Violence, Tranquility, and Changing Perceptions of Honor

A Close Analysis of Four Casta Paintings in New Spain:

1750-1790

Madison Fuelling
Senior Thesis in History
December 9, 2014
ABSTRACT

What role does violence play in visual depictions of Black women and Spanish men in late eighteenth century New Spain? This thesis concerns the portrayal of Black women (*negra*), Spanish men (*español*), and their offspring (*mulata*) throughout four different casta paintings including two calm, tranquil paintings and two violent ones. Casta paintings were produced in the eighteenth century for literate, elite audiences, addressing a growing need for a depiction of a hierarchy of mixed-race people. The members of the elite class commissioned these paintings, so it can be assumed that the artist's depiction of the couple is a representation of the elite class's attitude toward the mixed-race coupling.

The presence of tranquil paintings with scenes depicting an organized, controlled couple perhaps signified the artists', and therefore the elites', acceptance towards the existence of this couple, highlighting that individual free will as exemplified through marriage choice was emblematic of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The peaceful scenes showed acceptance of this couple as an ordered family unit with individuals adhering to their assigned social roles, i.e.: an ornately dressed, elite Spanish man being served by his unadorned Black wife. However, the full effect of the Bourbon Reforms, both social and economic, in the second half of the eighteenth century resulted in an attempt to control and reduce racial mixing as male honor became based on wealth and class instead of virtue. The ways in which disorder was depicted in the violent paintings alluded to the anxieties of Black female/Spanish male as a couple. Concerns arose in the latter half of the eighteenth century due to the increased need to regain social control through honorable households. This change in attitude is demonstrated through three specific visual cues concerning disorder and a lack of honor in the four paintings studied, specifically: the man's hat, the fruit basket, and the presence of insults.

An elite anxiety grew as a result of the Reforms targeting social order and adherence to marriage rites, which increased control over the households through a larger focus on *paterfamilias*: the male head of a household maintaining control and order within his own house. The household served as a microcosm for the larger macrocosm of the family of the nation, thus *paterfamilias* was how the Crown attempted to maintain control over its subjects. This control was represented through casta paintings. The paintings manifest social anxieties regarding race mixing and improper marriages, as well as the production of mixed-race children. Thus as anxieties concerning the coupling of Black women and Spanish men increased, there was a simultaneous increase in depiction of violence in the casta paintings.
I. INTRODUCTION

What role does violence play in visual depictions of Black women and Spanish men in late eighteenth century New Spain? This thesis concerns the portrayal of Black women (negra) and Spanish men (español) throughout different casta paintings. These paintings, produced in eighteenth century New Spain, provided a way for the elite class to delineate a class hierarchy in accordance with increased anxieties about blood purity. Most casta paintings depicting Black women and Spanish men are tranquil, meaning the paintings are controlled, non-violent, and ordered. However, nine paintings involving violence from a Black woman to a Spanish man emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The tone of the painting as either tranquil or violent can be understood as the artists' perception of the inherent danger or perceived acceptance of the mixed-race coupling. The commission of these paintings by the elite class highlighted the use of this visual imagery as a way to structure the disordered masses. The tranquil paintings imply a positive attitude, or perhaps an acceptance of, the existence of the español and negra couple and their offspring. However, the advent of the violent casta paintings beginning in 1750 depicts this couple in a negative light, coinciding with the increasing focus on pureblood marriages under the Bourbon Reforms in the eighteenth century. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, when the full

effect of the Bourbon Reforms directly affected New Spain, various forms of racial mixing were accepted at a certain level, provided the couple was legally married, as shown through the tranquil casta paintings depicting a Spanish male and Black female couple. However, the full effect of the Bourbon Reforms resulted in an attempt to control and reduce racial mixing as male honor became based on wealth and class instead of virtue.\(^3\) In addition to this new understanding of honor, a more concerned focus on an honorable, controlled household emerged.\(^4\) The control of the household was based on the notion of *paterfamilias*—the male head of a household maintaining control and order within his own house. The household served as a microcosm for the larger macrocosm of the family of the nation, thus *paterfamilias* was how the Crown attempted to maintain control over its subjects. This control was represented through casta paintings, which served to visually reinforce the hierarchy of mixed-race people to the elite class that attempted to control social order. The paintings manifest social anxieties regarding race mixing and improper marriages, as well as the production of mixed-race children. Thus as anxieties concerning the coupling of Black women and Spanish men increased, there was a simultaneous increase in depiction of violence in the casta paintings.

