

Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America

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Source: *The Americas*, Oct., 2000, Vol. 57, No. 2, The African Experience in Early Spanish America (Oct., 2000), pp. 171-205

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1008202>

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BLACK CONQUISTADORS: ARMED AFRICANS IN EARLY SPANISH AMERICA*

“I, Juan Garrido, black resident [*de color negro vecino*] of this city [Mexico], appear before Your Mercy and state that I am in need of making a *probanza* to the perpetuity of the king [*a perpetuad rey*], a report on how I served Your Majesty in the conquest and pacification of this New Spain, from the time when the Marqués del Valle [Cortés] entered it; and in his company I was present at all the invasions and conquests and pacifications which were carried out, always with the said Marqués, all of which I did at my own expense without being given either salary or allotment of natives [*repartimiento de indios*] or anything else. As I am married and a resident of this city, where I have always lived; and also as I went with the Marqués del Valle to discover the islands which are in that part of the southern sea [the Pacific] where there was much hunger and privation; and also as I went to discover and pacify the islands of San Juan de Buriquén de Puerto Rico; and also as I went on the pacification and conquest of the island of Cuba with the *adelantado* Diego Velázquez; in all these ways for thirty years have I served and continue to serve Your Majesty—for these reasons stated above do I petition Your Mercy. And also because I was the first to have the inspiration to sow maize here in New Spain and to see if it took; I did this and experimented at my own expense.”¹

While the role of people of African descent in Latin America’s colonization “is relatively well-known,” Peter Gerhard once noted, “it is for the most part an impersonal history.” Gerhard’s brief biographical essay on Juan Garrido, “A Black Conquistador in Mexico,” was his contribution to the personalization of black history in Spanish Amer-

• I am grateful to Patrick Carroll, Jane Landers, and Kris Lane for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this article.

¹ The opening of Juan Garrido’s *probanza* (petitionary proof of merit) of September 27, 1538; Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereafter AGI), *México* 204, f.1; there is also a facsimile of this first page, and a transcription of the whole document, in Ricardo E. Alegría, *Juan Garrido, el Conquistador Negro en las Antillas, Florida, México y California, c.1503-1540* (San Juan: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y El Caribe, 1990), pp. 6, 127-38.

ica.² More than two decades later, that process of personalization—and contextualization—still has a long way to go.³

This article places Juan Garrido in the specific biographical context of black conquistadors who fought and settled in other regions of Spanish America—from Yucatan to Chile (see Table 1)—and in the broader historical context of the black experience in Spanish America (see the articles that follow in this issue of *The Americas*). The sources for this endeavor are a combination of primary material, mostly the genre of colonial “chronicles” but including a few archival items, and secondary works, some pre-dating Gerhard’s essay but some representing recent work. The article’s purpose is thus, first, to marshal the widely scattered evidence on the topic with a view to making the broad and simple—but hitherto inadequately substantiated if not marginalized⁴—point that Africans were a ubiquitous and pivotal part of Spanish conquest campaigns in the Americas; second, to articulate whatever patterns are visible in black conquest roles and to locate African participation in the phases of Spanish expansion; and third, to argue that such roles should be seen in a longer-term colonial context whose most notable features were the existence of black militias and individuals whom I have termed black counter-conquistadors.

From the very onset of Spanish activity in the Americas, Africans were present both as voluntary expeditionaries and as involuntary colonists.⁵

² Peter Gerhard, “A Black Conquistador in Mexico,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 58:3 (August 1978), pp. 451-59; partially reprinted in Lewis Hanke and Jane M. Rausch, eds., *People and Issues in Latin American History: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Marcus Wiener, 1993), pp. 189-92, and in Darién J. Davis, ed., *Slavery and Beyond: the African impact on Latin America and the Caribbean* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1995), pp. 1-9. Gerhard was apparently not aware of Garrido’s probanza in the AGI. A note on terminology: here, as in the introduction to this special issue, I use “black” broadly to mean “of African descent” (as Spaniards and blacks in Spanish America often did); and “African” to refer to those known—or very likely—to have been born in Africa; the mixed-race terms “mulatto” and “pardo” are used synonymously and where individuals are identified as such in the historical record.

³ As Peter M. Voelz has observed, similarly in the context of armed Africans in the New World (*Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* [New York: Garland, 1993], pp. 3-9), although note that for at least a century scholars have shown interest in pieces of the puzzle—see, for example, R. R. Wright, “Negro Companions of the Spanish Explorers,” *American Anthropologist* 4:2 (1902), pp. 217-28.

⁴ Although scholars are increasingly aware of black roles and their conspicuous absence from the historical record, the current boom in the publication of English-language editions of Conquest accounts, which devote little or no attention to black participation, is likely to help perpetuate the problem—see, for example, Matthew Restall, *Maya Conquistador* (Boston: Beacon, 1998); Pedro de Cieza de León, *The Discovery and Conquest of Peru*, Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook, eds. and trans. (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998); Stuart Schwartz, *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahua Views of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Bedford, 2000); and the several editions of Cortés’ letters that are now in print.

⁵ A phrase I borrow from Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand*

Likewise from the onset, the roles played by people of African descent can be placed in three overlapping categories. The category that would soon include the majority of Blacks in colonial Spanish America was that of the mass slave—that is, slaves shipped en masse to the colonies and forced to work in labor gangs in various industries but most typically on sugar plantations. Beginning as early as 1505, enslaved men and women were imported in increasingly large numbers to the Spanish colonies, at first from the Iberian kingdoms but soon directly from Africa.⁶ King Ferdinand authorized in the first months of 1510 the transportation to Hispaniola of 250 African slaves;⁷ thus formally began the trans-Atlantic expansion of a slave trade that would last into the nineteenth century and bring millions of Africans in chains to European colonies in the Americas.⁸ That trade is not the immediate topic of this article, but it does provide the broader context to the phenomenon of black conquistadors in Spanish America.

The second category of Spanish American Blacks was that of the unarmed auxiliary. These were men and women who were born either in

Years (New York: Scribner, 1995), p. 269. The immediate involvement of Africans in Spanish endeavors in the Americas is rooted in the incorporation of free and enslaved blacks and mulattos into Iberian societies long before 1492; Ruth Pike, "Sevillian Society in the Sixteenth Century: Slaves and Freedmen," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 47:3 (1967), pp. 344-59; William D. Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1985), pp. 138-63; Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 1-20; Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), pp. 25-86; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 7-9.

⁶ On royal licenses or *asientos* and the accompanying trade in the early-sixteenth century, see Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 4-5; Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 7-13; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La Población Negra de México: Estudio etno-histórico* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989 [1st ed., 1946]), pp. 17-19, 33-80; Thomas, *Slave Trade*, pp. 92-104; for examples of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *asientos de negros* published in facsimile, see David Marley, ed., *Reales asientos y licencias para la introducción de esclavos negros a la América Española (1675-1789)* (Windsor, Ontario: Rolston-Bain, 1985).

⁷ Thomas, *Slave Trade*, p. 92 (citing royal edicts in AGI, *Indiferente General* 418, 1, 2, fs. 98 and 104v).

⁸ Of these between 75,000 and 120,000 Africans were brought to Spanish America by 1600 (estimates vary). There is of course a vast literature on the slave trade but most of it focuses on North America and, to a lesser extent, Brazil, rather than Spanish America (of many examples a notable and recent one is Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* [Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ., 1998]). For a general, albeit detailed, study of the slave trade which devotes considerable attention to the Iberian world, see Thomas, *Slave Trade*; a briefer such survey is Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999); one that is more Africa-oriented is John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998, 2nd ed.); for general studies focused less on the trans-Atlantic trade and more on black slaves in the Iberian world, see Rolando Mellafe, *Negro Slavery in Latin America* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), and Klein, *African Slavery*. For regional studies, see the various works cited below.

TABLE 1
BIOGRAPHICAL PATTERNS OF SELECTED BLACK CONQUISTADORS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth Place and Status</i>	<i>Places of Conquest Activity</i>	<i>Recompense</i>
Juan Garrido	Africa or Portugal, black slave	Mexico, Zacatula, & Baja California	Manumission, various minor posts, site within Mexico City <i>traza</i>
Sebastián Toral	Africa(?), black slave	Yucatan	Manumission, tribute exemption
Pedro Fulupo	Africa(?), black slave	Costa Rica	Unknown
Juan Bardales	Africa, black slave	Honduras and Panama	Manumission, 50-peso pension
Antonio Pérez	North Africa, free black	Venezuela	Horseman and captain
Juan Portugués	Africa or Portugal, black	Venezuela	Unknown
Juan García	Spain, free mulatto	Peru	Footman's share of gold and silver at Cajamarca, a share at Cuzco
Miguel Ruíz	Spain, free mulatto	Peru	Horseman's double share of gold and silver at Cajamarca, a posthumous share at Cuzco
Juan Valiente	Africa(?), black slave	Peru, Chile	Treated as though free, made captain, granted an estate and an <i>encomienda</i>
Juan Beltrán	Spanish America, free mulatto (black-native)	Chile	Confirmed as captain of the fort he built at Villarica and given an <i>encomienda</i>

Sources: same as Tables 2-4, plus: Archivo General de Indias, *México* 2999, 2, f. 180; Carlos Meléndez and Quince Duncan, *El Negro en Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 1972), p. 25; Robinson Herrera, "The People of Santiago: Early Colonial Guatemala, 1538-1587" (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 1997), p. 254; José de Oviedo y Baños, *Historia de la conquista y población de la provincia de Venezuela* [1723] (Caracas, 1967), pp. 347, 390, 394, 438-39; James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1972), pp. 421-22; Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa, *Compendium and Description of the West Indies (c.1620)*, trans. Charles Upson Clark (Washington: Smithsonian, 1942), pp. 743-44.

West Africa or in the Iberian kingdoms, more likely the latter in the early decades after Spaniards first crossed the Atlantic. They were servants or slaves—though they were more typically the latter and were less likely to acquire their freedom in the Americas than armed auxiliaries, even if the militarized environment of the early conquest years often blurred the line between the armed and unarmed. The experience of black auxiliaries was markedly different from that of mass slaves for these reasons and because they functioned as individuals, alone or in small groups, as personal dependents or agents of their Spanish masters. Although the condition of slavery was certainly never tolerable, nor is there evidence that any slaves in the Spanish world perceived it as such under any circumstances, some slaves in this category were granted considerable responsibility and relative freedom of movement.

The third category, and the focus of this article, is that of the armed auxiliary of African descent. These were men ranging from African-born slaves to Iberian-born free men of mixed racial ancestry (although black women were among the first Africans in the Americas, I have found no evidence of any playing armed roles) (see Table 1). The enslaved acquired their freedom soon after they began fighting alongside Spaniards, if not before; very few black conquistadors seem to have remained slaves after their participation in the Conquest.

Such men tended to hold predictable posts during and after the Conquest and to become part of early colonial life in certain ways; they are few in number but their lives sufficiently conform to certain patterns for analytical generalizations to be made about them. Nor did the phenomenon of the black conquistador end with the initial series of Spanish conquests; as argued later in this article, it survived in various forms throughout the colonial period and remained an important part of the black experience in Spanish America.

