3

Purchasing Freedom

Economics of Liberty in New Spain

In late sixteenth-century Puebla de los Ángeles (in present-day Mexico), an enslaved Black woman named Margarita de Sossa accumulated sufficient funds to pay the market price of her freedom and liberated herself from slavery. Sossa later described how she had provided healing services to residents of Puebla to raise the necessary funds to pay for her liberty, explaining how "the money with which I liberated myself was from my work and sweat."[1] Enslaved people residing across the Spanish Atlantic world often plotted paths to obtain their liberty through economic decisions that thrust them into nascent Atlantic economies as creditors, debtors, and owners of capital. Sossa likely negotiated the price of her liberty with her former owner after obtaining permission from him to hire out her labor and keep a share of the proceeds. Enslaved people's economic decisions in pursuit of their liberty also extended to raising credit through commercial agreements with friends and strangers. Notarial records often reveal how and where enslaved people and their creditors agreed the terms of loans, labor, or gifts. Such conversations took place during auctions when enslaved people sometimes negotiated with prospective owners for their freedom, in private residences between friends who had known each other for many years, in urban spaces with neighbors, associates, and employers during labor-for-hire arrangements. Loans from friends and strangers sometimes provided enslaved people with sufficient capital to liberate themselves from slavery, even though the price of their liberty might involve siphoning a vast proportion of their future wages to their creditors to repay their debts. In other

[1] "Margarita Sossa," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 102–103v. See also Ireton, "Margarita de Sossa."

words, some enslaved people managed, against all the odds, to plot paths to purchase their own liberty or the freedom of their kin by participating in early modern economic life (even when still enslaved) and developed sufficient creditworthiness in their communities or among residents and passersby in the sites where they dwelt to raise sufficient capital. And, in doing so, they made choices about the type of liberty that they sought, namely the legal status of an *horro* that could be proven through a physical *carta de alhorría* or *carta de libertad*.

The rule of law in the Castilian empire concerning slavery legitimized the enslavement of certain people and rendered them into commodities that slave-owners could buy and sell at will, while dispossessing enslaved people from their right to property ownership. Under these legal conditions, how did some enslaved people in the sixteenth-century Spanish realms accumulate their own capital and negotiate with their owners to pay the price of their liberty and become free? The answer lies in enslaved people's determined work as economic actors, their precarious and brave economic choices in pursuit of their liberty, and the broad social ties that they developed to accumulate credit or capital. Conversations between enslaved people with potential creditors as they attempted to raise capital were rarely recorded in archival documents. Yet, these ephemeral conversations shaped the history of Black thought about freedom in this period. Conversations with friends and strangers about their enslaved condition informed enslaved people about laws of slavery in the Spanish empire and the possibilities to negotiate their freedom with their owners through self-purchase agreements. And some enslaved people developed social and economic ties to raise the capital to pay for their freedom through conversations with friends and strangers. As the work of historian Yesenia Barragan and others demonstrates, enslaved and liberated people's participation in economic life and entrance into complex debt relationships continued throughout the late colonial period and into the era of abolition.[2] This chapter traces a history of conversations about purchasing freedom along a major thoroughfare in the viceroyalty of New Spain in the late sixteenth century, namely the two royal trading routes that connected the coastal fort of San Juan de Ulúa and the viceregal capital of Mexico City. The fragmentary archives that document this history include a detailed cache of records about the life of Margarita de Sossa and a

[2] Barragán, *Freedom's Captives*. For an analysis of similar economic activity in this period in Sevilla through notarial records, see Fernández Chaves, "Amas, esclavas, y libertad"; Pérez García, "Matrimonio, Vida Familiar."

host of commercial contracts of self-purchase, loans, and credit agreements signed by enslaved Black people before public notaries in the towns of Veracruz, Jalapa, Puebla de los Ángeles, and Mexico City, as well as records of embarkation and passenger licenses, probate records, and inquisitorial investigations into the lives of free Black dwellers in Veracruz and Puebla de los Ángeles. Collectively, these records reveal a history of Black thought about freedom constituted through enslaved and free people's discussions about their attempts to accumulate sufficient capital to purchase their liberty, and the ways that liberated people reckoned with the meanings of freedom after their liberation from slavery.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE TOWNS ALONG THE CAMINOS REALES IN THE TIMES OF ECONOMIC BOOM

Tracing Margarita de Sossa's forced journey inland to Puebla de los Ángeles after her arrival in New Spain in the late sixteenth century allows us to reflect on the economic, political, and geographical conditions that shaped the lives of enslaved and free Black people in this region. The annual fleet of ships sailing from Sevilla in the Carrera de Indias usually arrived in San Juan de Ulúa in the spring. People and commodities offloaded from the fleets were often destined for towns and cities along the royal routes in New Spain that linked Sevilla with Manila (Philippines). Life in the towns dotted along these trading was characterized by a constant influx and transit of merchants, travelers, royal officials, clergymen, passengers, and local tradesmen, and significant flows of money.

Margarita de Sossa arrived at the fort of San Juan de Ulúa in 1580 on board a ship in the annual fleet that had departed from Sevilla.[3] Before then, she had endured a grueling life of slavery, violence, and sexual abuse as she forcibly displaced across the Atlantic world at the hands of various owners before she disembarked in chains from the ship (Figure 3.1). Years later, Sossa recounted in an Inquisitorial trial in Mexico City that she had been born enslaved in Porto (Portugal). Her father was a merchant named Juan de Cáceres from Porto and her mother was an enslaved Black woman named Lucía. Sossa reported that she had spent her early years enslaved in the house of Señora Lucrecia de Cisna, who sold her in Lisbon when she was twenty years old. Her second owner

[3] "Margarita Sossa," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 31–32, 80–84.

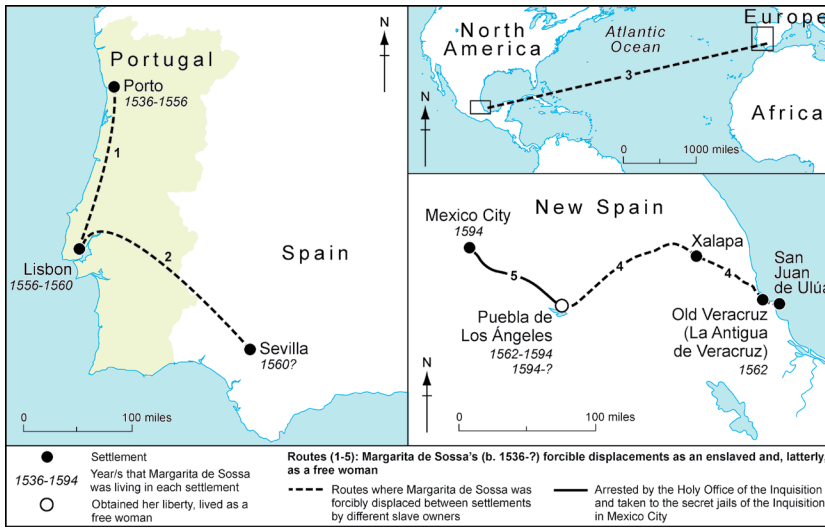

FIGURE 3.1 Approximate routes along which Margarita de Sossa was forcibly displaced as an enslaved woman and latterly as a free woman. Map drawn by Cath D'Alton, Drawing Office, University College London, based on a map drawn by Alex Killough in Ball et al., *As If She Were Free*, 31.

reportedly forced Sossa into sexual relations with him, and after a few years of enduring this sexual violence, she described how she refused any further access to her body. As a result, her owner sent her to Sevilla, where a Flemish merchant purchased her. Thereafter, in 1580, Sossa's owner sent her from Sevilla to be sold in New Spain, where she was bought and sold by three further enslavers. At some point during these years, one of Sossa's owners used scorching irons to burn his initials on her face, as witnesses later described how she had "some letters on her face (*rostro*)."[4]

Margarita de Sossa likely arrived in San Juan de Ulúa in 1580 on a medium-sized vessel with other passengers and merchandise as part of the annual fleet that departed Sevilla in the spring, her owner probably enlisting an agent or a merchant to take her to New Spain.[5] After disembarking at San Juan de Ulúa, Sossa likely spent some days in Old Veracruz, a nearby settlement that served as the de facto port town for the region until 1599, while an agent or merchant arranged onward travel. Her voyage differed from those of enslaved Black people from West Africa

[4] Ibid., fols. 31–32.
[5] Ibid., fols. 80–84.

and West-Central Africa, who were forced to disembark from slave ships in San Juan de Ulúa after surviving the torturous displacements through the Middle Passage and would then have endured a treacherous overland journey in chains through mountainous terrain along the royal trading routes to the towns of Jalapa, Puebla de los Ángeles, and Mexico City.[6] Merchants sold enslaved Black people in slave markets in each of these towns, often condemning them to a precarious and violent existence in the sugar-producing plantations that abounded in the hinterlands between Old Veracruz, Jalapa, and Puebla de los Ángeles, and in silver mines across New Spain and beyond.[7]

From San Juan de Ulúa, there were two major *caminos reales* (royal trading routes) to Mexico City, each of which veered around the highest peaks of the mountainous Sierra Madre Oriental that lay between the coast and Mexico City. The first Camino Real, later known as the Camino de Veracruz, had been built by Spanish officials in the 1520s on existing pre-Hispanic indigenous routes (Figure 3.2). From San Juan de Ulúa, the route passed through Old Veracruz, where royal officials inspected and taxed goods, and then veered to the northern edge of the Sierra Madre Oriental and to the town of Jalapa before circling the northern peak of the Cofre de Perote to the town of Puebla de los Ángeles, and then continued to Mexico City. Spanish officials ordered further construction

[6] Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz*; Clark, *Veracruz*; Méndez Maín, "Apuntes para"; Sierra Silva, "The Slave Trade" and *Urban Slavery*.

