

INTRODUCTION

Great empires like those of Rome, the Mughals, or the Ottomans brought peoples of different languages, ethnicities, and faiths under imperial rule. They ruled by establishing hierarchies of differentiation, but they allowed differences in practices, customs, and belief. The empires of early modern Spain and Portugal, both of which justified their expansion by spreading the Roman Catholic faith, departed from this imperial model by imposing whenever possible a uniformity of religion and law, although sometimes granting limited acceptance of cultural and ethnic differences.¹ Both these empires—born in the late Middle Ages, consolidated in the sixteenth century, and motivated by millenarian dreams of a universal Christian monarchy—enforced policies of religious intolerance as the most effective way to ensure the conformity and loyalty of their subjects. Common membership in the community of Christendom would mute or overcome cultural and linguistic differences and ensure unity.

Spain and Portugal, motivated by the ideal of “one flock, one shepherd, one monarch, one empire, one sword,” promoted religious unity by converting and assimilating their internal others (Jews and Muslims) or, eventually, by expelling them.² But this drive for religious unity at home was complicated by the roughly contemporaneous creation of overseas empires. Warranted and legitimated by papal authority to spread the faith among myriad peoples of other cultures and beliefs, the monarchs of both Portugal and Castile viewed their Christian missionary activity as a principal justification of empire and as a basis of their legal claims to sovereignty. As the chronicler Diogo de Couto noted approvingly, Portugal’s kings had always believed that temporal and spiritual power “should never be exercised one without the other.”³ Conversions, which had been done in Granada and Lisbon with Muslims and Jews, now became

a great missionary enterprise as these empires created New Christians around the globe from the Canary Islands, to the Kongo kingdom, coastal Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, India, and Japan.⁴ In various areas of contact such as Portuguese Goa prior to 1540, or in Spanish America in general, there was some experimentation with juridical plurality and allowance of cultural and religious diversity, somewhat akin to the way in which Jews and Muslims had lived under their own law in medieval Christian Iberia, but such concessions were short-lived or remained mostly theoretical.⁵

In the Americas, although levels of religious syncretism varied with time, place, and the policies of various missionary orders or individual bishops, the general tendency over time was to define indigenous beliefs and practices as superstition and to extirpate any religious alternatives that were clearly outside of the Catholic tradition. In Spain's overseas "kingdoms" (the term "colony" came into use only in the eighteenth century) although the newly converted Native Americans were exempted from the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, missionaries, episcopal courts, and separate inquisitorial-style tribunals sought to maintain Indian orthodoxy. Africans—most of whom arrived in the Americas as slaves—enjoyed no such exemption from the Inquisition, and once baptized they and their descendants fell under the jurisdiction of the Holy Office, which vigorously suppressed African rituals, practices, and beliefs as superstition or witchcraft. The Church sought to channel African and Afro-American religiosity into lay confraternities, the cults of particular saints, and other more orthodox beliefs, but African continuities and syncretism flourished despite these efforts, and peoples of African descent (both enslaved and free) used the approved organizations and practices to protect and advance their own interests.⁶

However, empires have always had more than a religious dimension. Rather quickly the processes of conquest, colonization, sexual exploitation, and contact engendered in the Iberian empires new social divisions based on ethnicity, comportment, appearance, and a variety of other characteristics and conditions that supposedly determined not only a person's civic obligations, rights (*fueros*), and

privileges, but also her or his life opportunities and place in the social order.

In the Iberian Americas, the inclusion of Europeans, Amerindians, Africans, some peoples from Asia, and neoteric populations of mixed origins produced a new and complex social hierarchy based on a variety of cultural, ethnic, social, and physical characteristics. How this social order came into being and changed over time, from the moment of Columbus's landfall in 1492 to the independence of Latin America in the 1820s, provides the framework for the following chapters. They will examine how the principles of incorporation or exclusion shifted in emphasis from religious affiliation, ethnic origins, or some moral or social deficiency to phenotype—or what some scholars have called racial discrimination.

