioned Hato de Doña María, the precise site of this new location was never determined, and the Hato does not appear in documentary record until 1553.

If Velasco had supported moving the city deeper into the highlands upon his appointment, then the havoc wrought by the 1552 hurricane abruptly changed his tune. While the hurricane spurred Escalante to formally request a move into the interior, metropolitan authorities and mercantile elite in the imperial center were more alarmed by the storm’s impact on shipping than they were by the threat to the health of the city. Because the city and the port were separated by more than a dozen miles, relief had to be funneled to not one but two disaster zones in the storm’s immediate aftermath.

Moreover, the storm had severely damaged the port’s facilities, which would require not only money but manpower to rebuild. To support this effort, Velasco approved an additional one-percent of tax on imported and exported goods, which would fund the royal purchase of “fifteen or twenty black slaves” to work on the repairs and to aid in the unloading of ships. Despite this provision, Velasco expressed concern that

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108 María Justina Sarabia Viejo, *Don Luis de Velasco, virrey de Nueva España, 1550-1564* (Seville: Editorial CSIC, 1978), 450-452. Sarabia suggests that administrative discussions about relocating the city had centered on the Hato de Doña María even before the 1552 hurricane. I have not seen any documents dated before 1553 that mention the Hato, in relation to moving the city of Veracruz or otherwise. Moreover, while it is not impossible that officials considered a number of possible sites before the hurricane, Escalante’s recommendation of the Hato suggests that it is an original suggestion made in the wake of the hurricane. Therefore, I believe not only that earlier discussions of moving Veracruz did not consider the Hato as a possible location, but earlier discussions were less focused on improving the health of the city and more focused on improving the public health apparatus at San Juan de Ulúa.

109 Sarabia cites a document dated to 1562, but written in 1551, that attests to local opposition to moving the city prior to the hurricane, apparently suggesting that a reward system could be used to entice residents to move. According to Sarabía, in this system, the first twenty families that moved from Antigua Veracruz to a new site would receive one hundred pesos. See: Sarabía, 451. See also: AGI-México, leg. 280, “Mandamiento sobre el cobro de la imposición hecho por Hernando de Vegara,” 6 January 1551.
moving the city of Veracruz during such a trying time could hinder the recovery effort and further delay the transit of merchandise. Writing just one month before the French pirate Jacques de Sorés’s famed sack of Havana, Velasco cited reports of increasingly daring attacks on Caribbean ports by French corsairs as a key strategic reason for keeping the city close.\textsuperscript{110} If Veracruz moved further into the interior, then it would not be able to reinforce the battered and vulnerable port. Tellingly, at no point in his report to the crown discussing the repairs did he mention the question of public health.\textsuperscript{111}

In the second half of the sixteenth century, metropolitan discourse on the city’s location would focus on the efficiency of shipping above all else and subsequent viceroyos would follow Velasco’s example by calling on their authority over the port’s defenses to put pressure on the city’s cabildo. This was particularly true after the city was attacked by English pirates in September 1568, when five English vessels under the command of John Hawkins engaged in a naval battle with ships of the Spanish fleet docked at San Juan de Ulúa.\textsuperscript{112} Although the Spanish ships scored a decisive victory in the battle, New Spain’s new viceroy Martín Enríquez de Almanza, wrote an urgent missive to the council of the Indies requesting approval and financial support for the construction of two bulwarks on the mainland, at the northern and southern extents of the Ulúaean harbor, to supplement the island’s own defenses.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} One year earlier, the corsair François le Clerc had raided Spanish ports in Puerto Rico and Hispaniola and had occupied Santiago de Cuba for one month. See: Kris E. Lane, \textit{Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500-1750} (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13-22.

\textsuperscript{111} AGI-México, leg. 19, n. 17, “Carta del virrey Luis de Velasco, el viejo,” 3 June 1555.

\textsuperscript{112} Othón Arróniz, \textit{La Batalla naval de San Juan de Ulúa, 1568} (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1982).

\textsuperscript{113} AGI-México, leg. 19, n. 39, “Carta del virrey Martín Enríquez,” 1568.
Enríquez’s appeal followed on the heels of the beginning of construction of a fortress on the island itself two years earlier, in 1566, under the direction of the Spanish military engineer Cristobál de Eraso. That same year, the previous viceroy, Gastón de Peralta, granted a license to a man named Juan González de Buitrón to construct a private residence (solar) on the mainland directly across from the island. Buitrón also received a license to open a shop (venta) that would serve the overflow population of soldiers, sailors, laborers, and incoming migrants during the period of construction on the island.114 The license was the first of fifty that would be granted for the establishment of ventas, solars, hospederías (guesthouses), and provisions farms on the Ulúa canal coast between 1566 and 1599. Two of these licenses also indicated the presence of other residents, including a free-black woman named Francisca de Villegas, whose house was listed as a neighboring plot in a grant of two solares in 1592.115 In all, the licenses, all of which were granted before the city was officially moved to the Ulúa canal coast, represented more than ninety percent of all such licenses that would be granted for the Ulúa-Veracruz area during the entire colonial period.116


In effect, New Spain’s viceroys systematically used their power and, from the vantage of the viceregal state, their imperative to direct funding in support of colonial defense. Not incidentally, one effect of that funding was a redistribution of population, commerce, and infrastructure to the Ulúa can coast. While this redistribution may not have been the intended consequence of increased defense spending in the second half of the seventeenth century, the early flow of settlers to Ulúa can coast set an important precedent. The establishment of a baseline population and infrastructure on the mainland coast soon produced a snowball effect. As more sailors and travelers made use of the mainland’s service economy, the more service economy relocated from La Antigua to the Ulúa can coast.

At the same time as a small service economy was beginning to huddle on the mainland coast of San Juan de Ulúa, merchants in Puebla, Mexico City, and Seville were growing agitated by the slow pace of trade, and particularly with the long delays that resulted from the transshipment of goods from the island to La Antigua, which could take as many as two weeks, depending on the weather. Once goods arrived in La Antigua, the pace of trade did not hasten, as the Antigua River was often too shallow to be particularly useful for transporting goods. At some points, the river was so shallow that quicksand

forced river boats to unload their cargoes on the bank, transferring the merchandise to teams of muleteers who would cart the cargo overland while the boat proceeded unladen until the water was deep enough to transfer the goods back. The lack of a good road in and out of the city and the shallowness of the river meant that some cargo could take as much as two years to arrive in Mexico City from the time it was unloaded at San Juan de Ulúa.\footnote{AGI-México, leg. 350, “Cartas del cabildo secular de la ciudad de Veracruz,” 24 December 1595, fs. 268r-272v.}

In 1572 a group of Spanish ship owners, captains, and pilots based in Seville and Triana petitioned the crown advocating that the city be moved to closer to San Juan de Ulúa, possibly frustrated by the relatively small service economy at the port. In their petition, the seafarers appealed to commerce, claiming that trade would be better off if cargo entered the mainland at the Ulúa can coast and progressing overland than they were being ferried from the port to Antigua Veracruz.\footnote{AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 259, r. 41, “Mudanza de la población de Veracruz a San Juan de Ulúa, etc.,” 1572.} Meanwhile in New Spain, a separate group of merchants in Puebla petitioned viceroy Martín Enríquez to supply funding for the building of a new dock (atarazana) at San Juan de Ulúa, which he approved.

The growing movement in Seville, Puebla, and Mexico City to relocate the city nearer the port was not well-received in Antigua Veracruz. Resistance to the idea of moving the city to the Ulúa can coast was strong and immediate. In August 1575, the city council sent a letter to the Spanish crown stating in unequivocal terms all of the dangers of moving the city:

By another letter this city has written to Your Majesty to tell of the general and universal damage that will be done to Your Majesty’s treasury and to the merchants and vecinos of this city and this kingdom if the viceroy is indeed
successful in his attempt to have ships unload their goods in the mainland of the port of San Juan de Ulúa. There will be no sailor who will not die of work and sun, nor could he leave the city by foot, for in that land is greatly unpopulated and the terrain is rough, its rivers dangerous, and its swamps and marshes large and deep. Nor is there wood nor grass nor anything that is good for the sustenance of life. The site is beaten with great northern gales and the wind is very bad in such a way that moves the sand dunes, creating mountains of sand that shift from one place to another, so that one year the city is blind and the next it is open for the mosquitoes that make this land uninhabitable.\textsuperscript{119}

Not only did the city council strenuously object to the moving of the city, they lambasted the “remarkable” underhandedness and “prejudice” of the Poblano elites who had convinced the viceroy to undermine the city of Veracruz, causing “irreparable damage… to our royal service and the general good of the Republic.”\textsuperscript{120}

Alongside protestations about the dubious actions of Poblano merchants and the viceroy, the \textit{cabildo} made several requests for grants that would allow them to improve the city’s life at Antigua, including a new roof for the cathedral, money for a prison “for the large quantity of galley slaves (\textit{galeotes}) and other prisoners who arrive with the fleets,” a new \textit{cabildo} building, and convents to house the itinerant Franciscans who stopped in the city.\textsuperscript{121} These requests often met no response, a fact that the \textit{cabildo}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} AGI-México, leg. 350, “Cartas del cabildo secular de la ciudad de Veracruz,” 17 August 1575, fs. 96r-97v. “Por otra carta que esta ciudad escribió a Vª Magd. significa el general y universal daño que a la real hazineda de Vª Magd. y a la de mercaderes y vecinos desta ciudad y deste reyno veria si huviese efecto lo que el visorrey ha pretendido en el hazer la descarga de las naos en la tierra firme del puerto de San Juan de Ulúa […] No aura marinero que no muera del trabajo y el sol ny se podra andar el camino, que para allí se pretende hazer por los grandes despoblados y tierra aspera y rios peligrosos y cienagas y pantanos grandes y largos […] no ay leña ni hierba ni cosa que sea buena para el sustento de la vida sitio con batido de grandes vientos especial del norte que es el viento que mal reyna [do?] la costa en tal manera que mueve los medanos y montes de arena de un cabo a otro que un año los ciega y otro los abre y de mosquitos que por esta causa sería y es ynahitable.”
\item \textsuperscript{120} AGI-México, leg. 350, “Cartas del cabildo secular de la ciudad de Veracruz,” 13 February 1576, fs. 98r-171v. “El notable e unreparable daño y perjuicio que resultaría de hacerse la dha descargo y lo que la dha ciudad de Los Angeles pretende y que lo mas conviene a vro real servicio y bien general de la republica.”
\item \textsuperscript{121} AGI-México, leg. 350, “Cartas del cabildo secular de la ciudad de Veracruz,” 3 May 1583, fs. 177r-178v. “Se necesita un cárcel fuerte porque se meten en ella todos los años mucha cantidad de Galeotes y otros Presos.” See also: AGI-México, leg. 350, “Cartas del cabildo secular de la ciudad de Veracruz,” 2 February 1584, fs. 195v-196r.
\end{itemize}
complained about in subsequent letters. But if Antigua’s requests for more public buildings and infrastructure went unanswered, those of the burgeoning settlement on the Ulúacan coast did not.

In the 1590s, the Ulúacan coast underwent rapid development, as its population growth far outstripped the city at Antigua. Beginning in 1594, new residences, shops, and guesthouses were joined by a series of convents and hospitals granted to various religious orders—first to the Jesuits, with the Franciscans, Carmelites, and Augustinians following shortly after. The year 1595 also saw viceregal approval for the construction of the city’s first portale (a covered and arcaded public market), though it is unclear when that project was completed, since it is not mentioned in subsequent reports or urban plans. Since no city had yet been established on the site, these grants specified the area as the “ventas de Buitrón” (see Figure 1.2). Although the city of Veracruz officially remained at the Antigua River, it was evident by then that metropolitan and mercantile interests had succeeded in turning the port at San Juan de Ulúa into the magnetic force around which the coastal population would gather.

The effectiveness of metropolitan subversion wore down the resistance of Veracruz’s residents. In 1590, the port’s chief accountant (contador), Antonio Cotrina, penned the first of two letters to the council of the Indies requesting that the city be formally relocated. Both letters referred to the opening of two new overland routes—one through Xalapa, the other through Córdoba—that connected the Ulúacan coast to Mexico City. Writing from San Juan de Ulúa in June 1590, Cotrina explained that “the new road… is further [from the Antigua Veracruz] than the old road by twenty-four leagues (by Xalapa), thirty-five leagues by the Sierra Caliente [Córdoba], which is very harmful
for the conservation of the *naturales* that tend to the carts and pack animals.”

By the time viceroy Gaspar de Zúñiga Acevedo issued an order to relocate the city to the Ulúacan coast in 1599, rechristening it the “Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz,” it was the culmination of a process that metropolitan authorities in Puebla, Mexico City, and Seville had orchestrated for at least three decades.

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In an account of the 1552 hurricane that ravaged Antigua Veracruz and San Juan de Ulúa, Stuart Schwartz suggests that the Spaniards “had chosen poorly” in building their settlement on the coast, rather than in the highlands of the interior, as indigenous communities had done for centuries. Locating the city at Antigua and later the Ulúacan coast did indeed expose the settlement to inclement weather and dangerous disease climates. However, the administrative battles over the city’s location demonstrate that the decision to keep the city in the coastal lowlands was not only a sober and informed decision, but one that went against the expressed preferences of the city’s own residents. While Schwartz correctly points out that “the Totonacs could have warned [the Spaniards] of the dangers of the region,” it is unlikely that any such warning would have been heeded. After all, the New Spain’s viceroy, its merchants, and the council of the Indies failed to heed their own experience and the warnings of local Spanish administrators, let alone the indigenous communities of the coast. Although indigenous groups like the Totonacs and others had avoided settling the coast, the Spaniards who arrived there in 1519 were engaged in the construction of a transoceanic commercial

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system the likes of which had never existed in Mesoamerica. If locating New Spain’s primary port city in the gulf lowlands was a risky choice, then it was one made in service of commercial goals that cared little for the perils of hurricanes, flooding, and pestilence. In this sense, the Spaniards did not choose the Ulúa can coast poorly; they chose it ruthlessly.\textsuperscript{124}

Veracruz’s many early movements reveal not only the truism that the city’s geography responded to the dictates of colonial priorities, but also the way that shifting priorities reflected the negotiation of what kind of city Veracruz would be. In its initial foundation on the Ulúa can coast, it was a city facing seaward, a terminus for a group of weary conquerors arriving by ship from the island of Cuba. When the city moved to Quiahuiztlán, its mission shifted to providing land-based infrastructure in the form of food, water, and supplies to facilitate Spanish incursions into the interior. Following the success of those incursions, the city gradually moved southward, first to Antigua, where estuary access to the hinterland and proximity to San Juan de Ulúa combined to complement both the city’s landward and seaward uses, and finally, as it became clear that the city’s central purpose was to act as a hub of maritime traffic, to its original location on the sandy, mosquito-infested strip of land that was once considered too barren to inhabit.

These movements also help to demonstrate one of the overriding similarities of colonial Veracruz with other Caribbean ports. In the past, scholars have suggested that while other Caribbean ports like Havana acted as early modern way stations—places where maritime traffic stopped to resupply before once again setting sail—Veracruz

\textsuperscript{124} Schwartz, \textit{Sea of Storms}, 1-5.
could be thought of as city that effectively connected land and sea. Thus, Caribbean ports stood as islands on the open sea, whereas Veracruz mediated interactions between interior populations and the sea. True though this may be, Veracruz’s sixteenth-century relocations are a testament to the primacy of the sea and its maritime connections in official thinking about the city. Its return to the inhospitable shores off San Juan de Ulúa in 1599 was a belated admission that the city’s primary purpose was, like other Caribbean ports, to function as a kind of “way station,” as the city’s own terrestrial needs and “sustenance of life,” in the words of its cabildo, were secondary to what the city could offer maritime transit. In its own way, Veracruz too stood as an island in the open sea.

*Ciudad de Tablas: Death, Disease, and Natural Disaster in the Seventeenth Century*

If the motives of relocation are instructive of changing political and economic priorities in the sixteenth century, then the consequences of relocation are instructive of the environmental conditions that shaped the Veracruz’s social and cultural development throughout the colonial period. As we have seen, each time the city moved, the new location was chosen to serve the expeditious needs of colonial ambitions that were minimally attentive to the needs of a stable urban settlement. In the final instance, viceregal and imperial authorities mandated the city’s relocation to the Ulúa\'can coast above the objections of its own cabildo, leaving residents to contend with the environmental externalities that the move produced—including dramatic incidents, such as hurricanes, flooding, and fires, but also more quotidian problems like resource allocation and disease climates. These constraints not only influenced the city’s demographic fluctuations, its commercial growth, and its built environments, they also
helped to shape the way that early modern travelers and officials indexed the city and its social milieu.

Veracruz’s struggles with disease, climate, and resource poverty rendered a sparsely populated city throughout the early colonial period, as new arrivals chose to settle in more salubrious and prosperous areas such as the tropical highlands of the Mexican interior or in the valley of Mexico. Even as Veracruz became New Spain’s most important port—and indeed, one of the most important in the New World—its population stagnated. To manage the myriad operations that the port required, the city increasingly relied on a large population of non-Spanish merchants and laborers, particularly African and Afro-descended communities. As elsewhere in the Caribbean, in Veracruz, non-Spanish and predominantly black populations stood-in for absent Spanish settlers, and by the end of the sixteenth century, well over half of the city’s population of three thousand was Afro-descended.

Meanwhile, although the port processed millions of reales worth of silver exports each year, the abandonment of wealthy settlers left it without a large merchant class. Instead, merchants in the consulado (merchant guild) in Mexico City managed the city’s trade from afar, and even their agents typically operated out of Xalapa. Veracruz did not receive royal permission to form its own consulado until 1795. In the seventeenth century, Mexico City also hosted large annual market fairs featuring goods from the Spanish treasure fleets, and although those fairs moved to Xalapa and later Orizaba in the eighteenth century, transit remained Veracruz’s primary commercial role throughout the colonial era. Lacking a merchant guild and a large market fair, Veracruz retained little of
the wealth that passed through its customs and warehouses and remained a relatively poor city throughout the seventeenth century.

While disease and climate guaranteed that Veracruz would remain poor and underpopulated, its poor resource environment guaranteed that the city’s infrastructure would be similarly decrepit. Lacking nearby quarries, the city had almost no masonry-built buildings until the eighteenth century. Hardwoods were also scarce, and many poorer residences were built with wood from repurposed ships. Even important public buildings like the customs house (aduana), post office, and cabildo building were made of wood. What stone the city did use had to be imported by frigate from Coatzocoalcos, Tabasco, and other coastal ports or madrepores (piedra de mucara) excavated from the seabed.125 On more than one occasion, fire destroyed large sections of the wooden city, including a conflagration in 1619 that burned more than one-third of the city’s built structures. Disease also influenced the Veracruz’s built environment, as hospitals and grave sites dotted the urban landscape as the city struggled to dispose of its dead, creating a grim geography of death.

Bound up in Veracruz’s real-world problems was its growing reputation as a pestilential settlement. Although epidemic disease was common in sixteenth-century New Spain, Veracruz’s lack of an indigenous population led European observers to view its struggles with illness as an atypical phenomenon that resulted from a poor physical location, with airs and waters that were inherently febrile. Already in the sixteenth century Veracruz had been called the “tomb of the Spaniards” in papal correspondence.

125 von Humboldt, 264.
By the start of seventeenth century, the city had adopted Saint Sebastian as its chief patron—a popular patron saint for cities in late medieval Europe, known as a protector against the plague—and by the end of the century it had acquired the nickname “ciudad de los muertos” among sailors in the transatlantic fleet. Meanwhile, arriving travelers regularly noted the incongruity of the port’s wealth of trade and the city’s penurious built environment, earning it yet another dubious moniker as the “ciudad de tablas.”

Veracruz’s tendency toward calamity and distress, troped in early modern accounts, continues to color scholarly interpretations of the city’s past. Like other early Caribbean settlements, scholars have dismissed Veracruz as a social, cultural, and economic “backwater,” a description that is often animated by references to contemporary observers who described the city as a brutally hot, pest-ridden image of desolation. More recently, some scholars have begun to counter the Caribbean’s “backwater” reputation. This revision, however, has focused largely on the diversity of Caribbean populations and the complexity of commercial networks that crisscrossed the islands and the mainland. Even as scholars seek to dispel earlier biases of Caribbean “backwaters,” the depiction of Caribbean environments as inhospitable has remained an almost-requisite stipulation. The Caribbean may have been culturally and commercially “vibrant,” this revision suggests, but it was still a climatological hellscape.

126 See: AGI-Mapas y Planos, Bulas Breves, leg. 20, “Bula de Clemente VII ordenando el cumplimiento de otra inserta de la misma fecha, por la que establece la fundación de los Hospitales en San Juan de Ulúa y Veracruz, en Nueva España, a cargo de Fray Juan de Paredes (O.F.M.) y otros monjes de su orden nombrados por el Arzobispo de México y el Provincial de su religión, de la provincia del Santo Ángel,” Rome, 20 February 1534.


The assessment that Caribbean environments were extreme is more or less correct. The compulsion to append this reality as a cautionary note to arguments against the backwater trope, however, fails to capture the importance of extreme environments in the creation of the early modern Caribbean world. I argue that its extreme environment can be understood not only as a social and economic millstone, but as a key factor in producing deep cultural similarities to other Caribbean outposts. Early Caribbean settlements were not only subject to comparatively similar environments, as some authors have noted, they were also connected by environment and by environmental struggle. As we now know, climates, weather events, and diseases are not isolated products of particular geographical spaces, but are relational and dialogic, just as trade, migration, and communications networks are relational and dialogic. Hurricanes that landed in Veracruz first passed the South American littoral and the Yucatán peninsula. Epidemics that began in Puerto Rico or Campeche spread to Veracruz through trade.\(^{129}\) Shortages of wheat or maize in New Spain could lead to starvation in Havana.\(^{130}\) Environment thus connected disparate Caribbean spaces in a common, synchronized system.

Although the depth of that systemic connection may not have been recognized in the seventeenth century in an explicitly scientific sense, it did not go unnoticed. European travelers and learned writers understood Veracruz and the Caribbean to be a part of the same geographic category, and in the seventeenth century that often meant that they were considered to be part of the same social category as well. As the limits of the “known”

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\(^{130}\) AGI-México, leg. 23, n. 4, “Carta del virrey Luis de Velasco, el joven,” 30 January 1595; See also: García Acosta, et al., *Desastres agrícolas en México*, 136.
world expanded in the early modern era, European writers attempted to rationalize new lands, seas, and peoples within an existing worldview that tied social and cultural traits to geographic spaces, leading to a series of elaborations on classical climatic divisions of the world. These elaborations provide a valuable framework for understanding seventeenth-century descriptions of Veracruz, placing the city, its residents, and its environment into the context of early modern geographic and social categories.

Climate, Disease, and Race in Seventeenth-Century Veracruz

Within a year of relocating to the Ulúacan coast, Veracruz’s size nearly doubled. Virtually all of the city’s residents abandoned the earlier settlement, leaving La Antigua a hollow ghost town. At the same time, the city’s new proximity to the port attracted a number of new migrants who sought to capitalize on what promised to be a booming service economy. In 1601, a Dominican convent joined the other four religious orders that had moved there in the 1590s. Around the same time, a garrison of soldiers was permanently stationed at the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa, adding to the city what was to be its largest single source of permanent residents of Spanish origin and descent.¹³¹

The rapid growth of the mainland settlement necessitated a reorganization of the city’s public health resources. There had been a hospital on the island of San Juan de Ulúa since 1569, but on the mainland there was only a small hospital run by the Jesuits. Noting that the old city had been mostly abandoned, in 1603 the viceroy mandated that the Hospital de San Martín in La Antigua be relocated to the Nueva Veracruz. Three years later, as the mainland population had continued to grow with new arrivals, the

viceroy issued a second order commanding the Hospital Real de San Juan de Ulúa to move to the mainland “banda de Buítron” and merge with the Hospital de San Martín.

The creation of a new, larger hospital on the mainland did not necessarily indicate the privileging of local needs over those of the sailors of the transatlantic fleet. At its foundation, the hospitals of San Juan de Ulúa were explicitly intended to treat the sailors and soldiers of the transatlantic fleet; the hospital San Martín in La Antigua, on the other hand, was intended to service the residents of the city. Once the two hospitals had merged—re-christened the Hospital de San Juan de Montesclaros—the mission of treating sailors remained central, particularly as the hospital relied heavily on maritime traffic for its funding. All ships that docked in the port, whether of the transatlantic “fleet, which arrive from the kingdom of Castile, as well as those that come from Guinea, Cartagena, Havana, and other parts,” were required to pay a monthly rate to the hospital while in port.

Possibly responding to the persistent lack of health resources for the city’s own residents, in 1610 a surgeon named Pedro Ronson, a native of Venice, founded the Hospital de Nuestra Señora de Loreto. In his will, Ronson dictated that the hospital’s mission would be the treatment of “abcesses, sores, wounds, boils and other ailments concerning surgery and syphilis” (mal de bubas). He also specified that the hospital should never be merged with Montesclaros and further that “those who serve in one hospital should not serve in the other, and the Hospital de Nuestra Señora de Loreto

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132 Rodríguez-Silva and Verónica Ramirez, Los cirjuanos de hospitales de la Nueva España, 133-134.

133 AGN-Hospitales, vol. 18, exp. 9, “Mandamiento del virrey don Luis de Velasco, para que se satisfagan las soldadas con que deben contribuir los navios de flotas al Hospital de San Juan de Montesclaros,” 1611, fs. 67r-68r.
should not share clothes, medicine, nor criados nor slaves with the Hospital de San Juan de Montesclaros.”\textsuperscript{134}

As was common throughout the Spanish Americas, all of Veracruz’s hospitals relied on the service of enslaved Africans. In 1584, Montesclaros listed seven slaves among its workers: four women—Cathalina Criolla, Ysabela Cazanga, Dominguilla, and Leonor Biafara—and three men—Ambrozio, Luis, and Juanillo, the last of whom was Cathalina Criolla’s son.\textsuperscript{135} When the Hospital de San Martín moved from La Antigua to the Ulúa coast in 1603, the porters (arrerios) who transported its stores were paid slaves (jornales). Little is known of the staff of the Hospital de Nuestra Senora de Loreto, but at least three enslaved Africans were listed in Ronson’s will as “slaves linked to the hospital” (“negros... quedan vinculados al dicho Hospital”)—a sawyer and carpenter named Francisco Colo, and Antonio Arara, a stone mason, as well as an enslaved woman known only as María.\textsuperscript{136}

The city’s newfound proximity to the port caused other issues as well. Residents frequently complained about the endless carousing and disruptions of unruly soldiers from San Juan de Ulúa. As early as 1602, the cabildo addressed the crown directly to express their frustrations, noting that because the soldiers fell under the jurisdiction of the castellan (castellano), rather than local authorities, their crimes went largely

\textsuperscript{134} “Los que estuvieren en el uno no sirvan en el otro, y el dicho Hospital de Nuestra Señora de Loreto no mezcle ni junte las ropas ni medicinas ni los criados ni esclavos con el dicho Hospital de San Juan de Montesclaros.” AGN-Hospitales, vol. 3, exp. 24, “Testimonio del testament otorgado por Pedro Ronson, cirjuano,” 1726, fs. 303r-315v. Transcribed in Rodríguez-Silva and Verónica Ramírez, Los cirjuanos de hospitales de la Nueva Espana, 425-432.

\textsuperscript{135} AGN-Hospitales, vol. 18, exp. 2, “Mandamiento de la audiencia gobernadora para que el receptor de la avería acuda al hospital de San Juan de Ulúa,” 1584, fs. 9r-12r.

unpunished.\textsuperscript{137} Similarly, sailors of the transatlantic fleet, which docked in Veracruz between August and December of each year, were more likely to reside within the city now that it was closer to the port and occasionally wreaked havoc of their own. Spanish sailors often arrived in Veracruz carrying a significant quantity of fireworks (\textit{artificios de fuego}), gleefully setting them alight after long nights of carousing. Displays of fireworks posed “great danger and risk, as any fire that might happen in the city would destroy many houses, as they are made of wood and many of them of boards taken from former ships, and so are lacquered with tar.” In 1607, a group of “artillerymen, soldiers, and men of sea who came with the fleet” set off a firework display during a night of festivities, igniting large quantities of “merchandise stored in warehouses and \textit{bodegas}.” Sailors, like soldiers, came under the jurisdiction of their superior officers, leaving local authorities with little recourse to punish such displays. After the 1607 incident, the \textit{cabildo} appealed to the viceroy, who in 1610 issued a decree prohibiting the use of fireworks in the city and giving the \textit{cabildo} permission to punish such acts “in the manner appropriate.”\textsuperscript{138}

Eight years after the viceregal prohibition of fireworks, Veracruz suffered what was perhaps its most devastating fire during the colonial era. The fire began in a private residence at eleven in the evening on December 5, 1618. Within two hours, the fire had consumed several private residences and shops, the Dominican and Jesuit convents, and

\textsuperscript{137} AGI-México, leg. 350, “Cabildo secular de Veracruz a S.M.” 30 July 1602, fs. 285r-287v.

\textsuperscript{138} AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Mandamiento del virrey Luis de Velasco, dirigido al corregidor de la Veracruz, que prohíbe el uso de fuegos artificiales,” 29 October 1610, fs. 21r-23v. “A vos el corregidor de la Nueva Vera Cruz, sabed que haviéndole dado noticia Benito González, regidor de ella, por su y en nombre de los demás vecinos de la dicha ciudad de el peligro y riesgo que en cualquier incendio que suceda en las casa en que viben por ser de madera y muchas de ellas de tablas breadas de nabíos que se deshacen, como sucedió el ano pasado de siscientos y seis, quemándose muchas mercadurías en las casas y bodegas donde estavan recogidas y este riesgo siempre por las fiestas que en la dicha ciudad se solemnizan por los artilleros, soldados y gente de mar que viene en las flotas haciendo muchos artificios de fuego.”
most of the royal buildings (casas reales) in the city. Early responders were able to salvage most “cajas and papers” from the royal treasury, but by the end of the evening, one-third of the city had burned. By command of the viceroy, local officials undertook a large-scale investigation to determine the fire’s origins and the party responsible, but the result of the inquest was inconclusive.

Hurricanes were not the only natural disaster that swept into Veracruz from the Caribbean in the early modern period. Between 1648 and 1651, Veracruz was one of the many Caribbean port cities struck in what was possibly the first large-scale yellow fever outbreak in the Americas. “In August of 48,” Gregorio Martín de Guijo described in his *Diario de sucesos virreinales*, “an incurable plague visited the residents of Veracruz, and shortly devastated all of the city, as the infected lasted only three or four days.”¹³⁹ The disease subsided with the winter months but returned each summer for the next three years, wreaking annual havoc on the city’s non-immune residents and travelers.¹⁴⁰ The total volume of the dead is unknown, but the historian John McNeil has suggested that the death toll was likely higher than twenty percent of the resident population.¹⁴¹

Although historians and epidemiologists have tracked the origin of the outbreak to the island of Barbados in 1647, at the time Spaniards believed the virus to have originated in either Puerto Rico or Santo Domingo, and that it was carried to Veracruz, Campeche, and Cuba onboard “an infected ship.”¹⁴² This suggests, at least at some level, an

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¹³⁹ “Por Agosto de 48, vino a los vecinos de Veracruz una incurable peste, que en breves días se asoló todo de ella, y duraban las personas tres y cuatro días.” Martín de Guijo, *Diario de sucesos virreinales*, 22.

¹⁴⁰ Martín de Guijo, *Diario de sucesos virreinales*, 168-169.


¹⁴² AGI-México, leg. 374, “Cartas y expedientes de los obispos de Michoacán,” 1649, fs. 409r-410v, as quoted in García Acosta, Pérez Zevallos, and Molina del Villar, eds., *Desastres agrícolas en México: catálogo histórico*, 183; Martín de Guijo, *Diario de sucesos virreinales*, 15-22; AGN-Hospitales, vol. 18,
understanding that diseases were not necessarily the product of the innate airs and waters of the lands they affected. At the same time, however, local authorities reacted to the outbreak with new public works projects aimed at improving the quality of the city’s water. While attempts had been made in the past to divert the Jamapa river—with its supposedly superior water—to the city, the yellow fever outbreak provided greater urgency, as the city council decreed that:

All vecinos, residents, homesteaders, and visitors above the age of fourteen years… including women, who will equally use the utility… must contribute for this work one jornal (a rented slave) for one month of every eight months for as long as it takes to complete the project, paying six reales each, four for the renting the jornal and two to feed the jornal.\(^{143}\)

Although the effort to divert the river would once again prove unsuccessful, it demonstrates that even as authorities began to track the geographic spread of disease, they still attributed its ill effects to the localities that it touched. Yellow fever may have come to Veracruz from the Caribbean, but it was only able to take root there because of the city’s objectively bad temperance. In this sense, it is possible to see the emergence of an official logic that attributed disease climates not only to local spaces, but to broad regions that shared climactic factors, allowing diseases to spread within them. Rather than understand disease as a product of Veracruz, then, it was understood as the product of a Caribbean region of which Veracruz was one part.

\(^{143}\) AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Mandamiento referente a la introducción del agua del río Jamapa,” July 1652, fs. 403r-422v. “Todos los vecinos y residentes y estantes y visitantes en esta ciudad de catorce años para arriba contribuyan para esta obra un jornal de cada mes en ocho que según lo que tiene tanteado será necesario para traer el agua y el dicho jornal ha de ser de seis reales cuatro que gana un peón y dos para darle de comer y aquí se han de comprender las mujeres pues igualmente usan de utilidad.”
Table 1.1. Natural disasters in Veracruz, 1552-1699.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Disaster</th>
<th>Affected Areas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1552</td>
<td>Hurricane</td>
<td>Antigua Veracruz; San Juan de Ulua</td>
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<tr>
<td>1577</td>
<td>Epidemic</td>
<td>San Juan de Ulua</td>
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<tr>
<td>1587</td>
<td>Grain shortage</td>
<td>Antigua Veracruz</td>
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<tr>
<td>1595</td>
<td>Grain shortage</td>
<td>Veracruz; Havana</td>
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<tr>
<td>1607</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Nueva Veracruz</td>
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<tr>
<td>1609</td>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Tlacotalpan; Nueva Veracruz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1618</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Nueva Veracruz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1625</td>
<td>Hurricane</td>
<td>Nueva Veracruz</td>
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<tr>
<td>1630</td>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Nueva Veracruz</td>
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<tr>
<td>1648-1651</td>
<td>Epidemic</td>
<td>Nueva Veracruz; San Juan de Ulua; Alvarado</td>
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<tr>
<td>1683</td>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Nueva Veracruz</td>
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<td>1696</td>
<td>Grain shortage</td>
<td>Nueva Veracruz; San Juan de Ulua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>Epidemic</td>
<td>Nueva Veracruz</td>
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Sources: AGI-Patronato Real\textsuperscript{144}; AGI-México\textsuperscript{145}; AHCV-Caja 1\textsuperscript{146}; Alonso de la Mota y Escobar, 159-160; Thomas Gage, 207-212; Martín de Guijo, Diario de sucesos virreinales, 15-22, 168-169; Antonio de Robles, Antonio Castro Leal, ed., Diario de sucesos notables (1665-1703), vol. 2, (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1946), 51-75.

As the yellow fever epidemic struck in the late 1640s, royal officials in New Spain and around the Caribbean quickly observed that those who seemed to be most vulnerable to the disease were Amerindians and people of European birth. People who had lived longer in the tropical lowlands of the Caribbean—and especially slaves from

\textsuperscript{144} AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 181 r. 25, “Estragos causados por una tormenta y huracán en Veracuz,” 27 September 1552

\textsuperscript{145} AGI-México, leg. 20, n. 1, “Carta del virrey Martín Enríquez,” 19 October 1577; AGI-México, leg. 21, n. 20, “Carta del virrey marqués de Villamanrique,” 24 October 1587; AGI-México, leg. 374, fs. 1026-1027; AGI-México, leg. 66, r. 3, n. 66, “Cartas del virrey conde de Moctezuma,” 13 July 1699

\textsuperscript{146} AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Mandamiento del virrey Luís de Velasco, dirigido al Corregidor de la Veracruz, que prohibe el uso de fuegos artificiales,” 29 October 1610, fs. 21r-23v; AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Amonestaciones del virrey Fernandez de Cordoba dirigidas a la Nueva Veracruz, respecto al incendio que en ella se propago,” 1619, fs. 33-36; AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Mandamiento librado a pedimento de los padres de la Compañía de Jesus para que de los propios, dibiertan y hagan limpiar un arroyo de agua corrompida que pasa delante de las puertas de su colegio y calles publicas,” 1630, fs. 177-179
tropical regions of Africa—were more likely to have acquired immunity to the disease. This reality may have contributed to perceptions that Veracruz and the Caribbean existed in a different category of the natural world than did Europe or the Mexican hinterland—a category that typified by disease—and that people of African descent were better suited to its airs and temperance than were white Europeans or Amerindians. In fact, a number of writers had already expressed the sentiment that Veracruz’s disease climate and the phenotype of its residents were inextricably linked.

In September 1585, a Franciscan priest named Antonio de Ciudad Real arrived in Veracruz from Mexico City. He was traveling with the entourage of padre comisario fray Alonso Ponce, who was charged with reviewing the progress of the Spanish mission to “urbanize” the indigenous populations of Mesoamerica under centralized spiritual and colonial authority in newly established pueblos de indios (indigenous towns). Unlike most of the cities and towns that Ciudad Real visited, however, Veracruz had no indigenous population. “The convent has only four or five friars,” he wrote, “and has guardianship of no Indian town… [instead,] they minister to the fleets that have in them cofradías (confraternities), saying mass for them every week.” The city was home to “very few children” and almost no residents of advanced age. The people he did see he described as sickly and “discolored.” Even the Spanish migrants who arrived in the port in abundance were scarcely to be found, as most headed directly to the more salubrious highlands of central Mexico, while Ciudad Real noted that “many of those who arrive from Spain die here.” If Native Americans and Spaniards, children and the elderly, did not thrive in Veracruz, however, then there were two populations that did: “[Veracruz] is a very hot and sick land,” Ciudad Real observed, “a land where the mosquitoes reign, and
even the *negros*, because of all the people they are the greatest in number and have almost all the freedom that they want.”

A similar description came in December 1609, when Alonso de la Mota y Escobar, the bishop of Tlaxcala, visited Veracruz during a tour of the convents in his jurisdiction. Approaching Veracruz from its southern outskirts, Mota y Escobar first came across a small fishing village near the mouth of the Medellín River, where the *vecinos* were “fishermen of the Greek nation, whose wives were *negras* and *mulatas*.”

Though the river was too shallow to allow the passage of large ships, the water that it did provide was salubrious, leading Mota y Escobar to remark that it was “the best that there is in the world.”

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147 Ciudad Real, 116-118. “El convento de la Veracruz está fundado en la mesma cibdad, la vocación es de nuestro padre San Francisco y residen en él cuatro o cinco frailes, y no tiene aquella guardiana ningún pueblo de indios de visita; habia muy poco tiempo que se tomó aquel convento, y así aún no se había hecho, pero iba haciendo y haciéndose de la flota, los cuales habian en él ordenado una cofradía y los frailes dicen por ellos ciertas misas cada semana. La cibdad de la Veracruz es pueblo de españoles, cinco leguas del puerto de San Juan de Ulúa… es tierra muy calurosa y enferma y donde reinan los mosquitos y aun los negros porque de todos hay gran suma y tienen casi toda la libertad que quieren; críanse en aquella cibdad pocos niños y éstos y los grandes andan de ordinario enfermos y descoloridos, y dellos y de los que vienen de España mueren allí muchos, especial cuando llegan las flotas.” I have chosen the word “freedom” for the original “libertad,” though it should be understood that Ciudad Real likely was referring to a specific kind of freedom in his writing. Particularly, the freedom of movement throughout the city—not to be confused with freedom from bondage. In *Slaves of the White God*, Colin Palmer relates an identical description of Veracruz, sourcing it to Alonso Ponce himself. In Palmer’s translation, however, he connects the phrase “críanse en aquella cibdad pocos niños,” to the black population specifically—“even the negroes in that city have few children”—which I do not. The discrepancy in our translations likely results from our use of different editions of the same account, and the editorial choices of the different transcribers with regard to punctuation. The edition that Palmer cites is: Martín Fernández Navarrete, et al., *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España*, 112 vols. (Madrid, 1842-1895), 57, 188. See: Palmer, *Slaves of the White God*, 49, 217n52.

148 Mota y Escobar, *Memoriales del obispo de Tlaxcala*, 50. “Antes de llegar a la Veracruz esta boca y rio de Medellín… están en este puesto, algunos vecinos pescadores que ganan su vida a pescar y son de nación griegas, casados con negras y mulatas.”

149 Mota y Escobar, 50. “Esta boca y rio de Medellín que es poco menos que el de [rio de] Alvarado, tiene muy poca agua en su boca y así no entran naos grandes en él… Es el agua de este rio la mejor que hay en el mundo.”
Mota y Escobar arrived to Veracruz itself on the morning of December 21, the feast of Saint Thomas. Upon his arrival, he learned that the townspeople had not prepared a reception for him, as he was accustomed to in other places. Not having arranged accommodation, city officials purchased the bishop a room in a guesthouse, where he stayed through the third day of Christmas feasts. Over the course of a week, Mota y Escobar visited all four of the city’s convents, meeting with priests and vicars as well as public officeholders and royal officials. He traveled by canoe to San Juan de Ulúa, where he met with soldiers and castellans, noting with surprise the large number of “mestizos, mulattos, and blacks” who filled out the ranks of the musketeers.

Throughout his visit, Mota y Escobar echoed the earlier commentary of Ciudad Real, particularly in his assessment of the city’s climactic and somatic traits, remarking that “the vecinos of this city are Spaniards all, having many black slaves and many other free blacks. It is hot in temperature, sickly, and has many mosquitoes, as it is situated by the sea.” To this familiar analysis, Mota y Escobar added a comment on the city’s built environment, appending to Veracruz a name, “ciudad de tablas,” that would become its moniker throughout the seventeenth century and that persists in later scholarship on the period: “It is a city entirely made of wood, so that the residents live in great suspicion and fear of fire, because in the past a great part of the city had already burned.”

A final assessment along these lines came at the end of the seventeenth century, more than one hundred years removed from the travels of Antonio de Ciudad Real. In 1697, the famed Italian traveler and physician Francesco Gemelli Careri passed through

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150 Mota y Escobar, 53. “Es esta ciudad toda de vecinos españoles, tienen muchos negros y negras esclavos y otros muchos libres. Es el templo cálido enfermo tienen mosquitos, esta sitiada en la marina…es todo el edificio de tablas, viven con gran recelo y sobresalto del fuego porque ya se ha abrasado una gran parte de ella.”

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Veracruz during his decade-long voyage around the world. In his overland route from Mexico City, Careri traversed dense jungle in the tropical highlands to Veracruz’s west, making a brief stop at the maroon town of San Lorenzo de los Negros, of which he observed: “because it was inhabited entirely by Blacks (Neri), reminded me of the land of Guinea.”151 Two days later Careri arrived in Veracruz to find a city surrounded by sand dunes and “barren” so that all “food comes from a long distance, and life is dear.” The airs of the city were “little salubrious, particularly in summer,” being so unhealthful as to drive off “people of means, who retreat to the interior.”152

Those left behind struggled to maintain the city’s most rudimentary public works, leading Careri to aver that “those who built the city’s walls brazenly defrauded their King, as they are only six palms high.”153 Careri described a city whose central districts consisted mostly of “small wooden houses [only capable] of short duration” and a surrounding belt of shantytown “huts that are covered with leaves and held together with strips of reeds.”154 To summarized the city’s combination of “barren” landscapes, “fraudulent” public works, “bad airs” (mal’aria), and dilapidated housing, Careri


152 Careri, 141. “E’ situata in terreno arenoso, e sterile; onde, dovendosi venire le vituaglia da lontano, vi si vive carissimo… L’aria e poco salutevole, particolarmente in Estate… Quando questa e partita, le persone agiate ritiransi dentro terra.”