[7] For a select bibliography on the histories of enslaved and free Black people in New Spain, specifically in the regions between Veracruz and Mexico City (broadly conceived), see Apodaca Valdez, *Cofradías Afrohispánicas*; Bennett, *Africans in Colonial México* and *Colonial Blackness*; Bristol, "Although I Am Black" and *Christians, Blasphemers*; Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz*; Castañeda García, *Esclavitud africana*, "La devoción a Santa Ifigenia," "Modelos de Santidad," "Piedad y participación," and "Santos negros, devotos de color"; Castañeda García and Ruíz Guadalajara, *Africanos y afrodescendientes*; Castañeda García and Velázquez, "Introducción"; Clark, *Veracruz*; Domínguez Domínguez, "Circulaciones imperiales," "Entre resistencia," and "Veracruz"; Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions* and "The Black Blood"; Masferrer León, "Confraternities" and *Muleke*; Milton and Vinson III, "Counting Heads"; Mondragón Barrios, *Esclavos africanos*; Naveda Chávez-Hita, "De San Lorenzo" and *Esclavos negros*; Nemser, *Infrastructures of Race* and "Triangulating Blackness"; Proctor III, *Damned Notions of Liberty*; Restall, *The Black Middle*; Roselló Soberón, "Relevancia y función"; Schwaller, *Géneros de Gente*; Seijas and Sierra Silva, "The Persistence"; Sierra Silva, "Afro-Mexican Women," *Mexico, Slavery, Freedom*, "The Slave Trade," and *Urban Slavery*; Smith, "African-Descended" and "Juana Ramírez"; Terrazas Williams, "My Conscience" and *The Capital of Free Women*; Valerio, *Sovereign Joy*, "The Spanish," and "'That There Be No Black Brotherhood'"; Velázquez Gutiérrez, *Mujeres de orígen africano*; Velázquez Gutiérrez and Correa Duró, *Poblaciónes y culturas*; Vinson III, *Bearing Arms* and *Before Mestizaje*; Vinson III and Restall, *Black Mexico*; von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*.

FIGURE 3.2 Map of two royal trading routes in sixteenth-century New Spain between San Juan de Ulúa and Mexico City, known as *Camino de Veracruz* and *Camino Nuevo*. Map drawn by Cath D'Alton, Drawing Office, University College London, based on "Archipelague du Mexique où sont les isles de Cuba, Espagnole [Haïti], Jamaïque, etc. [Document cartographique]." Jean Covens et Corneille Mortier, Amsterdam, 1741. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, FRBNF40739006.

work on the route between 1530 and 1532 to expand the road, allowing wagons of mule- and oxen-pulled trains to haul precious metals and other natural resources violently extracted with Black and Indigenous labor from the mountainous highlands to the coast to be loaded onto

ships at San Juan de Ulúa.[8] The second half of the sixteenth century was a period of economic boom in New Spain, following key developments in technologies for silver mining in the 1550s, namely "the amalgamation process, a cheap, simple method of refining large quantities of low-grade silver ore" that led to the mass extraction, melting, and refining of silver in New Spain and Peru, and its transportation to Europe in the late sixteenth century.[9] In the 1550s, the viceroy of New Spain, Luis de Velasco (viceroy 1550–1564) authorized further construction work on the route to improve the reliability and speed of transportation, relying on forced Indigenous labor for the works. And between 1560 and 1562, royal officials again forced Indigenous laborers to toil on a construction project to improve the infrastructure, including bridges; this allowed for the introduction of large wagons with metallic wheels that could be pulled by up to sixteen mules.[10] Throughout the sixteenth century, Spanish royal officials favored this northern Camino Real for the transportation of silver caravels, other precious natural resources, and voluminous merchandise.

A second royal route also connected San Juan de Ulúa, Puebla de los Ángeles, and Mexico City, by veering south of the mountainous Sierra Madre Oriental range near the Pico de Orizaba. The two routes joined at the town of Puebla de los Ángeles, from where various routes splintered off to the metropolis of Mexico City. This southern route supported regional and intraregional commerce within the Americas for most of the sixteenth century.[11] The southern route became known as the Camino Nuevo, while the northern route was referred to as the Camino de Veracruz. The Camino Nuevo became consolidated by the mid sixteenth century with the rise of the production of grains, especially flour and wheat, as well as sugar in the Orizaba region. By the turn of the seventeenth century, royal officials had expanded the Camino Nuevo, spelling the downfall of the Camino de Veracruz.[12] As wagon drivers increasingly used the Camino Nuevo instead of the Camino de Veracruz, the town of Old Veracruz became obsolete, and in 1599 royal officials recognized the small settlement of Buitron near the fort of San Juan de Ulúa as New Veracruz (henceforth Veracruz) and encouraged residents

[8] del Valle Pavon, "Desarrollo" and *El camino México-Puebla-Veracruz*; Pérez González, *Los caminos reales*; Vargas Matías, "El Camino Real de Veracruz."

[9] Baskes, "The Colonial Economy"; Brading and Cross, "Colonial Silver Mining"; Guerrero Quintero, "The Environmental History"; Martínez López-Cano et al., *El crédito*.

[10] del Valle Pavon, "Desarrollo" and *El camino México-Puebla-Veracruz*.

[11] See note 8.

[12] del Valle Pavon, "Desarrollo" and *El camino México-Puebla-Veracruz*.

to move their dwellings to the new town.[13] Old Veracruz maintained a small population at the turn of the seventeenth century, as people often lived and labored in the two places.[14]

In Old Veracruz of the early 1580s, Sossa would have encountered a town where the majority of the year-round population comprised free and enslaved Black people: The coastal littoral proved inhospitable for many Spaniards, who tended to prefer to settle in the inland towns of Jalapa and Puebla de los Ángeles.[15] As a result, many Black residents of the town were enslaved to owners who lived elsewhere and endured labor-for-hire arrangements; they often lived and labored semiautonomously in the town while their distant owners resided in Jalapa, Puebla de los Ángeles, or Mexico City and received a portion of their wages.[16] Both Veracruz towns also had significant populations of free Black people who hailed from the broader region of New Spain, around the Caribbean, and other sites in the Spanish empire. Free and liberated Black people were often attracted to the Veracruz region by the economic opportunities of the annual passing trade and the relative autonomy experienced by Black residents.[17] Free Black women, in particular, developed trades that responded to the commercial demands of the port, working as seamstresses, clothes-washers, innkeepers, cooks, street sweepers, healers, hospital workers, and chocolate producers, to name just a few professions.[18]

[13] Clark, "Environment and the Politics" and *Veracruz*.

[14] García Quintana and Castillo Farreas, *Tratado curioso*: Antonio de Ciudad Real, "De cómo salió la flota del puerto de San Juan de Ulúa y llegó al de La Habana" pp. 409–412; Domínguez Domínguez, "Circulaciones imperiales," "Entre resistencia," and "Veracruz"; García de León, *Tierra adentro*; Thiébaut, "San Juan de Ulúa."

[15] García de León, *Tierra adentro*; Clark, *Veracruz*.

[16] García de León, *Tierra adentro,* 536–575.

[17] See, for example, "Juana Gutiérrez Jalapa," HLSM, HM 35130, Volume 36, 1650–1684, Discurso de vida, *sin foliación*; "Proceso Contra Inés de Villalobos, Mulata," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 206, exp. 9. "Proceso Criminal Contra Leonor de Isla, Mulata," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 341, exp. 1. "Proceso Contra Beatriz de León, Mulata," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 131, exp. 2. "Proceso Contra Ana de Herrera, Mulata, por Hechicera (Tormento)," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 207, exp. 1. "Proceso contra Pero Hernández Negro Horro," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 102. exp. 3. In a recent study, Clark has documented many Black-Veracruz residents' ties with the broader Caribbean in the seventeenth century; see Clark, *Veracruz*, 192–225.

[18] For Black female inn-keepers in the late sixteenth-century Veracruz-Mexico City region, see María Gerónima [de Vallejo], HLSM, HM 35165, sin foliación (Discurso de vida, describes how she owned many posadas); "Juana Jalapa," HLSM, HM 35130, sin foliación (Discurso de vida, describes how Adriana Cabrera offered rooms to rent in her house in Veracruz in the early seventeenth century); Margarita de Sossa also became an inn-keeper who owned at least six beds after her liberation from slavery: "Margarita Sossa," AGN, México, GD61

Testimonies in Inquisitorial trials also document how free and enslaved Black people in Veracruz often established alliances and social and economic ties with Indigenous and Spanish people residing in the town and its environs.[19] They also maintained social, economic, and kinship ties with enslaved and free friends, family, and associates who resided inland on plantations and in the towns of Jalapa, Puebla de los Ángeles, and Mexico City. For example, testimonies provided to the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City against a free Black man named Pero Hernández and a Black woman named Juana Jalapa, dating to the 1570s and 1640s respectively, reveal how they and many other Black residents of Veracruz often had social, economic, and kinship ties with Black port dwellers whose cartographies stretched the vast distances across the Atlantic world, while they maintained kinship ties with enslaved and free people who lived in inland sugar plantations, rural communities, and in the aforementioned towns.[20]

From Veracruz, Margarita de Sossa was transported to the inland town of Puebla de los Ángeles in the central highlands of New Spain; this had been founded by Castilian colonists in 1532 and served as a major commercial and communication crossroads between Veracruz, Jalapa, and Mexico City.[21] By the mid sixteenth century, Puebla's strategic location at the intersection of numerous trading routes transformed the town into a site of transit with a concentration of intense mercantile activity.[22] Given the town's strategic location, a permanent influx of temporary dwellers arrived in Puebla. Travelers, merchants, soldiers, members of religious orders, and colonial officials constantly passed through en route to other sites in New Spain, the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Iberian Peninsula. By the 1550s, merchants established a slave market in the town by selling enslaved Black people from Upper Guinea and Indigenous people whom the Spanish monarchy believed they had captured and enslaved in a just

Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 31–32; "Bartolomé Martín," AGI, Contratación, 938A, no. 10 (a free Black woman named Ana de Tapia from Jalapa purchased a venta on the route between Jalapa and Puebla in 1587 with her husband, a mulato named Bartolomé Martín from Castilla (Huelva); while it is unclear whether the venta served as an inn, associates regularly stayed while traveling between sites).

