

with the outside world. At the end of the book, a bibliographical essay provides a starting point for those who want a more detailed understanding of Mexico's long and complex history.

If I see the street peddler again the next time I am in Mexico, I plan to ask her about Andrés Manuel. In September 2006, the federal elections jury—the Tribunal Federal Electoral—declared Calderón the winner of the presidential election by a narrow margin of less than 300,000 votes. Alleging massive fraud, Calderón's opponent, López Obrador, did not concede, rallying the masses in the Zócalo, or main square of Mexico City. In protest, his supporters paralyzed the Paseo de la Reforma for weeks by constructing a vast tent city on the lanes and sidewalks of the sprawling boulevard.

By now (2007) the tents are long gone, and Calderón has been sworn in as the new president, but López Obrador and his supporters still do not recognize the triumph of the PAN. Leading a parallel government, they hold out hope for their vision of Mexico—a vision quite different from that of Calderón and his conservative allies. Hence, although one might find Coca Cola as surely in a remote indigenous village as in a Mexico City mall, Mexico remains a complex mosaic of competing and coexisting cultures and viewpoints. The chapters that follow tell the story of how this mosaic came to be.

CHAPTER ONE

➤ The Making of Mexico ➤

To the people who had just landed on the coast, it was called the year 1519. Already there were ominous signs in the Aztec Empire, a land that stretched from the Pacific to the Atlantic. The inhabitants of the capital city, Tenochtitlán, were restless. There had been crop failures and droughts, as well as wars with neighboring indigenous communities. But none of these worries compared with the news that light-skinned people had disembarked on the coast several hundred miles east of Tenochtitlán, men who appeared to possess miraculous powers. They were mounted on animals much larger than any the Aztecs (or *Mexica*, as they called themselves) had ever seen. The invaders carried weapons that emitted smoke, fire, and enormous noise and killed people standing hundreds of feet away. They wore iron armor, shields, and hats, and they spoke in a language none of the indigenous people had ever heard. A year later, yet another Spanish expedition arrived, bringing more disruption to the indigenous world. Some of these newcomers were not as light skinned as the others—in fact, their skin appeared so dark that those who witnessed the explorers dubbed them “gods of the earth.” And sickness followed the second expedition. Only days after the arrival of the newcomers, some of the natives who had come into contact with them contracted smallpox, a disease they had never known before, which proved fatal to many. The invaders were still many days’ journeys away, but they carried ill portents. Little did the Aztecs know that the days of their empire were numbered, and that the invasion would produce mass death, the destruction of their way of life, and the forging of what the twentieth-century Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos has labeled a “cosmic race.”

During the next three centuries under Spanish rule, Mexican culture emerged as an amalgamation of its diverse roots. Not only did indigenous peoples, Spaniards, and their mixed progeny contribute to this unique blend, but the arrival of approximately a quarter million African slaves between 1519 and 1700 added to the mixture. Even as cultures clashed and blended, their roots—indigenous, Spanish, and African—have never disappeared completely in Mexico.

THE COMPONENTS OF THE COSMIC RACE

Indigenous people have lived in what is now Mexico for many thousands of years. The ancestors of the Aztecs and Maya migrated from Southeast Asia to North America via a land connection at the present location of the Bering Straits and rapidly spread south throughout the double continent. Mesoamerica—the area including contemporary Mexico and Central America—soon emerged as one of the most densely populated regions in the Americas, and around 2000 BCE,* its inhabitants began to build cities. The first indigenous civilization that left behind extensive archaeological evidence was that of the Olmecs, who lived in the tropical lowlands in present-day Veracruz and Tabasco. Giant stone heads and other artifacts there date from around 1200 BCE.

Almost a millennium later, three major clusters of indigenous civilizations emerged: Teotihuacán in the valley of Mexico, or Anáhuac; Monte Albán, Oaxaca; and the Maya city-states in the Yucatán peninsula and Central America. In what is known as the classic period (200 BCE–900 CE), these civilizations founded great cities that were not only centers of worship, but also commercial hubs and places of residence for a socially differentiated population. Many of the structures in these cities have survived to the present day, displaying the notable architectural and artistic achievements of the classic period. By 500 CE, Teotihuacán had at least 100,000 inhabitants, more than any European city of the time, and its imposing Sun Pyramid remains the highest such structure outside Egypt. Led by a king and a theocratic elite of priests, the people worshipped a complex pantheon of gods, chief among them Quetzalcóatl, the plumed serpent.

Centered on city-states such as Palenque, Tikal, and Uxmal, the Maya world developed a bit later than Teotihuacán, around 300 CE. Dependent on seasonal rainfall, the Mayas developed such sophisticated mathematical and dating systems that their calendar—a combination of solar and lunar years—is

* Before the common CE.

off by less than a minute after thousands of years. As in Teotihuacán, natural phenomena corresponded to representative gods in a polytheistic religion as characterized by gods and goddesses of the sun, rain, and fertility, among others. The gods' ties to nature signified the deep connection between the Maya and their environment. For example, when there was either too much or too little rain, the Maya practiced rituals to appease their gods. These rituals often involved the shedding of human or animal blood, as indigenous peoples throughout Mesoamerica believed that blood was life. Land belonged to the community, a community dominated by a king and a caste of priests who monopolized knowledge, power, and religious authority. The Maya caste system left an individual's station in society fixed—with few exceptions—and in some Maya city states, members of the upper castes even deformed the heads of babies in order to create visibly apparent physical distinctions.

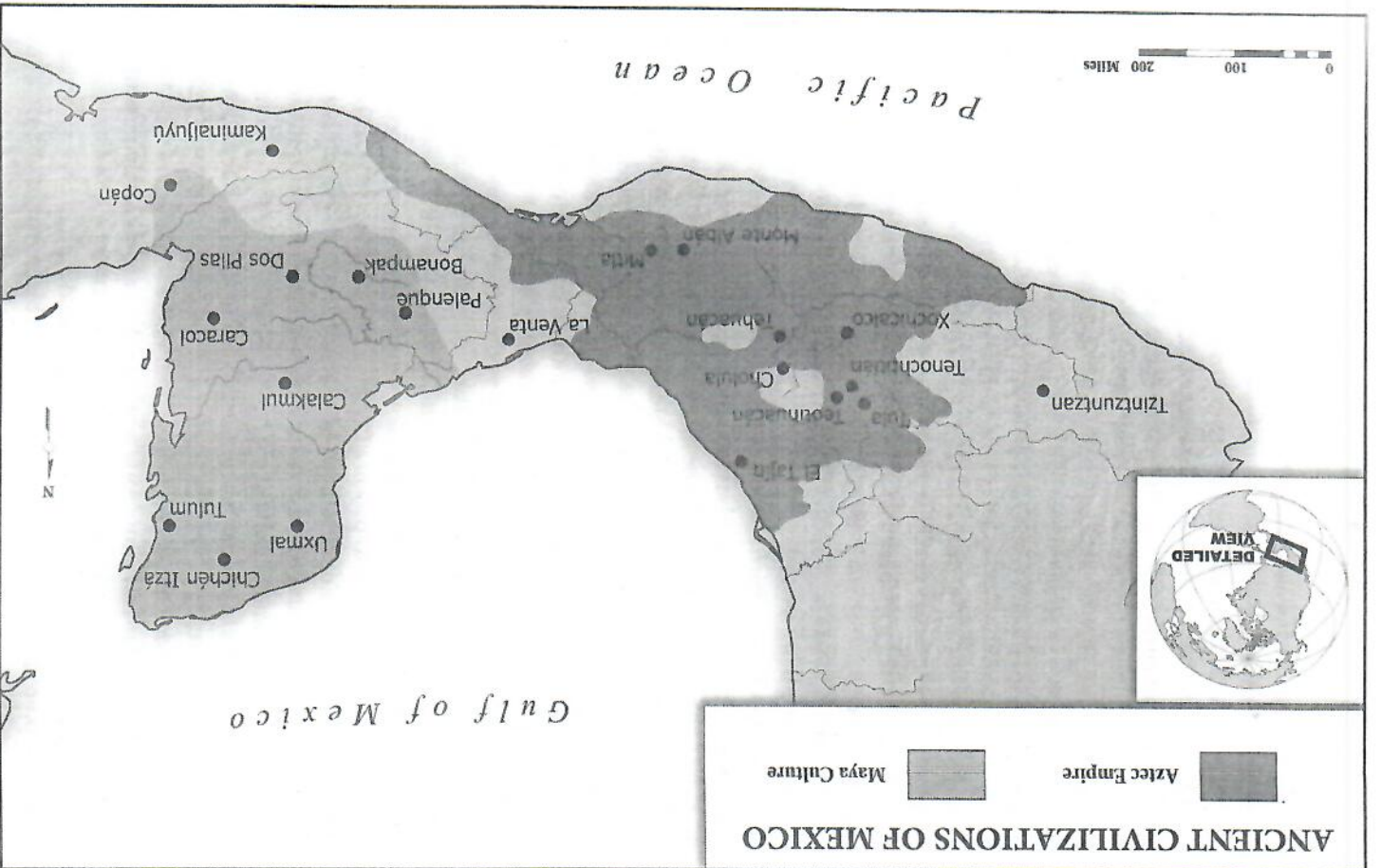
With good reason, a novel by the Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias labels the indigenous people of Mesoamerica as *hombres de maíz*, or people of corn. Indeed, the indigenous worldview revolved around the cultivation of maize, usually in a *milpa*, or raised field, together with beans and squash. A Maya myth, the *Popol Vuh*, told the human creation story as successive attempts by three water-dwelling plumed serpents. First, they attempted to make mud into humans, but their creations could neither move nor speak. Next, they made a set out of wood, but the new humans had neither a soul nor blood. Finally, the serpents decided to make humans out of maize, resulting in the creation of the Maya. The *Popol Vuh* reflects the great attachment of Mesoamerican peoples to the cultivation of corn. Yet the artistic and scientific accomplishments of the postclassic civilizations should not suggest that they were peaceful societies devoted to agriculture and the study of nature and the universe. Instead, these societies were often at war with their neighbors, and recent research demonstrates that both Teotihuacán and the Maya states practiced human sacrifice for god-appeasement and celebrations.