The eighteenth century was a century of reform. A new generation of Spanish and Spanish American writers spread innovative ideas about the nature of rational thinking and economic advancement, while the Spanish Crown moved to tighten control over the inhabitants of the colonies and regulate what they perceived as

---


\(^4\) Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey.*
social disorder. The Bourbon Crown emphasized social control, and within the colony the Crown attempted to reform problems such as: idleness, drinking, card playing, gambling, and propensity for vices, along with a loose adherence to proper domestic unions. In addition to social issues, the Bourbon Reforms concentrated on economic improvement and consolidation for Spain; this resulted in an increase of merchants, miners, and bureaucrats that changed the way the elite class governed and viewed the working classes. These reforms also demanded an increase of labor output for two reasons: the Spanish Crown desperately needed money, and because labor was seen as a way to control an idle and disorganized society. In contrast to the seventeenth century of individual free will, the eighteenth century saw a rise in paternalism on behalf of the Bourbon Reforms and attempts to control the social disorder of all classes. A general tendency of the Crown was to increase control over areas that had been controlled by the church, including an increasing concern of marriage and paterfamilias. During a time of increasing anxiety concerning control of a disordered society, casta paintings served as a visual aid to structure and organize the mix of races existing in the community.

The primary sources within this essay are a selected group of four individual casta paintings, analyzed as a way to investigate the increased anxiety of Black female and Spanish male couples in eighteenth century New Spain. Typically

6 Katzew, Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-century Mexico, 111.
7 Seed, To Love, Honor, and Obey, 123.
8 Katzew, Casta Paintings, 112.
9 Seed, To Love, Honor, and Obey, 109.
10 Socolow, Women of Colonial Latin America, 172.
11 Carrera, Imagining Identity in New Spain, 54.
produced in a series of sixteen paintings, casta paintings visually served as a hierarchy of the precise names and order of the mixed races. This hierarchy included the children, as the Crown was also highly concerned with the production of mixed-race children and their place within the social hierarchy. Specifically, mixed-race children posed a threat to the ordered society as they represented the dilution of pure Spanish blood, resulting in more confusion and disorder for future generations. Casta paintings depicted married couples that produced children because in New Spain throughout the colonial period, the church was the center of power and it was considered a sin to cohabit but remain unmarried. The casta paintings were intended for an elite, literate audience as each painting has a written inscription explaining the racial mixture of the couple and their children. As a primary source, casta paintings depict a perception of social norms and dynamics to the elite audience viewing them: “many of the concerns of the enlightened reformers...of Bourbon Spain are addressed in casta painting by including scenes that refer to specific issues.” These scenes often included the artists’ perception of the couple in accordance with the changed definition of honor as a result of the Bourbon Reforms to include the wealth and status of each person in the painting: the husband, wife, and child.

A Spanish male was preoccupied with knowledge of expected levels of honor and decorum. The Black woman, perceived as lacking honor, would not have been as greatly preoccupied with the new expectation of honor as she had limited options to

12 Katzew, Casta Painting, 1.
13 Carrera, Imaging Identity in New Spain, 50.
14 Katzew, Casta Painting, 11.
amass wealth. She might have been aware of expected actions and manners, but she could only hope to increase her standing in society by marrying a Spanish man. Marriage with a woman of a much lower class was a concern for the aristocrats of New Spain, as the marriage would erode the “customary privileges” enjoyed by that social class and reduce the person’s honor. Marrying and producing children with a Black woman became increasingly unaccepted. The violent paintings of a Black woman and Spanish man highlight loss of honor through mixed-race marriages and demonstrated that the marriages needed order to elite audiences.

Within the four casta paintings examined in this essay, two of the Black female/Spanish male couples are portrayed positively, shown through a tranquil and controlled scene. One of those paintings depicts two people of similar wealth, portrayed as acceptable to elite society because the marriage made the two people more equivalent in terms of wealth and honor. Otherwise, the painting shows two people who are clearly not of the same wealth status, where the Black woman is clearly serving and financially below the Spanish male. The latter painting was also accepted as shown by the calm domestic scene, because it placed both people in their traditional roles: servant and aristocrat. However, in some paintings, the couple is depicted negatively, with violence and chaos dominating the scene. The

15 Katzew, Casta Painting, 155. It is important to remember that people of African descent were considered by the law and authorities as occupying the lowest levels of society. Indians were granted similar privileges as Spaniards, because they were protected under their own separate political organization.
17 Ibid., 155.
change from tranquil, positive paintings to negative and chaotic paintings highlights changing views of Black women and Spanish men couples throughout the eighteenth century in New Spain.

This change is demonstrated through three specific visual cues concerning disorder and a lack of honor in the four paintings studied, specifically: the man's hat, the fruit basket, and the presence of insults. An important depiction of honor within casta paintings can be seen when locating the man's hat in each painting. According to Evelina Guzauskyte, honor is symbolized through the location of the male's hat. If it is on the ground he has lost his honor, but if the hat lies atop the head, the man possesses honor.\(^\text{18}\) Within each casta painting, the placement of the man's hat is indicative of the artists' opinion concerning the man's honor.