153 Careri, 141. “Coloro, che ebbero la cura di cingerla di muraglie, sfacciatamente fraudarono il Re; facendo alcuni sottili muricciuolo, alti sei palmi, che appena potrebbe servire di strada coperta; oltre che di presente sopra di essi si passa a cavallo, per esser coperti dall’arena; ed e inutile serrare le porte, potendosi entra da ogni lato. Alcuni Bastioni, e Ridotti, che tiene, sono ben distanti l’un dall’altro, e irregolari; e solamente due fortini alla spiaggia, nelle due estremita, potranno servire di qualche difesa.”

154 Careri, 142. “Si per la mal’aria, come per essere mal sicuri i loro averi nella Città: e perciò non vi fabbricano, che qualche casetta di legno, poco durevole… imperocchè le fue case sono capanne, coperte di foglie, e cinte di canne.”
concluded that “instead of being great and rich as Mexico, Veracruz is inhabited by a few poor Spaniards and most of the time only by Blacks (Neri) and mulattoes, so that the only time one sees whites is when the Fleets arrive.”

What do we make of the rhetorical coupling of Veracruz’s unhealthy climate and poor infrastructure with its large African population? Although all three accounts clearly imply a relationship between the physical city and the blackness of its inhabitants, none of them explicitly suggest a causal link. Is the presence of black bodies intended to be indicative of Veracruz’s hot climate and poor health, or are its hot climate and poor health meant to explain the presence of black bodies? Why does Thomas Gage, whose 1625 description of the city opened this chapter, avoid mention of the city’s black population while repeating the same observations about disease and dilapidated buildings?

Conventional wisdom in the early modern period held that disease, hurricanes, and other natural disasters were the consequence of divine intervention in the natural world, and that particularly bad disasters were the product of moral failings. In other words, the sickness and poverty of the land mapped on to the spiritual and social health of its people. For instance, according to a 1632 biography of the Jesuit priest Alonso Guillén, who founded the Jesuit convent in Veracruz at the end of the sixteenth century, the city suffered from a “spiritual disease that is in this land more than elsewhere, being

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155 Careri, 142. “Or, con tutto che quivi vadano ad approdare tutte flotte, e la navi, che vengano da Europa nella Nuova Spagna; pure la Città, in vece d’esser grande, erica, al puri di Mexico; per le cause suddette e ben picciola, e povera, abitata pochi Spagnuoli, e per lo piú da Neri, e da Mulati, onde vi si vede solamente gente Bianca in tiemo che viene l’Armata.”
hot, like a plague rising and falling.”\textsuperscript{156} If failures of spirit could be blamed for disaster, then displays of piety were believed to prevent disaster or alleviate its effects. In the midst of the yellow fever outbreak that gripped the Caribbean region from 1647 to 1651, for instance, churches and confraternities Mexico City erected stone crosses and held flagellant processions (\textit{procesión de sangre}) through the city streets, hoping to stave off a similar fate of “plague” that had befallen Veracruz.\textsuperscript{157}

Similarly, in the aftermath of the 1618 fire that burned one-third of the city, Spanish king Philip II wrote to New Spain’s viceroy, Fernández de Córdoba, laying blame not on misfortune, but squarely on the shortcomings of the city’s residents, stating that “although fires such as this often seem to be the result of accident, they are always caused by the faults, negligence, and omissions of the residents, which is greater than the guilt of simply not being careful.” Philip went on to suggest that the fault was particular to the residents (\textit{abitadores}), and not of the city’s poor infrastructure, as “there are many provinces and kingdoms where… the buildings are made of wood.”\textsuperscript{158} Not only were moral failings to blame for natural disasters, but for man-made disasters as well.

At the same time, in the seventeenth century, white Europeans living in the Americas were increasingly invested in representing New World environs in a positive light for their European counterparts. Those living in the Spanish Americas in particular

\textsuperscript{156} AGN-Jesuitas, vol. I-26, exp. 1, “Razones por las cuales se proyecta la fundación del colegio del puerto de Veracruz y casos observados en las misiones establecidas antes de la fundación,” 1632, fs. 2r-3v. “Es la enfermedad spiritual que en aquella tierra más que en otra, por ser cálida, como peste cunde y crece.”

\textsuperscript{157} Martín de Guijo, \textit{Diario de sucesos virreinales}, 15.

\textsuperscript{158} AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Amonestaciones del virrey Fernández de Córdoba dirigidas a la Nueva Veracruz, respect al incendio que en ella se propagó,” 14 July 1620, fs. 34r-35r. “Por que estos incendios que por presunción legal aunque algunas veces sean fortuitos, siempre se hacen y causan por culpa, negligencia, y omissió de los abitadores, lo qual bien a ser más que tal culpa en no tener cuidado en lo que conviene tanto… se pregonen el fuego como se usa en mucha provincias y reynos donde esto de practica y los edificios son de tabla.”
faced challenges from both their Iberian-born countrymen, who questioned the legitimacy of creole rule in the Americas, and from northern Europeans who were eager to diminish Spanish dominion in the Gulf-Caribbean region. They did so both through militaristic predation of Spanish territory and through rhetoric that challenged the legitimacy and efficaciousness of Spanish rule, suggesting that the depopulation, poverty, and barbarity of the Caribbean was the product of Spanish failure.

In countering these claims, Spanish creoles promoted the favorability of American climates where they could reasonably do so. Representing American climates as healthy, however, required a qualification with regard to indigenous and African populations. If New World conditions truly produced favorable humors, then, in Hippocratic-Galenic logic, it should follow that Indian and African bodies that were indigenous to the New World should be subject to the same humors. In his famous article, “New World, New Stars,” Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra argued that this contradiction generated the first articulation of “modern forms of racism.” In order to simultaneously protect their own claims of dominion against their European detractors and to legitimate their subjugation of non-white people, “learned white creoles” created a system of classification that differentiated white bodies from their non-white counterparts.

There were some regions and territories—like Veracruz—where white creoles could not reasonably claim that the land, air, and water produced good humors. In these places, the qualification that black bodies were essentially different from white bodies worked in reverse: black bodies could endure the extreme environments of places like

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Veracruz, where white bodies could not. By emphasizing the connection between Veracruz’s environment and the skin color of the majority of its inhabitants, seventeenth-century writers not only demonstrated that the city and its people should be classified separately from the Mexican interior and from white bodies, but also justified the city’s poverty by leaning on racialized understandings of black bodies as innately inferior. In Gage’s account, which does not mention Veracruz’s African population, the role of moral inferior is inhabited instead by the city’s Spanish friar, who Gage described uncharitably as an incurious, vain, and avaricious man. Unlike the other accounts reviewed here, Gage’s narrative is not structured to absolve Spaniards and white creoles for Veracruz’s environmental ills, but to implicate them specifically. This is because he wrote for an English-speaking audience and published his account in 1648 at the height of the English Civil War. By that time, he was a silent convert to Protestantism and an ardent supporter of Oliver Cromwell. As one of the few Englishmen with extensive experience living and traveling in New Spain, he plied his knowledge to gain Cromwell’s favor, becoming one of the chief proponents of the strategy of “Western Design” (the English strategy to wrest the Indies from Spain), which he hoped would lead to the “ruining and utter fall of Romish Babylon, and to the conversion of those poore and simple Indians.” 160

While Gage described Spanish lethargy and vanity across New Spain, his depiction of Veracruz captures his exaggeration of those traits at their most extreme. His choice to leave the city’s African population out of his tale in particular can be understood as a deliberate

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omission that was designed to more strongly link Spanish governance with Veracruz’s decrepitude. As other writers had used the Veracruz’s black population to distance Spaniards and white creoles from the city’s faults, Gage used their absence to lay those faults at the feet of the Spanish Catholic empire.

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On a long enough scale, every city, town, and village experiences environmental calamity, be it a hurricane, a fire, an earthquake, or an epidemic. In the seventeenth century, many parts of the world seemed to be in a perpetual state of environmental crisis. The “Little Ice Age,” as the period has come to be known, froze rivers and canals across the northern hemisphere, produced blizzards in Istanbul, and prolonged droughts in Mesoamerica, northern China, Senegambia, and throughout the Mediterranean.161 In southern Spain, torrential rainfalls raised the Guadalquivir above its banks and inundated Seville at least four times during the seventeenth century. The worst of these floods occurred in 1649—the same year as the Caribbean’s yellow fever outbreak—and coincided with an epidemic of bubonic plague across Andalusia that lasted from 1647 to 1652. Combined, the flood and the plague claimed the lives of over sixty thousand people in Seville alone, nearly half of the city’s total population.162 In his global history of seventeenth-century crisis, Geoffrey Parker quotes a Spanish tract called Nicandro that was written in 1643:

Sometimes Providence condemns the world with universal and evident calamities… This seems to be one of the epochs in which every nation is turned

162 Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, Historia de Sevilla: la Sevilla del siglo XVII (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1984), 74.
upside down, leading some great minds to suspect that we are approaching the end of the world.\footnote{163}

What is significant in the case of Veracruz is not the fact of environmental calamity but the extent to which natural disaster became one of the city’s defining characteristics. The fires, hurricanes, and diseases that befell Veracruz did not kill as many people or cause as much destruction as the many other disasters that populated the seventeenth century, but environmental struggle was one of the few perspectives through which early modern Europeans understood the city. As European thinkers began to incorporate new spaces in Africa, Asia, and America into earlier models of the climactic division of the world, Veracruz’s reputation for environmental struggle became entangled with the prominence of its black population. As creole elites were increasingly beset by questions of their fitness to rule in the Americas, they began to redefine the categories of the natural world in such a way that separated Veracruz from the more temperate lands of the Mexican interior, placing it instead into a social and cultural space typified by tropical climates, bad temperance, and black skin.

Conclusion

When Cortés announced the establishment of a new city called “La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz” in a 1519 letter to the Spanish crown and in his subsequent epistles, he made a self-conscious attempt to separate Mesoamerica from previous Spanish discoveries and conquests in the Caribbean.\footnote{164} In his future correspondence with the crown, Cortés reiterated the separateness of Mesoamerica from the Caribbean. In what is

\footnote{163 John Huxtable Elliott and José F. de la Peña, eds., Memoriales y cartas del conde-duque de Olivares, vol. 2 (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1981), 276; Parker, Global Crisis, xxi.}

\footnote{164 José Rabasa, Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 98-100.}
perhaps the most famous passage of his letters, Cortés describes his experience in the valley of Mexico:

From all that I have seen and understood, nearing a similarity between this land and that of Spain in its fertility and great size and the cool air and in many other things, it seemed that the most suitable name to call this land was New Spain of the Ocean Sea, and so in Your Majesty’s name I called it that.\textsuperscript{165}

Equating the greatness of Mexico with that of Spain, Cortés builds on the justification for conquest and settlement that he originally laid out in Veracruz. In so doing, he self-consciously portrayed the original Spanish settlement in Veracruz as the gateway to a new land, where the “virginal space” of the Caribbean ended and the intricate human web of mainland empire began.

The division of the Caribbean and the mainland into two separate worlds has persisted in historical discourse, as scholars have followed Cortés’s lead in identifying New Spain as the “second phase” of Spanish dominion in the New World. Over the course of the sixteenth century, however, it increasingly became clear that Veracruz itself was subject to many of the same phenomena that befell the Caribbean: depopulation, hurricanes, and disease. The primary port of the largest and wealthiest Spanish American colony, Veracruz took on many of the characteristics that earlier scholars ascribed to Caribbean “backwaters” and that more recent interventions describe as part of the Caribbean’s “dual character.” By the seventeenth century, as Veracruz settled into its final location on the Ulúacan coast, these qualities had become so entrenched that early modern writers and travelers understood Veracruz, its wooden aesthetic, and its African population not as a part of New Spain, but as a part of the Caribbean.

Chapter Two

Regional Trade and the Mexican-Caribbean Urban System

Two hundred years after Columbus first crossed the Atlantic, the port cities of the Caribbean and the mainland littoral were stitched together by common environments and common histories of environmental struggle. For many European travelers and observers, the Caribbean’s tropical extremities were entangled with its poor built environments, with notions of Spanish “vanity,” and, above all, with the marked presence of black bodies. In this way, the cities of the Caribbean were understood as a discrete space, where innate airs, waters, and temperance foreordained common social and cultural traits. The same cities were stitched together through relationships of trade. If environments influenced the way that Caribbean cities were thought about, categorized, and troped, then trade provided both typological similarities between Caribbean cities and material connections that bound them to one another.

The entanglement of economic function and social and cultural life are starkly evident in the port cities of the early Spanish Caribbean and the American littoral. By and large, these were cities that came into existence suddenly after the Spanish conquest. They were intended to serve the immediate goals of an extractive colonial regime. More often than not, they were established in places where no city had existed before Spanish arrival. Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, many of these new cities were uprooted shortly after their foundation and moved, sometimes dozens of miles, in search of a physical environment that could better suit their primary economic purpose.
The single-minded deliberateness that motivated the foundation of Caribbean cities laid the groundwork for the social formations that followed: administrative, religious, and military institutions were all born out of a necessity to serve colonial purpose. The utility of the city was afforded a self-conscious primacy, and the institutions that followed were especially responsive to it. In the Caribbean that utility was not production or administration, but the shipment of goods to and from regional, transatlantic, and global markets. From their foundation, whatever social and cultural life that existed in Caribbean cities grew up around some form of shipping. Their convents and churches ministered to sailors rather than to Amerindians, their local economies were typified by ship building and the service industry, their cabildos consisted primarily of merchants, and their most prominent built structures—the castle of San Juan de Ulúa in Veracruz, El Morro in Havana, San Felipe de Barajas in Cartagena—were built to protect the fleets in the harbor. Caribbean cities—especially Veracruz and Cartagena—were hubs of the early slave trade, and although many of the African captives who arrived in Caribbean ports remained there only briefly before moving on to hinterland plantations, port cities stand out as early centers of African diaspora.

Shipping was also the most concrete avenue through which Caribbean cities were connected to one another, whether through direct trade, the transshipment of merchandise bound for other destinations, or the remittance of capital. In Veracruz and Havana, for

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instance, regional shipping accounted for roughly sixty to seventy percent of all maritime traffic into and out of port. On a yearly basis, more than one hundred ships traveled between Veracruz and regional ports, carrying commodities, foodstuffs, travelers and news from around the Caribbean. Bound, then, not only by typological similarity but also by intensive material exchange, trade enabled Caribbean ports to develop the deep social and cultural proximity that is indicative of their affinity to one another and of the affinity of the larger Spanish Caribbean system in the seventeenth century.

This chapter reconstructs and compares Veracruz’s participation in two discrete commercial systems during the seventeenth century: the transatlantic circuit and the Caribbean circuit. Building on a dataset of import and export duties assessed in Veracruz and Havana—two of the Caribbean’s largest regional shipping centers and two cities that shared an uncommon bond between one another—I describe the major routes and ports of both of these two circuits. While earlier studies of trade have focused almost exclusively on the transatlantic exchanges fostered by the famed Spanish treasure fleet (often known as the carrera de indias or, simply, the flota), I focus on the regional exchanges that took place within the Caribbean. Regional shipping created strong material links between Caribbean ports, and while transatlantic commerce was clearly an influential factor in the social development of the cities it touched, I argue that the patterns of regional trade had a more lasting effect on Caribbean societies.

In the first section of this chapter, I offer an overview of transatlantic trade in both Veracruz and Havana in order to show why transatlantic trade has been the central

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I count coastal shipping traffic—to and from New Spanish ports of Campeche, Tabasco, and Coatzocoalcos—as part of the Caribbean circuit, but I have broken down the data to show how active coastal trading corridors were.
concentration of earlier studies of Caribbean commerce. The importance of the fleet is reflected in its presence in trade documents and should not be understated. As we will see, between one-quarter and one-third of all ships that entered either Havana or Veracruz were transatlantic vessels, and taxes on transatlantic shipping constituted more than eighty percent of all shipping tariffs raised in either city during the seventeenth century. Perhaps more importantly, some scholars have argued that regional shipping was a byproduct of transatlantic traffic, making it subordinate and suggesting that the importance of transatlantic trade was greater even than the data suggest.

At the same time, regional shipping registered a deceptively large impact on Veracruzano society and, I argue, followed distinct patterns that show it to be qualitatively different than transatlantic trade. In the second section, I highlight the frequency and seasonality of shipping—as opposed to the volume and monetary value of cargo—to show that Caribbean trade was both more frequent and more regular than transatlantic trade. Other categories like vessel types and naming practices, tax rates and structure, and types of merchandise reinforce this distinction, while also providing alternate ways of thinking about trade and its many meanings. Finally, I turn to the people who made up the captains and crews of the Caribbean and transatlantic circuits. As we have already seen, Veracruz’s residents often had a strained relationship with the sailors of the transatlantic fleet, who they viewed as unruly and disruptive. Captains and crews in regional circuits, on the other hand, moved more frequently between Caribbean ports and were more likely to be American-born than transatlantic sailors, allowing them more opportunities to foster social connections in the various communities they visited.
My intervention follows a recent tendency in Caribbean and Atlantic scholarship to highlight regional trade relationships “that had very little to do with the metropolis, and reached well beyond the confines of empire.”168 Scholars have used commercial connections between cities like Boston and Kingston, Caracas and Curaçao, Santa Marta and St. Croix, and Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo to demonstrate the ways in which American ports formed economic, social, political, and cultural bonds that were either extraneous or explicitly opposed to imperial designs.169 In Latin America specifically, the bulk of this scholarship is concentrated on the trans-imperial smuggling circuits that operated between the northern coast of South America and the Caribbean islands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Drawing connections between contraband trade and *comercio libre*, Ernesto Bassi, Jesse Cromwell, Linda Rupert, and others have argued that the Caribbean “was turning into a *de facto* free trade area” by the end of the eighteenth century, bypassing imperial restrictions on trade.170 Through trade, Caribbean

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societies—and port cities in particular—fostered novel connections to one another, the consequences of which were the development of a human geography that was “more attuned to local physical, economic, and cultural realities than to imperial imaginings” and the emergence of a coherent regional consciousness.¹⁷¹

One of the great innovations of this scholarship has been its reorientation of Caribbean and Latin American history away from a traditional focus on hinterland plantations and rural agriculture and towards a focus on the ways in which largely free populations (which Cromwell has called “sinew populations”) interacted and created networks across geographic and and imperial boundaries.¹⁷² In so doing, however, this scholarship frequently looks forward to the role of free and contraband trade in the buildup to the independence wars of the nineteenth century. Turning against an older scholarship that emphasizes rural rebellions as the “precursors” to independence, the trans-imperial school argues that trade relationships that transcended the Caribbean’s political borders—often illegal, but rarely suppressed—fed into sentiments of regional identity and that rebellion against Spanish rule followed in part from attempts to crackdown on contraband activity. In general, these kinds of trans-imperial relationships are rightly considered to be specific to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Wim Klooster has noted, although contraband trading had always been a part of the Caribbean commercial universe, it made a “quantitative leap” at the end of the seventeenth century,

and only then took on the region-forming effects that trans-imperial historians have identified in the port cities and littoral spaces that it touched.\textsuperscript{173}

If we look back to the seventeenth century, we may not find the same kind of trans-imperial relationships elucidated by the scholars cited above, but we might find an earlier precedent for Caribbean networks that operated in ways that were largely tangential to metropolitan concerns. In the early seventeenth century, regional trade occurred mostly within the Spanish empire, but often across colonial boundaries. Though smaller in value and tonnage than the transatlantic trade, regional trade was more frequent, subject to less seasonal variation, and, critically, frequently attracted less imperial oversight and control. Just as the emergence of large-scale contraband trading at the end of the Habsburg period (ca. 1700) may have evoked a regional consciousness that was explicitly opposed to imperial designs, earlier patterns of trade between islands and mainland similarly integrated disparate Caribbean spaces into a cohesive regional construct, which I have termed the “Mexican-Caribbean urban system.”

The Mexican-Caribbean urban system united port cities in relationships of trade that operated parallel to imperial administrative constructs. As imperial administrators created and regulated a transatlantic system of exchange to serve their own ends, the denizens of Mexican and Caribbean ports built bonds with one another to serve local needs. These bonds became the foundations for the development of similar social and cultural institutions. My concept of the Mexican-Caribbean urban system builds on Johanna von Grafenstein’s extensive work on the region that she has called the “golfo-

caribe” (Gulf-Caribbean). As von Grafenstein defines it, the *golfo-caribe* region was a space in greater Caribbean, a “sub-region of the Atlantic,” in which similar historical processes and productive industries “imprinted common [sociocultural] characteristics.” By focusing on relationships of trade within the *golfo-caribe* region, the Mexican-Caribbean urban system offers to highlight not only the social and cultural similarities of Caribbean ports, but the foundations upon which those similarities were based.

**A Note on Methodology**

There are a number of potential methodological pitfalls in the large-scale use of import and export trade data that require our attention. For instance, although historians have long understood that colonial-era trade was particularly intensive between Havana and Veracruz, this is not always clearly reflected in import and export tax data. As we will see, the coastal Mexican ports of Campeche, Tabasco, and Coatzacoalcos (Guazacualco) rivaled Havana in their relationship with Veracruz. However, many of the ships that docked in Veracruz with the recorded provenance of Mexican ports actually originated in Havana. The current system of the Caribbean created a circuit by which ships sailing from Havana to Veracruz would travel along Mexico’s Gulf Coast from the island of Cozumel at the northeastern tip of the Yucatán Peninsula until reaching Veracruz, passing all three Mexican ports en route. In the eighteenth century, ships would record all previous stops upon arrival in a port, but in the seventeenth century, officials usually only noted the most recent port of call. As a result, tax records show that ships

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arriving in Veracruz were more likely to come from Campeche or Tabasco than from Havana, while ships departing Veracruz were more often destined for Havana than they were for Campeche or Tabasco. In Havana, a mirror image of this pattern emerged, where departing ships left for Campeche, and arriving ships originated in Veracruz. This demonstrates not only that Havana was slightly underrepresented as a port of provenance in Veracruz’s tax records, but also that Caribbean exchanges were not strictly lateral, but circuitous, as ships followed prevailing currents, making call at ports along the way.

The use of multiple ports of call and the resultant imprecision of provenance and destination data is only one of the methodological hurdles of using import and export tax records to portray Caribbean trade networks. Although ships paying no tax were still technically required to be recorded in tax accounts, there is no guarantee that they always were noted. More importantly, contraband trade was extraordinarily common in the Caribbean during the seventeenth century. Writing to port officials in Veracruz in 1698, Puerto Rico’s governor Antonio de Robles Silva complained that “the vecinos and other persons of this port and any other person who wants [will] flock to purchase anything that is sold at this port at any signaled time.”

At the same time, port officials often lacked the resources to properly investigate contraband practices. In 1599, Veracruz’s contador, Antonio Cotrina, wrote to the crown to complain that he did not have a royal vessel (chalupa) at his disposal to meet and inspect incoming ships.

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175 “Los vezinos de ella y demas personas que quisieron comprar alguna cosa de dicha almoneda acudan a dicha puerto de San Juan a la [h]ora señalada.” AGN-Indiferente Virreinal, Marina, caja 6580, exp. 22, “Informe del veedor de la Real Armada de Barlovento sobre el arribo de Andrés Pérez en el Puerto de Veracruz on 4 fragatas y con armada de Guerra; Autos fhos sobre la urquetta nombrada El Rey David que apresso la Armada de Barlovento a Olandeses en el Meridano de la Ysla de Portorico por el mes de Agosto de 1698,” 9 September 1698, fs. 3r-3v.

equipped, the admiral of the transatlantic fleet or the castellan of San Juan de Ulúa frequently prevented port authorities from inspecting the ships under their command, claiming jurisdictional discretion.\textsuperscript{177} There can be little doubt that such jurisdictional disputes often provided cover for contraband practices.

Contemporary officials were so inured to contraband trading that, rather than seeking ways to stop contraband trade, they sought ways to control it. In 1608, New Spain’s viceroy, Luis de Velasco the younger, issued a decree that merchandise arriving in Veracruz without register should not be confiscated by port officials, but rather that they should attempt to secure a \textit{donativo}—a merchant’s contribution to the royal treasury that was technically voluntary—in lieu of a specific tax on the merchandise.\textsuperscript{178} This practice of forgiving certain types of contraband in exchange for a donation to the royal treasury was standard practice throughout much of the colonial period.\textsuperscript{179} Practices such as these have obscured the total volume of contraband trade in the historical record. Often, evidence of such practices was recorded only at moments of heightened political tension, such as after the pirate attacks of John Hawkins in 1568 or Laurens de Graaf

\textsuperscript{177} AGI-México, leg. 351, “Oficiales reales Alonso de Villanueva y don Luis de Cespedes a S.M.,” 23 December 1576; AGI-México, leg. 351, “Testimonio de como el castellano don Guillermo de Monroy ympidio a los oficiales reales que no visatasen un navío,” 1 August 1598; AGI-México, leg. 351, “Testimonio de los autos de competensia entre los oficiales reales de la Veracruz y el castellano de aquellas fuerzas en razon de haver prendido los dichos oficiales reales a Juan Mendes, vecino de aquella ciudad, por haver llegado a desora a un navío que polo de negros aquel puerto sin estar primero visitado,” 18 November 1625; AGI-México, leg. 351, “Relacion de carta que los oficiales reales de la Veracruz escrivieron a su Magestad,” 20 January 1629.

\textsuperscript{178} AGI-México, leg. 27, n. 57, “Carta del virrey Luis de Velsaco, el joven,” 12 September 1608.

(Lorencillo) in 1683, or when illegal trade was part of a larger criminal proceeding that included the investigation and prosecution of other crimes as well.

The lack of comprehensive contraband shipping data is particularly problematic since it often followed patterns that were distinct from legal trade. Principally, contraband vessels were less likely than legal vessels to originate in Spanish-controlled ports, were more likely to make undeclared stops, and may have specialized in different kinds of merchandise. The absence of contraband trade from the import and export tax records that this chapter uses as its primary evidence is therefore especially challenging. Rather attempt an overly speculative estimation of contraband trade to address this challenge, I have instead framed my discussion not in terms of the total volume of shipping, but in terms of the relative volume of shipping, comparing two different legal trades: the transatlantic and the regional. By referring these two trades to one another, I attempt to use import and export tax data not as absolute evidence of shipping frequency, but as a general metric that is suggestive of larger patterns.

The Impact of Transatlantic Shipping

While the volume of trade within the Caribbean region—and especially between Havana and Veracruz—is relatively well-known, those exchanges have always been peripheral within historiographical traditions that privilege the activity of the transatlantic silver fleet.180 For all of the regional traffic in Havana and Veracruz, both cities

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180 On the relationship between Havana and Veracruz, see: Francisco Pérez Guzmán, “Veracruz y La Habana en la concepción estratégica del Imperio español en América,” *Sotavento*, vol. 3, no. 6 (Summer 1999): 9-17; Bernardo García Díaz and Sergio Guerra Vilaboy, eds., *La Habana/Veracruz, Veracruz/La Habana: Las dos orillas* (Veracruz: Universidad de Veracruz, 2010); Laura Muñoz Mata, ed., *México y el Caribe: vinculos, intereses, region* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2002). The historiographical tradition that privileges transatlantic exchanges, which is vast, is largely driven by scholarly interest in the role of American silver in early modern global trade and in the development of capitalism. While these topics are undoubtedly worthy of the attention they have received, they have tended to overshadow regional trades...
maintained more profitable and, occasionally, more active commercial relationships with metropolitan and viceregal centers like Mexico City and Seville than they did with any individual Caribbean port. Moreover, neither city was a terminus. As two of the primary hubs of the Spanish *flota* system, both cities served as transshipment points, meaning that their relationships with smaller regional circuits can be understood as the byproduct of transatlantic exchanges.\(^{181}\)


\(^{181}\) The other two ports that served as the principal hosts of the Spanish fleet were Cartagena and Portobelo (Nombre de Dios) on the isthmus of Panama. Together, these four cities are sometimes referred to as the “Sistema Antonelli,” after the military engineer Bautista Antonelli, who, in the late sixteenth-century was commissioned to design fortifications in each of the cities. I prefer this notation, since referring to the transatlantic convoy simply as the “fleet system” directs our focus to the ships themselves, which can lead us to forget that land-based fortifications were also an integral part of the convoy system. See: García de León, 470-483.

\(^{182}\) De la Fuente, García del Pino, and Iglesias Delgado, 11-50. See also: Levi Marrero, *Cuba, economía y sociedad*, 8 vols. (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial San Juan, 1972). De la Fuente and García del Pino’s
of each circuit relied upon that of the others. Regional vessels took advantage of the expansion of local markets while the fleet was in port, and the fleet in turn relied on regional trade for provisioning before and after sixty-day voyages across the Atlantic. Though the three circuits operated independent of one another in terms of commodities, vessels, and financial backing, they all responded—perhaps not in unison, but in harmony—to the same stimuli and, ostensibly, in pursuit of the same goals.

Although all three of the circuits relied on one another to function, the transatlantic fleet emerges in the historical imagination as the circuit that had the most impact on local society. With its larger, grander ocean-going vessels, the fleet arrived en masse at roughly the same time each year—late summer in Veracruz, early spring in Havana—filling the arrival port with hundreds or even thousands of sailors and migrants, delivering news and merchandise, and drawing greater numbers of locals into the port than were there at any other time of the year.\(^{183}\) In some years, the fleet’s arrival was accompanied by displays of fireworks and bull runs (fiesta de toros).\(^{184}\) In Veracruz, where there was a comparatively small service industry, the overflow was so large that it could spill into the interior, as sailors filled inns and guesthouses as far away as Xalapa and Puebla, even as they were legally required to stay in the port.\(^{185}\) In addition to the


\(^{184}\) ANC-Indiferente, vol. 1456a, “Carta anónima enviada a S.M. en la que un oficial denuncia la corrupción de los generales de flota,” 1 February 1621.

\(^{185}\) This requirement extended from the possibility of need, in case of hurricane or attack.
masses of Spanish settlers who flocked to Veracruz and Havana for annual market fares, in both cities the arrival of the fleets brought a legion of enslaved African laborers from nearby plantations, rented out by their owners as temporary workers (*jornales*) in response to the increased demand for urban labor. 186 Given the combined effect of the ships, their crews and cargoes, and the flood of travelers from nearby towns and *haciendas*, the annual arrival of the fleet transformed whatever city they visited, often for months at a time. Understandably, this transformation is often the focus of scholarly studies of Caribbean ports.

The fleet not only projected an image of its size and importance, it left behind a record of those qualities in terms of its annual frequency and, especially, its economic impact. In a typical taxation period, lasting fourteen months—in this case, between September 1603 and November 1604—twenty-four ships (*naos*) of the Spanish silver fleet arrived in New Spain by the port of Veracruz. 187 It was the second arrival of the *flota* within a fourteen-month tax cycle—a period during which 133 registered vessels arrived and paid taxes in the port. 188 Of those, a total of 38 belonged to the transatlantic silver fleet, while seven more arrived from ports in Castile (three), the Canary Islands (two), and Angola (two). Together, these 45 arrivals from ports across the Atlantic

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186 On the *jornal* system in Havana, see: de la Fuent, García del Pino, and Iglesias Delgado, 154-156. Secondary sources on the *jornal* system in Veracruz are surprisingly difficult to come by, but it is mentioned in Antonio García de León, “Economía política de la esclavitud en la Nueva España: un ensayo de aproximación general,” *Historias*, no. 77 (2010): 51; and in Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, *Pardos, Mulatos y Libertos: Sexto Encuentro de Afromexicanistas* (Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 2001), 118.


188 To be registered meant that the vessel was recorded in the tax records of the Contaduría. Usually, this also means that the ship paid tax into the *real hacienda*, but ships that were assigned no taxes also appear in the register. Of course, there were other ships that went unrecorded, some of which (but not all) were contraband.
constituted just over thirty percent of all traffic into the port. As a portion of taxation, the prevalence of transatlantic trade was even more pronounced. The fleet accounted for 85 percent of all import and export duties assigned in Veracruz, and roughly half of all taxes raised in the city, from any source, during the period of taxation.189

While these numbers vary from year to year, they are typical of the first half of the seventeenth century. Transatlantic traffic regularly represented between twenty and forty percent of entradas in Veracruz (see Table 2.1), and, prior to 1630, transatlantic shipping accounted for 53 percent of all money remitted into the real caja in the city. Although the overall portion of revenue that could be attributed to shipping tariffs fell significantly after 1630—when changes to the tax code dramatically expanded the purview of the catch-all extraordinario tax, which could be applied to any activity deemed productive—transatlantic shipping remained a consistent source of income, constituting 84 percent of all shipping tariff revenue (almojarifazgo) from 1590 to the end of the seventeenth century (see Table 2.2). In Havana, a similar pattern emerged. Between 1602 and 1650, 24 percent of all entradas and 44 percent of ships overall (combined entradas and salidas) were registered as transatlantic, while such vessels accounted for eighty percent of the almojarifazgo (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.1. Percentage of ships arriving to Veracruz by provenance, 1600-1605.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provenance</th>
<th>1600</th>
<th>1601</th>
<th>1602</th>
<th>1603</th>
<th>1604</th>
<th>1605</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transatlantic</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AGI-Contaduría, leg. 882, pza. 1-8, Caja de Veracruz, Cuentas de Real Hacienda.

189 AGI-Contaduría, leg. 882, pza. 6; John J. TePaske and Herbert S. Klein, Ingresos y egresos de la Real Hacienda de Nueva España (Mexico City: INAH, 1986).
Table 2.2. Shipping tariffs assigned in Veracruz, 1590-1700.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Tax</th>
<th>Amount (reales)</th>
<th>% of shipping tax</th>
<th>% of all tax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flota</td>
<td>6,881,872</td>
<td>82.10%</td>
<td>12.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navíos Sueltos</td>
<td>1,338,017</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>161,334</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,381,223</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2.3. Shipping traffic to and from Havana by frequency and tariff, 1602-1650.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Ships</th>
<th>% of ships</th>
<th>Taxes (mill. of pesos)</th>
<th>% of all taxes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transatlantic</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canary Islands</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castile</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>1351</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campeche</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veracruz</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2309</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The impact of the fleet’s annual arrival went beyond its expansion of local markets and populations, as it became a central concern of the local coffers. Moreover, a closer look at shipping tax in Havana reveals a separation between ships that were taxed on entry into the port and those that were taxed on exit, both in the transatlantic and in the regional circuit. While ships in the regional circuit paid a larger share of tax upon arrival in Havana, ships in the transatlantic circuit tended to pay a greater share of tax upon departure. What this demonstrates is a flow of taxation that appears to be uni-directional: taxable goods entered Havana from regional vessels and were re-exported with the
departure of the fleet. In short, this would indeed appear to show regional shipping as a side effect of the movement of the transatlantic fleet.

The directionality of the *flota* and its links with regional shipping have led historians to describe it as preeminent, dictating the pace and volume of smaller circuits of trade. If the two circuits overlapped, forming a mutually dependent relationship, then it certainly appears that all trade activity, regional and transatlantic, ultimately spun off of the energy of the transatlantic fleet. Not only was transatlantic trade more valuable than regional trade, regional trade also depended on the *flota* for its very existence. This reality in some way validates the scholarly tendency to focus on transatlantic shipping. At the same time, however, the value of such focus depends entirely on the motive underlying our study. If our goal were to find the most valuable trade, the one that most occupied the minds of royal administrators, accountants, and merchants in imperial centers, then we could end here. If instead we intended to explore the ways that trade influenced the development of social ties between port cities, we must also consider the alternate measures of trade that clearly differentiate the regional from the transatlantic.

**Frequency and Seasonality in Regional Trade**

Given the numerical prominence—and especially the financial superiority—of the transatlantic trade, it is not difficult to understand why it is this trade that is usually afforded primacy, either in the study of the ports themselves, or in the study of economic history in the colonial era more generally. In fact, recent efforts by de la Fuente and others to so much as raise the specter of the intercolonial and insular trades have been successful largely because they have remained deferent to the larger trade, merely demonstrating its reliance on other, often neglected, circuits of exchange. This has not
only added significant detail to the diversity of trades that existed in the early modern period, it has done so also in such a way that integrates the trades so that the importance of one is buoyed by the existence of the other. Regional and coastal trades attain greater privilege within historical accounting by their association with the transatlantic fleet than they would if evaluated on their own, as the fleet connects them to important circuits of global exchange. On some level, then, to abstract Caribbean commerce from its place within transatlantic and transcontinental networks of exchange is to reduce significantly the universe that Caribbean cities inhabited.

There are, however, compelling reasons to shift focus to Caribbean trade routes set apart from, if not to the exclusion of, the larger circuits of which they each were a part. For example, if as much as a third of shipping traffic in Havana and Veracruz belonged to the transatlantic fleet in some years, that leaves two-thirds of incoming vessels to Caribbean trade. Each year, hundreds of ships operated in the Caribbean circuit, connecting the large transatlantic ports of Veracruz, Havana, and Cartagena with each other and with smaller Caribbean cities and towns (see Tables 2.3 and 2.4). The sheer frequency of circum-Caribbean voyages deserves our attention. Each individual voyage created an opportunity for interactions and exchanges, while the collective frequency of Caribbean trade allows us to understand regional shipping as a daily part of port life. While Caribbean trade cannot be completely abstracted from the larger transatlantic and overland circuits of which they were a part, there is value in analyzing material exchanges in the Caribbean within a clearly delimited context, particularly when it comes to the qualitative interpretation of trade data—that is, an interpretation that
centers on the potential social and cultural effects of trade instead of evaluating trade for its own sake.

To begin this sort of analysis requires a more nuanced description of the relationship between trade and cultural transformation. The idea that the two are closely linked is hardly revolutionary. Countless studies of cultural exchange not only adduce records of trade, but predicate themselves upon material exchange.\textsuperscript{190} This makes sense. Evidence of trade necessarily entails evidence of exchange, and the material of trade can often—if not always—be viewed through a cultural lens. It is the very proximity of these two concepts—exchange of trade and exchange of culture—that often leads to the flattening of their differences. In some cases, the “link” has evaporated entirely, leaving in its place the semblance of an equivalency: trade is cultural exchange, and so the greater the volume of trade, the greater the volume of cultural exchange. To restore the separation of trade and cultural change requires not only an evaluation of trade itself, but of what trade signified. While transatlantic trade may have outpaced regional trade in terms of volume regional trade created opportunities for social and cultural exchange that did not exist within the transatlantic circuit. Drawing evidence primarily from import and export tax records (\textit{almofaridazgo}), in the pages that follow I examine the various ways in which regional trade created spaces for exchange within the Caribbean circuit, beginning with the frequency and seasonality of shipping, followed by a consideration of vessel

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{190} See: Philip D. Curtin, \textit{Cross-Cultural Trade in World History} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Most studies of trade and cultural exchange concern “cross-cultural” trade, indicating a process of cultural exchange between separate linguistic, ethnic, or religious groups. While that is not the model in this study—which is ostensibly concerned with trade that occurred underneath the single, if diverse, cultural umbrella of the Spanish Atlantic—the theoretical framework is not far off. It is particularly useful to think of trade in terms of cultural transformation when describing the atomization of a distinct regional construct out of a larger polity.
\end{footnote}
types and naming practices. I then examine the different taxation methods used throughout the seventeenth century to reiterate the pitfalls of thinking of tax income in purely monetary terms, and finally consider the role of human networks within the two circuits: captains, crews, and merchants.

**Table 2.4. Shipping traffic to and from Veracruz by frequency, 1600-1612.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circuit</th>
<th>No. of ships</th>
<th>% of ships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transatlantic</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castile</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canaries</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Africa*</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartagena</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havana</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campeche</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coatzocoalcos</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabasco</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,871</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes Cape Verde


**Seasonality and Cognitive Distance**

The first area in which regional trade differed significantly from transatlantic trade was seasonality: the timing of shipping cycles throughout the calendar year. As has long been understood, the comings and goings of the fleet followed a tightly regimented
schedule. Beginning in 1555, two separate fleets departed Spain for the New World each year, one bound for San Juan de Ulúa and Veracruz, the other for Cartagena and Portobelo. The New Spain fleet was typically organized in Seville in the late winter months, departing for its voyage across the Atlantic from Sanlúcar de Barrameda in April or May. It would arrive in Veracruz in the late summer months and winter in port until the following spring. Meanwhile, the Tierra Firma fleet, with a somewhat shorter voyage, departed later in the summer, sailing first to Portobelo and then to Cartagena for winter. The following spring, the Veracruz-based fleet and the Cartagena-based fleet both sailed for Havana, where they would resupply for a summer journey east across the Atlantic. Counterintuitively, this schedule often meant that the fleet sailed during hurricane season in the Caribbean, but this was considered preferable to sailing during winter, when the sea was generally rougher, and preferable to spending the hot summer months docked in Caribbean ports that were considered pestilential.191

This schedule can be construed as evidence for the imperium that the transatlantic fleet commanded over other shipping cycles. Scholars have argued that the seasonal cycles of regional shipping traffic were synchronized to the seasonal cycle of the transatlantic fleet. According to the dominant understanding, regional shipping traffic was concentrated in the period immediately before the arrival of the transatlantic fleet and the period immediately after its departure, as smaller trade circuits fed into and off of

191 The seasonality of the transatlantic fleet has been written about in many places, including: Alfredo Castillero Calvo, “La carrera, el monopolio, y las ferias del trópico,” and de la Fuente and García del Pino, “Havana and the Fleet System: Trade and Growth in the Periphery of the Spanish Empire, 1550-1610.” In his recent book, Stuart Schwartz gives two reasons why the timing of the fleet’s movements do not appear to have avoided the Caribbean’s hurricane season, which lasts from July through November. In the case of the New Spain fleet, the timing was meant to reduce the length of stay in Veracruz during the most pestilential months, while hurricanes were less of a concern for the southern-bound Tierra Firme fleet. Schwartz, Sea of Storms, 34.
the fleet’s largesse. This understanding of the shipping calendar is one of the principal ways that scholars have argued that regional trade was a byproduct of transatlantic trade.

While there is a spike in regional traffic associated with the arrival of the fleets, that spike is not nearly as dramatic as it is sometimes assumed to be (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). In Havana, the peak month of the Caribbean circuit was July, just as returning fleets from New Spain and Tierra Firme prepared to depart for Spain. Similarly, in Veracruz, the month of May was the most active month of coastal and regional traffic, in advance of the fleet’s June departure for Havana. In both Havana and Veracruz, however, the peak months of regional traffic were well within a single standard deviation of median monthly traffic. For instance, import and export tax records documented a median of 2.1 regional vessels in Havana per month between 1602 and 1650. During the same 48-year period, the peak month of regional traffic—July—averaged just 2.9 regional vessels—less than one more than a typical month. Between 1600 and 1612, 7.5 regional vessels arrived in Veracruz in a typical month. In the peak month of May, an average of 13.6 regional ships were documented in the port—a greater boost than Havana, but still well within a single standard deviation of the monthly median.
Even though transatlantic shipping did result in an increase to regional traffic, regional traffic was relatively stable throughout the twelve-month calendar year. In a
typical year, Caribbean vessels traded in both Havana and Veracruz every month, registering a constant presence. Meanwhile, entire months could pass in either port without the arrival or departure of a transatlantic vessel. The timing and pace of shipping traffic can be just as important as the forces that dictated them. The arrival of the royal fleet in Havana might represent a greater volume of annual traffic than vessels from Veracruz, but there is a significant difference in the synchronous influx of two dozen ships, occurring at roughly the same time every year, and the paced arrival of “loose” ships spread across twelve months. One event is attended with fanfare and anticipation as the city is completely transformed, while the other is a quotidian occurrence that registers only slightly in public consciousness. That small register may appear to be another reason to think of the flota as predominant, but another way of putting it might be to say that transatlantic shipping was exceptional, while regional shipping was typical.