To do this, I have not concentrated on the Native American populations or on the large numbers of Africans brought as slaves. Instead, I have focused on three minority categories of people—Muslims, Jews, and mestizos—whose place in Spanish and Portuguese colonial societies or exclusion from them defined the peculiar ordering that distinguished the Iberian from other colonial enterprises in the Americas. Conquest, alliances, barter, and violence neutralized Native American resistance, and all of the European colonies either eliminated indigenous peoples or incorporated them as a dependent or subject population. Africans came to all the European colonies, usually as slaves, and everywhere they and their descendants (even when free) were placed near the bottom of the social ladder. The Iberians shared in those experiences and, in fact, had been the forerunners of the fusion of Amerindians and Africans into colonial society. However, the Spaniards and Portuguese also introduced a hierarchy not only based on ethnic or phenotypical differences, but one that also incorporated elements such as reason and religion. In Spain and Portugal various categories of people and groups at different times suffered discrimination or legal disadvantage—Gypsies, homosexuals, Protestants, religious dissidents, witches, the mentally ill, and beggars, to mention just a few. *Moris-cos* (converts from Islam) and *conversos* (converted Jews) were two

minority groups that were denigrated and disadvantaged in Spain and Portugal and were eventually prohibited from migrating to or residing in the New World. Even after conversion, they and their descendants were disadvantaged and discriminated against, based not necessarily on what they did but on who they were.⁷ This made lineage and blood a model for dealing with ethnic and cultural or religious alterity that influenced the shaping of social hierarchies of Latin America. There, sexual contact with the indigenous peoples began to produce a population of mixed heritage that rather quickly became a challenge to the existing social and juridical categories. Of course, people of mixed parentage (*mestizos*, *mamelucos*, *métis*, half-breeds, and so on) existed in all the European American colonies, but probably nowhere did their numbers or importance rival those of the Iberian colonies. “Mestizo” was a term that originally meant simply the offspring of European and Indian unions, but eventually it usually implied illegitimacy as well. The word was also sometimes used generically to include the offspring of any mixed union, so over time it became used interchangeably with terms like *casta* (caste) in Spanish America or *pardo* in Brazil—both of which had pejorative connotations because they encompassed persons of African descent and thus implied servile origins. Like *Morisco* and *converso*, *mestizo* was a label that underlined genealogical thinking and the importance of lineage, and thus it suggested the presence of *mala sangre* (bad blood) and the defects it was thought to transmit to anyone whose lineage included Africans, heathens, heretics, or people of ignoble birth or occupation.⁸ Although there were some parallels with the other European colonies in the Americas, especially in the case of the *mestizos*, these three minorities seemed dangerous and destabilizing to the society because they were so difficult to physically distinguish from the Old Christian population of European descent, and thus they are a key to understanding the role of race and other forms of social difference in these colonial regimes.⁹

The following chapters will examine the reasons for and the results of the exclusion of and discrimination against these categories of people. However, my focus is not so much on the laws and insti-

tutions that sought to enforce the exclusions and reinforce the social hierarchy or on the discourse and patterns of genealogical thinking that sought to distinguish between purity and infection, but rather on the experience of those who lived under these constraints, and on how and why the attempts to marginalize them were limited, modified, ignored, or evaded — not only by the victims of the exclusions but also by other groups and individuals in their society, and at times even by the state or by ecclesiastical institutions as well.