Another way to show order within the paintings, fruit baskets also represented the novel wonders of the New World to people in Spain. Foreign fruits and goods were painted and labeled in a basket or simply placed in the foreground of the painting, showcasing the exoticism of the New World for curious Spanish eyes.\(^\text{19}\) Often in a painting of what the artist perceives as a dishonorable or contradictory couple, the fruit basket is overturned on the ground with fruit spilled on the floor. The fruit baskets are often found at the bottom of the painting, and the order or disorder of the basket is possibly a way the artist shows his attitude towards the couple in the painting.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 5.
As part of the disorder within the violent paintings, the men and women are physically insulting one another in the two violent paintings. Insults and insulting gestures were a part of daily life, as Sonya Lipsett-Rivera argues in her article: "De Obra y Palabra: Patterns of Insults in Mexico 1750-1856". She argues that the language of insults as well as insulting gestures included comments on both honor and rank in society. Lipsett-Rivera draws on other prominent historians in the field such as William B. Taylor to argue that the punishments conducted by priests trickled down through society; the actions people humiliated each other with mimicked the actions and words priests used to scold a wayward individual. Many of these priest-mimicking gestures are present in the violent casta paintings, and understanding what the insults were meant to signify assists the analysis of the place of those insults within casta paintings. Throughout the article she lists many ways that people could and did humiliate each other, actions that are present in the following violent casta paintings.

Lipsett-Rivera also argues that having an audience was needed for the insult to take place. The audience for the insult was more important than the insult itself. Without an audience, it was difficult to insult someone with meaning. In one of the casta paintings analyzed in this essay, there is an audience for the violent insults occurring in the painting perhaps pointing to the public’s interest and importance in the act of insulting another person. While viewing the casta paintings, the setting of

22 Lipsett-Rivera, "De Obra y Palabra", 527.
the painting matters because it signified either a public or private interest to the elite people who commissioned these paintings. Public shame and degradation of honor were far worse than a private altercation.
II. CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many scholarly texts exist concerning casta paintings, gender roles, honor, and experiences in society within colonial New Spain. Casta painting has been written about extensively, though most authors focus on the reason for the existence of casta painting and not necessarily the specific imagery within casta paintings. Authors focus on subjects such as honor, sexuality, and marriage rites, which form the important components of the social implications and reception of a union of mixed-race couples in late colonial New Spain. A few authors focus on an interesting assortment of social experiences, such as drinking, crime, and insults, and the violent casta paintings contain multiple insulting gestures. The authors all relate to one another because they each highlight and explain different aspects of social hierarchy and casta painting in late colonial New Spain.

Ilona Katzew is a prolific academic writer serving as the main source of academic knowledge concerning casta paintings for many historians. In her books, *New World Orders: Casta Painting and Colonial Latin America* and *Casta Painting*, she provides a general overview of the creation and meaning of casta paintings, answering questions related to the paintings as primary sources. While she acknowledges it is difficult to know exactly if each painting was produced for a specific person, she argues the production of casta paintings primarily served the elite, literate classes in Spain and New Spain, produced by various known and

---

anonymous artists. She also argues for the necessity of casta paintings in a society that became more anxious over the organization of its people throughout the eighteenth century, as a result of the need for social order created by the Bourbon Reforms. As the boundaries between classes became increasingly blurry, casta paintings proved to Spain and the local authorities and elites that New Spain understood and had social hierarchies, ideals important to the Bourbon Crown.

In addition to Ilona Katzew, Magali Carrera has authored multiple books concerning depicting identity in New Spain. One of her books, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, provides a broad overview of the status of different castes in New Spain throughout the colony’s history. Compared to Ilona Katzew, Carrera focuses more on society at large and how the definition of social hierarchy and who belonged to what class changed over the course of the colonial period. One of her main arguments is that people of lower status would adorn clothing reserved for those of higher classes, which was problematic because the lack of proper attire confused the social divide within the imposed hierarchy. This problem is represented in the violent casta paintings, where the Black women wear clothing improper to their status. She also provides an art historian analysis of a select variety of casta paintings. Combining Carrera and Katzew’s similar arguments about casta paintings assists with understanding the role and place of casta paintings in late colonial elite society.

24 Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 93.
25 Ibid., 93.
Susan Socolow's work, *The Women of Colonial Latin America*, is a study of gender relations in colonial Latin America, researched to better understand the nuances of female experiences in colonial Latin America. Socolow uses most of her time focusing on the female half of gender relations. What is useful to this thesis is the full chapter she devotes to exploring the lives of Black women, enslaved and freed, throughout all of Latin America. Socolow argues that it was sex, rather than race or class, which defined women in society. In addition, male heads of households usually controlled women in terms of marriage selection after the Royal Pragmatic of 1778 was instituted in the colonies. The Royal Pragmatic made it possible for parents to legally oppose the marriage choices of their children, concentrating the power under the male head of household, and increasing focus on *paterfamilias*.