One way of understanding this difference is the concept of cognitive distance. In geography, cognitive distance is the physical perception of a space from a particular vantage: the distance between two points as observed as opposed to the true distance between those points. I use this concept to refer to the distances separating Caribbean ports from each other as perceived by trade.\(^\text{192}\) To describe the cognitive distance between Havana and Veracruz, for instance, we could look at the amount of time it took the average ship to sail between the two ports. This would be roughly three weeks—approximately the same amount of time that it would take a typical traveler to make the

overland journey between Veracruz and Mexico City, and slightly less time than it would take an overland mule train to make the same journey. In other words, despite the geographic divide that separated the two cities, the time to travel between them was actually roughly equivalent or even less than the time it took to travel from Veracruz to the viceregal capital. While the raw numbers of shipping movement give us an idea of the flow of exchange, they are also the common denominator through which we are frequently forced to compare events that are essentially different. For instance, in a given year, ten ships may have arrived in Havana from Veracruz while twenty arrived from Spain. That fact alone does not indicate what the significance of each arrival was or the context in which it was perceived.

Another common interpretation of seasonality has emphasized the drastic transformation that a city would necessarily undergo whenever the fleet was in port. There can be little doubt that the presence of dozens of ships, as many as two thousand sailors, and a new inventory of merchandise in port did dramatically change the way that the city operated. Further, the length of time the fleet stayed in port—sometimes as many as eight months in Veracruz, and sometimes as long as a year in Havana in the event of a bad hurricane season—prolonged this transformation. Sailors in port formed relationships, annual voyages meant that many returned year after year, and upon retirement, some petitioned the Crown for license to permanently settle in the New World. These social formations developed in the context of the transatlantic trade.

At the same time, the dramatic shift in the operation of daily life while the fleet was in port can be understood as a potent symbol of the cognitive distance that separated Caribbean ports from Spain. The transformation of the city would necessarily reinforce
the idea that the period of time during which the fleet was in port was unusual, perhaps even exotic. Meanwhile, the same social formations were available to sailors who worked in regional circuits of trade. And though there are few records that allow us to track the activities of sailors in the regional circuit with the same depth that it has been possible to track those of the silver fleet, we know that regional sailors moved between ports even more frequently. Using the same tax record to construct a nominal database allows us to follow individual ship captains as they moved back-and-forth throughout the Caribbean over spans of time that sometimes lasted as much as three decades. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the typical captain of a regional vessel visited the same port 2.7 times in his career, compared to 1.8 times for the captain of a transatlantic vessel. While this difference may seem small, regional captains were also twice as likely to visit a port four or more times throughout their career.

The Caribbean captain Jacome Perez, for example, made twelve roundtrip voyages between Havana and Veracruz over a ten year period, from 1605 to 1615, stopping at least twice in Campeche in the same time.\textsuperscript{193} It is also evident that the same regional vessels often visited the same port multiple times within a year, as a roundtrip voyage between Havana and Veracruz was half the time of a roundtrip voyage between Havana and southern Spain.\textsuperscript{194} None of this is to say that the value of the social relationships formed in the regional circuit was greater than that of the Atlantic. Yet each recurrence of a ship’s captain in the entry and exit records is yet another opportunity for

\textsuperscript{193} AGI-Contaduría, legs. 1093-1095, “Caja de La Habana, Cuentas de Real Hacienda,” 1605-1615.

the development of social relationships, for the exchange of material goods or
information, for contraband trade, or for any of the other processes that are typically
associated with trade to play out. None of these possibilities were available exclusively to
the men and women who participated in regional circuits of exchange, but they were
available with greater frequency.

Vessel Types and Naming Practices

Another illustration of cognitive distance comes in the technological means of
trade. As with seasonality, it has long been understood that the types of vessels that
typified trade within the Caribbean circuit were different than those that traveled the
transatlantic circuit. But again, this difference carried significant implications that are not
often fleshed out. First, different classes of vessels required different outfitting and
technological preparation. Oceangoing vessels would require an astrolabe for
navigational purposes, for example, whereas a regional ship would not. Consequently, an
oceangoing vessel would require a more specialized assortment of crew—including a
navegante (navigator) instead of only a piloto (pilot), as a regional vessel was likely to
have. Second, the mere differences in the size and build of a ship would register a visual
impact on contemporary observers.195

Since vessel class sizes were not standardized, there is a high variance in their
actual sizes. Generally, the largest class of ship were the oceangoing vessels: the galleon
(galeon), the carrack (nao), and the Portuguese caravel (caravela), often exceeding five
hundred tons. Frigates (fragatas) headed the second tier of vessel sizes at approximately

195 See: María M. Portuondo, Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 2009), 47-57.
three hundred tons, followed by the navíos at about 250 tons. There are, however, some examples of frigates that were built in Havana that exceeded three hundred tons and may have even eclipsed some smaller examples of carracks and caravels in size. The final class of vessel was the smallest, including balandras, barcas, urcas, tartanas, and pataches. These ships could be as small as ten or twenty tons and were used primarily in coastal voyages, but were also occasionally involved in long-range communications (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5. Vessel classes by approximate tonnage, ca. seventeenth century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class (approximate tonnage)</th>
<th>Vessels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic (300-500 tons)</td>
<td>Caravela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Galeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circum-Caribbean (200-300 tons)</td>
<td>Fragata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal (10-200 tons)</td>
<td>Balandra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tartana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zabra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Not only were transatlantic naos two-thirds larger in size than regional vessels, they were also more likely to bear adornments like ornately carved wooden figureheads (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4). While port workers and locally-based sailors may have had the opportunity to actually interact with the ships in port, most port city residents only ever engaged with vessels optically. If the dramatic difference in vessel sizes did not catch the eye of Veracruz’s townspeople, then figureheads certainly would, as they were designed specifically as conspicuous displays of wealth and importance. Figureheads required
large expenditures and specialized craftsmen who, unlike most of the shipyard workforce, often concentrated only in certain dockyards. They were often painted bright colors with the deliberate intention of attracting attention, both of sailors and of men and women in port. Figureheads are difficult to recover systematically, but their presence on larger vessels would have highlighted the exoticism of transatlantic shipping, acting as a visual reminder that transatlantic ships originated in far off lands and traveled a greater distance than smaller regional vessels.

Figure 2.3. Stern of a *fragata* built in Veracruz, 1690.


Understanding vessel types also helps us to illuminate patterns of shipping traffic that are not evident in the records themselves. Tracking vessel types in Veracruz’s port entry records, for instance, can give us an idea of just how many ships that arrived in Veracruz with a stated provenance of Campeche may have originated in other Caribbean ports. Half of all ships that arrived Campeche-based ships in Veracruz’s tax records were *navíos*, compared to less than twenty percent of ships that arrived from other coastal ports, like Coatzacoalcos, Tampico, or Panúco. Meanwhile, nearly eighty percent of ships

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197 This means that vessels arriving from different locations would register different visual impacts on contemporary observers. Compare, for instance, the design of a *fragata*, built in Veracruz, with that of a transatlantic vessel, built in Spain.
that arrived in Veracruz from larger Caribbean ports like Cartagena and Havana were *navios*. What this implies is that possibly as much as a third of all ships that arrived in Veracruz from Campeche actually originated in another Caribbean port.\textsuperscript{198}

### Table 2.6. Vessel types in Havana and Veracruz by region, 1602-1650.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel Type</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Caribbean</th>
<th>Atlantic Islands</th>
<th>Castile</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caravela</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragata</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galeon</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nao</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navío</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AGI-Contaduría 1093, 1095, 1100A-B, 1105-6, 1108, Caja de La Habana, Cuentas de Real Hacienda.

Evaluating vessel types in order to trace shipping patterns can also work in a broader sense. In the first half of the seventeenth century, approximately half of all ships sailing between Castile and Havana and Veracruz were either *caravelas*, *galeones*, or *naos*—the three largest ships sailing the Atlantic at the time. In the remaining half of transatlantic traffic, 42 percent of ships were the slightly smaller *navíos*, with a smaller proportion of *fragatas* and *urcas*. While some of the larger vessels did occasionally handle regional trade (*naos* and *caravelas* account for four percent of all voyages between Veracruz and Havana, for instance), almost half of the ships departing Veracruz for other regional ports were *fragatas*, while forty percent were *navíos*. In the coastal trade between Veracruz and other Mexican ports, the percentage of smaller ships jumps

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\textsuperscript{198} AGI-Contaduría, leg. 882, pza. 1-8, “Caja de Veracruz, Cuentas de Real Hacienda,” 1600-1610.
again, as *barcas* and *fragatas* account for nearly eighty percent of all voyages, with a sizeable number of even smaller *tartanas, pataches,* and *zabras."

Interestingly, while the trade with Castile was dominated by the largest classes of vessel, 85 percent of traffic between the Canary Islands and the Caribbean was handled by *navíos* and only four percent was handled by *carabelas, galeones,* and *naos.* In other words, through the lens of vessels alone, in the seventeenth century, Veracruz and Havana were engaged in four distinguishable categories of trade: a transatlantic trade with Castile (mixed large- and medium-size vessels); a circum-Atlantic trade with the Canary Islands (medium-size vessels only); a regional trade within the Caribbean (mixed medium- and small-size vessels); and a coastal trade that was internal either to an individual island or to a discrete section of the littoral (small-size vessels). While most analysis tends to lump the Canary Island trade in with the transatlantic trade, the distribution of vessel types suggests that it was a distinct circuit.

Even details such as vessel naming practices yield valuable information about the social networks of trade. Since ships were officially named for saints, it is possible to correlate specific vessels with Catholic fraternal organizations.\(^{199}\) While the variance in this approach is high, over a large enough sample, these correlations might attest to a pattern of trade-based social development throughout the Caribbean region. In Havana, for instance, vessels arriving from and departing to the Caribbean region used 315 distinct names over a 48-year period, while vessels in the transatlantic circuit used approximately 250 (though since there were far fewer transatlantic voyages, that circuit

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\(^{199}\) An important caveat to the evaluation of vessel names is that ship crews often knew their vessels by colloquial names that were more likely to correspond to the geographic origins of crew members than to anything else. These colloquial names are not in import and export tax records, but appear sometimes in civil and criminal litigation and testimony.
still had a higher rate of variance). The variety of names used means there are few vessel names that recur in the records the way that the names of individual captains might, though some names do stand out: *Nuestra Senora del Rosario*, for example, was by far the most commonly used name in either circuit, representing twenty percent of vessels in the Caribbean circuit and twelve percent in the transatlantic circuit. Ships bearing the name of “Our Lady of the Rosary” also represented the largest *difference* between the two circuits, as the proportion of Caribbean ships that used this name was two thirds larger than the proportion of Atlantic vessels that did. Is this merely a coincidence or is it possible that the devotion to the rosary—a Dominican confraternity and favored patron for Afro-Catholic confraternities in the New World—meant something different to the people responsible for maritime commerce of the Caribbean than it did for those responsible for transatlantic shipping? The question is a difficult one to answer, but it is also one that we may not even think to ask without taking a closer look at trade records that we so frequently take for granted.

**Exchange Value and Use Value in Atlantic and Caribbean Markets**

If it is possible to reinterpret the relative importance of transatlantic and regional traffic by examining seasonality and vessel types, then this is largely because the number of regional voyages were roughly comparable to the number of transatlantic voyages to begin with. The distribution of shipping tariffs, however, is a much starker example of the fleet’s importance to local treasuries. In terms of monetary value of trade and taxation, the transatlantic fleet far outstripped regional trade. Between 1590 and 1700, transatlantic shipping raised nearly seven million *reales* worth of tax in Veracruz alone. In the same time frame, tariffs on regional shipping accounted for only 1.3 million *reales*
(see Table 2.6). The vast difference in the monetary sums of trade, however, can mask important uses and patterns of taxation that again show Caribbean trade to be distinct from transatlantic trade.

Table 2.6. *Almojarifazgo* applied in Veracruz, 1590-1700.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax rate</th>
<th>Atlantic Reales</th>
<th>Caribbean Reales</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total reales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-17.5%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>123,361</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>6,283,261</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>475,250</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>177</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,881,872</strong></td>
<td><strong>181</strong></td>
<td><strong>358</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AGI-Contaduría 879-889, Caja de Veracruz, Cuentas de Real Hacienda.

A demonstration of the impact of the revenue that the fleet raised necessitates not only an accounting of how much tax was raised, but also an understanding of what the purpose of that tax was. This means not only an accounting of the use to which the money raised was put, but also an examination of the reason that the tax was assigned in the first place. It is worth noting, for instance, that the *almojarifazgo* that was most frequently allocated at the fleet’s arrival was valued at ten percent of the value of the goods they carried, while *navíos sueltos* were taxed at a rate of five percent. Though this discrepancy does not even come close to erasing the wide gap that separated the value of the cargoes of the fleet and the *navíos sueltos*, it is indicative of the financial priorities of the royal treasury. In the early modern Spanish Caribbean, taxes were

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200 AGI-Contaduría, legs. 879-889, “Caja de Veracruz, Cuentas de Real Hacienda,” 1590-1700; TePaske and Klein. Exit tariffs were valued at 2.5% of tonnage for all outgoing ships. Oddly, many previous studies of shipping movement do not discuss the different rates of the *almojarifazgo*. De la Fuente, for instance, does not mention them, though his sources on shipping movements were the Protocolos Notariales at the Archivo Historico Nacional in Cuba, and not the records of the Contaduría. Isabelo Macías Dominguez, meanwhile, also does not discuss the differences in *almojarifazgo* at length for reasons that are less clear.
ascribed not only as a means of raising revenue, but as a way of exerting royal power to encourage and discourage certain kinds of social and economic behavior. In fact, the royal treasury maintained a much larger series of distinct shipping tariffs that were applied selectively depending on the provenance, tonnage, and cargo that a ship carried. In general, the type of behavior that the differing *almojarifazgo* were meant to encourage had to do with the distinction between merchandise that were deemed necessities and those that were deemed luxuries. In other words, it had to do with the distinction between exchange value and use value.

On their face, exchange value and use value are somewhat self-explanatory concepts. Exchange value refers to a quantitative sum that can be received in exchange for a given commodity. Use value refers to the qualitative utility of that commodity. In 1683, a frigate named the *Nuestra Señora de Regla* arrived in Veracruz from Havana laden with, among many other cargoes, two *petates* (rolls) of bizcocho, which it sold for a relatively small sum of fifteen pesos—its exchange value. The use value of those same two *petates* of bizcocho was the nutrition that they provided to six slaves who were hired to unload, measure, and re-package the same ship’s much larger cargo of 1,009 bushels (*fanegas*) of salt. The salt itself carried an exchange value greater than two thousand pesos, and the value of the slaves’ labor was assessed at eleven pesos each for fifteen days of work.

The distinction between exchange value and use value functions to demonstrate the differences between commodities that are exchanged in regional markets from those

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201 AGN–Indiferente Virreinal, Marina, caja 2748, exp. 4, “Veeduría y contaduría de la armada de Barlovento. Relaciones de los géneros confierados por la Armada de Barlovento a diversas embarcaciones extranjeras,” 26 July 1683, fs. 8r-9r.
that are exchanged in global markets. For export especially, transatlantic vessels principally carried commodities with high exchange to use ratio: American gold, silver, sugar, and cochineal; Asian goods like silk, spices, porcelain and ivory that were transshipped from Acapulco and the Manila galleons. The import commodities carried by transatlantic vessels often carried high use value, but tended to be bulk goods that were not available locally and thus were intended for distribution throughout the Americas: Spanish mercury for the silver mines, wine and olive oil, which could not yet be produced in the Americas, and African slaves.\(^{202}\) Meanwhile, *navíos sueltos* carried goods that were valued more for their utility than for the potential of exchange and were frequently meant for local use, rather than re-export. For instance, the islands often purchased grains and foodstuffs from the mainland for local provisioning, while Veracruz imported slate from Coatzocoalcos, timber from Campeche, leather hides from Caracas, and nails and other building supplies from Havana.\(^{203}\) It is unsurprising, then, that many studies emphasize the monetary value of trade privilege transatlantic exchanges, since those were the exchanges most likely to consist of goods with high exchange value, and therefore represent a larger share of trade.

### Table 2.7. Venezuelan *cacao* exports, 1621-1700.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Bushels</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Spain</td>
<td>365,317</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castile</td>
<td>71,849</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6,365</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>443,531</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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\(^{202}\) On transatlantic commodities, see: de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic*, 18.

\(^{203}\) AGN-Marina, vol. 1, exp. 2
There were some luxury commodities that were heavily represented in regional trading circuits, particularly toward the end of the seventeenth century. The most prominent of these was Venezuelan chocolate (cacao), which was in high demand in New Spain. Between 1621 and 1700, more than eighty percent of legal Venezuelan chocolate exports were shipped to New Spain via Veracruz (see Table 2.7). Interestingly, as the chocolate trade to New Spain took off in the second half of the seventeenth century, silver exports to Spain entered a period of decline. Both of these turns are reflected in the changing quantities of almojarifazgo raised in the port. In fact, by the 1650s, Caribbean shipping had caught up with transatlantic shipping in terms of annual value (see Figure 2.5), and although transatlantic shipping recovered somewhat in the 1660s and 1670s, it never recovered to its earlier peaks, and regional shipping remained competitive with transatlantic shipping throughout the century.

![Figure 2.5. Almojarifazgo by decade, 1590-1700.](image)

The growth of chocolate as an important import commodity in New Spain testifies to the entrenchment of regional trading circuits over the course of the seventeenth century. This was a lucrative trade that developed largely outside of any imperial design, the proceeds of which served more to enrich the colonies than they did the metropole. At the same time, unlike the merchants who dealt in transatlantic luxuries like gold and silver and did business in Mexico City and Puebla, the merchants in the Caribbean chocolate market tended to base their operations within port cities. Such was the case of Antonio Méndez Chillón, who was probably the most important chocolate merchant operating in Mexico in the second half of the seventeenth century, and has since become one of the city’s most famous merchants in the seventeenth century. His story can help us understand regional circuits of trade not only through depersonalized import and export tax records, but as networks created by individuals and communities.

A Portuguese converso from Lisbon, Méndez Chillón had been a slave factor in the Angolan port of Luanda prior to arriving in Veracruz in 1621. When he arrived, he sold 100 slaves at a considerable profit, using the proceeds to purchase regional trading vessels, hire crew, and enter the chocolate market. Over the next two decades, Méndez Chillón became firmly embedded in regional shipping networks, establishing agents in Maracaibo, Caracas, Havana, Campeche, Mexico City, and Puebla, in addition to an agent in Seville. He also established himself in Veracruz’s community. Though he never purchased a home in the city, he lived in a rented house with a former slave named Lucrecia, who had come with him from Angola and with whom he had two children.204

In 1642, Méndez Chillón was arrested on the charge of being a secret Jew. Among of the allegations against him was one that suggested he and Lucrecía—who were officially unmarried and whose children were officially illegitimate—had married in a secret Jewish ceremony at the house of another converso merchant who was also suspected of being Jewish. In fact, Méndez Chillón was only arrested after a long series of inquests into the secret lives of many other suspected Jews in New Spain, and in Veracruz in particular. Eventually, the Inquisition’s investigation expanded to include Méndez Chillón’s associates in Caracas and Maracaibo other Caribbean ports where he had done business, including ship captains Antonio González Jamaica, Felipe Estrada, Benito Enríquez, Gaspar Andrés, all of whom were denounced in Mexico. Like Méndez Chillón, these men were also identified as former slave traders who had later entered the Caribbean chocolate trade. At least one of them, Benito Enríquez, was tried for Judaizing by the Inquisition in Cartagena.

The cases of these Caribbean chocolate merchants accused of Judaism begin to demonstrate the human consequences of regional trading. These were men at least some of whom had at one time operated in transatlantic circuits of trade as slave traders, but later put down roots in the Caribbean. According to the historian Robert Ferry, who has

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206 Escobar Quevedo, 184.

studied the case of Méndez Chillón, many of the denounced merchants in Méndez’s network were unable to provide testimony against him, largely because they claimed that they had never met him personally, and thus had no knowledge of his religion. Despite this fact, Méndez Chillón and his associates both had been implicated as co-members of a single secret community. The Inquisition thus relied on Caribbean trading circuits—networks in which geographically dispersed merchants may not have even met one another—in an attempt to illuminate what they believed to be a covert community. While we cannot know whether or not Méndez Chillón and his associates were really involved in such a community, nor how well they knew one another, the inquisitors who investigated them understood the Caribbean trading circuit to be a potent vector of social and cultural formation and community-building. Indeed, circuits of trade involved not only the exchange of goods and money, but of people in the form of migrants, slaves, captains and crews. In the final section of the chapter, I turn to the captains and crews of the Caribbean and Atlantic circuits to demonstrate a final way in which regional trade was qualitatively distinct from transatlantic trade.

Captains and Crews

Relations between the fleet and the city’s residents were often poor. As we have already seen, early in the seventeenth century, Veracruz’s cabildo sought viceregal prohibition of fireworks displays in the city after a group of reveling sailors of the fleet sparked a fire that damaged homes and shops. In fact, relations between the city and the fleet were poor long before the 1607 fire. In 1589, a royal official named Gonzalo

\[208\] Ferry, 55.
Rodriguez wrote to the crown complaining that “the soldiers of the flota and the armada should not go ashore in the land nor enter the city of Veracruz… nor hold public games and that they should instead remain in their ships in the port of San Juan de Ulúa.”²⁰⁹ At the request of Veracruz’s corregidor, in 1621 viceroy Diego Carillo de Mendoza ordered the fleet’s admiral, Fernando de Sosa, to advise his men that any who left their ship in the night to acquire “wine and merchandise [brought by muleteers, carters, and chirrioneros]” should be punished as a “deserter” and sentenced to five years in the galleys.²¹⁰ One year later, the viceroy commanded the castellan at the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa to “post corps of soldiers inside the city council building” each night while the fleet was in port “so that this way no disturbances, brawls, and other atrebimientos will be committed in the public streets.” According to the cabildo, the annual arrival of the fleet “disembarks in this city many people and among them men of evil life (mala vida) and bad habits, causing inquietude and the loss of respect for justice.”²¹¹

If strained relations existed between the townspeople and the sailors of the Caribbean circuit, then that strain did not register as bluntly as it did with sailors of the transatlantic fleet. While Caribbean captains and crews left less of an archival footprint than did Spanish “men of the sea,” there is reason to believe that they may have coexisted more easily with local Caribbean populations than sailors in the fleet. As we have seen,

²⁰⁹ AGI-México, leg. 351, “Gonzalo Rodriguez en nombre de la ciudad y puerto de la Veracruz a S.M.,” 18 July 1589, fs. 252r-255v. “Los soldados de las flotas y armadas no saltasen en tierra ni entrasen en la ciudad de Veracruz ni llevasen banders ni tuviesen juegos publicos y que se quedasen en las naos en el Puerto de San Juan de Ulúa.”

²¹⁰ AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Orden para que la flota provenientes de los reinos de Castilla, así como sus oficiales no se entrometan en asuntos ajenos a sus naos,” 30 March 1623, fs 58r-60r.

²¹¹ AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Mandamiento por parte del virrey para que el alcalde de las fuerzas de San Juan de Ulúa asista a la Veracruz y ponga un cuerpo de guardia en las casas de Cabildo de la ciudad,” 8 May 1622, fs. 54r-55v.
quicker travel times between Caribbean ports allowed certain vessels and captains to make more regular roundtrip voyages.

Caribbean crews were also more likely than the crews of the fleet to be populated with American-born sailors who better reflected the demographics of the ports that they visited. The admirals of the fleet had a tendency to fill command positions and captainships with their relatives and countrymen, which often meant that the sailors of the fleet were overwhelmingly drawn from regions in Spain that the commanding admiral hailed from. For example, the first admiral of the fleet, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, was a native of the northern Spanish province of Asturias, and the first royal fleet was populated largely with his countrymen. One of Menéndez’s successors, Cristóbal de Eraso, similarly filled the fleet with lower nobles from his home city of Écija in Andalusia.212

There are fewer records attesting to Caribbean ship crews, but those we have indicate demographic mirroring of local populations. The crew list of the navío El Ave María, for example, included 22 individuals—one captain, one pilot, thirteen marineros (mariners), and seven grumetes (cabin boys or apprentices). While the captain, pilot, and marineros appear to all be either Spanish or white creoles, all seven of the ship’s grumetes were listed as negros. Three of the seven—Juan Bañol, Jacome Congo, and Luis Congo—were listed using an African surname, while two others—Felipe Criollo and Pedro Matheo—were given Spanish surnames, suggesting that they may have been American-born.213 Although the none of the crew were identified by birth place, the

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surnames of the *negro* crew suggest that they were drawn from the local port population. More research into the identities of Caribbean circuit captains and crews is likely to reveal a similar tendency for traders and sailors in regional circuits to be drawn from Caribbean ports. While this does not guarantee social cohesion between Caribbean crews and the residents of the ports they visited, it does suggest that they would have been viewed less as outsiders than the boisterous mariners of the transatlantic fleets.

**Conclusion**

In the seventeenth century, Veracruz maintained more active trade relationships with ports in the Caribbean than it did with ports in Spain, Africa, or the Canary Islands. Although scholars often assume that these relationships were subordinate to the movement of the transatlantic silver fleet, which was more far more profitable than regional shipping, Caribbean shipping functioned in patterns that were distinct from transatlantic trade, allowing it to register a deceptively large impact of Veracruzano society. Unlike the transatlantic fleet, Caribbean ships sailed in and out of Veracruz year-round, making them a constant presence in local life. While transatlantic traffic could dramatically transform the ports it visited, that transformation can be understood as an atypical phenomenon that reinforced the notion that Atlantic ports were physically and cognitively more distant than ports in the Caribbean. In fact, transatlantic ships were far larger, technologically distinctive, and designed and adorned in such a way that would have emphasized their exoticism to contemporary observers. Similarly, the merchandise that characterized regional trade were often bought, sold, and used locally, unlike the luxury cargoes of the transatlantic fleet. Finally, the mariners who made up regional crews were more likely than their transatlantic counterparts to be American-born and to
reflect the demographics of the Caribbean. Moreover, regional sailors are far less likely to appear in correspondence between local and royal officials as unruly vagrants disrupting the daily lives of good citizens.

By reinterpreting trade between Caribbean ports through these categories, it is possible to see the emergence of a regional network of relations that existed parallel both to the transatlantic relationship between metropole and colony and to the overland relationship between the viceregal capital and primary ports of three separate audiencias. Beyond facilitating trade, the Mexican-Caribbean urban system was the foundation upon which Mexican and Caribbean ports developed not only similar social and cultural institutions and traits, but followed synchronized patterns of development. The similarities that have occasionally led scholars to group the ports of Mexico and the Caribbean together in the golfo-caribe region did not develop in isolation, but through a process of communication and mirroring that was facilitated by regional relationships of trade. In other words, the Mexican-Caribbean urban system is not only a region in which disparate cities developed similar social institutions and cultural practices, it is the process through which those similarities were built. In the chapters that follow, I will highlight some of those similarities, contextualizing them through the lens of the Mexican-Caribbean urban system.
Chapter Three

The Large and Small Scale Introduction of Africans into Veracruz

Over more than a century, accounts and descriptions of Veracruz focused on three of its seemingly indelible qualities: its unhealthy environment, crumbling infrastructure, and large African population. As we have seen, the rhetorical coupling of the city’s physical ills with the presence of black bodies was part of an ongoing discourse that attempted to parse the ways in which climate, bodily humors, and social behavior were connected to geographical space. One result of this discourse was the creation of new categories of space, which filtered Veracruz out of the Mexican world and into the Caribbean. But the accounts of Antonio de Ciudad Real, Alonso de la Mota y Escobar, Francesco Gemelli Careri, and others do more than insert Veracruz into an emergent early modern discourse on race and geography. On a more rudimentary level, these descriptions also attest to the European understanding of seventeenth-century Veracruz as a fundamentally “black” urban space. Whatever the relationship between climate, bodies, and behavior, Veracruz’s environmental and social worlds were, in the eyes of early modern travelers, the domain of its African and Afro-descended inhabitants.

In many ways, Veracruz was a city shaped by African diaspora. From the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, Africans and Afro-descended individuals constituted well over half of the city’s population, at times reaching majorities as high as seventy or eighty percent. Unlike the slaves in sugar plantations and silver mines of the Mexican interior or those of the later Caribbean, most of the African individuals who lived and worked in Veracruz did not toil in extractive industries, producing the export commodities that underwrote the European colonial project. By and large, Veracruz—as
a city—did not have such industries. Neither did it have many of the processing facilities that turned raw materials, like silver ore and sugar cane, into ready-for-market goods. For most of the colonial period, Veracruz existed almost exclusively as a hub of transit, and it was in support of transit that Veracruz’s African population labored. As we have already seen, some worked in the city’s burgeoning service economy, attending to travelers and migrants as innkeepers, hospital workers, and vendors of food and drink. Many others provided the physical labor that the port required to function, loading and unloading ships and mule trains, repairing damaged vessels, and building and maintaining public works.

Although the port did not process outgoing commodities, there was one incoming cargo that was tended to in the port: the human cargoes of the slave trade. While free migrants arriving from Spain or elsewhere moved quickly through the port and on to other destinations, captive Africans often remained in port for months before being marched to inland slave markets and plantations. Slave ship voyages to New Spain could last as long as three or four months—weeks longer than for other New World destinations—and for slaves, most of the voyage was spent cramped below decks in the hold of a ship.²¹⁴ Shipboard deaths from disease and malnutrition were a foregone conclusion in the slave trade, and longer voyages often translated to more shipboard deaths. Those slaves who survived months at sea often arrived at the port sickly or near-death and required relatively lengthy recovery times before they could make the overland

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²¹⁴ The data on length of voyage is severely limited, though the handful of voyages for which this figure is known suggest that a typical voyage could last almost twice as long as a voyage to Cartagena. This is unsurprising given the additional physical distance separating the eastern Atlantic and Veracruz and the current systems that dictated voyage length. Shipboard deaths are somewhat more well-documented. In the 89 voyages in which the figure is recorded, 28% of slaves died en route to Veracruz, a figure far larger than other Spanish American ports of the period. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, “The Slave Trade in Mexico,” *HAHR*, vol. 24, no. 3 (August 1944): 419-427; TASTD Voyages.
journey to the interior. The Hospital de San Juan de Ulúa (and later the Hospital de San Juan de Montesclaros) was designated to attend to slaves as they arrived in order to filter out those who might carry contagious disease to the mainland.\textsuperscript{215} Meanwhile, both the island and the city housed stocks and holding pens where slaves would be kept as they awaited overland journey to Xalapa or Córdoba, which hosted the slave markets where the initial sale of slaves would often take place. Notarial records in those cities are rife with examples of slave ship captains selling large quantities of captives months after arriving in Veracruz. For example, Andrés Moreira, captain of the slave ship \textit{Nuestro Señora de Nazaré}, paid import duties on 124 piezas of slaves when his ship landed in Veracruz from Angola on December 31, 1608. He sold fifteen slaves in Xalapa ten weeks later in March 1609.\textsuperscript{216}

In the first half of the seventeenth century, slave ships entered Veracruz every year, temporarily filling the city with hundreds, sometimes thousands, of African captives. These new arrivals linked Veracruz and its African and Afro-descended residents to homelands in Great Fulo, Mina, or the Kingdom of Kongo. Although only a small percentage of captives remained in the port in the long-term, the constant arrival of individuals recently departed from Africa created a continuous link that was absent in many hinterland plantations and mining towns. Scholars of African diaspora, particularly those interested in the idea of cultural “survivals,” tend to emphasize “regions of refuge”

\textsuperscript{215} AGN-General de Parte, vol. 6, exp. 712, “Aprobacion de los mandamientos dados por los virreys Martin Enríquez, Luis de Velasco, y conde de Monterrey sobre que el medico de la isla de San Juan de Ulúa, visite los navios que a ella vienen de negros, por si traen alguna enfermedad contagiosa,” 11 November 1603, fs. 260 v.

\textsuperscript{216} ANUV-Xalapa, vol. 4, 11 March 1609, 305vta-309v. A “pieza” was the common notation for quantifying slave ship cargoes in the early modern Spanish Americas. It refers not to a number of individuals, but to units of labor, excluding, for instance, slaves under the age of thirteen. See:
where members of African ethnic groups could retain aspects of their social and cultural identities: isolated rural plantations far from the repressive authority of the colonial state or *palenques* in dense jungle or rugged mountains, where free Africans established largely autonomous polities.\(^{217}\) It was port cities like Veracruz, however, that had the most immediate and frequent contact with the African continent, and the same ports often had larger numbers of African-born residents than even the largest maroon communities.

The slave trade connected Veracruz not only to Africa, but also to other slaving ports throughout the Spanish Caribbean. Slave ships bound for Veracruz frequently stopped at smaller Caribbean ports to resupply and often sold a portion of captives while in port. Once in the Americas, some slaves moved frequently between ports in the Gulf-Caribbean region, either following peripatetic owners, as galley slaves working on ships, or as *esclavos del rey*—slaves owned by the Spanish crown, who could be moved as a group from one location to another to fulfill specific colonial need, such as the building of a fortress or as emergency response to rebuild structures destroyed by hurricane.\(^{218}\) In the early post-conquest period, there was also a small intracolonial slave trade that re-


distributed slaves imported by larger ports like Veracruz and Cartagena to underserved ports in Cuba or Hispaniola.\textsuperscript{219}

This chapter focuses on Veracruz’s role as a hub of the transatlantic slave trade. Citing slave trade data, legal disputes over contraband slave voyages, and evidence of African migrations to New Spain that occurred outside of the slave trade, I argue that the Africans who arrived in Veracruz were a much larger and more diverse group than any previous study has adduced. In particular, I cite archival sources held in Mexico to demonstrate that earlier studies—which have concentrated on sources in Spanish, Portuguese, and, less often, Dutch archives—miss whole swathes of the slave trade, especially in the pre-1595 and post-1640 periods. Conservatively, from 1519 to 1700, I estimate that approximately 155,000 slaves arrived in the port of Veracruz—about forty percent more than the typical estimate of 110,000. Further, almost all of the additional 45,000 slaves hailed from regions other than West Central Africa. While earlier studies have argued that West Central Africans accounted for as much as eighty percent of all slaves in New Spain, my revised estimate suggests that the actual proportion was closer to sixty percent, with thirty percent of individuals hailing from the West African regions of Upper and Lower Guinea, and the remaining ten percent from East Africa, Europe, or other New World locations.

Though most slaves who entered Veracruz did not stay in the city long, slave trade data represent the largest repository of evidence concerning the size and ethnic origins of New Spain’s African population.\textsuperscript{220} The enduring value of slave trade data is

\textsuperscript{219} On the intra-colonial slave trade in the early Caribbean, see: de la Fuente, \textit{Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century}, 35-47.

\textsuperscript{220} See: Bennett, \textit{Africans in Colonial Mexico}, 197 n. 2; Proctor III, \textit{“Damned Notions of Liberty”}, 55-57.
evident in its clear depiction of the ethnicity and provenance zones of incoming captives. No other source offers as thorough evidence on these demographic categories as the records of incoming slave ships. The most important of these provenance zones was West Central Africa, comprising the area of the Congo River basin and including the major slave trading ports of Portuguese Angola, Benguela, and Luanda. Since the eminent Mexican historian and anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán published the first major study of the slave trade to Mexico in 1944, no study has attributed fewer than seventy-five percent of Mexico’s incoming slaves to West Central Africa.\footnote{221}

Given how contentious the question of African provenance zones has been in scholarship on other parts of the Americas, the broad acceptance of West Central Africa as the chief supplier of slaves to New Spain is impressive. Tellingly, some scholars of African diaspora outside of New Spain have dubbed the period before 1640 as the “Angola wave” or the “Bantu wave” of the slave trade (the latter referring to the dominant language branch spoken in West Central Africa), based largely on the overwhelming data for New Spain.\footnote{222} The strength of this assertion has, in turn, led


historians of early New World societies to cite provenance data in support of arguments attesting to both collective and individual retention of West Central African cultural practices and beliefs. In some cases, such arguments are not only supported by, but predicated on the notion that African captives from a single “culture zone” predominated in New World slavery, thus allowing those captives to continue certain cultural practices that they held in common with their fellow slaves. Because the data for New Spain is so stark, this logic has resonated particularly among historians of Afro-Mexico.

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224 The term “culture zone” was first coined by Melville Herskovits in the 1940s and revived by John Thornton fifty years later. It denotes a region in which there are a number of distinct cultures, ethnicities, languages, or religions, but all of which are mutually intelligible. In other words, using the culture-zone logic, captives from a given provenance region need not be members of the same precise cultural groups in order to form common bonds and maintain common cultural beliefs and practices in the New World. The invocation of the culture zone thus allows researchers to sidestep the troubling fact that European records of African ethnicities were often imprecise and tended to be prescriptive rather than descriptive, and thus identify distinct cultural retentions even in cases when distinct cultures are in doubt. See: Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941), 295; Melville J. Herskovits, “On the Provenience of New World Negroes,” *Social Forces*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Dec., 1933): 247-262; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, xiv, 183-193. See also: Heywood and Thornton, 386. For extended descriptions of “culture zone” historiography, see: David Northrup, “Igbo and Myth Igbo: Culture and Ethnicity in the Atlantic World, 1600-1850,” *SA*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2000): 1-6; Sarah E. Green, “Culture Zones in the Era of the Slave Trade: Exploring the Yoruba Connection with the Anlo-Ewe,” in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum Press, 2000), 87; Sherwin K. Bryant, *Rivers of Gold, Lives of Bondage: Governing through Slavery in Colonial Quito* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 105-107.

While there is no evidence to suggest that slaves from West Central Africa did not constitute the majority of captives who arrived in Veracruz, there is significant evidence that should temper projections of an eighty or even ninety percent majority. This chapter presents that evidence in two parts, arguing that the documentary record upon which earlier studies have been based is a partial record and that it is one that tends to exclude slaves who hailed from regions other than West Central Africa.

In its first section, this chapter gives a broad overview of the slave trade to Mexico before 1700, paying particular attention to the methodologies that earlier studies have used in their estimation of the trade. Separating the slave trade in Veracruz into three distinct chronological periods—the early period (pre-1595), the high period (1595-1640), and the decline period (1641-1700)—I introduce new research showing both that slaves from the West African regions of Upper and Lower Guinea constituted the majority of captives introduced in both the early and decline periods of the slave trade and that more slaves entered New Spain in these periods than previous studies have assumed. Almost all previous studies have focused on the high period of the slave trade exclusively, and as a result, that period is comparatively well understood. It was in this period that the greatest number of slaves were introduced to New Spain, eighty percent of whom hailed from West Central Africa. There is evidence, however, that the contraband trade in that period drew slaves from West Africa as well as Angola, demonstrating that the slave trade remained diverse even as one provenance zone rose to dominance over others. More important than any revision to overall numbers or provenance zones, my research and chronological grouping of the slave trade place Veracruz into the same slave trading cycles as other Caribbean ports in the seventeenth century.
In section two, I draw on archival sources to deal with one of the “less visible” pathways through which slaves entered Veracruz: the forced and voluntary migrations of “household” slaves and free individuals. The full magnitude of this avenue of African diaspora is difficult to gauge. While it involved the large-scale migration of Africans to the New World, it was not a trade as such, and thus left none of the import tax records that historians have used to gauge the commercial slave trade. Still, as we shall see, these migrations bear two characteristics that are relatively indisputable: first, they represented a significant number of slaves arriving in New Spain, stretching across the first two centuries of colonization, from the early sixteenth to the very end of the seventeenth century. Second, in terms of provenance zones, these migrations followed patterns that were distinct from the large-scale slave trade. Therefore, although small-scale migrations did not approach the total volume of the large-scale trade, they must be taken into account in any effort to substantiate cultural or social arguments with slave trade statistics.

In its revisions, this chapter draws Veracruz more deeply into the social world of the Caribbean. The ethnic diversity of incoming African captives of the slave trade demonstrates, against widely held understanding, that the “Mexican wing” of the slave trade was not an Angola-centric aberration in the early modern period, but rather a part of the same slave trading circuit that operated throughout the seventeenth-century Spanish Caribbean. Although Veracruz received more of its slaves from Angola than did other Caribbean ports, placing the slave trade’s large-scale trends into appropriate chronological context demonstrates that Veracruz followed largely the same trajectory of slave trade traffic as did other ports.
Its revisions also build upon the broader interventions that scholars have recently made for the slave trade to the Spanish Americas generally. In fact, many recent studies have similarly demonstrated that the early slave trade was larger and more diverse than is typically understood.\(^\text{226}\) Most of these revisions, however, have been concentrated in Cartagena, Rio de la Plata, and the Caribbean islands, leaving Veracruz in a somewhat ambiguous position.\(^\text{227}\) This is largely because early studies of the seventeenth-century slave trade to Spanish America relied too heavily on an incomplete data set in which traffic to Veracruz was overrepresented relative to other ports. As scholars began to note the inadequacy of Veracruz-based data to describe events in the broader Spanish Caribbean, they have produced more specific work for other ports. In some cases, this work has surpassed the level of detail available for Veracruz to the extent that it appears not only that Veracruz was not representative of other Caribbean ports, but also that it was not typical of them either. In making similar detailed revisions for the Veracruz slave trade, I seek both to offer a more accurate picture of that trade and to demonstrate that Veracruz—though not representative of all Caribbean slave trades—was typical of the early modern slave trade to Spanish America.


The Transatlantic Slave Trade to Veracruz, 1519-1713

Throughout the colonial period, Veracruz was the port of entry for nearly all of the African and Afro-descended slaves who arrived in New Spain. Prior to 1700, it was the second largest slaving port in the Americas, surpassed only by Cartagena. According to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TASTD), a minimum of 184,625 captive Africans were forcibly sent to Veracruz between 1545 and 1686. The number of slaves who actually arrived in Veracruz, though smaller, significantly outstrips the estimated migration of Spaniards and other Europeans to New Spain in the same period. In the first 150 years of Spanish rule in Mexico, the slave trade was so pervasive that some scholars have called New Spain the “largest slave society in the Americas” in the early colonial period.

Although scholars have long understood New Spain as a major hub of the seventeenth-century slave trade, it has not always been treated as an equal partner within a regional slave trading system so much as a discrete branch of that trade. This is partly a result of the fact that the historiographical questions that guide studies of Afro-Mexican

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230 Bennett, Africans in Colonial Mexico, 29.
history are often somewhat divorced from those that inform Caribbean and Atlantic history, leading to multiple bodies of slave trade literature that are at times incongruous.\textsuperscript{231} At the same time, recent scholarship on other Spanish Caribbean slaving outposts like Cartagena, Havana, and Santo Domingo have identified explicit distinctions between the slave trade to those places and the slave trade to Veracruz. In this section, I re-evaluate the slave trade to Veracruz in three chronological periods, arguing that similar patterns of slave trading prevailed in Veracruz as in other ports of the Spanish Caribbean.