AFRICANS AS ARMED AUXILIARIES (SIXTEENTH CENTURY)

Wherever Spaniards set foot in the Americas as members of conquest companies they were accompanied by black conquistadors. Some individual examples are presented in Tables 1-4 and will be discussed later in terms of their collective biographical patterns. But it is worth offering first of all a brief narrative summary of such examples, arranged in approximate chronological and geographical sequence according to the three major phases or chains of Spanish conquest in the sixteenth-century Americas.

Juan Garrido's Caribbean experience closely follows the patterns of the

first phase of Spanish expansion from the mid-1490s to late-1510s (see Table 2). Arriving in Santo Domingo in 1502 or 1503, Garrido was among the earliest Africans to reach the Americas. As Columbus was a product of the Italian-Portuguese community that played such a crucial role in the slave-based colonization of the eastern Atlantic in the late-fifteenth century, black slaves or servants may have traveled with him to the Caribbean in the 1490s—although the best evidence for such participants is the assertion in some accounts that Alonso Pietro (Prieto?), the pilot of the *Niña* on the 1492 voyage, was a mulatto. Certainly on his fourth voyage, in 1502, Columbus traveled with a black cabin boy named Diego (who may have been a servant rather than a slave). That same year a black slave was sent to trade Spanish goods in Hispaniola along with other agents of Juan de Córdoba, a *converso* merchant who was an associate of Columbus.⁹

The earliest evidence of black conquistadors in the Spanish colonies also comes from 1502. In that year the new governor of Hispaniola, Nicolás de Ovando, brought with him from Spain a number of Iberian-born black slaves not only to work but to help keep the indigenous population subdued. They seem to have done the opposite, however, for within a few months Ovando had banned further introduction of Blacks on the grounds that they incited native rebellion. Nevertheless, in the ensuing decade King Ferdinand repeatedly permitted and encouraged the taking across the Atlantic of black slaves, who continued to enter the colony in small but steadily growing numbers and to participate in Spanish expansion in the region. In 1508 Ponce de León took armed Africans to help him conquer Puerto Rico, while Diego Velázquez similarly used black auxiliaries in his conquest of Cuba in 1511-12. Juan Garrido later claimed to have participated in both these expeditions.¹⁰ In 1515 Velázquez wrote to the king that “many black slaves” were taken on the invasion of Cuba but none were left there after its pacification, “due to lack of royal authorization and because that would not be convenient to Your Majesty”;¹¹ in other words, Velázquez probably had concerns over the loyalty of the slaves and saw more profit in their participation in further conquests.

Thus the first Blacks in the Americas were in the category of auxiliaries, some armed but most unarmed—probably a few in the 1490s on voyages of exploration, and several dozen (perhaps up to a hundred) in 1502-10 as mer-

⁹ Thomas, *Slave Trade*, pp. 87-91; Alegría, *Garrido*, p. 17.

¹⁰ AGI, *México*, 204, fs.1, 2; Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, pp. 16-17; Juan Pérez de Tudela, *Las Armadas de Indias y los Orígenes de la Política de Colonización (1492-1505)* (Madrid: Instituto Oviedo, 1956), pp. 222, 228-29; Wright, “Negro Companions,” p. 219; Thomas, *Slave Trade*, pp. 91, 95.

¹¹ Letter quoted in Alegría, *Garrido*, p. 49.

TABLE 2
BIOGRAPHY OF JUAN GARRIDO

c.1480?	Born in West Africa and either sold as a slave to Portuguese traders or travels voluntarily to Portugal
c.1495?	Arrives in Lisbon; becomes a Christian; later moves to Seville (if enslaved, he likely became free in Lisbon or Seville)
c.1503	Crosses Atlantic to Santo Domingo, possibly as a servant of a Spaniard named Pedro Garrido
1508-19	Participates in the conquests of Puerto Rico and Cuba, in the supposed conquests of Guadalupe and Dominica, and in the discovery of Florida; is otherwise resident in Puerto Rico
1519-21	Member of the Spanish expedition of conquest into central Mexico, probably as a servant of Pedro Garrido and later Hernando Cortés (or, less likely, in the retinues of Juan Núñez Sedeño [1519] or Pánfilo de Narváez [1520])
1521	Builds a commemorative chapel on the Tacuba causeway at or near the site of heavy Spanish losses during the 1520 Noche Triste
1521-23	Resident, adjacent to his chapel, on the outskirts of Mexico City; during this period, either on Cortés' orders (as Cortés claimed) or on his own initiative (as Garrido claimed), he plants the first three seeds of wheat to be grown in New Spain
1523-24	Member of the Antonio de Carvajal expedition to Michoacán and Zacatula
1524-28	Resident in Mexico City; on February 10, 1525, he is granted a house-plot within the new city's <i>traza</i> ; 1524-26 holds post of doorkeeper (<i>portero</i>) and for a time is also crier (<i>pregonero</i>) and guardian of the Chapultepec aqueduct
1528	Heads a gold mining expedition, complete with slave gang, to Zacatula
1528-33	Resident in Mexico City
c.1533-36	Member of the Cortés expedition to Baja California, in charge of a squad of black and indigenous slaves intended for mining
1536-c.47	Resident in Mexico City, where he dies; leaves a wife and three children (one of whom may have been the Juan Garrido resident in Cuernavaca in 1552)

Sources: AGI, *México* 204, fs.1-9; Francisco A. de Icaza, *Diccionario autobiográfico de conquistadores y pobladores de Nueva España* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Facsimiles Mexicanos, 1923), I, p. 98; Peter Gerhard, "A Black Conquistador in Mexico," *HAHR*, 58(3), 1978, pp. 451-59; Ricardo E. Alegría, *Juan Garrido, el Conquistador Negro en las Antillas, Florida, México y California, c.1503-1540* (San Juan: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y El Caribe, 1990).

chant's agents, supervisors of indigenous mining gangs, and personal servants. After 1510, as the flow of Blacks from the Old World to the New increased in leaps and bounds, so did the black servant become omnipresent in Spanish enterprises and households in the Americas.¹² Spanish officials in the colonies were soon writing of black slaves and servants as "indispensable" to the empire, its "strength and sinew."¹³ Although some black conquistadors seem to have existed before 1510, Garrido among them, it is primarily after this date that armed black servants and slaves begin to play significant military roles in Spanish conquest enterprises.

As Spaniards began to move onto the mainland in the 1510s demand for black slaves and servants increased, a demand more easily met as the crown began to grant more and more slave-import licenses and as more free Blacks and mulattos migrated along with Spanish colonists. The second major phase of Spanish expansion was the chain of conquest that extended from Hispaniola to Cuba to central Mexico, and from there out to what would become the provinces of New Spain and its adjacent territories, stretching from Florida to Honduras.

Cortés was accompanied by a number of black auxiliaries, Juan Garrido being the best known to us but not necessarily to his Spanish contemporaries. Of the Blacks who accompanied Cortés and the other first-generation conquerors in Mexico, we know the name of one, Francisco de Eguía, who may have soon died as he was alleged to have introduced smallpox to Mexico.¹⁴ Another may have been a black slave of the conqueror's named

¹² See, for example, Miguel Acosta Saignes, *Vida de los esclavos negros en Venezuela* (Caracas: Hesperides, 1967), pp. 181-99; Carlos Meléndez and Quince Duncan, *El Negro en Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 1972), pp. 24-43; Bowser, *African Slave*; Lolita Gutiérrez Brockington, *The Leverage of Labor: Managing the Cortés Haciendas in Tehuantepec, 1588-1688* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1993); Herman L. Bennett, "Lovers, Family and Friends: The Formation of Afro-Mexico, 1580-1810" (PhD dissertation, Duke Univ., 1993); James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532-1560: A Social History* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2nd ed., 1994), pp. 193-224; Patrick J. Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development* (Austin, Univ. of Texas Press, 1991), pp. 61-68; Martha Few, "Mujeres de Mal Vivir: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala, 1650-1750" (PhD dissertation, Univ. of Arizona, 1997), pp. 36-69, passim; Robinson Herrera, "The People of Santiago: Early Colonial Guatemala, 1538-1587" (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 1997), pp. 254-318; Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1997); Brígida von Mentz, *Trabajo, sujeción y libertad en el centro de la Nueva España: esclavos, aprendices, campesinos y operarios manufactureros, siglos XVI a XVIII* (Mexico City: CIESAS and Porrúa, 1999); Landers, *Black Society*.

¹³ Wright, "Negro Companions," pp. 221-22, citing official correspondence in documents collected in the nineteenth century by Gayangos and Bergenroth that I have not been able to locate.

¹⁴ Fray Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, Doris Heyden, ed. (Norman, Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1994), pp. 510, 563. The granting of the role of patient zero to a black man strikes me as classic Spanish scapegoating. Egüfa is likewise blamed for introducing smallpox—and measles to boot—in the sixteenth-century biography by Francisco López de Gómara, *Cortés, the Life of the Con-*

Juan Cortés.¹⁵ It is possible that Garrido was one of the servants of Cortés who appear to be black in the paintings accompanying the sixteenth-century *History* by Dominican friar Diego Durán (see Figure 1), and in a similar illustration in the *Codex Azcatitlán* (see the caption to Figure 1); or one or both of these servants may be Juan Cortés. I suggest, however, that it is just as likely that these portraits represent the fact that, in the words of Sahagún's Florentine Codex, "among [the Spaniards] came some Blacks, who had crisply curled dark hair."¹⁶ Just as other figures in these paintings represent Spanish invaders, native auxiliaries or native nobles, so do the black figures here represent the presence at these events of black auxiliaries.¹⁷

The proportion of black armed auxiliaries in expeditions such as that of Cortés is thus difficult to assess, as Spanish conquest accounts tend to ignore them or mention them only in vague or passing terms.¹⁸ In the early conquest years, when conquistadors relied more on credit than ready capital to fund expeditions, black servants were highly valued and black slaves extremely expensive; as Bernal Díaz notes, in his account of preparations in Cuba in 1519 by the Cortés expeditionaries, "at that time blacks and horses were

queror by His Secretary (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1964), pp. 204-5, 238, 397. The story even appears in Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* (see Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and the New World Conquest, 1492-1650* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998], p. 68; Cook also cites Gómara). Other sources, including a *relación* of 1520 by the *oidor* in Santo Domingo, state that indigenous Cubans carried smallpox to Mexico on Narváez's ships; see Cook, *Born to Die*, pp. 63-65.

¹⁵ Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, p. 19, who gives no citation but his source is presumably Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas' *Historia general* (III, X, 13, p. 488), cited in this context by Alegría, *Garrido*, p. 117, who suggests that Herrera may have mistakenly dubbed Juan Garrido with his master's surname.

¹⁶ This is from the Spanish text—"venia algunos negros entre ellos, que tenia los cabellos crespos, y prietos"; the Nahuatl text ambiguously includes in its description of the hair of the invaders the remark that some had "tightly curled [hair]"—*ocolotlic*; James Lockhart, *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), pp. 80-81.