To some extent by concentrating on the resistance, negotiation, or evasion of the restrictive laws and the dominant social ideology, I am following a path I began to travel in my book *All Can Be Saved*, which explored surprising sentiments of religious tolerance or at least indifference to orthodox dogma in the Iberian world as expressed by common people in Spain, Portugal and their overseas territories in the Americas.¹⁰ In these chapters I draw on that work, but I seek to broaden my scope from religious considerations to social and political ones as well. As a historian of colonial Latin America, I have often written about the impact that the intersection of color, religion, class, and gender has had on that region's social organization.¹¹ There may be no topic in early Latin American history that has generated more interest and debate than the issue of race and racial identity — including that identity's characteristics, terminology, effects, history, and hierarchies. This historiography is extensive and rich.¹² Since the middle of the twentieth century, generations of historians have examined the origins, structure, and vocabulary of the exclusionary laws and practices, as well as their effects on the people they affected. Over time, historians have concentrated on differing aspects of this history. In the 1970s and 1980s many scholars, often employing quantitative methodologies, sought to determine the extent to which race was more important than social class or wealth in structuring Latin American societies.¹³ By the 1990s there had been a perceptible shift in emphasis to questions about the degree to which people identified with these racial categories and the extent to which that identity shaped their collective behavior. There was also a continuous preoccupation with the impact of gender on the system of exclusions and incorpora-

tions, and the degree to which gender affected social status in these societies.¹⁴

Many of these studies made clear that these New World Iberian colonies were in various ways extensions of their founding European metropolises, and that to understand the social systems in America, it was necessary to place them within the context of the original Iberian societies. However, doing that was complex and daunting, since in the historiography of medieval and early modern Spain and Portugal there may have been no topic that had generated more scholarly writing or more heated debate than their religious and ethnic plurality before the sixteenth century and their religious exclusivity thereafter, as their Muslim and Jewish populations either converted voluntarily or by force or were expelled.¹⁵ One aspect of those debates carried out by two Spanish medievalists, Américo Castro and Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, and their respective supporters was about the extent to which Hispanic culture itself was a result of cultural plurality (Castro) or was essentially and positively forged in the rejection of its non-Christian elements (Sánchez Albornoz). Their exchanges about these two opposing visions of Spanish history and culture, and especially of the role of the Jews and Muslims in that history, had a broad impact and generated renewed interest in Spain and its multicultural past. It was also a stimulus to the scholars of Judaism and Islam, who now saw the Iberian experience as a crucial moment in a broader history. By the 1960s, Hispanists and those interested in Spain's and Portugal's role in that broader history had begun to pose new questions and shift their areas of interest and interpretations.¹⁶ Some of them still followed Castro's approach but dropped his essentializing of "Jewish" character traits and ways of thinking. They found in the social and cultural histories of Spain and Portugal a hopeful model of an at least practical religious tolerance and a productive cultural exchange among Muslims, Jews, and Christians, the so-called *convivencia* of the Hispanic medieval period. However, in early modern Iberian history and in the forced conversions and exile of the minorities, others found the origins of modern racism, religious dis-

crimination, and (in the methods of the Inquisition) even the technologies of the modern totalitarian state.¹⁷

Underlying much of this historiography was a concern with the origins of racism and the extent to which it, or something like it, existed prior to the nineteenth century. Even before World War II, some scholars had seen clear parallels to contemporary racial thinking in the Iberian treatment of Jews and Jewish converts, and after the war, other scholars even sought to find a direct link between Nazi policies and racial ideology and such Hispanic precedents.¹⁸ Particularly troubling was the late Iberian medieval idea that culture and rejection of Christian attitudes could be genealogically transmitted, so that certain Jewish characteristics were carried in the blood and were genetic. This was the thinking upon which a series of regulations requiring purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*) had rested. The first of these regulations had appeared in Toledo in 1449 in the midst of a power struggle in which the opponents of newly converted Jews sought to limit them as competitors by excluding anyone who had a Jewish ancestry from public office and other positions of distinction or authority. These restrictions — eventually expanded to exclude anyone whose lineage included Muslims, heretics, or relatives punished by the Inquisition — quickly spread throughout Spain and later Portugal and were adopted by cathedral chapters, religious orders, municipalities, universities, and other institutions. Although contested on theological and practical grounds and never fully incorporated into royal or ecclesiastical law, these restrictions effectively served to discriminate against and potentially disadvantage anyone who could not claim to be “pure.” They had the effect of creating a new social division in a society no longer simply divided between gentlemen (*hidalgos*) and commoners (*pecheros*), but now separated as well by the purity of their genealogy. *Limpieza* created a new kind of nobility that even a most humble person like Don Quixote’s companion Sancho Panza could claim as a way to set himself above those lacking in this regard. As an anonymous seventeenth-century observer wrote, “it is more prestigious to be a gentleman than to be a ‘clean’ commoner, but more disgraceful to

be lacking in that quality because in Spain we value far more a ‘clean’ commoner than a hidalgo who is not.”¹⁹