Patricia Seed's book, *To Love, Honor and Obey in Colonial Mexico*, deals with the understanding, social expectations, and definitions of honor and free will in colonial New Spain from the time of conquest through the colonial period. In contrast to Socolow, Seed argues that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in New Spain, trust was placed in each individual to stand up for

---

27 Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America*

28 Ibid., 1

This argument stands in contrast to the editor's introduction to Marysa Navarro's essay, "Women in Pre-Columbian and Colonial Latin American and the Caribbean". The editor argues that race and class affected women's autonomy, not simply their gender.


themselves, which took the form of choosing a marriage partner for oneself. She claims that marrying for love was an expression of individual will inherent to the colonies. As time passed from the early colonial period to the eighteenth century, the view of individual will changed as a result of a new focus on and acceptance of wealth while protecting the family’s status. As a result of the Bourbon reforms Seed argues in favor of a change in society’s view of honor: “aristocratic parents began to speak openly against such marriages, basing their arguments on an aspect of honor that had previously been not mentioned in these disputes—that of honor as status—in which honor is directly related to wealth and position.” The shift of power from the marrying couple to the parents of the couple culminated in the second half of the eighteenth century, with the advent of the Royal Pragmatic.

Only one article deals directly with violence in casta paintings from women to men. Evelina Guzauskyte’s article, “Fragmented Borders, Fallen Men, Bestial Women: Violence in the Casta Paintings of Eighteenth-Century New Spain” provides an interesting twist to the typical gender study of casta paintings. Ilona Katzew argues for the existence of more than 1,600 casta paintings, but Guzauskyte’s concentrated article focuses on the twenty-four paintings that show direct violence in order to pull apart the complicated roles of women. Guzauskyte points out that most of the paintings that depicted violence were painted between 1750 and 1790,

31 Seed, To Love, Honor, and Obey, 109.
32 Ibid., 109.
33 Ibid., 123.
34 Seed, To Love, Honor, and Obey, 137.
35 Ibid., 137.
37 Katzew, Casta Painting, 1.
which is why I have chosen to focus my research within that timeframe. Guzauskyte places the complicated role of women at the heart of the disruptions to the social order in colonial Spanish America. This disruption was seen as a problematic to the Bourbon Crown and thus needed to be controlled to maintain an honorable, controlled society.

My analysis of social norms as shown through paintings of a Spanish man and Black woman fits in to this existing body of literature by expanding upon a primary source that is widely studied and using secondary sources that relate to the general social relationships within colonial New Spain. By focusing on a small set of casta paintings it is possible to illustrate possible ways in which elite society changed its opinions of a union of an español and negra. This specific coupling serves as a microcosm to elucidate larger social changes in perceptions of mixed-race marriages in the later half of the eighteenth century.
Miguel Cabrera, *De español y negra, mulata*. 1763.\(^{38}\)

---

This painting depicts a Spanish man and a Black woman with their mulata daughter nestled between them. The family is outside, possibly near the edge of their house. The portrayal of this Black woman speaks to the generalized social place of Black women in Colonial New Spain. Most Black women were free by the late colonial period, though they still filled roles of servitude. They served elite people; “their labor was considered so essential to the running of a household that one or two female slaves were frequently included in dowries given to wealthy new brides.” They were caretakers; they were women meant to connect the public sphere and private elite woman’s spaces, women meant to be in the background. As women out of the direct gaze of higher society, Black women enjoyed freedom of movement that other women did not, though they had little freedom comparatively. The painting is serene, tranquil, and domestic. There is a certain level of equality between the Spanish man and Black woman, as shown by their faces occupying the same plane as each other. The paintings depicts parity of wealth between the husband and wife where the Black woman gained benefits from marrying a Spanish man, but the Spanish man did not advance to become a member of the elite class. Both of them appear to occupy a comfortable, if not elite, level of wealth. With this depiction, the artist might be saying this level of economic parity between the couple was acceptable because neither part of this couple claimed to be of the elite class.