¹⁷ The early date of these visual sources is significant (the early-1560s for Durán; c.1572 for the codex), for a century later, in a visual representation of the meeting of Cortés and Moctezuma that is far more detailed than any such painting from the sixteenth century, the token black servant is missing and the role of blacks apparently (or conveniently) forgotten: "The Encounter of Cortés and Moctezuma," attributed to the Mexican Juan Correa, oil on canvas on a *biombo* (folding screen) of 8'2" by 19'8", painted c.1645-50 (reproduced in color in *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990], pp. 422-23).

¹⁸ Good examples, because they are detailed first-hand accounts of a series of conquests in which blacks are almost entirely absent (despite evidence to the contrary in other sources), are Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain* (Penguin, 1963) (e.g. p. 55); Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, Anthony Pagden, ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1986); and Cieza de León, *Discovery* (examples cited below). Other accounts tend to be similarly dismissive; see, for example, Durán, *History*, pp. 510, 563. Likewise the 1,385 *probanzas* of conquistadors and their relatives summarized in Francisco A. de Icaza, *Diccionario autobiográfico de conquistadores y pobladores de Nueva España* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Facsimiles Mexicanos, 1923, 2 vols.), ignore black roles save for a few passing comments (e.g. I, p. 129; see note 22 below).



Figure 1. Cortés, being received by Moctezuma with two Mexica lords, and accompanied by a black servant or auxiliary often assumed to be Juan Garrido but probably representing the presence of blacks on the expedition. Source: fray Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, original manuscript and illustrations in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid; reproduced with permission. Note: In the preceding illustration in Durán, in which Cortés is being received by two Tlaxcalan lords, he is similarly accompanied by a black servant. For a third such image, see the widely reproduced page of the *Codex Azcatitlán* (No. 59-64, in the Collection Aubin, Paris), featuring Cortés with Spanish forces, Nahua porters, doña Marina, and a well-dressed black servant.

worth their weight in gold.”¹⁹ Indeed the lack of black protagonists in Díaz’s narrative and his remark that “Juan Sedeño was reputed the richest man in the fleet, for he came with [a] mare in his own ship, and brought a black man” was taken by a later historian to imply that only one black accompanied Cortés and that man must therefore have been Juan Garrido.²⁰

But while black conquistadors were relatively few in number, the early black presence was surely greater than Gerhard implied when he described Garrido as “a rarity because of his color [and] the only Negro vecino in Mexico City in the 1520s.”²¹ Indeed, Durán, who largely ignores Blacks in the tradition of his compatriot historians, mentions that during the Spanish

¹⁹ Díaz, *Conquest*, p. 55.

²⁰ As observed by Gerhard, “Black Conquistador,” p. 453. Díaz quote in *Conquest*, p. 55 (which edition I have followed in my quotes here and above save for changing “Negro” to “black”). A similar rationale—that any nameless black coming to Mexico in 1519-21 must be Garrido—underlay the suggestion by another historian that Garrido arrived with Narváez; see Table 1 and Gerhard, “Black Conquistador,” p. 453.

²¹ Gerhard, “Black Conquistador,” p. 456.

journey towards Tenochtitlán in 1519, there were “three hundred men who had reached these shores, without counting servants and blacks”; this unknown number were joined by other Blacks from the Narváez expedition of 1520, including the ill-fated Eguía. Nor were Cortés, Sedeño, and Narváez alone in bringing black dependents: a conquistador’s daughter, Andrea Ramírez, whose father and uncle participated in campaigns in Mexico, Pánuco, and Guatemala, asserted that they brought to the conquest “two horses, a servant, and two black men.”²²

Juan Garrido was neither the only African to participate in the fall of Tenochtitlán, nor the sole black member of Spanish expeditions to the west; he and other Blacks went to Michoacán in the 1520s, and Nuño de Guzmán swept through that region in 1529-30 with the aid of black auxiliaries.²³

Likewise, to Mexico’s south, in the decades following the 1521 founding of Mexico City, Spaniards embarked on conquest campaigns and established colonies together with their black auxiliaries. Among them was a black slave, probably born in Africa, who had been given the name of Sebastián Toral. Toral was brought from Mexico to Yucatan by Francisco de Montejo during his second unsuccessful campaign into the peninsula in the 1530s, and returned there in 1540 with the third and final Montejo-led invasion.²⁴ The Montejos had been granted a license in 1533 to import up to one hundred slaves,²⁵ and while it is not certain that this permit was fully used, it is clear that Toral would not have been alone as an armed slave during the conquest years. By 1540 the Montejos were able to make use of black auxiliaries whose experience was not only that of combat in the Americas but specifically that of engagement with Mayas; at least one such black conquistador allegedly learned a Mayan language during the protracted Montejo conquest campaigns.²⁶ Nor would Sebastián Toral have been the sole surviving black conquistador of the Yucatec campaigns; others would have joined Toral as a black settler in newly founded Mérida—where he won his freedom, raised a family, and lived late into the century.²⁷

²² “[D]os cavallos y un moço y dos negros”; her probanza, as in Icaza, *Diccionario*, I, p. 129.

²³ On Garrido, see Table 2; on the Conquests in the west, see J. Benedict Warren, *The Conquest of Michoacán* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1985); James Krippner-Martínez, “The Politics of Conquest: An Interpretation of the *Relación de Michoacán*,” *The Americas* 47:2 (October 1990), pp. 177-98.

²⁴ AGI, *México* 2999, 2, f. 180 (also in Richard Konetzke, ed., *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de la Formación Social de Hispanoamérica, 1493-1810* [Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Superiores, 1953], I, pp. 511-12).

²⁵ Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, pp. 19-20, 22.

²⁶ Wright, “Negro Companions,” p. 220. There were also African interpreters in Hispaniola’s Taino wars (Jane Landers, personal communication).

²⁷ AGI, *México* 2999, 2, f. 180. An ecclesiastical report written around 1550 put the Spanish population of Mérida at 190 and the black population at 150 (British Library, Rare Manuscript Room, MS 17,

Some of the black slaves who accompanied Pedro de Alvarado on his 1524 conquest campaign into highland Guatemala were also among the first settlers of that province's early capital, Santiago in Almolonga. Some of these would have been among the two hundred Blacks that Alvarado took with him to Peru ten years later—although others were brought in by Alvarado and his partners or, like Juan Valiente (see Table 4), came from outside Guatemala in order to join the expedition. Of the Blacks remaining in Santiago in Almolonga, no doubt including some from the conquistador generation, a number were killed when the city was devastated by the torrential landslide of 1541.²⁸

To the north of Mexico Blacks also accompanied Spaniards in their campaigns of exploration, conquest, and settlement. For example, Blacks were a part of Francisco de Ibarra's expedition into the Mexican north in the 1520s.²⁹ African slaves accompanied the 1526 expedition to the Carolinas under Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón; after three months the Spaniards returned to Santo Domingo, abandoning a small settlement possibly along with the surviving Blacks, some of whom had already escaped.³⁰ A Moroccan-born black man named Esteban walked from Florida to Mexico City with Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca on his well-known 1528-1536 journey.³¹ In a subsequent expedition of 1539, Esteban appears to have been the first non-native to reach the region that would become New Mexico, although his death there prevented him from taking full credit for the discovery.³² The misguided Cortés venture to Baja California in the 1530s included three hundred Africans, almost equal in number to the Spaniards.³³ Hernando de Soto took fifty slaves on his unsuccessful Florida expedition of 1537.³⁴ Black slaves were also part of the ill-fated Luna y Arellano attempt to conquer and settle Florida in 1559-62; in 1565 Menéndez de Avilés took a number of

569: f. 181); within twenty years the latter had doubled, by one estimate (Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, pp. 209-10).

²⁸ Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, p. 20; Christopher Lutz, *Santiago de Guatemala, 1541-1773: City, Caste, and the Colonial Experience* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1994), pp. 7, 83; Herrera, "People of Santiago", pp. 254, 261; "'Porque no sabemos firmar': Black Slaves in Early Guatemala," *The Americas*, this issue.

²⁹ Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, p. 20.

³⁰ Cook, *Born to Die*, p. 159; Landers, *Black Society*, pp. 12-13.

³¹ Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America* (New York: Collier, 1961); Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz, *Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: His Account, His Life, and the Expedition of Panfilo de Narváez* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 3 vols., 2000), v. 1; v. 2, pp. 414-22.

³² Wright, "Negro Companions," pp. 221-28; Andrew L. Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680: Conquest and Resistance in Seventeenth-Century New Mexico* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1995), p. 20.

³³ Gerhard, "Black Conquistador," p. 458.

³⁴ Thomas, *Slave Trade*, p. 103.

Africans to the region.³⁵ Indeed it is very likely that every Spanish campaign into the American regions north of Mexico City, being largely financed by the conquests in Mexico and Peru, included black slaves and servants.

The third major phase of Spanish expansion was the chain of conquest that ran from Hispaniola into southern Central America and from there into South America. The Pedrarias colony in Panama, which was the first Spanish settlement on the American mainland, probably included black conquistador-settlers. The first two men from the Old World to see the Pacific Ocean were Nuflo de Olano, an enslaved black conquistador, and his owner, Vasco Núñez de Balboa—who subsequently brought thirty black workers to build ships on the Pacific coast.³⁶

Blacks accompanied Gil González on his conquest expedition up the Pacific coasts of Costa Rica and Nicaragua in 1522-23, while the Spanish conquerors of Costa Rica in the 1540s, Sánchez de Badajoz and Cavallón, respectively brought nine black slaves and ninety “Spaniards and blacks.” The name of only one of the black conquistadors in Costa Rica was apparently recorded—Pedro Fulupo.³⁷ We do have the name, however, of another African-born slave who fought in Central America; Juan Bardales participated in the conquests of Panama and Honduras, for which services he was granted his freedom and later a modest pension (see Table 1).³⁸

Mentioned above are the two hundred Africans who accompanied Pedro de Alvarado to Peru in 1534, among them Juan Valiente, who went on to play a central role in the conquest of Chile (see Table 4); Valiente was fortunate to survive the Alvarado campaign, as many of his fellow Blacks died of starvation or cold.³⁹ Alvarado’s Africans, however, were neither the first nor last Blacks to be brought down the Pacific coast of South America; during the 1530s thousands of Africans accompanied the Spanish invaders of the greater Peruvian region as conquistadors and auxiliaries of various kinds. As scholars have noted, the historical record is “remarkably silent” on the roles of black conquistadors in Peru,⁴⁰ yet their presence and large numbers are indisputable.

³⁵ Menéndez de Avilés had the standard *adelantado* license for five hundred, but as is often the case with such licenses, the extent to which the license was filled is not apparent. Cook, *Born to Die*, pp. 116-19; Thomas, *Slave Trade*, p. 103; Landers, *Black Society*, p. 12-15.

³⁶ Meléndez and Duncan, *Negro en Costa Rica*, p. 24; Thomas, *Slave Trade*, p. 95.

³⁷ Meléndez and Duncan, *Negro en Costa Rica*, pp. 24-25.

³⁸ Herrera, “People of Santiago,” p. 254; “Black Slaves.”

³⁹ Cieza de León, *Discovery*, pp. 311, 333, 336.