Early historical considerations of the exclusion of or discrimination against certain ethnicities or categories of people had used the concept of race (*raza*) in very general terms or had avoided it all together, claiming that prior to the development of scientific racism in the nineteenth century, that use of the term was probably erroneous and surely anachronistic. However, much recent scholarship has questioned that previous avoidance, with considerable emphasis placed by medievalists on the perception and mistreatment of Jews and Africans as evidence that racial theories (some of them based on the “sciences” of those times, like astrology, the Hippocratic medical theory of bodily humors, Aristotelian natural science, and demonology) and discrimination easily merged with other forms and principles of hierarchy and distinction well before the nineteenth century and the birth of “scientific” racism.²⁰ Other scholars, however, are still cautious, and some are not at all inclined to employ that term.²¹ For those who do use it, Catholic Iberia’s treatment of its religious or ethnic minorities (Jews and Muslims) was a key factor in and a crucial step toward the development of racialist thinking.²² In contrast, some North American scholars — perhaps influenced by the movement for civil rights in the United States and the legacy of black slavery in the Atlantic world — tended to see racism mostly in terms of its modern association with skin color. They also found the Iberian world a logical starting point and began to search for the origins of racism in the extensive presence of African slaves and the color hierarchies of colonial Latin America, but they sometimes paid little or no attention to the well-established literature on the Hispanic exclusionary policies toward the Jews and conversos and, to a lesser extent, Muslims.²³

In the following chapters I have accepted the argument that aspects of the purity of blood restrictions and the beliefs of the inheritability of cultural and moral characteristics have a similarity to modern racism, but I also believe that the system of social organization and hierarchy of early modern Spain, Portugal, and their empires importantly incorporated concepts such as nobility, honor,

legitimacy of birth, occupation, education, and accomplishment in ways that were quite unlike more modern forms of racial thinking. Whatever the specific cause of their origins, *limpieza* statutes were directed not only against religious or ethnic minorities and heretics but also against persons of illegitimate and thus dishonorable birth and those who worked with their hands in so-called vile occupations.²⁴ These regulations reflected genealogical thinking and a belief in the essentialism of character traits and behaviors that was not an exclusively Iberian problem. Medieval Western Europe had broadly accepted a juridical division of society into nobles, commoners, and members of the clergy that had never encompassed social and political reality (and that was probably never intended to do so) but that did provide a basic grammar of social standing and expectations of behavior associated with each corporate estate. The distinctions between nobles and commoners often were supported by implications of inherited ethnic or racial difference. For example, in France, to have been among the “companions of Clovis” provided a patina of age and ethnic distinction to noble lineages that justified the concept of *noblesse naturel* that separated commoners from people of quality.²⁵

The concept of nobility permeated European societies, and Iberia was no exception. The nobles imposed their conception of life and social order on society as a whole.²⁶ Despite the many gradations and subranks in each estate, the division into nobles and commoners ordered society. It made nobility (*hidalgua*), with its privileges, precedence, and access to power, a status to which almost all aspired and that, in fact, became increasingly accessible through military, bureaucratic, or financial service to the monarch—a process that opened the door to many people of non-noble origins, although not without objections from those families that wished to maintain their exclusive control of privilege based on blood.²⁷ What I hope to show in the following chapters is that along with this traditional importance of nobility, the division of society after the fifteenth century based on a family’s religious purity created in Spain, Portugal, and their empires a new kind of privileged or noble status based on religious affiliation—and when that was combined with