Around 900 CE, migrations reshaped the indigenous world and ushered in the postclassic period (900–1519 CE). The primary reasons for these migrations were climate change and economic degradation as a result of land cultivation. This post-classic period was marked by the formation of large empires, especially in present-day central Mexico, and more intense and technologically advanced forms of warfare in the Maya region. At the beginning of this period, the Toltecs, a warlike, nomadic people, established their capital at Tula in what is now the state of Hidalgo, where tall stone figures still bear witness to their mark on the region. The Toltecs followed religious practices that pitted a militaristic god, Tezcatlipoca (or Smoking Mirror), against Topiltzín-Quetzalcóatl, a newer, benevolent version of the Teotihuacán deity.

Pointing to apparent similarities between Quetzalcoatl and Kukulcán, a Maya god, archaeologists and historians long believed that the Toltecs also overran the Maya city states in the Yucatán. The resultant cultural fusion, these scholars argued, produced new architecture such as the northern half of Chichén Itzá, including the famous Temple of the Sorcerer. Recent research suggests, however, that the Toltec conquest of Yucatán never occurred. Instead, scholars point to the Putun Maya, a civilization located in present-day Tabasco, or between the Toltecs and Yucatec Maya, as cultural mediators between central Mexico and Yucatán. In any event, Chichén Itzá became the most powerful city in Yucatán, and perhaps the largest urban settlement in eleventh-century Mesoamerica. For reasons that remain debated, most of its inhabitants abandoned Chichén Itzá after 1100 CE, possibly as a consequence of crop failure or another natural catastrophe.

Even as the Toltecs and Itzá consolidated their rule, another warlike people came from the north, from a legendary place they called Aztlán (most likely present-day Oklahoma or Texas). The Aztecs numbered among the Chichimeca, an assortment of nomadic communities that entered the Valley of Mexico in the eleventh century CE. The Aztecs initially settled eighteen miles southwest of the former Teotihuacán, near Chapultepec Hill, but remained nomadic. Legend has it that they left Aztlán upon the command of their primary god, Huitzilopochtli, or hummingbird, who instructed them to perform human sacrifice in his name. Throughout the Valley of Mexico—and particularly around Lake Texcoco—the Aztecs were reviled for their cruelty; for that reason, local towns hired them as mercenaries. Finally, beginning in 1325, the Aztecs built a city on an island in the middle of the lake. According to legend, an Aztec leader named Tenoch decided on the site after seeing an eagle perched on a nopal cactus with a serpent in its beak—much later, the Mexican coat of arms. This city became known as Tenochtitlán.

In the fifteenth century, Tenochtitlán emerged as the largest city in the Western Hemisphere. Its growth rested on revolutionary agricultural techniques that included the use of *chinampas*, or floating gardens, to allow year-long cultivation of crops. The aqueducts and drainage systems needed to support these techniques as well as a growing population represented an unprecedented achievement in engineering. By 1500, the population of Tenochtitlán approached 200,000 inhabitants. The Aztec capital was an architectural marvel. As the Spanish conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo wrote: “We were astounded when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water ... these great towns, temples, and buildings, all made of stone and rising from the water, seemed like an enchanted vision.” Indeed, the lake was crucial to the rise of Tenochtitlán. The Aztecs used the lake around them not just as a



source of irrigation, but also as a highway for their canoes, through which they obtained invaluable commercial advantages over their neighbors.

By the time Díaz and other Spaniards arrived in Mesoamerica, Tenochtitlan had become the center of a vast empire. Superior to their neighbors in technological and military terms, the Aztecs subjugated the peoples of central and southern Mexico by means of a tribute system that collected from villages as far away as the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean. By 1500, the Aztecs claimed dominion over an estimated 15 to 25 million people. Tribute collection depended on clientelist arrangements with local leaders, or *caciques*, and it involved the provision of food, pottery, handwoven items, and forced labor, among other goods and services. In return, the Aztecs supported the caciques against their adversaries. The Aztec Empire entered the period of its greatest glory under the reign of Moctezuma II, who came to power in 1502.

However, Moctezuma's rule also manifested widespread discontent with the Aztec dominion. The Aztecs subscribed to a brutal religion that demanded ever-increasing human sacrifice. They believed that they lived in the era of the “fifth sun,” a period in which human sacrifice was required in order to keep the sun shining. The Aztec nobility thus took the ancient belief that blood equaled life to its extreme. They promoted the idea that the chief god Quetzalcóatl had fled from Mesoamerica in a state of intoxication, leaving the bloodthirsty god Huitzilopochtli to dominate the region. The emperor considered himself the representative of Huitzilopochtli. During his reign, the imposing temples of Tenochtitlan—and particularly what we now know as the Templo Mayor, the high temple of the emperor—featured awesome displays of power, including the ritual sacrifice of captured enemy soldiers, chiefly among them the Tlaxcaltecos, members of a civilization sixty miles to the east that had not submitted to Aztec rule. Aztec priests cut out the hearts of the victims with obsidian blades, offering them to Huitzilopochtli as his blood sacrifice so that the empire might continue to prosper. The mounting human toll was but one sign that the realm of Moctezuma was in deep distress at the moment of its greatest power. A small class of Aztec priest-rulers, the *pipilín*, lorded over a vast majority of commoners and serfs, and they had cast aside the communal landholding patterns of the past to emerge as a landowning aristocracy. Across the far-flung empire, local communities merely tolerated the Aztec military presence, hoping for a chance to break free in the near future.