⁴⁰ Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 5; James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1972), p. 447; quoted phrase by Cook and Cook in Cieza de León, *Discovery*, p. 111 n12.

If the Spanish force at Cajamarca in 1532-33 is an indication of the broader pattern—and here we are fortunate enough to have both a detailed record of the men present and a modern study of that record—1.2% of conquistadors were black. However, this list only includes the black Spaniards who were free mulattos and voluntary members of the expedition; it does not include the unknown number of African slaves.⁴¹ Also the men at Cajamarca were very much the vanguard of the Spanish invasion of greater Peru; in the immediate wake of the advance parties of conquest expeditions came more Spaniards with additional indigenous and black retainers. Because Spanish conquests were rarely the rapid affairs suggested by conquistador reports, these later-arriving Blacks tended to play conquest roles too.

The treatment of Blacks in Pedro de Cieza de León's mid-sixteenth century account of the Peruvian invasion paradoxically illustrates both the marginalization of Blacks in the sources and the clear fact of their participation. There are thirteen mentions in this account of Blacks in the Peruvian campaigns and six of Blacks in Chile; in none of these cases is a black named.⁴² There are three mentions of two conquistadors whom we know from other sources to have been black—Juan García and Miguel Ruíz (see Tables 1, 3, and 4)—but Cieza de León states or implies they were Spaniards.⁴³ Of the nineteen mentions of Blacks, seven are references to groups of Blacks starving or freezing to death in the northern Andes or in Chile.

The remaining references fall into two categories: passing mentions of black individuals or groups as auxiliaries to conquistadors; and the inclusion of a black's role in a notable incident. In the latter cases, Cieza de León's account indicates the presence of Blacks at a particular place and time despite the chronicler's failure to otherwise record this fact. For example, at one point "Diego de Alvarado took eighty Spaniards, split between the horsemen and the footmen" on an expedition into the Ecuadorian interior; the presence of Africans would have gone unrecorded but for Cieza de León's mention that it was a black who accidentally discovered fresh water. Likewise, the participation of Africans in other expeditions, forays, and encounters is only made explicit as a result of Cieza de León noting that a black saved Almagro's life, that native Andeans attempted to wash the color off a black man, that a Spaniard crazed by disease almost killed a black man, and that a mulatto messenger had a finger cut off by Manco Inca.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Lockhart, *Cajamarca*, pp. 36, 96-102, 380, 421, 447.

⁴² Cieza de León, *Discovery*, pp. 68, 109, 116, 305, 310, 311, 327, 332, 333, 336, 429, 430, 465 (Peru); 433, 434, 437, 438, 439, 442. The chronicle runs to 430 pages in English translation.

⁴³ Cieza de León, *Discovery*, pp. 242, 243, 290.

⁴⁴ Cieza de León, *Discovery*, pp. 310 (quote), 68, 109, 305, 465.

Other sources make occasional reference to Blacks playing particular roles in conquest moments. One such African, an assistant to the master of artillery on the 1531 campaign, gained the rank and title of captain; like other Blacks and Spaniards, he survived the conquest wars only to die in the civil conflict of the 1540s.⁴⁵ Another black may have been one of the four first men from outside Peru to see the Inca capital of Cuzco; sent there by Pizarro in 1533 as part of an embassy from Cajamarca, he seems to have returned with a train of Andean porters and emissaries carrying precious metals.⁴⁶ Black roles during Manco Inca's 1536 siege of Cuzco, in addition to that of the mulatto messenger mentioned above, included extinguishing the fires on the roof of the royal palace as fast as attacking natives could set them; the relief force sent from Hispaniola included two hundred Blacks with military experience.⁴⁷

The impression given above, that Blacks were everywhere that Spaniards were during Peru's conquest years, is supported by the few recorded references to raw numbers. In the period 1529-37 the extended Pizarro family were granted 258 licenses to import African slaves to Peru; these and permits given to other Spaniards during this time resulted in at least five hundred Blacks being taken to the Andean colonies. This sum does not include the two hundred brought by Alvarado in 1534, or the countless others brought without royal license. A hint of the dimension of the illegal transportation of Blacks to the Andean regions is offered by one observer, who reported that in one six-month period in 1535 some four hundred African slaves left Panama for Peru.⁴⁸ Thus over a thousand Blacks had probably entered greater Peru by the late-1530s, perhaps double that by the mid-1540s; although the Spanish civil wars of the 1540s may have slowed black slave imports and the migration of black auxiliaries, by the 1550s there were some 3,000 Blacks in Peru—this despite the mortality of the conquest and civil-war years.⁴⁹

A number of the Blacks who participated in the conquests of greater Peru can be identified by name. There is no evidence that a female black slave of Diego de Almagro's, named Margarita, ever had to fight, but she was with the Spanish conquistador throughout his campaigns in South America and even remained his servant and companion in jail; after his execution, Mar-

⁴⁵ Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*, p. 193.

⁴⁷ Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 7; Thomas, *Slave Trade*, p. 103; Robert Himmerich y Valencia, "The 1536 Siege of Cuzco: An Analysis of Inca and Spanish Warfare," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 7:4 (Fall 1998), pp. 387-418.

⁴⁸ Bowser, *African Slave*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁹ Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 11.

TABLE 3
BIOGRAPHY OF JUAN GARCÍA

c.1495?	Born free, near Jaraicejo (near Trujillo, Extremadura), probably of mixed black-Spanish parentage though later referred to by other Spaniards as “black”
1530	Recruited in Trujillo to join the Pizarro expedition of conquest to Peru; leaves behind a wife and two daughters
1531-34	Footman member of the Pizarro-led expedition of conquest that leaves Panama in January 1531; holds the posts of crier (<i>pregonero</i>) and piper (<i>gaitero</i>) and is made responsible for weighing gold and silver at Cajamarca; present at the division of gold and silver at Coaque in 1531, at Cajamarca in 1533 (where he buys an enslaved native Nicaraguan woman from a fellow conquistador), and at Cuzco in 1534
1534-35	One of the founding citizens of Spanish Cuzco, where he then resides
1535-36	Travels to Lima, where he spends time preparing his return to Spain, then to Nombre de Dios (Panama) and back to Extremadura; takes with him his share of gold and silver and probably his illegitimate daughter and her native Andean mother, one of his servants
1536-45	Lives in the Jaraicejo-Trujillo area to at least 1545, calling himself Juan García Pizarro; date of death unknown

Sources: James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1972), pp. 6-15, 380-84; Pedro de Cieza de León, *The Discovery and Conquest of Peru*, Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook, eds. (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), p. 243.

garita Almagro settled in Cuzco as a free woman of some means.⁵⁰ More significantly, among the 168 conquistadors present at the capture of the Inca in Cajamarca, and at the subsequent division of spoils, were two Blacks; we know considerably more than just the names of Juan García and Miguel Ruíz, whose biographies are presented in Tables 1 and 3.

Of the Blacks who became conquistadors in the Chilean campaigns, some can also be named. A black conquistador named Felipe fought at the battle of Marihueni; another, named Juan Fernández, fought much later at Cañete; others, whose names are lost, fought and died during hostilities at Chumumaguigi and Labapie. A black soldier named Juan Beltrán played so vital a role in the conquest of Villarica that he was appointed commander of the garrison there; he was said by a Spanish observer to have successfully kept

⁵⁰ Bowser, *African Slave*, pp. 7-8.

TABLE 4
BIOGRAPHY OF JUAN VALIENTE

c.1505?	Probably born in Africa
Pre-1533	Resident in Puebla as the slave of Alonso Valiente
1533	Leaves Puebla, with written and notarized permission from his owner to join conquest campaigns as a soldier for four years; travels to Guatemala
1534	Joins Pedro de Alvarado's expedition from Guatemala to Peru; Alvarado is bought out by Diego de Almagro but Valiente stays in Peru
1535	Member of Almagro's expedition to Chile
1540	Member of Juan de Valdivia's expedition to Chile, as a vested partner with his own horse; gains title of captain
1541	His legal owner in Puebla sends a nephew with power of attorney to sell Valiente his freedom; the nephew apparently never finds his uncle's conquistador slave
1546	Granted an estate near Santiago de Chile
Pre-1548	Marries Juana de Valdivia, probably an ex-slave of the conqueror Valdivia
1550	As governor, Valdivia grants Valiente an encomienda near Concepción; he commissions a royal official to negotiate his legal freedom in Peru or Mexico, but the official returns to Spain instead
1553	Killed by native Andeans at the battle of Tucapel; his son inherits his encomienda

Sources: Peter Boyd-Bowman, "Negro Slaves in Early Colonial Mexico," in *The Americas* 26:2, 1969, pp. 134-51; William F. Sater, "The Black Experience in Chile," in Robert Brent Toplin, ed., *Slavery and Race Relations in Latin America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1974), pp. 16-17.

the area safe for Spaniards until his death, after which instability returned. Five men of color appear to have been given encomiendas (grants of native labor and tribute) in Chile: the Villarica captain, Beltrán; a mulatto named Gómez de León; one Leonor Galiano, the son of an enslaved Moor; Cristóbal Varela, who was either a Spaniard or a mulatto; and Juan Valiente.⁵¹ Valiente's biography can be relatively well constructed (see Table 4).

Elsewhere in South America Spanish campaigns of conquest featured roles by black slave and servant auxiliaries: substantial numbers of Africans

⁵¹ Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa, *Compendium and Description of the West Indies (c.1620)*, trans. Charles Upton Clark (Washington: Smithsonian, 1942), pp. 743-44; William F. Sater, "The Black Experience in Chile," in Robert Brent Toplin, ed., *Slavery and Race Relations in Latin America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1974), p. 16-17.

participated in the founding of Cartagena in the 1530s, for example, and also in the initial attempts to settle Buenos Aires that same decade; Pedro de Cieza de León recorded the presence of a large number of Blacks on a disastrous expedition into Colombia, also in the 1530s, that the chronicler himself was lucky to survive; other sources indicate that one of the conquistadors of New Granada was a free mulatto named Pedro de Lerma; Diego de Ordaz also took black men down the Orinoco.⁵²

Likewise the conquerors of Venezuela benefited from the participation of black auxiliaries: the infamous Lope de Aguirre had Blacks with him on some, if not all, of his various expeditions; and Diego de Losada had with him in the 1567 conquest of Caracas at least two African conquistadors identified by the chronicler Oviedo y Baños as “Antonio Perez Africano, natural de Oran” (i.e. a North African, rather than a black West African) and “un negro llamado Juan, Portugues” (“a black named Juan Portuguese,” or “a Portuguese black named Juan”). Pérez, a cavalryman described as “an old soldier of the African wars who had been with the emperor at the storming of Tunis,” was by 1568 one of Losada’s most valued captains.⁵³

It is clear, therefore, that Juan Garrido was by no means unique as a black conquistador in the Caribbean and Mexico or in the history of Spanish expansion in the Americas. Individual armed Africans can be identified time and again, from Tenochtitlán in 1519 to Cajamarca in 1532-33, from Mérida, Yucatan, in the 1540s to Mérida, Venezuela, in the 1560s. Furthermore, those whom we can name represent a far larger number of other black auxiliaries, some playing armed roles and some not, at all stages of the Spanish conquests. The fall of the Mexica and Inca empires both inspired and helped finance further expeditions in the Americas, ventures that included as many black auxiliaries as possible—one, two, and five hundred being the oft-cited numbers.

