

# Rethinking the Coloniality of Race: Blood Purity and the Politics of Periodization

ISAAC GABRIEL SALGADO *Trinity College, United States*

**T**he coloniality of power stands as a major framework for theorizing race within the context of Latin America, providing an influential account of the origin of race in the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Without abandoning the task of theorizing the ways in which race functions in Latin America, this article asks: what is obscured by an insistence on 1492 as the moment when race emerged, and what different understandings of race can be made available by connecting the colonization of the Americas to a different set of temporal and spatial referents? Specifically, I develop a “prismatic” approach to analyze the impact of fifteenth-century Iberian blood purity statutes on the development of race without positing these as the new, singular origin of race. This article thus suggests an alternative genealogy of racialization while providing a critical engagement with the coloniality of power’s account of race.

## INTRODUCTION

**P**eriodizing is a political act. The *New York Times*’ 1619 Project stands as a recent and prominent example of how contesting origins and shifting one’s temporal frame of reference can open the space for making different claims—in this case regarding the centrality of anti-Black racism to the founding and subsequent history of the United States. The backlash to the project, which included the introduction of legislation in over two dozen states that would ban its being taught and Trump’s creation of a rival “1776 Commission,” reveals how important origins are for grounding certain political imaginaries and how they can become the battleground between competing political projects. But the reactions to the 1619 Project cannot simply be reduced to two sides: one that affirms it, by extension acknowledging the salience of anti-Blackness and supporting some assortment of progressive policies for racial equity, and a conservative one that opposes it, invoking some pabulum about freedom and equality as America’s founding values in order to promote the enactment of “race-neutral” policies. Indeed, Nikole Hannah-Jones, the project’s originator, has herself acknowledged critiques regarding how the choice of date and invocation of slavery as “the country’s original sin” (Silverstein 2019, 4) rendered Indigenous peoples invisible (Louis 2019). Such critiques did not seek to deny the importance of addressing anti-Blackness or of centering Black peoples in the history of the United

States but rather interrogated how this framing wrote others out of the history of race.

As Michelle Wright argues, “The problem begins with origins. ... By extending the birth of the US to 1619, this new single story effectively erases their [Indigenous peoples’] presence even before their sovereignty was undeniably destroyed” (2020, e6). The answer is therefore not to identify yet another moment of origin. Instead, the 1619 Project illustrates the limits and exclusions necessarily produced by any move to (re)establish origins. We need not despair over the fact that any account will be a partial one, but can instead take this as an opportunity to critically evaluate the work that identifying an origin does and explore alternative ways in which we may engage with the history and development of such significant a concept as race.

This article does so by taking up a set of policies that are mentioned many in accounts of the origin and development of race but are often cast as precursors to the “properly modern” form of race: *limpieza de sangre* or “blood purity” statutes from fifteenth-century Spain. Through an analysis of the first recorded blood purity statute—the *Sentencia-Estatuto* (judgment-statute) of 1449—I argue that these statutes, which limited the rights and privileges of Jewish and Muslim converts to Christianity and their descendants in perpetuity, constituted a way of understanding and managing difference that should itself be considered racial. My intention is not to declare 1449 as *the* moment in which race originated. Rather, I propose taking what I term a “prismatic” approach to 1449, noting the various histories of difference which informed the enactment of the *Sentencia-Estatuto* and were subsequently transformed by it. I offer it as a method for analyzing the historical development of concepts and practices (like race and racialization) which attends to the multiple ways of plausibly narrating their development, eschewing any claims regarding their origins and instead focusing on how highlighting the various histories it

Isaac Gabriel Salgado , Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Trinity College, United States, [gabriel.salgado@trincoll.edu](mailto:gabriel.salgado@trincoll.edu).

Received: September 10, 2023; revised: March 16, 2024; accepted: June 04, 2024. First published online: October 28, 2024.

participates in can lead to different understandings of the concept/practices.

Following postcolonial critiques of universal and unilinear conceptions of history and development (Chakrabarty 2000), the prismatic approach is meant to provide a method for not only acknowledging but engaging with the plural histories that run through any given moment. It differs from approaches like Wilkerson's (2020), which links different iterations of what she argues are the same phenomenon in terms of their structural similarities, by instead looking to trace the actual historical diffusion of the concept/practices. It is distinct from other pluralizing approaches, such as intersectional and conjunctural analyses (which highlight with the multiple and coexistent factors, identities, or forms of oppression necessary for understanding a particular context [Crenshaw 1991; Camp 2022]), in that it specifically focuses on the development of concepts/practices *over time* (which is not an intrinsic element of intersectional analyses) and in that its primary concern is not to identify contingency and possibilities for change in the present (unlike conjunctural analyses) but to show how shifting the spatial and temporal parameters we employ can modify our understanding of a concept/practices by situating it differently in relation to various histories which both precede *and* succeed it. I demonstrate the value of this prismatic approach and of incorporating blood purity more centrally into our accounts of race by critically engaging with a set of scholars who all acknowledge the early modern Spanish preoccupation with blood purity but nevertheless insist that race originated with the colonization of the Americas, therefore arguing that blood purity can at best be described as "proto-racial." These are the theorists of the coloniality of power, including Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

The difference between designating something as racial and of recognizing it as an important precursor to the idea of race may at first glance seem minor. However, when (and where) one begins one's account will shape the histories, connections, and problems that come into focus. Approaching the *Sentencia-Estatuto* prismatically, I argue that it was pivotal in reconfiguring the understanding and management of human difference—therefore making it an appropriate *starting point* for discussing the development of race—without claiming it as the absolute origin of the concept and practices that make up racialization. This approach is therefore staunchly agnostic regarding projects that seek to identify instances of racialization prior to 1449, a stance that Quijano and Mignolo explicitly disavow. I critique their insistence that 1492 constituted a radical break out of which race and modernity were born by arguing that in order to understand the significance of a moment like 1492—as well as the role of race in the subsequent colonization of the Americas—we must first understand the notions of difference Spaniards carried with them across the Atlantic.

Scholars have of course put forth various, conflicting periodizations of race, which I group into three broad categories: "modern/scientific," "modern/colonial,"

and "premodern/pervasive" approaches. I begin by introducing some of what is at stake in debates over the periodization of race by briefly outlining key features and shortcomings of these approaches, and explaining how a prismatic approach differs. Given the constraints of space, I then focus on one example of a modern/colonial approach, the coloniality of power, offering a more detailed analysis of its account of race and critique of its limitations. Though many of these critiques also apply to other ways of periodizing race discussed below (particularly the modern/scientific approach), I focus on the coloniality of power's modern/colonial approach due to its prominence as a framework for theorizing race in and from Latin America, illustrating how a prismatic approach can lead to a significantly different account of racialization than an origin-based approach that locates its emergence a mere 50 years later.<sup>1</sup>

Next, I provide a prismatic reading of the *Sentencia-Estatuto* and blood purity policies more broadly. These policies targeted *conversos* and *moriscos*, Jewish and Muslim (respectively) converts to Christianity and their descendants, categorizing them as "New Christians" and denying them the full rights and privileges enjoyed by "Old Christians." By starting with the *Sentencia-Estatuto*, my account frames antisemitism and Islamophobia more centrally in the early modern development of race. I conclude by discussing two dimensions of racialization and racism which I argue are obscured by the framework of coloniality and that a prismatic approach helps emphasize: the unequal and predatory inclusion—not simple exclusion—of Black and Indigenous peoples into the category of "the Human," and the process by which different forms of labor were racialized. This prismatic approach is thus meant to draw a distinct set of processes into focus and provide an opportunity to rethink whose history we assume the history of race to be.