41 Ibid., 132.
As Lipsett-Rivera argues, “marriage... brought into the family a new person, one who could either augment or detract from the family honor.”\(^{42}\) By marrying a Spanish man, Black women could gain a small sense of honor and heightened class standing. In this painting, it appears that the man and woman are of very similar social standing, as all of the clothing is intact and well produced, signifying a certain level of wealth above the lower classes. The woman wears a brooch of either pearls or silver, which signifies a certain level of wealth. Her floral dress is European and attractive, she wears an indigenous striped shawl below a black cape, suggesting she is a well-rounded woman of the Americas. Still, she carries a basket of fruit signifying she is the primary shopper in the house, which suggests she ventures into the street frequently. The streets were considered to be a place for dishonorable women, typically inhabited by the lower class. The fruit basket she carries is juxtaposed with the level of dress and wealth she possess; similarly, the man’s Spanish jacket is juxtaposed with the laboring hat he wears. This suggests both the man and woman have similar levels of honor, though neither of them are part of the elite class. In this way the artist is perhaps pointing to the parity within their marriage as acceptable and most importantly, controllable.

In every colony many Spanish people were poor, but the presence of pure Spanish blood automatically placed those poor people at a higher level in society. The male is dressed in traditional, but not elite, Spanish clothing with the European jacket and Spanish hat. In contrast to the three paintings that follow, the Spanish

man wears a non-European hat, one that is probably used for working outdoors, as evidenced by the large brim. This hat signifies he is not a member of the elite class because members of the elite class would not have performed outdoor labor. His jacket is Spanish, representing his Spanish blood even though he is not of the elite class. His lower social standing could perhaps be why the painting is depicted as orderly and serene; marrying a Black woman was not as scandalous, because as a person outside of the elite class, his honor was not as much at stake as it would have been for an elite Spanish male. This painting possibly serves to show the elite classes that it is acceptable for those Spanish men below the elite class to marry a Black woman and have a level of social parity with her because the painting is ordered and tranquil. However, in subsequent paintings, the men are dressed in fully elite Spanish clothing, and those paintings each have some element of disorder to them.
Jose de Paez, De español y negra, mulato, ca. 1770-80.43

Similar to the previous painting, this painting depicts a tranquil, domestic scene between a negra and español. The artist, José de Páez, was one of the most prolific artists in 1770s, but little is known about his life.44 The woman is shown attending to domestic chores, standing in the kitchen making traditional hot cocoa in a copper heating vessel, which is shown through the hand motion where she is

44 Ibid., 21.
breaking up cocoa beans into the boiling water. The kitchen is orderly, with the
serving plates and baskets in their proper places. At first glance, the artist most likely
has a positive attitude towards this couple because the painting is tranquil and
ordered.

This woman occupies the traditional servitude role of Black women. Though
this couple was married, the union did not seem to have increased her status, as she
is dressed in plain, unadorned clothing, with a small headband in the hair. Preparing
hot cocoa for her husband, she stands above the wood-burning stove, looking on at
her child and husband. Her gaze is resigned, perhaps signifying her acceptance of
her role of life-long servitude in this marriage. Her acceptance is perhaps why this
painting is a tranquil one. Páez might have been signaling to his elite audience that
this couple posed no threat to society because each person was acting according to
his or her assigned social roles.

The man stands in ornately decorated Spanish clothing, complete with a
triangular European hat and walking cane. The walking cane he holds signifies his
elite status as a rich Spanish male. His clothing and hat are intact and impeccable,
and he is wearing a sable, a privilege extended to specific elite members of society.
Lighting his cigarette and waiting for hot cocoa suggests the man just entered the
kitchen. Neither parent engages with each other; they both look only at the child. In
the previous painting, the father interacts with his child by playing with her. In this
painting the Spanish man simply uses his child as a tool to light his cigarette,
suggesting a larger distance between the mulato child and the elite Spanish man
than between a non-elite Spanish man and his mulata child. Perhaps that is why the
painting is calm: the artist depicted a union where both people adhered to the expected social behavior of a typical elite Spanish man and Black woman: master and servant, with limited social interaction and a child who is clearly not connected to his Spanish father.

It was acceptable for a man to venture outside of the home no matter his level of wealth and honor, but it was dishonorable for a woman to ever venture outside of the home. Kitchens belonged to the women while the men controlled the outdoors, and this painting depicts exactly that divide with the physical division of the kitchen to the outdoors, where half of the background shows the landscape and half shows the kitchen. This division of the painting correlates to the physical placement of each adult in the painting: the man is located on the outside whereas the woman is located in the domestic half. Perhaps this painting is tranquil because both adults conform to the expected social norms. The physical location perhaps serves to augment the visual division between the elite Spanish man and the Black woman. The male child separates the two, crossing the divide from the home to the landscape. Placing the child's feet within the domestic half of the painting perhaps points to the fact that most of the time, children born of Black women, especially those with Spanish fathers, remained in the control of the women.45 Stretching the child across the divide possibly argues for a desire to increase the child's social standing in life. Because the man is clearly of the elite class, this desire of the child to increase his social standing was a concern of the elite class, signified perhaps by the empty fruit basket just to the right of the child. The empty fruit basket, typically a

sign of disorder, is neither overturned nor chaotic in this painting. Perhaps the artist is suggesting that while this marriage was not fully acceptable, it was not a concern for the elite class because each person is acting squarely within his and her individual classes.
IV. VIOLENT CASTA PAINTINGS