BIOGRAPHICAL PATTERNS (SIXTEENTH CENTURY)

Because the trans-Atlantic slave trade was still in its infancy during the first decades of the sixteenth century, the African slaves and other Blacks brought to the Americas by Spaniards rarely came directly from Africa.

⁵² The Introduction by Cook and Cook in Cieza de León, *Discovery*, p. 8; Thomas, *Slave Trade*, pp. 96, 102; José Ignacio Avellaneda, *The Conquerors of the New Kingdom of Granada* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1995), p. 63-66.

⁵³ José de Oviedo y Baños, *Historia de la conquista y población de la provincia de Venezuela* [1723] (Caracas, 1967; facsimile reprint of 1824 edition), p. 347, 390, 394, 438-39; *The Conquest and Settlement of Venezuela*, trans. Jeannette Johnson Varner (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987), pp. 152, 171, 173, 193.

Most of these black conquistadors were born in Africa, but they typically reached the American mainland after spending time in the Caribbean colonies, and sometimes also in Spain or Portugal. Most were slaves when they began fighting, but as conquistadors sooner or later won their freedom.⁵⁴ A minority were Iberian-born and a minority were free men before their conquest experience. Juan García and Miguel Ruíz, Spanish-born free mulattos who fought in Peru (see Tables 1 and 3), were at the far end of the spectrum in both these respects; Ruíz, who (like Antonio Pérez in Venezuela) participated as a horseman rather than a footman, was the closest to being a Spaniard in terms of status and treatment.

Most Blacks were young men when they joined conquest expeditions, but not youths, and not without some experience of the world; thirty seems to have been a typical age of a black conquistador at the start of his first campaign. This would have put him very slightly older than his Spanish counterpart—judging from the ages of 107 of the conquistadors at Cajamarca, two-thirds of whom were in their twenties (mostly late-twenties) and a quarter in their thirties;⁵⁵ and from the ages of the Spanish conquerors of New Granada, whose average age was twenty-seven.⁵⁶ The Spanish distrust of less Hispanized Blacks must in part account for the paucity of very young African men playing armed roles in the Conquest; it is also probable that younger unacculturated Africans (or “*bozales*”) were more likely to be placed in danger by Spaniards—used as “arrow fodder,” as it were—and thus less likely to survive and enter the historical record.

The high incidence of “Juan” as a black conquistador Christian name is worth comment. Of a dozen black conquistadors whose names are recorded (see Table 1 and the discussion above on Chile), seven were named “Juan.” This was more than mere coincidence, but it did not reflect a pattern particular to Blacks under arms or to Spanish American Blacks in general; “Juan” was simply the most common male Christian name in the Spanish-speaking world in the sixteenth century. A comparison of names given to Spanish and black infants in the 1540s and ’50s, the former in Mexico City and the latter in nearby Puebla, showed that “Juan” was the name of choice, assigned to about a quarter of baptized boys in both groups.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Juan Valiente died a slave, technically speaking, but not through want of trying to buy his manumission papers or through efforts by his owner to sell him his freedom; the barriers were essentially logistical, and for most of his last two decades of life Valiente seems to have acted and been treated as a free man (see Table 4).

⁵⁵ Lockhart, *Cajamarca*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ Avellaneda, *Conquerors of the New Kingdom*, p. 62.

⁵⁷ Peter Boyd-Bowman, “Negro Slaves in Early Colonial Mexico,” *The Americas* 26:2, (October 1969), p. 145.

A survey of primary sources on Yucatan and secondary sources from various regions of Spanish America suggests that two naming patterns emerged during the colonial period. Where Blacks were slaves assigned names by their owners, whether as adults or newborns, Spaniards tended to show a lack of imagination and to use to a disproportionate extent the most common Christian names of the day. Thus while we cannot take too literally the suggestion of the statistical sample of twelve that 60 percent of black conquistadors were named "Juan," it is plausible that a third to a half bore that name. The other pattern relates more to Spanish American Blacks given names by their parents. These families were more likely to be free, to be of mixed racial descent, and to assign Christian names that reflected trends within Afro-Spanish communities rather than the larger Spanish American world—taking the names, for example, of parents, grandparents, godparents, or local saints. They also tended to live in mid-to-late colonial times, rather than in the Conquest decades; thus names such as Clemente, Eugenio, and Lázaro, common Afro-Spanish names in mature colonial society, were not to be found among black conquistadors.⁵⁸

With respect to occupations, trades, and skills, the Blacks who served in sixteenth-century conquest expeditions were loosely of two types. We know very little of the occupational skills of those who made up large gangs of auxiliaries in campaigns later in the century; such gangs were often intended to function as mine labor, in the hope that mines would be found, and thus arguably fall into the category of mass slaves rather than auxiliaries. Nevertheless, such Blacks often became conquistadors because expeditions encountered hostile indigenous groups rather than mines—as in the 1530s during the Cortés campaign to Baja California and the Montejo campaign in Yucatan.⁵⁹

Of those who were more or less from the onset black conquistadors—those who participated in campaigns in smaller numbers earlier in the century—we know more. As mentioned above, these men had typically spent time in Iberian or Caribbean lands before coming to the American mainland, and had therefore acquired one or more skills or trades that they put to use both during and after the Conquest. One royal official, Alonso López de Cer-

⁵⁸ Baptism books in the Archivo Histórico de la Diócesis de Campeche, Campeche (hereafter AHDC), *libros* 1-38, 146-53, 161-73, 201-15; and in the Archivo del Arzobispado de Yucatán, Mérida (hereafter AAY), primarily the *libros de bautismos* from Jesús María parish; Marta Espejo-Ponce Hunt, "Colonial Yucatan: Town and Region in the Seventeenth Century" (PhD dissertation, Univ. of California, Los Angeles, 1974), p. 530; Boyd-Bowman, "Negro Slaves," p. 138-50; Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*, pp. 193-224; Rolando Mellafe, *La introducción de la esclavitud negra en Chile: Tráfico y rutas* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1984, 2nd ed.); Landers, *Black Society*, pp. 116-23, Appendix 9.

⁵⁹ Gerhard, "Black Conquistador," pp. 457-58; AGI, *México* 2999, 2, f.180; Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, p. 22.

rato, told the king that many Spaniards on Hispaniola “made a living by buying Africans [bozales], teaching them some trade [*alguna industria*] and then selling them at a profit on the mainland.”⁶⁰

A number of these “trades” (if the term is loosely defined) were so common as to be virtual stereotypes attached to Spanish American black men. The most obvious was the trade or position of crier (*pregonero*); indeed one historian of Peru commented that “Spanish social convention demanded that criers be black or mulatto.”⁶¹ Both Juan García and Juan Garrido, respectively black conquistadors of Peru and Mexico, were criers (see Tables 2 and 3). Another Peruvian crier, Pedro de la Peña, who held the post in Lima in the 1540s, was probably black, and the position was likewise associated with people of African descent in sixteenth-century Quito.⁶²

Black criers were more than just criers, however; they also tended to function as one or more of the following: constable, auctioneer, executioner, piper, master of weights and measures, and doorkeeper or guard. Juan García was also a piper (*gaitero*) and master of weights; Pedro de la Peña was also a piper and auctioneer; Juan Garrido was also a gatekeeper (*portero*). Where historians have seen evidence of a black man given responsibility for weighing precious metals, they have tended to comment on it, suggesting that each case was rare. I suspect this was not rare, and have placed the role in the list of those conventionally attached to Blacks, especially criers, as not only was Juan García assigned the role, but so was Quito’s black crier in the 1570s.⁶³ Among the other crier-associated roles, that of doorkeeper or guard was second only to crier as a position virtually synonymous with Blacks in Spanish America, and it was clearly seen by Spaniards as an obvious position for a black conquistador to assume after the fighting was mostly over in a given area. Thus Juan Garrido and Sebastián Toral were made porteros in Mexico City and Mérida (Yucatan) respectively in the wake of the founding of those Spanish cities.⁶⁴

Beyond these positions there is little evidence of black conquistador occupations or trades. According to one source, one of the Blacks brought

⁶⁰ My gloss of the Spanish original quoted in Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, p. 20. Cerrato is best known as the 1548-55 president of the Audiencia of Guatemala (see Lutz, *Santiago*, 16-18 and his references). Another way to profit from the mainland demand for slaves was to steal them in Spain and sell them in Mexico—as one case example shows (Herrera, “People of Santiago,” pp. 261-62).

⁶¹ Lockhart, *Cajamarca*, p. 380.

⁶² Lockhart, *Cajamarca*, p. 384; Kris Lane, “Captivity and Redemption: Aspects of Slave Life in Early Colonial Quito and Popayán,” *The Americas*, this issue, p. 231.

⁶³ Cook and Cook in Cieza de León, *Discovery*, p. 248; Lockhart, *Cajamarca*, pp. 380-84; Lane, “Captivity,” this issue.

⁶⁴ AGI, *México* 2999, 2, f.180; see the sources to Table 2.

into Mexico by Pánfilo de Narváez in 1520 was a jester (*bufón*);⁶⁵ whether this man also fought in the central Mexican conquest wars is not known but it is unlikely that he would have survived into the autumn of 1521 without fighting.⁶⁶

Indeed, black conquistadors, by definition, fought alongside Spaniards against indigenous warriors; it was by risking their lives, suffering in the field, protecting Spaniards, and killing natives, that black men were able to improve their circumstances and, if enslaved, fight for their own freedom. Yet the historical record contains only passing mention of black combat experience in the Spanish campaigns. Juan Bardales claimed, in his eventually successful petition for a royal pension, that his military services and sacrifices included taking 106 arrow wounds in Honduras and saving the life of his Spanish captain; that his wounds were not a round number makes one wonder whether Bardales had 106 corroborating scars.⁶⁷

Other descriptions of black conquistador actions, by both Blacks and Spaniards, tend to be frustratingly vague—"he helped place that province under our command," as the king, in an edict, remarked of a black conquistador in Yucatan, is typical.⁶⁸ Often such remarks pay homage to the combat effectiveness and military prowess of black soldiers: Rodrigo de Quiroga, writing to the king about the campaigns in Chile, commented that Blacks ". . . often fulfilled functions necessary to the war . . ." ⁶⁹; during the 1536 siege by Manco Inca of the Pizarro-led forces in Cuzco, the colonial authorities in Hispaniola sent to aid them "two hundred Spanish-speaking Blacks" who were "very good at fighting."⁷⁰ Some black conquistadors only made it into the historical record either because they were killed in notable battles (such as the five who died at the Chilean battles of Chumumaguigi and Labapie) or they killed a notable native ruler (the Araucanian leader

⁶⁵ Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ On the occupations of blacks in Spanish America, enslaved and free, during the colonial period, see Boyd-Bowman, "Slaves," p. 146; Mellafe, *Negro Slavery*, pp. 85-99; Bowser, *African Slave*, pp. 88-146; Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*, pp. 204-22; Francisco Fernández Repetto and Genny Negroe Sierra, *Una población perdida en la memoria: los negros de Yucatán* (Mérida: Univ. Autónoma de Yucatán, 1995), pp. 49-57; Landers, *Black Society*, pp. 87-106; also see the other four articles that follow in this issue. Without systematically surveying this literature, my impression from it, combined with a preliminary reading of archival items relating to Yucatan, is that while Spanish American blacks were involved in a vast variety of economic activities, they were concentrated in six areas: industries related to transportation, such as shipping and the mule-train business; mining; farming and rural enterprise, especially cattle ranching and animal husbandry; service-industry artisanry, especially tailoring and shoemaking; domestic service; and the militia (as discussed below).