The Early Period: 1519-1595

Black sailors, soldiers, and explorers—slave and free—played an important role in the Spanish conquest and colonization of the Americas as early as Christopher Columbus’ first transatlantic voyages in the 1490s.\textsuperscript{232} Beginning with Nicolás de Ovando’s expedition to Hispaniola in 1502, contingents of African slaves and soldiers

\textsuperscript{231} This is, in part, necessitated by the fact that scholars of Mexican history have access to a vast, diverse, and detailed collection of documentary evidence of which Caribbean scholars can only dream. This archival wealth has allowed Mexicanists to produce detailed social, demographic, and economic histories of densely populated regions, cities, and towns across Mesoamerica without having to turn to the large-scale data of the slave trade. The overwhelming quantity of paper that was produced in colonial New Spain is, of course, also a testament to the comparatively large size and complexity of colonial Mexican society (both in terms of population and in terms of economic activity) as well as the privileged place that it held within the Spanish American empire. In other words, it is possible to say that the mere fact that New Spain produced so much archival material validates the historiographical tendency to treat the viceroyalty as an entity unto itself. In a way, then, this depth of source material has, rightly or wrongly, inhibited attempts to study Mexican slavery in intercolonial, or transnational context, as many Afro-Mexicanist historians tend to focus on local case studies and the place of slaves and free blacks within the vast colonial Mexican administrative structure.

\textsuperscript{232} At least one member of Columbus’s crew on the Santa Maria may have been Afro-descended. Pedro Alonso Niño, the ship’s pilot, who would go on to lead an expedition of his own to the Orinoco Basin of South America in 1498, was sometimes recorded in contemporary sources by his nickname, “El Negro.” While this nickname—which a number of scholars of African Diaspora have cited as evidence of early African arrivals to the Americas—is not a definitive marker of Niño’s phenotype, if Niño himself was not Afro-descended, it is not unlikely that another, lesser-known member of Columbus’s crew was. See: Ropero Regidor, Diego. “La Aportación de Moguer al Descubrimiento: Sus Hombres de Mar, el Monasterio de Santa Clara, y la Familia Niño,” in David González Crus, ed. Descubridores de América: Colón, los marinos y los puertos. Madrid: Sílex Ediciones, 2012, 127-164.
participated in every major New World expedition in the conquest period, including Juan Ponce de León’s expedition to Florida, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar’s conquest of Cuba, and, of course, Hernán Cortés’s invasion of Mexico. While the individual Africans who took part in these early campaigns are less well known than their European counterparts, several achieved significant contemporary and historical notoriety.

Two of the most prominent of these black actors, Juan Garrido and Gaspar Yanga, made a particular mark in the course of early Spanish settlement in Veracruz. Garrido was an African-born slave and conquistador who was present at the founding of the town of Villa Rica de Vera Cruz, the namesake and predecessor of the port city of Nueva Veracruz. He later accompanied Cortés in the siege of Tenochtitlan in 1519 and participated in Spanish campaigns to conquer Mexico’s western province of Michoacán. Like Garrido, Yanga was African-born and most likely a member of the Bran ethnicity from the Lower Guinea region of West Africa. But while Garrido participated in the Spanish conquest directly—eventually earning freedom for his service—Yanga earned his fame as an early resister of slavery, escaping his captivity in Veracruz in 1570 and, with a group of other escaped slaves, establishing what was, by some accounts, the first free black town in the Americas—San Lorenzo de los Negros, a

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233 On Ponce de León’s personal slaves, see: AGI, Indiferente General, leg. 419, r. 4, “Licencia de esclavos a Juan Ponce de León,” 12 August 1512, f. 13r-13v, f. 27r; On Diego Velázquez, see: AGI, Indiferente General, leg. 419, r. 19, “Real Cédula a Diego Velázquez, dándole licencia para pagar a Indias tres esclavos y una esclava negros,” 22 August 1540, f. 379v (hay duplicado). There are no documents attesting to personal slaves of Hernán Cortés, though there are several of his chief lieutenants, for instance, Francisco de Montejo and Pedro de Escalante Alvarado.

city that in 1697 reminded Gemelli Careri of “the land of Guinea.” Today it is known as the city of “Yanga” in honor of its founder. These early accounts of Garrido and Yanga not only attest to the important role that Africans played in the early settlement of Veracruz, but also demonstrate polarities of African agency in New Spain: Africans could at once be understood as the agents of Spanish expansion, its victims, and some of its most able resisters.

In addition to a handful of detailed biographical accounts, there are some qualitative records that attest to the numerical prominence of Africans in sixteenth-century Veracruz. In addition to Ciudad Real’s 1585 testament, at least three other sixteenth-century accounts attempted to estimate the size and ethnic makeup of the city’s population, showing an equally large proportion of African diasporans. The first comes in the form of a 1570 chronicle written by the Spanish court historian Juan López de Velasco, who attested that the city’s population included two hundred Spanish vecinos, six hundred African laborers, and no indigenous population. A year later, a report prepared for the council of the Indies claimed that “there are no indios in this town, but there are more than six hundred black slaves (negros esclavos). There are few free blacks

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235 Aguirre, La población negra de México, 207; Bristol, 99-100; Carroll, 90-92; Juan Laurencio, Campaña contra Yanga en 1608 (Mexico City: Editorial Citlatepetl, 1974); Adriana Naveda Chavez-Hita, Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz, 1690-1830 (Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1987), 123-161; Vinson, Bearing Arms for His Majesty, 15-22.

236 “La ciudad de Veracruz… es pueblo de doscientos vecinos españoles… no hay indios ningunos, aunque hay seiscentos negros esclavos arriba.” Juan López de Velasco, Geografía y Descripción Universal de las Indias, edited by Don Justo Zaragoza (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Fortanet, 1894), 207-214. According to Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah, the ratio of Africans to Spaniards in all of New Spain in 1568-1570 was approximately 1:3. Although this ratio is heavily—and probably erroneously—skewed in favor of the Spanish population, if we were to accept it, then Veracruz would represent the mirror opposite ratio, as Africans outnumbered Spaniards 3:1. In sum, Veracruz was not only predominantly African, it had a proportionally larger African population than most New Spanish cities and towns in the late sixteenth century. See: Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, Essays in Population History: Mexico and the Caribbean, vol. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 197-198.
(negros libres), although there are some, and there are no mestizos, though there are some mulatos.” Though the 1571 report gave no reckoning of the Spanish population, it also indicated five hundred Catholic confessors and noted that the primary occupation of African laborers was as “porters (carreterías), who are rented for construction work and other jobs, as well as for cattle ranching,” presumably in the near interior. 237 The final sixteenth-century assessment of the city’s demography comes from the Italian military engineer Giovanni Bautista Antonelli, who restricted his estimate to the fortifications and port facilities of the island of San Juan de Ulúa. In the annotation of his 1590 perspectival drawing of the island, Antonelli observed that “the population of the island includes perhaps eight or ten Spaniards; the rest being slaves, who live in houses made of the wood of ruined ships, built on top of posts above the water.” In a second drawing, Antonelli elaborated on this estimate, stating that the number of wooden houses on the island was no fewer than forty. 238

237 “No [h]ay en el pueblo yndios ningunos, [h]ay mas de 600 negros y negras esclavos, pocos libres aunque algunos, no [h]ay mestizos ningunos aunque algunos mulatos. Poco mas o menos que ha una mas de 500 personas de confesión. El trato principal del pueblo es comprar y vender y oficiales de todos officios no [h]ay otra grangería ni trato en la cibdad y otra sino cosa de comprar y vender y así todos de los negros es carreteria los cuales se alquilan por obras y otros trabajos y estancias de ganados.” AGI-Indiferente General, leg. 1529, n. 5, “Relación sobre Veracruz,” 11 March 1571, fs. 6v.

238 “La dicha población tendrá como ocho o diez españoles bezinos. Los demás son negros esclavos de su magestad. Dichas casas son de madera de nauíos que se ban al traués, fundadas e fabricadas sobre palios y debajo la agua.” AGI-Mapas y Planos, México, leg. 36, “Perspectiva de reparo y fuerte y población de San Juan de Ulúa,” 27 January 1590. A second drawing in the same series contains a similar notation written within the northern peninsula of the island, adding that the number of wooden houses is about forty: “En este parte de sitio obra como quarenta casas hecho de madera de las navios… aqui como seis o ocho españoles los demás son negrós de V. Mag.” AGI-Mapas y Planos, México, leg. 37, “Planta del fuerte y reparo adonde serrecogen las flotas que ban a S. Juan de Ulúa, Provincia de la Nueva España,” 27 January 1590. Bautista Antonelli is often confused with his brother, Giovanni Battista Antonelli, who was also a military engineer. Giovanni was twenty years older than his brother and was responsible for the design of several fortresses in Europe and North Africa, including those in the Mediterranean ports of Cartagena and Oran. See: Richard L. Kagan and Fernando Marias, Urban Images of the Hispanic World: 1493-1793 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 76; Diego Angulo Íñiguez, Bautista Antonelli: Las fortificaciones americanas del siglo XVI (Madrid: Hauser y Menet, 1942). See also: Judith Hernández Aranda, “La fortaleza de San Juan de Ulúa,” in Bernardo García Díaz and Sergio Guerra Vilabo, coords., La
While the period of contact and conquest produced significant qualitative evidence of Africans as conquistadors, settlers, and laborers in Spain’s new American realms, the early stages of colonization also produced some of the most limited documentation of the transatlantic slave trade as a whole. In part, this is a reflection of the slow transition of the slave trade from a trade with a predominantly south-north axis to a trade with a predominantly east-west axis. For nearly a millennium prior to 1492, slaves from sub-Saharan Africa had been brought in large numbers across the Sahara desert, either to be sold in North African slave markets or to be shipped to ports throughout the Mediterranean. Many of these individuals arrived in Iberia, and, by the fourteenth century, Seville, which served as an important launching point for early transatlantic voyages, as well as the home to the council of the Indies and the house of trade (*casa de contratación*), hosted one of the largest slave markets in late medieval Europe. In the 1430s, Portuguese incursions along the West African coast added a maritime slave-

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trading route to Iberia. By the time of the first Castilian settlements in the Caribbean, the south-north slave trade was well established, with defined commercial routes, established mercantile networks, and codification in Castilian administrative and legal systems.

The expansion of the Castilian realm into the Americas did not dissolve these ties overnight. In fact, it would still be several decades before the east-west transatlantic slave trade began to supplant the south-north trans-Saharan trade as the dominant corridor of slave traffic in the Iberian world. Although slave ships sailed to the Americas directly from Africa as early as 1519 when a vessel from Senegambia disembarked 259 slaves in Puerto Rico, a large proportion of slaves arriving in the Americas departed from Iberia, often aboard ships that were not intended exclusively for slave trading. If nothing else, the Iberian “layover” in the sixteenth-century journey from Africa to the Americas

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241 The first Portuguese maritime expedition to West Africa that successfully rounded the Cape of Bojador took place in 1434, under the command of Gil Eannes and the auspices of Infante Henrique of Portugal (commonly known as Henry the Navigator). Though the 1434 expedition was the first to open the “African wing,” as John Thornton has called it, of European expansion into the Atlantic, it was not until 1441 that the first Atlantic slave ship arrived in the Portuguese city of Lagos from the Mauritanian coast. See: Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 30.


243 In fact, in overall numbers the east-west transatlantic slave trade did not begin to outpace the south-north trans-Saharan slave trade until the end of the seventeenth century, though those numbers do not account for specific regions. See: Larson, 134; Aguirre, *La población negra de México*, 17-30.

created a longer, more circuitous paper trail, making individual captives harder to track, and the early slave trade harder to quantify.\textsuperscript{245}

A second reason that the early decades of transatlantic slavery are so poorly understood is the fluctuation of accounting methods before 1595. Prior to that date, the most readily available evidence of the slave trade exists in the form of royally granted licenses (\textit{asiento} contracts). Although these licenses noted a specific number of slaves to be transported to a specific location, they were fungible in both of these categories, meaning that the license itself gives no clear record of how many captives arrived and to what port.\textsuperscript{246} More precise data is not available until after 1595, when the import and

\textsuperscript{245} The lingering significance of this indirect route to American slavery was largely due to royal anxiety about the introduction of recently Christianized slaves and un-Christianized \textit{bozales} into the New World. This anxiety came to a peak in the years 1521-1526, following a series of slave revolts on the island of Hispaniola that were led by Wolof slaves from Senegambia. In response these uprisings of predominantly Muslim slaves, in 1532 the Castilian crown banned the import of un-baptized slaves to the Americas, implicitly encouraging the introduction of slaves from Castile instead of those directly from Africa. As many historians have pointed out, this regulation was most likely not strictly followed in practice. However, even if it was ineffective, the existence of such a regulation serves to obscure the data on the early transatlantic slave trade, if only because it would encourage traders to misrepresent and obscure their activity. On the uprisings, see: AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 295, “Real Cédula,” 6 January 1522. Jane Landers, \textit{Black Society in Spanish Florida} (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 12; Carlos Larrazábal Blanco, \textit{Los negros y la esclavitud en Santo Domingo} (Santo Domingo: J.D. Postigo, 1967), 143-146. On the royal response, see also: José Antonio Saco, \textit{Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana en el Nuevo mundo y en especial en los países amércico-hispanos}, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Imprenta de Jaime Jepús, 1879), 157-159; Leslie B. Rout, \textit{The African Experience in Spanish America, 1502 to the Present Day} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 27-40; Toby Green, \textit{The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 91-92. In 1526, a second revolt in the short-lived colony of San Miguel de Guadalupe, in present-day South Carolina, further narrowed royal restrictions. In this case, Hispanized slaves (\textit{landinos}) revolted, provoking the crown to restrict the import of slaves who had been in Spain for more than a year. It was the dual restrictions that insisted upon Catholization, but prohibited Hispanization, that ultimately precipitated the shift of the slave trade in the Spanish world from a south-north trade to an east-west trade. See: Paul Hoffman, \textit{A New Andalucía and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast During the Sixteenth Century} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 73-79.

\textsuperscript{246} Indeed, there was a parallel market for asiento contracts themselves, as merchants bought and sold the right to import slaves. The frequency of these exchanges further muddles the document trail, as it is not always possible to tell whether or not an asiento contract was executed, and, if so, when and by whom. On the early trade, see: Alejandro de la Fuente, “Esclavos africanos en la Habana: Zonas de procedencia y denominaciones étnicas. 1570-1699,” \textit{Revista Española de Antropología Americana} No. 20 (1990), 135-160; Lutgardo García Fuentes, “Licencias para la introducción de esclavos en Indias y envíos desde Sevilla en el siglo XVI,” \textit{Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas}, No. 19 (1982): 1-46; António de Almeida Mendes, “Les réseaux de la traite ibérique dans l’Atlantique nord: aux origines de la traite atlantique (1440-1640),” \textit{Annales: Histoire}, No. 4 (2008): 739-768; António de Almeida Mendes, “The Foundations of the
export tax records for individual ports are more accessible and more consistent, no longer requiring a reliance on contracts that are, in some cases, more propositional than actual.

The lack of consistent accounting in the pre-1595 slave trade has been particularly pronounced for Veracruz. For decades, studies of the slave trade identified only a handful of slave ships arriving to New Spain in the sixteenth century. In all, published studies of the sixteenth-century slave trade have identified only six slave ships arriving to Veracruz before 1595, reflecting the unevenness of slave trade scholarship that focuses heavily on the high period (1595-1640) of the slave trade to New Spain. Recently, as historians of the slave trade to Cartagena, Rio de la Plata, and the Caribbean islands have begun to publish more detailed studies on those territories, the extent of the missing data for the early period in Veracruz has become even more stark.

It is impossible, based on what we know from qualitative sources that slave ship traffic to New Spain was so paltry prior to 1595. Instead, either the records accounting for the missing ships are lost or they have fallen outside of the methodological bounds of earlier studies. Because the sixteenth century slave trade drew more heavily from the West African regions of Upper Guinea, Cape Verde, and the Canary Islands than it did from West Central Africa, the absence of records for this period may lead us not only to undercount the number of slaves who arrived to New Spain, but also to skew the provenance data for those who have been counted. Even a cursory investigation of extant tax records reveals multiple slave ships arriving to Veracruz prior to 1595 that are not included in earlier published studies. For instance, the ship *Nuestra Señora de la System,* 63-94; David Wheat, “The Afro-Portuguese Maritime World and the Foundations of Spanish Caribbean Society, 1570-1640,” PhD Dissertation, (Vanderbilt University, 2009); David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
Concepcion, arriving from São Tomé, paid taxes on an unknown number of slaves in Veracruz in 1588. In 1590, the San Juan Bautista arrived in Veracruz from Cape Verde carrying 97 slaves, stopping in the Canary Islands and Havana along the way.

Table 3.1. Slave ship voyages to Veracruz by provenance, 1545-1594

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provenance</th>
<th>1540s</th>
<th>1550s</th>
<th>1560s</th>
<th>1570s</th>
<th>1580s</th>
<th>1590-1594</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Guinea</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These two voyages represent a miniscule sample of information long missing from earlier studies of the sixteenth-century slave trade. The full extent of the gap is much larger. From 1545 to 1594, a minimum of 132 slave ships arrived in Veracruz.

247 AGI-Contaduría, leg. 879, “Caja de Veracruz, Cuentas de Real Hacienda: Negros por la cuenta,” 11 August 1588. The NS de la Concepcion paid a total tax of one thousand “pesos de oro commun.” A standard tax per slave at this time was 15 ducats, while a ducat was worth one third more than a peso. One thousand pesos, then, was the equivalent of 750 ducats, meaning that the ship may have carried as few as fifty slaves. The tax sheet, called “Negros por la cuenta,” is the only one of its like in Veracruz’s tax records for the entire colonial period. It includes eleven other entries of tax paid, but gives no information on any other voyages. The total tax paid, including NS de la Concepcion, was 12,020 pesos (9,015 ducats), suggesting that the combined number of slaves disembarked was approximately six hundred.

248 AGI-Escribanía, leg. 165a, n. 1, “El fiscal con el maestre Domingo de Sabando sobre una carga de negros,” 9 February 1592, f. 48r-56v.

249 Voyages 5088, 28058, 29545, 29781, 29782, 29784, 29787, 29795, 41613, 41614, 41624, 41626, 41627, 41633, 41638, 41640, 41643, 41647, 41648, 41649, 41652, 41655, 41656, 41658, 41660, 41661, 41664, 41668, 41669, 41671, 41672, 41673, 41674, 41675, 41676, 41903, 42134, 42137, 42502, 42503, 42504, 42526, 42528, 42535, 42540, 42541, 42543, 42547, 42548, 42557, 42559, 42569, 42599, 42600, 42602, 42609, 42612, 42614, 42618, 42620, 42629, 42636, 42648, 42652, 42655, 42661, 42663, 42674, 42675, 42677, 42678, 42683, 42685, 42686, 42699, 42709, 42712, 42714, 42716, 42717, 42719, 42720, 42731, 42732, 42737, 42740, 42746, 42758, 42764, 42782, 42787, 42788, 42791, 42845, 42846, 42847, 42848, 42849, 42850, 42856, 42857, 42860, 42862, 42863, 42873, 42875, 42876, 42877, 42878, 42879, 42880, 42881, 42883, 42885, 42886, 42887, 42889, 42890, 42891, 42957, 42958.
More than seventy percent of these ships—97 in total—purchased their slaves in Cape Verde (see Table 3.1). Another 22 ships, or seventeen percent, embarked slaves from the West African coast of Upper Guinea. Four ships purchased slaves in Lower Guinea—all but one in São Tomé—and only one of purchased captives in West Central Africa.

Many of these newly discovered voyages have come to light thanks to recent revisions to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, based largely on the research of David Wheat and Alex Borucki. The additions to the TASTD have come an enormous distance in filling the void of slave ship voyages to sixteenth-century Veracruz. Still absent from the TASTD, however, are local records from Mexican archives. For all the rigor of most large-scale studies of the slave trade, very few source their evidence to the colony in which the slaves in question actually arrived, particularly in the case of the Spanish Americas. The absence of these sources is surprising, but can be explained largely as a matter of institutional organization. The documents that are most revelatory of the slave trade to the Spanish Americas were compiled by two civil ministries: the house of trade (casa de contratación), which issued asiento contracts to slave traders, and the royal treasury (real hacienda), which assessed import and export taxes. While some duplicates of these documents exist in the Americas, the largest and most comprehensive collections are held in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain. Meanwhile, local records in the port of Veracruz itself are quite paltry. The city’s municipal archive contains only one volume pertaining to the period before 1700, and that is badly damaged by smoke, humidity, and termites.250 The documents in that volume relate to minutes and

250 AHCV, caja 1, 513 fs., 1608-1699. The volume has been painstakingly restored within the last decade, but in many cases the damage is so vast as to prevent any significant investigation.
correspondence of the city’s secular cabildo, and contain only three documents relating to the arrival of ships of any kind, none of which are slave ships.

There was, however, one institution located primarily in New Spain that produced a handful of sources that can shed light on the slave trade, especially in the pre-1595 period: the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City. Unlike the house of trade and the royal treasury, which were headquartered in Spain throughout the colonial period, the Mexican Tribunal of the Inquisition was functionally autonomous from its Spanish predecessor for most of its existence.\textsuperscript{251} It was due to this independence that the records of inquisitorial investigations and proceedings were collected and archived in the tribunal’s headquarters in Mexico City, while the bulk of tax records and shipping contracts were housed in Seville. Historians concentrating on shipping contracts and import duties—the most obvious sources for the study of the slave trade—have thus focused their research in European archives, and have made little or no use of Mexican archives in general and Inquisition records in particular.

Meanwhile, Inquisition records have been a major source for the study of black and African individuals and communities in New Spain, but no study has mined them for information on the slave trade itself. This is largely because the Inquisition did not have an explicit interest in the slave trade and did not systematically investigate, track, or record slave trade activity. It did, however, have an interest in regulating the importation of printed material and the immigration of non-Spanish Europeans into the colony. This task was particularly urgent in the political landscape of Counter Reformation in the late

sixteenth century, when Spain’s European enemies in first began challenging Spanish
dominion in the New World. When the Mexican Inquisition was formally established
in 1571, one of its primary duties was to inspect incoming ships in Veracruz and other
ports for evidence of censored books and Protestant stowaways or shipmates who might
try to infiltrate the colony. Historians have used the records of these “visitas” primarily in
the writing of book history, most famously in Luis González Obregón’s seminal study
Libros y libreros en el siglo XVI. As we shall see, however, the same sources can be
used to illuminate the early slave trade.

In all, I have identified eight slave ships using inquisitorial visitas that are not
reported in any other sources (see Table 3.2). The ship La Concepcion departed Lisbon in
early May of 1588, sailing for “San Tome en guinea” where it purchased a cargo of
slaves before departing for Veracruz, stopping in the port of Ocoa in southern Hispaniola
along the way. In 1585, inquisitors in Veracruz visited at least two vessels carrying
more than three hundred slaves: the Sant Lazaro, which was owned by the prominent
Portuguese slave trader Sebastian Nieto, and the San Cristobal, which was owned by a
Milanese merchant named Juan Bautista Rovelasca. Both vessels purchased their slaves
in “Guinea.” Other slaving vessels arrived as part of the transatlantic fleet. La

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252 For inquisitors, the concern was the circulation of anti-Catholic texts and the infiltration of Protestants
into the colony. This concern was not entirely unfounded. In one dramatic instance in 1568, the English
freebooter John Hawkins abandoned 110 of his sailors on the coast following a naval engagement with
Spanish ships at San Juan de Ulúa. While many of these men were captured or killed immediately, others
remained at large in the colony for several years, undermining Spanish authority through the support of
contraband trade. See: Othón Arróniz, La batalla naval de San Juan de Ulúa, 1568 (Jalapa: Universidad
Veracruzana, 1982).

253 Luis González Obregón, Libros y libreros en el siglo XVI (México: Archivo General de la Nación,
1914).

254 AGN-Inquisición, vol. 171, exp. 2, “Visita del navio ndo Nstra Sa de la Victoria, maestre Franco
Marquez que vino por guinea,” 9 July 1588, f. 69r-74v.

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*presentación de Nuestra Señora*, captained by Martín de Aguirre, was one such ship. Departing the Spanish port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda in spring 1578, *La presentación* purchased slaves in Cape Verde and arrived in Veracruz with the fleet in December of the same year. In this case, inquisitors did not record the number of slaves onboard, but noted that the ship “did not carry passengers because it arrived loaded with slaves.”

Inquisitors also recorded information about one slave ship that suffered a shipwreck nine leagues to Veracruz’s south, at a location known as “Cabezas de Antón Zardo.” According to the testimony of a Portuguese mariner named Antón Arenas, this ship, the name of which is not recorded, arrived on the coast in 1575 with “one hundred and some negros, the remnant of five hundred and some, the others of whom had died.” Several of the ship’s crew members also died, while others survived to be recuperated in the Hospital de Nuestra Señora. The ship’s captain, Diego Vizcaíno de Ayamonte, also survived the voyage and would captain two other slave ships to the Spanish Caribbean in the next three years.

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255 AGN-Inquisición, vol. 84, exp. 37, “Visita de la flota llegada al puerto de San Juan de Ulúa, en diciembre de 1578, al mando del General Alvaro Manrique,” 1578, fs. 44.

Table 3.2. Slave ships identified in inquisitorial “visitas” before 1595

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Provenance</th>
<th>Captain</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La presentacion de NS</td>
<td>1578</td>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>Martin de Aguirre</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS de la Victoria</td>
<td>1573</td>
<td>Sao Tome</td>
<td>Martin Rodriguez</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Concepcion*</td>
<td>1573</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Pedro Lopez</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1576</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Diego Vizcaíno de Ayamonte</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS del Encina*</td>
<td>1579</td>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>Andres Lorenzo</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Antonio*</td>
<td>1579</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Rodrigo Madera</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS de Guia*</td>
<td>1579</td>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>Pedro D’Asco</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS de Alta Gracia</td>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Lucas Quixada de Castilla</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Buenaventura*</td>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Sebastian Nieto</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sto Tome</td>
<td>1585</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Lazaro</td>
<td>1585</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Antonio Sanchez</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Cristobal</td>
<td>1585</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Melchor de Acosta</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS de la Victoria*</td>
<td>1587</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Francisco Marquez</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Concepcion</td>
<td>1588</td>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>Melchor Gonzalez</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sta Maria del Puerto*</td>
<td>1588</td>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>Pedro de Yriate</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ships that are identified in other sources. For the purposes of this table—which is to demonstrate the scope of the inquisitorial visitas—I have not included data from other sources.


Of slave ships that do appear in other studies, the visitas offer more detail than is available in tax records alone. For instance, the TASTD entry for the ship *Nuestra Señora de la Victoria*, which disembarked 287 slaves in Veracruz in 1587, does not specify the voyage’s port of origin nor the port in which it purchased its slaves.257 In its inquisitorial visita, its origin is identified as Sanlúcar de Barrameda and the place of slave purchase is described as the “rio de Santo Domingo” in “guinea.” In another instance, the vessel

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257 AGN-Inquisición, vol. 171, exp. 2, “Visita de la nao ndo La concepcion q vino por guinea, ms Melchior Gonzalez,” 10 August 1588, f. 113r-119v.
Santa Maria del Puerto and her captain, Pedro de Yriate are identified in the TASTD delivering 287 slaves in Santo Domingo in 1588, with no other known ports of call.\(^{258}\) The ship’s visita, however, identifies the same vessel and captain unloading slaves in Veracruz, also in 1588, showing that the ship delivered slaves to multiple American ports, even though only one port of sale was recorded in contratación documents.\(^{259}\)

In addition to details on slave ship routes, the visitas shed light on shipboard practices. When the Dutch-owned slave ship Nuestra Señora de Guía arrived from Cape Verde, the inquisitor reported that “These slavers declare that they were very exact in the fulfillment of their religious duty [to the slaves], offering [daily] the four prayers, and on Saturdays singing the Salve [Regina].”\(^{260}\) Whether or not the ship’s African captives were actually made to observe Catholic ritual, the inquisitor’s report makes clear that slave traders operating in Spanish territories would have understood regular religious instruction as the expectation of Spanish authorities. This stands in stark contrast to what we know of the British slave trade, in which shipboard slaves were made to perform limited daily exercise or “dances” that may have had devotional significance, but with no pretense of organized religious practice.\(^{261}\)

\(^{258}\) TASTD, Voyage 29577, S Maria del Puerto (1588).

\(^{259}\) AGN-Inquisición, vol. 171, exp. 2, “Visita del navio ndo Sta Maria del Puerto que vino por cabo verde, ms Pedro de Yriarte,” 25 June 1588, f. 57r-62v. Because New Spain was geographically further from Africa than other New World destinations, slave ships would have had the opportunity to stop at multiple locations before arriving to Veracruz. At the same time, the current system in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico would have allowed transatlantic ships making stops at Tierra Firme, Panama, Campeche, or Cuba’s southern coast to pass Veracruz in the course of a roundtrip voyage. While slave trade records often record on single-port provenance or destination, the reality is that many of these vessels made multiple stops in the course of a voyage.

\(^{260}\) AGN-Inquisición, vol. 85, exp. 19, fs. 70, “Visita de las naos de la flota de que vino por General Don Bartolome de Villavicencio, llegada a San Juan de Ulúa en agosto de 1579,” 1579.

There is a final category of vessels in *visita* records that may also be relevant to historians of the slave trade. These are records pertaining to ships that are not identified in the *visitas* themselves as slave ships, but which are captained by known slavers. In other words, while the *visitas* identify slave ships that are not known in other records, they also include voyages that are not identified—in the *visita* or elsewhere—as slaving voyages, but that circumstantial evidence suggests may have in fact carried slaves. For example, in 1583, inquisitors in Veracruz visited the ship *Santa Catalina*, but did not refer to its cargo or its voyage itinerary in their report. In *Séville et l’Atlantique*, Pierre and Huguette Chaunu identify the same vessel and its captain, Alonso Lopez Escamilla, as a slave ship that purchased 359 captives at an unspecified African port, but with no further details on its destination. Left to the visita alone, the *Santa Catalina* would have appeared in inquisitorial records just like any other non-slaving voyage. With additional evidence from the Chaunus, however, we can confidently say that the *Santa Catalina* was in fact a slave ship, the destination of which was previously unknown, but which the *visita* confirms to have been Veracruz. This raises questions as to whether there are other slave ships among inquisitorial records that are not referred to as such.

The answer appears to be yes. There are no fewer than twenty-four ships identified in *visita* records that were either captained, piloted, or owned by known slave ship captains, but which the *visitas* themselves do not identify as slave ships. In some cases, circumstantial evidence strongly indicates that the ship in question may have been

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262 González, *Libros y libreros*, 397. In this case, González notes that the visita in question may no longer exist in the AGN, referring instead to a volume housed in the library of the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística.

a slaver. In his 1581 investigation of the vessel *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, which was owned and captained by the slave trader Juan Nunez, the inquisitor Francisco Lopez Rebolledo did not record any slaves, but did note that the ship carried two copies of the book *Discreción de África* (Description of Africa). A second vessel owned by Nunez, the *San Juan*, arrived in Veracruz in the same year. Again, Lopez did not report the presence of any slaves, but did note that the ship carried just two books: *El Pontifical*—a liturgical book giving instructions on how to perform the sacraments—and *Historia del África*.\(^{264}\) The presence of books on African history and geography does not definitively prove that the ship in question was a slaver. It does, however, show an interest in the African coast that is consistent with slave trading.

Other cases are less clear. The slave ship owner Domingo Rico (sometimes transliterated as Domingo Rizo) captained at least three slave voyages between 1577 and 1582, and appears again in Inquisition documents as the owner of the ship *La Joana*, which arrived in Veracruz in 1584.\(^{265}\) Could this have been a slaving voyage as well? It is not possible to say. In some cases, the presence of slave ship captains in Inquisition records is likely to be merely coincidental. In the sixteenth century, few, if any, Spanish mariners would have been slave traders exclusively and many captains and pilots in Spain’s transatlantic fleet carried slaves at one time or another. The membership rolls of the Sevillan confraternity Nuestra Señora de Buenos Ayres are instructive on this point.

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\(^{265}\) On Domingo Rico’s earlier voyages, see: TASTD, Voyage 42715, *Trinidad* (1577); TASTD, Voyage 42713, *S Antonio* (1582); TASTD, Voyage 42714, *Concepcion* (1582). For the visita of *La Joana*, see: AGN-Inquisición, vol. 169, exp. 7, fs. 122 “Visita de las naos de la flota llegada de España a San Juan de Ulúa por septiembre de 1584. General Diego de Alcega, con relacion de las cajas de libros que llegaron,” 1584.
The confraternity was entirely composed of pilots and captains in Spain’s transatlantic fleet. Of its fifty-two members at the end of the sixteenth century, at least twenty-three appear in other sources as slave ship captains (see Appendix B). This fact underscores the pervasiveness of slave trading in the sixteenth-century transatlantic fleet—a commercial activity of the fleet that until recently has been understudied and not well understood. That pervasiveness does not necessarily help to elucidate the quantitative vagaries of the early slave trade, however: any captain could be a slave trader, but few specialized in slave trading, as was often the case in the seventeenth century and later.

The recent revisions to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database have filled longstanding gaps in our knowledge of the sixteenth-century slave trade to Spanish America. The records of inquisitorial visitas demonstrate, however, that yet more work remains to be done if we are to reveal and understand just how active the early period of the slave trade was. Critically, the visitas should call our attention to archival documents held in the New World that have not been thoroughly cataloged or included in earlier studies of the slave trade. A fuller accounting of these sources seems likely to expand the quantitative measure of the early slave trade. If the early slave trade can be called “small,” as many have characterized it, it was only small relative to the much larger trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If there was an “Angola wave,” in the early slave trade, then it was the second wave, and not the “charter generation,” as some have argued. If the slave trade to Veracruz differed somewhat from the slave trade to

Cartagena or the Caribbean islands—if it consisted of longer voyages and more shipboard deaths—then it was still part of the same slave trading circuit.

The High Period: 1595-1640

While the study of the pre-1595 slave trade has been mired in obscurity, the period about which we do know is quite detailed. In Mexico, the trade reached its peak of sustained activity between 1608 and 1625, a period during which a minimum of 62,310 captives (an average of 3,665 per year) entered New Spain, with significant spikes in 1619 (10,359) and 1621 (9,257). A shorter peak lasted from 1634 to 1639, during which just under 24,950 slaves disembarked in Veracruz (4,158 per year). This second peak was cut short, however, in 1640, when the slave trade to the Spanish Americas—and New Spain in particular—underwent a near-total collapse.

Though the chronology of the 1595-1640 slave trade is rarely disputed, sources vary considerably on its total volume. In the earliest assessment of the trade, in 1946 Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán estimated that 88,383 slaves were imported to Veracruz between 1595 and 1640, relying on the numbers reported in the asiento contracts. In 1972, Aguirre’s total was codified in Philip Curtin’s influential study, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*. Four years later, Colin Palmer increased the count to 110,000, using the same asiento contracts as Aguirre, but also accounting for contraband trade. Palmer’s estimate remains widely accepted among Mexicanist scholars.


In 1977, Enriqueta Vila Vilar’s study of import duties (contaduría) lowered the overall estimate to 70,800.\textsuperscript{269} In fact, Vila was able to account for import duties paid on only 25,000 slaves, but her research indicated an equal number of unlicensed imports and took into account fourteen years for which records were unavailable.\textsuperscript{270} Nicolás Ngou-Mve expanded on Vila’s estimation of the illicit trade in a 1994 study, concluding that every licensed slave ship departing Africa between 1595 and 1640 carried at least one-third more slaves than were officially registered, to say nothing of unlicensed ships.\textsuperscript{271} His research, however, rests largely on other studies of Portuguese sources from the coast of Africa, meaning that, while the one-third increase in the number of embarking captives may be accurate, it is difficult to say whether the additional slaves would have disembarked in Veracruz, elsewhere on Mexico’s Gulf coast, or at other Caribbean destinations entirely.\textsuperscript{272} Given this uncertainty, Ngou-Mve’s overall estimate remains somewhat conservative, falling in line with Palmer’s earlier total of 110,000.\textsuperscript{273}

More recently, in 2010 and again in 2016, the TASTD made two significant shifts in the total volume of slaves who arrived to Veracruz between 1595 and 1640. The effect of these shifts is significant, though not as dramatic as the database’s recent adjustments for the pre-1595 period. First, in 2010, the database significantly reduced the estimates of earlier studies, identifying 60,718 slaves arriving to New Spain between 1595 and 1640.

\textsuperscript{269} Vila, \textit{Hispanoamérica y el comercio de esclavos}, 239-279.

\textsuperscript{270} Vila, “The Large-Scale Introduction of Africans into Veracruz and Cartagena,” 270.

\textsuperscript{271} Ngou-Mve, 54-55.

\textsuperscript{272} The possibility of slaves of the contraband trade disembarking in other, smaller Mexican ports is discussed with explicit reference to Ngou-Mve’s numbers in Álvaro Alcántara López, “Negros y afromezitizos del puerto de Veracruz. Impresiones de lo popular durante los siglos XVII y XVIII,” in Bernardo García Díaz and Sergio Guerra Vilaboy, coords., \textit{La Habana/Veracruz, Veracruz/La Habana: Las dos orillas} (Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 2002), 175-191.

\textsuperscript{273} Ngou-Mve, 152-156.
and only 37,082 for whom the arrival port was noted as Veracruz.\textsuperscript{274} In its 2016 revision, the database increased overall arrivals to New Spain by 76\% to 107,098, nearly meeting Palmer’s earlier estimate for the entire pre-1640 period. Taken together with the increased account of the pre-1595 trade, the TASTD identifies 147,429 African slaves who arrived in New Spain before 1700, or one-third more than any previous study. For the 1600 to 1640 period specifically, TASTD’s estimates sit just under one hundred thousand, at 98,427 disembarkations.

While different methodological approaches to the Mexican slave trade have resulted in a relatively wide range of estimates of the total number of arriving captives, the same studies are virtually united in their estimation of the provenance zones of those slaves. According to Vila, 81\% (140 of 173) of known slave ships arriving in Veracruz purchased their slaves in Angola. In terms of individuals, these voyages accounted for 86\% of all licensed slaves landed in Veracruz. The 2010 TASTD account is nearly identical, finding 86\% (288) “Angola” vessels among the 335 that arrived in Veracruz during the high period. Meanwhile, Ngou-Mve posits an Angolan “monopoly” of upwards of ninety percent.

Whether West Central Africa represented 75\% or ninety percent of slave imports to Veracruz during the high period, the percentage is considerably higher than the portion of West Central Africans who arrived to other Spanish Caribbean regions in the same period. In Cartagena, West Central African accounted for only 43\% of recorded provenance zones; in the rest of the Spanish Caribbean mainland, 67\%; in

\textsuperscript{274} By these numbers, Veracruz accounted for roughly 61\% of all slaves arriving to New Spain, though of the remaining 39\%, nearly all (23,350) are recorded simply as arriving in “New Spain.” It is likely that most—if not all—of these slaves also arrived in Veracruz. The remaining 286 slaves arrived in a single voyage to Campeche in 1622. See: António de Almeida Mendes, “The Foundations of the System,” 86.
the Spanish Caribbean islands, 59 percent. This is by far the strongest evidence supporting the thesis that the Mexican slave trade was atypical of the Spanish American slave trade overall in the 1595-1640 period.

There is one other way in which provenance data for New Spain differs from provenance data for other regions. For New Spain, less than ten percent of arriving slave ships embarked from unknown provenances, both in the high period and overall. This is not the case for the rest of the Spanish Americas. In all regions except New Spain, more than twenty percent of arriving slave ships did not record a provenance region for their captives between 1595 and 1640, and the percentage of unknown provenances is greater than 25 overall (see Tables 3.3 and 3.4). In other words, while New Spain introduced far more slaves from West Central Africa between 1595 and 1640, the rest of the Spanish Americas introduced significantly more slaves of unknown provenance.

### Table 3.3. Provenance of slave ships to New Spain, 1519-1713

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Upper Guinea*</th>
<th>Lower Guinea</th>
<th>West Central Africa</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1595 (n=132)</td>
<td>90% (119)</td>
<td>3% (4)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>6% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595-1640 (n=363)</td>
<td>7% (25)</td>
<td>4% (14)</td>
<td>81% (297)</td>
<td>8% (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1640-1713 (n=32)</td>
<td>25% (8)</td>
<td>9% (3)</td>
<td>22% (7)</td>
<td>44% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (n=527)</strong></td>
<td><strong>29% (152)</strong></td>
<td><strong>4% (21)</strong></td>
<td><strong>59% (305)</strong></td>
<td><strong>9% (49)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes Cape Verde.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Upper Guinea*</th>
<th>Lower Guinea</th>
<th>West Central Africa</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1595 (n=418)</td>
<td>55% (231)</td>
<td>5% (20)</td>
<td>6% (23)</td>
<td>34% (144)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595-1640 (n=833)</td>
<td>24% (203)</td>
<td>4% (36)</td>
<td>50% (412)</td>
<td>22% (182)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1640-1713 (n=198)</td>
<td>15% (29)</td>
<td>27% (54)</td>
<td>21% (41)</td>
<td>37% (74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n=1,449)</td>
<td>32% (463)</td>
<td>8% (110)</td>
<td>33% (476)</td>
<td>28% (400)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes Cape Verde.


Since Angola was the largest provenance zone in the high period for all regions it is likely that many slave ships of unknown provenance actually purchased slaves in Angola. This would not eliminate the gap that separates New Spain from the rest of the Spanish Americas, but in bringing them closer together, it increases the likelihood that the difference is not the result of “multiple networks” but of statistical noise. Without additional documentation, we cannot say whether or not the slave ships of “unknown” provenance should be distributed similarly to those of “known” provenance or whether they derive largely from one region as opposed to another. The number of “unknown” provenances for Spanish territories other than New Spain, however, are certainly large enough to inhibit any definitive conclusion about overall distribution.

Ngou-Mve’s optimistic assertion of an Angolan monopoly is predicated on the assumption that slave ships sailing from Angola carried more slaves than they officially licensed to carry, allowing him to increase further the already significant total of “Angola” imports, and thus increasing the West Central African share of the slave trade for the 1595-1640 period. There are archival indications that give this assumption credence. For instance, on January 7, 1599, port officials in Veracruz boarded four slave ships: the San Pedro, the Nuestra Señora de Esperanza, the Nuestra Señora de la
Concepción, and the Nuestra Señor de Loreto. In their testimony, the captains of these
four ships claimed to have sailed under the asiento contract of Pedro Gomes Reynel—a
well-known Portuguese slave trader who operated primarily from West Central Africa—
from Angola on August 8, 1598. Together, they were licensed to deliver 675 slaves to
Veracruz. In their investigation of the ships, however, the officials encountered 81
additional slaves “fuera de registro” (unregistered).\(^\text{275}\) Similarly, Aguirre Beltrán relates a
case in which a slave ship captain named Pedro Barbosa, who operated in Angola, and a
slave factor in Veracruz named Manuel Carrillo laid out a plan for Barbosa to purchase
fifteen percent more slaves in Angola than he was licensed for, in order to account for “a
lowering by fifteen percent of all deaths during the voyage.”\(^\text{276}\) The fifteen percent mark
is only slightly larger than the twelve percent excess of slaves carried by Pedro Gomes
Reynel’s four ships in 1599, suggesting that slave ship captains routinely purchased more
slaves than they were legally allowed in order to make up for the financial loss resulting
from shipboard deaths during the middle passage.\(^\text{277}\)

Based on these accounts and Ngou-Mve’s scholarship, we can be reasonably
certain that slave ships arriving from Angola carried more slaves than their licenses

\(^{275}\) They also recorded the provenance of the ships as “guinea,” a geographical determination that was
common in the Iberian Atlantic at this time, but which did not always carry an implication of specificity.
“Guinea” as a geographical term was often used to mean “Africa” when a more precise location was
unknown. Since Reynel was well-known to operate out of West Central Africa, it is not likely that the ships
in question actually purchased slaves in West Africa. AGI-México, leg. 351, “Carta de los Oficiales Reales
de Veracruz,” 1 January 1599, fs. 7. On Reynel’s asiento, see: Henri Lapeyre, “Le trafic négrier avec
l’Amérique espagnole,” in Juan Maluquer de Motes y Nicolau, ed., Homenaje a Jaime Vicens Vives, vol. 2
(Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 1967), 285-306.