## RACE AND THE POLITICS OF PERIODIZATION

A dominant tendency in the periodization of race has been to situate its origins in the Enlightenment, distinguishing a "properly modern" notion of race from prior forms of prejudice or discrimination.<sup>2</sup> This approach, which I term "modern/scientific," takes race to function as a tool for legitimating domination in contexts where there is a putative commitment to equality, hence its origins in the Enlightenment. Race is thus understood to serve an ideological function that accompanies *but did not originally give rise to* class inequality in certain societies. Barbara Fields famously espoused this view when critiquing "a majority of American historians

<sup>1</sup> This is not to imply that there are no competing accounts of race in and from Latin America. For one such critique of the coloniality framework, see Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Representatives of this approach include Barbara J. Fields (1990), George W. Stocking Jr. (1997, 36–41), Patrick Wolfe (2016, 6–10), and George M. Fredrickson (2002, 56).

[who] think of slavery in the United States as primarily a system of race relations—as though the chief business of slavery was the production of white supremacy rather than the production of cotton, sugar, rice, and tobacco” (1990, 99).

This idea of race is most often equated with what is commonly referred to as “scientific racism”: attempts to explain and systematize racial categories through reference to physical and biological features, the heritability of such features, and theories of human evolution that arose in the late eighteenth century. Pre-Enlightenment forms of differentiation are at best cast as proto-racial. When, for example, Patrick Wolfe comments on Spanish blood purity policies he distinguishes them from “modern antisemitism” and describes them as an earlier form of “Judeophobia” (2016, 106–7). While the theories of eighteenth and nineteenth-century scientific racists like Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and Arthur de Gobineau were certainly original in various ways, scholars of early modernity have noted that much of what is taken to characterize the “properly modern” form of modern/scientific racism (e.g., detailing physical differences between races, theorizing the origins of said differences, and investigating how racial traits were transmitted intergenerationally) were also present in racial ideologies that preceded the Enlightenment (Cañizares-Esguerra 1999; Loomba 2009; Nemser 2017).<sup>3</sup> It would be rather odd to dismiss those earlier racial ideologies as unscientific because they drew on Galenic humoral theories, given that we are presumably not meant to take the “properly modern” racial theories of Blumenbach, Gobineau, or even Francis Galton to be grounded in markedly better science.<sup>4</sup> Modern/scientific approaches thus risk reifying the very category of science which they are often critical of.

Modern/scientific accounts often emphasize the need to study race within specific—usually national—contexts, prioritizing a materialist analysis of the particular conditions that gave rise to racial ideologies<sup>5</sup> (generally granting capitalism a fundamental role) as well as how they are reproduced. The emphasis on contextual specificity reflects a concern that grouping an overly broad set of prejudices and practices under the category of “racism”—finding racism in an ever-increasing assortment of times and places—may lead people to falsely universalize and naturalize the concept of race (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999; Fields 1990). In doing so, this approach forecloses the possibility of conceiving of racism as operating on a global scale or across a longer time span. This distinguishes modern/scientific

approaches from both modern/colonial and premodern/pervasive approaches, which take racism to play a more integral and far-reaching role in shaping the modern world.

The modern/colonial approach, which includes but is not limited to theorists of the coloniality of power, takes race to be constitutive of modernity (rather than an outgrowth of the Enlightenment) and roots it in the colonization of the Americas.<sup>6</sup> As with the modern/scientific approach, race is understood to have developed as a justification for inequality, particularly between various forms of labor. However, according to the modern/colonial approach, race soon exceeds that function and is thus not reducible to its role in sustaining capitalist class relations. Instead, the broader epistemic dimensions of race are taken to be just as significant, if not more so (Mignolo 2008a, 250; Quijano 2008, 189).

While theorists of coloniality emphasize how distinctions between Europeans and non-European others, the modern and premodern, and civilization and barbarity (to name a few) are contingent and historically produced, they are curiously adamant that race is a modern phenomenon, emerging from the Spanish colonization of the Americas, and cannot be said to exist prior to 1492. This leads them to categorically reject the notion that there were prior forms of race-making that impacted the development of race in colonial contexts. A central claim of this article is that this produces a partial understanding of race that is unable to account for the complexities of early colonial society as well as the full range of ways in which racism continues to function today (such as moves of unequal and predatory inclusion, discussed below). These shortcomings, I argue, should lead us to think critically about the role of periodization in shaping our understanding of key political concepts like race.

Finally, there is the premodern/pervasive approach, most famously espoused by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism*. Like the later theorists of the coloniality of power, Robinson emphasizes the role of race in legitimating social and laboring hierarchies while critiquing traditional Marxist accounts (which tend to follow a modern/scientific approach) for being insufficiently attentive to the epistemic dimensions of domination (2000, 66). Robinson decisively differs from the modern/colonial approach in claiming that racism originated as an *intra*-European phenomenon and was a ubiquitous feature of European society since the beginning of the feudal era (308).

Another noteworthy example of a premodern/pervasive approach is James Sweet’s “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought” (1997). Sweet’s account—which stretches back to the ninth century—begins with distinctions made by Arab Muslims between white and Black slaves, tracing how prejudices against the latter were taken up by the Portuguese with the launch

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Cañizares-Esguerra (1999) situates the origin of race in the early seventeenth century and considers the discourse of blood purity to have preceded it.

<sup>4</sup> Stocking critiques the tendency to qualify race science as pseudo-scientific on the basis that it represented the prevailing science of the time (1997, 42). However, this would seemingly apply to humoral theories as well.

<sup>5</sup> As modern/scientific scholars of race themselves maintain. I make no claim as to whether or not any particular scholar’s analysis is indeed a materialist one.

<sup>6</sup> An example of scholars who take this approach from a different perspective than that of the coloniality of power are Omi and Winant (2014).



of their African slave trade in the mid-fifteenth century (145–50). Like Robinson, Sweet critiques modern/scientific scholars who treat race as merely a derivative of capitalism, positing that racism is altogether prior to capitalism. Unlike Sweet, however, Robinson argues that racism originates as an intra-European phenomenon. This is not meant to imply that racism is *solely* a European phenomenon, as Robinson stresses, but simply that it does not require the type of “encounter” with non-Europeans centered by modern/colonial approaches (2000, 2).

As this brief overview should make clear, the origin of race can be plausibly narrated in various ways. While scholars acknowledge many of the same events and factors as significant for the development of race (e.g., the rise of physical anthropology, the colonization of the Americas, the slave trade), their choice of where to situate its origin—and thus what gets cast as merely proto-racial—also has the effect of making race more or less central to capitalism and modernity. This makes it all the more important to reconsider the dominant frameworks within which race has been studied.

A growing body of literature has been doing so in part by turning its attention to Latin America. Diego von Vacano (2012) identifies a “synthetic” paradigm of race from Latin America, which he argues is a descriptively and normatively more useful way to approach race than the popular “domination” and “dualistic” paradigms derived from Europe and the United States. Engaging Latin America may also prompt us to reconsider the spatial and temporal parameters we employ when studying race, as Juliet Hooker (2017) does, developing a hemispheric approach to reveal how Latin American and U.S. American ideas of race were more significantly informed by each other than has been generally recognized given the tendency to treat them as having two distinct traditions of race. This inadequacy of assigning analytic priority to the nation-state in giving form to racial ideologies has indeed been a lesson derived from the engagement of Black political theory with Latin America (Hanchard 2003; 2006). Joshua Simon (2017) interprets Spanish- and Anglo-American revolutionaries as having been similarly shaped by their position as creoles, while Arturo Chang (2022; 2023) shows how early republican thought in both Mexico and the United States had a particularly hemispheric inflection, shaped in part by popular Indigenous actors. The presumed coherence of regional demarcations becomes all the more suspect when dealing with the early colonial period.