Farther to the east, the Maya world underwent a different kind of transformation. For reasons that remain the subject of intense debate among archaeologists and historians, the Maya had abandoned most of their great cities during the preceding centuries. Some scholars have blamed overcultivation and

crop failure, which might have induced the city dwellers to disperse. Others point to the practice of ritual bloodletting among the elite, which often took the form of self-mutilation, as evidence that Maya states were experiencing a crisis of leadership. Yet others hypothesize that the Maya interpreted a single natural disaster, such as an earthquake or the strike of a large meteorite, as a sign of the impending end of their world. In any event, by the time a Spanish expedition reached Yucatán in 1517, the Maya age of glory had long passed.

Although they had never met the Aztecs or Maya up to the day they reached Yucatán, the Spaniards shared several important cultural traits with the indigenous people they were about to conquer. Like the Aztec Empire, sixteenth-century Spain was a monarchy featuring a landowning aristocracy and a close association between the state and organized militaristic religion. And both the Aztecs and the Maya could relate to one of the central tenets of Christianity—the idea that salvation came to the faithful through Jesus's sacrifice and the shedding of his blood on the cross. Modern Spain emerged in the late 1400s out of the union of the two largest Iberian kingdoms by the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragón and Isabella of Castile. Located in the extreme southwest of Europe and separated from Africa only by the forty-mile Straits of Gibraltar, the Iberian Peninsula was a major meeting point of peoples: the indigenous Iberians and Basques, the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans of the ancient Mediterranean, Jewish refugees, the Visigoths, and the Moors, Muslims of Arabic extraction.

Of these peoples, the Romans and Moors left the most lasting impact on the region. Its inhabitants would go on to establish vast colonial empires stretching from the Philippines to California to Tierra del Fuego. Rome dominated Iberia for seven hundred years (c. 216 BCE–476 CE), and a variant of Latin, enriched by Iberian, Basque, and Arabic words, evolved into the Spanish and Portuguese languages of today. The imperial Roman political system—a fusion of authoritarian rule, bureaucratic administration, and the trappings of parliamentary decisionmaking—imprinted itself on Iberia. Roman law survives in the legal codes of Spain and Portugal as well as their former colonies, and both Judaism and Christianity came to Iberia through the trade routes of the Roman Empire. The Moors invaded Iberia in 711 CE and destroyed the Visigoth kingdom that featured a small Germanic ruling class governing a multiethnic society. The Moors established their rule over more than 90 percent of the Iberian Peninsula and founded one of the greatest cities of the Muslim world, Córdoba, in the southern province they called Al-Andalus, contemporary Andalusia. Under Muslim rule, Iberia flourished economically and culturally, and the Qur'an's toleration of Judaism and Christianity produced a unique

society. The ruling class was Muslim, as only Muslims were allowed to bear arms; most of the peasants were Christian; and a significant percentage of the urban professionals were Jewish. But this civilization was never at peace. At first, the Muslims pushed on into what is now France, only to be repelled, then several small Christian kingdoms in the unconquered north of Iberia began their own offensive against the Moors.

Thus began what subsequent Spanish historiography would label the *reconquista*, or age of reconquest. In the course of the next four centuries, the Christian kingdoms pushed south against their Muslim enemies, promising land and booty to those who led their troops into battle. The reconquista produced a crusading and wealthy Church bent on expanding its influence as well as a powerful feudal nobility conscious of its role. This nobility ruled over its conquered subjects—whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim—with an iron fist. By the twelfth century, the reconquista slowed, and Aragón, Castile, and Portugal had emerged as the primary Christian kingdoms, with Al-Andalus remaining a Muslim monarchy until after Ferdinand and Isabella's marriage in 1469 aligned Aragón and Castile. The slowing of the reconquista meant fewer opportunities for the warring nobles who had benefited from the expansion of Christian lands at the expense of the Muslims. Moreover, the principle of primogeniture restricted land inheritance to the eldest son, leaving the younger sons to pursue careers in the Church, the bureaucracy, or the military. The Spaniards called these dispossessed aristocrats *hidalgos*, a term that derived from the phrase *hijo de algo*, or son of something. Determined to destroy the remaining Muslim kingdom, Isabella persuaded Ferdinand to join Castile in an attack on Al-Andalus. In 1492, the combined troops of Aragón and Castile conquered Andalusia. But Isabella, who later received the byname *la católica*, the Catholic Queen, was not done in her quest to “purify” her kingdom of its enemies. That same year, she and Ferdinand expelled all Jewish inhabitants from their combined kingdom.

If 1492 marked the end of the reconquista, it also signified the beginning of a new age of conquest: a new opportunity for the *hidalgos* and others in search of social and political advancement. On October 12 of that same year, Columbus's expedition stumbled upon the New World while looking for a sea route to India—a route that the Portuguese, Iberian rivals of the Spaniards, had been seeking for almost a century in their explorations around the coast of Africa. This expedition was therefore part of an age in which Spain and Portugal took the enterprise of conquest overseas. The conquistadors engaged in this endeavor sought “God, gold, and glory,” i.e., the spread of Christianity, personal enrichment, and political power. Indeed, they did so with the

Church's blessing. In 1493, Isabella and Ferdinand struck an unprecedented deal with Pope Alexander VI—the so-called *patronato real*, or kingly patronage—that assured them of the Vatican's support in their enterprise of conquest in exchange for their pledge to defend Catholicism across the globe. In a papal bull, Alexander awarded Spain all newly explored lands to the west of a north-south meridian 100 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands. Of course, in drawing this line, he never asked the opinion of any of the inhabitants of the affected territories. This line would have opened up all of the Americas to Spanish colonization if the subsequent Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494, had not moved the line 1,000 miles west. The Tordesillas treaty opened eastern South America to Portuguese colonization. The alliance between Pope Alexander and the Spanish monarchs was but one important aspect of a special relationship. The late fifteenth century witnessed the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition, an ecclesiastical high court charged with purging the realm of witches, infidels, and half-hearted converts to Christianity. This court gained sweeping powers to investigate Spanish subjects, and conviction often meant death.

When Columbus and other explorers returned from the New World with tales of unknown riches, many *hidalgos* jumped at the chance to participate in new military conquests. They saw the conquest of the New World as an opportunity to reclaim the social status of their forebears. Steeled by centuries of conflict and repression in the reconquista, the *hidalgos* were well suited to confront civilizations culturally different from their own. By the time Isabella and Ferdinand's grandson, Charles I of Habsburg, became king of Spain in 1516, *hidalgos* had featured prominently in the conquest of Cuba and the other Caribbean islands.

In 1519, it was one of these *hidalgos*, Hernán (or Fernando) Cortés who took the command of an expedition to explore the vast territories to the southwest of Cuba. Cortés was a native of the province of Extremadura in western Spain, an arid region with few opportunities even for the fortunate. He hailed from a noble family of modest means that desired him to pursue a career in law—along with the army and the Church, one of the *hidalgos'* career avenues for social climbing. Yet young Hernán, born only seven years before Columbus's first voyage to America, dreamed of participating in the Spanish conquest of the West Indies. In 1504, he boarded a ship to the New World, and seven years later, he formed part of the Spanish army that conquered the island of Cuba. Once there, Cortés took a position in the colonial government and became a man of considerable prosperity. In this capacity, he knew of two Spanish expeditions to a vast land southwest of Cuba. In 1517,

an expedition under Francisco Hernández de Córdoba reached the coast of Yucatán, a peninsula then believed to be an island; and the following year, Juan de Grijalva's expedition visited what is now the Gulf Coast of Mexico and brought home several small gold objects. Grijalva and his charges told stories of a legendary land of gold that, they believed, lay in the heart of the area they were about to encounter. Intrigued, Cortés hired many of the men who had participated in these earlier forays for his own attempt to conquer the lands to the west. On February 18, 1519, Cortés and a small force of approximately 550 set out for Yucatán.