\(^{276}\) AGN-Civil, vol. 653, exp. 3, “Pleito del capitan pedro Barbosa, maestre del navio San Antonio,” 28

\(^{277}\) In the later slave trades of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, this was common practice. Licenses
such as the asiento no longer dictated the number of slaves who could be legally brought to the Americas
on a single voyage, but slave ship captains routinely factored shipboard deaths into their purchasing
indicated. We cannot say for certain, however, that ships from West Africa did not as well. According to both Aguirre Beltrán and Ngou-Mve, ships from Angola were more likely to carry contraband slaves because of the longer distances they had to travel to reach New Spain. Indeed, the voyage from Angola to Veracruz lasted between one and two weeks longer than the voyage from the West African coast, and some slave ship captains believed specifically that the crossing of the equator significantly affected shipboard death rates. At the same time, however, the rate of shipboard deaths for slave ships sailing from West Africa to Veracruz was similar to the rate for Angola—in a limited sample, 23 percent of slaves embarking from West Africa died en route to Veracruz, compared to 28 percent for Angola. Both figures are considerably larger than for other New World destinations, suggesting that slave ship captains bound for New Spain may have been inclined to exceed their charter whether they embarked from West or West Central Africa.\(^{278}\)

In one of the most detailed contraband cases from the 1595-1640 period, West Africa was indeed the primary supplier of slaves. The frigate *San Josephe* landed at the island port of San Juan de Ulúa in the spring of 1636. According to the ship’s register, it had sailed from Cape Verde carrying 128 slaves. When port officials boarded the ship, however, they found only 70 individuals. When they questioned the captain—Jorge Nuñez de Andrada, a Portuguese native of Cape Verde—about the discrepancy, he claimed that the ship had encountered stormy weather on its way to Caracas, and that he

\(^{278}\) Shipboard death rates are an imprecise statistic in this period, both because of the limited sample of slave ships that recorded slave deaths, and also because of the contraband trade itself. While Aguirre Beltrán, Ngou-Mve, and others suggest that high death rates incentivized contraband, it is plausible that the preternaturally high death rates of slave ships bound for Veracruz are the result of slave ship captains concealing their contraband practices, unloading excess slaves in smaller ports not licensed for slave sale before arriving in Veracruz, and recording the losses as deaths.
had off-loaded the 58 missing slaves at a settlement between Campeche and Veracruz (possibly Tabasco), as the ship had run out of food to support all of its remaining passengers. Unconvinced by the captain’s story, the officials imprisoned him in the fortress at San Juan de Ulúa while they completed an investigation of the ship.

The port’s accountant (contador) made a list of the seventy remaining slaves, noting their names, estimated age, and ethnicity. Of these seventy individuals, all originated from the Upper Guinea Coast of West Africa (see Table 3.5). Additionally, in their investigation port officials noted sixteen distinct ethnonyms among the seventy slaves, demonstrating that a single provenance zone did not translate to ethnic homogeneity among a ship’s captives, as some historians have assumed.

The register of San Josephe slaves also calls our attention to the considerable presence of children under the age of twelve who might have been onboard slave ships (see Figure 3.1). Children represented more than one-third of the San Josephe’s captives, including nineteen slaves under the age of eleven, and six more under the age of sixteen. This is significant because most colonial treasurers did not record the number of slaves onboard a ship as individuals, but instead the “piezas” of slaves being imported—piezas standing in as a unit of labor, rather than an individual. In import and export tax records, slaves under the age of seven—referred to as “muleques”—were assessed import duties at a rate half that of adults, and that newborn children, or “crias,” were assessed no duty at all. This discrepancy resulted in the systematic undercounting of children. While

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279 AGI-Escribanía de Cámara de Justicia, leg. 295a, “Memoria de arribada de la fragata nombrada San Josephe,” 11 April 1634, fs. 551v-557r.

considerations about the age of captives are usually factored into estimates of the slave trade, as scholars convert *piezas* to individuals by assuming a certain proportion of *muleques* and *crias*, the large proportion of children onboard the *San Josephe* calls our attention to yet another way in which slave trade data can be opaque.

Table 3.5. Slaves onboard the *San Josephe* by ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnonym</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Children</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baoyote</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berbeci</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biafara</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biaxox</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bran</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cazanga</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cololi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folupo</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landima</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandinga</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valanta</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolof</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xoxo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zape</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AGI-Escribanía de Cámara de Justicia, leg. 295a, 551v-557r, “Memoria de arribada de la fragata nombrada San Josephe,” 11 April 1634.
There is no question that the vast majority slaves who arrived in Veracruz between 1595 and 1640—the period during which the slave trade was by far its most active—embarked from Angola. Indeed, it is likely that nearly four out of every five slaves that entered New Spain in those forty-five years had been born in West Central Africa. This represents a significantly larger portion than that of other Caribbean ports over the same period, where the proportion of Angolans was closer to one in two. There is even some evidence that asiento holders and slave ship captains who operated mainly out of West Central Africa tended to connect with slave factors in Veracruz, whereas those operating out of West Africa tended to connect with factors in Cartagena or other Caribbean ports. At the same time, however, there are broad patterns of the slave trade that all regions of the Spanish Caribbean held in common: prior to 1595, the majority of slaves hailed from the West African region of Upper Guinea; between 1595 and 1640, there was a sharp turn toward West Central Africa that was perhaps more significant in
New Spain than it was elsewhere. Moreover, there are significant discrepancies in the number of voyages of unknown provenance between New Spain and other Spanish territories. These factors suggest that the variance in provenance data, while not unimportant, may have more to do with statistical noise and outliers than with two discrete patterns of slave trading.

The Decline Period: 1641-1700

After reaching a second peak in the 1630s—a decade in which more than ten slave ships entered the port each year—in 1640, the number of incoming slave ships dropped to two. No slave ships arrived in 1641, and over the final sixty years of the seventeenth century, only 28 additional slave ships entered the port legally (see Table 2.6). A number of reasons have been cited for the sudden decline in slave traffic to New Spain. Among historians of Mexico, the most common explanation is that the demographic recovery of indigenous populations, after more than a century of inexorable decline, rendered the labor of African slaves inefficient and extraneous. Others have asserted that the Spanish crown consciously chose to “redirect” slave trade traffic to South America, despite all evidence pointing to a general collapse in the slave trade to Spanish America. Others have pointed to the natural growth of the black creole

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population, arguing that the development of the caste system allowed American-born
blacks to fulfill non-elite labor roles without requiring the introduction of new slaves.283
Finally, some scholars have suggested that white settlers and Spanish officials were
growing concerned that African populations in the colony had grown too large, posing a
potential threat to Spanish authority, either in the form of outright rebellion or collusion
with Spain’s foreign enemies.284 All of these explanations are rooted in demonstrable
fact. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the indigenous population had largely
recovered, the black creole population was naturally increasing, and Spanish officials did
express anxiety about the numerical prominence—and potential for political
subversion—of the colony’s black communities. All three explanations also suggest a decline in the demand for slaves that was
general across New Spain. A fourth explanation, however, points not to a decline in
demand, but a decline in supply as the biggest reason for the demise of the slave trade.285
Between 1580 and 1640 the Spanish and Portuguese realms were united under the
Spanish Habsburg monarchy in what was known as the Iberian Union. Concurrently,
between 1595 and 1640, a series of Portuguese merchants held the exclusive license to
supply the Spanish Americas with African slaves, uniting Portuguese trading factories on
the African coast with Spanish settler colonies in the New World. In 1640, however,

284 See: David M. Davidson, “Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650,”
285 On the inability of the legal trade to meet demand in New Spain, see: AGI-México, leg. 45, n. 57, “Carta
del virrey marqués de Mancera,” 29 July 1670; AGI-Contaduría, leg. 263, n. 7, “Ynformes y Razon de los
Negros” 1673, fs. 1r-2r.
Portuguese nobility revolted against the Habsburg monarchy and proclaimed the duke of Braganza the independent king João IV of Portugal.

Although Portuguese slave ships continued to arrive in Veracruz throughout the 1640s—though in much smaller numbers—the end of Portuguese political alliance ultimately left Spain without a clear supply of slaves to its New World colonies. To some extent, this demand was met by contraband trade, largely operated out of the non-Spanish Caribbean, but also from the transoceanic hubs of Cape Verde and São Tomé.\(^{286}\) For a time, the Spanish crown unsuccessfully encouraged Spanish merchants to enter the slave trade, going so far as to mount direct military and economic challenges to Portuguese interests in Angola.\(^{287}\) Failing to secure a toehold on the African coast and without the significant participation of Spanish merchants, the viceroyalty began to rely on two new supply lines for their slaves, both of which remain relatively unstudied. One entailed the small-scale importation of slaves transported by the Spanish treasure fleets; the other was the expansion of the transpacific trade which connected Goa, Macau, and Manila to Acapulco and included both “esclavos negros” and “esclavos chinos,” however it is often


\(^{287}\) This was attempted primarily through the asiento of Spanish merchants Manuel José Cortizos and Manuel Hierro de Castro, both of whom were also members of the *consulado* in Seville. See: AGI-Contaduría, leg. 261, n. 12, “Reales Cédulas pertenecientes al asiento de Manuel Hierro de Castro, en nombre y como administrador de Manuel José Cortizos, marqués de Villaflorés,” 1675-1677.
unclear what these racial categories actually mean in the ever-shifting vocabulary of caste in seventeenth-century New Spain.288

As the Spanish crown sought alternatives, non-Spanish carriers continued to periodically supply slaves to Spanish New World colonies through both the legal and illegal slave trade. In the first two decades following the end of the Iberian Union, thirteen slave ships arrived in the port, ten of which sailed under Portuguese colors. In 1662, the Spanish crown granted the first post-Iberian Revolt asiento contract to the company of two Genoese merchants, Domingo Grillo and Ambrosio Lomelín. Operating under the authorization of the Dutch West India Company, Grillo and Lomelín promised to the supply Spanish American territories with 3,000-4,000 slaves annually. To this end, the company established factors in the ports of Cartagena, Portobelo, and Veracruz, which were to be their three main bases of operation.

There is no evidence, however, that the Grillo and Lomelín contract was ever executed to the number.289 Rather than supply Spanish ports with slaves directly from Africa, the Grillo and Lomelín company purchased excess slaves from Dutch and British markets in Curaçao, Jamaica, and Barbados, and re-exported those slaves to Spanish territories. This often led to shortages, as demand and prices ballooned in British and Dutch territories. In Veracruz in particular, the Grillo and Lomelín asiento resulted in the

288 On these smaller slave trades, See: AGI-Escritoría de Cámara de Justicia, leg. 187A, pzas. 4-7, “Manuel Ferreira de Carvallo y compañía, a cuyo cargo estuvo el asiento de negros en las Indias, con Juan de Garaicoecchea, Juan Andrés de Iturralde y consortes, vecinos de Manila, sobre la introducción y comiso de los esclavos que los susodichos introdujeron en México de las islas Filipinas,” 1700; Aguirre, “The Slave Trade in Mexico,” 422; On shifting caste categories, especially those related to “chinos,” See: Tatiana Seijas, Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 249.

arrival of only three slave ships in the thirteen-year life of the contract—two from Curaçao and one from Barbados. Even this meager traffic was interrupted with the sudden death of Agustín Lomelín, the company’s factor in Veracruz, in 1669.

Scholarship on the slave trade to Veracruz after the official end of the Grillo and Lomelín asiento in 1674 is sparse. In all, earlier studies have identified only two more slave ships that entered the port legally during the seventeenth century, the last arriving in 1686 under the asiento held by the Dutch Coymans company. Turning once again to inquisitorial visitas and other sources held in Mexican archives, however, my research has revealed an additional ten slave ships that arrived in Veracruz in the final two decades of the seventeenth century, seven of them between 1698 and 1701.

In all, a minimum of 7,335 slaves disembarked legally in Veracruz between 1641 and 1700, though the actual total is likely closer to eight thousand (see Table 3.6). This represents a decrease in annual traffic of roughly ninety-four percent over the preceding sixty-year period (from 1580 to 1640). In absolute numbers, the sudden decline of slave

290 Marisa Vega Franco, El trafico de esclavos con America (asientos de Grillo y Lomelin, 1663-1674), (Seville: EEHA, CSIC, 1984), 200-201.

291 AGI, México, leg. 45, n. 57, “Carta del virrey marqués de Mancera,” 29 July 1671, f. 1r.

292 Johannes Menne Postma, The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 33-44.

293 AGN-Inquisición, vol. 538, exp. 3, “ Autos que hizo el comisario de la Veracruz en la visita de un navio Portugese, que surgió en aquel puerto con negros de cargazon,” 1698, fs. 400r-462v.

294 There are two reasons to believe that the actual total is larger. First, the TASTD data offer a conservative estimate of 250 slave disembarkations per voyage between 1641 and 1681. By contrast, the TASTD estimates an average of between 290 and 300 slave disembarkations per voyage for all earlier decades. Increasing the estimated disembarkations to earlier levels would increase the overall number by eight percent, or 520 additional slaves. Second, there is a discrepancy in the TASTD data that suggests that at least a few slave ships that are listed under the arrival port “Spanish Caribbean, port unspecified” actually arrived in Veracruz. Of twelve such ships in this period, five are known to have arrived in Veracruz, and it seems likely that at least a handful of the remaining seven may have as well. Given the conservative TASTD estimates and the likelihood of misclassified arrivals, the actual total for legal slave imports between 1641 and 1700 is likely about seven thousand.
imports in Veracruz was more drastic than it was in the two other leading Spanish slaving
ports of the post-1640 period: Cartagena and Portobelo, each of which disembarked
nearly twice as many slaves as did Veracruz from 1641 to 1700. For Cartagena, however,
overall slave traffic decreased by a similar margin as it did in Veracruz—roughly ninety-
two percent. And although Portobelo, which had received almost no documented slave
ship traffic prior to 1640, saw a significant increase in slave trade traffic after 1640, the
Spanish Caribbean in general witnessed a decline of 68 percent—apart from the massive
decreases of Veracruz and Cartagena. While slave traffic did reorient slightly after 1640, its
decline was general across the Spanish Caribbean.

Table 3.6. Slave ships voyages to Veracruz, 1641-1701.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ship</th>
<th>Provenance</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1645</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1647</td>
<td>Cesar</td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650</td>
<td>NS del Populo y S Antonio</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650</td>
<td>S Salvador y NS del Rosario</td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1652</td>
<td>NS de la Vitoria</td>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1653</td>
<td>NS del Buen Sucesso y El Sto Cristo</td>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>NS del Rosario y S Antonio</td>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>S Francisco de Assis</td>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1656</td>
<td>Jesus María y Jose</td>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1656</td>
<td>NS de la Popa</td>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1656</td>
<td>NS de Regla</td>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1659</td>
<td>NS de la Soledad</td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1664</td>
<td>S Juan Bautista</td>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1666</td>
<td>S Vicente</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1669</td>
<td>S Vicente</td>
<td>Curaçao</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1672</td>
<td>La Concordia</td>
<td>Curaçao</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In fact, nearly one-third of Portobelo’s slave imports were remitted from Cartagena, suggesting that
Portobelo’s rise as a slaving port actually diminished the slave market in Cartagena. If Portobelo was able
to draw slaves from Cartagena, then it is likely that its rise diminished Veracruz’s slave market as well.
Like Cartagena itself, Portobelo was easier to reach for ships sailing from Curaçao than was Veracruz, and
well over half of all slave ships in Portobelo hailed from Curaçao. See: Vega Franco, 197-201.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1673</td>
<td>Buen Suceso</td>
<td>Curaçao</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1679</td>
<td>NS del Rosario y S Domingo</td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1681</td>
<td>S Francisco Xavier</td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1686</td>
<td>Alida</td>
<td>Lower Guinea</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1687</td>
<td>La Santa Cruzada</td>
<td>Curaçao</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1687</td>
<td>Santa Rosa y las Animas</td>
<td>Maracaibo</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698</td>
<td>NS de Ayuda</td>
<td>Havana</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>NS de Buenaventura</td>
<td>Havana (via Cartagena)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>La Beaten</td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>El Sol de Siam</td>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701</td>
<td>“Navio Olandesa”</td>
<td>Curaçao</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701</td>
<td>“Navio Frances”</td>
<td>Cartagena</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 7,335

*Number of slaves is the estimate of the TASTD.

Sources: TASTD\(^{296}\), Vega Franco, 200-201; AGN-Real Fisco de Inquisición\(^{297}\); AGI-Casa de Contratación\(^{298}\); AGN-General de Parte\(^{299}\); AGN-Inquisición.\(^{300}\)

The decline in overall traffic was not the only disruption in the slave trade that Veracruz witnessed in the post-1640 period. The end of the Portuguese *asiento* also caused a shift in slave provenance zones. As we have seen, the early seventeenth century

\(^{296}\) TASTD Voyages 10025, 10304, 29515, 29525, 29563, 29564, 29567, 29749, 29750, 29936, 29981, 30025, 33804, 39086, 40670, 40719, 41454.


\(^{298}\) AGI-Casa de Contratación, leg. 975, n. 1, “Autos de los bienes de la gente de mar y guerra que murió en la nao de Nuestra Senora del Rosario y Santo Domingo, su maestre Antonio Ibarra, que fue a Angola por esclavos negros,” 1679.

\(^{299}\) AGN-General de Parte, vol. 16, exp. 164, “Vuestra excelencia, ordena al almirante real don Francisco Navarro, guarde, cumpla y ejecute la respuesta del senor fiscal inserta en todos los puntos de su contenido haciendo las diligencias que se refieren y las demas, sobre el encarcelamiento del capital y tesorero de La Santa Cruzada, Gaspar Herrera y de una nao que transporto negros,” 20 June 1687, fs. 143v; AGN-General de Parte, vol. 16, exp. 166, “Para que el almirante don Francisco Navarro ejecute las diligencias que pide el fiscal en su respuesta inserta, en los autos originales que se le devuelven para este efecto y el de proseguirlos, concluirlos y determinarlos con parecer de asesor, sobre la averiguacion de haberse embarcado en el navio de los negros y de una balandra que transportaba sal,” 14 July 1687, fs. 148v.

\(^{300}\) AGN-Inquisición, vol. 538, exp. 3, “Autos que hizo el comisario de la Veracruz en la visita de un navio Portuguese, que surgio en aquel puerto con negros de cargazon,” 1698, fs. 400r-462v.
was typified by the heavy influx of captives from West Central Africa, who represented more than forty percent of all slaves arriving to the Americas before 1640 and two-thirds of all arrivals in the first half of the seventeenth century. In the second half of the seventeenth century, however, only three of nineteen slave ships entering Veracruz hailed from West Central Africa. Once again, the trend was common throughout the Spanish Americas, as the share of West Central Africa among captives arriving to the Spanish Americas dropped to just under thirty percent, while Upper and Lower Guinea combined to constitute 43% of the slave trade between 1641 and 1700. These findings correspond to a recent analysis of slave market prices in central Mexico conducted by Tatiana Seijas and Pablo Sierra, who demonstrate that the demise of the external slave trade to Mexico was more protracted than earlier scholars suggested.301

In 1672, a doctor in the Hospital Real (Montesclaros) in Veracruz named Nicolas Lopes Sandoval submitted a memorial to New Spain’s viceroy in which he requested confirmation that the hospital’s doctors would continue to be paid “by emolument” for their work treating slaves from arriving slave ships (armazones de negros). “In the hospital,” Lopes wrote, “we are always [kept busy] curing the soldiers of the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa and those in the mainland as well as arriving travelers (forasteros),” suggesting that the additional duty of attending to arriving slaves was a particularly onerous burden. “We do this as best we can,” he continued, “despite the small salary of our occupation and the large amount of work, particularly with respect to the bad temperance of this land.”302

301 Seijas and Sierra Silva, “The Persistence of the Slave Market in Seventeenth-Century Central Mexico.”
302 AGN-General de Parte, vol. 14, exp. 159, “Vuestra excelencia, con paracer del doctor don Joseph de Vega y Vic, abogado de esta real audiencia, manda que en la visita de los navios de negros que vinieron a la Veracruz, se guarde la costumbre con el bachiller Nicolas Lopez, medico del hospital real de dicha
Lopes’s petition referred to no specific vessel, but it is suggestive of a regularity of slaving traffic that is not otherwise reflected in official tallies of slave ships. According to the most inclusive studies, only three slave ships had arrived in Veracruz in the preceding decade at the time of Lopes’s memorial. Given Veracruz’s disease climate, it is not unusual for medical officers there to comment on the burden of their work or to cite their labor in a request for one privilege or another. Similarly, as we have seen, hospitals in Veracruz had been expected to treat incoming slave populations and were compensated for doing so since the sixteenth century, showing that Lopes was not calling for a new privilege, but the continuation of a long-established custom. It is somewhat surprising, however, that Lopes would cite his treatment of incoming slave populations in a request for viceroyal privilege at a time when the slave trade to Veracruz was, by all other measures, at an all-time low.

Fifteen years later, a scandal broke out involving the illicit transport of slaves from Curaçao to Veracruz. In 1687, two ships—the La Santa Cruzada and the Santa Rosa y las Animas—belonging to a Spanish resident of Veracruz named Gaspar de Herrera were caught attempting to offload slaves, salt, chocolate, and other goods without a license. The number of slaves onboard was not recorded, though the number was likely in the low hundreds, as the two ships were recorded as “balandras,” or small regional ships, rather than larger navios or naos. In the subsequent investigation, royal officials determined that Herrera had struck an agreement with Dutch slave traders Baltasar Beq
and Peter Van Belle to import slaves to Veracruz from Curaçao, possibly using the Spanish governor of Cartagena, Juan Pando de Estrada—who had already been implicated in the orchestration of contraband trade between Curaçao and Cumaná, La Guaira, and Maracaibo—as a go-between. Herrera’s scheme involved the complicity of several port officials and local elites, including Julián Salinas, one of Veracruz’s oidores (justices); Sebastian Lopes, the alcalde mayor of Papantla; and the merchants Fermín Sasoeta, Juan Lacarra, Jacinto Pérez, Martín de Aranguti, Francisco Arias, and Juan Francisco Herrera. While the investigation was restricted to two ships in particular, the extent of corruption not only demonstrates a deep network of officials and elites who were actively engaged in an effort to introduce slaves to the Veracruz, but their connections to contraband networks in the northern coast of South America.  

The clearest evidence of systematic slave trading in the post-1640 period comes once again from the inquisitorial visitas of incoming vessels, primarily those covering the years 1698-1701. The slave ships recorded in visitas records at the end of the seventeenth century apparently entered Veracruz legally under the auspices of an asiento granted to the “Royal Guinea Company of the Kingdom of Portugal” in 1696. The company was controlled largely by the Portuguese slave trader Manuel Ferreira Carvallo, who operated

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303 AGN-General de Parte, vol. 16, exp. 164, “Vuestra excelencia, ordena al almirante real don Francisco Navarro, guarde, cumpla y execute la respuesta del senor fiscal inserta en todos los puntos de su contenido haciendo las diligencias que se refieren y las demas, sobre el encarcelamiento del capital y tesorero de La Santa Cruzada, Gaspar Herrera y de una nao que transporto negros,” 20 June 1687, fs. 143v; AGN-General de Parte, vol. 16, exp. 166, “Para que el almirante don Francisco Navarro execute las diligencias que pide el fiscal en su respuesta inserta, en los autos originales que se le devuelven para este efecto y el de proseguirlos, concluirlos y determinarlos con parecer de asesor, sobre la averiguacion de haberse embarcado en el navio de los negros y de una balandra que transportaba sal,” 14 July 1687, fs. 148v; AGN-Inquisición, vol. 477, exp. 19, “Testificacion contra Gaspar de Herrera por haber tratado con los holandeses en Curazao,” 1687, fs. 191r-193v. See also: Antoni Picazo Muntaner, “Comparative Systems and the Functioning of Networks: The Caribbean and Indo-Pacific Models of Trade. XVII and XVIII Centuries,” *Culture and History Digital Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2015).
both in Angola and in Mozambique, with a factor in Veracruz named Manuel Luis de Fonseca. Though Aguirre Beltrán discusses the terms of this *asiento* agreement, he identified only one slave ship that actually arrived under it—in Acapulco, not in Veracruz. The *visitas* identified seven slave ships that entered Veracruz under this *asiento*. While we might expect that local sources in Mexican archives would contain references to the contraband slave trade not found elsewhere, the fact that the vessels in the *visitas* entered the port legally—and yet do not appear in metropolitan records—demonstrates the critical necessity of accounting for local records in the study of the slave trade.

At least one of the ships appears to have been a French slaving vessel, recorded only as a “*navio Frances*,” which was the first French slave ship to land in Veracruz, and one of only three that are known to have stopped there in the entire colonial period. Another ship is identified as a “*navio Olandesa*,” with a provenance of Curaçao. The inquisitors who investigated the Dutch ship identified one of its crew, Joseph Obediente, as a “Jew of the Hebrew nation,” (*judio de nación Hebreo*). Although he was not arrested, he was confined to his ship’s quarters and not allowed to set foot in the port.

As with the earlier *visitas*, the inquisitors who investigated incoming slave ships in the late seventeenth century were less concerned with the number and provenance of arriving slaves than they were with the religious views of crew members and the presence of banned books among the ships’ cargoes. Again, however, the *visitas* reveal important

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information about the systemic integration of the Spanish Caribbean slaving system. A number of the ships investigated recorded earlier stops in Cartagena, Caracas, or Havana before arriving in Veracruz, and one ship, the *Nuestra Señora de Buenaventura*, even attested to sailing to Caracas, Portobelo, Cartagena, and Havana before finally arriving to Veracruz, in an attempt to maximize its profits by seeking out the most advantageous slave markets and redistributing slaves from one port to another in order to meet demand.³⁰⁶ Slave importations under the Royal Guinea Company *asiento* stopped in 1701, when the *asiento* passed to a French company. Although the *visitas* identified only two additional slave ships thereafter, the presence of legal slaving vessels in the *visitas* that are not reported elsewhere should once again encourage us not to dismiss automatically the possibility of the trade’s continuation.

Overall, the events and scandals in the post-1640 period do not indicate a decline in demand, but a decline in supply. The end of the Portuguese *asiento* in 1640 entailed both a rapid decline in slave ship traffic and a shift in the predominant provenance zones of incoming captives. Despite protestations about the resurgence of the indigenous population, fears of slave rebellions, and a mysterious “redirection” of slave ship traffic to other Spanish American regions, these changes to the slave trade were common throughout the entire Spanish Caribbean. The slave trade to Veracruz briefly reopened in the eighteenth century, following 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the Wars of Spanish of Succession. One of the provisions of the treaty was the transfer of the *asiento* to the British South Sea Company, which gained exclusive rights to import slaves to the

³⁰⁶ AGN-Inquisición, vol. 538, exp. 3, “Autos que hizo el comisario de la Veracruz en la visita de un navio Portugués, que surgio en aquel puerto con negros de cargazon,” 1698, fs. 430r-437v.
Spanish Americas. Under this *asiento*, at least seven slave ships visited Veracruz between 1717 and 1733. Although the trail of the legal slave trade ends in 1733, there are faint traces that an illicit or quasi-legal trade continued periodically throughout the eighteenth century, most likely bringing slaves from other parts of the Caribbean, particularly the northern coast of South America. As in the Gaspar de Herrera case, these eighteenth-century shipments from around the Caribbean were likely much smaller in scale, and evidence indicates that intra-Caribbean slave ships in this period carried a variety of cargoes in addition to slaves.

* * *

Until recently, the estimates of slave provenance zones in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have unequivocally endorsed Angola as the “charter” supplier of slaves to the Americas. Because these estimates have been so firm, scholars in search of data to support arguments of cultural reproduction have subjected them to little scrutiny. This has resulted in the development of two related bodies of scholarly literature: one which takes the Angola-centric provenance data of New Spain as evidence of the broader dominance of West Central Africans throughout the Spanish Americas, and another

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309 Perhaps the best indication of this trade is an Inquisition case from 1791, in which an English-Trinidadian merchant named Juan Pietri was arrested and prosecuted in Veracruz for “*malas palabras*” against the Catholic Church. In testimony, the trader, Pietri was identified as an English cocoa merchant who had arrived in the port from British Trinidad carrying a cargo of 85 slaves. See: AGN-Inquisición, vol. 1306, exp. 5, “El sr. inquisidor fiscal de este santo oficio contra D. Juan Pietri, maestre de la foleta Elisabet, que procedente de la isla de la Trinidad de barlovento, esta surta en el puerto de Veracruz por proposiciones. El comercio de esta Goleta consistia en cacao y en negros,” 1791, fs. 265r-295v.
which, responding to this suggestion, has argued that the dominance of West Central Africa in New Spain made it an outlier colony in early Spanish America. The new data on the period before 1595 shows earlier estimates of West Central Africa’s dominance to be somewhat exaggerated. While West Central Africa did supply a majority of slaves to New Spain, particularly in the seventeenth century, its share of total captives was closer to sixty percent than it was to eighty or ninety percent. Further, while a greater proportion of captives who arrived to New Spain originated in Angola than did captives who arrived to Tierra Firme and other Caribbean destinations, the difference is smaller than recent studies have suggested.

More than proving any definitive thesis about the predominance of specific provenance zones, the recent changes to estimates of the slave trade to Veracruz should serve as a caveat. Attempts to quantify the slave trade have given enormous detail on ethnicity and provenance in Spanish American slave societies. At the same time, the clear and concise presentation of that work often masks its staggering complexity. As we have seen, the scholars who compile slave trade data have drawn from a diversity of archival fonds, spanning centuries, continents, and including the records of multiple civil and religious institutions. In some cases, the methodology of a given work can exclude entire bodies of evidence that demonstrate contrary trends or patterns. At times, different sources convey contradictory information even about a single voyage, as was the case with the slave ship Santa Maria del Puerto. These observations should not detract from large-scale studies of the slave trade, but rather encourage even more detailed work on the smaller, less visible forms that African Diaspora could take. The following section discusses one of those forms.
Small-Scale Migrations of Africans to Veracruz

Given the long tradition of scholarship on the transatlantic slave trade, it is perhaps surprising that almost no studies include in their consideration slaves who entered the Americas not as commercial property, but as members of private households. There are three explanations, I believe, for the exclusion of these slaves from official tallies. First, per the strict definition of the term “trade,” slaves who entered the Americas as non-commercial property were not part of the slave trade. Second, most of the households in question contained only one or two slaves—hardly enough to merit much consideration alongside slave ships transporting several hundred slaves at a time. Third, it is unclear, in almost all cases, where the slaves in question came from or whether or not they were, in fact, African or even Afro-descended, as most, if not all, private households transporting slaves obtained licenses in and departed from Spain. The inability to say, with certainty, the provenance of “household slaves” inhibits one of the primary motivations of slave trade studies: to adduce African regions of origins as evidence of social and cultural retention, or transformation, in the New World.

310 One study that does consider limited information on such slaves is: Ward Barrett, The Sugar of the Marqueses Hacienda del Valle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), 78-86.

311 Although their legal status as property and the tax paid to obtain the license make the question of what constitutes a “trade” more ambiguous.

312 Some slaves in the non-commercial trade are referred to as “esclavos blancos” or white slaves. While these individuals were likely the descendants of North African Muslims who had ruled and inhabited parts of Iberia since the eighth century, and therefore would have had some African genetic links, in many cases, those links may have been so distant as to be moot. See: Michael A. Gomez, Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13-30; Karen Graubart, “So color de una cofradía”: Catholic Confraternities and the Development of Afro-Peruvian Ethnicities in Early Colonial Peru,” SA, vol. 33, no. 1 (March 2012): 43-64; Molly A. Warsh, “A Political Ecology in the Early Spanish Caribbean,” WMQ, vol. 71, no. 4 (October 2014): 517-548.
While these three explanations might be reason enough to separate out information on non-commercial slave licenses within a generalized study on the slave trade, they are not sufficient to justify the complete exclusion of such slaves. More to the point, the facts give lie to the assumptions. While most households did only contain one or two slaves, many contained significantly more—in one or two cases, as many as the average commercial slave ship. Moreover, there is compelling evidence that many—if not most—of the slaves brought to the Americas with non-commercial licenses did not embark in Spain, but were instead bought in the slave markets of Cape Verde, São Tóme, or the Canary Islands en route to the Americas.

These findings are reinforced by recent investigations into similar practices in other parts of the Spanish Caribbean. Focusing on slave arrivals to Cartagena and Spanish Jamaica, for instance, David Wheat has demonstrated that in some cases households contained several dozen slaves—most, if not all, bought in West African slave markets.\(^{313}\) While several dozen slaves is clearly a significant number in the Caribbean—especially within the context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the majority of slaves disembarked in the Spanish American Mainland—my research shows that the practice was far more widespread in New Spain. In one early case of 1545, the conquistador Pedro Almíndez Cherino obtained licenses to travel to New Spain with one hundred slaves ("negros esclavos") for his personal service ("para servicio personal").\(^{314}\) In a second case from 1548, two Sevillianos, Juan Pinto and Alonso Martínez, secured

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\(^{314}\) AGI-Indiferente General, leg. 423, l. 20, 1549, fs. 854v-856r.
the right to bring with them a total of 150 slaves directly from Cape Verde. Most cases were smaller, involving groups of one to three slaves.

In the seventeenth century, the concept of importing slaves “for personal service” may also have been a cover for contraband slave traders wishing to avoid import duties. In November 1622, for example, a slave ship called the *Nuestra Señora de Amparo* was impounded in Veracruz after the captain of another ship—which had arrived earlier from Merida de Yucatán—tipped off local authorities that it may be trying to import slaves without a license. Under questioning, the *Amparo*’s Portuguese captain, Duarte de Acosta Noguera, claimed that he had sailed legally to Angola fifteen months earlier, where he and three of his passengers purchased 452 captives. Crossing the Atlantic, the ship made stops in Santo Domingo, San Juan de Puerto Rico, Portobelo, Trujillo (Honduras), Jamaica, and Campeche before arriving in Veracruz. According to Acosta, one of his passengers, named Joan Antonio, disembarked in Jamaica with “34 or 35 *piezas* of slaves… because he had married there.” A second passenger, Joan Rodriguez, a native of Lisbon, also disembarked in Jamaica and possibly went forward to Havana. Although Rodriguez had brought between forty and fifty slaves of his own, a witness named Pedro Garrido claimed that Acosta had purchased Rodriguez’s slaves when he departed in Jamaica, suggesting that Rodriguez did not want to pay a *libranza* in Havana for the introduction of slaves. In Campeche, a third passenger, Jeronimo Suares

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315 AGI-Indiferente General, leg. 1964, l. 11, 24 April 1548, fs. 34r-34v.

316 AGI-México, leg. 351, “Informacion que hizieron los oficiales Reales de la Veracruz sobre la arrivada que hizo a los puertos de Puerto Rico Truxillo y Campeche Duarte de Acosta Noguera que salio de Angola con 452 esclavos para el de San Juan de Ulua y como hecho al traves el navio en Campeche,” 22 November 1622, fs. 1r-13r.

317 “Joan Rodriguez oyo desir este testigo se yba a la Havana por averle comprado en la dicha Jamaica sus esclavos el dicho capitán Duarte de Acosta e lo que montaron se lo dio en libranza para el dicho puerto de la Havana no save sobre que persona.” AGI-México, leg. 351, “Informacion que hizieron los oficiales
disembarked with eighty slaves, intending the hire a separate ship there that would bring him and his slaves to Veracruz, presuming that this gambit would allow him to avoid port authorities. Although there is no record that any of these men had applied for or received a license to import “household” slaves (in fact, none of them claimed that they had) their actions are indicative of the thin line that often separated the introduction of slaves “for personal service” and of slaves of the transatlantic trade.318 Moreover, it demonstrates yet again that the Spanish Caribbean functioned as a unitary circuit in the minds of slave traders, as they traveled from port to port, between island and mainland, seeking the most advantageous markets, as Joan Rodriguez did when he determined to sell his slaves to Duarte Acosta in Jamaica, rather than bring them on to Havana.

Although the peak of these migrations was in the 1540s—a decade in which four hundred slaves entered New Spain in this fashion—it persisted until the end of the seventeenth century, with households of as many as twenty-four slaves arriving to Veracruz as late as 1640 (see Figure 3.2). In all, 1,003 slaves entered New Spain in this fashion between 1520 and 1700. The years in which such introductions were most significant were 1520-1550, when the introduction of “household” slaves outstripped those of documented slave ships.

Another less common practice was the migration of free blacks from Spain to the New World. While examples of applications made by free blacks to the casa de contratación in Seville number in the low hundreds (for all of the Americas), the

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318 This case is in fact included in the TASTD, and therefore I have not included it in my quantitative analysis of “household” slave licenses. See: TASTD Voyage 28201.
applicants were often sailors and tended to declare their intention to migrate to port cities like Veracruz. Like those of household slaves, migrations of free blacks are concentrated in the middle of the sixteenth century, though it is possible that the practice continued as late as 1640. While it is unlikely that any of these applicants were born in Africa, many of them justified their fitness to migrate to the Americas on their supposed ancestral origin in the land of “guinea.” Rather than a legitimate claim of diasporic origin, this seems to have been an appeal to be recognized as an “Old Christian”—as opposed to an African recently converted from Islam or Judaism, a class of people who were legally prohibited from traveling to the Americas.

As in the case of Juan Martínez, a free black man born in Seville, who, in 1534, applied for license to travel to New Spain, presenting papers attesting to his status as a free man. See: AGI-Casa de Contratación, leg. 5536, l. 3, “Libros de asiento de pasajeros de 1509 a 1540,” 30 June 1534, f. 214r.

In a forthcoming dissertation at the University of Texas, Austin, Chloe Ireton provides a comprehensive study of these cases, citing some in which slaves claimed an ancestral connection to “Ethiopia,” which was recognized as an Old Christian kingdom. See: Chloe Ireton, “Ethiopian Royal Vassals: Free Black Itinerancy in the Iberian Atlantic (1500-1640),” (PhD Dissertation, University of Texas—Austin, in progress).
In addition to the free-colored men and women who sought license at the casa de contratación to settle in the Americas, there are faint traces of Africans who arrived to the Americas freely, directly from Africa, traveling onboard slave ships. One such case from December 1632 identifies an individual named Antonio Moreno, who departed from Angola for Veracruz onboard a Portuguese slave ship named *Nuestra Señora de Monserrat y San Antonio*. The ship, which has an uncommonly large archival record relating to the ship includes not only lists of passengers, but of crew and of the enslaved population as well. A handful of the ships 29 crew were recorded as “de color moreno,” though all were natives of Iberia or the Atlantic island of Madeira. See: AGI-Contaduría, leg. 885a; AGI-Casa de

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321 AGI-México, leg. 1088, l. 1-1. 3; leg. 1089, l. 1-1. 4.
322 AGI-Indiferente General, legs. 420-424; legs. 449-455; legs. 1964-1965; legs. 2048-2056; legs. 2071.
323 AGI-Casa de Contratación, leg. 5239, n. 2, r. 62; leg. 5364, n. 15; leg. 5373, n. 41; leg. 5398, n. 35; leg. 5399, n. 63; leg. 5420, n. 6; leg. 5435, n. 3, r. 91; leg. 5439, n. 112; leg. 5442, n. 95; leg. 5449, n. 74; leg. 5451, n. 5; leg. 5451, n. 6; leg. 5454, n. 2, r. 46; leg. 5455, n. 3, r. 60; leg. 5459, n. 179; leg. 5709, n. 218, r. 33; leg. 941b, n. 32; leg. 962a, n. 3; leg. 963, n. 2, r. 11.
324 Luis Romera Iruela and María del Carmen Galbis Díez, eds., *Catalogo de Pasajeros a Indias durante los siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII*, vol. 3-5 (Seville: Archivo General de Indias, 1980). Entries cited include: vol. 3, entry 4102; vol. 4, entries 1107, 1626, 2596; vol. 5, entry 1089.
325 The archival record relating to the ship includes not only lists of passengers, but of crew and of the enslaved population as well. A handful of the ships 29 crew were recorded as “de color moreno,” though all were natives of Iberia or the Atlantic island of Madeira. See: AGI-Contaduría, leg. 885a; AGI-Casa de
footprint, was impounded and investigated in the port for carrying 193 more slaves than its license allowed. The investigation of the ship’s cargo and passengers lists Antonio Moreno among a dozen other free passengers, noting that he was a “native of Angola, of black color *atezado*, more or less sixteen years of age” and in possession of documents proving his freedom. While this is the only case of a free African arriving to Veracruz from Africa of which I am aware, there are so few slave ship records that account for each individual onboard that it is possible that Antonio Moreno was not the only African-born free-colored person who migrated to New Spain in the early colonial period.

**Figure 3.3.** Passenger list of the *NS de Monserrat y S Antonio*, 1632.


Although the relative numerical importance of non-commercial introductions drops precipitously after 1550, the importance of the data goes beyond the “numbers...
game” approach to African diaspora. Since these small-scale introductions were common throughout the Spanish Americas during the sixteenth century, they demonstrate again that New Spain was part of a broader regional system of diaspora that was internally coherent in terms of volume, provenance, and patterns of introduction. While most scholarship has treated these individuals as members of private Spanish households, suggesting that their status fundamentally differed from the later cargoes of the slave trade, the distinction was often blurred. Particularly in the early period, Spanish migrants embarking for the New World routinely sought licenses to bring with them coteries of African slaves that could be as large as several dozen individuals. In many cases, they even purchased those slaves in the same Cape Verde slave markets that would supply the transatlantic slave trade in its initial decades of operation.

Conclusion

This chapter has made two central historiographical interventions. First, it has drawn on new evidence of African diaspora—including inquisitorial visitas, contraband cases, and the introduction of household slaves—to argue that the African captives who arrived in Veracruz in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were more regionally and ethnically diverse than has previously been suggested. This follows recent scholarship of historians who have analyzed the early slave trade to the Spanish Caribbean. Not only have those studies reached similar conclusions about the diversity of the slave trade, they have done so by calling on the same types of evidence. Second, I have argued that the slave trade to Veracruz was broadly typical of the slave trade to the rest of the Spanish Americas. Although there are observable variances in provenance zones of incoming slaves, the historical record demonstrates greater similarities in slaving patterns than
discrepancies. Moreover, slave ship captains, merchants, and factors understood the ports of the Spanish Caribbean to be part of a unitary whole. In some cases, slave ships even delivered captives to multiple ports—or moved slaves from one Caribbean port to another—in the course of a single voyage. By demonstrating similar patterns of slave trading in Mexico and the Caribbean, this chapter refutes the argument that the slave trade to Veracruz was atypical. In so doing, this intervention not only revises the historical assessments of the Mexican slave trade, but also asserts that Mexico was part of a broader Caribbean slave trading system.
Chapter Four

After the Slave Trade: Race and Ethnicity in a Religious Borderland, 1640-1700

Notwithstanding continued efforts to fulfill local demand for slaves, the sudden decline of the regular slave trade in 1640 precipitated an enormous disruption of both Mexican and Veracruzano society. Between Veracruz’s permanent relocation to the Ulúacan coast in 1599 and the slave trade’s eventual decline in 1640, over one hundred thousand captive Africans had entered the port. As the city’s resident population remained under ten thousand, the yearly average of approximately 2,500 arriving slaves represented close to one-third of the city’s population, and in the decade preceding the trade’s demise, the annual average was even greater. The end of the slave trade severed what was at that time one of the oldest, largest, and most continuous links between the New World and the African continent.