[19] Ibid.

[20] "Juana Gutiérrez Jalapa," HLSM, HM 35130, vol. 36, 1650–1684; "Proceso Contra Pero Hernández Negro Horro," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 102, exp. 3. For detailed discussion of the Juana Jalapa case, see Clark, *Veracruz*, 195–225.

[21] Sierra Silva, *Urban Slavery*.

[22] del Valle, "Desarrollo de la economía."

war, namely the Mixtón Wars (1540–1542) in New Spain.[23] Puebla also had a significant number of free Black *vecinos*; historian Pablo Sierra Silva has explored their presence in town council records in the mid sixteenth century, and by the 1570s, contemporaries estimated a Black population of some five hundred Black men and women (most of them enslaved) as well as many people of mixed African descent (*mulatos*).[24]

Living in Puebla in the early 1580s, Sossa may have obtained a slightly greater degree of freedom than when she was enslaved in the cities of Porto, Lisbon, and Sevilla. During her time in Puebla, Sossa labored in private households. Enslaved individuals in Puebla's private households had some degree of autonomy in the city, or at least more so than enslaved people who were destined to labor in mines, plantations, and textile production. For example, enslaved women washed clothes in Puebla's public streets, and had a notable presence in the city market.[25] Sossa later testified that she had maintained a labor-for-hire arrangement with her owner in Puebla.[26] In practice, she likely worked as a healer, tending to the maladies of various residents of the city who sought her services, while her owner kept a percentage of her wages. Sossa's birth in Portugal, experiences living as an enslaved woman in households in Porto, Lisbon, and Sevilla prior to her arrival in Puebla, and her ability to speak Portuguese and Spanish meant that she possessed a particular know-how of the broader Iberian world, laws, and economic life that was distinct from the knowledge possessed by enslaved people who were displaced to New Spain from sites in West Africa and West-Central Africa. Upon Sossa's arrival in Puebla, she was purchased by a clergyman named Alonso Hernández de Santiago, who was also the commissary in Puebla to the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City. She was sold twice more to other enslavers in the same city. It is possible, given the practices of slave-ownership in nearby towns, that Sossa might have lived independently from the three men who owned her during her early years in Puebla.[27] While enslaved there, Sossa was also permitted to marry a Portuguese shoemaker named Antonio Álvarez.

[23] Sierra Silva, *Urban Slavery*, 32.
[24] Ibid., 30, 37.
[25] Ibid., 21–44.
[26] *Jornaleras/jornaleros* were enslaved people who usually lived separately from their owners to whom they paid a regular (daily, monthly, etc.) quota from wages earned doing different kinds of work.
[27] García de León, *Tierra adentro*; Terrazas Williams, "My Conscience" and *The Capital of Free Women*.

Upon arriving in Puebla, Sossa would have developed an understanding of the importance of the town's strategic location on the trading routes in New Spain and its proximity to the viceregal capital of Mexico City, a metropolis with a significant Black urban population of enslaved and free people.[28] As a healer, Sossa would have met a range of people from other households in Puebla and also passersby who required healing services during their lengthy voyages. Indeed she would have been aware of the commercial opportunities of passing trade, as she later eked out a living as an innkeeper after liberating herself from slavery, renting up to six beds a night for weary travelers.[29] One witness noted that Sossa's "trade and way of living has been and is to provide food and beds in her house to some people."[30]

Other free Black dwellers of late sixteenth-century Puebla also developed ties with the broader region and Spanish Atlantic world. In the first instance, free Black residents of Puebla often traveled between other towns in New Spain, and sometimes across the Atlantic.[31] For example, free Black *vecinos* of Puebla are recorded in the ranks of wage-earning servants on Atlantic crossings.[32] Some residents of Puebla developed commercial ties with those who lived in the rural hinterlands, including free Black and *mulato* men and women who rented or owned land or *ventas* along the Camino de Veracruz between the towns of Jalapa and Puebla.[33] One example is Bartolomé Martín, a freeborn *mulato* who hailed from Huelva in Castilla and had arrived in New Spain in the 1570s. Martín married a free Black woman from Jalapa named Ana de Tapia and the pair purchased a *venta* and land on the route between Jalapa and Puebla in 1587. Martín maintained economic and social ties between both towns, as he used the services of notaries in Puebla and Jalapa to record his various commercial transactions.[34] A Jalapa notarial record dating from 1586 reveals how Hipólito Hernández, the owner of *Venta de Lencero*, gave power of attorney to Bartolomé

[28] Velázquez Gutiérrez, *Mujeres de orígen africano*.
[29] "Margarita Sossa," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 31–32.
[30] Ibid., fol. 40.
[31] An example is "Isabel de Cartagena," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 466, exp. 3, fols. 26^{r}–35^{v}.
[32] "Isabel Ortíz, Diego," AGI, Indiferente, 2074, no. 50; "Isabel Ortíz, Diego," AGI, Contratación, 5324, no. 30. See also Garofalo, "Shape of a Diaspora."
[33] Terrazas Williams, "My Conscience" and *The Capital of Free Women*; "Bartolomé Martín," AGI, Contratación, 938A, no. 10.
[34] "Bartolomé Martín," AGI, Contratación, 938A, no. 10.

Martín, "of *mulato* color and *vecino* of Jalapa," to collect any *pesos de oro común* owed to Hernández in New Spain.[35] The following year, in 1587, Bartolomé Martín purchased two *cavallerias* of land and a *Venta de los Naranjos* for 500 pesos, both located one league away from Xalapa.[36] He signed the contract to purchase this land in Puebla de los Ángeles. Twenty years later, Martín and his wife purchased two further *cavallerias* that adjoined the Venta, and he also owned additional land in the town of Xalapa, selling a plot (*solar*) on the Calle Real of the town for 30 pesos to a free *mulata* named Beatriz de Arriaga in 1601.[37] Martín also had access to credit in both towns. He had purchased at least one of his slaves in this way, buying thirty-year-old Lucrecia, described as Black "*bozal Angola*," in Xalapa in 1600 for 430 pesos on six months' credit.[38]

The towns along these royal trading routes that connected the fort of San Juan de Ulúa and Mexico City were visited constantly by passersby who brought information and experiences from distant parts of the Spanish empire. Even those who never left the towns where they dwelt would have developed a sense of the broader regional cartographies through discussions with passersby operating in broader trading and travel networks. And constant flows of commodities, people, and information also brought capital to these urban sites. As Ana de Tapia explained in her testament in 1602, she and her husband Bartolomé Martín had accumulated significant capital after their marriage. She explained how "in the time when we married, we didn't have any property or furniture." But in the two decades since, the pair had accumulated significant property, which Tapia detailed in her will, noting that they owned

[35] "Poder," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Jalapa, Año del protocolo: 1578–1594, July 20, 1586, no. 1, clave del acta: 27 1578 446, fol. 283.

[36] "Venta," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Puebla de los Ángeles, Año del protocolo: 1578–1594, October 19, 1587, no. 1, clave del acta: 53 1578 489, fols. 320–321; "Obligación," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Puebla de los Ángeles, Año del protocolo: 1578–1594, October 19, 1587, clave del acta, 53, 1578, 490, no. 1 fol. 321^{vta}.

[37] "Venta," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Jalapa, Año del protocolo: 1600–1608, November 14, 1601, clave del acta, 27, 1600, 1187, n. 3, fol. 72^{vta}; "Bartolomé Martín," AGI, Contratación, 938A, no. 10, fols. 9^{v}–11^{v}.

[38] "Venta, esclava," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Jalapa, Año del protocolo: 1600–1608, September 19, 1600, no. 3, clave del acta: 27 1600 1126, fols. 21^{v}–22; "Obligación de Pago," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Jalapa, Año del protocolo: 1600–1608, September 19, 1600, clave del acta 27, 1600, 1127. no. 3, fols. 22–22^{vta}.

firstly a *venta* that they call of the oranges which is in the province of Xalapa with four *cavallerias* of land, and the land of the *venta* with its houses … a Black *Biafara* slave called Catalina who is thirty years old more or less who has a Black son called Felipe and a *mulata* daughter called Sesilia … another slave called Isabel, *Angola*, who is twenty years old more or less. A horse, two mattresses on which she sleeps.[39]

Arriving into this interconnected world as an enslaved Black woman from Portugal, Sossa inevitably became an economic actor within the fabric of urban dwellers who provided services for passing trade, and likely took part in gossip and whisper networks that connected these various towns.

NEGOTIATING AND RAISING FUNDS TO PURCHASE THE PRICE OF LIBERTY ALONG THE CAMINO REAL

By the mid 1580s, Sossa had accrued sufficient funds in Puebla to purchase her liberty. It is unclear how much money she raised, but on average, enslaved Black people in this region agreed to pay 300 to 600 pesos for their liberation from slavery at this time. Two of Sossa's former owners provided testimony about how she had liberated herself, each emphasizing the different ways in which Sossa had gathered the funds. Alonso de Ribas, her most recent owner and the person who had agreed to liberate her from slavery, recalled in a witness statement in 1588 that Sossa had liberated herself through money that she had earned as a healer.[40] Ribas provided this testimony in the context of Sossa's petition for an ecclesiastical divorce from her husband in order to counter her husband's claim to have liberated her from slavery. Ribas clarified that Sossa's husband was poor when the couple married, and described Sossa as a hard worker who had earned all the capital in the couple's possession and that she had liberated herself from slavery with her own money. Years later, Sossa's first owner in New Spain, Alonso Hernández de Santiago, gave an account of her liberation that placed greater emphasis on Sossa's husband, noting how "Antonio Álvarez liberated her [Sossa], having married her before."

Although Margarita de Sossa was adamant that her husband had played no role in her liberation from slavery in Puebla, notarial records

[39] "Bartolomé Martín," AGI, Contratación, 938A, no. 10, fols. 57^{r}–67^{r} (Ana de Tapia's testament).