Contrary to a stereotype passed down by generations of historians, this expedition was not primarily composed of hidalgos or other noblemen. Poor nobles comprised a small minority among Cortés's troops, which included men from all social strata such as sailors, artisans, and craftsmen, as well as a handful of women. Regardless of their standing in society, the conquistadors sought power and wealth they could only obtain through an opportunity such as this one. Nor was the expedition an exclusively Spanish enterprise. Cortés's force comprised people from Portugal, Germany, and Italy, for example.

THE SPANISH CONQUEST AND ITS AFTERMATH, 1519—C. 1630

The stuff of legends and epic tales, the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire has generated a great many misconceptions. The intriguing question of how a small invasion force could overpower an empire of millions of subjects has triggered a host of explanations, often founded on myth. For instance, many textbooks still claim that Moctezuma initially welcomed the Spaniards rather than killing them because he and his advisers believed that Cortés was the exiled Quetzalcóatl returning to reclaim his rightful throne from the usurper Huitzilopochtli. According to this tale, Malintzin, an indigenous woman and an aide and translator to Cortés, informed the Spaniards of the Quetzalcóatl myth and thus assisted them in a game of deception that allowed the Spaniards to sneak into the heart of the Aztec Empire. Invented by Bernardino de Sahagún, a sixteenth-century Spanish friar and chronicler of Aztec oral histories of the conquest, this entertaining story makes for powerful human drama, highlights Spanish resourcefulness, and turns Malintzin into a Mexican Mata Hari, whose betrayal of her people led to the fall of the empire. The myth, however, obscures the true reasons for the Spanish triumph: their technological superiority, the introduction of diseases hitherto unknown in Mesoamerica, and—most important—the role played by indigenous enemies of the Aztecs.

Luck, the element of surprise, and superior weaponry helped the Spaniards in the first weeks of their expedition, adding to Cortés's considerable skill as a military commander. During his first stop on the island of Cozumel off the coast of the Yucatán, Cortés encountered Jerónimo de Aguilar, a Franciscan friar who had been shipwrecked eight years before on his way from Panama to Santo Domingo and had attained fluency in the local Mayan dialect. During a subsequent stop on the coast of present-day Tabasco, Cortés obtained twenty slave women, among them Malintzin, who spoke both Mayan and Náhuatl. Together, Aguilar and Malintzin gave Cortés the ability to communicate with the Aztecs. Soon after landing on the Gulf Coast and founding Veracruz, the first Spanish settlement in Mesoamerica, Cortés and his men turned inland. At Cempoala, the Spaniards defeated a smaller indigenous army. This confrontation pitted indigenous troops on foot, armed with stone weapons against armored soldiers on horseback. The Spaniards' single greatest technological advantage was their use of metal and gunpowder. Their guns could kill scores of indigenous troops from a distance, and the invaders' swords were vastly more effective than the obsidian blades and spear tips used by the indigenous armies. In addition, the horse—an animal bred exclusively in the Old World at that time—gave the Spaniards great advantages over their indigenous adversaries. It is also worth noting that the Spaniards possessed distinctive strategic advantages in their style of warfare; while the Aztecs' priority lay in the capture of prisoners for use in ceremonies of human sacrifice, the Spaniards focused on defeating and killing their enemies.

Once other indigenous communities realized that they could not stop the Spanish invasion force, many of them decided to support Cortés in the hopes of throwing off the yoke of the Aztec Empire, who under Moctezuma, had greatly increased imperial demands for tribute from subject peoples. Cortés's powerful indigenous allies were the most important factor in his eventual victory; so much so that the conquest was a joint venture, an "Indian conquest" as much as a "Spanish conquest." Moctezuma had one inveterate opponent in Xicoténcatl the Elder, the ruler of Tlaxcala. Xicoténcatl and other leading Tlaxcaltecos resented the Aztec ruler's ritualistic sacrifices of their warriors on the Templo Mayor, and they longed for a chance to destroy his empire. After his troops had lost a skirmish with Cortés's force, Xicoténcatl decided to assist the Spaniards.

From Tlaxcala, Cortés and his troops proceeded to the city of Cholula, a mere sixty miles east of Tenochtitlán. Once allied with Xicoténcatl, the city had recently joined the Aztecs. Warned by Malintzin, who by then had learned to communicate in Spanish, Cortés suspected a trap at Cholula and ordered his

troops to fire on the local leadership, which had assembled to greet him upon his entrance to the city. During the ensuing fight, as many as 6,000 Cholulans lost their lives. Frightened by the Spaniards' display of deadly violence and uncertain whether their coming represented divine intervention, Moctezuma agreed to meet with Cortés on the causeway leading to Tenochtitlán. During this meeting on November 8, 1519, Malintzin again played an important role. As she had done in the Spanish negotiations with other indigenous leaders, she provided Cortés with important information regarding local society and culture. It even appears that she took on authority of her own, as Cortés trusted and valued her judgment on the indigenous people with whom he was dealing. Confident of success, Cortés bluntly informed Moctezuma that he and his companions suffered from a "disease of the heart that [could] only be cured with gold."⁷ This statement demonstrated the Spaniards' greed, implying that Cortés and his men certainly fought for gold and glory as well as for the proclaimed purpose of extending the global reach of Christianity. Uncertain of what to do, Moctezuma ordered gold jewelry delivered and invited the Spaniards into Tenochtitlán. But the Spanish conquistador suspected another trap, and once in the Aztec capital, Cortés decided to deal a preemptive strike by taking Moctezuma hostage.

This scheme might have delayed hostilities for quite a while had Cortés not received word of the coming of a rival, Pánfilo Narváez, the leader of another Spanish expedition. To confront Narváez, Cortés returned to Campeche, leaving a detachment of troops in the Aztec capital under the leadership of Pedro de Alvarado. Cortés handily defeated the Narváez expedition and augmented his own troops with hundreds of Narváez's men. In Cortés's absence, the Aztecs staged a ceremony to honor Huitzilopochtli—a feast designed to show that their institutions and rituals continued to function even with the Spaniards in their city. The inexperienced Alvarado was nervous about what he considered a threat to the Spanish garrison and ordered his troops to attack the Aztec aristocracy during the ceremony. The attack was brutal and bloody; in the words of the Spanish chronicler Bernardino de Sahagún, "the blood of the chiefs ran like water." It also marked the beginning of open hostilities, and the Aztecs elected a new leader, Cuítláhuac, in place of the captive Moctezuma. At this juncture, Cortés and his men reentered the city, and the conquistador persuaded Moctezuma to ask his people to allow the Spaniards to leave peacefully. Even before Moctezuma had finished speaking, however, the Aztecs pelted him with rocks, and the former emperor died in the ensuing melee. We still do not know the exact circumstances of his death; while Bernal Díaz claimed that Moctezuma died as a result of the stoning,

indigenous accounts indicated that the Spaniards killed him. Whatever the case may be, Cortés knew that the Spaniards could not stay in the Aztec capital any longer and ordered a daring departure from Tenochtitlán across the narrow causeways that connected the city to the edge of the lake. On July 1, 1520, in what became known in Conquest lore as *la noche triste*, or the sad night, the Spaniards attempted their escape from the island city. Loaded down with gold and other booty, at least 450 Spaniards died during the escape.

The Spanish exodus allowed Cortés to plan a full assault on the Aztec Empire. With the help of tens of thousands of Tlaxcalteco troops, Cortés laid siege to Tenochtitlán. In 1521, the allies took Tenochtitlán and captured the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtémoc. To demonstrate their power, the Spaniards razed the Aztec city and built a new capital, the Ciudad de México (Mexico City) over the ruins of its temples. Dragged from his homeland to accompany the Spaniards in the conquest of southeastern Mesoamerica, Cuauhtémoc died in captivity.

As mentioned, the inadvertent introduction of Old World diseases played an important role in the Aztec defeat. Smallpox, measles, and other viral diseases appeared in Mesoamerica in the wake of Narváez's expedition, spreading quickly. While Europeans and Africans had acquired significant immunity against these diseases in the course of several millennia of exposure, the immune systems of indigenous Americans had little defense against the new germs. Even before the Spaniards and Tlaxcaltecos overpowered Tenochtitlán, the mysterious deaths of thousands of indigenous people had weakened Aztec resolve. These deaths were particularly important in a society dominated by a belief system that emphasized its ties to nature and the need to appease the gods in charge of natural forces. In the long term, the consequences were even more devastating. Over the next century, the native population fell to approximately 1 million, a decline of at least 92 percent.