Recently, some historians have identified this rupture as a harbinger of the rapid dissipation of distinct African cultural “survivals” in New Spain. As fewer Africans entered the colony, homelands became more materially and cognitively distant. As time passed, accommodation to the social and cultural norms of a repressive colonial state became increasingly necessary and increasingly likely. Critically, at the same time that the slave trade began to subside, black creole populations were growing and becoming more socially and culturally dominant. Herman Bennett cites the “abatement of the international slave trade” as the key juncture for the rise of a dominant class of black creoles within Afro-Mexican communities. Trey Proctor has analyzed slave marriage patterns to show that African ethnic categories like “Angola” had begun to “break down”
more specific forms of ethnolinguistic identity in New Spain as early as the 1650s.\textsuperscript{327} Meanwhile, Nicole von Germeten has focused on Catholic confraternities as the institutions around which free-black communities coalesced and began to define corporate identities that broadly corresponded to colonial categories of caste and color, rather than African ethnicity.\textsuperscript{328} Finally, Joan Cameron Bristol has examined Afro-Mexican uses of magic, blasphemy, and heterodoxy, arguing not that these practices were evidence of cultural “survival,” but that they were deployed strategically “to affect their material conditions; to create communities, improve relations with masters and mistresses as well as friends and lovers, and earn money”—in short, to navigate and mitigate the colonial conditions of caste and \textit{calidad}.\textsuperscript{329}

Not only have these interventions greatly expanded our knowledge and understanding of African experiences in and contributions to colonial Mexico, they have re-inserted Mexico into the long-standing debate between creolists and Africanists about the nature of African diaspora and cultural transformation in the era of the slave trade (a debate which I will summarize below). Drawing on various forms of religious records—marital, confraternal, and inquisitorial—all four of the scholars cited above have argued that African individuals and corporate groups in New Spain had either shed specific African ethnic markers or had begun to assimilate into Hispanic categories of caste by the middle of the seventeenth century.


\textsuperscript{328} von Germeten, \textit{Black Blood Brothers}.

\textsuperscript{329} Bristol, \textit{Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches}, 219.
This chapter focuses on cultural retention and transformation, religious practice, and power in Veracruz during the decline phase of the transatlantic slave trade (1640-1700). Drawing on evidence of census data, religious processions, and an inquisitorial investigation of border-crossing witchcraft this chapter argues that the process of acculturation was more protracted in Veracruz than it was elsewhere, and that it followed patterns that were distinct to the Mexican-Caribbean region. In its first section, I analyze three census registers (padrones) from the 1681 Tlaxcala census to show that Africans in Veracruz’s outlying towns continued to use detailed ethnonyms four full decades after the end of the regular slave trade. In section two, I draw evidence from a Corpus Christi procession that took place in Veracruz in 1667, showing the participation of five distinct corporate groups that used African ethnonyms, which I place into the context of Caribbean cabildos de nación. Reading this evidence against earlier assessments of two free-black confraternities in Veracruz, I argue that adding the Caribbean context to New Spanish archives can alter the way we read and understand sources attesting to cultural change. The final section is based on a case study of a group of free-black and Spanish women who were accused of witchcraft, and whose testimony reveals a construction of identity that built on the racial and religious diversity of the Caribbean world.

For their part, Afro-Mexicanists often stipulate regional variations in the acculturative process—particularly in the case of Veracruz, which is often seen as somewhat of an outlier, both because of its relatively large African population and because of its more immediate connection to the slave trade.330 While those factors were

330 See, for instance: Bennett, Africans in Colonial Mexico, 27; Vinson III, Bearing Arms for His Majesty, 83, 172-175
indeed critical, I focus on the way in which Veracruz’s connections to the Caribbean region influenced the cultural transformations that took place there. I argue that Veracruz’s integration into the commercial and political networks of the Caribbean made it a religious borderland, and that excluding this context sharply limits our ability to understand the people who lived there and the corporate institutions they formed.

As a port city, Veracruz was home to a cultural milieu that differed from that of central Mexico. The slave trade ensured close ties to a number of African provenance zones and, consequently, to a diversity of religious traditions. The city was also the permanent and seasonal home of a number of merchants, sailors, and travelers, some of whom were of Spanish origins, others of whom were not. While most foreigners in Veracruz hailed from Catholic realms, like Portugal or Genoa, others traveled to New Spain from territories that were in the midst of the Protestant Reformation. Although ostensibly barred from entering the colony, in Veracruz, Protestant seamen of English and Dutch origin were occasionally able to disembark and interact in local society. Like other ports, Veracruz was also hosted a relatively large converso community, which occasionally aroused the suspicion of the Inquisition as a potential cover for covert Judaism. Veracruz was, in short, a religious borderland, where men and women of diverse backgrounds could negotiate overlapping systems of power, building cultural and religious identities that were in dialogue with geographical dispersed Caribbean societies.

For Veracruz’s African population, this meant more regular access to African-born slaves, as the slave trade meandered along, as well as contact with black and African populations in Cartagena, Havana, and elsewhere around the Caribbean.
Creolization, Survival, and the “Live Dialogue” between Veracruz and the Caribbean

The creolization vs. survival debate is perhaps the most well-worn scholarly turf in the study of African diaspora to the Americas during the era of the slave trade. Because it still offers useful framing for the arguments I will lay out in this chapter, however, I will summarize the debate here with an eye to recent literature on Afro-Mexico and what I hope to add to that literature. The dispute originated in earnest in the middle of the twentieth century with the disagreements of the anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier. An Africanist by training, Herskovits argued for the continuity or “survival” of distinguishable African “cultural” traits among the black communities of the Americas. Frazier rejected Herskovits’s survivalist approach, arguing specifically that Afro-American family structures—in the United States and in Brazil—were the product of quintessentially American social conditions—the traumas of the middle passage, of New World slavery, and of American racial tyranny, as Africans were forced to adapt to and negotiate the oppressive expectations of American societies.

In their famous 1976 essay on “The Birth of Afro-American Culture,” the Caribbean anthropologists Sidney Mintz and Richard Price joined the emergent “creolist” school, arguing first that the slave trade “randomized” the Africans who were brought to the Americas, and second that the brutal regime of slavery unleashed a “relentless assault

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on personal identity,” thus preventing the collective retention of distinct or “authentic”
African languages, religions, or other “cultural” material.333

In the 1990s, Africanists like John Thornton, Linda Heywood, Joseph Miller, and
Paul Lovejoy—emboldened by the early findings of the TASTD, which showed the slave
trade to be less “random” than Mintz and Price suggested—began to argue forcefully
against the creolist characterization of the “cultural stripping” of slavery, demonstrating a
number of ways in which Africans in the Americas retained or refashioned certain
aspects of culture, religion, and political ideologies.334 Their revisionist work—which is
by no means uniform in its conclusions—opened the door for new generations of scholars
working on the colonial Americas to approach the African individuals who they
encountered in the archive with greater sensitivity to African cultural backgrounds.335

Mexico was a battleground in this debate relatively early, stemming from Gonzalo
Aguirre Beltrán’s publication of La población negra de México in 1946. His work
strongly supported Herskovits’s conceptualization of African cultural retentions


334 See: Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*; John K. Thornton, “‘I Am the
Subject of the King of Congo’: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *The Journal of
Rebellion,” *AHR*, vol. 96, no. 4 (October 1991): 1101-1113; John K. Thornton, “Cannibals, Witches, and
Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press,
2002); Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (New York:
Cambridge University Press, 2011); Joseph C. Miller, “Retention, Reinvention, and Remembering:
Restoring Identities through Enslavement in Angola and under Slavery in Brazil,” in José C. Curto and
Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural
Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil in the Era of the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge
University Press, 2012); Walter Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave
Trade, 1600-1830* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Judith Ann Carney, *Black Rice: The
(Herskovits was Aguirre Beltrán’s mentor) and especially Herskovits’s concept of syncretic acculturation—wherein African, European, and Amerindians intermingled with one another and exchanged cultural practices through the course of daily life, creating new identities out of old material. Aguirre Beltrán aligned the idea of syncretic acculturation with existing ideologies of Mexican mestizaje, suggesting that the intermixing and blending of Africans into Mesoamerican society led to the gradual disappearance of their distinct hue.\(^{336}\)

In subsequent decades, relatively few scholars picked up the mantle of Afro-Mexican history.\(^{337}\) This changed following the publication of Patrick Carroll’s *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz* in 1991 (around the same time as the “Africanist” school was mounting its challenge to creolization), which focused on black communities in the rural Veracruzano regions of Orizaba, Xalapa, and Córdoba. Carroll argued that “despite the best efforts of the Spaniards to prevent it, the creolization of Africans in Veracruz led to their racial and ethnic blending with the broader society.”\(^{338}\) Carroll’s study spurred others, leading to a rejuvenation of Afro-Mexican history in the 2000s.\(^{339}\) Although these studies vary in chronological, thematic, and regional scope, they are broadly aligned in their view that Afro-Mexican history tends toward the shedding of diasporic ethnicities and the emergence of racial identities that were specific to New Spain—whether mixed-

\(^{336}\) Cohen, “In Black and Brown,” 204.

\(^{337}\) There were significant exceptions, of course. See: Solange Alberro, *Inquisición y sociedad en México, 1571-1700* (Mexico City: FCE, 1988); Palmer, *Slaves of the White God*.

\(^{338}\) Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz*, 147.

race “castas,” or a self-conscious, discrete groups of Afro-Creoles. Rather than the question of creolization or survival, here, in Mexico the more relevant fault line has been the dispute about whether Afro-Mexicans “blended” into colonial society—affiliating with indigenous, mestizo, and Spanish creole communities—or whether they formed a distinct corporate group of their own.

The debate between Africanists and creolists, in Mexico and elsewhere, has swung back and forth for decades, with the occasional protestation that the debate itself has outlived its “usefulness” or has become “meaningless.” In this chapter, I introduce a new dimension to scholarship on African ethnicity in the New World. Stipulating the basic contentions of both the Africanist and the creolist schools, I argue that the African corporate identities in Veracruz were not exclusively the product of intermingling between African forbearers and American locales, but were also the product of horizontal communication between African diasporans in geographically dispersed parts of the Caribbean. That is, African communities defined their relationship to and role within New World societies by drawing on their knowledge of a cultural past as well as their understanding of a social present—a social present that, in urban Veracruz, specifically included overlapping regional and local systems of power with ties to the Caribbean.

My interpretation builds on J. Lorand Matory’s concept of “dialogic” identity formation, which he applies specifically to his analysis of Afro-Brazilian Candomblé.  

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In Matory’s schema, historians err in the study of diasporic communities when they seek out retention or survivals because “diasporas create homelands” rather than the reverse.\textsuperscript{342} Instead of survivals in which an antecedent “\textit{ur}-culture” follows an unbroken line from Africa into the New World, Matory argues that New World ethnic categories—including those that explicitly claim an African provenance—are the product of a “live dialogue between Africa and the Americas.” Expanding on Matory, I suggest that the scale of interaction between Spanish Caribbean ports allowed diasporic groups in those cities to engage in a “live dialogue” with one another as they constructed New World identities that built on Old World ethnicities.

In my use, the “live dialogue” between Veracruz and the Caribbean is meant to address the spatiality of cultural transformation. Spatial considerations are often absent or tangential to studies of Afro-Mexico. Even as some Afro-Mexicanists acknowledge spatial variations, “New Spain” remains the default geographic lens through which historians analyze religious communities throughout the colony. When historians do acknowledge the existence of spatial variations in the syncretic process, they are rarely adduced to countervailing regional influences, but instead to the variations of local material conditions.

As we have already seen, Veracruz maintained an active connection to the port cities of the Spanish Caribbean. These cities demonstrated environmental and structural similarities, functional similarities, common bonds to the slave trade, and common bonds to one another. In particular, relationships of trade forged corridors of migration and information exchange, and Africans and their descendants, enslaved and free, traveled in

\textsuperscript{342} Matory, \textit{Black Atlantic Religion}, 3.
those corridors as migrants, sailors, and human cargoes. At the same time, port cities functioned as centers of transit and international holding zones, where men and women of diverse religious and national backgrounds co-existed, causing local authorities to adjust their expectation of religious conformity and their application of religious law. It was within this context that both enslaved and free-black communities in Veracruz were able to articulate individual and collective understandings of identity that may not have been available outside of the Caribbean.

**African Nación, Ethnicity, and Caste in New Spain and Veracruz**

The provenance categories that emerge from the slave trade did not correspond precisely to the specific regional or ethnolinguistic background of incoming captives. Slave ships hailing from Angola, for instance, might have included individuals from the Imbangala, Mbundu, or Ovimbundu ethnicities. Similarly, the previous chapter discussed the case of the *San Josephe*, which purchased captives in Upper Guinea from eleven distinct ethnolinguistic backgrounds.

Once ashore in the New World this diversity could be compressed into a handful of “representative” ethnic categories, some of which corresponded to broad regions of embarkation. Africans from the “land of Angola,” (*tierra de Angola*) the “Angola nation,” (*de nación Angola*) or the “Angola caste” (*casta Angola*), proliferated broadly in New Spain’s notarial parish records in the seventeenth century. In a sample of notarial records from Xalapa, “Angola” is listed in 67 percent of all records that mention an African region of origin in the period 1578 to 1693. By comparison, only eleven percent of such records mentioned West Central African regions or ethnicities other than “Angola” (see Table 4.1), suggesting that out of a number of diverse West Central
African ethnicities, “Angola” became the predominant label that West Central Africans used in New Spain.

The collapsing of ethnicity into a few small categories has long vexed historians of American slavery, particularly those interested in tracking the survival of African ethnicities and cultural continuities in the New World. While the expansion of the “Angola” ethnonym is the most prominent example of this process for New Spain, the same process was replicated virtually everywhere in the Americas. In Nueva Granada, Lower Guinea slaves from the Ewe, Fon, and Popo ethnolinguistic groups became “Arará” (sometimes transliterated “Arda” or “Allada”). In Jamaica, slaves from the Akan states of Asante, Fante, and Akwamu became “Coromantee” (Koromantine). In Cuba, Africans from Yorubaland became “Lucumi” (Lucumen). Complicating matters further, in Brazil these New World ethnic categories often had distinct analogues. A person who was “Lucumi” in Cuba or New Spain might be “Nagô” in Brazil. An “Arará” could become “Jejé.” A person sold in the port of Calabar in the Niger River delta might be known as “Carabali” in Spanish America, but “Mina” in Brazil.343

Table 4.1. African ethnonyms in the notarial records of Xalapa, 1578-1693.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnonym by region</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>% of region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Guinea</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bañon</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biafara</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biohó</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bran</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cazanga</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folupa</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandinga</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rios de Guinea</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolof</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zape</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Guinea</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arará</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carabalí</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locumí</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Central Africa</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angico</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benguela</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loango</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boemí</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macao</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ñame</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Thomé</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some historians have argued that such broad terms, when used in the New World, identified not only slaves from the actual provenance region that the term implies, but also Africans from other provenance zones, suggesting that to be “Angola” or “Lucumi” in the New World carried a social and cultural capital that influenced the way in which enslaved and free individuals identified, regardless of material or genealogical link to the provenance region in question. Meanwhile, others, following the “culture zone” thesis, have insisted that the expansion of such categories reflected the fluidity of ethnic identification in African provenance regions. In this argument, broad categories like “Angola” became the common meeting point of a diversity of African captives from the same broad region as they reconstituted Old World socio-cultural groupings based on mutually-intelligible languages, religions, and kinship practices, and bonded also by the shared trauma of their own enslavement.

In one explanation, the flattening of ethnic difference is seen as part of the creolizing process, in which Old World Africans from a number of ethnic backgrounds become New World “Angolans” or “Lucumens,” attenuating the social capital of practices and beliefs that are ostensibly “African.” In the other, the development of broad ethnic categories is an extension of a process that had already been present in Africa, and actually became the means through which Africans in the New World held on to shared ideologies and customs in the American context. Trey Proctor has added to these

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346 For the argument that a kind of “creolization”—the transformation of “African” ethnicities into what were to be their New World analogues—was taking place along the African coast prior to enslavement and
arguments a more nuanced position. Using slave marital applications from Mexico City in the 1650s, he has argued that the broad use of “Angola” for slaves from West Central Africa represents a New World ethnic category that built on a significant connection to specific African regions, but also one that, in its creation, stripped Africans of more specific ethnic markers. In short, he sees “Angola” as an interstitial category, between African ethnic label and acculturation into New World racial categories.

As in Proctor’s work, in New Spain, much of the research undergirding these arguments is drawn from large-scale data offered by notarial records of slave sales (as in Table 4.1), marriage and baptismal records, and census data. These records often recorded an individual’s “nation” or land of origin, and have been read both as evidence of black endogamy and as evidence of the declining importance of African ethnic categories. Although there are abundant records of slave sales in the notarial archives of Xalapa, Puebla, and Mexico City, there does not appear to be such source base for Veracruz. Similarly, Catholic church records of marriages and baptisms in Veracruz have been lost prior to 1696. Instead, in the first part of this section I draw on the 1681 census of the Tlaxcala diocese, which included Veracruz. Although the census has been analyzed to give a broad sketch of late-seventeenth century demographics, it also includes more detailed records (padrones) for three outlying towns within Veracruz’s jurisdiction.

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Using these *padrones*, I argue that African ethnic monikers in Veracruz retained distinct meanings long after the end of the regular slave trade.

**Caste, Ethnicity, and Marital Status in the 1681 Tlaxcala Census**

Conducted over a seven-year period, the census 1681-1688 census of the Tlaxcala diocese contains detailed information on the *vecinos* in no fewer than 128 cities and towns, covering a geographic territory that stretches from the Gulf coast to the Pacific. In Veracruz, the census found “one thousand residents,” only half of whom were listed as *negro* or *mulato*. The remaining five hundred were recorded as Spanish. Since the term “vecino” excludes unfree residents, it is unlikely that any slaves would have been recorded as “vecinos,” suggesting that in fact the Afro-descended population was larger than half.  

Using the 1681 census, the eminent historian and geographer Peter Gerhard estimated Veracruz’s population to be 1,360 *indios*, 2,500 *espanoles*, and 3,480 undifferentiated “*castas*.”  

Gerhard’s methodology is a bit questionable—no source mentions a significant number of Amerindians in Veracruz, and Gerhard uses a larger multiplier for Spanish households than he does for *casta* households—but his suggestion that black residents made up the majority of Veracruz’s inhabitants is correct.

The archival record of the 1681 census contains more detailed *padrones* on the demographic makeup of three outlying towns to Veracruz’s south that were part of its

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348 AGI-México, leg. 1157a, “Informes de la Contaduría General y copias y minutas de informaciones, relaciones y descripciones de diversas materias,” 1643-1828.


350 Gerhard’s estimations of the Spanish and “*casta*” populations relied on assumptions of the average household size that are a bit curious: five “Spaniards” are counted for each Spanish “*vecino*” while the five-hundred *negro* and *mulato* households are multiplied by a factor of four. There is no consideration of the possibility that some Spanish households certainly included “*castas*,” and Gerhard only arrived at a superior number of “*castas*” by acknowledging that Veracruz’s enslaved population would not have appeared on a census of *vecinos*. 
jurisdiction (*comarca*): Tlacotalpan, Tlalixcoyan, and Medellín. Of the three, the furthest from Veracruz is Tlacotalpan, one hundred kilometers to Veracruz’s south along the coast, while Tlalixcoyan and Medellín are, respectively, fifty and twenty kilometers to the port’s southwest (see Map 4.1). The census records for these coastal areas detail the names, gender, caste, marital status, and enslaved status for more than 610 individuals. Of those, 43 percent were recorded as members of the *negro, mulato, or moreno* caste, seventeen percent were recorded as *españoles*, and twelve were recorded *indio or mestizo* (see Table 4.2). More than a quarter of the individuals recorded in the census (169 people) were not assigned a caste category, but the vast majority of those were identified as enslaved (88 percent). Since all other enslaved people listed in the census were known to be Afro-descended, we can speculate that the 149 caste-less individuals who were enslaved were also Afro-descended, signifying that, at minimum, 414 (68 percent) of the people registered in the census were of African descent (see Table 4.3).

**Map 4.1. Camino real** from Veracruz to Mexico City, showing Medellín, Tlalixcoyan, Tlacotalpan, ca. seventeenth century.

Source: AGI-Mapas y Planos, México 39, “Discreción del camino, que se pretende hacer empezando de la venta de Butrón hasta la ciudad de México,” 8 March 1590.
While *mulatos* and *morenos* account for approximately eighty percent of all black residents for whom caste is known, only eleven percent of people in those groups were enslaved. By contrast, 91 percent of *negros* and 88 percent of people of unknown caste were slaves, suggesting that enslaved people of unknown caste are more likely to be *negro* than *mulato* or *moreno*. This distinction is important, as *negro* was a caste group that is more likely to have been either African-born or the offspring of unions between African-born individuals.

The *padrones* of Veracruz’s outlying towns are also valuable for the information they reveal about marital status. According to the *padrones*, 42 percent of Indians and Spaniards were married. Slightly fewer *mestizos* were married—just under thirty percent. When it comes to Afro-descended groups, however, the marital rate drops dramatically. Only eleven percent of *mulatos* recorded in the *padrones* were married. Seven percent of those of “unknown” caste were married, and among the *negro* group, only one of 54 individuals was married. In all, a paltry nine percent of Afro-descendants recorded in the *padrones* were married.

**Table 4.2.** 1681-1688 *Padrones* of Tlacotalpan, Tlalixcoyan, and Medellín.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mestizo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Español</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AGI-México, leg. 1157a, “Informes de la Contaduría General y copias y minutas de informaciones, relaciones y descripciones de diversas materias,” 1643-1828.
### Table 4.3. 1681-1688 Padrones by caste.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African or Afro-Descended</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulato</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreno</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mestizo</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>610</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AGI-México, leg. 1157a, “Informes de la Contaduría General y copias y minutas de informaciones, relaciones y descripciones de diversas materias,” 1643-1828.

As we have seen, evidence drawn from Catholic marriage records have been an extremely valuable resource for scholars interested in the emergence and use of broad ethnonyms like “Angola” in the seventeenth century. The Veracruz padrones offer a glimpse of the actual marriage rate within a single Afro-descended community, and they reveal that vast majority of Afro-descended individuals included in the padrones were not married within the church. Other studies of slave marital rates and illegitimacy in Mexico City, Xalapa, and Guadalajara have similarly shown that the large majorities of slaves did not marry.351 This point has not gone unacknowledged in studies of marriage records. As Proctor helpfully notes in his study of Mexico City, for instance, “the overwhelming majority of slaves did not marry… [and] those who did had all been baptized, had taken Hispanicized names, and had learned at least rudimentary Spanish.”352 This recognition

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352 Proctor, “African Diasporic Ethnicity in Mexico City to 1650,” 56, 60. See also: Bennett, Colonial Blackness, 76-85.
has not always translated to correspondingly narrow arguments, however, as scholars tend to read the ethnic categories in marriage records with an eye to broader societal patterns—that is, to use the data from a limited, non-random sample of slaves who married as suggestive of the population of slaves as a whole. Proctor himself, for instance, seems to suggest that “Africans in New Spain did not use ethnic monikers that better reflected their various localized ethnicities in Africa” based largely on marriage data. The preponderance of “Angolan” slaves who married other “Angolans” and also used “Angolans” as their witnesses (testigos) in central Mexican marriage records is no doubt meaningful—pointing, as Proctor argues, to an interstitial ethnic category of “Angolan” that existed between more localized African ethnicities and Afro-Creole ethnicity—but it should not be understood as evidence attesting to the widespread decline of alternate ethnic monikers in New Spain.

In fact, there is evidence that Africans in Veracruz and its surrounding districts did use appellations that reflected more localized identities—both African and American—than marital records alone would suggest. The same Veracruz padrones, for instance, include 48 individuals who listed a non-Spanish surname. Though a small sample, among those 48 surnames, eleven connect to distinct African ethnic groups,

353 Proctor, “African Diasporic Ethnicity in Mexico City to 1650,” 56, 60. Other scholars who use marriage records as evidence of ethnic transformation also sometimes fail to indicate the bias of the sample toward Hispanicized individuals. Herman Bennett, for instance, draws on Mexico City marriage records to claim that “72 percent of enslaved Angolans selected Angolans as spouses” without mentioning that most enslaved Angolans did not marry at all. The sample bias weakens Proctor’s argument more than Bennett’s, however, as Proctor uses the prevalence of Angola-Angola unions to argue that more specific ethnic categories fell out of use in the New World, whereas Bennett uses such unions to claim that African ethnicities retained purchase. For Proctor’s case, a proper accounting of the sample bias would amend his argument such that specific ethnic categories fell out of use for Hispanicized individuals—who represented the minority of the enslaved. For Bennett’s case, on the other hand, recognition of the sample bias may actually strengthen his claim, such that even among Hispanicized individuals, the distinct Old World ethnic markers retained purchase. See: Bennett, Colonial Blackness, 76-85.
including four surnames from Upper Guinea, two from Lower Guinea, and five from West Central Africa. Among the West African group, eight slaves are listed as “Rayado”—an unusual ethnonym which was only used in New Spain. While the precise ethnic origin of the term is unknown, scholarly work on the Rayado (literally “lined”) indicates that the term refers to scarification practices consistent with ethnic groups in the Upper Guinea region of West Africa.354

Four slaves were listed using a geographic moniker that specifically derives from the Americas: one “Xavana” (Havana), one “Cayamba” (Cayamba, Ecuador), and two “Campechana” (Campeche). Eight slaves were also surnamed “de los Reyes”—a common marker in the Caribbean for slaves who were, at one point in their life or their lineage, owned by the Spanish crown (esclavos del rey), and two were surnamed “Portuguesa.” In many cases, slaves were identified using surnames that could be considered either “Spanish” or “American,” such as “Trujillo,” possibly corresponding to the Honduran port city, or “Trinidad” and “Santiago,” either of which could have referred to the Cuban ports of the same name, as well as merely common Spanish surnames.

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354 Regardless of their origin, “Rayado” was an exceedingly rare ethnonym. The eight “Rayados” in the 1688 census double the quantity of known instances of Rayados in Mexican colonial records. Ben Vinson III, “Rethinking the Contours of Caste in Colonial Mexico,” (Paper presented at the Conference to Honor Professor Herbert S. Klein, Rutgers University, October 28, 2011).

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Table 4.4. Non-Spanish surnames of *negros* and *mulatos* in the Tlacotalpan, Tlalixcoyan, and Medellín *padrones*, 1681-1688.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname by Region</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upper Guinea</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cacheu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de los Rios</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolofo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayado</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Guinea</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arará</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bondo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West Central Africa</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambuila</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loango</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matamba</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campechana</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayamba</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criollo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de los Reyes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguesa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bozal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabo Verde</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AGI-México, leg. 1157a, “Informes de la Contaduría General y copias y minutas de informaciones, relaciones y descripciones de diversas materias,” 1643-1828.

The *padrones* of Tlacotalpan, Tlalixcoyan, and Medellín from the 1681-1688
census of Tlaxcala offer a relatively small sample of “ethnic” names used to describe
African slaves in Veracruz’s outlying regions. In that sample, however, there is clear
evidence that ethnonyms reflecting a number of localized ethnicities in Africa continued
to describe Africans in Veracruz’s outlying areas in the second half of the seventeenth
century, unlike in the marriage records of Mexico City and elsewhere. This suggests that the choice of ethnonym in official documents may have depended on the nature of the document or on regional variations more than a conscious and general tendency to “break down” African ethnicity into broader units. As Joseph Miller has argued, with specific reference to “the words [Africans] employed when asked to identify themselves,”:

The singular discourse of ethnic labeling that reached the ears of those who wrote was calculated to tell them what they wanted to hear and to conceal who else the enslaved in fact thought they were meant to be.\footnote{Miller, “Retention, Reinvention, and Remembering,” 82-83.}

Miller spoke of adversarial cases, which we may imagine marriage applications and censuses were not. That does not change the point, however, that we have little insight into the motives that drove Africans to choose the words they did to identify themselves in marriage applications, and much less into the reasons why they chose a particular partner over another, especially as the great masses of slaves did not marry at all. The volume of evidence shows a clear pattern that partner choice usually had to do with common ethnolinguistic background. It is likely, too, that marriage choice also had to do with other factors, like occupation, owners, and neighborhoods. While we have yet to find comparable marital or baptismal records for Veracruz as exist for other Mexican cities, detailed studies of similar records for the contemporary Caribbean have shown that the selection of god parents and marriage partners among the enslaved often depended on these alternate factors in addition to ethnolinguistic group, especially on the ability of the partner or god parent to act as a linguistic intermediary.\footnote{In a study of baptisms in Havana, David Wheat revealed several cases of godparentage that crossed broad ethnolinguistic borders, suggesting that the most important factor in the choice of godparents was the...}
Although it may not seem surprising that individual Africans registered a variety of ethnonyms, this case shows that in Veracruz, Africans did not immediately shed specific ethnic markers in the decades following the slave trade. Although the people listed in the padrones are individuals, the following section investigates a case of five distinct African corporate groups that participated in officially sanctioned religious festivals in Nueva Veracruz in 1667.

African Corporate Groups in the Corpus Christi Processions of 1667

Between June 1 and June 9 of 1667, Veracruz’s public streets were filled with processions, flagellants, and revelers. During those eight days (octavario), the city’s civil cabildo organized a series of festivities to celebrate the moveable feast of Corpus Christi. Brightly colored floats and gigantes filled the streets, dance troupes performed a dance tantalizingly named the “dança do saco macaco” (dance of the monkey sack) to accompaniment of rhythmic drums, mojarilla puppets (“little demons”) taunted the crowd and were chased away by a large Tarascana dragon. In the plaza de toros to the city’s south, there were bullfights and displays of horsemanship (domas vaquera).

Although there are no narrative sources that describe the festivities, the city’s chief accountant (contador mayor), Gregorio de Villar, kept a detailed book of expenses on behalf of the royal treasury (real hacienda).357 The cabildo enlisted the local chapter of the Santa Hermandad, under the direction of its captain, Sebastian de la Pena (who was also Veracruz’s alguacil mayor) to collect taxes and dole out payments to the performers,

ability of the godparent to act as an intermediary—both between Africans and Spaniards, and among distinct groups of Africans. See: Wheat, Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 126.

carpenters, painters, porters, and street sweepers who worked on the festival. Among those listed as festival workers in the ledger were seven dance troupes who were paid for the performance of the “dance of [their] nation” (*danza de nación*). Of the seven troupes, one was identified as Portuguese, one was composed of “*negros criollos*,” and the remaining five were identified with five distinct African ethnonyms (see Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5. Dance troupes paid for Corpus Christi performances in Veracruz, 1667.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnonym</th>
<th>Probable Ethnicity</th>
<th>Region of Origin</th>
<th>Payment (pesos)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criollo</td>
<td>Afro-Creole</td>
<td>Americas (Veracruz)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Iberia (Portugal)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>West Central Africa (Angola)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matamba</td>
<td>Kongo/Ndongo</td>
<td>West Central Africa (Angola)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobolo</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Southeastern Africa (Mozambique)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bendo</td>
<td>Mende</td>
<td>Upper Guinea (Sierra Leone)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bando</td>
<td>Banda</td>
<td>Lower Guinea (Bight of Biafra)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The five African ethnonyms used here represent a regionally diverse cross-section of ethnolinguistic groups, including two from West Central Africa (Congo and Matamba), one from Upper Guinea (Bendo), one from Lower Guinea (Bando), and one, called Lobolo, that may have originated in Southeast Africa. With the exception of the “Congo” troupe, the four other dance groups identified in the ledger do not represent ethnicities that are known for being New World amalgams of Old World regions. More importantly, each group’s participation demonstrates institutional recognition of a distinct corporate identity based on the explicit performance of ethnicity.

The precise form that these performances took remains obscure. They may have included elements that derived from the African cultures that each troupe represented, whether in music, choreography, or costuming. Were we able to access a narrative
interpretation of each dance, these performances might open the door for a discussion of African religious survival or of Afro-Catholic syncretism and heterodoxy. We could perhaps read the dances as expressions of African agency, or subaltern ideologies embedded within a Catholic ritual. At the same time, however, the Corpus Christi ledger shows that—whatever the content of each performance—these dances were specifically sanctioned and even paid for by the very institutions that otherwise obstruct the historical view of folk culture. While the performances may have offered opportunity for the public display of heterodox and perhaps even subaltern expressions, they did so with significant expectation that such displays would hew closely to accepted patterns of religious performance.

In fact, while the Corpus Christi procession may have allowed some African communities to draw on their folk backgrounds, other aspects of the procession indicate that African and Afro-descendants also participated widely in the Corpus Christi festivals, not only as carpenters, painters, and tailors, but also in the performance of European folk customs. Some Africans acted as vaqueros in displays of horsemanship. Others were paid to perform in the bullfighting ring. A number of negros participated in processions featuring folk religious symbols that originated in Europe. One group of

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twelve negros were paid to carry mojarillas puppets.\footnote{On European Corpus Christi customs, see: Francis G. Very, \textit{The Spanish Corpus Christi Procession: A Literary and Folkloric Study} (Valencia: Tipografia Moderna, 1962); David D. Gilmore, “‘Tarasca’: Ritual Monster of Spain,” \textit{Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society}, vol. 152, no. 3 (Sept., 2008), 362-382.} Another group carried the Tarascana (Tarasque) dragon float, a custom that originated in the Provence region of southern France in the middle ages and later migrated to Catalonia.\footnote{Other performances for which Africans were paid included the performance of a dance curiously named the “\textit{dança do saco macaco}” or “dance of the monkey sack.” The spelling of the name in the manuscript is given in Portuguese. Although it is not terribly uncommon for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish sources to alternate between Portuguese and Spanish spellings, this does imply that it may have been a Portuguese, or perhaps West Central African folk custom.}

It is important, too, that the amount of payment varied between different groups of participants. The largest sum went to the creole troupe, which received a total of forty pesos. The payment to the Portuguese troupe was slightly less at thirty-six pesos, while the five troupes labeled with African ethnonyms were paid just one-third of that amount, twelve pesos each. The ledger does not explicitly state the precise reasoning behind this payment schedule, but we can speculate. The first assumption we could make is that the troupes were paid amounts corresponding to their social standing in Veracruzan society. In this case, we could say that the “creole” label commanded greater purchase than did corporate groups associated with African and non-Spanish European ethnonyms. This would follow a schema of social hierarchy that some historians have forwarded, wherein American-born, “latinized” individuals of African descent were considered cultural insiders to a degree that transcended certain color boundaries—that is, they held greater privilege even than white Europeans of non-Spanish origin.

Another reasonable explanation of the payment schedule is that each troupe was paid according to the number of its individual members. This interpretation is supported
by the fact that each payment was in multiples of four, suggesting that the creole troupe may have comprised ten members, the Portuguese nine, and three apiece for each African troupe. If this were in fact that case, one could interpret the sheer numerical size of the creole and Portuguese troupes as evidence of a particular hierarchy of status. In this arrangement, the size of a group is itself the marker of status: the fact that the “creole” group is largest demonstrates that belonging to the “creole” group is more desirable than belonging to one of the other groups. Once again, this leaves us with a hierarchy that first privileges creoles, followed by Portuguese and, finally, the five “African” groups.

Both of these explanations suggest a social hierarchy in which corporate groups with African ethnonyms occupy the lowest rung. Both of these explanations, however, collapse seven groups of Corpus Christi participants into three discrete social categories—creole, Portuguese, and African. Indeed, the fact that each “African” troupe was paid at the same rate encourages us to combine them into a single broader category. At the same time, however, we must consider that the “African” category is represented by not one but five distinct troupes, the total payment to which was sixty pesos. While the individual creole and Portuguese troupes may have received larger lump payment than each individual African troupe, the total “African” contingent in the Corpus Christi “danzas” would then comprise both the largest share of participants and the largest single payment. In this interpretation, even if their social standing was below that of the other two groups, Africans could be seen as the dominant single group that participated in the Corpus Christi festival.

There is reason to expect that the organized performance of ethnicity extended beyond the festivities of a single Corpus Christi event. In religious festivals in Mexico
City, Lima, and other parts of the Spanish colonial world, festival groups typically corresponded to local confraternal organizations. Although it is not stated explicitly in the ledger, we can speculate that in Veracruz too, each dance troupe—including the Portuguese and criollo groups—is likely to correspond to a broader organization with an institutional presence in the city. In fact, the seven dance troupes of the 1667 Corpus Christi festival likely corresponded to independent confraternal organizations or mutual-aid societies, similar to the cabildos de nación that existed elsewhere in Spanish American urban centers, most famously in Havana.

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361 We know this because larger cities in the Spanish American world kept “diarios de sucesos notables” or “diaries of notable events,” in which processions such as these are rendered in more detail. For instance, in Mexico City, see: Robles, Diario de Sucesos Notables; For Lima, see: José Ramón Jouve Martín, Esclavos de la ciudad letrada: Esclavitud, escritura y colonialism en Lima (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2005), 1-5.

First organized in Seville as early as the late fourteenth century, *cabildos de nación* extended out of the *Reconquista* tradition in which Catholic forces allowed Muslim and Jewish residents in a conquered city a modicum of communal self-government. As Seville became a hub of the slave trade in the fifteenth century, similar organizations were formed for Africans and Afro-descendants, as well as Portuguese and Genoese merchants who lived in the city. By the sixteenth century, such organizations served primarily as cultural touchstones for the Seville’s non-Castilian communities, allowing members to participate in public religious festivals and processions in a way that accorded to corporate conceptions of cultural distinction.\(^{363}\)

In the Americas, African *cabildos de nación* have been documented as early as 1568 and probably arrived decades earlier. Officially registered as confraternities, *cabildos de nación* were affiliated with specific religious orders and worked under the patronage of a particular saint. Black confraternities performed a number of social functions in the New World, including works of charity—usually devoted to a specific cause, such as hospitals, orphanages, or the performance of burial rites and maintenance of grave sites—and performances of piety and penitence. In some cases, confraternities also acted as institutional mediators of disputes: between slaves and masters, free-blacks and colonial authorities, or between their own members.

In Cuba and elsewhere, confraternal activities were also tinged with the conscious performance of various African cultural and religious customs. Leadership roles within the confraternity were often determined by the annual election of *cabildo* royalty,

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\(^{363}\) Ortiz, *Los cabildos*, 4-5. See also: Karen Graubart, ““So color de una cofradia,”” 46-48.
mirroring the system of elective monarchy that was common in the kingdom of Kongo (West Central Africa), in Yorubaland (Lower Guinea), and the Mali empire (Upper Guinea).\textsuperscript{364} In some confraternities, constitutional bylaws dictated that women retain leadership positions, possibly reflecting the matrilineal social structure found in many Akan societies.\textsuperscript{365} Confraternities also mediated fictive kin relationships through the selection of godparents during baptismal rites.\textsuperscript{366} The saints that confraternities selected as patrons could double as ancestral deities and spirits, like Yoruban orixás or Kongoese nkisi.\textsuperscript{367} Linda Heywood has gone so far as to suggest that West Central Africans in particular would have taken to New World confraternities as the extensions of functionally similar religious brotherhoods in West Central Africa.\textsuperscript{368}

Despite the large quantity of scholarship dedicated to cabildos de nación and Afro-American confraternities in general, there have been relatively few studies that concentrate on the period before the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{369} Nicole von Germeten’s work on black confraternities in New Spain is one of the most thorough studies of such organizations in the early colonial period. Although von Germeten acknowledges that African cofradías facilitated the collective retention of certain African customs—like matrilineality and elective monarchy—early in the colonial period, she ultimately sees

\textsuperscript{364} Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800}, 82-84.


\textsuperscript{369} In many cases, this seems to result from a lack of documentation of such groups.
them acting almost exclusively as institutions of “Hispanicization” by the middle of the seventeenth century. As she describes, in the early period, colonial authorities regarded confraternities with guarded tolerance. They extolled the benefit of encouraging Africans and their descendants to participate in Catholic rites, but remained wary of the potential for heterodoxy and political subversion. In 1608 and again in 1612, these abstract fears of subversion crystallized into allegations that two African confraternities in Mexico City had planned widespread rebellions to coincide with Holy Week festivities. Supposedly, the would-be rebels intended to overthrow the viceroy and install two of their own elected monarchs as rulers of the colony, but their plan was betrayed by Portuguese slave traders who had claimed to overhear discussions of the plot in the “Angolan language.”

The alleged plots were discovered before any actual violence took place. Dozens of African cofrades were publicly executed by hanging. Some bodies were left hanging for display for twenty-four hours, while others were decapitated and quartered. Cofrades who were not executed were jailed, and others were banished from the city. In addition to these punishments, the viceroy issued a series of new decrees restricting the rights of Africans and black confraternities colony-wide, including one order that prohibited confraternities from electing monarchs. These disastrous rebel plots and the subsequent surveillance of confraternities transformed confraternal activity, as key rituals and practices that were linked to African homelands were forbidden and suppressed. Coupled with the end of the slave trade in 1640 and the growth of the black creole population, von Germeten argues that as early as the 1650s, New Spain’s black confraternities no longer

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functioned as sites of cultural retention, as they did elsewhere in the Spanish Americas, but began to concentrate on displays of “Baroque piety,” consciously dissociating from the language of ethnic distinction in favor of displays of Catholic humility and penitence in order to publicly abnegate their shameful enslaved past.

Von Germeten makes a strong case that confraternities in many parts of New Spain did function as mediators of creolization by the middle of the seventeenth century. Even in the early seventeenth century, before the crackdown on African confraternities began in earnest, she has shown that many central Mexican confraternities had already begun to emphasize their Hispanicization rather than their African past. In fact, von Germeten was only able to identify one of confraternity in New Spain that even used an African ethnonym, much less encouraged membership along the lines of geographic or ethnolinguistic origin. Although she does not state it explicitly, von Germeten’s conclusions clearly suggest that black confraternities in New Spain were markedly different from black confraternities in the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, historians often see such groups as potent sites of African cultural survivals. In New Spain, von Germeten sees them as exactly the opposite: potent sites of creolization.

Veracruz is not absent from von Germeten’s analysis. Two of the city’s black confraternities serve as important case studies for her argument that distinctions based on skin color and caste had begun to replace distinctions based on birthplace and ethnolinguistic group by the 1650s. Both were founded by American-born criollos, one a Franciscan-affiliated confraternity called Coronación y San Benito, founded in 1636, the other a Mercedarian-affiliated mulato confraternity called Nuestra Señora de la Concepción y la Humildad y Paciencia del Christo, which may have been founded in
1659. In its constitution, the San Benito confraternity used the language of “nación” to differentiate between black creoles and African-born members, creating a leadership system that reserved most offices for “blacks of the criollo nation” (negros de nación criollo). Meanwhile, the second confraternity used the language of color to differentiate between members, stating in its constitution that voting rights would be restricted “only those who are legitimately mulattos and not of any other color.”

This would seem to imply that black confraternities in Veracruz not only valued American birth and Hispanicization over African birth, as the San Benito confraternity did, but as early as 1659 also valued the total abnegation of African ethnolinguistic identities. In other words, where a person was born and what “nation” they belonged to had ceased to be the most important questions, replaced by the questions of what color skin a person had and what color skin their parents had. This would seem to suggest that in Veracruz, like elsewhere in New Spain, black confraternities helped to mediate a transition from ethnicity to caste as the important distinction between individuals of African descent.