⁶⁷ Herrera, "People of Santiago," p. 254; "Black Slaves," this issue.

⁶⁸ AGI, *México* 2999, 2, f.180.

⁶⁹ Sater, "Black Experience," p. 17.

⁷⁰ Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 7; Thomas, *Slave Trade*, p. 103.

Caupolicán was killed by a black soldier) or they saved a prominent Spaniard (Diego de Almagro's life was once saved by an African slave).⁷¹

The broader cultural context to the Spanish use of black fighters in the Conquest and subsequent accounts of their roles is the Spanish perception of Africans as natural warriors. This perception is deeply rooted in Iberian—and African—history, going back to the role played by black slaves in the Muslim armies of North Africa and the Middle East during the medieval phase of the trade in sub-Saharan Africans, and to the black experience of the Reconquista as armed auxiliaries on both sides of the conflict.⁷² There may or may not have been a more developed “warrior tradition” in Africa than in Spain or Mesoamerica or anywhere else; what mattered was that Spaniards believed in such a tradition. Furthermore, the fact that many Africans forced to cross the Atlantic had been sold into slavery as prisoners of war greatly increased the likelihood of their having prior military experience—and helps to explain why they might be eager to play the role of soldier rather than slave. The grueling experience and mortality rate of the Middle Passage was an additional factor that increased the military suitability of surviving Africans in Spanish America.⁷³

In the early sixteenth century Spanish Crown legislation aimed at reducing the incidence of slave rebellions attempted to prevent the importation into the colonies of Africans deemed most pugnacious. The Crown and its colonial officials varied on their opinions as to which Africans were the most bellicose, but two categories appeared most consistently in such commentary and legislation. These were Muslims (or anyone of African descent who may have been exposed to Islam, which periodically included mulattos, *ladinos* or Hispanized Blacks, and anyone from Guinea); and Wolofs (or Gelofes, as Spaniards tended to term them), described in royal legislation of 1532 as “arrogant, disobedient, rebellious and incorrigible.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ According to Cieza de León's sixteenth-century account, during a battle near the coast south of Panama, “Indians advanced against [Almagro], and if it were not for a black slave, they would have killed him” (*Discovery*, p. 68). Bowser, *African Slave*, pp. 3-4, mentions the incident but does not make specific his source. On the Chilean examples, see Sater, “Black Experience”, p. 16.

⁷² Leslie B. Rout Jr., *The African Experience in Spanish America* (London: Longman, 1969), pp. 13-17; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 15-18, 23-43; Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*, p. 11.

⁷³ Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, pp. 180-94; Malcolm Cowley and Daniel P. Mannix, “Middle Passages,” *American Heritage* 13:2 (February 1962); Vincent Bakeptu Thompson, *The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas, 1441-1900* (London: Longman, 1987), pp. 85-127; Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*, pp. 289-301; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, pp. 98-116.

⁷⁴ Aguirre Beltrán, *Población Negra*, pp. 113, 160; Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 148; Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, pp. 145-49 (quote on p. 146).

There were two sides to the coin, of course, as this perception contributed to Spanish mistrust and fear of black men, especially the enslaved, as much as it helped perpetuate armed roles for Blacks in the colonies. The Wolof reputation for rebelliousness was tied up with their reputation for valor and their fame as horsemen; Juan de Castellanos, a sixteenth-century Spanish poet who lived for a time in Puerto Rico, wrote that “The Wolof are skillful and very warlike / With vain presumptions to be knights.”⁷⁵ Thus when a black man appeared to be both an exemplar of African warrior prowess and an unquestionably loyal servant of Spanish interests, he qualified for hagiographic treatment from Spanish commentators and their cultural heirs. Something of this phenomenon can be seen in the way history has viewed Juan Garrido, especially in Mexico, although Garrido’s story lacks the adornments of tales of military valor. The best example is probably that of Juan Beltrán, who in Vásquez de Espinosa’s account of 1620 can be seen in the advanced stages of legend formation:

The valiant captain Juan Beltrán, a mulatto, son of a black man and an Indian woman, is worthy of eternal memory for his great deeds among those savages. He was very deferential toward the Spaniards, and very obedient and loyal to them. With the Indians he was fearless; they stood in awe of him and respected him, to such a degree that the mere mention of his name was often enough to intimidate the Indians and put their forces to flight. The Spaniards on several occasions, seeing themselves hard put to it, gave out that Captain Juan Beltrán was coming to them, and thus they gained the victory; such authority did he have with them, and such respect and fear did they show him.

Accordingly for his sterling character and his bravery, Governor Martín García de Loyola, in His Majesty’s name, presented him with 500 Indians and gave him the title of Infantry Captain. He was a valiant governor and captain for them. With his 500 Indians he built his fort two leagues from Villarica, and they were very obedient to him. He made himself respected and feared in all the neighboring provinces, into which he made long *malocas* or raids, bringing back great prizes. So long as he lived, Villarica was well defended and could rely on his aid and protection, until they finally killed him. His loss was the end of the Spaniards, and they perished at the hands of the Indians. Merely to write his victories and heroic deeds against the savages in His Majesty’s service and in defense of the Spaniards, would require an entire volume.⁷⁶

Despite the mythologizing tone of this account, this kind of warrior reputation was broadly associated with black conquistadors to an extent that suggests a consistent Spanish witnessing of African military prowess in the

⁷⁵ “Destos son los Gilosos muy guerreros / Con vana presuncion de caballeros”; Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, p. 148, translation hers.

⁷⁶ Vásquez de Espinosa, *Compendium*, pp. 743-44.

Americas; in fact, it amounts to a tacit Spanish recognition of the black role in New World conquests.

Nevertheless, there remained something exceptional to the Chilean experience, as it appears only to have been in Chile where black conquistadors were rewarded with *encomiendas*.⁷⁷ Elsewhere in Spanish America, conquerors of African descent who achieved upward mobility by virtue of surviving the wars tended to hit a glass ceiling. Juan Garrido was eventually granted a house plot within the *traza* of Mexico City, a privilege usually reserved for Spaniards, but he was never granted positions in the new city other than those traditionally associated with Blacks.⁷⁸ Likewise, Sebastian Toral, black conquistador of Yucatan, settled and raised a family in Mérida, but remained a doorkeeper and guard and was obliged to petition the Crown at least twice just to avoid paying tribute (an automatic exemption for Spaniards in the colonies).

The frequency with which black conquistadors left the regions they had helped to conquer was probably related to the unwillingness of Spaniards to fully admit their black one-time comrades-at-arms into colonial society. Juan Garrido repeatedly left Mexico City to participate in further commercial and conquest ventures. Juan Bardales participated in expeditions in various parts of Central America (see Table 1). Juan Valiente's career stretched from Mexico to Chile. These individuals represent the small pools of black veterans who moved from one conquest expedition to another, a phenomenon that included Spaniards (and in some cases natives) and was intrinsic to Spanish conquest patterns.

Juan García's response was somewhat different. He did what so many Spaniards intended to do but never did; he collected his share of the earliest—albeit impressive—conquest spoils and returned to Spain, where he lived to be an old man.⁷⁹ In doing so, he escaped the rumors of resentment that had already begun to circulate about him in Peru.⁸⁰ He was also spared the kind of marginalized roles assigned to Garrido in Mexico City and to

⁷⁷ Although there is some indication that Africans received *encomiendas* in early Hispaniola (Lynne Guitar, personal communication), so it is possible that there were some others at very early conquest stages or in fringe regions.

⁷⁸ The acquisition of *traza* plots by blacks was a phenomenon restricted to immediate post-Conquest years or to frontier regions where aspects of Conquest society lingered; hence the similar granting of an intra-*traza* plot to a freed black, Tomé Vásquez, in Santiago (Chile) in 1559 (Wright, "Negro Companions," p. 220).

⁷⁹ See sources to Table 3; on Spanish intentions, as asserted here, see the letters in James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies: The Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976).

⁸⁰ Lockhart, *Cajamarca*, p. 51.

Toral in Mérida, as well as the violent deaths that awaited Valiente and Beltrán in Chile.

COLONIAL CONQUISTADORS (SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES)

In regions of the Americas where the Spanish invasion was a delayed or protracted affair, the role of the black conquistador was inevitably prolonged. The careers of Valiente, Beltrán and others in Chile represent a late-sixteenth-century example of this phenomenon, but there are still later examples. A notable one is that of the Conquest of the Itzá Mayas of the Peten region in what is now northern Guatemala, carried out in 1697 with the predictable assistance of native and black auxiliaries. This was not the first time Africans had set foot in the Peten; an unknown number accompanied Cortés on the trip to Honduras that passed through the Itzá Maya region in 1525, and one of these black would-be conquistadors deserted the Spaniards to remain at the Itzá capital of Noh Peten.⁸¹

But the black men who accompanied the Spanish forces that moved south from Yucatan in 1695 (to protect the workers extending the Camino Real) and again in 1696-97 (as part of a full-scale invasion force) were black conquistadors of a different ilk. Some may have been African-born black slaves, but the evidence suggests that most, if not all, were free mulattos (or *pardos*, as they were usually termed in Yucatan) who would have been born in the Caribbean or Yucatan.⁸² Furthermore, most already had some military training as members of pardo militia companies stationed at strategic points along the Yucatec coast and near Spanish urban centers. A José Laines was one pardo militia captain who served on the campaign, responsible for a company of pardos and mestizos. Another company of forty-nine men apparently consisted of eighteen Mayas under their own officer and thirty-one pardos from Mérida, all under a Captain Mateo Hidalgo, who was almost certainly a *casta* (black or of mixed descent), probably a pardo. The name of at least one free pardo infantryman is also recorded; Juan de Vargas

⁸¹ Grant D. Jones, *The Conquest of the Last Maya Kingdom* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), p. 37 (citing the account by Bernal Díaz del Castillo; see Díaz, *Conquest*).