This population decline determined the characteristics of Spanish rule, and, in particular, the systems of forced labor imposed by the conquerors. The deaths of millions of indigenous peoples undercut efforts by the conquistadors to make themselves into a noble class in what was now the colony of New Spain. The conquistadors expected to be handsomely rewarded by Spain for their exploits, and Cortés himself attained a new noble title: the Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca. As the Spaniards never found the gold they were looking for when they sought the mythical El Dorado, these rewards came in the form of the labor grant, or *encomienda*. A grant of *encomienda* entitled a conquistador to dominion over the indigenous community or communities listed in the title in exchange for the theoretical commitment to bring Christi-

unity to the indigenous people. In practice, the *encomienda* became a tribute system in which *caciques* (local chiefs) could either pay or provide indigenous labor. Thus the conquistadors used the *encomienda* both as an instrument of tribute and as a justification for keeping thousands of indigenous people in conditions of forced labor even as many of these people were permitted to keep their lands and other property. Over time, the decline of the indigenous population rendered most of the *caciques* unable to meet their obligations to the *encomenderos*. At the very time when the native nobility was disappearing, the *encomienda* system came under attack in Spain, as the Crown feared that the *encomiendas* would evolve into hereditary feudal fiefdoms that it could not control. Desiring to impose his authority on the conquistadors and their descendants, Charles I issued the New Laws of 1542, which promised to end the *encomienda* and outlawed the enslavement of indigenous Americans on the grounds that they—unlike the Africans—had not yet had the opportunity to embrace Jesus Christ as their savior. In response, the conquistadors moved to assume more direct control over native land and labor. By 1600, two new institutions had begun to replace the *encomienda*: the *repartimiento*, which required indigenous communities to contribute a percentage of laborers to nearby Spanish authorities, and the *hacienda*, the great agricultural estate held in private hands.

The controversy regarding the exploitation of indigenous labor highlighted the tensions between the Crown and its subjects in New Spain; tensions that demonstrated the chasm between the theory and practice of the colonial government. The official representative of the Spanish king was the viceroy in Mexico City, a native Spaniard appointed to a six-year term. To provide a system of checks and balances in government, the king also appointed a legislative and judicial body, the *audiencia*. At the regional level, *corregidores* and *alcaldes mayores* answered to the viceroy. In practice, however, the viceroy depended to a great extent on the goodwill of the conquistador families. Thus the *encomienda* survived for centuries in spite of the New Laws, and local authorities often ignored directives from Mexico City.

Rather than the colonial government, however, it was the Church that was the most important institution in the making of colonial New Spain. The Church was responsible for molding the hearts and minds of the conquered peoples according to the cultural values of the conquistadors, and it played a significant role in the cultural transformation that occurred in colonial New Spain. Under the patronato real, the Crown had pledged itself to convert all indigenous peoples to Christianity, and the Spanish monarchs considered the defense and advancement of the Catholic Church one of their most important

missions. This endeavor became even more important during the Protestant Reformation in Europe, which coincided with the era of the Iberian conquest of the New World. Thus Franciscan friars had accompanied Cortés's expedition to Mesoamerica. Unlike conquistadors, Franciscan and Dominican friars vowed to lead a life of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and they stood at the forefront of the conversion effort.

Yet conversion of indigenous peoples to Catholicism proved to be a complex undertaking. In the first place, the friars were greatly outnumbered in comparison to the native population. The friars soon found out that they needed to accept indigenous idols and beliefs in order to succeed in their efforts at conversion, thus creating syncretic religious practices that blended Catholic and indigenous ideas. The foremost example of such a syncretism is the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the "patron" saint of Mexico who reputedly appeared to an indigenous campesino, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatzín, on December 9, 1531. According to historians, this cult either represents a convergence of the Catholic Virgin Mary and the Aztec goddess Tonantzin, or it is a Catholic rendition of Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess and mother of Huitzilopochtli. As the story goes, Juan Diego saw Guadalupe as the Virgin Mary, speaking to him in Náhuatl. Guadalupe asked Juan Diego to tell the bishop to build a shrine at the site of the encounter, Tepeyac Hill just north of the new capital city, so that she might bestow her grace on all those who sought her. Skeptical of Juan Diego's vision, the local bishop requested evidence that the apparition was true. But on December 12, the Virgin ordered Juan Diego to return to Tepeyac. That day, Juan Diego found a rose bush flowering in the midst of winter and took some of the flowers to the bishop. When the roses fell from his mantle, the image of the Virgin was imprinted on the cloth. Satisfied with the legitimacy of Juan Diego's vision, the bishop ordered the erection of a shrine to Guadalupe at Tepeyac. Since then, December 12 has been celebrated as the *día de Guadalupe* throughout Mexico and its diaspora. A fusion of indigenous and Spanish cultural traditions, the cult of Guadalupe remains an essential element in the Mexican national consciousness. In the words of novelist Carlos Fuentes, "One may no longer consider himself a Christian, but one cannot truly be considered a Mexican unless one believes in the Virgin of Guadalupe."

The story of the Virgin of Guadalupe stood in contrast to the "Black Legend" of Malintzin. The help that this indigenous woman provided to the Spaniards—and the fact that she probably gave birth to the first mestizo, Martín Cortés, following an amorous relationship with the leader of the conquistadors—earned her widespread condemnation. In fact, even today,

Malintzin, or La Malinche, stands for treasonous behavior, and *malinchismo* is a noun that denotes a Mexican who has either turned his or her back on the fatherland or is actively betraying Mexican interests. While the Spaniards informally referred to Malintzin as “doña Marina,” many Mexicans called her *la chingada*, a term that means “whore,” or someone who has been sexually violated. Paired with Guadalupe, Malintzin therefore represents one of the sides in the madonna/whore dichotomy used in many Catholic societies to classify women according to a presumed sexual propriety or impropriety. In fact, a closer look paints a more sympathetic picture of Malintzin. A noble woman who had been sold into slavery by allies of the Aztecs, she did not owe the Aztecs any allegiance, and she may have seen herself as only one of the millions of indigenous people who helped the Spaniards throw off the yoke of a hated empire. If we accept the notion of the “Indian conquest,” that is to say, an interpretation that focuses on the contribution of indigenous opponents of Moctezuma in the destruction of Tenochtitlán, Malintzin played a rather typical, if prominent role in advancing the agenda of the enemies of the Aztecs. Just like Xicoténcatl and the other Spanish allies, she could not possibly have fathomed that the arrival of several hundred outsiders would signal the end of the indigenous world as she knew it. Male-dominated post-conquest lore did not castigate the Tlaxcalans to nearly the same extent as Malintzin, even though Xicoténcatl and his men had played a significant role in the triumph of the Spaniards.

Far from being mere instruments of conquest, the friars living among the indigenous people sometimes turned into staunch advocates for them. The famous Franciscan friar and former encomendero Bartolomé de las Casas assailed the conquistadors—and particularly the encomienda—for its cruelty to native peoples. Las Casas’s treatise *The Devotion of the Indies* still stands as the most eloquent denunciation of the atrocities of Spanish colonialism. Las Casas’s ideas were to play a significant role in the formulation of the New Laws, which forbade the formal enslavement of indigenous peoples. Another friar, Toribio de Benavente, or Motolinía, was known as the “Poor Little One” in reference to his modest appearance and advocacy for the poor. Other churchmen such as Bernardino de Sahagún and the first bishop of Yucatán, Diego de Landa, were fascinated with indigenous cultures and saw it as their obligation to record the oral and written histories of the Aztecs and Maya. Ironically, after writing what remains the most important conquest-era description of Maya culture, de Landa ordered the destruction of all Maya icons and artifacts that he could find because they were not compatible with Christianity.