Estela Roselló Soberón has written a comprehensive study on the confraternity of San Benito—named for Benito de Palermo (or “Benedict the Moor), a child of African slaves born in Sicily—arguing that it helped create a sense of social cohesion among Veracruz’s mulatos, negros criollos, and negros bozales (African-born blacks), whether slave or free. Meanwhile, Antonio García de León has suggested another possible intra-group distinction that the confraternity may have made: between urban and rural blacks. He suggests that the confraternity of San Benito allowed urban blacks, of all backgrounds, to differentiate themselves from rural blacks arguing that “urban blacks despised rural slaves and mezclas (the jarochos), because they identified more with the dominant order and with the customs of Spanish creoles than with the negros and mulatos of the field.” It is possible that urban blacks who participated in confraternal activities did wish to differentiate themselves from rural slaves, but García de León provides no evidence that urban blacks “despised” rural blacks, and inexplicably compares confraternity members to “‘Uncle Toms’ or ‘good blacks’” (“’Tío Tom’ o ‘negro bueno’”). See: Estela Roselló Soberón, “La cofradía de negros: una ventana a la tercera raíz. El caso de San Benito de Palermo,” (PhD Dissertation, UNAM, 1998); Antonio García de León, Tierra adentro, mar en fuera, 573-574, 573n75.

AGN-Reales Cédulas Originales, vol. 159, exp. 34, “Aprobando las constituciones formadas por la cofradía de la Pura y Limpia Concepción de Nuestra Señora, y Humildad y Paciencia de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, sita en el convento de Nuestra Señora de la Merced de Veracruz, con las adiciones y declaraciones que se refiere,” 17 September 1794, fs. 49r-73v.
A closer look at the constitution of the mulato confraternity, however, requires the qualification of this conclusion. Two versions of the constitution exist, one in the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City, the other in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville. Neither copy is the original, and both copies date to 1792, rather than 1659. Although von Germeten acknowledges that the constitutions may have been modified in the intervening 133 years, in her analysis, she ultimately treats 1659 as the key date of incorporation. Although it is likely that the original constitution does date to the seventeenth century, the possibility of modification prior to the 1792 transcriptions of the original deserves more scrutiny. To begin, the city’s Mercedarian convent, which housed the confraternity, moved to a stone building in 1737, possibly after its original building was damaged or destroyed during a pirate raid. Although the original constitution could have survived the move, this does create a scenario in which it may have been damaged, lost, or replaced.

373 AGN-Reales Cédulas Originales, vol. 159, exp. 34, “Aprobando las constituciones formadas por la cofradía de la Pura y Limpia Concepción de Nuestra Señora, y Humildad y Paciencia de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, sita en el convento de Nuestra Señora de la Merced de Veracruz, con las adiciones y declaraciones que se refiere,” 17 September 1794, fs. 49r-73v; AGI-México, leg. 1308, “Testimonio de las constituciones de la cofradía de la Limpia Concepción y Humildad y Paciencia de Cristo Señor Nuestro, sita en el convento de mercenarios [sic] de Veracruz y demás actuaciones en su virtud practicadas, y a continuación de real cédula que ésta presentó,” 1794.

374 See: von Germeten, Black Blood Brothers, 193. After close readings of both documents I was unable to verify the date of the original document, nor was I able to locate a specific mention of the date 1659. In a separate article, Ben Vinson III cites 1659 as the date of the confraternity’s founding, citing the 1792 transcription. In an article on the confraternity reform movement of the 1790s, David Carbajal López states that the constitution “dated to the seventeenth century.” Although I have been unable to find a reference to the date 1659 within the documents themselves, I believe that the confraternity was likely founded in the seventeenth century, probably in 1659. See: Ben Vinson III, “Free Colored Voices: Issues of Representation and Racial Identity in the Colonial Mexican Militia,” The Journal of Negro History, vol. 80, no. 4 (Autumn 1985), 175-176; David Carbajal López, “La reforma de las cofradías en el siglo XVIII: Nueva España y Sevilla en comparación,” Estudios de Historia Novohispana, vol. 48 (January-June, 2013), 27-28

More importantly, the transcriptions were produced by a group of Spanish peninsular fiscales (auditors) who had been sent to New Spain with a charge of investigating the activities of confraternities and shuttering those that they deemed to be profligate, untrustworthy, or too firmly under the control of the clergy. Their task was part of the larger Bourbon reforms taking place throughout the Spanish empire at the time, with the ultimate goal of bringing confraternities under the authority of the crown. In order to avoid closure, confraternities had to fulfill a number of new provisions that restricted their public fundraising, membership, and charitable giving.\(^\text{376}\) In short, the Bourbon reforms of the late eighteenth century represented an existential threat to Veracruz’s mulato confraternity, and that context must be taken into account in any reading of the documents that the auditors’ investigation produced. If the constitution had not been altered to reflect changing social realities over the previous 133 years, then the political climate of the late eighteenth century certainly would have incentivized the confraternity to present itself and its members in a way that would meet official approval. Restricting membership along the lines of color—or, indeed, claiming an institutional lineage stretching back more than a century—is precisely the kind of modification we might expect to see if the confraternity did in fact make changes to its founding document prior to transcription.

At the same time, the participation of five distinct African corporate groups in the Corpus Christi festival in Veracruz in 1667 calls our attention the continued importance of ethnolinguistic distinctions in the Mexican city most closely linked with both the slave

trade and with other centers of African diaspora throughout the Caribbean. Von Germeten’s research revealed only one black confraternity in all of New Spain that “asserted a connection to African ethnic identity in its interaction with colonial bureaucrats”: the confraternity of Limpia Concepción in Mexico City, which claimed a connection to the Zape ethnic group of West Africa. That confraternity was disbanded in 1668—one year after the Corpus Christi festival in Veracruz—by which time it had long ceased to have a direct connection to the African ethnolinguistic group of the same name. The Corpus Christi dance troupes, however, suggest a wider formal acceptance of ethnically-based African brotherhoods and sisterhoods in Veracruz, outlasting such organizations elsewhere in New Spain.

Why did African ethnonyms persist as markers of identity in Veracruz and in the Caribbean while similar ethnonyms lost currency elsewhere in the New World? Some scholars of have suggested that the answer lies in particular in the “re-Africanization” of Spanish Caribbean territories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the “second” slave trade began with renewed force, bringing greater waves of Africans to the Spanish Caribbean than had come at any time previously. New waves of captives, the argument goes, reinvigorated otherwise dormant institutions like cabildos de nación, establishing new links to African belief systems that had elsewhere fallen by the wayside. Although this answer bears significant weight for Cuba and, to a lesser extent, Puerto

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Rico, it does not describe the littoral, where such “re-Africanization” never truly took place. Although the occasional shipments of slaves may have arrived in mainland ports like Veracruz—establishing a brief connection to Africa that did not register as heavily in the interior—for all intents and purposes, Veracruz ceased to be a home to large quantities of African-born people in the second half of the seventeenth century.

A separate answer may lie not in the Spanish Caribbean’s connection to Africa, but to its own internal coherence. Cities like Veracruz, Cartagena, Havana, and Santo Domingo were key to Spanish power in the Americas. As port cities, they did not offer the opportunities for African cultural and religious survival that existed in isolated “regions of refuge” like hinterland estates and maroon communities. Because they were hubs of an ever-changing slave trade, port cities were home to multiple regionally and ethnically diverse “cohorts” of Africans, whereas rural plantations were often overwhelmingly drawn from a single provenance zone. Meanwhile, the same port cities still had relatively large populations of Africans and Afro-descendants, particularly in terms of their proportion to Spanish and indigenous populations. While Hispanicization was the preferred strategy for dealing with African communities in most imperial centers, local officials in Veracruz and other ports that relied heavily on African labor may well have seen value in preserving a sense of ethnic distinctions within African communities. In a context where white residents were outnumbered by black residents by as much as five to one, the maintenance of more granular distinctions between groups may have helped Spanish officials allay fears of a unified slave uprisings or political subversion. In this sense, African ethnic identities could remain prevalent as a function of their diversity, as the presence of an ethnic “other” reinforced claims of distinction. Cutting against the
standard logic of both the “creolization” and “survivalist” schools of African diaspora, this suggests that the preservation of identifiably “African” ethnic markers did not rely on ethnic homogeneity, and that ethnic diversity did not always portend rapid assimilation into New World categories of race and caste.

Across the Spanish Americas, lay brotherhoods acted as refuges of communal self-fashioning, where Africans and their descendants could participate in both in the creation of intra-group distinctions—based on place of birth, ethnicity, color, or occupation—and in the public performance of corporate identity. In many communities in New Spain, confraternities facilitated the Hispanicization of black communities, embracing distinctions along lines of color, and rejecting distinctions along ethnic lines as early as the middle of the seventeenth century. In Veracruz, the participation of the Congo, Matamba, Lobolo, Bendo, and Banda dance troupes in the Corpus Christi festival of 1667 reveals a different pattern. Although it is not possible to say whether or not the troupes in question exclusively included members of the particular ethnolinguistic group, displays of African ethnicity were alive and well in Veracruz decades after they subsided elsewhere in New Spain. Moreover, such displays corresponded with the similar activities of *cabildos de nación* in Havana, Santo Domingo, and Cartagena, where claims African ethnic identity retained social capital long after the decline of the transatlantic slave trade. The Corpus Christi dance groups thus offer evidence that Veracruz’s integration into the spatial world of the Caribbean materially affected the way in which its African residents chose and applied ethnic markers in the second half of the seventeenth century.
Heterodoxy and Social Control in a Religious Borderland

Although Veracruz was small relative to the cities of New Spain’s interior, as a port city, its population was racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse. In addition to the large number of African and Afro-descended residents, the city was home to merchants and sailors of Portuguese, Genoese, Dutch, and English origin, as well as Spanish and Portuguese conversos (as Jewish converts to Catholicism were known) and itinerant gypsies. The national diversity of the city’s residents itself pushed boundaries of calidad and caste. Though not African, indigenous, or casta, Europeans of non-Spanish origin did not fit into the category of españoles. Non-Spanish Europeans in the Spanish Americas—particularly those of Catholic faith—were tolerated but closely watched and were often regarded with more scrutiny than Indians or black creoles. Like Amerindians and black creoles, non-Spanish Europeans could achieve the status of cultural insider or “citizenship” (vecindad) if they were “willing to integrate themselves into the community and take on both the rights and duties of membership.” By contrast, those who chose to remain embedded within non-Spanish communities remained cultural outsiders.

In the ports where such communities were most common, non-Spanish Europeans moved in social networks of co-nationals, often defined more by language than place of origin. Non-Spanish Europeans brought to the city a diversity of religious beliefs and practices that fell outside of the bounds of Spanish Catholic orthodoxy. In some cases, these included regionally distinct folk traditions that received at least tacit official approval and were even incorporated into Catholic festivals and religious processions.

379 See: Tamar Herzog, Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1. Herzog argues, however, that Africans and those of African descent underwent greater scrutiny than did Indians, mestizos, or non-Spanish Europeans before they could be considered “citizens.” See: Herzog, Defining Nations, 159-164.
such as the Portuguese dance troupe or the Tarasque dragon float that were part of the Corpus Christi festival.

At other times, European heterodoxies were treated with more suspicion and caution—tolerated, but policed and surveilled. For instance, the Inquisition did not automatically prosecute English sailors who passed through the city as “Lutherans” (as most Protestants were called in the early modern Spanish world) if they did not discuss or display their disagreements with the Catholic Church while in Spanish jurisdiction. Instead, local authorities kept a close watch on Protestant passersby for signs of transgression and maintained an active policy of promoting “reconciliation” with the Catholic Church, even offering religious services in the English language. Converso communities, in particular, remained under constant surveillance and, unlike English Protestants, who were allowed to disembark in Veracruz, sailors and travelers who were suspected of being Jewish were denied entry to Spanish jurisdiction.

In part because of the city’s diverse religious milieu, from the formal inception of the Inquisition’s tribunal in Mexico City in 1571, its mission in Veracruz was distinct from its operations elsewhere in New Spain. While inquisitorial authorities in Veracruz investigated allegations of blasphemy, witchcraft, and bigamy as they did elsewhere, their duties also included monitoring the contents of incoming vessels in the port of San Juan de Ulúa. Inquisitors in the port inventoried the books and passenger lists of incoming vessels in search of heretical literature and foreign and unlicensed travelers. Just as

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380 While the jurisdiction of the Mexican Inquisition ostensibly extended to the audiencia of Santo Domingo, including Spain’s holdings in the Caribbean, inquisitors carried out only a handful of investigations of cases that originated in the islands themselves. See: Greenleaf, The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century.

royal treasury officials guarded the colony’s coasts against the infiltration of illicit commerce, so did inquisitors guard New Spain from the infiltration of what they deemed to be anti-Catholic religious ideology.

The Inquisition’s emphasis on a kind of religious border control in Veracruz demonstrates not only its interests in maintaining orthodoxy in the city itself, but also the Inquisition’s understanding of Veracruz’s role within the broader circuit of information distribution. Veracruz was a bottleneck where heretics and heretical texts could be stopped before they had a chance to permeate colonial society, and inquisitors devised their mission in Veracruz accordingly. This understanding did not always translate to efficient practices. In his monograph on book censorship, Martin Nesvig argues that he inquisitors in Veracruz—mostly Franciscans in the early seventeenth century—were often remiss in their duties. He attributes this fact to the poor climate, suggesting that the Franciscan *comisarios* did not actually live in the port, on account of its poor health, and so could not fulfill their duties. A more likely reason might be the prevalence of contraband trading, but either way, it demonstrates that inquisitors in Veracruz did in fact have to adjust their expectations and practices due to the port’s idiosyncracy, and that such adjustments may have resulted in a more permissive environment.

Though investigations of incoming cargo subsided after the first few decades of the seventeenth century, Veracruz remained a focal point in fight against transgression. As Richard Boyer has shown in his work on bigamy, inquisitors throughout New Spain continued to understand Veracruz as a key source of information. According to Boyer, when accused bigamists attempted to exculpate themselves by claiming that they had remarried only because they believed that their original spouse had died somewhere
overseas, inquisitors frequently responded by asking whether or not the accused had traveled to Veracruz, where arriving sailors might be able to bring news of the original spouse’s well-being. In some cases, the severity of a punishment for bigamy hinged on whether or not the accused had traveled to Veracruz, in an attempt to tap transatlantic and circum-Caribbean information networks.\footnote{Boyer, Lives of the Bigamists, 31-54.}

Veracruz was a hub of information, much of which was of interest to inquisitors—whether for its heretical content or because of its exculpatory nature. It was also a hub of trade, and although protectionist mandates ostensibly prohibited Veracruz from interacting directly with ports and merchants outside of the Spanish empire, the pervasiveness of contraband, the exchange of trading licenses between merchants of different nationalities, and the high demand for goods made the goal of exclusion impossible to achieve.

Some foreign sailors, merchants, and travelers attracted more attention than others, and those from the English-speaking world attracted the most attention of all. While Portuguese, Genoese, and French merchants at least hailed from territories that were officially Catholic, English merchants did not. There are few, if any, sources attesting to the number of English merchants, sailors, and travelers in Veracruz at any given time. They were prevalent enough, however, that in 1663, the Inquisition appointed an Irish Catholic priest named Guillermo Cancino to a post in Veracruz specifically to minister to English and Irish nationalists who were not Catholic.\footnote{AGN-Inquisición, vol. 598, exp. 2, “Consulta que hace el Dr. don Guillermo de León, clerigo presbitero de nación Irlandes, desde la ciudad y Puerto de la Nueva Veracruz para que se de facultad por este tribunal al comisario o al licendado don Guillermo Cancino, presbitero Irlandes residente en esta ciudad, para que pueda reconciliar a los Irlandeses e Ingleses herejes que aportan a dicho Puerto, que convertidos quisieren reducirse a nuestra santa fe Católica,” 1663, fs. 25r-60v.} Cancino was not the
first nor was he the only Irish or English Catholic priest to operate in New Spain, but he was the only one specifically appointed by the Inquisition to minister explicitly to other English-speaking people.\(^{384}\)

It is unclear how effective the strategy of promoting reconciliation was, but it demonstrates that New Spain’s inquisitors certainly grasped the reality that total control of heterodoxy was impossible in the port of Veracruz, too great was the city’s reliance on corridors of exchange frequented and often facilitated by non-Spanish and non-Catholic individuals. This same reliance on the nationally and religiously diverse networks of the Caribbean provided cover for Spanish subjects of different backgrounds and caste categories to move with relative freedom between Caribbean ports, to form diverse networks of associates and to express heterodox ideologies that built on understandings of the multiethnic space of the Caribbean. In the following section, I examine a case of false testimony in which the deponent, a free-black woman named Ana María Vazquez, devised a tale that built on an intricate knowledge of Caribbean ports and their multiethnic milieu.

**The False Testimony and True Identity of Ana María Vazquez and Her “Conspirators”**

In the late winter of 1655, a free-black woman (*morena*) named Ana María Vazquez traveled from Havana to Veracruz, where she took up residence in the house of a woman called Doña Lucía, alias “La Prieta.” Born in Santiago de Guatemala around

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\(^{384}\) The Holy Office in Mexico City also dispatched Irish priests to Manilla in the 1760s to minister to English-speaking sailors and merchants there, but the appointment of Guillermo Cancino in Veracruz is the only example in New Spain of a Catholic priest whose mission was to induce the reconciliation and conversion of Protestant Europeans. Similarly, there were other instances in which English, French, and other non-Spanish Protestants in New Spain were reconciled to the Catholic Church, sometimes with the guidance of a priest who understood their native tongue, but records of these reconciliations emphasize the individual convert, whereas the records pertaining to Guillermo Cancino emphasize his priestly mission.
1635, it is not clear how long Ana María had been in Havana prior to her journey to New Spain. Her host in Veracruz, Doña Lucía, was also not a native of New Spain, having arrived in Veracruz from Cartagena several years before. There was a third resident of Doña Lucía’s house who was a native of Veracruz: one Adriana Ruiz de Cabrera, a free-black woman and a “vecina” of Veracruz.385

Within a few months of Ana María’s arrival from Havana, a robbery took place in Doña Lucía’s house. According to testimony, Adriana Ruiz returned one afternoon in April to find her room ransacked and “all of her clothes were stolen, as well as some silverware, jewels, and pearls.” In the days that followed the robbery, Adriana Ruiz was despondent and sought solace in Ana María’s companionship. Distressed at seeing Adriana Ruiz so unhappy, Ana María suggested that they should procure the services of women who were powerful in the occult and might be able to use their powers to identify and possibly punish the perpetrators.

The following week, on Thursday afternoon, the two women went together to the house of a Spanish woman named Angela María, a Canary islander also known as “La Isleña,” who had a reputation as a diviner and healer. There, they met with Angela María and her two apprentices, both of whom were free-black women and natives of Veracruz: one a negra criolla named Agustina Cevallos, alias “La Cumba” or “The Curved,” the other a mulata woman named Juana Jalapa. Adriana Ruiz described the circumstances of the robbery and also indicated that she suspected that the culprit was one of three men, all of whom were sailors lately arrived from Cartagena. Agreeing to work free of charge in exchange for a promise of secrecy, the three diviners devised a ceremony that would identify which of the three sailors was the guilty party.

The next day around noon, Ana María looked on as Angela María took a sheet of paper and cut it into a circle, drawling lines, numbers, and stars across the paper “in the fashion of a birth card” (carta de nacido). She labeled the lines with the names of “some rivers” and wrote the name of each suspect on the paper as well. Meanwhile, Angela María sent an enslaved girl named Juliana to the shore to fetch a jar of seawater. When Juliana returned, Adriana poured the water in a white basin and placed the basin in the middle of the floor of the highest room in the house. The five women sat in a circle around the basin of seawater as Agustina began rubbing the sides of the basin with green herbs, gradually clouding the water. After a time, Angela María placed the circle of paper on top of the basin and covered both with a white linen cloth. Angela María then sat Adriana in front of the bowl in a tall chair and asked her if she had removed all of her relics. Answering yes, the women began to ask the same series of questions in turns until their incantation began to produce the desired result.
In turn, the visage of each of the accused sailors appeared above the water. The visage, the deponent claimed, was not just a hallucination, but each of the individual men projected in corporeal form, though “not larger than a finger.” The first to appear was a captain named Juan López. Angela María asked Adriana if he was the man who had robbed her, but Adriana said that he was not. The next suspect to appear was a man called “Espichueta,” whose real name was Juan Çapata, son of the recently-deceased Jerónimo Garcés de Marcilla, the conde de Priego, who had been an important Spanish official in Cartagena. This man Adriana recognized as one of the men who had robbed her, and the paper wheel revealed him to be traveling along one of the rivers that Angela María had drawn on it. The final suspect to appear was a man whose only name was given as Manuel. Adriana declared that he was also responsible for her theft. Once they had settled on the suspects, they turned their efforts to conjuring an appropriate punishment in the form of a curse that they could affix from afar.

The ceremony that the women had devised combined elements of divination that are recognizable both in European and African epistemologies. Ana María Vazquez’s description of the circle of paper, for instance, highlights astrological and numerological elements that, in her own words, were similar to those of a “birth card” or zodiac wheel. As described, the paper also bears a resemblance to an instrument of divination called the “Wheel of Beda” or “Petosiris Circle” that was in common use throughout Western Europe in the late medieval and early modern period.386 Both of these potential origins of

386 The wheel was also known as the “Sphere of Apuleius” or the “Sphere of Democritus.” Although its precise provenance is unclear—early accounts of it claim that the device originated in either Greek or Egyptian antiquity, though these claims are spurious—by the late Middle Ages, the wheel was in wide usage across Western Europe. Its primary use was as a tool for predicting whether or not an illness would be fatal, and hence it has been termed the “Sphere of Life and Death” in later scholarship. According to the literary scholar Roy Michael Liuzza, the wheel was “undoubtedly a learned device, found only in Latin and
the paper wheel have their root in European belief systems. Meanwhile, the basin of seawater and herbs bears an almost precise similarity to a form of water divination that Jim Sweet has documented being used among Mina (Carabalí) slaves in seventeenth-century Maranhão, Brazil.  

On its face, the divination ceremony appears to be a textbook case of the New World syncretism of two Old World epistemologies. Much of the testimony on which it was based, however, would later be ruled false. After spending several months imprisoned in Veracruz and Mexico City, the accused witches—Agustina Cevallos, Juana Gutierrez (alias Juana Jalapa), and Angela María de Guzman—were released and absolved of the accusation of witchcraft. They had never fled to Cartagena, as Ana María alleged. The Inquisition determined that Ana María had been motivated to make the charges against the other women out of envy, and she was sentenced to receive two hundred lashes in the public square. The two men she claimed had been implicated during the divination ceremony, Juan Çapata and Manuel, were found and questioned in Xalapa and absolved of any crime. Instead, a vizcaíno named Lorenzo, who worked in the house of Veracruz’s contador, testified that he had witnessed the theft in question and that it had been carried out by a black boy (negrito) who was later stopped on the road.  

The resolution of the case leaves in doubt not only Ana María’s allegations about the supposed divination ritual, but also her other claims, those incidental to the divination

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itself. Did she really arrive in Veracruz from Havana? Was she really born in Guatemala? What does it mean that she claimed that the other women had fled to Cartagena, when all available evidence suggests that they had in fact remained in Veracruz, where they were imprisoned later in the same year?

If nothing else, Ana María’s testimony demonstrates not only an awareness of the Caribbean world in which she lived, but her belief that her description of such a world would appeal to a tribunal that was involved in the policing the circulation of religious ideas and practices. In inventing an elaborate tale of divination, witchcraft, and thievery, she repeatedly drew on a detailed knowledge of Caribbean port cities, emphasizing in particular the connection between Cartagena and Veracruz. Many of the details she drew on were based in fact. Juan Capata, the second of the three suspects, for instance, was the son of the conde de Priego, and, as Ana María stated in her testimony, he had traveled to Veracruz following his father’s death in Cartagena the previous year.388 Perhaps Ana María hoped that if she embedded her story with a kernel of truth, she could convince the inquisitors of her worldliness and her connection to Caribbean networks of information. By demonstrating her knowledge of events in Cartagena and possibly Havana, Ana María sought legitimacy.

More interestingly, although Ana María’s testimony in this case was ruled false, the case that her testimony generated was not the last time that some of the accused women would face the Inquisition. More than three decades after the 1655 affair, the same Angela María, “La Isleña”—the Spanish woman and supposed mastermind of the

388 AHN-Sección Nobleza, Archivo de los Condes de Priego, c. 6, d. 83, “Autos para el nombramiento de Margarita Zapata, Condesa viuda de Prieto, como tutora de sus hijos Pedro, Juan, y María Sidonia García Carillo de Mendoza, según de dispuso en el testament de Jerónimo García de Marcilla, XII Conde de Priego, marido y padre de los anteriores,” 4 March 1654.
divination ceremony—was again accused of superstition and divination. Although few
details of the second case survive in inquisitorial records in Mexico, the case reiterates
the ways in which Veracruz’s connection to Caribbean circuits may have influenced the
beliefs and actions of its residents. In this second instance, which was investigated in
1690, inquisitors referred to the old case and suggested that Angela María may have
indeed been an active practitioner of divination and other forms of magic after all.
Tellingly, though she was still identified as a “vecina” of Veracruz, the 1690 case
stemmed from crimes she had allegedly committed in Cartagena, where inquisitors took
her testimony and relayed it back to officials in New Spain. In their report, inquisitors
mentioned and a second woman in conjunction with Angela María’s case: a *morena libre*,
identified also as a *vecina* of Nueva Veracruz, whose only given name was Adriana.³⁸⁹

Ana María’s allegations portrayed Veracruz as a spiritual borderland, where
Spanish women and women of African descent moved freely between Caribbean islands
and the American littoral, often relying on predominantly female networks for shelter and
support; where European and African ideas about divination, spirituality, and prophecy
existed side-by-side; where transient sailors robbed, and their victims sought revenge on
their own terms; where diviners and witches fled viceregal authority, turning the port
cities of the Spanish Caribbean into their own maritime frontier. In a literal sense, the
“borderland” is a space where one jurisdiction ends and another begins, where the
structure of power shifts from one spatial arrangement to another. For Ana María and the
women she accused, the Caribbean world was a place where bordering power structures

³⁸⁹ AGN-Inquisición, vol. 435, exp. 3, “Testificación contra Angela María, alias La Islena, vecina de la
Nueva Ciudad de la Veracruz, penitenciada por la Inquisición de Cartagena, por hechicera, sospechas de
que lo era, o rumor que todavía lo era,” 1690, fs. 2r.
could be negotiated and manipulated. They moved through that world with a degree of freedom, regardless of the constraints of color, caste, and gender. In Veracruz, a free-black woman from Guatemala and Havana elicited the support of a Spanish diviner from Cartagena, aided by free-black women from Veracruz. Whether and to what degree their divination was “authentically” European or African, whether these women themselves believed their practices to be “European” or “African,” their lived experience demonstrates that they occupied a religious and social space located in the Caribbean—not in the audiencias of New Spain, Santo Domingo, or New Granada, but in a Caribbean world that connected politically and geographically distinct entities.

Conclusion

Responding in part to an earlier literature that argued that Africans in Mexico quickly “blended” into racially mixed communities, recent studies of Afro-Mexican history have focused on the ways in which Mexican people of African descent retained a distinct corporate identity in the colonial period. Arguing that Afro-Mexicans did not mix into relatively undifferentiated groups of “castas” or “afromestizos,” these studies have charted the crystallization of Afro-Mexican racial consciousness in the seventeenth century and its persistence to the end of the colonial period. Notably, some historians have also read the emergence of a discrete Afro-Mexican racial group as a sign of the dissipation of African ethnic signifiers as modes of distinction. In marital unions, in confraternities, and in other forms of public and religious life, these historians have argued that some Afro-Mexican communities had begun to shed African ethnonyms and coalesce around colonial identities as Afro-Creoles even before the end of the large-scale
slave trade in 1640, and that they did so more even more rapidly in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Even as many of these studies have acknowledged that the acculturative process through which Africans became Afro-Mexicans varied by region, a clear consensus has emerged as to the dominant trajectory. In some cases, the words “regional variation” only seem to be mentioned so that they can be ignored. When scholars do look more closely at the regional, they frequently attribute differences to local demographic factors extending from proximity to the slave trade. These factors are by no means unimportant—I have argued elsewhere that they are—but they also come with a built-in expiration date, suggesting that, given the right amount of time, the dominant process of acculturation will again prevail. In this sense, when we speak of “regional variation” we are sometimes actually talking about chronological variation: different spaces existing simultaneously at different stages of the same acculturative process.

Although the regular slave trade stopped in 1640, Veracruz did not stop being a part of the Caribbean and Atlantic worlds. Africans in Veracruz and its outlying districts continued to use specific ethnic markers—both in an individual and in a collective sense—even as such terms fell out of use elsewhere in New Spain. In the Corpus Christi procession of 1667, African corporate groups resembling Caribbean cabildos de nación performed dances that were identified by five distinct African ethnonyms as part of an officially sanctioned display of ethnicity that drew on specific African regions of origin. Meanwhile, Veracruz’s integration into international commercial and political networks made it a religious borderland, where free-black and Spanish women used their mobility and their access to information to navigate overlapping systems of power and define
transgressive or heterodox identities that built on the Caribbean’s multiethnic and multinational milieu.

None of this is to say that approaching histories of social and cultural change from the colony-wide perspective of “New Spain” is not sometimes useful and often appropriate. Clearly, the centripetal force of the viceregal capital was a powerful influence in creating common institutions and systems through which people across the colony could mediate various aspects of identity and navigate its vagaries. The case of the Inquisition is instructive on this point. Although the Inquisition’s jurisdiction ostensibly extended into the Caribbean, its investigatory and prosecutorial powers almost always functionally stopped at the Gulf coast. When Adriana Ruiz was arrested on a charge of witchcraft in Veracruz, she was clapped in irons and brought to the secret cells of the Inquisition in Mexico City. Her story may have taken advantage of Veracruz’s integration into the Caribbean, but the ultimate decision-making power rested in New Spain’s capital.

At the same time, the application of countervailing regional perspectives can allow us to see patterns in archival cases that the perspective of New Spain alone would not. In the seventeenth century, we do not always have a record of the self-conscious application of regional identities that are distinct from condition of archives that has forced historians to sometimes work backwards from later periods, or laterally, by suggesting that identity markers in one space may have translated to another within a similar administrative unit. As we have seen, however, we can place seventeenth-century Veracruz firmly into the regional system of the Caribbean, which challenges us to read that system into processes of social and cultural change that occurred in the city and to
show how it affected the way in which its residents defined their relationships to the colonial state.
Chapter Five

Imperial Competition and the Free-Black Militia in the Spanish Caribbean

At three in the afternoon on May 17, 1683, soldiers at the island fortress of San Juan de Ulúa, opposite the port city of Veracruz, observed two vessels approaching the Veracruz harbor. Lacking a disposable patrol ship (barco de vigía) and noticing nothing extraordinary about the vessels’ approach, the observers declared “in common voice” that they must be a scheduled arrival from Caracas. Sentries were dispatched to set lighthouse fires to help guide the ships’ entry to the port, but by five o’clock, they determined that it was too late in the day for the ships to dock and unworriedly resolved to await their arrival the following morning.\footnote{Quotations are from: Fray Juan de Ávila, Relación verdadera del saco y suceso que hizo la armada y junta de piratas en la ciudad de la Nueva Veracruz (Mexico City: Alcancia, 1937). See also: AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 243, r. 4, 4 fs., “Oficiales de Veracruz: entrada de los enemigos en la ciudad,” 1683; Ilyas Mawsili, Caesar E. Farah, ed. and trans., An Arab’s Journey to Colonial Spanish America: The Travels of Elias al-Mûsili in the Seventeenth Century (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 83-85; Juan Juárez Moreno, Corsarios y piratas en Veracruz y Campeche (Seville: EEHA-CSIC, 1972), 116-240; Clarence Henry Haring, The Bucaneers in the West Indies in the XVII Century, 2nd ed., (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1966), 240-44; David Marley, Sack of Veracruz: The Great Pirate Raid of 1683 (Windsor, Ontario: Netherlandic Press, 1993); Ben Vinson III, Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 29-31.}

As the “weight of the night” began to wash over the city, the two ships docked at the river of Bergara, a little more than one league south of the city, where they were awaited by six other vessels. There, under the command of three notorious pirate captains—the Dutch Laurens de Graaf (Lorencillo), English Nicholas van Hoorn (Nicolás Briñón), and French Michel de Grandmont (Miguel de Grammont)—the eight vessels disembarked between eight hundred and one thousand armed men. The motley band, which “consisted of armed mulattoes, mestizos, Campechano Indians, Spaniards,
Englishmen, Frenchmen, and some Biscaynes,” approached the city, staying hidden in-between the large sand dunes that surrounded it on all sides. With the help of a “mulato” guide “who had been in Veracruz and knew [its layout and defenses],” the invading corsairs encircled the city and, shortly after midnight, launched a simultaneous attack on its northern and southern bulwarks. Many of the soldiers on watch had fallen asleep, making the assault quick and silent. After securing the city’s principal mainland defenses, the pirates advanced to the main plaza, taking the city’s governor and as many as six thousand of its residents as hostages.

A fleet of Spanish warships of the armada de barlovento (windward fleet) was within sight of the port as the attack unfolded, but it was either unable or unwilling to come to the aid of the city. Lacking maritime assistance, a call for reinforcements was sent into the interior. Riders hastily dispatched to the camino real brought word of the attack to the nearby cities and towns of the interior, summoning troops from Atrisco, Cholula, Xalapa, Orizaba, Oaxaca, Querétaro, Puebla, and from Mexico City itself.

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391 In some versions, the mulato guide is described as a slave. See: Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Mexico: Volume III, 1600-1803* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft & Co., 1883), 195-200. The identity of the mulato guide remains unknown, however, in 1687 the British Jamaican Governor Hender Molesworth claimed to have apprehended the guide and offered him to the Spanish in exchange for English prisoners being held at San Juan de Ulúa. See: CSP Colonial, America and West Indies, vol. 12, 1685-1688, no. 13, pp. 657-660. “Sailing orders from [Lieutenant Governor Molesworth to Captain Spragg, H.M.S. ‘Drake,’]” 23 March 1687.

392 Accounts vary considerably both on the size of the corsair force and on the number of hostages. The landed pirate force was between six hundred and one thousand men, though several accounts estimate it at eight hundred, while the number of hostages ranges between four and six thousand. See: Ávila, *Relación verdadera*, 30-35

393 The Syrian Christian traveler Elias al-Mûsili, who happened to be in Veracruz at the time of the attack, speculated that the Spanish fleet failed to engage the pirates because the armada was laden with goods and its admiral, Diego Fernández de Zaldivar, was unwilling to risk the sinking or capture of a ship in an engagement with the pirate vessels. See: Mawsili and Farah, *An Arab’s Journey*, 84; AGI-Manuscritos, 80, “Tabla cronologica de los Generales que fueron a yndias con flotas y galeones, y de los geñes que fueron a comisiones particulares, desde su descubrimiento,” 1787, f. 104r.

394 Juárez Moreno, *Corsarios*, 220.
When the riders arrived in Puebla, they described a vivid scene of rape and murder. According to one account, “all the city people grew agitated” and the administrators in the city’s palace “quickly unfurled the standard of blood, which had never come out before” as “proclamations were issued that all the Spaniards there were should outfit themselves for war.” Over the next two days, the Spaniards were joined by the city’s free-black and -mulatto militias, both of which, according to our source, “raised [banners] for the first time.”395

Despite the “prompt” and “diligent” response of the Puebla militias, “the short duration [of the siege] and the considerable distance and rocky terrain [that separates] the port” from interior had made a timely counterstrike impossible.396 On May 22—four days after the initial report about the attack had arrived in Puebla and before any soldiers were able to begin their march to Veracruz—a second report arrived, informing the city’s residents that the pirates had retreated with their hostages to the uninhabited island of Sacrificios, insulated from landward counterattack, where they awaited receipt of ransom. Ransom arrived on May 24 and, one week after the attack began, the pirates boarded their ships and retreated, unpursued, to Petit-Goâve in French Saint-Domingue.

The raid was one of the most damaging of the period. In all, the pirates made off with more than six million reales in stolen goods—more than twice the annual revenue of city’s royal treasury. The pirates looted 1.5 million reales in specie, an equal value of


396 AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 243, r. 3, “Peligro de Nueva España por la invasión de Veracruz,” 18 August 1683, f. 1v. “El Conde de Paredes, marques de la Laguna, vuestro Virrey estubo tan prompta en las assistencias auxiliares de gente, y armas, municiones, viveres, y demas circunstancias que pedia el casso; que su diligencia ocurrencia excedio la posibilidad, aunque no pudo servir el apresto por la cortedad del tiempo y la considerable y fragosa distancia que ay de aquel puerto a estos lugares.”
“jewels, pearls, silverware, and silver reliquary,” one million in “grain, olive oil, and wine,” and one million in textiles and other stores to go along with the 1.2 million in ransom that the city had paid in exchange for hostages.\textsuperscript{397}

The human toll was even more astounding. Four hundred men and women were dead of various causes, including a number of hostages who died of starvation while awaiting ransom on the barren island of Sacrificios. The freebooters also kidnapped many of the slaves and other black residents who resided in the city to sell in other ports. Ávila’s report claimed “two thousand slaves were taken or killed.”\textsuperscript{398} Without offering a specific number, another report from Puebla stated that the pirates “took all of the slaves of the city of both sexes and all ages.”\textsuperscript{399} Using the British intelligence reports from the Calendar of State Papers (CSP), the historian C.H. Haring has suggested that one thousand slaves had been kidnapped.\textsuperscript{400} The fate of the black captives is largely unknown. According to one account, ninety of the captives were purchased in Coatzocoalcos one month later for sixty thousand pesos.\textsuperscript{401} In August 1683, the \textit{armada de barlovento} captured a vessel called the \textit{Nuestra Señora de Regla} off the coast of Havana, claiming that it was “one of those with which the pirates invaded Veracruz”

\textsuperscript{397} The ransom money is the only amount reported in pesos, not reales, and is given as 150,000 pesos. For the sake of simplicity, I have converted the units using the standard measure of one pesos for eight reales. On the annual revenue of the real caja, see: John J. TePaske and Herbert Klein, \textit{Ingresos y egresos de la Real Hacienda de Nueva España}, (Mexico City: INAH, 1986). Between January 1680 and June 1682—the last tax cycle before the attack—the treasury took in 2.4 million reales.

\textsuperscript{398} Ávila, \textit{Relación verdadera}, 65-67.

\textsuperscript{399} AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 243, r. 3, “Peligro de Nueva España por la invasión de Veracruz,” 18 August 1683, f. 1r-1v.

\textsuperscript{400} H.H. Bancroft estimated the number at 1,300. See: Haring, 243; Bancroft, \textit{History of Mexico: Volume III, 1600-1803}, 199.

\textsuperscript{401} Robles, \textit{Diario de Sucesos Notables}, 380-383

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three months earlier. Among the goods the *armada* seized was an unspecified number of slaves, who were brought to Veracruz and resold.402

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Veracruz’s similarity to the ports of the Caribbean manifested itself in environment, trade, and slavery and African diaspora. That similarity manifested also in the city’s military-strategic role within the Spanish empire. Veracruz’s defensive infrastructure bears an obvious similarity to the ports of the Spanish Caribbean. This was true within decades of the city’s founding, long before foreign pirates and freebooters became a routine part of the lives of Veracruz’s residents. The same military engineers who designed the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa in the sixteenth century—Bautista Antonelli and Cristóbal de Eraso—also designed the primary fortifications of Santo Domingo, Havana, Cartagena, Portobelo, Campeche, and San Juan de Puerto Rico.403

The very same royally owned slaves (*esclavos del rey*) who laid the stone for the San Juan de Ulúa also worked in the construction of the castle of El Morro in Havana.404

Soldiers garrisoned at one Caribbean fortress could be moved to another to respond to

402 AGN-Indiferente Virreinal, Marina, caja 2748, exp. 4, 9 August 1683, fs. 7r-8r.


404 AGI-Santo Domingo, leg. 2280, l. 3, “Real Cédula de D. Felipe al Gobernador y Oficiales de su Real Hacienda de la Isla de San Juan de Puerto Rico, avisándoles de como se ha ordenado a Pedro Gómez Reinel que envie doscientos esclavos a la Isla de San Juan de Puerto Rico para trabajar en las Fortificaciones que en dicha Isla se han de hacer, y les ordena que en llegando los reconozcan y concierten el precio de la paga de cada uno,” 7 September 1596, fs. 218r-218v; AGI-Indiferente, leg. 541, l. 1, “Real Cédula a los oficiales reales de la Española, San Juan de Puerto rico, Cuba, Cartagena y Tierra Firme, para que de los esclavos que perteneciesen a S.M. en esa Tierras den 150 al maestre de Campo, Juan de Tejeda, para las fortificaciones,” 15 January 1589, fs. 72r-72v.
Beginning in 1636, the fortified flotilla known as the *armada de barlovento* roamed the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, defending Spanish merchant vessels from piratical attack and seeking out contraband traders. Not only was the armada based in Veracruz, but whenever they succeeded in apprehending an enemy vessel—whether trading illegally in Havana or roving furtively off the coast of Venezuela—the vessel would be impressed (*apresa*) and sailed back to Veracruz, where its goods would be offloaded and its captain and crew imprisoned, or put to work doing hard labor on port facilities.

The role of defense, military, and war-making in shaping Veracruz was never more profound than in the second half the seventeenth century. From the 1630s onwards, Spain faced increasing competition from its European enemies for supremacy in the Caribbean. It lost ground both literally in the territories of Jamaica, Hispaniola, and parts of Central America, and figuratively in terms of trade and production in its colonial realms. These developments forced Spanish American ports to adopt a stouter defensive posture, which required an adjustment of Spain’s earlier military priorities. Prior to the middle of the seventeenth century, Spain’s imperial focus had been largely dedicated (in New Spain at the least) to northward expansion (see Figure 5.1). At the same time, Spain confronted the problem of manpower, as its Caribbean territories were its least populated.

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405 AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Bando para levantar una compañía de infantería para llenar las plazas de los galeones,” 15 February 1639, fs. 290r-291v.


Those people who did populate the islands and American littoral were very often slaves and free people of color, who occupied an ambiguous position vis-a-vis the colonial state—often feared and suspected of rebellion, but occasionally required to supplement meager defenses or to provide essential work building and maintaining fortifications.

Figure 5.1. Defense expenditures in New Spain by category, 1575-1647.\textsuperscript{408}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{defense_expenditures.png}
\caption{Defense expenditures in New Spain by category, 1575-1647.\textsuperscript{408}}
\end{figure}


By the time of the 1683 sack of Veracruz, the need for new solutions to the Caribbean’s defensive problem was becoming more and more evident. The creation of the \textit{armada de barlovento} in 1636 had been intended to secure the trunk lines that connected the Americas to Spain and Spain to American silver. Nearly half a century

\textsuperscript{408} The percentage of expenditure going to the \textit{armada de barlovento} is extraordinary considering that it only began in earnest in 1636.
later, it was clear that securing trade routes on the open seas was not enough. Tellingly, the *armada de barlovento* had been unable to respond during the sack of Veracruz, even though it was within sight of the city. In order to secure the Caribbean ports that were as essential to colonial systems of commerce and communication as maritime supply lines, Spanish administrators in the second half of the seventeenth century sought the military-defensive realignment of the Caribbean. In this chapter, I investigate that realignment, arguing that it had a profound effect on the Mexican-Caribbean urban system and, consequently, on regional consciousness.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the way Spanish administrators in the early colonial period balanced their fears of internal and external threats. In this period, *cabildos*, castellans, and viceroys voiced a range of anxieties about colonial defense in Veracruz and the Caribbean, including concerns about underpopulated garrisons, underfunded fortifications, and the potential threats posed by slave rebellions and maroon communities. While many of these concerns were repeated by administrators throughout the Spanish Americas, I argue that they were more pressing in the Caribbean, where the most troubling fear was the alliance between runaway slaves and foreign enemies—a threat that hinterland communities did not have to consider.

