

Title: The Racial Caste System in Colonial Spanish Mexico

Author: Lynne Scully, Master of Labor Industrial Relations, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, U.S.A.

As a result of the conquest of Mexico and other Latin American countries by the Spaniards, a European style caste system was imposed on the culture. The conquest produced four overall racial categories: Europeans (Spaniards), Mestizos, Indians and Slaves. A Spaniard born in Spain had a higher social standing than an individual with Spanish parents born in the New World, they were referred to as Creoles.¹

The conquest introduced to the Western Hemisphere both the European and the African; the combination of these three races what has been called the mestizo, initially regarded as the blend of European and the Indian. Eventually, by the 18th Century, the class of mestizo was broke down into as many as 16 different racial categories.¹

Some of the Caste Categories Used in Colonial Spain

Parents	Off-Spring
Spaniard and Indian	mestizo
Mestizo and Spanish woman	castizo
Castizo woman and Spaniard	Spaniard
Spanish woman and Negro	mulatto
Spaniard and mulatto	morisco
Morisco woman and Spaniard	albino
Spaniard and albino woman	torna atras
Indian and torna atras	lobo
Lobo and Indian woman	zambaigo
Zambaigo and Indian woman	cambujo
Cambujo and mulatto woman	albarazado
Albarazado and Mulatto woman	barcino
Barcino and mulatto woman	coyote
Coyote woman and Indian	chamiso
Chamiso woman and mestizo	coyote mestizp
Coyote mestizo woman and mulatto	ahi te estas

Source: Morner (1967) as reported in Mason (1998).

Maria Elisa Velazquez at the Nation Museum of Mexico who also does research and teaches history, showed Henry Gates Louis, Jr. a collection of the "casta paintings" by local artists in the 18th century basically to show Europeans the culture and racial diversity of the people of Mexico (or New Spain, as it was called). It is believed this is where the 16 racial categories came from. Ben Vinson a Professor of Latin American History and Director of the Center for Africana Studies at Johns Hopkins University; and, a specialist on issues of race in Latin America, particularly Mexico states that he believes during the colonial period there were many more categories of race in Mexico.²

Indians were the third class in Spanish Colonial Society. Even though when the Spanish first arrived in Mexico they were impressed by the Aztec and Inca civilizations, they soon regarded the Indian as inferior.¹ Indian and African slaves had no power or standing in Spanish conquered Mexico.

These policies continued until the end of the Mexican War for Independence in 1821.

1. Kirkwood, Burton, (2000) pp. 58 -60, The History of Mexico , West Port, CT: Greenwood Press, ISBN 0-313-30351-

2. Gates, Henry Louis Jr. (2011) pp.65-73, Blacks In Latin America, New York and London, New York University Press ISBN 978-0-8147-3298-4