⁸² Notarial and parish records from Yucatan indicate that in the last century and a half of colonial rule black slaves were born either in Africa or in the British Empire, typically Belize or Jamaica, while free blacks and mulattos tended to be born in Yucatan or in Spanish or British Caribbean colonies (AAY; AHDC; Archivo General del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida [hereafter AGEY]; Archivo Notarial del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida; various sources in AGI and in Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City [hereafter AGN]; my book manuscript-in-progress on *Black Yucatan*). The term “pardo” was used variously in Spanish America; most commonly it was a synonym for Spanish-African “mulatto,” as was the Yucatec case, but it could also refer to someone of “Indian”-African descent.

saw action among the Itzá Mayas starting in 1695, later testifying to the experience.⁸³

The Spanish American connection between black conquistadors and black militias—illustrated in the Peten conquest case—was more than just the dovetailing of two eras and two roles. Black militiamen were simply black conquistadors organized differently to reflect the shifting threat to Spanish interests in the Americas; similarly, the contrast between the African-born conquistadors and the American-born mulatto militiamen was a reflection of Afro-Spanish American demographic changes during the colonial centuries.

Beginning in the late sixteenth century the Spanish crown systematically worked to create a network of defense in and around the Caribbean. This initiative was a response to the increase in English and French pirate activity, most notably the Drake sackings of San Agustín (St. Augustine), Santo Domingo, and Cartagena in 1585-86. It included the fortification of, initially, San Juan de Ulúa, Havana, Santo Domingo, Panama, and Cartagena, with other ports, such as Campeche, added as the colonial period wore on and the threat increased. These new forts were garrisoned by permanent militias and given the logistical support of sentinel systems on various coasts, patrol boats in some areas, and additional militia units stationed at strategic points near the coast or near to Spanish centers. African construction skills and black labor contributed to the building of new fortifications, and increasingly Blacks participated in look-out and patrol work.⁸⁴

More by necessity than design, Blacks, both free and enslaved, became an integral part of Spanish American garrisons and militias in the sixteenth century; by the seventeenth century this fact had become fully accepted by the colonial authorities, and formal black or pardo militias were set up during the course of the century in almost every colony. Black soldiers fought in the service of the Spanish crown against the English in various parts of the Caribbean and its environs in the seventeenth century—in Jamaica, for example, during the English invasion of 1655; in Campeche, during the sack of 1663; and in Florida in the final decades of the century, where black units engaged in offensive as well as defensive actions in a tradition that would continue in that province into the next century. Black mili-

⁸³ Jones, *Conquest*, pp. 144, 229, 259, 260, 267, 467.

⁸⁴ Jorge Victoria Ojeda, *Mérida de Yucatán de las Indias: Piratería y estrategia defensiva* (Mérida, Yuc.: Ayuntamiento de Mérida, 1995); Jane Landers, "Africans in the Spanish Colonies," *Historical Archaeology* 31:1 (1997), pp. 89-90; Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 49-53.

tiamen fought and died to defend Campeche not just against the English but also against Dutch and French filibuster attacks during the seventeenth century, most notably during the French assault and six-week sack of the port in 1685. By this time, pardo militias were stationed at strategic points throughout New Spain, with one estimate claiming there were three thousand Blacks at arms in Central America alone by 1673.⁸⁵

The period from the late-seventeenth century to the 1760s saw a consolidation of black militias in Spanish America. In some cases this involved extending militias to new areas or increasing company sizes, but the most significant change during these decades seems to have been the further institutionalization of pardo militias, with officers in particular campaigning and gradually receiving privileges that included tribute exemption, access to higher military ranks, and a degree of autonomy. The final half-century of colonial rule in mainland Spanish America saw a further phase of changes in the black militia experience, as pardo companies were periodically hit by the successive waves of defense-related reforms that swept through the empire in the wake of the British capture of Havana in 1762. The numbers of black men in service increased in some regions, but fell in others, while many of the privileges won earlier were undermined, especially with respect to the autonomy of pardo officers.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, pardo militiamen remained as crucial as ever to colonial defense. On the Mexican Costa Sur, for example, even after a reform cut of 1793, pardos comprised 3,575 of a total of 3,971 militiamen. In Tabasco, following the same reform, 906 of 1,018 soldiers were black. In Yucatan in 1778, just over half of the 2,846 militiamen were pardos; in 1794 a little

⁸⁵ Victoria Ojeda, *Mérida*, pp. 49-53; Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, pp. 69, 107, 126, 167; Landers, *Black Society*, pp. 22-28; documents displayed in the exhibit on colonial defense in Campeche's Puerta de la Tierra museum. On the 1673 estimate: Stephen Webre, "Las compañías de milicia y la defensa del istmo centroamericano en el siglo XVII: el alistamiento general de 1673," in *Mesoamérica* 14 (1987); this list clearly records 1,715 black militiamen, with ambiguities of racial classification suggesting that as many as 3,000 of the militia troops (in a region stretching from Chiapas to Costa Rica) were of some African descent (pp. 518, 525-29).

⁸⁶ Herbert S. Klein, "The Free Colored Militia of Cuba, 1568-1868," *Caribbean Studies* 6:2 (1966), pp. 17-27; Allan J. Kuethe, "The Status of the Free Pardo in the Disciplined Militia of New Granada," *Journal of Negro History* 56:2 (April 1971), pp. 105-17; Leon G. Campbell, "The Changing Racial and Administrative Structure of the Peruvian Military under the Late Bourbons," *The Americas* 32 (1975), pp. 117-35; Christon Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico, 1760-1810* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1977); Joseph P. Sánchez, "African Freedmen and the *Fuero Militar*: A Historical Overview of Pardo and Moreno Militiamen in the Late Spanish Empire," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 3:2 (1994), pp. 165-84; Hanger, *Bounded Lives*, pp. 109-35; Ben Vinson III, "Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico" (PhD dissertation, Columbia Univ., 1998), pp. 13-90; "Race and Badge: Free-Colored Soldiers in the Colonial Mexican Militia," *The Americas* 56:4 (April 2000), pp. 471-96.

fewer than half were black, but *pardo* numbers increased again in the late-1790s. There were similar variations in numbers and as a result of reforms in other parts of the circum-Caribbean, New Spain, and greater Peru, but in all these colonies armed men of African descent played roles similar in nature and significance to those of their sixteenth-century conquistador predecessors.⁸⁷

COUNTER-CONQUISTADORS

This article thus far has discussed the roles of Blacks as auxiliaries to Spaniards and thus effectively as agents of colonialism. Most Blacks who fought in the Spanish Americas fought for Spaniards and, with the exception of circumstances such as the Peruvian civil wars of the 1540s, fought against indigenous Americans. Indeed, in the broader colonial context of the roles of black auxiliaries—armed and unarmed, personal slaves and servants—men and women of African descent lived and worked in and for the Spanish world, rather than the native one. And while the subject of black-indigenous relations is a highly complex one that involves considerable variations of place and time and thus largely defies sensible generalizations, it is fair to say that such relations were often antagonistic, especially earlier in the colonial period and outside the increasingly-multiethnic setting of Spanish cities and towns. Even in an urban setting such as Mexico City, black-native relations early in the colonial period appear to have been marked by mutual hostility—a logical extension of such black roles as conquistador and supervisor of native labor.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Vinson, "Bearing Arms," pp. 466, 468, 470; "Race and Badge," pp. 490-95; J. Ignacio Rubio Mañé, *Archivo de la Historia de Yucatán, Campeche, y Tabasco* (Mexico City, 1942, 2 vols.), I, pp. 207-47; AGN, *Reales Cédulas (Originales)* 164, 245/f.392 (edict of 1796 on expanding Yucatan's *pardo* militias). For studies of the parallel use of black forces by the British in the Caribbean, see Roger Norman Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979); and Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*.

⁸⁸ Bowser, *African Slave*, pp. 7, 103, 150-54, 176-78, 282-87; Palmer, *Slaves*, pp. 60-64; Rebecca B. Bateman, "Africans and Indians: A Comparative Study of the Black Carib and Black Seminole," *Ethnohistory* 37:1 (Winter 1990), pp. 1-24 (reprinted in Davis, *Slavery and Beyond*, pp. 29-54); Rebecca Horn, *Postconquest Coyoacan: Nahuatl-Spanish Relations in Central Mexico, 1519-1650* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 78-79, 184, 205; my unpublished book manuscript, cited here as *Black Yucatan*, includes detailed discussion of black-Maya relations, the most important archival sources of which include AGEY, *Colonial, Criminal*, 1; 2; and 3; AGI, *México*, 3042; AGN, *Inquisición*, 125, 69; 1131, 2; 1164; 1187, 2; and the marriage records in AAY and AHDC. Also relevant is Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-black Peoples* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1993). I am currently compiling an edited volume on African-native American relations in colonial Latin America, to be published in a couple of years in the University of New Mexico Press *Diálogos* series.

However, it is also clear that one dimension of the very genesis of the black experience in the Americas was the refusal by some Africans to fight for Spaniards against natives. Such a refusal inevitably resulted in Blacks taking up arms against Spaniards as individuals, in the groups that evolved into independent maroon communities, or in common cause with indigenous opponents of colonialism. As soldiers opposed to Spanish colonial expansion, these men were not black conquistadors in the sense that the phrase has been used here. But any study of armed Africans in the Americas would be incomplete without emphasizing that a significant number of such men were black conquerors who fought Spanish colonialism, hindered its expansion, and even set up parallel colonial settlements; they were, if you like, black counter-conquistadors.

As mentioned above, Nicolás de Ovando, when Spanish governor on Hispaniola, complained as early as 1503 that there were already *cimarrón* or maroon communities on the island, causing the Crown momentary reluctance to permit further transportation of Africans to the colonies. This suggests that the history of black counter-conquistadors is as old as that of black conquistadors. Indeed, wherever Spaniards went with African auxiliaries in the Americas they ran the risk of black rebellion, often in conjunction with native resistance or revolt, as in Florida in the 1520s.⁸⁹ These rebellions were the precursors to the slave uprisings that would become a fact of plantation enterprise in the Americas, beginning with the 1521 Wolof-led revolt on Diego Colón's Hispaniola sugar plantation.⁹⁰ Over the next fifteen years there were four major slave revolts in the Spanish colonies, not only on plantations but in urban settings where black men and women were theoretically better treated; these revolts culminated in the black uprising in Mexico in 1537, which inspired the Crown to consider suspending the importation of enslaved Africans as it had done briefly in 1503 and 1516.⁹¹ By the turn of the seventeenth century, the racial climate was even worse, as maroon communities grew and Spaniards increasingly feared black revolt in both city and countryside; in 1612, twenty-nine African men and seven African women, alleged conspirators in a Mexico City plot, were hanged and their severed heads displayed on pikes.⁹²

⁸⁹ Wright, "Negro Companions," p. 221; Landers, *Black Society*, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁰ Landers, "Africans," p. 85; personal communication; Carlos Esteban Deive, *La Española y la esclavitud del indio* (Santo Domingo: Fundación García Arévalo, 1995).

⁹¹ David M. Davidson, "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 46:1 (February 1966), p. 243; Bowser, *African Slave*, p. 148; J. I. Israel, *Race, Class, and Politics in Colonial Mexico, 1610-1670* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 67.

⁹² Edgar F. Love, "Negro Resistance to Spanish Rule in Colonial Mexico," *Journal of Negro History* 52:2 (April 1967), pp. 98-99; Israel, *Race, Class*, pp. 67-75; Palmer, *Slaves*, pp. 138-40.