The relationship between royal officials and the Church was another example of the differences between policy and practice. Under the patronato real,

the state pledged itself to supporting the Christianization of the indigenous people in the colony, while the Pope promised to stay out of political affairs and even allowed the Crown to name the archbishop in Mexico City as well as other top clergy. As a result, the higher rungs of the Catholic hierarchy in New Spain—archbishops and bishops—worked closely with the colonial government. For example, in 1571, the Crown and Church cooperated in installing the Inquisition in New Spain, and over the next quarter millennium, the Inquisition brought approximately 6,000 individuals to trial, with 100 defendants burned at the stake for heresy. In practice, however, this partnership did not always work well. The viceroy permitted abuses against the native population to continue unabated, and the lower clergy often clashed with Spanish mine and landowners over their harsh treatment of their workers. There was little communication between the Church hierarchy in the cities and the missionaries in the countryside. One particular religious order that came to Mexico in the late sixteenth century, the Jesuits, ignored the arrangement between Church and state altogether, built their missions far away from Spanish-dominated cities, and defied the authority of the Crown.

By about 1600, the indigenous population had stabilized, Catholicism was entrenched, and a new society had emerged. In theory, the colony was divided into “castes,” based on a person’s ethnic or racial origin. Thus Spanish colonial law recognized more than sixty racial classifications ranging from a pure-blooded Spaniard to the product of an African-indigenous union. Social status loosely corresponded to one’s degree of “whiteness,” and relatively speaking, the caste system stigmatized African origin more so than indigenous heritage. In practice, however, these classifications were not universally recognized. A majority of the inhabitants of New Spain were mestizos, descendants of mixed unions of Spanish men and indigenous and/or African women. About 15 percent of the population was Spanish, with a significant and growing percentage of *criollos* (Mexican-born whites), who felt less attachment to colonial dictates than the native-born Spaniards, also known as *peninsulares*. Another 20 percent was indigenous, defined as people who continued to speak indigenous languages and practice the culture of the Aztecs and other native peoples. The remainder was African, both slave and free, a group concentrated along the coasts of central and southern Mexico and in the largest cities.

African slaves and freedmen probably first entered Mexico as part of the ill-fated Narváez expedition. These African slaves formed part of a story often forgotten amidst the epic clash of civilizations in the conquest of Mexico. Indeed, the institution of slavery, and the forced migration of Africans that it produced, was an integral part of the enterprise of conquest. By the time Cortés embarked on his adventure, thousands of African slaves worked on sugar

plantations as well as in private households and many other locations in Cuba, the other Caribbean islands, and on the Iberian peninsula itself. Accustomed to tropical climates and largely immune to Old World pathogens, the slaves survived conditions that had proven fatal for the indigenous people.

Africans and their descendants constituted an important element of the colonial crucible. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, more than 200,000 slaves (the equivalent of 10 percent of the transatlantic slave trade) arrived in Mexico. To be sure, African slaves never accounted for more than 2 percent of the population, and they did not suffer the impact of the people in areas where Old World diseases virtually wiped out the indigenous population, as in Cuba, the Portuguese colony of Brazil, or in British possessions such as Jamaica or South Carolina. Nonetheless, Afro-Mexicans left indelible traces on the evolving culture. They worked on plantations, in mines, in textile sweatshops, and as domestics. Working under brutal conditions, Africans created social networks that allowed them to retain some aspects of their cultural heritage. To this day, the regional cultures of the coastal states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz—particularly with regard to music, dance, and food—remain influenced by their African roots. Social networks also allowed slaves to rebel against their conditions, although rebellion came at a heavy price: whipping, mutilation, and even death. Some slaves fled to distant runaway slave communities, or *palengues*. Yanga, the leader of the most famous palenque in the mountains of Veracruz, forced the authorities to recognize the independence of his town, and he remains a symbol of black resistance even today. Ultimately, however, the Afro-Mexican population became absorbed in the miscegenated population.

Although Spanish colonial legislation carefully distinguished among Spaniards, “Indians,” Africans, and mestizos, even subdividing the latter into sixteen categories based on their racial ancestry, the reality was more fluid. In rare cases, prosperous nonwhites could purchase a certificate—the *gracias al sacar*—that certified the holder to be a Christian of pure Spanish descent. This example demonstrated the primacy of class over racial categories even though social stratification roughly followed color lines. Indigenous people who spoke Spanish also could blend into mestizo society when they so desired. Further differentiated at the regional and local levels, colonial Mexican society presaged the patchwork of regional and social identities that would characterize the mature colony and beyond. Equally fluid as the caste system was the court system of the viceroalty. In theory, a system of *jueros*, laws bestowing special privileges, established separate areas of jurisdiction for the army, the Church, and the indigenous population, respectively. In practice, however, the legal system became an area in which indigenous people and mestizos contested

and resisted colonial rule, and recent scholarship has demonstrated the many ways in which poor Mexicans—particularly those of indigenous and African descent—used the courts to their own advantage.

The ongoing cultural clashes highlighted the fact that the Spanish conquest had opened Mesoamerica to a relationship with the outside world. Not only had the Spanish conquest changed Mesoamerica, but the region also changed the rest of the world. The “Columbian Exchange” that brought guns and germs to the Americas introduced the Old World to countless products native to present-day Mexico, including maize and the cocoa bean, which had once served as a form of currency in the Aztec Empire and would now have lasting importance on a global scale.

A COLONY IN TRANSITION, C. 1630—C. 1800

The viceroalty of New Spain was the crown jewel of the Spanish Empire. Financed by the export of silver and other commodities, Mexico City became the largest city among Spain’s colonial possessions, and also one that enjoyed the closest administrative and cultural relationship with the mother country. Whether as priests, merchants, or artisans, Spaniards continued to migrate to the viceroalty throughout the colonial era. It is not surprising that this close relationship endured into the nineteenth century, marking Mexican history well beyond the colonial years.

Nonetheless, as New Spain entered the seventeenth century, inhabitants of the viceroalty remained far less obedient to decrees from Madrid than the Crown expected. From the vantage point of the Spanish government, the revenue from Mexico was a source of disappointment. Having hoped to find tons of gold in the Aztec Empire, the conquistadors discovered that the precious metal was almost as scarce in Mesoamerica as it was in Europe. Instead, the Spaniards found silver in the mountains of present-day central Mexico. While the sixteenth century witnessed a steady flow of silver to Spain to help finance a host of imperial wars against Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire, Mexican silver mining initially remained modest compared to that in Peru. Moreover, the price of silver declined precipitously in the early seventeenth century.

Mexico, however, featured a burgeoning internal economy beginning in the seventeenth century. Rather than investing in silver mining, wealthy creoles turned to manufacturing, and particularly the *obraje*, or textile sweatshop. Supplying the domestic market with relatively inexpensive clothes, the *obraje* amounted to a first small step toward the growth of manufacturing in the colony. It also provided the first significant source of wage labor for

women. Taking advantage of cheap labor in the cities and the virtual absence of competition from abroad, the obraje emerged as the primary producer of garments in New Spain.

It is not surprising that recent scholarship has shattered the old notion of the seventeenth century as a “long siesta” in which Spanish rule continued uncontested in a placid, unchanging colony. Indeed, New Spain was a colony in transition during that century, and in many ways, these decades witnessed the emergence of a complex amalgamation of colonial identities amidst the slow recovery of the indigenous population.

In addition, a series of revolts and riots challenged Spanish rule, demonstrating the strength of local resistance against colonial authorities. Revolts plagued the northern frontier between 1630 and 1750. In this vast and sparsely populated region—an area that spans the entire present-day southwestern United States as well as the northern half of Mexico—indigenous societies continued to operate with minimal Spanish interference and resented Spanish efforts to impose effective control. The nomadic Apaches periodically overran the small Spanish *presidios*, or garrisons, in Sonora, and in 1688, the Pueblo Revolt in New Mexico briefly threw off colonial rule altogether. On the northern frontier, the Jesuit and Franciscan missions were the primary evidence of Spanish colonization. The missionaries built churches that looked like fortresses, with small windows, thick walls, and strong defenses. On the frontier, the Spanish conquest was still taking place centuries after the death of Cortés, and the Yaquis of Sonora were not subdued until the late 1920s.