In section two, I turn my attention to the second half of the seventeenth century, when foreign attacks on Caribbean territories were becoming more common. As the question of collusion between non-Spanish subjects and foreign enemies became more pressing, Spanish administrators in Caribbean ports began to locate a solution in the form of free-black militias. Although fears about slaves and free-blacks carrying weapons persisted, administrators argued that the formalization of free-black militias would solve
two problems with one solution: the garrisoning of depopulated Caribbean outposts often racked with tropical disease, and the incorporation of free-blacks into a new civic role that would mitigate fears of collusion. While the formalization of the free-black militia in New Spain has been read in the past as a critical moment in the development of a distinct Afro-Mexican identity, I argue that this formalization began in the Caribbean, citing a petition filed by free-black militiamen in Veracruz in 1669, in which the militiamen self-consciously identified themselves with free-black militias of four other Caribbean ports.

While it is possible to see the defensive realignment of the Spanish Caribbean as the disintegration of an older regional system, I argue that in many ways, the increased focus on port city defenses at the end of the seventeenth century strengthened earlier connections even further. As the coordination of defensive activities became more important and as port cities began to rely on free-black militias for essential defensive functions, port-city residents increasingly understood their role within colonial society through a defensive system that was located in the Caribbean region.

**Mediating Internal and External Threats in the Early Colonial Period**

The details of the 1683 attack fed neatly into existing Spanish anxieties about the integrity and durability of their dominion in the Americas. In one sense, this anxiety accrued to the negligence of sentries and soldiers, both in mistaking the approaching vessels as friendly ships, and later in falling asleep in their posts and allowing the city to be taken with scant resistance. In another sense, it coalesced around the potential threat posed by the collusion of foreign enemies with Spanish subjects. The most persistent rumors, however, involved the possibility that the invading force had been aided by at least one and possibly more free-black Spanish subjects.
If the sack of Veracruz raised concerns about disorganized militiamen and dilatory soldiers, then the collusion of Spanish subjects was a far more pressing problem. Following the attack, there were rumors that Spanish subjects in Campeche or elsewhere had given up vital information to the pirates that had enabled the attack to happen. According to testimony, the entire plan for the attack originated with information about the scheduled arrival of two Spanish ships from Caracas that was either purchased or extorted from Spanish subjects in Campeche.409 As attacks on Spanish vessels and ports had become more common, shipping schedules in the Spanish Caribbean became guarded secrets in the second half of the seventeenth century. In 1638, for example, port officials at San Juan de Ulúa received advanced notice from the governor of Havana that “twelve Dutch ships have been seen off those coasts [of Havana], all of which we are obliged to presume to be a daring rebel enemy.”410 Later, in 1668, port officials in Cartagena sent a notice by dispatch to their counterparts in Campeche and Havana, advising them change their shipping schedules, as sailors in Portobelo had recently noticed two vessels belonging to “French enemies” lurking off the coast of Honduras.411

More importantly, the fact that the invading force was a diverse coalition, including Hispanized *mulatos*, mestizos, Indians, and even some Spaniards alongside Spain’s foreign enemies, exacerbated long-held fears about the loyalty of Spanish

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409 CSP Colonial, America and West Indies, vol. 11, 1681-1685, no. 1759, “Report of Governor Thomas Lynch to the Lord President of the Council of Three,” 20 June 1684, 657-660. In a separate letter to the Governor of Havana, Lynch (who was the British Governor of Jamaica) asserted that the success of the sack was due to Spanish apathy: “you owe that calamity to the Dutch and to yourselves.” See: CSP Colonial, America and West Indies, vol. 11, 1681-1685, no. 1198, “Thomas Lynch to Governor of Havana,” 18 August 1683, 477.

410 AHCV-Caja 1, vol. 1, “Mandamiento con el que se ordena se establezcan en la plaza de la ciudad compañías de milicianos, a causa de noticias enemigas,” 14 April 1638, fs. 271r-283v.

411 AGI-Santo Domingo, leg. 122, r. 3, n. 1, “Cartas y expedientes de Oficiales Reales de Cuba y la Habana,” 15 December 1668.
subjects who were not native to Spain and who were consistently perceived as outsiders.\footnote{It is not clear whether the Spaniards who were noted to be a part of the invading force were thought to be Spanish-born or creole. The lone witness who described the national or ethnic composition of the attackers, fray Juan de Ávila, did identify “some Biscaynes” (\textit{algunos vizcaínos}) among the attackers. Although these men presumably would have been Iberian-born, Ávila also stated that the only reason he could deduce their identity as Biscaynes was from the accent of a “surgeon” (\textit{cirjuano}) who was with them, and that “I knew him to be a Biscayne even though he attempted to disguise [his voice]” (\textit{conocí ser vizcaíno aunque el intento disimularlo}). See: Ávila, \textit{Relación verdadera}, 65-67.} As we will see, slaves and free-blacks in particular raised suspicion among Spanish administrators, and a litany of ordinances existed in most Spanish municipalities restricting slaves and, in some cases, free-blacks from congregating, drinking, being out at night, and, especially, carrying weapons.

The question of when and where people of African descent could carry weapons caused significant consternation throughout the early Spanish Americas.\footnote{See: Jane G. Landers, “Transforming Bondsman into Vassals: Arming Slaves in Colonial Spanish America,” in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., \textit{Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 120-145.} Although the \textit{Leyes de Indias} maintained a general ban on people of African descent carrying weapons in the Spanish Americas until at least 1663, such broad restrictions were impossible to implement. Already by the end of the sixteenth century, the majority of the Caribbean’s residents were African or Afro-descended, and many of them were engaged in occupations that required the use of knives and machetes that could otherwise be considered weapons. Most Spanish American governments instead instituted a series of local ordinances that stipulated specific limits on the holding of weapons depending on conditions like enslaved status, time of day, type of weapon, and occupation.\footnote{See: Paul Lokken, “Useful Enemies: Seventeenth-Century Piracy and the Rise of Pardo Militias in Spanish Central America,” \textit{Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History}, vol. 5, no. 2 (Fall 2004), n4; \textit{Recopilación de leyes de los Reynos de las Indias}, Libro 7, Titulo 5, Leyes 14-18, vol. 2 (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1973), 287-288.} One of the earliest such restrictions in Veracruz, issued from Mexico City in 1547, decreed that...
“negros y moriscos” newly arrived from Spain were to be allowed a three month period of adjustment before the weapons ban would apply to them. After those three months had passed, they were expected to be familiar with local laws, which dictated that any slave found outside at night with a weapon was to be sentenced to death. Another allowance for weapon-holding was issued in 1603, declaring that slaves and free people of African descent who were engaged in cattle ranching or pastoralism were allowed to carry a single knife to be used in their work. Laws such as these existed throughout the Spanish Americas, fluctuating depending on local circumstances. Specific laws restricting the ownership of weapons among on free-black ranchers in particular existed in Havana, Cartagena, and Spanish Jamaica, and probably elsewhere in the Spanish American world as well.

Although restrictions on weapon-holding often included strict punishments, they were also often addressed from the crown or from the viceroy to local officials, suggesting that existing laws were poorly enforced on a local level. In fact, slaves and free people of color had broad access to weapons, perhaps no more so than in fortresses.

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416 AGN-General de Parte, vol. 6, exp. 554, “Se aprueba un mandamiento dado por el virrey marques de Villa Manrique, para que los ganaderos y pastores no traigan más armas que cuchillo,” 15 July 1603, fs. 207r.
417 In early 1578, the secular cabildo of Havana voted to repeal a local ordinance that had allowed free-blacks (negros horros) and black cattle ranchers (negros baqueros) to own weapons, declaring the change in law should be "publicly announced in the four streets of the city… in a loud and intelligible voice." AGI-Santo Domingo, leg. 117, “Cartas y expedientes de los cabildos seculares de la isla de Cuba y villa de San Cristóbal de la Habana,” 29 April 1631. See: Wheat, Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 192n18. See also: Kathryn Joy McKnight, “Confronted Rituals: Spanish Colonial and Angolan ‘Maroon’ Executions in Cartagena de Indias (1634),” Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, vol. 5, no. 3 (Winter 2004).
418 AGN-General de Parte, vol. 4, exp. 13, “Para que el alcalde mayor de la Veracruz no consienta que el alguacil mayor ni sus tenientes, no habiendo delinquido los negros que andan en el beneficio de las carretas, les quiten sus cuchillos,” 15 October 1590, fs. 17r.
like San Juan de Ulúa, where weapons were stockpiled and slaves were depended on to perform construction and maintenance. In 1609, Alonso de la Mota y Escobar visited San Juan de Ulúa and registered his shock at the number of negros and mulatos who lived and worked at the fortress, in close proximity to swords, arquebuses, muskets, and various kinds of explosives. The year before, a group of familiares of Veracruz’s Inquisition complained to their superiors that San Juan de Ulúa’s castellan had appropriated their slaves, by putting them to work at the fortress. Castellans in Veracruz, Havana, and elsewhere, for their part, regularly complained about not having enough slaves to fulfill the ancillary duties that their fortresses required.

In many cases, the fear of Africans and free-blacks owning weapons extended from the experience of slave rebellions and violent engagements with maroon communities in the earliest decades of Spanish settlement in the Caribbean. When the colonial project moved to the mainland, so did periodic skirmishes with powerful maroon communities, some of the most famous of which occurred in Veracruz between Spanish settlers and a constellation of maroon communities led by Gaspar Yanga. Yanga and his cohort attacked overland supply trains, raising the ire of travelers and settlers alike, who responded by attacking Yanga’s main outpost. In 1611, Veracruz’s treasury paid out

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419 Mota y Escobar, 50-55.
420 AGN-Inquisición, vol. 283, exp. 50, “Información contra el castellano de San Juan de Ulúa, por haber llevado a trabajar a unos esclavos de los familiares,” 1608, fs. 298r-309v.
421 AGI-Santo Domingo, leg. 116, n. 52, “Memoriales y relaziones del alcalde Juan de Lobera para la S.C.C.M. el emperador y rey my señor de lo tocante de la fortaleza de la villa de la Havana,” 13 August 1551, fs. 1r
one thousand pesos to eight individual captains to coordinate an attack that would eliminate the maroon settlement. Their attacks failed to vanquish the maroons, and eventually a tentative treaty was reached, allowing the community to become officially incorporated as San Lorenzo de los Negros.

At the same time as residents of Veracruz were engaged in an ongoing struggle with Yanga, an uprising of African slaves frightened Havana. According to Havana’s cabildo, between the years 1608 and 1611, the city was home to five thousand slaves, far outnumbering the Spanish population and posing a significant risk to the city:

A great quantity of have escaped their service and the subjection of their masters in the past three or four years, spending this time roving the country side and posing great danger to this land… we ask that you send relief as has been witnessed elsewhere in the Indies.

While fears of slave rebellions and maroon communities may have been general across the Spanish Americas—as we have seen, the years 1609 to 1612 also correspond to the alleged slave rebellion in Mexico City—the danger that free-blacks or runaway slaves (negros huidos) would ally with Spain’s foreign enemies was particular to the Caribbean. In January 1573, a group of twenty English raiders allied (aliándose) with forty negros cimarrones to attack caravans on the road between Nombre de Dios and Panama City, killing at least three Spaniards and one Dominican priest and stealing eighty thousand pesos worth of silver. More recently, during the English invasion of

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424 AGI-Contadruía, leg. 883, “Dattos de lo pagado por la conquista de negros levantados de la comarca de la ciudad de Veracruz,” 1611.

425 AGI-Santo Domingo, leg. 116, r. 3, n. 124, “Petición de la ciudad de Havana sobre confirmación de ordenanzas contra negros cimarrones,” 14 November 1611.

426 AGI-Panamá, leg. 30, n. 4, “Carta del cabildo secular de Panamá dando cuenta del ataque de piratas ingleses a Nombre de Dios en julio de 1572, y que han perturbado todo el reino aliándose con los negros cimarrones. Solicitan armas y municiones para poder defenderse,” 24 February 1573.
Spanish Jamaica that lasted from 1650 to 1660, a group of free-black militiamen—who had originally formed the core of Spanish resistance to the English invasion—turned on the Spaniards in a decisive moment, some allying with the English, and others retreating into the island’s interior and forming some of its earliest maroon communities.\(^{427}\)

The fear of alliances between armed maroons, free-blacks, and foreign invaders posed a significant challenge to administrators who were struggling to find a way to address the predation of Spanish islands that were sparsely populated save for their black inhabitants. Adding to this challenge was the long-documented difficulty of maintaining well-armed, well-trained corps of soldiers and militiamen in major Caribbean holdings. As early as 1553, Havana’s cabildo had complained that city was “too poor, and many of the vecinos are old or sickly and not useful for fighting or manning the forts.”\(^{428}\) The problem was particularly pressing in tropical areas like the Caribbean, where yellow fever claimed a disproportionate number of newcomers. As we have already seen, the perception of Veracruz’s ill health drove away would-be settlers from its earliest settlement. This was no truer than in the 1640s and 1650s, decades in which Spain was facing the strongest challenge yet to its dominion in the Caribbean and also the decades of the first widespread yellow fever epidemic, which affected Spanish soldiers in Veracruz, Campeche, San Juan de Puerto Rico, and possibly other outposts as well.\(^{429}\)


\(^{428}\) AGI-Santo Domingo, leg. 116, r. 2, n. 54, “Cartas y expedientes de Cabildos seculares de Cuba y Habana,” 20 March 1553.

\(^{429}\) As difficult as it was to populate Caribbean fortifications with trained soldiers from more temperate areas, there were other imperial priorities that inhibited the improvement of regional defenses. While
The environmental historian John McNeill has even characterized yellow fever as Veracruz’s equivalent to Russia’s “General Winter” because, like the Russian winter, yellow fever was so rampant in Veracruz that no invading force could hold the city without falling to the disease.\(^{430}\) Perhaps unlike the Russian winter, however, yellow fever made it difficult not only for invading forces to hold Veracruz, but for Spain to maintain a healthy, adequately sized garrison of soldiers there as well. Soldiers from Europe or central Mexico who were stationed in Veracruz routinely fell ill or died, and many others deserted their posts, unwilling to face the risk of disease. The city’s reputation for disease meant that the soldiers who were garrisoned there were drawn disproportionately from the tropical lowlands, especially from Veracruz itself and its surrounding coastal areas, as well as from other Caribbean regions.\(^{431}\)

As foreign encroachment on the Caribbean became more common in the second half of the seventeenth century, the possibility of collusion between free-black Spanish subjects and foreign enemies and the inability to maintain full regiments of soldiers at its Caribbean outposts became two of the central concerns of Spanish administrators. Despite lingering fears about arming non-Spanish subjects, the unceasing foreign assault

\(^{430}\) McNeill, Mosquito Empires, 141-142.

\(^{431}\) AGN-Indiferente Virreinal, Indiferente de Guerra, caja 989, exp. 27, “Autos hechos a petición de los ficiales, soldados y artilleros de la Real Fuerza de San Juan de Ulúa, sobre que se los pagaran los 22 meses que les adeudaban de sueldos,” 1649-1650.
on the Caribbean left few options. As a consequence, the role of free-black militias began to undergo a radical transformation, significantly affecting to both free-black corporate identity and, as we will see, the expression of a Mexican-Caribbean regional consciousness.

**Caribbean Competition and the Evolution of the Free-Black Militia**

The Low Countries achieved functional independence from Spain in 1634 and at the same time, agents of the Dutch West India Company had begun to occupy parts of the southern Caribbean islands and coasts, from which they organized expansive contraband activities and freebooting, preying on less populated Spanish territories. In 1640, the Portuguese followed the Dutch in revolt against Spanish rule, proclaiming their independence from Spain, and causing significant anxiety in the Caribbean, where Spanish ports often relied on large and important Portuguese merchant communities. Within a little more than a decade, Oliver Cromwell, then Lord Protector of England, initiated the project of “Western Design” that was intended to seize the Caribbean islands from Spain. Although an early defeat in Santo Domingo fueled political opposition to Cromwell in England—and led to the perception that his Western Design was doomed to failure—by 1665, English troops had seized total control of Jamaica, the third largest island in the Caribbean. Meanwhile, French corsairs, relatively unopposed, had begun to occupy and functionally rule the western half of Hispaniola.\(^{432}\)

In this context, the sack of Veracruz in 1683 can be understood as one of an increasing number of serious threats to Spain’s colonial enterprise in the Americas. While scholarship on the Bourbon reforms tends to date the wholesale transformation of Spanish colonial military to the Seven Years’ War (ca. 1756-1763), some historians have read the 1683 sack of Veracruz as a critical moment in the development of the free-colored militia in New Spain. Not only did the attack reveal major defensive weaknesses in Veracruz, it demonstrated how coastal vulnerabilities could spill into the mainland—a threat that had previously been unthinkable. As recently as 1656, viceroy Francisco Fernández de la Cueva had responded to the English siege of Santo Domingo with assurances about the safety of New Spain, affirming “the impossibility of the conquest and invasion of this kingdom.” In Fernández’s description, the long distances, numerous rivers, and pueblos de indios that stood in-between Veracruz and Mexico City provided a decisive advantage against foreign invasion. Less than three decades later, the siege of Veracruz appeared to shake that confidence. As one Pueblo-based official described, “If the enemy had come with the manpower (potencia) to advance to this city (Puebla) or that of Mexico, he could have achieved it without resistance.”

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434 AGI-México, leg. 38, n. 16, “Carta del virrey duque de Albuquerque,” 30 November 1656, fs. 12r-14v. “Afirmo en el conocimiento de las ymposibilidades que hay para conquistar y ynvadir este reino propietario de la nueva españa como tengo representado en todos mis despachos desde que an sobre venido los movimientos y recelos de los yngleses.” Despite his protestations, Fernández de la Cueva still used the occasion to request a significant resupply of firearms for colonial troops, including three thousand arquebuses, muskets, and carbines.

435 AGI-Patronato Real, leg. 243, r. 3, “Peligro de Nueva España por la invasión de Veracruz,” 18 August 1683, f. 1r-1v. “Es cierto (señor) que si el enemigo hubiera venido con potencia para pasar a esta Ciudad y la de México lo hubiera conseguido sin Resistencia.” While the Puebla report does express anxiety about
If the catastrophe of 1683 forced administrators to consider coastal defenses with an eye to the viceregal center, then it had also revealed the solution of calling upon troops in the interior to respond to threats in the colony’s maritime borderlands. Although pirate raids along the Gulf coast were frequent throughout the seventeenth century, in 1683 the far-reaching call-to-arms to counter piratical attack was unprecedented in New Spain’s history. All previous invasions had been countered either by local troops or by naval engagement.  

The use of mainland forces in response to a coastal crisis represents a particular turning point for Mexico’s free-colored militias. Over the next thirty years, free-colored militias in the mainland would be called to respond to coastal threats on at least three more occasions. While the Bourbon reforms would give more structure to the militia in the second half of the eighteenth century, in the increased regularity of large-scale mobilizations it is possible to see the emergence of a unified defensive strategy and the outline of a discrete colonial infrastructure that would map neatly onto later nationalist geography.  

It is within this context that historians of Afro-Mexico have seen the expansion of the free-colored militia system in the late seventeenth century as a critical moment in the development of Afro-Mexican corporate identity, as the free-colored militia transitioned

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436 The most significant pirate attack prior to 1683, discussed briefly in Chapter One, was John Hawkins’s raid on San Juan de Ulúa in 1568, which was countered by naval engagement. See: Arróniz, *La batalla naval de San Juan de Ulúa*.

437 Including a pirate strike in Campeche in 1685 and two invasion threats in Veracruz during the War of Spanish Succession (ca. 1701-1714).

438 Christon Archer has argued, however, that the formalized structure of Bourbon military policy did not translate to corresponding structure on the ground. See: Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*.
from a corps with largely ceremonial presence in colonial society to a fighting force that was woven into the colony’s defensive strategy. In the following section, however, I argue that coastal regions experienced militia consolidation within a regional context that led to uneven, regionally distinct understandings of corporate identity. Placing the events of 1683 into the context of the contemporary Spanish Caribbean, I suggest that imperial competition and regional difference created uneven understandings of race in late seventeenth-century New Spain.

The Free-Colored Militia between New Spain and the Caribbean

Although the first free-black and -mulatto militias in New Spain can trace their origins to the middle of the sixteenth century, it was only after 1683 that most of these militias took an active role in colonial security. At the same time, the increased reliance on free-colored militias in the late seventeenth century dovetailed with the end of the large-scale slave trade to New Spain in 1640, a corresponding decrease in the colony’s African-born population, and the increase of the free-black population. As we have already seen, as New Spain’s demography changed to include fewer people with a direct link to Africa, categories of race and caste that were specific to New Spain gradually began to supplant the ethnically based language of “naciones” that had been common throughout the Spanish Atlantic. As a central corporate body, the militia was one of a handful of civil and religious institutions through which Afro-Mexicans mediated this transition. Coupled with the end of the slave trade and the crystallization of caste categories, then, historians tend to interpret the expansion of the free-black militia system through a predominantly national lens, as a central force in the development of distinctly Mexican understandings of racial categorization.
This is not to say that scholarly work on the free-black militia of New Spain is parochial—it is, in fact, broadly engaged with a wider body of literature on free-black militias throughout the Spanish Americas, including studies on Cuba, Colombia, Argentina, Spanish Florida, and Spanish Louisiana. The driving question of this scholarship, however, is whether the free-black militia is best described as a vehicle for upward social mobility or if it instead served as a catalyst of corporate identity. Did it function as an institution of “social whitening”—an avenue through which its members could escape the millstone of race and caste—or did it in fact nurture a common sentiment of racial belonging? Although most studies of the free-black militia refer to literature outside of the colonial space on which they focus, rare is the study that treats those connections as anything other than an analogue for the comparison of relative social mobility.

The result is a tendency to view militia service as a nationally bounded activity, to the elision of intercolonial contexts, influences, and entanglements. This is in contrast to the military-administrative schema of the Spanish circum-Caribbean region. The events of 1683 provide a valuable example. Rather than describing the siege as an unprecedented event in the history of New Spain, we could understand it as an extreme

but not unprecedented event in the contemporary Spanish Caribbean. The losses of Spanish colonies in Jamaica in 1660, the western half of Hispaniola in 1659, and the Portuguese Revolt of 1640 were fresh in living memory. In addition to large-scale conquests and revolts, raids and sieges similar to the one in Veracruz had spread throughout the Caribbean. As Havana’s procurado general, Juan de Prado y Cavajal described in a petition to the Council of the Indies in 1657:

[Our enemies] are not only content to rob in the sea, but also have such daring as to assault the coasts of this port, entering five or seven leagues into the mainland, robbing haciendas of cattle, burning houses, destroying forests, and taking the owners prisoner as if they were slaves.  

These assaults threatened Spanish dominion in sparsely inhabited islands, but in threatening bulwarks like Havana and Veracruz, what the assaults highlighted was not just weakening territorial integrity, but the vulnerability of the primary commercial and administrative artery of the Spanish Atlantic empire. Not only was Veracruz a hub of transatlantic commerce, but through its extensive ties to ports throughout the Americas, it acted also as a node in the broader Caribbean system, the purpose of which was the remittance of specie, goods, and information that sustained far-flung holdings and allowed them to function.

As we saw in Chapter Two, approximately 120 ships sailed between Veracruz and other Caribbean ports in the same time frame.  

As we saw in Chapter Two, approximately 120 ships sailed between Veracruz and other Caribbean ports in the same time frame. These voyages from Havana, Cartagena,

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440 AGI-Santo Domingo, leg. 117, “Cartas y expedientes de los cabildos seculares de la isla de Cuba y villa de San Cristóbal de la Habana,” 7 April 1657. “No solamente se contentar los dichos enemigos con rovar en los mares si no que llega a tanto su atrevimiento que saltando en las costas de este puerto se entran la tierra adentro cinco y siete leguas y rovan las haciendas de ganado queman sus casas destruyeyn los montes y a pricionan asi los dueños como los esclavos que en ellas stan sirviendo y se los llevan consigo y muchas vezes lo son muerto sobre seguro vendado les lo sotos y atandolos a los arboles digan candistinction sobre esta pregunta lo que supieren.”

Campeche, and Tabasco did not follow the same seasonal patterns as the fleet, but arrived at a steady pace throughout the year, establishing a constancy of contact and communication between ports within the Caribbean region. One of the principal purposes of this contact was the *Situado* system, which distributed specie from wealthier colonies to poorer outposts—money that was intended for the building and maintenance of fortifications.

In addition to the regional exchange of gold and silver in the *Situado* system, these relationships of small-scale trade included significant quantities of matériel and supplies expressly for military use. Veracruz’s fortifications were built with stone imported from Campeche, while the munitions factory housed in the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa supplied gunpowder and other munitions to strongholds throughout the Caribbean. Veracruz and Havana both imported cloth and dyes for uniforms from Portobelo. Caribbean ports also exchanged victuals for the express consumption of soldiers and the *esclavos del rey* who lived and worked in military fortresses. Veracruz supplied the Caribbean with *trigo* and *maíz*, which Havana processed and then redistributed as *harina*, and Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico provided dried pork and turtle meat. In the chapel at the El Morro in Havana, the silver reliquary and even the dyed chasuble vestments worn by the fortress’s priests were supplied by Veracruz.442

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As a city and as a stronghold, Veracruz was integrated into a broader system of Caribbean defense. It relied on the defensive support of other fortified outposts, just as those outposts relied on Veracruz. In this light, the 1683 siege highlighted the fragility not of the colony of New Spain, but of the colonial system itself, as the failure of one of these nodes was a threat to all of them.

It was precisely Veracruz’s role in the defense of the Caribbean that the city’s free-colored militiamen referred to when they brought a petition for tribute relief to the Spanish Crown in 1669. Citing precedents “in the ports of Havana, Cartagena, Campeche, and others,” their captain, Juan de Navarro argued that the service of free-colored militias of Veracruz should be rewarded as it had been elsewhere, “where the Pardos who bear arms for defense and security of those ports do not pay tribute.”443 In another part of the petition, Navarro argued that it was “well-known” that the free-black militiamen of “Havana, Cartagena, Santo Domingo, and Campeche,” received payment for their service because “without pay none would serve, the same as if they were soldiers who were always paid.”444 Navarro’s appeals rang true to the junta general that was assigned to study the merit of the petition, which found that “The good effects of [tribute

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443 AGI-México, leg. 45, n. 58, “Carta del virrey marqués de Mancera,” 26 July 1671. “[H]an asistido como actual asisten haciendo continuas Guardias en el Castillo citado y es así que estando en este ejercicio del servicio de Su Magestad y su Real Corona y por el libres de pagar tributo pretende con ynstancias el Corregidor de la dicha ciudad lo paguen quando se halla que en los Puertos de la Havana, Cartajena, Campeche, y otros no lo pagan los Pardos poren star exercitando las armas para la defensa y seguro de dichos puertos constando con evidencia que estas se hallan con menos çoçobras por sus fortificaciones que el de dicha ciudad de la Veracruz.”

444 AGI-México, leg. 45, n. 58, “Carta del virrey marqués de Mancera,” 26 July 1671. “Quando parece que se is debia alguna remunerazion a que pagasen los pardos y morenos de sus companies el tributo Real siendo asi que de… estar excusos de esta contribuzion por sus plaças como es notorio lo estan los de la Havana, Cartajena, Santo Domingo, y Campeche pues sin tener sueldo ninguno occurrin a lo mismo que si fueran soldados pagados siempre que se ordena como parece de las certificaziones que presente por cuyas causas suplicaron a Vex.a se sirviese de relacier
exemption] are experienced at different times in the coasts and ports of the Indies… and no tax is practiced in Campeche, Havana, and Santo Domingo, as is well-known."

In adducing precedent from the other major ports of the Greater Caribbean, the free-black militiamen of Veracruz not only reiterated the function of port cities as nodes of information, but implied a structural similarity in the militia systems of disparate colonial spaces. In fact, the only difference between Veracruz and the other Spanish Caribbean ports that the militiamen identified was that their peers in other ports had less pressing “anxieties” about the potential for foreign attack. While the militiamen may have exaggerated the relative vulnerability of Veracruz, it is significant that the only difference that they identified was one of scale, not of quality.

The second piece of evidence that the militiamen cited in support of their petition was their active role in repelling enemy attack. As Navarro described, the free-black companies of Veracruz remained perpetually “at arms to resist the invasions that are threatened by the enemy,” remaining vigilant “in night as in day.” The free-black militia manned not only the “principal bulwarks” (baluartes) in Veracruz, they were also called into action by “different voices” of the nearby port town of Alvarado,

445 AGI-México, leg. 45, n. 58, “Carta del virrey marqués de Mancera,” 26 July 1671. “Los buenos afectos que se en experimentado en diferentes ocaciones en las costas y puertos de las indias y que por lo que toca con reservar este genero de gente en lista, y sin tributo se practica en Campeche, Habana, y Santo Domingo como es notorio.”

446 AGI-México, leg. 45, n. 58, “Carta del virrey marqués de Mancera,” 26 July 1671. “El resguardo y defensa de [ciudad y puerto de Veracruz], puestos siempre en arma, para resistir las ynvasiones, que amenaçado el enemigo, mi tiendo y sacando Guardia continua en el Baluarte principal y castillo guardando la polvora de Su Magestad que en el esta para la fuerza de San Juan de Ulúa, así noche como de día sin que permita la promptitud de la obediencia.”

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approximately seventy kilometers to Veracruz’s south, where they provided “the first defense” against invading forces.\textsuperscript{447}

The demonstration of services rendered established a pattern that would be replicated in subsequent petitions for privilege submitted by free-colored militias across the viceroyalty. In particular, free-colored militias tended to repeat the claim of defending a region beyond the immediate area in which they were stationed as a central justification for the necessity of their service. The adoption of this strategy throughout the colony can reasonably be read as a marker of institutional affinity, connecting disparate groups of free-black militiamen across New Spain—not only through a common rhetorical strategy, but a common understanding of their function within colonial society. At the same time, there is a significant reason to doubt the immediate effect of that affinity. The first militias to apply this strategy were those in other Gulf coast territories, beginning with companies in Coatzocoalcos in 1676, and followed shortly by those in Guachinango, Papantla, and Tabasco.\textsuperscript{448} While interior militias like those in Puebla and Mexico City would later make the same argument—often citing their deployments to the coast—their petitions date to the 1740s, two full generations after the both the siege of 1683 and the granting of tribute exemption to coastal militias.

At the same time, in granting the militia’s request for exemption, viceroy Mancera created an institutional distinction between free-black communities in Veracruz and free-black communities elsewhere in New Spain, because male members of Veracruz’s free-

\textsuperscript{447} AGI-México, leg. 45, n. 58, “Carta del virrey marqués de Mancera,” 26 July 1671. “El descanso aún en a chaques que ha algunos de los soldados pudieran les el poco aloxamiento que ay en el de las aguas y nortes como ni tan poco resistido el salir fuera de dicha ciudad distintas Vozes del pueblo de Alvarado a defenderle del enemigo de algunas reynas que se pudieran prometer grandes faltando el socorro de dicha compañia siendo en las ocasiones que sean ofrecido los primeros y quemos avívido a el reparo y defensa.”

\textsuperscript{448} Vinson, “Race and Badge,” 485.
black community gained the possibility of tribute relief through militia service. Just as the obligation of paying tribute may have created an incentive for free-blacks in other New Spanish jurisdictions to claim different racial or caste identities, the exemption from that tax in Veracruz may have allowed free-blacks more latitude in their choice of identity.

It is significant, too, that the Veracruz petition was filed jointly on behalf of both the free-negro and free-mulato militias. The decision to file the petition together is significant in its implication of the flexibility of boundaries between members of distinct caste categories. While the petition grouped militiamen in such a way that minimized the caste boundaries between Afro-descendants within Veracruz, it is their assertion of a common class of “pardo” with free-black militias throughout the Spanish Caribbean that is most salient. By referring to militias in Havana, Santo Domingo, Cartagena, and Campeche, the free-colored militiamen of Veracruz both demonstrated a familiarity with the outline of the Caribbean’s defensive geography and asserted their role within it in a way that was distinct from their role within New Spain. While we could question the depth of the relationship between far-flung militias in the Caribbean, it is also clear that such a relationship existed not only in the rhetorical strategy of the petition but in the minds of the colonial officials who reviewed it. The later petitions of coastal militias were similarly adjudicated based on the geographic merit of their claim as guardians of “these coasts,” showing that colonial administrators considered petitions for privilege within the context of maritime defense in the Gulf-Caribbean, not the mainland.

Conclusions

The late seventeenth century was a period of enormous tumult in the Spanish Atlantic World. The end of the large-scale slave trade and imperial competition and the
atomization of the Caribbean contributed to sweeping institutional and social change. In New Spain, the free-colored militia was implicated in both of these developments. At the same moment as growing populations of free, American-born *negros* and *mulatos* began to redefine their relationship to the colonial state through categories of racial difference, their military service was becoming indispensable. In some cases, such as the pirate attack that seized Veracruz in 1683, free-colored militias in the interior of the province were deployed to provide support for those on the coasts. Since these deployments were occurring at roughly the same time as the free-black militia on the coast was gaining currency as a mediator of corporate identity, it is tempting to see their deployment as an indicator of a consolidated, if staggered, understanding of free-black social standing within New Spain.

In applying an alternate territorial lens, however, we see the expression of affinity not between coastal militias and the interior, but between coastal militias and their counterparts in the Caribbean. Rather than dismiss this relationship as the byproduct of rhetorical claims making, we should interpret it as the product of a spatial system that transcended national and colonial borders, inflecting understandings of race and caste throughout both the Spanish Caribbean and in New Spain’s maritime borderlands. In their petition for tribute relief, the free-black militiamen of Veracruz expressed a self-conscious regional identification with their equivalents in the Spanish Caribbean, demonstrating not only awareness of a distinct “pardo” corporate identity, but one that drew on Veracruz’s Caribbean connections.
Conclusion

In 1688 the French engraver Jean Baptiste Nolin and his Italian partner Vincenzo Coronelli published a map of the Caribbean entitled *Carte de l’archipel de Mexique: Map of the Mexican Archipelago*. Although the moniker is no longer in use, the map’s title is indicative of popular understandings in the seventeenth century that the Caribbean and Mexico were part of the same geographic space even if they were physically separated by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term “Mexican Archipelago” appeared in a number of monographs and treatises on New World history and geography.449

At the same as the literature using the phrase “Mexican archipelago” suggests a regional construct that has since fallen out of use, it is difficult to locate Mexico within that literature. In the first sentence of his 1757 chronicle *Histoire et commerce des Antilles Angloises* (History and commerce of the English Antilles), the French author Georges-Marie Butel-Dumont describes the Mexican archipelago simply as the Caribbean island region: “The Mexican archipelago includes a large number of islands, which are distributed in two general denominations: the greater and lesser Antilles.”450

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450 Butel-Dumont, 1. “L’archipel du Méxique comprend un grand nombre d’Isles, que l’on distribue sous deux dénominations générales: les grandes & les petites Antilles.”
Like Butel-Dumont’s overly general introduction, the map itself excludes the landmass from which the archipelago derives its name (see Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1.** Map of the Mexican Archipelago, ca. 1688.


This dissertation has focused on the intensive exchange of people, goods, and ideas between the Mexican port city of Veracruz and the Spanish Caribbean in the early modern period. It has evoked a regional construct that, like the “Mexican Archipelago,” fell out of use at some point between the seventeenth century and the period of our study. Through an archivally-based recreation drawing on environments, commerce, slavery and African diaspora, and imperial defense, I have attempted to reassert Mexico into the frame of the Caribbean archipelago, and the Caribbean into the frame of Mexican history.
In so doing, it has moved away from land-oriented studies that typify Mexican historiography and instead embraced the regional context of the Caribbean as an important perspective for understanding Veracruz’s early history. Like the Caribbean cities of Havana, Santo Domingo, and San Juan de Puerto Rico, Veracruz’s early history was marked by multiple relocations, natural disaster, and depopulation. Soon European and Spanish creole writers connected these struggles with the city’s large African population, creating a spatial schema that carved Veracruz out of Mexico and placed it in the Caribbean. In the seventeenth century, the expansion of regional trade relationships connected Veracruz to Caribbean port cities directly in the regular exchange of ships, goods, news and people. With Cartagena, Veracruz also became one of the two largest slaving ports in the Spanish Americas, following similar chronological patterns in the rise and fall of volume and in the changing provenance of African captives. The city’s connections to the Caribbean also allowed its relatively large African population to follow an acculturative process that was distinct from other parts of New Spain. Finally, by the end of the seventeenth century, Veracruz’s changing defensive role within the Spanish Caribbean and its reliance on the free-black militia to fulfill that role evoked a conscious expression of a Mexican-Caribbean regional identity.
Appendix A

Captains and pilots of the transatlantic fleet who were members of the confraternity of *Nuestra Señora de Buenos Ayres*, Seville, Spain, ca. 1590.

Likely Slave Ship Captains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Residence</th>
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Other Confraternity Members

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Source: José Torre Revello, *La Virgen del Buen Aire* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Talleres S.A. Casa Jacobo Peuser, Ltd., 1931), 41-44
Bibliography

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Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain
AGI-Contaduría
AGI-Casa de Contratación
AGI-Escribanía de Cámara de Justicia
AGI-Indiferente General
AGI-Mapas y Planos
AGI-México
AGI-Panamá
AGI-Patronato Real
AGI-Santo Domingo

AGN
Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico
AGN-Archivo Histórico de Hacienda
AGN-Civil Volumens
AGN-General de Parte
AGN-Hospitales
AGN-Impresos Oficiales
AGN-Indiferente Virreinal
  Consulado
  Indiferente de Guerra
  Inquisición
  Judicial
  Marina
  Real Caja
AGN-Inquisición
AGN-Marina
AGN-Ordenanzas
AGN-Reales Cedulas Duplicadas
AGN-Reales Cedulas Originales
AGN-Tierras

AHCV
Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad, Veracruz, Veracruz, Mexico
AHCV-Caja 1

ANUV
Archivo Notarial de la Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico
ANUV-Xalapa
ANUV-Orizaba

BL
Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California, USA
BL-Engel Sluiter Collection
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Watts, David. *Man’s Influence on the Vegetation of Barbados, 1627-1800*. Hull:
University of Hull Publications, 1966.


**J. M. H. Clark**

**Curriculum Vitae**

**EDUCATION**

**PhD Candidate in History,** Johns Hopkins University, September 2016  
Dissertation: "Veracruz and the Caribbean in the Seventeenth Century"  
Supervisors: Ben Vinson III, Gabriel Paquette, and Franklin W. Knight

**MA, Latin American History,** Johns Hopkins University, May 2012  
Major field: Colonial Latin American History  
Minor fields: Atlantic History, Caribbean History, Early Modern Spain

**BA, with Distinction, History,** Boston University, May 2010  
Supervisors: John K. Thornton (academic) and Bruce J. Schulman (thesis)

**Governor’s School of International Studies, Hausa,** University of Memphis, July 2005

**AWARDS, GRANTS, AND FELLOWSHIPS**

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<td>2016</td>
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<td>Research Travel Grant, Program for Latin American Studies, Johns Hopkins University (Mexico)</td>
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<td>Prize Teaching Fellowship, Center for Africana Studies, Johns Hopkins University</td>
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<td>Fulbright-IIE Fellowship (Mexico)—unable to accept</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Research Fellowship, Singleton Center for the Study of Premodern Europe, Johns Hopkins University (Spain)</td>
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<td>Lydia Cabrera Award, Conference on Latin American History (Spain)</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>2010-2015</td>
<td>Graduate Fellowship, Department of History, Johns Hopkins University</td>
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<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Grieg Fellowship for American History, Office of the Dean, Boston University</td>
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ARTICLES IN PREPARATION


EDITORIAL EXPERIENCE


ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRIES


SELECTED CONFERENCES, SEMINARS, AND INVITED TALKS


March 2016 Chair, “Enslaved Africans in Seventeenth-Century Spanish America,” Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies, Santa Fe, NM


October 2015 Presenter, “After the Slave Trade: Race and Religious Practice in Colonial Veracruz at the End of the Slave Trade to Mexico, 1640-
Vita

1700,” Ethnicity, Race, and Indigenous Peoples Conference, Richmond, VA

September 2015 Presenter, “Caribbean Environments in Popular European Imagination, 1500-1700,” Winston Tabb Research Center, JHU, Baltimore, MD

April 2015 Invited Speaker, “Havana and Veracruz in the Making of the Spanish Caribbean Urban System in the Seventeenth Century,” Alexandrian Society Annual Symposium, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

April 2014 Presenter, “‘Where the mosquitoes reign and even the *negros*’: The African Characteristics of Early Colonial Veracruz,” 14th Annual Africa Conference, University of Texas, Austin TX


June 2012 Presenter, “Port Cities and Maritime Culture in the Spanish Caribbean, 1566-1665,” Port City Lives, Centre for Port and Maritime History, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Fall 2016 Instructor, “Afro-Latin American Biography,” Program in Latin American Studies, Johns Hopkins University

Spring 2015 Instructor, “Mexico and the World from Cortés to Cartels,” Department of History, Johns Hopkins University

Spring 2014 Instructor, “Comparative Slavery,” Center for Africana Studies, Johns Hopkins University

Spring 2014 Teaching Assistant, “Twentieth-Century China,” Professor William T. Rowe, Department of History History, Johns Hopkins University

Fall 2013 Teaching Assistant, “Cuban Revolution and the Contemporary Caribbean,” Professor Franklin W. Knight, Department of History, Johns Hopkins University

Spring 2012 Teaching Assistant, “Occidental Civilization: Modern Europe,” Professor Peter Jelavich, Department of History, Johns Hopkins University

Fall 2011 Teaching Assistant, “Africa since 1880,” Professor Sara Berry, Department of History, Johns Hopkins University
Fall 2011  **Guest Lecturer**, “Colonial Latin American History and Readings,”
Professor Ben Vinson III, History, Johns Hopkins University

**DIGITAL HUMANITIES**

2013-2016  **Project Assistant**, GIS and Data Services Department, Milton S.
Eisenhower Library, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD

June 2014  **Presenter**, “GIS and the Digital Humanities,” Friends of the Sheridan
Libraries Fundraising Dinner, Johns Hopkins University

April 2014  **Conference Planning Committee**, “Digital Resources for Latin American
and Africana Studies,” Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD

2012  **Research Assistant (cartography and GIS)**, Herbert S. Klein and Ben
Vinson III, *La esclavitud africana en América Latina y el Caribe*, (El
Colegio de México, 2014)

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

2014-2015  **Graduate Liaison**, Program in Latin American Studies, Johns Hopkins
University (elected, stipendiary position)

2014-2015  **Conference Organizer**, “Urban Transformations in Latin America,”
Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, April 2015

2013-2014  **Conference Planning Committee**, “Mobility and Exchange in Latin
America, Past and Present,” Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, April 2014

2013-2014  **Travel Grants Committee**, Graduate Representative Organization, Johns
Hopkins University

2013  **Local Organizing Committee—Press Relations**, African Studies
Association 56th Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD, November 2013

2011  **Graduate Assistant**, NEH Summer Institute, “Slaves, Soldiers, and
Rebels: Black Resistance in the Tropical Atlantic, 1760-1888,” Center for
Africana Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, July-August
2011

**LANGUAGES**

Reading and speaking: Spanish, Portuguese
Basic reading and speaking: French, Hausa

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

American Historical Association (AHA)
Conference on Latin American History (CLAH)
Latin American Studies Association (LASA)
Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies (RMCLAS)