As long as Spain maintained American colonies, Africans would be imported as slaves and would continue to resist that role in multiple ways. Armed resistance took several forms: individual acts of armed revolt or violent resistance; armed opposition to Spanish colonial interests at sea, most of it of a quasi-organized nature; and organized armed resistance leading to the formation of maroon settlements or as part of their maintenance. The evidence for the first of these is by definition highly diffuse, being the sum of numerous incidents recorded in diverse and often passing ways and transposed into regional historical studies—records which surely represent but a fraction of the actual number of such acts.

The second of these forms of resistance is better substantiated (and more relevant to this article's focus), as the more successful black pirates—black counter-conquistadors at sea—won considerable attention from Spanish colonists and officials. In the seventeenth century there were at least three black pirates who went by the name of Diego “el Mulato,” all of whom were persistent thorns in the Spanish colonial side. The first, Diego “el Mulato” Martín, a former slave from Havana, terrorized the Gulf of Mexico coast in the 1630s, inspiring desperate Spanish officials to offer the pirate a generous royal commission in return for directing his energies in favor of Spanish interests.⁹³ The second “el Mulato,” Diego de los Reyes, aka Diego Lucifer, conducted a similar rampage along the Yucatec coast in the 1640s, sacking Campeche and Bacalar in 1642 and inspiring a royal edict in 1643 that ordered “every possible remedy to be taken to capture the mulatto pirate.”⁹⁴ The third “el Mulato,” Diego Grillo, also a former slave from Havana, used Tortuga as a base from which to plague Spanish shipping until being captured and executed by Spaniards in 1673.⁹⁵

I have termed this form of black counter-conquistador activity quasi-organized because, while the ships ran organized crews and often coordinated attacks with other ships in systematic raids, these pirate captains were not leaders of black communities. Their experience as Africans in Spanish America no doubt shaped their motivation and identity as pirates—indeed Thomas Gage, who encountered one Diego “el Mulato” in Portobelo, reports that the pirate held a grudge against the Spaniards for whipping and otherwise abusing him as a Havana slave. For similar reasons, or perhaps for reasons of piratical expediency, Diego Martín collaborated with the Dutch

⁹³ Landers, “Africans,” p. 89.

⁹⁴ AGI, *México* 360; AGN, *Reales Cédulas (Originales)* 2, 1, 23/f.40 (source of quote); this second Diego “el Mulato” may have been the same individual as the first, as Landers (“Africans,” p. 89) and Lane (*Pillaging the Empire*, p. 71) suggest.

⁹⁵ Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, p. 123.

and Diego Grillo with the English.⁹⁶ But there are no signs that the Diegos “el Mulato” represented particular refuges for escaped slaves or disaffected pardos; indeed one of Diego Lucifer’s kidnapping victims during his assault on Bacalar was a fellow mulatto named Luís Fernández.⁹⁷ Rather they represented either themselves as individuals, or their multiracial, multinational crews. Although black conquistadors fought for Spaniards in the sixteenth century and the black counter-conquistador pirates fought against them in the seventeenth, both were armed Africans involuntarily made part of the Spanish colonial world and seeking survival and opportunity as individuals more or less within that world.

The third form of resistance that gave rise to black counter-conquistadors—the armed activity related to maroon communities—was probably the most successful in terms of the number of Africans who were able to escape the colonial environment and live in relative freedom and independence, albeit subject to maroon community leaders and often facing a lifetime of defense obligations; hundreds of maroons were living near Vera Cruz and near Acapulco by the early seventeenth century, and by mid-century there were over a thousand maroons in four communities in Hispaniola and three times this many in the maroon sites around Cartagena.⁹⁸

This form of resistance is also the best evidenced and studied.⁹⁹ Suffice it to observe here, therefore, that the survival of maroon communities—either as independent entities hostile to Spanish authorities or as semi-independent municipalities more or less incorporated by treaty into the colony—was largely made possible by the leadership of extraordinary black counter-conquistadors, such as Antonio Mandinga in Panama, Bayano in Venezuela and Panama, Miguel in Venezuela, and Yanga and Francisco Angola in Vera Cruz. Yanga, an African-born slave of alleged royal descent from the Bram nation, lived as a free maroon for over three

⁹⁶ Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, pp. 71, 123, 200.

⁹⁷ Grant D. Jones, *Maya Resistance to Spanish Rule: Time and History on a Colonial Frontier* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1989), pp. 226-27.

⁹⁸ Israel, *Race, Class*, pp. 68-69; Palmer, *Slaves*, pp. 128-31; Landers, “Africans,” p. 86.

⁹⁹ Davidson, “Negro Slave Control”; Love, “Negro Resistance”; María del Carmen Borrego Pla, *Palenques de Negros en Cartagena de Indias a Fines del Siglo XVII* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1973); Patrick J. Carroll, “Mandinga: The Evolution of a Mexican Runaway Slave Community: 1735-1827,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19:4 (October 1977), pp. 488-505; Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979, 2nd ed. rev.); Bowser, *African Slave*, pp. 187-221; Palmer, *Slaves*, pp. 119-44; José Arrom and Manuel A. García Arévalo, *Cimarrón* (Santo Domingo: Fundación García Arévalo, 1986); Klein, *African Slavery*, pp. 196-208; Richard and Sally Price, eds., *Stedman’s Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992); Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, pp. 145-50; Landers, *Black Society*, pp. 13-16, 79-80.

decades in Mexico, eventually winning through military persistence and diplomatic skill formal Spanish recognition of the community and Yanga's governorship of it.¹⁰⁰

Miguel's career as a black counter-conquistador was far more short-lived, but his actions in north-west Venezuela in 1553, even seen through the prejudiced late-colonial account of Oviedo y Baños, illustrate both an individualized resentment-fueled resistance (most vividly exemplified by the mulatto pirates) and the separationist group-oriented resistance that led to the founding of maroon communities and produced their leadership. Miguel was one of eighty or so enslaved Africans working the mines of San Felipe, twenty of whom he persuaded to join him in escaping and then raiding the town of the same name. The catalyst of Miguel's revolt was his successful attempt to resist being whipped; in raiding San Felipe and seizing a number of Spaniards he selected out those who had abused black slaves and he (allegedly) tortured them to death, releasing the other Spaniards. Having enacted a harsh but considered justice, Miguel then retreated into the hills near Barquisimeto, where he founded a maroon settlement of black and native fugitives from Spanish towns in the region, appointing a bishop and himself as head of a royal family. Within months the kingdom had almost two hundred inhabitants, but before King Miguel could consolidate the community enough to negotiate with the Spanish authorities he was killed and his kingdom destroyed by a punitive expedition under Losada, the future conquistador of Caracas.¹⁰¹

Yanga, Miguel, and their ilk might appear as more heroic figures than the Blacks who fought for Spaniards or resisted as individuals, but arguably it was only historical circumstances that made them maroon governors or kings, rather than conquistadors like Juan Valiente in Chile, militiamen like Juan de Vargas in Yucatan, or Caribbean pirates like Diego Lucifer. On the one hand, as this study of black conquistadors illustrates, Blacks in Spanish America did not share the kind of modern racial identity that we might be tempted to impose upon them; indeed, there were circumstances under which conquistadors, militiamen, and counter-conquistadors, all of African descent, fought each other—for Blacks played increasingly crucial roles in Spanish campaigns to control or crush maroon settlements and in the colo-

¹⁰⁰ Oviedo y Baños, *Historia*, pp. 214-19, 278 (on Bayano, who was eventually captured by the conquistador Pedro de Ursúa in 1560 and died shortly afterwards as a prisoner in Seville; Oviedo y Baños, *Conquest*, p. 122); Israel, *Race, Class*, p. 69; Palmer, *Slaves*, pp. 128-30; Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, p. 147.

¹⁰¹ Oviedo y Baños, *Historia*, pp. 214-19; *Conquest*, pp. 96-98. Compare the creation of King Miguel's court with a similar creation under a black King Martín in Mexico City in 1608; Palmer, *Slaves*, pp. 135-36.

nial organizations that hunted escaped slaves.¹⁰² Simply put, color was not necessarily the primary way in which Africans related to each other.

On the other hand, Blacks in Spanish America must have shared to some extent and in some sense the view of Yanga, expressed in a 1611 letter to Spanish officials, that their actions and decisions—however varied—were motivated by a desire to escape the “cruelty and treachery of the Spaniards who, without any right, had become owners of their freedom.”¹⁰³

CONCLUSION

In his study of what he terms the free-colored militias of central Mexico, Ben Vinson suggests that the social mobility acquired by black militia officers was more than a simple step up the socio-racial ladder, more than a “passing” from mulatto to white; rather, the acquisition of status and privilege by black officers reflected the active leadership role played by these men in the black community as a whole and therefore had the effect of fostering a sense of local “race-based” black community identity.¹⁰⁴ As a result, *negros* and *pardos* became Afro-Mexicans or Afro-Veracruzanos or Afro-Yucatecans.

I suggest that this perspective is also relevant to the Conquest-era precursors of the mulatto militias, the black conquistadors, albeit more in terms of individual than community identity. Certainly the armed Africans that survived Spanish Conquest campaigns acquired many of the trappings of a Spanish social existence—they became free Christians, often raising families in conquistador cities, sometimes enjoying tribute exemptions or royal pensions or even *encomiendas*. But they did not thereby pass as Spaniards or even become black Spaniards (however such an identity might be defined). Certainly black conquistadors drew heavily upon their experience of Spanish culture and accommodated themselves profoundly to the requirements of early Spanish American society. But we must also assume that they

¹⁰² Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*, pp. 331-52 lists and cites over twenty examples of armed blacks used against escaped slaves and maroons in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish America (with dozens of additional examples from the later period, mostly from non-Spanish colonies); he also lists examples of black troops used against black rebels and of blacks as soldiers on opposing sides of conflict (mostly late colonial and mostly from non-Spanish colonies in the Americas). The slave-hunting organizations in which blacks may have been majority participants by late colonial times were called *rancheadores* in Cuba, *buscadores* in Santo Domingo, and *cuadrilleros* in Peru (*ibid.*, p. 337; Bowser, *African Slave*, pp. 105-6, 199-212). See Carroll, “Mandinga,” pp. 499-503 for a Mexican example.

¹⁰³ Letter quoted in Palmer, *Slaves*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁴ Vinson, “Race and Badge” (quoted phrase, p. 473); “Bearing Arms.”

brought with them from West and West Central Africa ways of viewing that experience, perceptions that remain hidden from us as they must largely have been from Conquest-era Spaniards but which nevertheless surely persisted on some level. In the end, they were neither the Africans they might have been nor the Spaniards they might seem to have become; they were something else, something unique to the encounter in the Americas between natives, Europeans, and Africans.¹⁰⁵ They were everything we may permit to be contained within the phrase “black conquistador.”

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¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of this encounter and its results, see Patrick J. Carroll, “Los mexicanos negros, el mestizaje y los fundamentos olvidados de la ‘raza cósmica’: una perspectiva regional,” *Historia Mexicana* 44:3 (1995), pp. 403-38 (tables in 45:1). The phenomenon of imitation resulting in the creation not of a copy but something new, which I have tried to present in straightforward terms here, is also discussed in the language of what Michael Taussig calls *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).