Closer to their center of power, the Spaniards experienced other problems. Even Mexico City, the epicenter of colonial rule, experienced two great riots in 1624 and 1692. A steep rise in corn prices following failed harvests precipitated both riots, as lower-class Mexicans took to the streets to seek redress for their plight. The *humble* of June 8, 1692, in particular, featured mass anger directed at the elite. To the cries of “Death to the *gabachinos* (Spaniards),” thousands of mestizos and indigenous Mexicans swept through the capital all the way to the *Zócalo*, leaving a trail of destruction in their wake. This riot was more than an act of desperation, as the violence reflected an increasing sense of racial identity among mestizos, particularly in urban areas. Royal officials blamed “treacherous Indians” for the looting, but court records show that a majority of the participants convicted for their part in the riot were indigenous and mestizo artisans, shopkeepers, peddlers, and other middling folk.

In addition, the Spaniards could not maintain intellectual and religious conformity in New Spain, particularly in the outer reaches of this far-flung viceroyalty. Despite the presence of the Inquisition, indigenous belief systems remained strong, forcing missionaries and parish priests to be flexible in their

interpretation of Christianity centuries after the conquest. As mentioned, the Maya of Chiapas and Yucatán practiced a syncretic religion that blended Christianity with ancient indigenous beliefs; for example, the ancient practice of ritual bloodletting still survives today in the form of the sacrifice of animals. In similar fashion, elements of African belief systems such as African deities and the role of shamans survived in syncretic Afro-Christian practices, particularly in the coastal states of Veracruz, Guerrero, and Oaxaca.

A particularly interesting (though possibly apocryphal) story that highlights the fluidity of identity under Spanish colonial rule is that of Catalina de Erauso, or the “Lieutenant Nun”—a woman who managed to live as a male for many years. Catalina was born into a military family in San Sebastián, Spain, in 1585 and entered a convent at the age of four. Just before taking her vows at the age of fifteen, she gave up life as a nun after a severe beating. Now she disguised herself as a man and embarked for the New World under an assumed name. She enlisted in the Spanish army and fought against the Mapuches in present-day Chile, attaining such military honors that she was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. She became an accomplished warrior and a famed duelist, killing at least a dozen men in duels throughout Spanish America. She fought in present-day Chile, Argentina, and Peru before revealing her gender and returning to Spain. In 1645, however, she went to Veracruz under the name of Antonio de Erauso and continued to live as a man until her death in 1650.

Erauso’s successful defiance of the gender norms of her era also mirrors the failure of the Spanish Crown to assert effective control over its colonies. Indeed, the hazards of early modern communications and the arcane political structures of colonial rule gave ample leeway to the king’s subjects to ignore or modify his decrees. Long before the arrival of telecommunications, let alone the Internet, the viceroy depended on the Spanish fleet to communicate with his sovereign. Of course, the fleet only sailed back and forth to the Americas once a year. On the regional level, the *corregidores* enjoyed considerable regional autonomy and only reluctantly responded to the viceroy’s initiatives. Finally, vast stretches of New Spain remained frontier, where the indigenous-Spanish encounter continued because the conquistadors lacked the laborers and resources to carry their authority into these distant regions.

Even the elite in the cities eluded the control of the empire. The Spanish ruling class was increasingly marked by a division between the Spanish-born peninsulares and the American-born creoles. The peninsulares occupied most high political and clerical offices, and the posts of viceroy and archbishop were reserved for them. Taking advantage of their immediate family connections with merchants in Seville, natives of Spain dominated overseas commerce.

The creoles owned most privately held land in New Spain, and they occupied most of the positions in the lower bureaucracy and clergy. They also held significant positions in the *audiencia* in Mexico City, the highest institution in which they could hold office. It appeared to them only a matter of time until they controlled colonial administration. Finally, the creoles could proudly point to significant achievements in architecture, art, music, and literature.

Perhaps no one better epitomized this flowering of creole culture than Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, probably the greatest Mexican poet and playwright who has ever lived. Born in approximately 1651, Sor Juana grew up within the confines of a liberal convent in Mexico City. A multitalented genius, she stumped a jury of forty university professors who examined her at age seventeen. As was usual at the time, she faced only the choice between marriage (and devoting herself to husband and children) and life as a nun, which offered her somewhat greater freedom in pursuing her literary and scientific interests. Sor Juana chose the latter. At a time when married women did not have access to literacy and books, she was able to amass books and scrolls in her private library within the convent, including many works on the Pope's list of forbidden books. Sor Juana considered her literary work to be part of the tradition of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*, or century of gold, but her work transcended these European origins. While closely associated with the vice-roy and his wife, she wrote a series of plays that mocked the incompetence of Spanish administrators and the prejudices of the Church. She also wrote early feminist poems that assailed the sexist double standard prevalent in New Spain—a standard that encouraged macho males to seek sexual companionship outside marriage while labeling adulterous females prostitutes. Ultimately, her intellectual ambition led to her downfall after she wrote a treatise criticizing the work of a renowned biblical scholar. This treatise was more than the male hierarchy of Mexico City could take. Pressured by both her abbess and her confessor, Sor Juana recanted and gave away her books, proclaiming herself the “worst of all” women. She ended her life as a devout nun, and became a victim of the plague in 1695.

The increasing confidence of creole society rested on the growing strength of the Mexican economy, particularly in the booming silver-mining sector. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, silver mining in Mexico experienced spectacular growth, while that in Peru declined. And the eighteenth century was Mexico's century of silver, as Spain grew dependent on its colony, rather than the other way around. By 1800, New Spain generated 60 percent of the Crown's colonial revenue. This wealth produced a new social class,

the silver kings, powerful enough to purchase noble titles. Even today, names such as the Count of Regla evoke images of limitless personal fortune. Of course, the peons who slaved away in the mines under inhumane conditions paid the price for such wealth. Mine workers seldom lasted more than five years on the job. If the backbreaking labor underground did not kill them, they suffered mercury poisoning, for they used that highly toxic metal to extract silver from the ore. The mine workers, however, were not the only ones whose work amounted to a virtual death sentence. Hundreds of thousands of workers perished in the Huachuco, an ambitious (and ultimately only partially successful) effort to drain Lake Texcoco in order to make Mexico City safe from flooding.

At least as far as the silver kings were concerned, the Crown considered their prize colony too prosperous for their own liking. Following the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–13) in Europe, the house of Bourbon had ascended to the throne of Spain. The family that had produced Louis XIV of France, the most powerful king of early modern Europe, viewed Spain as a backward and inefficient kingdom, and they were determined to modernize both the mother country and its colonies. As a result, the Bourbon king Philip V instituted a set of wide-ranging reforms in the colonies, abolishing the trade monopoly of the port city of Cádiz. His successor, Charles III, was determined to bring these reforms to the colonies. In 1765, he sent a visitor general, José de Gálvez, to New Spain on a fact-finding mission. An aristocrat and lawyer, Gálvez spent seven years in the colony, enjoying virtually unlimited powers to examine all aspects of colonial administration. His powers even exceeded those of the viceroy. The visitor general was appalled at what he found. He lambasted a corrupt system in which taxpayers could shirk much of their burden by paying off royal officials who enjoyed close ties to the local elite. Gálvez was especially alarmed at the situation on the northern frontier, and particularly the Interior Provinces (modern-day Arizona, Sonora, and Sinaloa), where the indigenous Apaches and other tribes eluded colonial rule. In the visitor general's opinion, the sparse Spanish settlement invited foreign colonization at the area, and he noted the advances of Russian settlers in distant Alaska. As Gálvez knew, it would only be a matter of time until either the Russians or the British would lay claim to northwestern New Spain. He also found that the Jesuit order—the wealthiest religious community in the Americas—had taken advantage of this power vacuum to set up autonomous missions on the frontier. On June 24, 1767, just two years after Gálvez arrived in New Spain, Charles III banished the Jesuits from Spain and its colonies.