hidalguía, it became a potential passport to success but simultaneously created a kind of diminished status that was intended to restrict and disadvantage those who bore the stains of impurity. When carried to the Iberian American colonies, these social divisions were adapted to a new social environment in which the mass of the Native American population in Spanish America was required to pay a tribute or perform labor and, in effect, it became a new taxpaying class. Simultaneously, all Spaniards, or those so considered, were freed of those obligations and thus enjoyed what had been the privileges and honor of *hidalgo* status in Spain and, *mutatis mutandis*, in Portugal. The famous German scientist Alexander von Humboldt observed in his 1803 visit to New Spain, “In America, every white man is a gentleman.”²⁸ Those who gained access to Indian labor—or, in some places like Brazil—to African slaves could live without recourse to manual labor, one of the principal characteristics of a noble lifestyle. But the transfer of traditional social divisions of the society of estates was not without complications and transformations. Throughout the Americas, people sought to better their position, avoid their corporate status and its obligations, and erase or forget their supposed lack of honor or purity. That process, combined with miscegenation and manumission, eventually created large populations of persons who did not easily fit into either the medieval corporate categories or the new colonial ethnic or color divisions. Eventually, by the later eighteenth century, a pigmentocracy emerged, but its incorporation of many elements like religious purity, education, occupation, and honor rather than a dependence only on genealogy and color distinguished it from more recent forms of racism. In any case, the principal objective of the following chapters is explain how the system of exclusions that operated not only to set the parameters of life for marginalized groups, but also to show that when seen through the life experiences of families or individuals, the restrictions and disadvantages were repeatedly circumvented, negotiated, ignored, and ultimately failed as policies of social marginalization—even though they were relatively successful in weakening those groups as corporate actors with political interests. Given the clear asymmetry of power between the insti-

tutions or groups in authority and those who were objects of their control, it is not an easy task to find the appropriate interpretative balance between agency and authority. However, to ignore the roles of agency and of individual and familial actions and strategies, as has too often been the case, is to lose an important dimension of how the societies of Latin America took shape.

Finally, I am aware that in the following chapters I touch on only a few of the themes that involved these marginalized peoples, all of which have been the subject of extensive scholarship. I have tried to read broadly in those literatures, but I realize both that my concentration on social and political aspects has not addressed the cultural, religious, and identity issues that have motivated much of the scholarship about them, and that understanding the relationship between their inner life and their political and social strategies or actions is a task that still remains to be accomplished. I also recognize that by limiting these chapters chronologically to the early modern era, and geographically to Latin America, they are incomplete and probably also misleading. The questions of civil status or identity did not cease to be asked in 1830, and the shadow of racial designations and disadvantages continued in many places into the nineteenth century alongside the questions of slavery and abolition, or how indigenous peoples would be integrated into the new nation-states of Latin America. Fine studies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, and Mexico have made it clear that *calidad* (quality), the early modern conception of what elements defined a person's status or race, continued to be used long after the end of the colonial era. Similarly, I am well aware that Spain, and especially Portugal, did not limit their overseas empires to the Americas, so that attitudes about other religions and ethnicities were shaped not only by experiences in the Americas but also by contacts with peoples in Africa, the Indian Ocean, East Asia, and the Pacific islands.²⁹ Although excellent studies have appeared on some of those areas, very few scholars of Latin America (and I count myself among them) have accepted the challenge to address in depth the history of ethnic and religious contact and interchange on that global scale and to question how the variety of experiences in different areas of the world affected

each other. Nevertheless, I believe that the history of Spain's and Portugal's experiences with religious and racial minorities in Latin America continues to be a crucial key to understanding not only that area of the world, but also the global history of empire and race. With an academic career that spans the era of the civil rights movement to the present moment of new state-sponsored attempts at discrimination and exclusion in my own country and elsewhere, I find this topic sadly relevant and contemporary, but I take heart in what the following chapters reveal about the resilience of those who found the means to avoid, contest, and struggle against the many obstacles created to limit, exclude, and demean them.