Violence shows tension. Violence in casta paintings directly points to a tension between the two people in the painting. Guzauskyte argues: “the violent casta paintings document the anxiety felt by the elite sectors of New Spain society as they perceived with dismay the increasingly more frequent crossing, and therefore, breaking, of geographic, racial and gender-based borders”. In this case, the following paintings depict tension through violence between Black women and Spanish men. Many of the concerns of the enlightened reformers of Bourbon Spain are addressed in casta painting by including scenes referring to social issues such as disorder and chaos at the lower rungs of society. Both the man and the woman engaging in violence perhaps pointed to a specific issue of mixed-race couples. These specific paintings are strikingly different from the more numerous and more typical casta paintings where women and men engage in relatively tranquil domestic scenes. Though the violent paintings are few in number, the existence of them represents a change in the depiction of those couples, perhaps pointing to a change in the way the couples were viewed by society.

Casta paintings that show women and men engaging in violent acts clash against the order of typical casta paintings. The article provides an interesting twist to the typical gender study of casta paintings. In addition to looking at casta paintings as a genre, Guzauskyte focuses on the twenty-four casta paintings that show direct violence out of the more than 1,600 paintings that are serene. Of those

---

47 Katzew, Casta Painting, 113.
twenty-four that show direct violence, a total of seventeen paintings show a woman engaging in a violent act towards a man, and nine of those paintings are of a Black woman and Spanish man. See the table below.  

**THE CASTA PAINTINGS OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NEW SPAIN**

Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial categories in the union</th>
<th>No. of paintings</th>
<th>The offspring and his or her parents (each union is represented in one painting, unless stated otherwise)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Spanish and Indian            | 3               | Coyote = mestizo + Indian  
Chamizo = coyote + Indian  
Cambujo = chamizo + Indian  |
| Spanish and Black African     | 9               | Mulato = Spanish + Black African  
(5 variations based on the same model)  
Morisco = Spanish + mulato (4 paintings)  |
| Black African and Indian      | 2               | Chino = Black African + Indian  
Zambaigo = lobo + Indian  |
| Spanish, Indian, and Black African; or ambiguous racial origins | 10 | Albarazado = Indian + cambuja  
Ahí te estás = coyote mestizo + mulato  
Calpamulato = sambaygo (zambaigo) + mulato  
Gibaro = genizaro + mulato  
Barcino = albarazado + mulato  
Tente en el aire = albarazado + salta atrás  
Lobo = torna atrás + Indian  
Cambujo = lobo + mestiza  
Albarazado = chino + genizaro  
Coyote = cuarterón + mestiza  |

This table shows that an overwhelming majority of the paintings produced depicting violence between non-ambiguous racial mixes were of a Black person and Spanish person, pointing to the significance of studying the violence between these two races. The violence between a Black woman and Spanish man are addressed in the next portion of this essay.

---

Andrés de Islas, No. 4 De Español y Negra, nace Mulata, 1774.49

This painting produced by Andrés de Islas in 1774 depicts an español and negra couple. A prominent feature of Islas’ paintings are his stratification of society

along economic and racial lines. In direct opposition to previous paintings, this couple has been captured during a moment of intense violence, where the woman is poised to strike the man over the head with a wooden object while the man grabs at her and pulls her clothing in an attempt to stop her. The child between them pleads her mother to stop fighting by tugging on her mother's dress. The fruit basket in the corner is intact, but the vessels on the countertop are in complete disarray, showing a disorderly, unstructured home.

The window in the painting serves two purposes: to connect this domestic scene to the outside world, and to highlight the intimacy of this violent domestic situation. Since there is no outside audience, the insulting gestures and violence between the two individuals remain inside the home. However, connecting this scene to the outside world through the use of the window highlights the ramifications of this loss of paterfamilias to the general society. Anxieties ran high during the latter half of the eighteenth century concerning this paterfamilias because without male dominance of the household, the Crown lacked control of its governed body, and social control was the goal of the Bourbon Reforms.

In this violent painting, the man's head is bare because his hat has fallen or been thrown on the ground as a result of the altercation, or possibly as the cause of the altercation. As mentioned in Guzauskyte's essay, the Spanish male's bare head is a symbol of lost honor. This lack of honor implies that his fellow elite Spaniards would not respect him as they gazed upon this painting. Instead, they might laugh at him and his position as his angry Black wife beats him. This is the most significant

---

50 Katzew, *Casta Painting*, 114.
age difference in the four paintings within this essay. The Spanish man's age points to a possibility of an accumulation of wealth greater than man younger than him. The fact that the artist then depicts this honorable, older man being beaten by his Black wife possibly further highlights the lack of honor as perceived by the elite class.