As Minister of the Indies, Gálvez inaugurated a set of reform measures upon his return to Spain. Collectively known as the Bourbon Reforms, these decrees aimed at maximizing revenue collection and achieving complementary economic development that would guarantee colonial demand for Spanish goods. For instance, the Crown increased the *alcabala*, or sales tax, from 4 to 6 percent. In 1786, Gálvez reorganized colonial administration with a view of achieving more efficient tax collection. Rather than relying on private tax collectors and creole *corregidores*—the preeminent political and taxing authorities in the countryside—Gálvez established a network of intendants with the nominal charge of assisting the viceroy. Always peninsulars, the intendants replaced creole *corregidores* with *subdelegados*, many of whom were born in Spain. The king also increased the percentage of peninsular *oidores*, or judges, on the *audiencia* of Mexico City. In 1750, 51 out of 93 *oidores* had been creoles; by 1807, however, that number had dropped to 12 out of 99. Finally, Charles III imposed a royal monopoly on tobacco. In total, Crown revenues increased from 3 to 15 million pesos by the end of the eighteenth century. On balance, the Bourbon Reforms were a mixed bag for the creoles. Many of them benefited from Gálvez's effort to modernize the colonial military. As the Crown launched a concerted attempt to bring the northern frontier under effective control, creoles found well-paid jobs in the expanding army. Nonetheless, creoles resented their higher tax burden as well as the curtailment of their political opportunities in the colonial administration. They believed themselves to be the true Mexicans, descendants of the Spanish conquistadors but linked to the colony's Aztec past by virtue of their birth in Mesamerica.

The late eighteenth century thus witnessed the emergence of national consciousness: a sense of "Mexico" as a geographical and cultural space distinct from Spain and the other American colonies. In their search for identity and uniqueness, creoles discovered the pre-Columbian civilizations their forebears had conquered and inserted the Aztec "x" into the word "Mexico," which Spaniards had always spelled as "Méjico." The Jesuit friar Francisco Javier Clavijero, a creole from Veracruz, wrote a comprehensive historical study of pre-Columbian Mexico from his exile in Bologna, Italy. Published in 1780, this ten-volume work reconstructed the life of the "Mexicans" on the eve of the conquest, and it particularly emphasized the grandeur of the Aztec and Maya civilizations. Clavijero's interpretation implied that colonialism had violated and diminished Mexico. Several decades later, Fernando de Lizardi wrote his satirical picaresque novel *El Periquillo Sarniento*, or "the itching parrot," a work that ridiculed colonial corruption and oppression. Creoles also found a unifying

figure in the Virgin of Guadalupe. Over time, a cult that had initially served as an instrument of conversion of the indigenous people became a protonational myth that gave creoles, mestizos, and Indians a shared sense of identity.

Events elsewhere in the Atlantic world encouraged the creoles to transform their emerging national consciousness into political action. In 1776, the American Revolution put the Enlightenment ideas of liberty and citizenship into practice, and the newly independent United States provided a model for all Latin Americans tired of Iberian rule. This revolution attacked the ideological foundations of colonial empires, and particularly the divine right of kings. The newly independent United States showed Spanish American creoles that people could take history into their own hands. Next, in 1789, the French Revolution toppled one of Europe's most powerful monarchies to the cry of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Yet these revolutions also provided a warning to Mexican creoles. Both upheavals were destructive and involved international wars and an immense loss of life, but from the creoles' point of view, the American Revolution was greatly preferable to the French one. The American Revolution ended a colonial system but left intact social hierarchies; in contrast, the French Revolution raised the specter of social war, especially during the "great terror" following the executions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in 1792. Even more ominously, the French Revolution encouraged nonwhites in the French colonial empire to seek their freedom. In 1791, Haitian slaves erupted in revolt, expelling the colony's white sugar planter class and creating the Republic of Haiti, only the second independent nation of the Americas and the first to abolish slavery. The Haitian Revolution demonstrated to creoles the social dangers of independence, and it fostered a royalist train of thought that argued for continued colonial rule as the only way to prevent social dissolution.

When the Prussian geologist Alexander von Humboldt arrived in New Spain in 1803 to undertake several months of exploration, the pro- and anti-independence forces among the creoles of New Spain were therefore in a delicate state of balance. Von Humboldt found reasons to be optimistic about the future of the colony. As much as he was astonished by the luxurious world of the silver kings, he believed that Mexico's agricultural potential was even more impressive. But von Humboldt also noted the explosive potential of the social and political differences between the rich and the poor. Influenced by frequent conversations with the creoles of Mexico City, he identified Spanish mismanagement and corruption as the principal obstacles to the colony's reaching its full potential, and he worried that the poor majority might rise up in armed revolt if conditions continued to deteriorate.

Indeed, Spanish rule became more onerous at the turn of the nineteenth century as a consequence of the country's increasing participation in imperial wars. King Charles IV, who ruled from 1788 to 1808, was one of the most incompetent monarchs Spain had ever had. The obtuse Charles was married to his first cousin, the cunning María Luisa of Parma, who ensured that real power in the government lay with the widely despised Prime Minister Manuel de Godoy, who was rumored to be the queen's lover. In addition, Spain faced an increasingly desperate situation in an Atlantic world beset by revolution and warfare. In particular, the French Revolution of 1789 had wide-ranging implications for both Spain and its colonies. When a coalition of monarchs including Charles IV and financed by Great Britain attempted to end the French Revolution by military means, the French raised a massive army by conscripting all men between the ages of 18 and 25. Buoyed by nationalist popular support, this army defeated its enemies and went on the offensive beyond France's borders. After a French army had crossed the Pyrenees, Spain signed a peace treaty with France in 1895, giving up the eastern part of the island of Hispaniola (the present-day Dominican Republic). Fearful of further setbacks, Charles agreed to join France in an alliance against Great Britain in 1796. At first glance, this alliance appeared well chosen: under Napoleon Bonaparte, the most capable military officer in the revolutionary army, the French scored impressive victories. In 1802, Napoleon was crowned emperor. Five years later, the Low Countries, Switzerland, Italy, and much of Germany were under his control. But the war with England had repercussions for Spain's colonial empire. At war with the world's preeminent naval power, Spain found its main port of Cádiz blockaded by the British until 1800, and in 1805, the British navy defeated the combined French and Spanish forces at Trafalgar.

To face these crises, the Spanish prime minister Godoy attempted to increase revenue collection from the colonies. He drastically raised the price of *mayorazgo*, or entail, a concession necessary to obtain noble status or pass wealth from one generation on to the next. Godoy also demanded forced loans from merchant and artisan guilds in the colonies. In December 1804, the Law of Consolidation expropriated funds held by the religious confraternities, the *cofrades*, a move that took away the small savings that indigenous communities had accumulated in the name of the Church. The decree also seized the mortgages and loans of the Church, the principal moneylender in New Spain, as well as the land and real estate purchased with those funds. The Law of Consolidation threatened both creoles and indigenous communities with financial ruin, and it even angered peninsulares, many of whom were in debt to the Church as well. Thus, Godoy's efforts to extract maximum revenue

from the Spanish colonies galvanized opposition to colonial rule among both the elites and the lower classes. By 1807—the year Napoleon readied an invasion force for the Iberian peninsula—the seeds of the Wars of Independence had been sown.

Yet independence had to be carefully considered in an age in which the newly sovereign United States sought to expand its borders westward toward New Spain. In 1803, Napoleon sold the vast territory of Louisiana to the United States, creating a land border between that country and New Spain. For Mexicans, this was a bad omen that presaged conflicts with the United States in the decade ahead.