Alongside this work on Latin America, a growing group of medievalists and early modernists working under the moniker RaceB4Race, largely in literary and historical studies, have approached the study of race in innovative ways.<sup>7</sup> This network of scholars has generally been less interested in identifying alternate

origin points of race than in showing the relevance of race as an analytic for describing “the articulation and management of human difference” during the Middle Ages, as Geraldine Heng puts it (2018, 27). I similarly approach the periodization of race as a matter that cannot simply be resolved empirically. Unlike the scholars grouped under the three main approaches to periodizing race, the prismatic approach I propose is distinctly uninterested in identifying an origin point for race or in parsing out the forms of oppression and difference-making that are “properly” racial from those that fall short of such a designation. This is not to wholly dismiss concerns that race may be invoked in ways that are potentially anachronistic or otherwise ill-suited. I am sympathetic to arguments that treating race as omnipresent can lead us to lose sight of how it actually functions in particular contexts, overlook other significant factors, or treat it as some expression of a natural human out-group prejudice. However, I am less confident that historicism offers a failsafe against the reification of race. It can be tempting to look for a time before racism to serve as proof that it can someday be overcome, but this should not lead us to dismiss certain scholarship on race out of hand simply because it challenges conventional periodizations.

The prismatic reading of the *Sentencia-Estatuto* I offer below therefore cannot be subsumed under one of the three aforementioned approaches because its aim is altogether different.<sup>8</sup> To read a moment prismatically, as simply a starting point for one’s analysis, is not an attempt to avoid the difficult question of origins. Rather, it is intended as a methodological intervention that rejects the question of when race originated as the wrong question and instead proposes two different questions to guide our inquiries: What does naming a particular form of difference “racial” help illuminate about how it functioned in its own historical moment? How does incorporating that moment more squarely into the history of race change our understanding of race, both in terms of its subsequent development and today?

Unlike Mignolo’s admonition to “not look for race/racism before the sixteenth century either in Europe or in the rest of the world” (2021, 90), I suggest that the interventions of medievalists and early modernists who analyze prior forms of difference as “racial” should be evaluated according to how they respond to the two aforementioned questions. The answer I offer in this article is that blood purity can be usefully termed as racial due to how it frames the (im)possibility of disavowing one’s ancestry and how it restructures the relationship between ancestry, identity, and one’s social location. As early modernists have argued (Nemser 2020; Salgado 2023), blood purity may offer

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that scholars, including some involved with RaceB4Race, have been making these arguments for decades. For an overview of the current wave of scholarship, see Chakravarty and Thompson (2021) and Ndiaye and Markey (2023).

<sup>8</sup> It is substantively closest to Cedric Robinson’s premodern/pervasive approach, the most significant overlap being our openness to locating instances of colonialism within Europe—unlike theorists of coloniality. While Robinson’s account of race can arguably be considered prismatic, he does emphasize its origins as an intra-European phenomenon.

a more useful example of how race functions today—enmeshed as it is with notions of cultural difference and riven with anxieties over how difference can be identified—than the more strictly biologicistic modern/scientific accounts of race. Finally, centering blood purity highlights the importance of the evangelical imperative in shaping the sixteenth-century colonization of the Americas, giving us a profoundly different understanding of the racialization of Black and Indigenous peoples than Quijano, Mignolo, or Maldonado-Torres' coloniality framework. To explain these differences, we should first delve into the coloniality of power and its account of race.

## THE COLONIALITY OF RACE

The framework of the coloniality of power offers an influential account of the emergence of race as a concept and principle for the organization of the world's population. It stands as a major contribution to theorizing race within the context of Latin America, both due to its provenance from Latin American scholars (like Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, María Lugones, and Enrique Dussel) and how it centers Latin America as the site of the production of race. As a research program, the coloniality of power began to coalesce in the early 1990s, with the term “coloniality of power” being coined by Quijano (1992). Since the early 1990s there has been a significant proliferation of scholarship that makes use of the framework of coloniality. The “Modernity/Coloniality Group” was formalized in the early 2000s and its research program distinguished itself in part through its periodization of race, situating its origins in the sixteenth century as opposed to the Enlightenment (Mignolo 2001, 433). Fellow member Arturo Escobar described it as grounded in “a new spatial and temporal conception of modernity” (2007, 184). The journal *Nepantla: Views from the South*, founded in 2000, went on to serve as an outlet for theorists of coloniality such as José David Saldívar, Javier Sanjinés, Ramon Grosfoguel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Catherine Walsh, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.<sup>9</sup> Scholars like María Lugones (2007; 2016) and Arturo Escobar (2008) further developed the framework of coloniality, contributing an analysis of the role that gender, heterosexualism, and ecology play within it. I do not pretend to offer an exhaustive overview of scholarship that makes use of the concept of coloniality. Rather, I am more narrowly focused on how the development of race has been situated in relation to coloniality by two of its most prominent theorists, Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo, and how this continues to inform more contemporary theorizing on coloniality through the work of Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

The coloniality of power, as first articulated by Aníbal Quijano, pinpoints the colonization of the Americas as the event that inaugurated the development of modernity as well as established the global distribution of power that remains with us today. Quijano's intervention both sought to reframe the foundations of modernity and make a claim about the ongoingness of colonial structures. At the core of coloniality, sometimes referred to as the “colonial matrix of power” (CMP), is the production of a series of distinctions between colonizers, who come to know themselves as Europeans, and the various colonized peoples of the world. These distinctions are produced not only at the level of formal political orders (i.e., colonialism narrowly defined) and relations of production (understanding capitalism as fundamentally colonial), but also on an epistemic level (by denigrating Indigenous ways of knowing and elevating Western epistemologies as the only valid forms of knowledge). Mignolo thus argues that “not only is such a historico-structural dependency [that of modernity/coloniality] economic or political; above all, it is epistemic” (2008a, 250). While coloniality names the broader structure of power, “underneath that codification of relations between Europeans and non-Europeans, race is, without doubt, the basic category” (Quijano 2008, 190). Coloniality therefore cannot be understood without accounting for race, but what is the account of race that coloniality offers?

To begin answering this question, we can turn to Quijano's most-cited article, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”:

The idea of race, in its modern meaning, does not have a known history before the colonization of America. [Perhaps it originated in reference to the phenotypic differences between conquerors and conquered. ... As time went by, the colonizers codified the phenotypic traits of the colonized as color, and they assumed it as the emblematic characteristic of racial category. That category was probably first established in the area of Anglo-America.] ... In America the idea of race was a way of granting legitimacy to the relations of domination imposed by conquest. ... So the conqueror and dominated people were situated in a natural position of inferiority, and as a result, *their phenotype traits* as well as *their cultural features* were likewise considered inferior. (2008, 182–3)<sup>10</sup>

Referencing this quote, Mignolo explains: “That paragraph exemplifies both Quijano's groundbreaking argument as well as a pillar of my own argument on the politics of decolonial investigations. Do not look for race/racism before the sixteenth century either in Europe or in the rest of the world” (2021, 90). I am interested in calling into question their insistence that one should not look for race/racism prior to the

<sup>9</sup> A thorough account of the Modernity/Coloniality Group can be found in Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007). Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui (2008) provide a useful introduction to the field.

<sup>10</sup> Emphasis added by Mignolo when quoted in *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* (2021, 90). Included in square brackets are several phrases from Quijano's original article which Mignolo omits.

sixteenth century. This stance, I argue, leaves them ill-equipped to explain the development of race across the early modern Spanish Empire.

Quijano frames the origin of race in slightly different ways throughout his career. However, in the above passages—the “pillar” of his and Mignolo’s approach—Quijano is curiously imprecise on several points which he takes pains to clarify in earlier works. The first, and most significant, has to do with the relationship between phenotype and race. Somatic features such as skin color and hair texture have undoubtedly been important components in racialization, but their seemingly self-evident nature, along with the outsized role they play as markers of racial difference today, can lead us to overlook the varied ways in which they have mattered for racialization. Difference is never self-evident in the first instance; its legibility depends on the development of particular practices of reading appearances that allow them to function as self-evident markers of difference.

In stating that “perhaps it [race] originated in reference to phenotypic differences between conquerors and conquered,” Quijano seems to suggest that race possesses some ontic dimension *in the first instance*. Race would thus appear first as a referent for a *real* difference. This is curious because that is precisely the misreading that he and other theorists of coloniality repeatedly warn against. Mignolo, for example, writes that “when ‘race’ is seen as having material existence (ontic) rather than being merely a discursive (logos) topic, the transparency of the discourse (logos) is accepted as merely a ‘representation’ of what is there. What I am decolonially arguing is that ‘race’ is an epistemic category; it is not a representation of what there is but a modulation of what is ‘seen’ and projected into what is ‘there’” (2021, 129). Fellow theorist of coloniality José Rabasa similarly argues that “Otherness must be a product of discourse rather than some form of unmediated alterity that is anterior to the cognitive self” (2000, 203). The overwhelming consensus among theorists of coloniality is that race is discursively produced. However, the danger in making the colonization of the Americas the focal point in the origin of race, and furthermore relating it to phenotypic differences between conquerors and conquered, is that race can appear to be born from a moment of colonial “encounter” with difference.

We should instead be cautious not to overemphasize the significance of the “encounter.” As Anthony Pagden argues, “to speak of the discovery of America as having had an *impact* at all is probably an error,” as this proposes first that Europeans grasped something ineluctably “real” form of difference and subsequently misrepresented that difference by *reinterpreting* it in accordance with their worldview (1982, 4). It is necessary to interrogate the precise function of phenotypic differences in defining any given racial category as well as in establishing broader racial taxonomies. Indeed, to explain the production of Blackness and Indigeneity as racial categories one must understand how these processes drew on the racialization of groups that are not as easily mapped by phenotypic criteria, such as Jews and

Moors. We should attend to the various figures that made up early modern Spaniards’ racial imaginary—*conversos*, *moriscos*, *indios*, *negros*, *chinos*, etc.—not just those that are more straightforwardly legible as racial today.

This relationship between race and phenotype is reformulated in other works on coloniality. In an earlier essay, Quijano explains that race, “is also not solely about the actual differences that the conquistadors and the vanquished encountered (e.g., skin color, the texture and color of their hair, and their eyes; or clothing, instruments, ideas, and social practices). Those differences could surely be translated, in today’s terms, as ‘ethnicities’ and ‘ethnicisms’; but not necessarily combined with ‘racism’” (1993, 758; translation mine). While here he attempts to guard against the misreading of race as simply a name for phenotypic (and cultural) differences, labeling such differences as “ethnic” instead of “racial” is an equivocation that does not go all the way in insisting on the epistemic nature of race, as Mignolo called for in the quote above. The distinction between race and ethnicity is a notoriously slippery one. In that same essay Quijano links race to an idea of biological difference while accepting that “ethnic” discrimination, based on an idea of social and cultural difference, can be found in various other historical contexts (1993, 760). A slightly revised reprint of Quijano’s “Questioning ‘Race’” tellingly omits the word “phenotype” in a key passage: “The idea of ‘race’ was born with ‘America’; it originally referred to the differences between ‘Indians’ and their conquerors (principally Castilian)” (2007, 50). An earlier Spanish print of the article reads: “The idea of ‘race’ was born with ‘America’ and presumably originally referred to the *phenotypic differences* between ‘Indians’ and their conquerors, principally Castilians” (1999, 22; translation and emphasis mine).<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the cause for this omission, it serves as a felicitous example of Quijano’s developing account of race.

In later works, Quijano (2012) affirms the use of the term race (rather than ethnicity) to describe the form of difference that is born with the colonization of the Americas. He furthermore clarifies the relationship between race and color, explaining that the first targets of racialization were Indigenous Americans, and that color was first employed against African peoples in securing social hierarchies, becoming the paradigmatic expression of race only in the eighteenth century (Quijano 2007, 50). Mignolo shares this analysis, explicitly distinguishing the modern/scientific approach from that of coloniality precisely on the question of when race is said to originate (2003, 90; 2008b, 312). This should not be surprising, as one of the core interventions of coloniality is backdating the origins of modernity from the Enlightenment to the colonization of the Americas. The “modern” form of race, as any other

<sup>11</sup> “La idea de ‘raza’ nace con ‘América’ y originalmente se refiere, presumiblemente, a las *diferencias fenotípicas* entre ‘indios’ y conquistadores, principalmente ‘castellanos’.”



“modern” phenomenon, must therefore be found in that early colonial period. But what (and who) is left out by refusing to look any earlier?

### THE SENTENCIA-ESTATUTO OF 1449

In late January, 1449, Alonso Cota, a *converso* tax farmer and treasurer of Toledo, attempted to collect payments on a controversial new tax. Cota worked under the direction of another *converso*, Álvaro de Luna, the constable of King Juan II, who had traveled to Toledo several days earlier to reject the city council’s request for an exemption from the tax. As Cota went to imprison an artisan who refused to pay the tax, mayhem broke out. The townspeople were called to attention by the ringing of the cathedral’s church bell. Once assembled they advanced to the Magdalena neighborhood, where Cota and other wealthy *conversos* lived, sacking and burning his house and several others (León Tello 1979, 208). Pedro Sarmiento, a nobleman who had briefly served as governor of Toledo, emerged as a leader of the rebellion and carried out a series of arrests, expropriations, and executions of the *converso* population.

Facing retaliation by the king, the rebels reframed their actions as not challenging his authority but as an objection to the tax, which they claimed the *converso* Luna had devised so as to abuse the poor “Old Christian” townspeople. On June 5, 1449, Sarmiento proclaimed the *Sentencia-Estatuto* before a gathering of townspeople, which declared that all “*conversos*, descendants of the perverse lineage of Jews,” on account of the “heresies and other offenses, insults, seditions, and crimes committed by them,” were held to be unworthy and incapable of exercising the offices and the benefits they enjoyed and were thus duly deprived of them (González Rolán and Saquero Suárez-Somonte 2012, 27–8; all translations mine). By casting doubts on the sincerity of their conversion, the Toledan rebels refused to exempt *conversos* from the restrictions in place against Jews. The *Sentencia-Estatuto* went on to list 14 specific *conversos* who would be stripped of their offices and replaced by others with clear Old Christian heritage (29). The rebellion was eventually put down with the help of Prince Enrique IV, but this was only the beginning of a seismic shift occasioned by the promulgation of the *Sentencia-Estatuto*.

When it was first enacted, the *Sentencia-Estatuto* was recognized to fundamentally challenge with the existing religious form of difference by undermining the logic of conversion which delimited the boundaries between the dominant categories of difference. It was met with outrage not only by the king, but also Pope Nicolas V, who issued three bulls affirming the rights and privileges of *conversos* and excommunicating those who participated in the Toledan rebellion. The alarming innovation of the *Sentencia-Estatuto* lay in the way it structured access to holding a variety of public offices. Both Castilian law and Church doctrine provided some precedent for withholding certain offices or privileges from individuals who had recently converted or whose faith was called into question by accusations of heresy (Vidal Doval 2013, 227–8).

The practice of having a “trial period” following conversion where one was not yet allowed to enjoy all of the privileges of Christian subjecthood was well established. However, the *Sentencia-Estatuto* was qualitatively different in that it barred individuals with Jewish ancestry—no matter how remote—from enjoying the full privileges afforded by Christian subjecthood with no hope that their own descendants may one day enjoy said privileges. Conversion no longer played the same role in mediating between categories of difference. By legally codifying the idea that there was some Jewish essence that remained in one even after conversion, it marked a shift in the understanding of Jewishness as signifying a purely religious form of difference to a form of difference which I consider racial.

Those who resist describing blood purity as racial may point to the fact that the Spanish term for race, *raza* (sometimes *raça*), is not itself used in the *Sentencia-Estatuto*, which instead refers to the “*conversos*, descendants of the perverse *linaje* [lineage] of Jews” and “the said *conversos*, descendants of the *linaje* [lineage] and *rarea* [breed] of the Jews” (González Rolán and Saquero Suárez-Somonte 2012, 27). Though *raza* does not appear in the *Sentencia-Estatuto*, this is not evidence of its anachronism. The *Corominas* etymological dictionary documents the first appearance of *raza/raça* in Alfonso Martínez de Toledo’s *El Corbacho* (1438), where those of “buena *raça*” are contrasted with those of “vil *raça* e *linaje*” (Corominas 1985, 800–2). Corominas notes that by the end of the fifteenth century the term was being deployed with a specifically negative connotation to describe descendants of Jews and Moors. *Raza* thus came into being as a descriptor for human difference in the very context of the proliferation of blood purity statutes. Translating *raza* as race and describing blood purity as racial is only improper if we assume the primacy of a narrowly Anglo-American notion of race. If we allow this to be even somewhat displaced by developments in the Spanish Empire, as the framework of coloniality calls for, if we concede that the experience and history of race—even in the United States—has been informed by and is part of a broader history of race, then we should be open to analyzing blood purity as “racial.” As blood purity statutes advanced a belief in the heritability of immutable characteristics in order to legitimate social hierarchies, I argue that they are significant for understanding the racial policies that would become ubiquitous instruments of colonial and national governance.

The initial opposition to the *Sentencia-Estatuto* waned as concerns over the presence of false converts grew (leading also to the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in 1478) and as the Crown realized the utility of blood purity policies as a tool for forging a common identity just as the modern Spanish nation-state was taking shape.<sup>12</sup> Blood purity policies began to

<sup>12</sup> The controversial tax that sparked the revolt in which the *Sentencia-Estatuto* was enacted came at a pivotal moment in state-building and was intended to fund King Juan II of Castile’s war with Aragon.

be enacted across the Iberian Peninsula in the latter half of the fifteenth century by various institutions like universities and religious orders which made purity a requirement for admittance, as well as royal decrees limiting public offices to Old Christians. The conquest and colonization of the Americas brought these policies to the New World. Indigenous peoples were classified as New Christians and denied access to various posts and institutions on this basis (Martínez 2008, 129). However, the extension of these policies to the Americas raised certain challenges. The Spanish Crown's original claim to the Americas rested in part on the very evangelical imperative which blood purity statues implicitly called into question. What was to guarantee their success with Indigenous peoples when they were simultaneously challenging the reliability of Jews and Moors' conversions?

Here, race provided a solution. Missionaries' descriptions of Indigenous peoples from this period are littered with comparisons to Jews and Moors. In their attempts to define Indigenous nature (i.e., their distinctiveness as a race), references to their impressionability and malleability—as opposed to the hard obstinacy of Jews and Moors—served to rationalize why a different outcome could be expected of evangelical efforts in the New World. Such disquisitions on Indigenous (and Black) racial difference also served to justify their particular place in colonial laboring hierarchies, as theorists of coloniality argue. As discussed below, even while acknowledging the prevalence of the discourse of blood purity, Mignolo maintains that “the question of ‘purity of blood’ acquired in the New World a meaning totally different from the one it had on the Iberian Peninsula” (2021, 107). My point is that we should recognize how racialization served multiple aims, and how the structure of colonial society in turn reflected the contestation between them. This is only possible, I argue, if we accept that the racialization of Jews and Moors via blood purity helped shape the problematics which the racialization of Black and Indigenous peoples in the New World responded to.

## DIFFERENT SORTS OF DIFFERENCE

Mignolo does engage with blood purity across many of his works, recognizing it as the discourse through which notions of racial difference were articulated in the sixteenth century. Indeed, any scholar of the early modern Spanish Empire would find it impossible to ignore the pervasive preoccupation with purity and frequent comparisons of Black and Indigenous peoples to Jews and Moors throughout this period. To their credit, theorists of coloniality often cite blood purity as a noteworthy antecedent to the development of race in the Americas. Maldonado-Torres even approximates important aspects of a prismatic approach by analyzing several forms of difference-making that made up the “prehistory” of race, including Maimonides' tripartite division of humanity and blood purity itself (2014, 640–6). But their analysis is hamstrung by their repeated insistence on the incommensurability of the Iberian and

American contexts, a claim which is fundamentally linked to their situation of the origin of race in the Spanish colonization of the Americas (Maldonado-Torres 2014, 646; Mignolo 2008b, 316; 2021, 107). The pursuit of and insistence on particular origins thus hampers analyses which otherwise emphasize the constructed and contingent nature of categories and identities. Mignolo's typology of difference provides a useful example of how these categories can become unduly rigid.

Mignolo distinguishes various categories of difference (Turks, Moors, Jews, English, Africans, and Indigenous peoples) according to whether they were internal or external to Christian Europe, and whether Spain's relationship to them was one of imperial competition or colonial domination (2008b, 319–21). While he specifies that “internal” and “external” are not objective positions but themselves designations produced by “Christian theological discourses,” his treatment of these categories presumes a coherence they did not have. Furthermore, his schema breaks down when we actually attend to the specificity of how the discourse and policies of blood purity operated across the New and Old Worlds.

For example, the presence of the Muslim kingdoms of Al-Andalus and lack of an analogous Jewish polity was significant in shaping the type of threat each group was imagined to pose to Spanish Christendom, and Mignolo accordingly frames Spain's relationship to Moors as external and imperial and their relationship to Jews as internal and colonial. However, Moors (or, more precisely, *moriscos*) came under the scope of blood purity policies following the fall of Granada in 1492. Those who remained and converted to Christianity (*moriscos*) were classified as New Christians and taken to lack “pure blood.” They were subject to purity policies precisely because they were Spanish vassals—“insiders” at least insofar as *conversos* (Jewish converts) were too. The Ottoman Empire and North African Muslim Kingdoms did represent external threats with which *moriscos* were associated, but this was true of *conversos* as well. Among the “many crimes” of *conversos* listed in the *Sentencia-Estatuto* is the allegation of an ancient betrayal where they opened the city gates to an invading Moorish army who proceeded to kill 306 Old Christians (González Rolán and Saquero Suárez-Somonte 2012, 26). Mignolo's internal/external distinction is thus troubled, as *conversos* were suspected of aiding external enemies and as *moriscos* were an internal population in need of surveillance.

The categorization of Black and Indigenous peoples raises similar issues. The distinction between the Old and New Worlds was indeed significant to early modern Spaniards. The construction of the New World as an uncontaminated space which had to be guarded against the corruption that had befallen the Old World played a major role in Spanish missionaries' racialization of Indigenous peoples as frail, childlike wards (Salgado 2022). At the same time, recognizing the Americas as part of the Spanish Empire, and consequently Indigenous peoples as Spanish vassals, was central to debates over their



rights vis-à-vis those of the conquistadors. Condemning the massacre and pillaging of the Incan city of Cajamalpa, the preeminent theologian Francisco de Vitoria wrote: “I grant that all the battles and conquests were good and holy, but we must still consider this war, *by the very admission* of the Peruvian conquistadors is not against strangers, but against true vassals of the emperor, as if they were natives of Seville” (1991, 332). Thus, we cannot understand how the colonies were produced as exterior without also accounting for how their “externality” was contested and negotiated amongst Spaniards. I will now discuss the broader implications this has for our understanding of racialization in two key ways: in its relationship to the concept of “the Human” and its role in legitimating nascent capitalist relations of production.

## RACE AND THE HUMAN

In recent work, Mignolo has been careful to explicitly reject the misreading of race as *reflecting* some already existing form of difference, rather than *producing* that difference, writing that “there is no ‘race’ in the world beyond the ‘concept of race’: race is a concept that serves to classify human beings according to preselected features: blood, skin color, religion, nationality, language, primitive/civilized, economic world ranking (developed/underdeveloped), etc.” (2021, xvii). Anchoring this more mobile understanding of race (which may take up blood just as well as skin color as a marker of difference) is the claim that race, at its core, rests on the adjudication of one’s humanity. The production of the category of “the Human” is thus central to coloniality, with racialization functioning to consign colonized peoples to a lesser-human or even nonhuman status. This preoccupation with “the Human,” according to Quijano, Mignolo, and Maldonado-Torres, is itself particular to race as a modern/colonial phenomenon. The infamous Valladolid debate of 1550–1551, where the celebrated “Protector of the Indians” Bartolomé de las Casas faced off against Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda regarding the just treatment of Indigenous peoples, has understandably influenced this view greatly. Quijano references the debate to argue that, unlike previous colonial projects, the colonization of the Americas was novel in that Spaniards took Indigenous peoples to be biologically different and inferior. While Quijano describes this debate as “regarding whether the aboriginals of America had a ‘soul’ or not; in sum, whether they possessed a human nature or not” (1993, 758–9), both las Casas and Sepúlveda actually agreed that Indigenous peoples were soul-bearing humans who were capable of attaining salvation (Adorno 2007, 106). The Valladolid debate instead revolved around the question of how best to attain their salvation and what forms of coercion should be employed to that end. However, Quijano’s gloss of the debate frames racism as resting on Europeans’ belief in their biological superiority and doubting Indigenous peoples’ very humanity—a

standard interpretation of Enlightenment-era scientific racism, but one that is misapplied to the early modern period (Adorno 2007; Pagden 1982).

Mignolo makes a similar argument, drawing additionally on the work of Vitoria. He writes that Vitoria “considered ‘Indians’ like women and children: they could not govern themselves and needed the guide of Christian European males. ... This is plainly a racial justification of the law that was based on neither religion or skin color but on a notion of lesser humanity” (2021, 148). His reading of Vitoria runs into the same problem as Quijano’s explanation of the Valladolid debate. Scholars have advanced competing interpretations of Vitoria as either a critic of the excesses of Spanish colonial violence who rejected the Pope’s ability to simply grant the Spanish Crown dominion over the Americas (along with various other popular justifications for colonization like the right of discovery and the fact that Indigenous peoples were non-Christians [Zapatero Miguel 2017]), or as a shrewd thinker who dismissed the more reprehensible characterizations of Indigenous peoples while nevertheless finding several legitimate excuses for colonization (Anghie 2005). However, there is broad consensus that Vitoria recognized the humanity of Indigenous peoples (Koskeniemi 2014).

In analyzing the justness of colonization, Vitoria first compares Indigenous peoples to women and children to establish that *even if* they had lesser intelligence it wouldn’t follow that they lacked legitimate dominion over their lands (1991, 251). The passages Mignolo seizes on comes at the very end of Vitoria’s discussion. After detailing seven titles by which Spanish claims to the Americas could be justified, Vitoria remarks that “there is one further title which may be mentioned for the sake of the argument, though certainly not asserted with confidence; it may strike some as legitimate, though I myself do not dare to affirm or condemn it out of hand. It is this: these barbarians, though not totally mad, ... are nevertheless so close to being mad, that *they are unsuited to setting up or administering a commonwealth both legitimate and ordered in human and civil terms*” (1991, 290). The reticence with which he engages this title makes the depiction of Vitoria’s defense of colonization as resting on his belief in the “lesser humanity” of Indigenous peoples rather specious. Moreover, this title stands in stark contrast to the seven prior ones, which are not accompanied by similar equivocations and all rest on the presumption of Indigenous peoples’ intellectual and moral worth. Vitoria’s argument in fact proceeds by positing that Spanish and Indigenous peoples are subject to the same rights and responsibilities under the *ius gentium* (law of nations), then identifying possible ways in which Indigenous nations violated the *ius gentium*, causing injury to the Spaniards and serving as the grounds for war to be legitimately waged against them. This is not to say that Vitoria’s justification of colonization had nothing to do with race, but rather that the idea of race it contributed to did not signify a lesser degree of humanity.

Maldonado-Torres also arrives at the conclusion that the racialization of Indigenous peoples entailed the

denial of their humanity, albeit by highlighting Spaniards' descriptions of them as "lacking religion" (2014, 641). Unlike Muslims and Jews, who were considered followers of "false" or superseded religions, Maldonado-Torres argues that to lack religion altogether was taken as an indication that Indigenous peoples were "ontologically limited," given the centrality of religious identity for early modern European Christians (650–1). As mentioned, Maldonado-Torres characterizes blood purity policies as "the anteroom to the modern racist discourse and practices that would be initiated with the arrival of Columbus in the Américas," while insisting that the conquest of the Americas "created something entirely new" (646, emphasis mine). This inordinately limits the role which he, like Quijano and Mignolo, accords Iberian purity policies in shaping the New World problematics that the racialization of Black and Indigenous peoples responded to. The sharp distinction between Iberian and American contexts is explained through the particular relationship that racialization has to the category of "the Human." Maldonado-Torres writes that "this fixation on genealogy and the 'purity of the blood' still did not constitute a properly racist mentality, since the humanity of the subjects in question was taken for granted, and all that was in doubt was their political and religious loyalty. The lack of such cleanliness of blood reveals one as a potential traitor or enemy, but not as a member of another species or as a formal exception from the human" (646).

However, the claim that Indigenous peoples "lacked religion" takes on a different meaning when read through the problematic established by the *Sentencia-Estatuto*—that the effectiveness of conversion was being called into question in regards to Jews and Moors just as the conversion of Indigenous peoples was about to serve as one of the bases for Spanish claims to the Americas. Conversion, it should be noted, requires a soul-bearing human subject. In this reading, Indigenous peoples' "lack of religion" was not a derogatory questioning of their status as human, but an attempt to justify why they (unlike Jews and Moors) were well-suited for Christianity. Missionaries like Gerónimo de Mendieta invoked this very "lack of religion" alongside descriptions of a pristine New World, distinguishing it from an Old World that had fallen into corruption and degradation (2011, 36).

To be clear, acknowledging that Indigenous peoples' fundamental humanity was widely accepted is not to imply that colonization was any less brutal a process. Mendieta also invokes the Parable of the Great Banquet from the Gospel of Luke to explain that different modes of evangelization are appropriate for different peoples, distinguishing Jews and Muslims—as sophisticated "nations" who could be engaged with more reasoned arguments—from Indigenous peoples, whose innocence and malleability in fact justified colonial violence as a means of teaching them "that they must have fear and respect, as children do their fathers and as children are taught in schools" (Mendieta 2011, 34–5, translation mine). Thus, while one can find Spaniards describing Indigenous peoples as being *almost* like

animals, there is good reason to attend to how those who are often celebrated for their "humanitarian" approaches to the plight of Indigenous peoples nevertheless also furthered their racialization. A shortcoming of coloniality's treatment of racialization as primarily involving the production of distance between colonizer and colonized and the denial of the latter's full humanity is its inability to account for how it can—and has—also functioned through the production of closeness and the avowal of the colonized's human capacities. These processes have played no less significant a part in shaping the racial/colonial structure of our world.

## THE LABOR OF RACE

Along with modernity, coloniality links the origin of race to the foundation of capitalism (Quijano 2000, 285). Quijano argues that "*from the very beginning* of the colonization of America, Europeans associated nonpaid or nonwaged labor with the dominated races because they were 'inferior' races" (2008, 538). Labor control and justifying laboring hierarchies are similarly put forth as the *reasons* for its emergence, though Quijano and Mignolo argue that race soon exceeds that function and is thus not reducible to its role in sustaining class stratification. This more complex understanding of race, I argue, should be extended to our account of its emergence and early development. We should not presume that the function it comes to serve within capitalism also explains it how it originated. Quijano argues that "the racial inferiority of the colonized implied that they were not worthy of wages" (2008, 539), but fails to provide a thorough account of the process by which racial categories and particular forms of labor co-constituted each other.

At this point, the framework of coloniality falls short, either due to the macro-level perspective of the analysis or its overly functionalist explanation of race. The structure of colonial labor relations was indeed justified through references to racial difference, but the discourse of race also served to critique that same structure. This was not, however, an understanding of racial difference that merely connoted lesser-humanity but rather one where a peoples' purported physical and moral differences entailed specific considerations for how they could best be brought into Christendom, as with Mendieta's invocation of the Parable of the Great Banquet.

From the early to mid-sixteenth century, *esclavos indios*, *esclavos negros*, and *esclavos chinos* worked, suffered, and died side-by-side.<sup>13</sup> Over the course of

<sup>13</sup> These terms (Indian, Black, and Chinese) were the most common qualifiers used to describe slaves. While the enslavement of Europeans (particularly in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean), did occur throughout the medieval and early modern periods, I have not found any indication that such slaves were employed in the Spanish Americas. There were limited amounts of slaves in the Spanish Americas who did not neatly fit into the aforementioned categories, but these tended to be Turks or Moors who either served

the century, as different laboring relations were elaborated, so too was a corresponding taxonomy of racial categories. Starting in 1528 the Spanish Crown passed a series of measures limiting the conditions under which Indigenous peoples could be held as slaves. These measures culminated with the enactment of the *Leyes Nuevas* (New Laws) in 1542, which ultimately prohibited their enslavement (García Añoveros 2000, 171). Concurrently, the trade in enslaved Africans expanded tremendously, such that by 1570 there were more enslaved Africans than Spaniards in Mexico City (Schwaller 2016, 62). These developments played a pivotal role in the formation of Blackness and Indigeneity as separate racial categories, organized around a distinction between who could and could not be legitimately enslaved. It is worth noting the role that missionaries' racialization of Indigenous peoples as frail played in the eventual ban on their enslavement.

In his *Historia eclesiástica indiana*, Mendieta bemoans that even "the lowliest villagers from Spain, and the women who there would have been chambermaids, although their homes are already well-staffed, want *indios* to give them their labor cheaply and by force, and they also demand it as if it were their right?" (Mendieta 2011, 527; all translations mine). His exasperation with the gall of chambermaids who, upon arriving in New Spain, demand an Indigenous servant reveals the anxiety that the Americas posed as a space for the reconstitution of social hierarchies. Certain discourses and institutions, like blood purity, operated transatlantically, but the colonial context of the Americas posed special challenges to forms of social differentiation that were based on land ownership and occupation, such as vassalage. The question of who was to serve whom, and under what conditions, was a significant part of what the specification of Indigenous nature (i.e., their racialization) was meant to address. While Quijano and Mignolo depict racialization solely as justifying their relegation to lower waged or unwaged work, for Mendieta the answer was that Indigenous service should be focused on god, not in digging for gold or cleaning after chambermaids. This did not mean that they would do no other work, but rather that they should be compelled to work in a manner befitting free people, and that their labor should not impede their fulfillment of any religious observances (Mendieta 2011, 74). This entailed their wholesale exemption from working as miners and domestic servants, which was decreed by King Carlos V—though apparently with little compliance. The relationship between race and labor throughout the sixteenth century is thus best understood as a product of the negotiation between the varied interests of

the Spanish Crown, missionary orders, and secular conquistadors, each of whom deployed the discourse of race to further their own ends.<sup>14</sup>

The establishment of Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Philippines in the mid-sixteenth century also established a trans-Pacific slave trade that brought enslaved Asians to colonial Mexico. However, the fact that they were classified as *indios* had the unanticipated effect that they were able to contest their enslavement as illegal following the enactment of the New Laws (Seijas 2014, 240). This left African peoples as the primary group who could be legally enslaved. The "Africanization of slavery," as historian Tatiana Seijas terms it, was a contingent process that took place over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not a *fait accompli* at the outset of colonization.

## VIEWS FROM 1449

How can drawing the *Sentencia-Estatuto* of 1449 and subsequent blood purity policies into the history of race address the shortcomings of the coloniality framework? I have argued that the racialization of Jews and Moors informed the racialization of Black and Indigenous peoples not only through direct comparisons between them as racial groups but also by shaping the imperatives racialization responded to in the Americas. These included the twin pressures of justifying social and laboring hierarchies and assuaging anxieties about the efficacy of conversion. Focusing solely on the former is insufficient even for explaining the shape that those hierarchies themselves took. The position of Indigenous peoples vis-à-vis Black peoples was informed by ideas about their racial difference that reflected debates over the evangelical imperative.

Likewise, the understanding of racialization purely as a process that cast others to the margins of humanity is not only overly simplistic, it is one that is unable to account for how racialization could operate through gestures of inclusion and the avowal of others' humanity. Francisco de Vitoria's justification of colonization rested precisely on the premise that Indigenous polities were part of the international community alongside Spain. The fact that racism and colonialism have often functioned through the dehumanization of another should not lead us to overlook how they have been no less capable of being carried out in the name of humanitarian interventions.

In interrogating the limits of Quijano and Mignolo's accounts of race, I hope to avoid falling prey to the methodological dilemmas which informed them. As mentioned, my argument is not that the *Sentencia-Estatuto* constitutes an absolute origin point. Instead,

as galley slaves or were employed in public works projects (Wheat 2010). Christian Spanish convicts were also offered the opportunity to work in the Caribbean in exchange for a commutation of their sentence, but this scheme involved employing them apart from Indigenous peoples as well as their return to Spain after 1–4 years of service (Las Casas 1875, 436–8).

<sup>14</sup> For the purposes of this article, I have limited myself to Spanish perspectives on race, but this is not to discount the ways that Black, Asian, and Indigenous peoples were themselves engaged in contesting and reshaping the meaning of race.



I propose taking a prismatic approach that recognizes the *Sentencia-Estatuto* as marking a significant shift while still discerning the variety of histories that are refracted through it. The failure of conversion to secure the full rights and privileges of Christian subjects for *conversos* distinguishes it from earlier anti-Jewish policies. Even as the *Sentencia-Estatuto* insists on the preservation of the Jewish spirit in the *converso*, “Jew” does not name the same subject it had previously. The juridico-theological criteria that lent cohesion to the Jewish subject were exploded. And yet the victims the *Sentencia-Estatuto* produced are not unexpected. We can find a history of anti-Jewish violence refracted through it. The restrictions on office-holding enacted by the IV Council of Toledo in 633, repeated in 1215 by the IV Council of Lateran, and again in the thirteenth century in Alonso X’s *Siete Partidas*, and the pogroms and mass forced conversions in 1391 are some of the moments of that history (González Rolán and Saquero Suárez-Somonte 2012, xlix–liii).

Recounting the suffering of Old Christians, the *Sentencia-Estatuto* reads “the constable don Alvaro de Luna, along with his henchmen and allies, our enemies, made cruel war against us, armed with blood and fire, harming, robbing, and laying waste to us as if we were Moors, enemies of the faith” (González Rolán and Saquero Suárez-Somonte 2012, 25). Here another history is revealed. What can we learn from the accusation that Luna waged war against Old Christians as if they were Moors? Its function as an indictment of Luna rests on a claim about the correspondence of different standards of treatments to different religious groups. The outrage over having been harmed, robbed, and laid waste to at the same time authorizes such actions toward Moorish enemies. A century later, Mendieta would levy a similar accusation against the newly appointed governor of Hispaniola, who arrived to the island with three thousand Spanish troops, “as if they were going to conquer Oran from the Moors” (2011, 70).<sup>15</sup> This glimpse into the relationship between religious difference and the legitimacy of violence can remind us of the centrality that categories of unbelief had in legitimating (Re) Conquest.

Approaching the *Sentencia-Estatuto* prismatically means recognizing the various other histories of difference that are refracted through it, including the *Reconquista*, Muslim and Christian forms of anti-Blackness, changing notions of gender and generation, and earlier histories of European antisemitism. To understand how these all contributed to the *Sentencia-Estatuto*—as well as how they were subsequently shaped by the spread of blood purity statutes—is to recognize that there is no single, simple history of race; that we must push beyond coloniality’s account of race.

<sup>15</sup> A city in present-day Algeria conquered by the Spanish Empire in 1509.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the participants of the “Tradition and Disruption in Latinx and Latin American Political Theory” workshop, M. Edith Sklaroff, Milo Ward, Anne Norton, Michael Hanchard, David Kazanjian, Jeff Green, and the editors and three anonymous reviewers at *APSR* for their invaluable feedback at various stages of this project.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human participants.

## REFERENCES

- Adorno, Rolena. 2007. *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Anghie, Antony. 2005. *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc Wacquant. 1999. “On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 16 (1): 41–58.
- Camp, Jordan T. 2022. “Gramsci and Geography.” In *Oxford Bibliographies in Geography*, ed. Barney Warf. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cañizares-Esguerra, Jorge. 1999. *New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600–1650*. New York: Macmillan.
- Castro-Gómez, Santiago, and Ramón Grosfoguel. 2007. “Prólogo. Giro Decolonial, Teoría Crítica Y Pensamiento Heterárquico.” In *El giro decolonial*, eds. Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel, 9–23. Bogotá, Colombia: Siglo del Hombre Editores.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chakravarty, Urvashi, and Ayanna Thompson. 2021. “Race and Periodization.” *New Literary History* 52(3/4): v–xvi.
- Chang, Arturo. 2022. “Languages of Transnational Revolution: The ‘Republicans of Nacogdoches’ and Ideological Code-Switching in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands.” *Contemporary Political Theory* 21 (3): 373–96.
- Chang, Arturo. 2023. “Restoring Anáhuac: Indigenous Genealogies and Hemispheric Republicanism in Postcolonial Mexico.” *American Journal of Political Science* 67 (3): 718–31.
- Corominas, Joan. 1985. *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico*, Vol. 4. Madrid, Spain: Gredos.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–99.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2007. “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program.” *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 179–210.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2008. *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Fields, Barbara Jeanne. 1990. *Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America*. London: New Left Review.
- Fredrickson, George M. 2002. *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- García Añoveros, Jesus Maria. 2000. *El pensamiento y los argumentos sobre la esclavitud en Europa en el siglo xvi y su aplicación a los indios americanos y a los negros africanos*. Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.

- González Rolán, Tomás, and Pilar Saquero Suárez-Somonte. 2012. *De la sentencia-estatuto de Pero Sarmiento a la instrucción del relator*. Madrid, Spain: Aben Ezra.
- Hanchard, Michael. 2003. "Acts of Misrecognition: Transnational Black Politics, Anti-Imperialism and the Ethnocentrism of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant." *Theory, Culture & Society* 20 (4): 5–29.
- Hanchard, Michael. 2006. *Party/Politics: Horizons in Black Political Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heng, Geraldine. 2018. *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hooker, Juliet. 2017. *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Koskeniemi, Martti. 2014. "Vitoria and Us: Thoughts on Critical Histories of International Law." *Rechtsgeschichte Legal History* 22 (22): 119–38.
- Las Casas, Bartolomé de. 1875. *Historia de las indias*. Madrid, Spain: Impr. de M. Ginesta.
- León Tello, Pilar. 1979. *Judíos de toledo*, Vol. 4. Madrid, Spain: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto "B. Arias Montano."
- Loomba, Ania. 2009. "Race and the Possibilities of Comparative Critique." *New Literary History* 40 (3): 501–22.
- Lugones, María. 2007. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." *Hypatia* 22 (1): 186–219.
- Lugones, María. 2016. "The Coloniality of Gender." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development*, ed. Wendy Harcourt, 13–33. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Louis, Pierre-Antoine. 2019. "No People has a Greater Claim to that Flag than Us." *The New York Times*, September 6. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/06/us/nikole-hannah-jones-interview.html>.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2014. "Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82 (3): 636–65.
- Martínez, María Elena. 2008. *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza De Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Mendieta, Gerónimo de. 2011. *Historia eclesiástica indiana*. Barcelona, Spain: Linkgua.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2001. "Coloniality of Power and Subalterneity." In *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, ed. Ileana Rodríguez, 424–44. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2003. *The Markers of Race: Knowledge and the Differential/Colonial Accumulation of Meaning*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins BV.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2008a. "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference." In *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, eds. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, 225–58. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2008b. "What Does the Black Legend Have to Do with Race? "In *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, eds. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan, 312–24. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2021. *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Miguel, Pablo Zapatero. 2017. "Francisco De Vitoria and the Postmodern Grand Critique of International Law." In *At the Origins of Modernity: Francisco De Vitoria and the Discovery of International Law*, eds. José María Beneyto and Justo Corti Varela, 177–95. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Moraña, Mabel, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, eds. 2008. *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ndiaye, Noémi, and Lia Markey, eds. 2023. *Seeing Race before Race: Visual Culture and the Racial Matrix in the Premodern World*. Tempe, AZ: ACMRS Press.
- Nemser, Daniel. 2017. *Infrastructures of Race: Concentration and Biopolitics in Colonial Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Nemser, Daniel. 2020. "Race and Domination in Colonial Latin American Studies." In *The Routledge Hispanic Studies Companion to Colonial Latin America and the Caribbean (1492–1898)*, eds. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Santa Arias, 43–56. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. 2014. *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Pagden, Anthony. 1982. *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quijano, Aníbal. 1992. "Raza, etnia y nación: cuestiones abiertas." In *José Carlos Mariátegui y Europa*, ed. Roland Forgues, 167–87. Lima, Peru: Amauta.
- Quijano, Aníbal. 1993. "'Raza', 'etnia', y 'nación' en Mariátegui: cuestiones abiertas." In *Aníbal Quijano: cuestiones y horizontes*, ed. Danilo Assis Clímaco, 757–75. Buenos Aires, Argentina: CLACSO.
- Quijano, Aníbal. 1999. "¿Qué Tal Raza!" In *Más allá del decenio de los pueblos afrodescendientes*, eds. Rosa Campoalegre Septien and Karina Bidaseca, 17–26. Buenos Aires, Argentina: CLACSO.
- Quijano, Aníbal. 2000. "Colonialidad Del Poder Y Clasificación Social." In *Cuestiones y horizontes: de la dependencia histórico-estructural a la colonialidad/descolonialidad del poder*, ed. Danilo Assis Clímaco, 285–329. Buenos Aires, Argentina: CLACSO.
- Quijano, Aníbal. 2007. "Questioning 'Race'." *Socialism and Democracy* 21 (1): 45–53.
- Quijano, Aníbal. 2008. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." In *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, eds. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, 181–224. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Quijano, Aníbal. 2012. "Colonialidad del poder, raza y capitalismo." *Debates en Sociología* 49: 165–80.
- Rabasa, José. 2000. *Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier: The Historiography of Sixteenth Century New Mexico and Florida and the Legacy of Conquest*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. 2020. *Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: On Practices and Discourses of Decolonisation*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Robinson, Cedric J. 2000. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Salgado, Isaac Gabriel. 2022. "Politics in the Time of Race." PhD diss. University of Pennsylvania.
- Salgado, Isaac Gabriel. 2023. "Mind the Gap: A Machiavellian Lesson in Anti-Racism." *Polity* 55 (3): 544–67.
- Schwaller, Robert C. 2016. *Géneros de gente in Early Colonial Mexico: Defining Racial Difference*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Seijas, Tatiana. 2014. *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Silverstein, Jake. 2019. "Editor's Note." In *The 1619 Project*, eds. Nikole Hannah-Jones, Mary Elliott, Jazmine Hughes, and Jake Silverstein, 4–5. New York: New York Times Magazine.
- Simon, Joshua. 2017. *The Ideology of Creole Revolution: Imperialism and Independence in American and Latin American Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stocking, George W. 1997. *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Sweet, James H. 1997. "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1): 143–66.
- Vidal Doval, Rosa. 2013. *'Nos Soli Sumus Christiani': Conversos in the Texts of the Toledo Rebellion of 1449*. Woodbridge, UK: Tamesis.
- Vitoria, Francisco de. 1991. *Francisco De Vitoria: Political Writings*. Translated by Jeremy Lawrance, ed. Anthony Pagden, 331–3. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Von Vacano, Diego A. 2012. *The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity and Latin American/Hispanic Political Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wheat, David. 2010. "Mediterranean Slavery, New World Transformations: Galley Slaves in the Spanish Caribbean, 1578–1635." *Slavery and Abolition* 31 (3): 327–44.
- Wilkerson, Isabel. 2020. *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents*. New York: Random House.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 2016. *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*. London: Verso.
- Wright, Michelle M. 2020. "1619: The Danger of a Single Origin Story." *American Literary History* 32 (4): e1–e12.