The woman and child are both dressed well, though there is slight discrepancy between the level of dress of the man and woman. In previous paintings, the couple was either very similarly dressed or there was a large disparity between the level of dress adorned by each person. Both of those options were possibly accepted by society because both the man and woman adhered to the social expectations placed upon them. In this painting, the woman's clothing is not of the elite class but she wears jewelry and the Spanish-style buckle shoes, which was problematic because that type of clothing and the jewelry and shoes contradict each other. The shoes and jewelry signifies a woman of elite status, but the clothes are not, and as Socolow argues, this was problematic for a society concerned with social control and order. In addition, the child is wearing a very similar dress to her mother and also wears the buckle shoes, perhaps depicting the transfer of confusion and contradiction to the next generation. Contradictions signaled a lack of control. The elite classes did not like contradictions, which might be why this painting is chaotic and violent. The couple did not adhere to social norms, resulting in a disordered and dishonorable household.
In addition to the removal of the hat, certain acts were universally accepted as insulting such as tearing someone’s clothing or making direct eye contact. In this painting, the woman is insulting the man’s honor. She hits him, something women were forbidden to do, and she also forces his head down by pulling on his hair. Both of these acts were seen as highly insulting with complete disregard for another person’s honor, especially a man’s. By depicting this violence, Islas shows his audience that a union between a Spanish man and Black woman can lead to a complete loss of honor resulting from the mixed marriage, serving as a microcosm for Black female/Spanish male couples throughout New Spain.

---

51 Lipsett-Rivera, “De Obra y Palabra”.
Unknown artist, *De Españaol y Negra, nace Mulata*, ca. 1785-1790.\(^{52}\)

An unknown artist produced this painting in the late 1780s, depicting a Black woman beating a white Spanish man with a wooden spoon and pulling his hair.\(^{53}\)

Fruit is scattered all over the floor next to a broken vase. The painting is set in a

---


\(^{53}\) Ibid., 138.
public space and all eyes are on the fighting couple. The child stands between the two parents, pushing them apart. The artist most likely views this pairing of a Spanish man and Black woman negatively because this scene is hectic and chaotic, symbolizing a disorganized, improper life. In retaliation, the Spanish man is resisting the black woman's onslaught by pulling at her arm and her neck. This painting is different from the previous paintings by setting the painting within a public area, allowing others members of society to see the private struggles of this couple.

In this painting, there is a distinct line between the dishonorable members of society and the more honorable members. In the left half of the painting are two Black women, the dishonored man, and the child tainted with Black blood. In the right half of the painting, two indigenous women are carrying out their work as normal by serving the men and making tortillas. Although they are working with their hands, a sign of dishonor, they are performing the tasks they are expected to perform.54 The Bourbon Reforms were instituted to control disruption in daily tasks of labor and work.55 In this painting, the placement of the Black women and the Spanish man visually separates the two groups of honorable and dishonorable people, because the Indian women are carrying out their duties, while the violence of the Black women and dishonorable man are part of the chaos and disruption to the daily tasks. The entire left-hand side of the painting is in disarray, including the broken vase and the partially overturned fruit basket.

55 Katzew, Casta Painting, 112.
Should this have been a calm, nonviolent casta painting, the fruit would be in its proper place in the basket. Following the argument of the division between the two halves of the painting, the fruit basket that lies in the middle of the painting is only partially overturned, perhaps because it is caught between the honorable/ordered and dishonorable/disordered halves of the painting. The fruit basket is a symbol for the unstructured, dishonorable society in New Spain and specifically the dishonor of the man and the woman in the painting and points to the larger problem of an unordered society.

According to the Bourbon-imposed social standards within colonial New Spain, this man should never have been with this woman, let alone produced a child with this woman. Unlike previously tranquil paintings, the violence shows a lack of acceptance by the artist, and since it is a painting, the negative attitude is thrust upon the elite viewer. The simple act of the Black woman hitting the Spanish man shows insubordination, directly challenging the role of *paterfamilias*. Violating *paterfamilias* was a severe problem for the Spanish Crown, because if the male heads of households were unable to control their individual families, the Crown would not be able to control its members of society. This painting points to the eventual rejection of Black woman/Spanish man couples in colonial New Spain as a result of the heightened focus on purity of blood.

Black women were often required to seek work outside of their home to help raise income for their families. Some women chose to provide meals for single
laboring men who needed food to be cooked for them.\textsuperscript{56} This painting is likely taking place in one of those home-restaurants. Perhaps the artist set this scene in the restaurant in order to bring the public audiences' interest towards a private problem, perhaps illustrating that the disorder of these couples all levels of society and were a public problem. While the honor of a Black woman was not of high social importance, any Spanish man had a presumed amount of honor, and this painting clearly points to a dramatic loss of honor visible to the all-important prying eyes of the audience.