[40] "Margarita Sossa," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 143^{v}–144.

from the region reveal that spouses were often involved in furnishing the capital to pay for the liberation of their kin. For example, a free Black *vecina* of Mexico City named Ana Hernández noted in her 1593 testament that she had liberated her Black husband, Cristóbal, from slavery through the "money that [I] earned in [my] labors," which most likely involved the production of *fideos* (a type of pasta) – as she owned a *fideo* grinder.[41] Similarly, Francisco de Camacho, a fifty-year-old enslaved Black man from the Canary Islands, was liberated from slavery in Jalapa in 1641 when his free Black wife, Juana de la Cruz, negotiated to pay the sum of 100 *pesos de oro común* to Camacho's owner within five months of his liberation.[42] Thereafter, the couple lived as *vecinos* in Jalapa, where they owned a small plot of land (in the Xallitic area), later moving to Old Veracruz. Once there, they maintained ties to Jalapa through ownership of their land there, until 1658, when Camacho instructed a *vecino* of Jalapa to sell the plot via an Old-Veracruz-notary.[43] Sometimes spouses lent, rather than gave, their loved ones the funds to pay for their liberty. This occurred across the Caribbean basin in the town of Portobelo, when a Black *horra* from Sevilla named Lucía Tenorio Palma (mentioned in Chapter 2) lent her enslaved husband, Cristóbal de la Palma, the sum of 500 pesos so that he could liberate himself from slavery.[44]

Margarita de Sossa was unambiguously clear that she – and not her husband – had provided the funds for the price of her liberty. In 1588, she explained that she had purchased her liberty with her own income generated from her labor as a healer, noting that "the money with which I liberated myself was from my work and sweat and not that of my husband."[45] Sossa's accumulation of sufficient capital to purchase her freedom through labor-for-hire arrangements reflected the broad trend in the

[41] "Testamento, Ana Hernández," Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocolos Notariales, Escribano Andrés Moreno, July 20, 1593, notaria 374, vol. 2463, libro 2, fols. 38–39^{v}, ficha 158.0.

[42] "Carta de libertad, Francisco Camacho," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales de Xalapa, November 7, 1641, Año del protocolo: 1632–1645, no. 6, clave del acta: 27 1632 3297, fols. 210^{vta}–211; "Obligación de Pago," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales de Xalapa, November 7, 1641, Año del protocolo: 1632–1645, no. 6, clave del acta: 27 1632 3298, fols. 211^{vta}–212^{vta}.

[43] "Poder," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales de Veracruz Vieja, May 2, 1658, Año del protocolo: 1645–1651, no. 7, fols. 218–218^{vta}, clave del acta: 19 1645 4037; "Venta," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales de Jalapa, Año del protocolo: 1645–1651, March 22, 1658, no. 7, clave del acta: 27 1645 4033, fols. 216–217^{vta}.

[44] "Lucia Tenorio Palma," AGI, Contratación 526, no. 1, ramo 1, doc. 8.

[45] "Margarita Sossa," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 102–103^{v}.

towns along the Camino de Veracruz and the Camino Real. Enslaved people who furnished the entire sum for their liberty often raised the money through these arrangements. For example, in 1574, two enslaved Black women named Magdalena and Francisca paid 300 pesos each for their liberation to the nuns of the monastery Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion in Mexico City.[46] In Jalapa, in 1595, Felipa *Mandinga* liberated herself by paying 300 *pesos de oro común* to her owner, Alonso de Villanueva, who was also the *alcalde mayor* of Jalapa.[47] Pedro de la Cruz, a twenty-five-year-old Black *criollo* (a term used in the sixteenth century to refer to an American-born Black person, whether enslaved or free) paid 500 *pesos de oro común* for his liberty in Mexico City in 1612.[48] In Jalapa, fifty-year-old Marta *Zape* paid 350 *pesos de oro común* to a *vecino* of Jalapa for her liberty in 1600,[49] while fifty-year-old Isabel from *tierra Zape* paid 300 *pesos de oro común* for her liberty to her owners in Jalapa in 1619.[50] None of the notarial contracts of these self-purchase agreements indicated that the liberated person accrued a debt, the absence of which suggests that they accumulated the funds themselves through labor-for-hire arrangements.

Some enslaved Black people managed to negotiate with their owners to accept partial payments of their liberty in exchange for their freedom and provide a loan for the remaining amount. For example, in 1567, a *morena* named Isabel Ruíz negotiated her freedom in Mexico City on the condition that she pay her owner 500 *pesos de oro común*, which she would furnish in instalments of 30 pesos every three months, agreeing that she could be returned to servitude if eight months elapsed without her paying 60 pesos.[51] The years-long repayment plan suggests that Ruíz hoped to raise the funds incrementally through her labor as a liberated woman. Other cases of enslaved people becoming indebted to their former owners in exchange for their liberty included a Black man named

[46] "Alhorría," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocoles Notariales, Pedro Sánches de la Fuente, Notaría 1, vol. 150, fols. 1401–1404, ficha 569.

[47] "Carta de libertad, Felipa *Mandinga*," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Xalapa, December 17, 1595, Jalapa, clave del acta: 27 1600 1217, no. 3, fol. 97.

[48] "Alhorría," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocoles Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, Notaría 497, vol. 3359, fols. 106–106^{v}, ficha 69,

[49] "Carta de libertad, Marta Zape," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Xalapa, January 2, 1608, clave del acta: 27 1600 1658, no. 3, fols. 541–541^{vta}.

[50] "Carta de libertad, Isabel, de tierra Zape," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Xalapa, November 23, 1619, clave del acta: 27 1617 2761, no. 5, fols. 251–252^{vta}.

[51] "Alhorría," in Mijares, *CPAGNXVI*, Protocoles Notariales, Antonio Alonso, February 18, 1567, Notaría 1, vol. 8, legajo 7, fols. 150^{v}–153 (1132–1137), ficha 521.0.

Miguel de Trejo, who obtained his *carta de libertad* in 1623 after paying 50 of the 160 pesos of his purchase price; he agreed to pay his former owner the remaining debt the following year.[52]

Notarial contracts in Jalapa, Puebla, and Mexico City reveal how some enslaved Black people obtained charitable loans from *vecinos* of these towns worth between 250 to 600 *pesos de oro común* to liberate themselves from slavery. In turn, they became indebted to third parties in exchange for their liberty as they pledged their labor to their creditors for specific periods of time or undertook to repay loans over the course of a specified time. For example, an enslaved Black woman named Juana borrowed 300 *pesos de oro común* in Mexico City from a merchant so that she could pay for her liberation from slavery in 1614.[53] Similarly, in 1612, a thirty-year-old Black *criollo* named Gaspar de Fuentes paid 300 *pesos de oro común* for his liberty in Mexico City by borrowing the funds from Dionosio de Merlo, a *vecino* of the city whom he described as a "person who has always helped him in his necessities."[54] Juana de la Cruz obtained a loan after her owner attempted to displace her and her seven-year-old *mulato* son from Mexico City to another region of New Spain in 1624. Cruz requested that her owner allow her to purchase her freedom, reporting that "honorable people intervened" to prevent her forced displacement. Cruz subsequently obtained a gift or a loan in 1624 of 200 *pesos de oro común* from a *vecino* of the city named Martín Saenz. This sum only covered one-third of the cost of her and her daughter's liberty, so she agreed to continue serving her owners until she raised the remaining 300 *pesos de oro común*.[55] Another example of an enslaved person's access to credit is given by the thirty-three-year-old *mulato* named Jusephe de la Cruz, who raised a 200 peso loan in Mexico City in 1634 so that he could purchase his liberty. His

[52] "Obligación de pago," in Mijares, *Catálogo de Protocolos del Archivo General de Notarías de la Ciudad de México, Fondo Siglo XVII, En línea* (hereafter *CPAGNXVII*), Protocolos Notariales, Juan Péres de Rivera, Notaría 497, vol. 3362, legajo 2, fols. 5–5^{v}, ficha 361.

[53] "Autos," [Testament], in Mijares *CPAGNXVII*, Protocoles Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, February 28, 1614, Notaría 497, vol. 3359, fols. 325–338^{v} (9bis–22^{v}). "Alhorría," in Mijares CPAGNXVII, Protocolos Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, Juan, March 10, 1614, Notaría, 497, vol. 3359, fols. 325–338^{v} (9bis–22^{v}), ficha 173.0.

[54] "Alhorría," in Mijares *CPAGNXVII*, Protocolos Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, May 25, 1612, Notaría 497, vol. 3360, fols. 80–82.

[55] "Carta de Pago y declaración," in Mijares *CPAGNXVII,* Protocolos Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, October 5, 1626, Notaría 497, vol. 3362, legajo 2, fols. 125–125^{v} (340–340^{v}), ficha 580.0.

creditor was Francisco de Aparicio Arreaga, a royal notary (*receptor*) for the Real Audiencia of the city.[56] Cruz undertook to repay the loan within four months.[57]

These records reveal how local creditors perceived some enslaved Black people as creditworthy, despite their enslaved legal status that prevented them from owning or accumulating property. Such cases explicitly noted the nature of the loan, revealing how they sought to secure their liberty and obtain a coveted *carta de alhorría* by indebting themselves to strangers. Records of enslaved people raising loans from prominent *vecinos* in towns and cities in New Spain represent a series of conversations and negotiations about liberty between enslaved Black people and other residents, often out of sight of slave-owners. These cases reveal how some enslaved people developed relationships beyond the walls of their enslavers' homes and accrued some social capital while enslaved, which permitted them to raise a loan to pay for their liberation from slavery.

Enslaved Black people who obtained these loans could became creditworthy as participants in early modern economic life, but it is worth paying attention to how such credit arrangements were formalized before notaries. Usually, credit agreements between creditor and debtor were drawn up and signed a day or two before the transfer of funds and the owner issuing a *carta de alhorría*. In other words, enslaved people signed agreements with their creditor, undertaking to repay the amount over a specific term, and a day or two later a slave-owner would grant freedom to their slave upon receipt of funds from the creditor. For example, the aforementioned Gaspar de Fuentes signed a contract on May 23, 1612, undertaking to repay 300 pesos to his creditor through his labor or with money (in the event that he managed to raise the sum), his creditor then furnished the funds to his owner, and two days later Fuentes received his *carta de alhorría*.[58] Less commonly, all parties would sign the various agreements simultaneously. For example, the aforementioned Juana borrowed 300 pesos from a merchant to purchase her liberty and all parties were present

[56] "Alhorría," in Mijares *CPAGNXVII*, Protocolos Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, February 9, 1634, Notaría 497, vol. 3362, legajo 1, fols. 441^{v}–442^{v}, ficha 299.0.

[57] "Obligación de Pago," in Mijares *CPAGNXVII*, Protocolos Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, February 9, 1634, Notaría 497, vol. 3362, legajo 1, fols. 443–443^{v}, ficha 300.00.

[58] "Alhorría," in Mijares *CPAGNXVII*, Protocolos Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, May 23, 1612, Notaría 497, vol. 3360, fols. 93–93^{v}, ficha 118; "Recibo," in Mijares *CPAGNXVII*, Protocoles Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, Notaría, 497, vol. 3360, fol. 112, ficha 125.0.

before the same notary to sign notarial contracts between Juana and her creditor, who furnished the price of Juana's liberty, while her owner issued a *carta de alhorría* upon receipt of the funds from Juana.[59]

Occasionally, enslaved Black people obtained loans from *vecinos* who resided in other towns from where they dwelt. Such credit agreements are indicative of how enslaved people who lived in towns along the royal trading routes interacted with regular passersby and sometimes developed social, economic, and communication ties across vast spaces in New Spain. These economic transactions also reflect the surplus of money in the region from the late sixteenth-century silver boom. As a result, some enslaved people developed sufficient social and economic ties to raise credit or capital with passersby to purchase their liberty. For example, in Jalapa, a *morena* named Ana Zavala liberated herself and her six-year-old *mulata* daughter from slavery by obtaining a loan of 500 *pesos de oro común* from a *vecino* of Puebla de los Ángeles named Jerónimo de Vega.[60] Vega paid Zavala's owner directly for her liberation, and two days later signed a contract with Zavala in which she agreed to repay the loan over a four-year period by furnishing her creditor with 125 pesos per year.[61]

Public auctions also became sites where enslaved Black people sometimes negotiated for their freedom with potential creditors, especially when they formed part of the estate of their deceased owners or when owners sought to resell their slaves in a public marketplace. Town criers organized public auctions in marketplaces in towns and cities, but auctions of deceased people's belongings could also take place anywhere where there were willing buyers present, ranging from public squares in metropolitan cities, rural areas, and on ships in the middle of the Atlantic. Black or *mulato* criers, commonly noted for their particularly "loud voices," often administered such auctions in New Spain and in other sites across the Spanish Americas.[62] Black auctioneers'

[59] "Alhorría," in Mijares *CPAGNXVII*, Protocolos Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, October 3, 1614, Notaría 497, vol. 3359, fols. 9^{bis}–22^{v} (325–338), ficha 173.

[60] "Obligación de pago entre Jerónimo de Vega, y el regidor Luis Pacho Mejía por la libertad de Ana Zavala," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales de Jalapa, Año del Protocolo, 1617–1631, February 10, 1620, no. 5, clave del acta: 27 1617 2766, fols. 256–256^{vta}.

[61] "Obligación de pago entre Ana de Zavala y Jerónimo de la Vega por 500 pesos de oro común que le prestó para liberarla del cautiverio," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Xalapa, February 12, 1620, no. 5, clave del acta: 27 1617 2769, fols. 258^{vta}–259^{vta}.

[62] For examples of Black and *mulato* criers, see "Ana Gómez," AGI, Contratación, 257A, no. 3, ramo 12, fols. 152^{v}–170^{v} (a Black *criollo* crier named Francisco); "Juan de Rojas,"

management of these public sales meant that auctions of enslaved Black people sometimes became Black spaces, away from the watchful eyes of the slave-owner who was selling slaves.

Enslaved Black people who were subjected to public auctions sometimes attempted to negotiate their path to freedom with potential buyers who were present at an auction. They engaged in discussions about the terms of slavery and the conditions of their future labor in public spaces with prospective owners or with charitable people who donated funds with the aim of liberating an enslaved person. These ephemeral conversations and bartering about liberty in marketplaces and auction sites became etched in the historical record in fragmentary form through formalized commercial agreements or testimonies about acts of liberation. For example, Hernan Priego bought forty-year-old Juan, an enslaved Black man who had been born in Triana (Sevilla), at an auction in Mexico City for 330 *pesos de oro común* in 1583. The auction likely took place in the Portal de los Mercaderes located on the central square of Mexico City near the cathedral (Figures 3.3 and 3.4, no. 4). As a condition of the purchase that the pair negotiated during the auction, Priego had agreed with Juan that he would be allowed to hire out his labor to raise the sum of his purchase price in return for his freedom.[63] Such a condition suggests that Juan discussed the terms of his purchase with prospective buyers during the live auction and before Priego agreed a purchase price with the crier. Similar conversations and haggling between prospective buyers and enslaved people occurred in 1601 when Alonso de Cerda purchased a *mulato* named Sebastián in a public action in Mexico City, reporting that he wished to "do good for the *mulato*." Apparently, the pair had agreed during the auction that Cerda would liberate Sebastián from slavery if Sebastián served his new owner for three years, or earlier if Sebastián managed to pay the original purchase price of 120 *pesos de oro común*.[64]

AGI, Contratación, 293A, no. 1, ramo 6, fols. 66–68^{v} ("*por vos de Thomas negro pregonero altos boces*," "*por voz de Jhoan mulato pregonero,*" and "*por voz de Andrés mulato ladino en lengua castellana y Mexicana*"); "Luis de Pinelo," AGI, Contratación, 296A, no. 2, ramo 3, fol. 8^{r} (a *mulato* crier named Francisco de Cara); "Lucía Tenorio Palma," AGI, Contratación, 526, no. 1, ramo 1, doc. 8, fols. 11^{r}–24^{r} (a *mulato* crier named Juan de Arlete).

[63] "Alhorría," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocolos Notariales, Juan Román, April 10, 1583, Notaría 1, vol. 135, fols. 231–233, ficha 81.0.

[64] "Declaración," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocolos Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, July 13, 1601, Notaría 497, vol. 3357, fols. 259–259^{v}, ficha 233.0.

FIGURE 3.3 Juan Gómez de Trasmonte, "Forma y Levantado de La Ciudad de México." A. Ruffoni: Florence, 1628. David Rumsey Map Collection, list no. 13213.000. David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

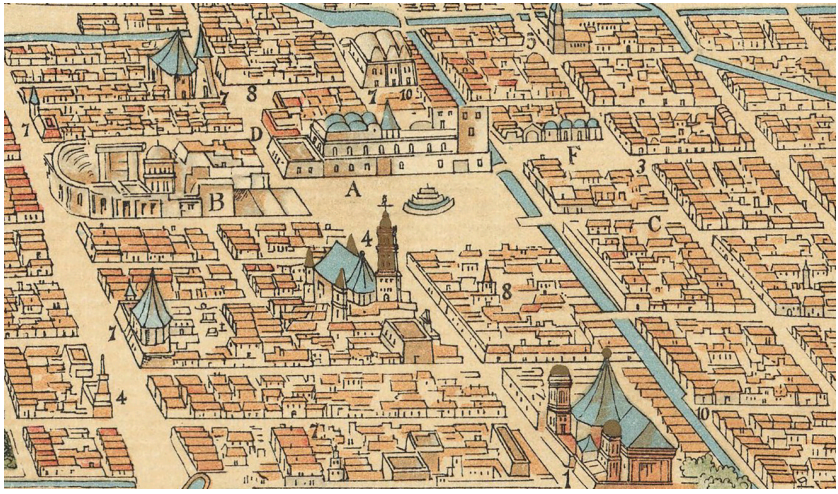

FIGURE 3.4 Juan Gómez de Trasmonte, "Forma y Levantado de La Ciudad de México" (detail). A. Ruffoni: Florence, 1628. David Rumsey Map Collection, list no. 13213.000. David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

Another moment of negotiation about the conditions of slavery during a live auction occurred in Mexico City in 1590. A widow named María del Toral purchased an enslaved Black woman named

María along with her sister, Juana, in an auction for 625 *pesos de oro común*.[65] Within three years, a priest named Pedro de Soto paid 500 *pesos de oro común* to María de Toral on the condition that she liberate her twenty-year-old Black slave named María, whom he described as the daughter of Catalina *Zape*.[66] Although I have not been able to locate further records detailing the nature of Pedro de Soto and María's financial or kinship relationships, there are various possibilities worth exploring. Three years elapsed between María and Juana being sold at an auction in Mexico City in 1590 and Pedro de Soto paying for María's liberation from slavery. It is possible that Soto had been in conversation for some years in Mexico City with María or her mother, Catalina *Zape*, to arrange credit for her liberation. Such conversations or relationships may have commenced during the auction in 1590 or may have dated from an earlier period. Given that María and Juana were both sold following the death of their owner as part of his estate, it is possible that the former owner's death tore apart this enslaved family, and the daughters were sold at auction to pay the debts of the estate.[67] In such a scenario, Catalina *Zape* may have activated her network within Mexico City to find someone to lend her the money or furnish a charitable gift to liberate her daughters. The only record that I have located for this family is the one in which Pedro de Soto paid the price to liberate María. Juana, it seems remained enslaved to María del Toral.

Public auctions also became sites where free Black kin and communities attempted the fraught and time-sensitive enterprise of negotiating the purchase price of their enslaved family member in the hopes of liberating them from slavery. Spouses, kin, and members of religious confraternities often raised the funds to bid on their loved ones at public auctions as acts of charity, solidarity, and kinship. A particularly striking description of this occurred in the town of Portobelo in 1616, when a *criolla morena*

[65] "Almoneda," in Mijares CPAGNXVI, Protocolos Notariales, Luis de Basurto (Escribano real), México, January 22, 1590, Notaria, 1, vol. 20, fols. 193/194) (97/97^{v}) Fols. 2 100/100^{v}, ficha 107.0.

[66] "Carta de libertad, María, negra," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocolos Notariales, "Luis de Basurto" (Escribano real), México, March 18, 1593, Notaría 1, vol. 20, fols. 98r–98v (189–190) (95–95^{v}), ficha 105.0.

[67] For examples of such auctions of enslaved people to pay estate debts, see "Ana Gómez," AGI, Contratación, 257A, no. 3, ramo 12, fols. 152^{v}–170^{v}; "Juan Limón," AGI, Contratación, 5581, no. 72; "Lucía Tenorio Palma," AGI, Contratación, 526, no. 1, ramo 1, doc. 8, fols. 11^{r}–24^{r}.

named Andrea testified that she had been sold at an auction after being left as the property of the previously mentioned Lucía Tenorio Palma.[68] According to Andrea, a *mulato* crier sold her for 400 *pesos de a ocho reales* in an auction in Portobelo to "charitable people of my nation" who wished to liberate her from slavery. Andrea recalled how a free Black woman named Francisca de San Miguel had gifted her enough money to liberate herself, and had not obliged Andrea to repay her.[69]

People heard news from afar about the prospective auctions of their enslaved kin through communication networks along the two trading routes that connected San Juan de Ulúa and Mexico City. As an example, free Black residents of Veracruz sometimes heard about the imminent sales of their kin in nearby towns. Such auctions were a unique opportunity to attempt to liberate kin, and family who heard about such auctions often embarked on lengthy journeys to participate in them. For example, a free Black *vecino* of Veracruz named Cristóbal Sánchez was married to an enslaved Black woman named Elvira Gutiérrez. When Gutiérrez's owner perished in 1610, Sánchez heard that an auction of the deceased's belongings would take place in Jalapa and that his wife was due to be sold. Sánchez traveled from Veracruz to Jalapa to negotiate with the crier and bid on his wife's freedom. During the auction, Sánchez agreed to furnish the auctioneer with a sixteen- to eighteen-year-old healthy enslaved Black man whom he would deliver within four months in return for his wife's liberty.[70] A similar negotiation took place in 1642 when a free Black *vecino* of Veracruz named Juan *Biafara* liberated his Black sister-in-law, Leonor, who was enslaved in a nearby sugar plantation. The agreement for Leonor's liberation involved Juan providing Leonor's owner with a thirty-year-old enslaved Black woman named Magdalena who was "of *Angola* nation," purchased by Juan for 360 *pesos de oro común*. Juan *Biafara* traveled from Veracruz to Jalapa to sign the notarial contract, and within thirteen days Leonor's owner liberated her and furnished her with a *carta de libertad*. Leonor may have gravitated towards Veracruz after her liberation from slavery to join her free Black brother-in-law, or perhaps she attempted to reunite with her own husband, if she knew of his whereabouts.[71]

[68] "Lucia Tenorio Palma," AGI, Contratación 526, no. 1, ramo 1, doc. 8, fols. 21^{r}–21^{v}.

[69] Ibid.

[70] "Obligación, Cristóbal Sánchez, Elvira Gutiérrez," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Xalapa, February 22, 1620, clave del acta: 27 1617 2774, no. 5, fols. 263^{vta}–264.

[71] "Carta de libertad, Leonor," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Xalapa, January 23, 1646, Lugar del acta, Ingenio Nuestra Señora De La Concepción La Concha, clave del acta: 85 1632 3818, no. 6, fols. 573–573^{vta}; "Juan Biafara, Magdalena de nación Angola,

Free Black people also acted as lenders to liberate their friends and kin from slavery,[72] these commercial agreements revealing Black solidarity ties. Records of self-purchase transactions in Jalapa, Puebla, and Mexico City reveal instances of charitable lending by Black *vecinos* and Black confraternities to liberate friends and kin from enslavement. In Mexico City in 1573, for example, Juana pleaded with her owner, Pedro Muñoz, to allow her to pay for the price of her liberty as her "godparents (*parientes*) and brothers of the confraternity" were willing to pay 200 *pesos de oro común* for her liberty.[73] After receiving a partial payment of 100 pesos, Muñoz agreed that he would liberate Juana and give her a *carta de alhorría* once he had received the remaining 100 pesos. In 1574, Francisca de Porras, a free Black *vecina* of Mexico City, lent her enslaved Black brother, Antón *Jolofe*, 250 *pesos de oro común* so that he could purchase his liberty, and she also lent him a further 93 pesos for his "other necessities."[74] In 1573, Cosme, an enslaved Black man in Mexico City, raised half of his purchase price after a free *mulato* named Juan Moronta gifted him 300 *pesos de reales*. María de Morales, who owned Cosme, agreed that he could have his *carta de alhorría* once he provided the remaining 300 *pesos de oro común* for his liberation.[75] Within one year, in 1574, Cosme had raised the outstanding 300 pesos through the "help of his godparents (*parientes*)" and from hiring out his labor, and he finally obtained his freedom.[76] In 1600, an enslaved Black woman named Luisa agreed a purchase price of 600 *pesos de oro común* for her liberty with her owner in Mexico City.[77] Luisa managed to obtain a loan or gift from a free Black woman named Luisa de Contresas, who paid 300 *pesos de oro común* towards Luisa's liberty. Luisa's owner agreed that she could have her *carta de alhorria* if she committed to paying the remaining 300 pesos over the

Leonor, carta de libertad," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales Xalapa, October 1, 1646, Lugar, Jalapa, clave del acta: 27 1632 3822, no. 6, fols. 576–576^{vta}.

[72] See, for example, Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars*.

[73] "Carta de Pago," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocoles Notariales, Pedro Sánches de la Fuente, January 23, 1573, Notaría 1, vol. 151, legajo 11, fols. 182–182^{v} (326–326^{v}) ficha 271.

[74] "Obligación de pago," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocolos Notariales, Pedro de Trujillo, November 12, 1574, Notaría 1, vol. 169, legajo 3, fols. 118–118^{v}, ficha 141.0.

[75] "Recibo," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocolos Notariales, Pedro Sánchez de la Fuente, January 27, 1573, Notaría 1, vol. 150, fol. 506, ficha 212.

[76] "Alhorría," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocolos Notariales, Pedro Sánchez de la Fuente, April 30, 1574, Notaría 1, vol. 150, fols. 1247–1249, ficha 515.

[77] "Declaración," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocoles Notariales, Juan Pérez de Rivera, August 19, 1600, Notaría 497, vol. 3357, fols. 223–223^{v}, ficha 207.

following two years. In addition, the contract stipulated that Luisa could hire her labor back to her owner, who would pay 1 peso per week of work and 2 pesos annually for two years. Presumably, Luisa was to raise the remaining 250 pesos by hiring her labor to others when not attending to her former owner.[78] Also in Mexico City, the aforementioned Ana Hernández developed multiple economic ties with Black people in Mexico City, acting as a moneylender to enslaved people so that they could purchase their own liberty.[79] Although Hernández provided credit to enslaved people, she also owned at least three slaves. In her testament, she freed all of them, although each under different conditions of further labor or capital that they should provide her husband before obtaining their freedom.[80] In Jalapa, an enslaved *moreno* named Luis Coronado and his wife Clara Ruíz de Cabrera obtained a loan of 700 *pesos de oro común* from their godfather (*compadre y padrino*) named Lucas Martín to help them pay for the price of Coronado's liberty in 1620.[81] The couple agreed to repay the loan in four annual instalments of 175 *pesos de oro común*.[82] Finally, in 1583 in the town of Huatusco, north of Orizaba, a free man named Sebastián Hernández [Portilla] negotiated for the freedom of his daughter, María, and her mother, Ana, by pledging to labor on the owner's cow estate for two years in exchange for their liberty.[83]

Other instances of Black kin liberating their family from slavery involved men trying to ensure the freeborn status of their children by paying a slave-owner for the market price of their slave to liberate an enslaved woman who was bearing his progeny. An example of this is when Francisco Carreño, a free *mulato* slave-owner from the Canary

[78] Ibid.

[79] "Testamento, Ana Hernández," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocolos Notariales, Escribano Andrés Moreno, July 20, 1593, notaria 374, vol. 2463, libro 2, fols. 38–39^{v}, ficha 158.0. It is possible that Ana Hernández had also borrowed 90 pesos de oro común from Andrés Sánchez in 1568, twenty-five years earlier, but if so she had repaid that debt by the time she composed her will in 1593: "Obligación de Pago," in Mijares *CPAGNXVI*, Protocoles Notariales, Pedro Sánchez de la Fuente, August 25, 1568, escribano real Notaria 1, vol. 150, fols. 305–306.

[80] Ibid.

[81] "Luis Coronado, Obligación de Pago," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales de Xalapa, March 28, 1620, Jalapa, clave del acta: 27 1617 2775, no. 5, fols. 264^{vta}–266.

[82] "Luis Coronado, Obligación de Pago," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales de Xalapa, March 28, 1620, Jalapa, clave del acta: 27 1617 2775, no. 5, fols. 264^{vta}–266.

[83] "Libertad y ahorría a María, mulata, de 3 años de edad," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales San Antonio Huatusco, 1583–1584, September 10, 1583, no. 5, clave del acta 220, 1583, 21317, fols. 39–39^{v}.

Islands who operated as a master of sugar in New Spain, furnished the funds for the price of an enslaved Black woman's freedom to liberate her from slavery before she gave birth to his son.[84] Carreño was seeking to assure the freeborn status of his son, Juan de Carreño. Although he did not name this liberated Black woman in his will, Carreño detailed how he had liberated her from slavery, how her owner had given her a *carta de alhorría*, and how Carreño had also paid to copy the precious *carta de alhorría* of his son's mother with a royal notary in Mexico City, in case his son ever needed to prove his liberty.[85] As it turned out, such precautions were wise as Carreño's *mulato* son was later mistaken for an enslaved person by a royal judge and the paperwork that Carreño senior had safeguarded proved his son's status.[86] White Spanish men also sometimes engaged in these practices to assure the freedom of their progeny.[87]

Enslaved Black people who resided in the towns along the two royal trading routes that connected San Juan de Ulúa and Mexico City sought out friends, kin, associates, and strangers in their quest to purchase their liberty and obtain a coveted *carta de alhorría*. In the process, they engaged in discussions in public and private spheres about their strategies to raise funds and purchase their liberty from their owners. Notarial documents invariably only recorded the contractual details of commercial transactions, rather than the series of discussions, social capital, economic decisions, and relationships that led to the agreements that underpinned these transactions. Nonetheless, these documents show how enslaved Black people were participants in early modern political economies, negotiating the terms of their enslavement and paths to liberation and discussing how to plot a path to freedom through self-purchase. They sometimes became creditworthy in the eyes of their neighbors and passing traders, as they sought to negotiate their liberty by seeking out credit among friends, kin, associates, and strangers when they were unable to raise the funds themselves.

LIFE AFTER LIBERATION FROM SLAVERY

After paying for their liberty, many Black *horros* lived in towns and cities in this region as free or partially liberated people, eking out a living along

[84] "Francisco Carreño," AGI, Contratación, 515, no. 1, ramo 5. For a discussion of this case, see Ireton, "The Life and Legacy."
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] "Alhorría," USBI Xalapa, Protocolos Notariales de San Antonio, Año(s): 1583–1584, clave del acta: 223, 1583, 21289, September 5, 1583, no. 5, fols. 5–6^{vta}.

the royal trading routes; and for the most part their lives disappear from the archival record. Unusually, though, there is a remarkable trail of information about the life of Margarita de Sossa after her liberation from slavery. Testimonies about her life as a free Black woman in Puebla emerged when she petitioned for an ecclesiastical divorce from her husband in 1588 a few years after her liberation from slavery.[88] Six years later, in 1594, further testimonies about her life were also recorded when she was arrested by the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City.[89] These two sets of documents provide rare insights into the meanings of freedom for a woman who purchased her own liberty, and her life as an economic actor after her liberation from slavery in late sixteenth-century Puebla.

After a lifetime of experiencing violent enslavement and being displaced across the Atlantic world, Sossa found that her freedom as a liberated woman in Puebla remained curtailed. She found herself trapped in a violent marriage with a husband who physically restricted her movements, threatened her life, and failed to fulfil his marital, financial, sexual, and cohabiting duties and obligations. In an attempt to gain a greater degree of freedom, Sossa took the unusual measure in 1588 of petitioning the bishop of Puebla to grant her an ecclesiastical divorce from her husband.[90] She did not request an annulment to the marriage, but rather an ecclesiastical divorce, "a permanent or temporary legal separation that suspended the obligation of marital cohabitation without dissolving the marriage bond."[91] A pronouncement of this kind did not signify the freedom to remarry, but instead permitted the parties the "right to live separately, to settle their estates, and to manage their affairs independently" while retaining "all the other incidents of marriage, including the responsibility of the husband to economically support his wife and the requirement of sexual chastity."[92] As historian Jonathan Bird notes, ecclesiastical divorce was not common in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century New Spain, and was "an absolute last resort" for couples who "had extremely troubled and often violent relationships."[93] Sossa's petition for a divorce fed a

[88] "Margarita de Sossa," AGN, Inquisición 208, exp. 3, fols. 92^{r}–332^{r}.

[89] Ibid., fols. 16^{r}–91^{v}.

[90] "Margarita de Sossa," AGN, Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 97–97^{v}. For divorce in New Spain, see Bird, *For Better or Worse*; Gonzalbo Aizpuru, "Afectos e intereses," 200. For ecclesiastical divorce petitions in Lima (Peru), see Wisnoski, "Intimate Knowledge."

[91] Bird, *For Better or Worse*, 2.

[92] Ibid., 8.

[93] Historians have found only 110 petitions for divorce in New Spain, see ibid., 49. For another divorce petition by a Black person, see "Proceso contra Pero Hernández, negro horro," AGN, México, GD61 Inquisición, vol. 102, exp. 3.

whisper network in Puebla that led to accusations she was a practitioner of witchcraft. These accusations eventually led the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City to arrest her in 1594.

Sossa's petition for divorce and the legal strategies that she and her procurator employed shed light on the importance of interrogating the significance – in terms of lived experience – of a legal pronouncement of freedom. Typical petitions from wives who asked for ecclesiastical divorces cited their husbands' excessive and irrational violence, lack of financial support, and scandalous adultery.[94] Sossa drew on these common themes in her 1588 petition for divorce by describing her husband's multiple failings: He had failed to provide for her while she sustained the pair through her own labor; he had failed to live a married life with her as he ate and slept alone, and was the lover of another a married woman – a matter of public notoriety and scandal across the entire city of Puebla; and he was excessively violent towards her, which endangered her life.[95]

The most egregious of Álvarez's actions, according to Sossa, was his theft of an enslaved Black woman whom Sossa owned. According to Sossa, Álvarez stole her property to furnish his lover with a gift, and a servant of her husband's lover was now acting as Álvarez's personal servant. In other words, Álvarez had stolen one of the public symbols of Sossa's status as a free property-owning woman. Records of dowries among *vecinos* in the region show the importance of slave-ownership as a mark of status.[96] Not only had Sossa lost her own slave because of her husband's theft, but also her husband had benefited from the service of another servant. According to Sossa, this was "a matter of great scandal."[97] While Álvarez had attempted to silence his wife, she described these events as "public and notorious in all of the neighborhoods where I have lived."[98] Sossa's description of the flagrant theft and subsequent regifting of her slave property is indicative of her attempts to mark her status as a free woman through the public symbolism of slave-ownership.

[94] Bird, *For Better or Worse*, 9–10.

[95] "Margarita de Sossa," AGN, Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, 78^{r}–80^{r} (172^{r}–174^{r}).

[96] "Dote, Compromiso," USBI Xalapa, Potocolos Notariales de Jalapa, Año(s): 1578–1594, September 30, 1581, no. 1, clave del acta: 21 1574 182, fols. 55–56^{vta}; "Dote, Compromiso," USBI Xalapa, Potocolos Notariales de México, Año(s): 1617–1631, February 4, 1609, no. 5, clave del acta: 36, 1617, 2996, fols. 477–479^{vta}.

[97] "Margarita de Sossa," AGN, Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 102–103^{v}.

[98] Ibid.

Sossa pleaded for a divorce because she foresaw no other remedy for ending the terrible life and dangerous insecurity that she endured under Álvarez's wrath. Her husband physically harmed her on a regular basis.[99] She described a series of violent incidents that left her on the verge of death:

> beating, whipping, caning, and thrashing cruelly left my body injured and mistreated and one time he took out a dagger towards me … and further, he gave me a very grave injury on my forehead of which I had a risk of death. Another time, he broke three ribs of my body and another time he broke me … and those times I was on the verge of death.[100]

Sossa described the impossibility of enduring a married life with Álvarez because he physically harmed her so regularly, often locking her in a room to prevent her from seeking justice from the city's *alcalde* or employing a healer to tend to her injuries.[101] Further, Álvarez had also threatened to kill her.[102] Sossa asked the bishop to grant her a divorce and allow her to live alone and separately from her husband, specifying the need for the two to sleep in different rooms.[103] She also requested that the ecclesiastical court should prevent Álvarez from communicating with her and prohibit him from physically abusing her any further.

In the divorce petition, Sossa also made assertions about her husband's inadequacy in fulfilling his financial obligations. She explained that he had failed to provide sustenance for her. She contrasted her husband's financial failures with her own independent economic productivity, both while enslaved and after she obtained her liberty. She had earned everything in her husband's possession and provided the resources for their marriage, noting that "there is no more to consider … beyond that I am a woman who has earned everything that he has, and he is obligated to give it to me." Sossa told the court that Álvarez had hidden her property – that she had earned through her own "sweat and labor" – with the intention of killing her and escaping with the fruits of her earnings.[104] She described how she had accumulated over 4,000 pesos during her time as a liberated woman and that her husband

[99] Ibid., fols. 78r–80r (172r–174r).
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

had stolen those funds. Sossa's claim to have accumulated 4,000 pesos within a few years of her liberation from slavery represented a significant sum of money at the time: It was the approximate value of purchasing six enslaved adults in New Spain.

The Sossa-Álvarez divorce proceedings became a moment of public reckoning about how to define a legitimate marriage, a husband's responsibilities within such a sacrament, and a wife's freedom and rights within a marriage. A diverse cross-section of Poblano society played a role in assessing the legitimacy of the marriage. Sossa called on twenty-four witnesses to attest to its many injustices and dangers.[105] Those who testified for her included merchants, slave-owners, two enslaved Black people, widows who resided in Puebla, Sossa's former owners, and a young girl who labored as Sossa's and Álvarez's servant, named Inés Pérez. Álvarez also sourced a varied cast of characters to act as witnesses for his defense.

The testimonies for Sossa provide a striking insight into social relations in Puebla. Witnesses described visiting or dining in Sossa and Álvarez's home, sighting Sossa's injuries while in Puebla's public spaces, and discussing the magnitude of Álvarez's violence towards Sossa. They confirmed that Álvarez beat Sossa and caused grave wounds to her body, and that Álvarez would often eat and sleep alone.[106] Two of Sossa's previous owners also testified for her.

Successful divorce petitions were rare in New Spain.[107] Only 13 percent of the known 110 ecclesiastical divorce petitions between 1548 and 1699 resulted in a pronouncement of divorce.[108] Owing to the low success rate for divorce petitions, historian Jonathan Bird has theorized that wives litigated for ecclesiastical divorces not with the hope of obtaining a pronouncement of divorce, but because they knew that if judges granted that their cases be heard, they would be placed in protective custody or deposit (*depósito*), usually in "a private house or institution and out of the control of her husband for the duration of the legal process."[109] Bird notes that 75 percent of ecclesiastical divorce petitions in New Spain remained unresolved, and suggests that wives might have hoped to remain in protective custody in a *depósito* for lengthy periods of time, if not permanently.[110]

[105] Ibid., fols. 122–146[v]. On witnesses in divorce cases, see Wisnoski, "Intimate Knowledge."
[106] Ibid., fols. 143[v]–144.
[107] Bird, *For Better or Worse*, 127–205.
[108] Ibid., 132–133.
[109] Ibid., 55.
[110] Ibid., 132–133.

Perhaps Sossa had not hoped for a pronouncement of divorce, but rather for the freedom to live separately from her husband and to receive maintenance from him while she resided in a temporary or permanent *depósito*. If this was her aim, she emerged victorious, as the ecclesiastical court ordered that her husband sustain her with an advance payment every year of 150 *pesos de oro común* while the case was ongoing and she remain sheltered in another house.[111] Given the high rate of unresolved and pending divorce cases in New Spain in the period under study, Sossa might have judged that her success lay in compelling the bishop to allow for the divorce case to proceed, to place her in a *depósito*, and to order that Álvarez sustain her, rather than any resolution of the case per se.

Perhaps Sossa viewed her placement in a *depósito* and the court-ordered contribution from Álvarez as a way of finally achieving liberty after becoming an *horra*. Her incensed husband certainly suggested that Sossa's *depósito* was a ploy for her to gain greater freedom. Appealing against the court order that he pay maintenance, Álvarez complained that Sossa was roaming the streets of Puebla at night and conducting business as though she were not a married woman. He explained that she had

> maliciously sought a divorce in order for her to have the freedom to walk in her business (*anduras*) and vices because there is no one who can detain her for more than an hour in the house, and she has not adhered to the *depósito*, because every day she is not in the house for more than an hour and she is instead walking the streets from the morning until the night and is accompanied by Juana Limpias, a free Black woman.[112]

In short, Álvarez accused Sossa of litigating for a divorce to enjoy the freedoms of an unmarried free woman while residing in the *depósito*. He was particularly preoccupied that his wife was enjoying the freedom to walk wherever she wanted and at whatever time she desired. It is unclear whether the case reached final resolution, although the undated summary note that arrived at the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City in 1594 implied that a judgment had decreed that the couple resume cohabitation and married life. However, in 1592, within three years of Sossa litigating for divorce, Álvarez had abandoned Puebla and the viceroyalty of New Spain for the Philippines – perhaps owing to the economic burden

[111] Margarita de Sossa," AGN, Inquisición, vol. 208, exp. 3, fols. 214–219^{v}.
[112] Ibid., fols. 218–219^{v}.

of high maintenance responsibilities – never to return.[113] Seemingly, the pair did not maintain contact thereafter.

On the one hand, Álvarez's departure and Sossa's depositions in the subsequent Inquisitorial trial implied that the couple became estranged, suggesting that Sossa escaped her husband's violent wrath. Further, in the years since his departure, Sossa testified to working profitably as an innkeeper in Puebla.[114] Inquisitors prosecuting her in 1594 described her as "Margarita de Sossa, Black, native (*natural*) of the city of Porto in the kingdom of Portugal … *vecina* of Puebla de Los Ángeles where she has as her trade to provide lodgings for guests."[115] Found among her belongings when Inquisitors arrested her in Puebla were five mattresses and a new wooden bed, suggesting that she could provide accommodation for at least half a dozen customers per night.[116] Her former owner, Alonso Hernández de Santiago, explained in his letter to Inquisitors in 1594 that Sossa's "trade and way of living has been and is to provide food and beds in her house to some people and she lives in the small houses."[117] Perhaps this trade also explains how she was able to secure a loan from a *vecino* of Mexico City to pay her bail during her Inquisition trial, allowing her to await the verdict while living freely in Mexico City rather than languishing in the secret jails of the Inquisition.[118] Sossa's ability to do so implied that she possessed social or economic ties that spanned Puebla to Mexico City, and that she found means to send word to one or more of her contacts in the viceregal capital after her arrest and displacement from Puebla to the secret jails of the Inquisition in Mexico City. On the other hand, Sossa continued to be married to Álvarez and would endure public notoriety for her attempt to petition for a divorce. The supposedly false testimonies provided about her witchcraft practices to the Inquisition by her Puebla enemies demonstrate just how dangerous such public notoriety could become.

Sossa's 1588 petition for divorce became the center of her defense strategy six years later in her 1594 Inquisitorial trial. She responded to the accusations levied against her by suggesting that some people in Puebla – who were her enemies and who harbored much hatred against

[113] Ibid., fols. 80–82.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., fols. 44–45.
[117] Ibid., fol. 40.
[118] Ibid., fol. 90.

her – must have provided false evidence about her life.[119] She explained that her enemies had falsely testified about her practicing witchcraft six years earlier and that they had already been imprisoned in Puebla for their false testimonies. In Inquisitorial proceedings, testimony or accusations based on personal acrimony were dismissed. Sossa knew as much, and accordingly claimed that her enemies must have furnished accusations against her. In the four Inquisitorial hearings for her case between August 8 and 22, 1594, Sossa refused to admit to any crimes that she may have committed or witnessed. Instead, in each hearing, she reaffirmed that people who hated her in Puebla, and who "had threatened her and promised to do all the bad that they could to her," must have provided false testimonies.[120] She demanded that Inquisitors seek the transcript of legal proceedings from six years earlier in Puebla, in which a number of witnesses had falsely accused her of witchcraft and had been imprisoned for their offences; they included a free Black man named Francisco Gallardo.

The commissary of the Inquisition for Puebla and the Archbishopric of Tlaxcala who was responsible for collecting information about any potential crimes against the Catholic faith in the region was Alonso Hernández de Santiago, who had been Margarita de Sossa's first owner in Puebla. Santiago wrote to Inquisitors in 1594 to describe the history of false testimonies against her in Puebla. In that letter, he explained that witnesses in Puebla had testified to him in February 1594 about Sossa's reported witchcraft, but he had dismissed them owing to a long history of false accusations against Sossa:

> in a court case that she [Sossa] had with the ecclesiastical court (*audiencia obispal*) against her husband to petition for a divorce, some people testified that Sossa had put some powders in the food, and that as I had noticed it, and that I punished her [Sossa] for it. It was a false testimony, and that is what I declared in the court case.

Santiago assured Inquisitors that he had sold Sossa because she spoke too much and swore ("*por hablar mucho y no tener buena lengua*"), even though she was a good servant, and not because she practiced witchcraft as some people in Puebla had claimed.[121] Perhaps the arrival of his letter convinced Inquisitors to acknowledge the potential danger of relying on accusations based on hatred or personal acrimony because they

[119] Ibid., fols. 81–90.
[120] Ibid., fols. 81–90, 86–97.
[121] Ibid., fol. 40.

subsequently requested from Puebla the documents of the divorce case that Sossa had cited.[122]

Upon receiving the 1588 divorce case from Puebla, an Inquisitor decreed that a free Black man named Francisco Gallardo had provided false testimonies about Sossa stemming from his hatred towards her following the divorce litigation.[123] On September 26, 1594, two months after her initial arrest, Inquisitors granted Sossa license to return to Puebla until any new information arose pointing to her culpability. To fulfill the bureaucratic need for evidence (even in those cases that proved inconclusive), Inquisitors inserted Sossa's litigation for divorce into the file of her Inquisitorial trial. As a result of this bureaucratic precaution, Sossa's petition for divorce in Puebla has been preserved over the centuries.

Sossa therefore continued as an economic actor in Puebla society after her liberation from slavery. She maintained her trade as an innkeeper in Puebla,[124] and also opted to publicly indicate her free status and wealth to the community in Puebla by becoming a slave-owner: She purchased a Black female slave for her personal service.[125] Perhaps, through this, Sossa hoped to assuage any doubts that Poblanos may have harbored about her status as a free woman, doubts that may have been heightened owing to the aforementioned visual branding on her face that signaled to onlookers a history of enslavement.[126] Finally, after experiencing violence in her marriage, Sossa sought to experience a greater degree of lived freedom by petitioning for an ecclesiastical divorce from her husband. All the while, she continued to build her diverse social and economic ties in Puebla and beyond. The details about the life of this woman who purchased her own liberty in late sixteenth-century Puebla and who accumulated significant property is of course unique to her particular set of lived experiences. Yet there is no indication among the various testimonies to suggest that she was exceptional.

CONCLUSION

This history casts important light on how networks and the passing of information operated between Black populations in the early Hispanic

[122] Ibid., fol. 90.
[123] Ibid., fol. 91^{v}.
[124] Ibid., fols. 80–82.
[125] Ibid., fols. 102–103^{v}.
[126] Ibid., fols. 31–32.

Atlantic. In particular, self-purchase records in the towns along the *caminos reales* between San Juan de Ulúa and Mexico City reveal how the connections among and between free and enslaved Black populations on royal trading routes had a significant impact on the lives and experiences of enslaved Black people who sought to negotiate to purchase their liberty in these places. Inhabitants of these towns lived lives that were marked by the constant flow of passersby and networks of information. Some enslaved people sought out friends, neighbors, and strangers to raise capital to purchase their liberty or attempted to negotiate favorable terms with prospective buyers when they were subjected to a sale by auction. Others, like Sossa, negotiated the price and terms of their own liberty with their owners and raised funds through labor-for-hire arrangements, and went on to build networks and social and economic ties across the towns where they lived. And free and liberated Black people sometimes traveled vast distances to other towns to liberate their kin from slavery by participating as prospective buyers in the public auctions of their loved ones. Collectively, enslaved people's imprints in notarial archives, including the contracts they signed to purchase their own liberty or their kin's freedom, reveal a history of enslaved Black people's participation in early modern political economies as they pursued liberty. Rare documentation of the afterlives of those who were liberated from slavery also provides evidence of how Black *horros* continued to build social and economic ties, while also contending with the diverse and often contradictory meanings of liberty as they embarked on lives as *horros* and how they continued to press for greater degrees of lived freedoms even after liberating themselves from slavery.