Honor mattered throughout all levels of society. A person’s honor was more tarnished if an audience was around waiting to hear or see the insult.\textsuperscript{57} Honor was built on deeds and actions; therefore rumors of an act could irreparably damage someone’s reputation.\textsuperscript{58} Without an audience, an insult to one’s honor fell on deaf ears; “it was implicit that defamation of character had no value if it was not communicated”, but an audience present could leave that person forever marked.\textsuperscript{59} Audiences served to augment the insult and make the insult and problem at hand a public problem, grinding against the grains of social control. By showing the casta paintings to an elite audience, it automatically implied an audience of one sort, but by creating a painting with an audience for the insult in the painting itself, it is possible that the artist was trying to convey the severity of the matter twofold.

\textsuperscript{57} Lipsett-Rivera, “De Obra y Palabra”, 527.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 527.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 528.
V. CONCLUSION

Casta paintings were produced in the eighteenth century as visual depictions illustrating that New Spain was exotic but controlled to the Spanish Crown. Within a thoroughly mixed-race society, a need existed for casta paintings to depict order and delineate the myriad of mixed-blood people to a literate, elite class that became increasingly concerned with social control as a result of the Bourbon Reforms. By naming and ordering the people, the elite classes assumed a self-perception of control over the masses. The paintings depicted a man and woman with their child or children and the names assigned to each person in the painting, for example: De español y negra, nace mulata (from a Spanish male and Black female, a mulata child is born). The presence of tranquil and orderly casta paintings depicting a Black woman and Spanish man perhaps signified a certain level of acceptance towards the existence of this couple, as the seventeenth century leading in to the eighteenth century was a period of exemplifying individual will, exemplified through individual’s marriage choices. The orderly casta paintings portraying a Black woman and Spanish man perhaps signified a level of acceptance as a couple in society. The traditional social scene was illuminated through the orderliness and structure of the paintings, with everything in the correct place. For example, the dishes in the kitchen are neatly placed on shelves and the fruit baskets located in each painting are in order. The peaceful scenes showed the artists’ acceptance of this couple as a family unit with individuals adhering to their assigned social roles, i.e.: an ornately dressed, elite Spanish man being served by his unadorned Black wife.
The production of violent paintings increased after 1750. Upon a reader’s first glance at the violent paintings, it could be perceived that artists painted the scenes simply because they did not want interracial marriages that produced “impure” children. However, now it is understood that those marriages were not always perceived negatively. The Spanish Crown never condoned racial mixing between Africans and Spaniards. Though this perceived lack of governmental control paved the way for a disordered society to emerge, by the second half of the eighteenth century, Reforms targeted social order and adherence to marriage rites, increasing the control over households through a larger focus on paterfamilias. The full effect of the Bourbon Reforms resulted in an attempt to control and reduce racial mixing as male honor shifted to wealth and social status instead of individual will. The passing of the Royal Pragmatic in 1778, allowing parents to oppose the marriage choices of their children, was most likely a reaction to the increasing concern of individuals marrying outside of their social class. This action tarnished the family’s honor, its wealth and long-standing status. If the couple then produced a child, it was even more of a threat to the Crown and elite classes as the mixing of blood caused social disorder ultimately contaminating the pure bloodline.

The ways in which disorder was depicted in the violent paintings alluded to the anxieties of Black female/Spanish male as a couple. Concerns arose in the latter half of the eighteenth century due to the increased need to regain social control and honorable households. The ways in which one dressed and presented oneself was indicative of the level of honor possessed. Jewelry or certain garments reflected order, but wearing clothing items or jewels that did not belong to one’s status
resulted in disorder. In addition, when a hat was misplaced in a casta painting, it represented to elite society that the man had lost his honor. In these paintings, the loss of the hat, and therefore honor, could be a result of marrying the Black woman thus deliberately breaking the expected social norms of a Spanish male. Violence is depicted within the chaotic casta paintings through the use of insulting gestures such as tugging on clothes or hair. The addition of an audience elevated the level of humiliation by publicly tarnishing a person’s honor thus the degradation of honor became even more significant.

Large changes within politics and social norms passively affected the literate classes. Day to day activities did not change. Throughout the eighteenth century, there was not necessarily a reduction in the number of Black woman/Spanish man couples, but merely a change in how literate, elite members of society viewed the pairings. This shift in opinion from indifference to concern represented itself in an increase in casta paintings depicting violence between a Black woman and Spanish man in the second half of the eighteenth century.
VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

i. Primary Sources:


ii. Secondary Sources:


