

Nopal en la Frente: Racial Passing and the Hidden Indigeneity of the Los Altos Region of

Jalisco, 1720-1950

A Senior Project

presented to

The Faculty of the History Department

California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo

In partial Fulfillment

of the requirement for the degree

Bachelor of Arts

By

Brandon Manuel Márquez

September, 2021

© 2021 Brandon Manuel Márquez

When one thinks of the Los Altos of Jalisco region, typically one imagines visions of charros, tequila, and light-skinned Mexicans. Yet these notions of European influences and traits in the Los Altos region fail to acknowledge a critical part of its history: its indigenous history. Layman historical accounts such as the Wikipedia entry for the Los Altos region of Jalisco places significant emphasis on its European populations, as it lists all the various European countries to which the area is claimed to have migrations from, all the while ignoring any indigenous ancestry.<sup>1</sup> Some articles from México even go so far as to associate beauty with Los Altos women, as the presence of features such as colored eyes, light skin, and a socially reinforced European genealogy allure readers to this perceived pocket of Europeanism.<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, my work seeks to build upon previous scholarship and highlight how racial passing has created an alternative to the history of the Los Altos region as well as debunk perceived norms of European ethnic homogeneity. Additionally, I will show how the Los Altos region's hidden indigenous roots allowed for many mixed-race persons to pass as Spanish, erode all their indigenous roots and acquire social markings of Spanish ancestry, which allowed them to own land as well as hold high social status.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, I am highlighting my family's own hidden indigenous ancestry to show how many persons in the Los Altos region passed as fully Spanish for generations. In doing so, I hope to build upon previously developed interpretations of race and expand it to arguably México's most European area. Even as the majority of mixed-race citizens in México have struggled due to endemic discrimination based on race, my family contradicts broader perceptions of non-Spanish experience in México. Despite the fact that the Los Altos region of Jalisco is typically correlated with light skin and colored eyes, a more

---

<sup>1</sup> (Wikipedia 2021)

<sup>2</sup> "Las Mujeres más Bellas del Mundo Están en Los Altos de Jalisco," La Brecha, last modified July 26, 2013, <https://labrecha.me/?p=17243>.

For a photographic example of this, see image 1.

<sup>3</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935)

nuanced dive into the genealogy of the *Alteños* (demonym for someone from the Los Altos de Jalisco) presents an alternative to popular belief; as the region became home to persons with indigenous and African descent who were able to pass as fully Spanish. The Los Altos region marks itself as unique as it represents the ways in which race, as well as the racial caste system, are malleable in México and how racial purity is impossible in the *mestizaje* (mixed race) country of México.

In regards to previous historiographical research, I largely agree with many of the interpretations of previous scholars such as Kenneth Andrien, Steven Hackel, Phillip Russel, and Jake Frederick; all of whom highlight examples of mixed-race persons passing in a more favorable racial categorization.<sup>4</sup> I seek to contribute to this larger discussion by utilizing primary source research I have conducted as examples of racial passing in the Los Altos region, which has not been done before. Examples of racial passing are presented quite frequently in scholarship, but are often glossed over in passing and are not noted to be of significance. I am arguing that this evidence is incredibly significant, especially considering the overwhelming negative social forces that are present for mixed-race Mexicans.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, I find it to be incredibly significant that the Mexican authorities turned a blind eye to the aspect of racial passing considering the laws and norms in place.

Another aspect that I have built upon in my research comes from Ann Twinam, whose area of study encompasses describing private vs public lives, especially in regards to illegitimacy in colonial Latin America. This study is exemplified by Don Gabriel Muñoz, who is one of many

---

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth J. Andrien, *The Human Tradition in Colonial Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2013), loc 4312.; Stephen W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missions of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 59.; Phillip L Russel, *The History of México: From Pre-Conquest to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 50.; Jake Frederick, "Without Impediment: Crossing Racial Boundaries in Colonial México." *The Americas* 67, no. 4 (April 2011): 497. <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/stable/pdf/41239107.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8e7fcf39654538f58aa92bef47c05e14>.

<sup>5</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 51.

Latin Americans who filed a *gracias al sacar* (thanks for the exclusion) in order to be legitimized. In the public reality, he is Don Gabriel Muñoz; but in the private reality, he is the illegitimate son of a Don and snaps at a man when he is not referred to as “Don” (yet in the private reality he cannot be a Don because he is illegitimate).<sup>6</sup> Eventually, Don Gabriel was able to purchase a *gracias al sacar*, which bought his public legitimacy and the title of Don, which is significant as it shows how characteristics, such as legitimacy, were malleable in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> In my research, I am arguing that just as Don Gabriel Muñoz’s legitimacy was malleable, aspects of race are also malleable in the same way, as they both have public and private spheres of presentation. Twinam also highlights the importance of legitimacy in Latin America, as illegitimacy was associated with mixed-race persons in the New World.<sup>8</sup> Being that my family has lengthy records proving their legitimacy, as well as their deep-rooted Catholic faith, would have helped them pass. This association is significant, as it strays from perceived notions of indigeneity. I believe similar public and private spheres shaped the Los Altos region. Just as Don Gabriel got mad at a passerby by not calling him Don, I believe similar reactions would have unfolded in the Los Altos region if someone was to describe another as non-Spanish, if that person had been presenting themselves in their public spheres as Spanish. I believe this difference between public and private lives helps describe some of the inconsistencies found in record-keeping when it pertains to race, as most records are quick to emphasize Spanish ancestry, but every once and a while, a record will make mention of someone’s mixed genealogy—shedding light into the private sphere.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ann Twinam, *Public Lives Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Twinam, *Public Lives Private Secrets*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Twinam, *Public Lives Private Secrets*, 10.

Furthermore, I am arguing that there is a large significance in applying this theory to the Los Altos region, as Alteños noted for their European features: brown hair, above average height, colored eyes, and lighter skin.<sup>9</sup> In addition, I want to specifically address and dismantle notions that people in the Los Altos region of Jalisco are 100% European.<sup>10</sup> It may seem to be an obvious point to many Latin American scholars, yet this is a common argument made by persons in this region, as many claim pure-blooded European ancestry.<sup>11</sup> This is an alternative to more generalized perceptions and connotations of European features, as this indigenous past that the Alteños have largely reveals how the genealogy of México is much more complicated than some may realize. Similarly, this means that even for Mexicans who present as fully European, their genealogy is still connected to a mestizaje collective. Despite the fact that the Alteños may look European, in reality they have more similar ethnic backgrounds to the rest of México, with mixed indigenous, African, and Spanish descent (albeit at likely different percentages).

There is also broader significance in how people in the Los Altos Region were able to pass as Spanish (or just a more European caste designation) and have economic success, especially when one compares the treatment of non-Europeans who were able to pass in México to the treatment of non-Europeans in the United States. One such example presented by Mark Wasserman highlights the inequalities facing people of indigenous descent, as *Mestizo* (a person of half indigenous and half Spanish descent) leaders in the Porifiro Díaz era hid their indigenous past, as well in how there were different garb worn between ranchers and Mestizos; as Mestizos

---

<sup>9</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

The Los Altos region, among Mexicans, has always been associated with European features. My family exemplifies this in all the ways listed in this section- eye color, height, and skin tone.

<sup>10</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

Many people that my father, Hector, has interacted with in México, as well as in the United States, who hail from this area argue that they are not just European, but 100% European. My oral family history has been much the same. Even popular culture upholds this, as simple searches on Google, as well as the Wikipedia pages for my father's hometown of San Juan de los Lagos, as well as the Los Altos region in general, make note of only its European past.

<sup>11</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

wore much less luxurious clothing.<sup>12</sup> In the United States, harsh miscegenation laws prevented couples of different races from marrying, with Louisiana even going so far as to ban any White person from marrying anyone with one drop of African blood.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Anglo Americans did their best to attempt to exterminate Mexicans, to which they compared to vermin.<sup>14</sup> For Native Americans in California, similar grotesque treatment followed them with the enslavement of indigenous persons in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Some other examples of negative treatment of ethnic non-Europeans are shown by David LaFevor, who highlights much of the racism that is evident through the sport of boxing, where African-American fighter Billy Clarke faces racial stereotypes and exoticism associated with his African ancestry in México.<sup>16</sup> The atrocities (violence, slavery, and death) of the repartimiento system in the New World described by Jeremy Baskes show a greater significance in the success of people who are of indigenous descent, as they rose above the previous oppression of the past, as well as the systems in place that wished to keep them down.<sup>17</sup> Non-Europeans in both México and the United States faced extreme hardship, thus making the relatively unknown success of these mixed-race landowners in the Los Altos region all the more significant.

Previous scholarship on racial passing gives many possibilities as to how these people, and my family, in the Los Altos region were able to pass as fully Spanish. Matthew O'Hara describes one instance wherein local leaders failed to tell ones' race once indigenous persons

---

<sup>12</sup> Mark Wasserman, *Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth Century México: Men, Women and War* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2000), 145, 164.

<sup>13</sup> Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 77, 134.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 36.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Magliari, "Free State Slavery: Bound Indian Labor and Slave Trafficking in California's Sacramento Valley, 1850-1864," *Pacific Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (May 2012): 160, 190.

<sup>16</sup> David C. LaFevor, *Prizefighting and Civilization: A Cultural History of Boxing, Race, and Masculinity in México and Cuba, 1840-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2020), 71-73.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremy Baskes, *Indians, Merchants, and Markets: A Reinterpretation of the Repartimiento and Spanish-Indian Economic Relations in Colonial Oaxaca, 1750-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 73.

began to dress in Spanish attire.<sup>18</sup> Lyman Johnson highlights government complicity in the passing when he highlights how local governments were complicit in falsifying racial records.<sup>19</sup> In a similar manner, Robert Curley highlights how the Catholic elite in México during the early twentieth century were of Mestizo descent, meaning that they would have been more willing to pass people off as Spanish, as they were Mestizo in a White man's world themselves.<sup>20</sup> Daniel Nemser presents a focused dive into the idea of mestizaje, which gives an allusion to México's mixing of indigenous, African, and European influences.<sup>21</sup> I would interpret these works to mean that for México, a country that is full of mixing in terms of ethnicity and culture (among other aspects); purity is impossible, as the periphery of each of these aspects becomes the new extreme. Combining the previous scholarship provides more insight into the aspects of how passing happened and gives many perspectives of how racial passing dominated the Los Altos region in the seventeenth through twentieth centuries.

Overall conclusions in my research have built upon a combination of previous scholarship and my interpretation from what my primary source analysis has revealed. In particular, my own research has revealed that there is a strong argument to be made that for persons of the racial caste "Mestiza", one could elevate their own social standing with marriage to a "Spanish" Don. In doing so, Mestizo spouses ensured that their children would have high-class Spanish titles, such as being a Don or Doña. Furthermore, I am highlighting a recurring point that persists in the baptismal records of the Los Altos region that has children of a

---

<sup>18</sup> Matthew D. O'Hara, *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion and Politics in México* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 38.

<sup>19</sup> Lyman Johnson and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, *The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1998), 76.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Curley, *Citizens and Believers: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Jalisco, 1900-1930* (Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2018), 263.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Joseph Nemser, "Toward a Genealogy of Mestizaje: Rethinking Race in Colonial México." (PHD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 1, [https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Nemser\\_berkeley\\_0028E\\_11452.pdf](https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Nemser_berkeley_0028E_11452.pdf).

Spanish parent and a Mestizo parent making the child Spanish. What I am arguing in these circumstances is that as long as a person received designation less than Mestizo, all of their indigenous ancestry is wiped away and they will then only be considered Spanish, as long as they uphold their social standing.<sup>22</sup> I believe that economic status plays a huge role in this, as titles such as Don (which is also typically synonymous with being a wealthy, legitimate, Spanish male) have only been given to persons listed as Spanish in my research of the baptisms and marriages of the Los Altos region. I am also adding to previous scholarship in how I am applying ideas in previous scholarship and expanding them to demonstrate how race was correlated with other social, as well as economic, aspects of oneself rather than their actual genealogy.

One aspect that I disagree with in previous scholarship is in the prevalence of this racial passing, and the success that these mixed-race people are having with it. As previously stated, the works of Andrien, Hackel, Russel, and Frederick all acknowledge significant racial miscategorization as well as passing, but fail to highlight this as a common phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> Yet, my research suggests to me that during this period of México racial passing was a very common occurrence. I would also add that the propensity of Spanish ancestry recorded in the baptismal records of the Los Altos region also suggests that this was not just a few families across the region, but had occurred en masse across the Los Altos region.<sup>24</sup> I am also contributing to previous research on racial passing, especially in regards to marriage, as my research has shown that marriage gave the opportunity for Alteños to elevate their caste to a more Spanish one.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, I am building on previous scholarship by comparing the difference between civil and Catholic church records in regards to their complicity in allowing for racial passing. In doing

---

<sup>22</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935); Andrien, *The Human Tradition in Colonial Latin America*, loc 4321.

<sup>23</sup> Andrien, *The Human Tradition in Colonial Latin America*, loc 4312.; Hackel, *Children of Coyote*, 59.; Russel, *The History of México*, 50. Frederick, "Without Impediment," 497.

<sup>24</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1810, 390)

<sup>25</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1807, 502); (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1810, 390)



so, I am highlighting how Catholic church records were more likely to permit racial passing, due to fact that the people who are passing are often land-owning Mestizos who were wealthy coffers and would be an economic loss for the Catholic church if they were to out them on a record as mixed-race. This is due to the donations that the church is dependent on, and if the church were to stop being complicit in the racial passing of mixed-race landowners, they may run the risk of them leaving the congregation, or seeing a decrease in their donations. For civil records, I would add that they were more likely to be accurate, as the state had little to gain in allowing people to pass one way or the other.

In writing this history, I seek to answer the questions of how, why, and who allowed for this racial passing; as well as showing my interpretation of how mixed-race land ownership came about in the Los Altos region of Jalisco. Furthermore, I am dismantling the genealogy of one of the most culturally European societies in México and highlighting their unknown indigenous roots. My research has revealed how this full disacknowledgment of its indigenous history, and due to the fact that the Los Altos region failed to make full racial distinctions, particularly for the term *Castizo* (meaning one-quarter indigenous), meant that for persons that could pass as anything less than Mestizo would be seen as having full 100% Spanish ancestry.<sup>26</sup> With my own body of research, I plan to map out alternatives to popular conceptions of the Los Altos region- and people who pass in México as white. As my research shows, many people who pass as White more than likely have a past that is rooted in indigenous history, thus connecting the genealogy of the White periphery into the mestizaje collective.

One issue I have come across in my research is Landownership by persons of mixed-race, as it is a hard piece of evidence to track. This is due to the fact that there are difficulties in identifying such aspects, as certain documents omit characteristics that would indicate this. For

---

<sup>26</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1810, 390)

example, baptisms starting in the post-colonial period in México began to not track race anymore, and along with this, often stopped using titles that would have alluded to land ownership, with the titles of “Don” and “Doña” being the most notable examples of this. Often, marriage records would give incomplete or inconclusive information regarding features such as race and land ownership. For instance, some marriage records may give the racial designation for the wife, but not the husband. Similarly, records would often use general terms to describe people, specifically in the Los Altos region. The evidence to this is in how people who owned land, and well as people who worked on ranches, were both labeled as *agricultor*, or farmer. This ambiguity in record-keeping highlights much of how this society was blurred and represents some of the biggest challenges in my research.

### **Mixed-Race Dons and Doñas**

Even as México moved further away from its violent Spanish dominance of the sixteenth century, economic symbols of status, mainly land, were still aspects customarily not found or associated with mixed-race and non-Spanish persons. Typically, land was either acquired through grants from Spain, or was taken from indigenous persons (although sometimes through marriage or purchase).<sup>27</sup> Stratified landownership in the late nineteenth century also builds more broad significance (1.5% of population owned 83% of the land), as the fact that mixed-race persons were able to receive their fair share through legal channels present a unique side note to the history of landownership in México.<sup>28</sup> Although prevailing belief presents landowners in the Los Altos region as Spanish persons with indigenous workers, my research presents a conflicting narrative, as well as challenging stereotypes that have strictly defined Spanish and indigenous work relations.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 81.

<sup>28</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 387.

<sup>29</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

One such example of mixed-race land ownership in the Los Altos region came with my paternal great-grandparents, José Jesús Márquez De La Torre and María del Refugio Márquez De La Torre. Both Jesús and Refugio came from landowning families at the ranch of El Tecolote, which was a family ranch that was prominently filled with the Márquez, Gutiérrez, and De La Torre families of the Los Altos region.<sup>30</sup> Seemingly to the public, this couple were Spanish landowners who had amassed multiple ranches and developed a successful trade network across the Los Altos region.<sup>31</sup> In fact, records spanning from their births until 1935 state that they are Spanish (although, sometimes no mention of race is made) and that they were landowners. However, a closer look at the civil birth record for my grandfather, José Manuel Márquez Márquez, reveals that his mother María del Refugio Márquez De La Torre was Mestiza, as she is designated as such for the first time in 1935.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, Jesús has no mention of his race on this same record, and even more interestingly, we know that he was present for the writing of this document, as his signature appears at the bottom of the birth record.<sup>33</sup> This means that seemingly, Jesús would have agreed to have his land-owning wife's racial description be put as not white- which is quite shocking when considering how conflicts some years prior (most notably, the Mexican Revolution) started based on the unequal land distribution to persons of mixed or indigenous descent.<sup>34</sup> Adding to the significance is the fact that María Refugio's family were very wealthy landowners, even more so than Jesús's perceived "Spanish" family.<sup>35</sup> What makes this discovery all the more significant is when Refugio's parents got married, both of them are

---

<sup>30</sup> (San Miguel el Alto Civil Registrar 1947, 19);(Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

<sup>31</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

<sup>32</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935)

<sup>33</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935)

<sup>34</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 362.

<sup>35</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

María Consuelo, the wife of José Manuel, described how her mother-in-law's family came from an extremely wealthy background; more so than Jesús's family, who were quite wealthy in their own right and were afforded possessions such as a large house in town built with a full *caballería*, which was a large horse stable.

specifically listed as having no indigenous descent whatsoever, yet 55 years later, her daughter is recorded as Mestiza.<sup>36</sup> Even though at times Refugia's family was able to pass, the fact that she was listed as mixed-race gives evidence towards her family as an example of people who passed as white, which afforded them the opportunity to do Spanish undertakings, such as owning land.

One other such example of a couple with mixed heritage owning land in the Los Altos region comes with José Bruno Gutiérrez Gutiérrez and María Anastacia González Ybarra, my 4th great-grandparents. Bruno was the son of Don Juan Lucas Gutiérrez and Doña María Gutiérrez, with the titles of "Don" and "Doña" signifying both their status as well their wealth.<sup>37</sup> Bruno was surrounded socially and through kinship with Spanish ancestry, with all four grandparents as well as his godparent all having the same Spanish titles.<sup>38</sup> This reveals much to Bruno's background, as having immediate family as well as role models in his life such as his godfather (who was a Don), meant that he would have been afforded a privileged life.<sup>39</sup> More specifically, aspects such as an access to (or an accumulation of) money, societal whiteness, land, education, and noble titles were just some of the aspects that Bruno stood to gain from his ethnic background. This makes the marriage to María Anastacia all the more interesting, as Anastacia was a Mestiza woman born to a couple with no honorary titles such as Don or Doña.<sup>40</sup> This marriage between Bruno and Anastacia also helps show some of the blurred lines that occurred in this period, as even though Bruno was from a high-status Spanish family, the marriage between him and his seemingly lower-class wife still occurred. This marriage becomes all the more significant when considering how their children, who stood to inherit Bruno and Anastacia's land holdings, would have mixed indigenous ancestry and yet still own land. Even

---

<sup>36</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Civil Registrar 1880, 129)

<sup>37</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1807, 502)

<sup>38</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1807, 502)

<sup>39</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1807, 502)

<sup>40</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1810, 390)

assuming that Bruno is 100% ethnically Spanish, this would still mean that the children between Anastacia and Bruno would be one-quarter indigenous and three-fourths Spanish. Even as this society seemed to have fixed, rigid social standings, marriage gave an opportunity for persons of mixed ancestry to have some landholdings; as social, ethnic and economic lines were crossed due to marriage in the Los Altos region.

Similarly, Victoriano Olivares Magaña and María del Refugia Gutiérrez Márquez (coincidentally the granddaughter of José Bruno Gutiérrez Gutiérrez and María Anastacia González Ybarra, making Victoriano as well as Refugia my 2nd great-grandparents) give another example to persons of mixed-race having land in the Los Altos region of Jalisco. According to my own family's oral history, they had significant land holdings in the San Juan de los Lagos area.<sup>41</sup> Yet, both Victoriano and Refugia had indigenous ancestry that was recorded in the baptismal records in their family, and more uniquely, Victoriano even had some recorded African ancestry in his lineage.<sup>42</sup> Even though both of them had a mixed ancestry, they still had noble titles in their recent familial history- once again showing how people in the Los Altos region would continually cross socio-economic as well as racial lines when forming their marriages; half of Refugia's great-grandparents carried the title of "Don" or "Doña" and at least half of Victoriano's grandparents carrying the same noble titles.<sup>43</sup> This evidence in the baptismal records of the residents of the Los Altos region helps reveal the common alternative that is present in this area. As for people who would normally face broader social barriers in the rest of México, the

---

<sup>41</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

Oral testimony from multiple family members back up that Victoriano Olivares was a substantial landholder in the San Juan de los Lagos area; although during the Mexican revolution, the land would be disinherited from my family's side and thus, stripping that line of the noble titles, as well as the status that came with it.

<sup>42</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1776, 151)

<sup>43</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1796, 157);(San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1798, 341) (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1800, 459)

Los Altos region gave a way for these people to intermarry and have substantial land holdings in the area.

Even though titles of “Don” or “Doña” may signify being 100% Spanish in the public sphere, I would argue that this is not the case in the Los Altos region of Jalisco. This is due in large part to the lack of racial castes of *Harnizo* (one-third indigenous, two-thirds Spanish) and *Castizo*. The lack of such designations meant that for persons who were 20%, 30%, and 40% indigenous, they could now fully pass as 100% Spanish- meaning they could all of a sudden receive all the benefits that come with this, such as land ownership and increased social standing. Under a strict interpretation of the racial caste system in México, persons such as my grandfather (who has his mother listed as *Mestiza* on his birth certificate) would have been seen as inferior and would have had barriers towards his success at every level of society (yet he did not, he was a landowning Don).<sup>44</sup> Similarly, I would use this same reasoning to argue that for many people who have noble titles, such as the aforementioned José Bruno Gutiérrez Gutiérrez, they likely had some indigenous ancestry somewhere in their familial history just from the fact that partial racial designations of less than 50% indigenous were never used in the Los Altos region of Jalisco. The blurred lines of the racial caste system in the Los Altos region of Jalisco allowed for many persons to escape their indigenous past, as for those who were able to remove their indigenous history, the social and economic benefits provided an incentive for excommunicating part of their history.

Further evidence towards this mixed-race land ownership comes in how my family resided in the Los Altos region of Jalisco for 300 years, but more specifically, for the fact that nearly all of my family hails from the city of San Juan de los Lagos; meaning that they have been

---

<sup>44</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)  
My grandfather was able to inherit his parent’s noble titles as well as land holdings in the Los Altos region.

extremely sedentary over the last 300 years. This also reveals a long history of land ownership, as the fact that my family was so sedentary for so many generations points to my ancestors having possessions that would have prevented them from leaving, with the most obvious aspect being land ownership. During this time, many people who did not own land would have moved from hacienda to hacienda looking for work, so my family was likely a minority in that they likely owned land in comparison to the migratory lifestyle that was common during this period.<sup>45</sup> Even the lack of titles of Don and Doña do not omit the possibility of land ownership, as one could still own a small property without these titles, as often the titles of Don and Doña were reserved to persons who had high social status, political status, as well as owning multiple ranches.<sup>46</sup> More significantly, historical research has indicated that successful ranches of mixed-race persons were quite common in México, which is likely an occurrence that was prominent throughout the Los Altos region.<sup>47</sup> The sedentary lifestyle presented in my family history gives further evidence towards the significance of my family coming from a mixed heritage, as their sedentary lifestyle as well as historical records highlighting the success of mixed-race ranch owners highlight more broad conclusions to my research.

### **Prejudice Throughout the United States and México**

When comparing the success of my family to similar families in places such as the United States, we start to see some more significance in how my family was able to own land and hold high social standing despite having mixed ancestry. For example, in the United States native populations faced many hardships due to government oppression. Some examples include the forced removal from their lands to reservations which often were located on undesirable land,

---

<sup>45</sup> Curley, *Citizens and Believers*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

<sup>47</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 82.; (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1807, 502);(San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1810, 390)

and in how the government sought to destroy their very existence.<sup>48</sup> Even in Western states such as California, Native Americans faced extreme discrimination; as until the late nineteenth century, some Native Americans were forced into slavery.<sup>49</sup> In México however, my family had mixed ancestry and were afforded significant upward mobility. María Anastacia González Ybarra demonstrates this in how she is half indigenous and half Spanish, yet can overcome the societal forces that should have kept her down in the United States, and ends up marrying a Spanish Don. Additionally, this means that her children (who would presumably be at least one-quarter indigenous) would inherit land as well as the honorary titles of Don and Doña. Although the Native American experience in the United States was extremely negative, we can draw broader significance to my family's history by highlighting how unique their experience was in comparison to indigenous groups in other countries.

A significant difference between how México and the United States viewed race came in their very different tolerances of intermarriage. In México, interracial relationships had been a commonality since Cortes reached the shores of México, as even Cortes would partake in his own string of interracial relationships. Although interracial relationships occurred in the United States, frequently they occurred in the private sphere and at the risk of punishment.<sup>50</sup> This is different from México, where interracial relationships are frequent and are even allowed by both the state and the church from the beginning of the colonial period.<sup>51</sup> Yet even in the later colonial period and beginning of the post-colonial period, similar practices continued, as mixed-race persons would be able to solidify their offspring's social position with a marriage to a Spanish person of status. This would result in making their children *gente de razon* (people of reason)

---

<sup>48</sup> Magliari, "Free State Slavery," 105.

<sup>49</sup> Magliari, "Free State Slavery," 156.

<sup>50</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 135-140.

<sup>51</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 51.



and access to noble titles such as Don and Doña.<sup>52</sup> Similar practices of intermarriage were not so common in the United States, as it was not until *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 where interracial marriage was legally accepted across the United States. In fact, before this case, places such as Louisiana made it a crime for someone with one drop of African ancestry to marry a European person.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to Mexican laws of inheritance, children of mixed-race relationships in the United States, as well as their non-European spouses, would often not be able to inherit their White family member's land; and it would often be passed to a more distant, fully White relative.<sup>54</sup> The equal practice of law in the United States took centuries to come to fruition, and only until recently was it fully sanctioned by the legal system; alternatively, México has a long history of interracial relationships and granted status to the products of such relationships.

While my family had a mixed ancestry and was relatively successful, this was not the case for most persons of indigenous descent in México. Even early accounts of Spanish elites such as Bartolome De Las Casas, a Spanish friar who advocated for indigenous rights, portrayed indigenous persons as feeble and inferior.<sup>55</sup> Even more empathetic views on the indigenous persons of México during the sixteenth century portray them as animal-like, with terminology such as “docile” and “humble” being used to describe the groups encountered by the Spanish.<sup>56</sup> After such accounts, the lives of indigenous persons failed to significantly improve as systems such as the repartimiento and encomienda systems allowed for the exploitation as well as the near enslavement of indigenous persons. Politically, indigenous persons in México experienced similar repression to Native Americans in the United States, as they lost their forms of political governance and were subjected to Spanish ways of living. Such examples include using the

---

<sup>52</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1810, 390)

<sup>53</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 134.

<sup>54</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 136.

<sup>55</sup> Bartolome De Las Casas. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. Translated by Nigel Griffin. (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1992), 6.

<sup>56</sup> De Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 6.

Spanish language (which also helped to diminish their culture), the Spanish caste system, and Spanish political governance. In these new forms of Spanish governance, the indigenous persons were at the bottom of society and their Spanish leaders were at the very top- thus helping further define the caste system that was present in early México. The political and social oppression of indigenous persons in México demonstrates how unique it was for my family to have success despite all the outside forces converging against them. As for my family, they did not let their ethnicity define them as persons, and continually rose above the oppressive systems in place to achieve socio-economic success.

Grotesque narratives coming from the conquistador accounts highlight more broad intrigue into my family's history in how indigenous people were treated so poorly generations before, yet now have found success and even intermarried with the children of the same Spanish people who wreaked havoc on their society a few generations before. The sheer brutality of the conquest of México stands as a reminder of how far the country has come, and highlights the resilience of the indigenous persons who survived the ordeal. The Mestizo present of México stands defiant to the bloody conflicts of the past; even as persons such as De Las Casas estimate the death toll of the conquest of the New World to be at twelve million.<sup>57</sup> Bernal Diaz del Castillo's account highlights much of the same, as he describes how the Spanish conquistadors violently overthrew the Aztec empire and littered the streets of Tlatelolco with the severed heads of the dead indigenous persons.<sup>58</sup> Seeing how past relations between the Spanish and indigenous persons of México led to devastating losses for the indigenous persons leads to a growing importance in my field of study. In doing so, it is revealed how just a few generations removed

---

<sup>57</sup> De Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Bernal Díaz del Castillo. *The Conquest of New Spain*. Translated by J.M. Cohen. (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1963), 404.

from such bloodshed we have evidence of successful interracial marriages and offspring, as well as non-Europeans becoming respected citizens in their municipalities.

Similarly, one drop laws sought to undermine the rights of persons who had any sort of non-European ancestry. One such system known as the *Limpieza de Sangre* (purity of blood) sought to significantly limit the rights of persons who, in many cases, had only a quarter or half non-European ancestry.<sup>59</sup> This also highlights European perceptions of purity and how Europeans viewed other races, as the name *Limpieza de Sangre* in itself highlights the severe discrimination that was present under the colonial rule of the Spanish, as the automatic assumption of being not 100% European is that one would be unclean or dirty. What makes the Los Altos region unique in regards to the *Limpieza de Sangre* laws is their very liberal interpretation of it. To more conservative interpretations of *Limpieza de Sangre*, once one person reached  $\frac{7}{8}$  Spanish ancestry, they would be able to be considered white. This is much more Spanish than some of the persons who passed as fully Spanish (more specifically my ancestors) in the Los Altos region of Jalisco, as many were at least 25% indigenous yet passed as 100% Spanish.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, one drop laws in the New World served often as surface-level guidance to how racial relations should take shape. As my family's history shows, acts such as *Limpieza de Sangre* were often preventative, but not fully enforced; and reveal the ways in which minorities overcame their past as well as their present oppression to find success in the New World.

### **Racial Malleability in the Los Altos region**

Even though rigid interpretations of the caste system were the norm in colonial Latin America, the Los Altos region marks itself unique in the ways in which they allowed for non-Europeans to openly circumvent this form of control. Similarly, there is also a great

---

<sup>59</sup> Twinam, *Public Lives Private Secrets*, 44.

<sup>60</sup> (San Miguel el Alto Civil Registrar 1947, 19)

significance in how my family members were able to attain titles such as Don and Doña, considering that these were supposed to be reserved for high-ranking persons of society. Not only did being a Don or Doña signify being a high-ranking member of society, but it was also supposed to signify one who is white, legitimate, wealthy, and a person of honor.<sup>61</sup> This draws broader interest towards my own family, in how they came from mixed heritage, yet were able to have such titles of Don and Doña.<sup>62</sup> In my research of the Los Altos region, I am yet to find anyone in the area who has the title of Don or Doña that is not listed in the records as Spanish. Yet this title holds significance in the rarity of it, as not every Spanish citizen was able to attain this, and many citizens who were listed in records as Spanish had no honorific titles.<sup>63</sup> By overcoming social barriers to receive honorific titles such as Don and Doña, my family reveals much of the fluidity of the social, as well as racial categorizations.

Despite the fact that the Los Altos region had rigid systems in place to order people by race, much of this categorization came with extreme flexibility, and often found itself subject to change over one's life. This is especially notable in the difference between the civil and Catholic records. In these records I have found that Catholic records were more likely to pass persons off as White in comparison to civil records (yet, civil records will still often contradict each other).<sup>64</sup> I believe the Church allowed for this in order to not offend mixed-race coffers, who would have made up a significant amount of their revenue. Evidence towards the church allowing for passing

---

<sup>61</sup> Andrien, *The Human Tradition in Colonial Latin America*, loc 4385.

<sup>62</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021);(San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935) Even though my grandfather's mother, Refugia, is listed as Mestiza, my grandfather would be able to attain the title of Don- signifying his status both as a landowner and a respected member of San Juan de los Lagos society. My grandfather's father was also a Don- which likely indicated that my great-grandmother Refugia, although Mestiza, would have held the honorific title of "Doña."

<sup>63</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

Adding to the significance, there were large populations of white-passing persons in the Los Altos region who not only lacked honorific titles but were poor. This is often a contradiction to perceived norms about Spanish people's position in society, as the perception often is that they are wealthy- this is not always the case, and my grandmother's mother's family exemplifies this in how they passed as European, yet remained incredibly poor.

<sup>64</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Civil Registrar 1880, 129);(San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935)

comes in the Catholic records for my grandfather's side of my family, as records show the family as pure-blooded Spanish persons, yet in 1935 my great-grandmother, María Refugia Márquez De La Torre, is listed as Mestiza.<sup>65</sup> Yet the inconsistencies of race remain in civil records, as a 1947 record lists María Refugia as white, and an 1880 civil record of her parents lists them as both having no indigenous ancestry.<sup>66</sup> In both records, abnormalities occur, highlighting the ambiguity and fluidity of not only the record-keeping but the racial designations. There was quite possibly some bargaining done in the nineteenth century when it came to listing one's race, and as time crept into the twentieth century, race became less of a taboo topic, which would explain my grandfather's birth record having his mother listed as Mestiza.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the fact that much of the leadership of the Catholic church in the twentieth century became Mestizo, it would be more likely that persons would be able to pass a full Spanish descent. Priests held a position of power and would have in many cases seen themselves as Spanish, meaning that if the child looked ethnically similar enough to the priest, they could likely pass.<sup>68</sup> Arguably just as important is the selective omission of race on certain baptismal and marriage records following México's independence from Spain.<sup>69</sup> This independence from Spain had an effect on racial records from the standpoint that Spain was a European nation, whereas México is a nation of mestizaje, and would have different definitions for each of the caste designations compared to the Spanish, thus reconfiguring how racial categorizations would proceed going forward.

---

<sup>65</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1935, 621)

<sup>66</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Civil Registrar 1880, 129);(San Miguel el Alto Civil Registrar 1947, 19)

<sup>67</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1935, 621)

<sup>68</sup> Curley, *Citizens and Believers*, 263.; Frederick, "Without Impediment," 497.; Nemser, "Toward a Genealogy of Mestizaje," 6.

Even if they did not see themselves as Spanish, the fact that much of the racial categorizations were done with a subjective eye test likely meant that a person who looked just a bit more Spanish than a Mestizo priest would be likely to pass; especially considering the lack of quarter designations. Also, the status of being a priest at many points in Mexican history would have allowed them great power- and the ability to potentially have Spanish ancestry in the public sphere.

<sup>69</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1935, 621);(San Juan de los Lagos Civil Registrar 1912, 82);(San Juan de los Lagos Civil Registrar 1897, 412)

Similarly, I also believe that the segregation of the Mexican Catholic church helped facilitate racial inconsistencies, and led to the ability of many high-status mixed-race persons to pass as Spanish. Even from the beginning, the roots of the Catholic church in México were based on segregation, as colonial Catholic churches in places such as México City were segregated by race.<sup>70</sup> In the Los Altos region, because it was a smaller area, socioeconomic differences segregated people more often than not, as only wealthy and high-status churchgoers were permitted to sit in the front of the pews.<sup>71</sup> This ties in with my previous points on racial passing, as the persons who sat in the front would be considered Spanish (due to their socio-economic status), and in turn, the ability to provide for the church would then be associated with one's race. This alludes to how passing occurred; if the high-status churchgoers had become mixed, they would still be seen as Spanish due to their influence and social standing in their local parishes. This also shows the effect of money and power on the Catholic church, as wealth granted a vastly different experience between different social and economic circles. Money and class had a large impact on how the church conducted its operations, as these social markings would have put high-class mixed-race persons in positions of power in Catholic leadership, meaning they would have been granted benefits such as Spanish racial designations.

At the point of Mexican independence, racial categorizations had begun to change after hundreds of years of intermarriage and cohabitation. This means that if under Spanish law in the Los Altos region, people who were 25% (or often times more) indigenous were able to pass as fully Spanish, would then under a mestizaje state be the new 100% Spanish people, as México lost its tie with truly pure blooded Spanish ancestry. With the racial comparisons to full Europeans coming to a close with the end of Spanish rule, the new "Spanish" persons were now

---

<sup>70</sup> O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

the people on the Spanish periphery: people who looked Spanish enough, often held social status, and had some degree of indigenous descent. This meant that for persons who were 20% or 30% indigenous, they were now considered to be full-blooded Spanish, vice versa, definitions of other caste designations must have shifted in a similar fashion. In this case, this pushed citizens towards a genealogy of being more indigenous, as now the Mestizos were more likely to have slightly more than 50% indigenous ancestry, as the periphery had now changed. This also may explain how people in my family were able to pass more easily, as malleable definitions that came to be during this period would have allowed for more persons with a minority or equal indigenous heritage to pass as White under the mestizaje rule.

Throughout the colonial period and even into more modern times, there were channels for mixed-race persons that would allow for them to pass as Spanish in both legal and informal realms. One such example of a legal changing of one's race (or standing) comes in the *gracias al sacar*, which allowed mixed-race, non-Catholic, or illegitimate persons of good social standing to petition the king of Spain to be recognized as White, legitimate, or Catholic. On a surface level, this presents another way in which the Spanish colonial systems are different from English systems, as mixed African and indigenous persons could petition (often successfully) under Spanish rule to be designated as white.<sup>72</sup> Yet although this process occurred during the colonial period (yet, rather infrequently), I do not think this explains how racial passing occurred in the Los Altos region, due to the fact that for many of the people who passed, they either looked White or had little enough non-European ancestry that would allow for their social standing to transcend their perceived inferiorities. Many of the people who purchased *gracias al sacar* were either *pardos* (brown-skinned, often pertaining to African ancestry) or were illegitimate-conditions that do not fit many people in the Los Altos region, and more specifically my own

---

<sup>72</sup> Twinam, *Public Lives Private Secrets*, 25.

family.<sup>73</sup> Although there were other methods to bump one's social and racial status in the colonial period, it seems to be that the people in the Los Altos region who came from mixed ancestry took advantage of their ability to pass as White and used their social standing (when applicable) to present themselves as Spanish citizens.

Another such way significant amounts of indigenous ancestry were able to creep into the Spanish populations of the Los Altos region came from the lack of correctly used caste descriptions when taking records. For instance, in a one year set of baptismal records, one would almost only find persons to be described 50% or 100% of something- rarely caste descriptions for 25% or 75% are present in the Los Altos region (with the only exception being for persons who were *Lobos*, which is 1/2 indigenous and 1/32 African). For children who are the offspring of one Mestizo parent and one Spanish parent, this meant that their indigenous ancestry is all of a sudden wiped away- revealing how for many persons who had Spanish caste designations, their ancestry was much more convoluted than this. Over time, this may have meant that through generations of breeding between "Spanish" persons, these people were anything but 100% Spanish. As being 30% or 40% indigenous would have likely been considered to be Spanish by the Los Altos standards of record keeping. Strict interpretations of caste designations would point to a more racially defined society in the Los Altos area, but ambiguously broad racial records allowed for large amounts of indigenous ancestry to slip into the Spanish populations of the Los Altos region.

Aside from the possibility of presenting as White, stereotyping also played a role in allowing people to pass as fully Spanish citizens. In México, being White is typically associated with being Catholic, taking on Spanish ideals (such as dress, speech, as well as culture), and

---

<sup>73</sup> Andrien, *The Human Tradition in Colonial Latin America*, loc 4428-4408.



being a legitimate born child.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, stereotypes about indigenous persons played on a perceived inferiority, and in a more general sense, the opposite of what it meant to be Spanish. Being illegitimate, poor, uneducated, non-Catholic, and restrictive of Spanish culture represent some of the dominant stereotypes about being of indigenous heritage.<sup>75</sup> My family, by and large, was able to meet the social criteria for being Spanish. This would have helped them pass and be perceived in the public as Spanish citizens; as my family has a long history of being legitimate, Catholic, and embracing of Spanish ways of life (as in how they are Catholic and take on Catholic names). The lengthy paper trail that follows my family's history undoubtedly helped their ability to pass, as their ability to cement themselves in the ideals and ways of Spanish stereotypes helped them propel their status.

Even though some people in the Los Altos region passed due to their inherited status from their ancestors, other people in the region used acts such as marriage as a way to accumulate status, wealth, and social mobility. One such example comes with Victoriano Olivares and María Refugia Gutiérrez. Upon their marriage, Victoriano was able to inherit land from Refugia's family. This is known due to the fact that his children were born on rancho El Tecolote, which is where Refugia's family comes from, meaning the land given to them came from Refugia's side.<sup>76</sup> More interestingly, even after his wife passed away at 38, Victoriano was able to keep the landholdings, and out of it, became a wealthy landowner.<sup>77</sup> Another example of marriage acting as a form of social mobility comes with María Rosalía De Anda and Rafael Muñoz, as Rosalía's sister was listed in her baptism as Mestiza, meaning that Rosalía would be a

---

<sup>74</sup> Twinam, *Public Lives Private Secrets*, 10.; O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*, 38.

<sup>75</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021);Twinam, *Public Lives Private Secrets*, 10.

<sup>76</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1854, 407);(San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1861, 476)

Victoriano was born at rancho San José de Olivares, which cements a passing of land from Refugia's side.

<sup>77</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

Mestiza as well.<sup>78</sup> Rafael had both African and Spanish ancestry in his family tree, yet was able to pass as Spanish. Their subsequent marriage afforded Rosalía's children the social mobility that she would not be able to provide. Her children were listed as Spanish, yet they were  $\frac{1}{4}$  indigenous,  $\frac{1}{4}$  African, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  Spanish.<sup>79</sup> The fact that they were labeled as Spanish in their baptismal records meant that they were afforded great social mobility, and that their perceived inferiority of having a mixed heritage would not hinder them. Both men and women benefited socially, as well as economically from marriage in the Los Altos region, as marriage became one way to give one's self wealth or social mobility in society.

One aspect that is unique to the Los Altos region that would have given more persons the ability to present as Spanish is the propensity of persons with above-average height in the region, and more specifically in my own family. Being tall would have helped persons in the area pass, as this would have been seen as an opposite to indigenous stereotypes, which portray the indigenous as short.<sup>80</sup> For example, my great-granduncle Manuel Márquez De La Torre stood around 6' 5" and his brother, José María Márquez De La Torre, stood around 6' 2".<sup>81</sup> This undoubtedly would have helped them pass, especially combined with the fact that they were both the sons of Don Refugio Márquez, and would have stood to inherit his titles as well as money.<sup>82</sup> Although height would be something that would be nearly impossible to track when going back hundreds of years, I believe, based on stereotypes that are present in México, that persons who

---

<sup>78</sup> (Lagos de Moreno Registros Parroquiales 1757, 198)

<sup>79</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1804, 227)

<sup>80</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

Although height may also just be an indication of wealth, as protein sources were often hard to come by for poorer persons, yet to this point, suggests how height could be seen as an opposite to stereotypes of indigenous persons.

<sup>81</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

The height of both of these individuals is backed up by oral history, and also from photos in my personal collection, which show both men as approximately around these heights of 6'5 and 6'2. See image 2 for visualization.

<sup>82</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

stood taller than average would have had a very easy time passing as Spanish; especially if they met the social criteria.

Even though racial records are often contradictory or nonsensical, it is also important to acknowledge how flawed it would be to even record race in México, regardless of the period. Here, it is important to note that the Spanish government's original desire of having racial categorizations would be flawed in itself, as many Spaniards had mixed ancestry even before coming to the New World, as Spain had migration from the Moors, Jews, North Africans, and Europeans; suggesting that even the most perceived pure blooded Spanish in the New World were likely a product of interracial relations. Similarly, cultural influences also had a significant role in identifying race, as once persons of non-European descent began to dress in Spanish garb, authorities struggled to identify their racial caste.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, racial categorizations were doomed to be flawed considering that they did not have access to the DNA and genealogical records we have access to today, meaning they would have to go off what they saw with their own eyes or knew about one's family. This led to many persons being judged based on their skin complexion in comparison to others, which would have drastically skewed how people would have looked at race.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, this could cause deep inaccuracies from the standpoint that if they are basing on skin tone, they may have great variance during certain parts of the year. This also increases the inaccuracy tremendously, as someone could present a phenotype more akin to being non-European, yet have more European ancestry than someone who looks European, but has more non-European blood than the said person who looks more non-European. The power the church and government had when making these designations were incredibly important to its citizens, as one were to all of a sudden fall out from favorable designation, one could potentially

---

<sup>83</sup> O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*, 38.

<sup>84</sup> Frederick, "Without Impediment," 497.; Nemser, "Toward a Genealogy of Mestizaje," 6.

lose status as well as standing. Inconsistencies such as subjectivity when guiding race in México show the ways in which race may be manipulated, how the racial caste system was a failure, how difficult it is to truly track someone's race during the colonial, and post colonial periods of México.

One such inconsistency is presented in the Muñoz family, where the children were given different racial designations from each other. My research has revealed that the Muñoz's had five children, and of these, four of the baptisms are available to access. Three of the children had caste designations of "Spanish", yet the third oldest is listed as "*Mulatto libre*" (free person of mixed African and Spanish descent).<sup>85</sup> Although this may pose a question of the overall accuracy about the listed racial designations to persons who have family with Spanish ancestry, I would argue the alternative, as stories such as this reflect how the private, rather than the public sphere, looked at race. As it is far more likely that the three siblings were mislabeled as Spanish rather than having one of the daughters mislabeled as Mulatto; as no truly Spanish person would have allowed for such a mistake to happen, considering that this was in the late eighteenth century and social ramifications were larger, as well as the fact that African slavery was still present. Although the few inconsistencies that hint at a genealogy of mestizaje are often seen as they are mistakes, I am arguing to the contrary, and that it would be highly unlikely for a person who believes themselves to be fully Spanish to accept a lower caste designation for any reason.

Although there were huge social and economic barriers for persons of non-European descent, not every person needed to pass as Spanish to achieve political, economic, and social success, especially after the post-colonial period. One such example of a successful person who did not need to pass as White is former Mexican president Porfirio Díaz, who was a *coyote* ( $\frac{3}{4}$

---

<sup>85</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1776, 151);(San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1771, 375);(San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1784, 640)

indigenous and ¼ Spanish).<sup>86</sup> President Vicente Guerrero is an even more compelling example as he came from both African and indigenous ancestry. This meant México had its first African president some 179 years before the United States, during a time where Africans were still enslaved in the United States as well as México. Similar examples of success occur in the Los Altos region, with Victoriano Olivares and María Refugia Gutiérrez being the best examples, as they both have recorded non-European ancestry in their familial history, yet came from land-owning families.<sup>87</sup> This evidence points to a society in which race only mattered sometimes (especially in the post-colonial period, where a mestizaje society truly takes shape). Following the end of Spanish colonization, México largely did away with racial categorizations, which helped blend Mexican citizens toward a genealogy of mestizaje, as being Mexican started to become more important than one's claim to European ancestry.<sup>88</sup> This evidence comes to show how México, despite its racist social conditions, has facilitated examples of social and economic mobility for persons of mixed ancestry; and reveals how for some persons in México, passing was not necessary as they were able to transcend their perceived inequities under post-colonial rule.

Although the change brought on during the post-colonial period allowed for some people of mixed ancestry to have upward mobility, I also believe this acceptance helps explain how some of the racial inconsistencies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries formed. One such example is my grandfather's baptism, which reveals his mother to be Mestiza.<sup>89</sup>

Although some may argue that this is a mistake seeing the long familial history of Spanish

---

<sup>86</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 230.

<sup>87</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1784, 640);(San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1810, 390)

Victoriano Olivares had both African as well as indigenous ancestry in his past, whereas Refugia only had listed indigenous ancestry. Both of their births came after the colonization period, so none of their records list their race, although we can track their familial history and see their mixed heritage.

<sup>88</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 163.

<sup>89</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935)

ancestry, I would argue the contrary; as the end of the colonial period and subsequent movement towards a Mestizaje collective allowed for such inconsistencies, as the social ramifications of being labeled as Mestiza would have been severely less in 1935 in comparison to anytime before Mexican independence. Even though my family as well as presidents Guerrero and Díaz present a more positive take on the progression of socio-economic opportunity in México, it is still important to recognize that these people are superseding their social limits. These examples of non-Europeans finding success in México does not take away from the fact that race relations were poor in México. Even the name *limpieza de sangre* even highlights the perceived dirtiness and inferiority of the non-Spanish. The need for persons of non-European descent to pass (in some cases) as White to evade prejudice in order to increase their economic and social standing represent in itself, the type of discrimination that was present during the colonial as well as post-colonial period. Despite some examples of minorities achieving success, Mexican society was biased towards Europeanism (in a cultural, linguistic, as well a religious sense). My family presents an exception, rather than a commonality of the Mexican caste system. They represent an alternative toward such prejudice, and highlight broader insight into significance of their socio-economic opportunities in how they were able to mitigate an oppressive system under the parameters of their society.

In comparison to the United States, all that was able to be accomplished by these mixed-race Mexicans is extremely significant when considering what type of treatment non-Europeans were facing during the same time in the United States. The fact that descendants of African and indigenous persons were able to attain significant social mobility in a time where slavery of Africans, as well as Native Americans, was occurring. As previously noted, México by 1829 had already had its first African descended president with Vicente Guerrero, who also

ended slavery in México with the Guerrero decree in 1829. Comparatively, strict one drop laws in the United States made it so that abolitionists used stenographs showing White-passing African slaves to create a movement for their cause.<sup>90</sup> In comparison to wealthy mixed-race persons in México, wealthy minorities, in particular African-Americans, could not use money to hide from prejudice. One such example comes from a wealthy African-American named Lola Houck, who sued the Southern Pacific Railway due to her denial of first class due to her race (even despite the fact that she paid for the first class ticket).<sup>91</sup> In America, minority groups could never hide from their ethnic heritage, no matter how much wealth or status they accrued. This is an extreme alternative to México, where people who could pass as Spanish would be afforded to do so. In México, the fact that people of similar heritages to Lola Houck were able to reach the pinnacle of government reveal the ways in which México viewed race differently than the United States. As in México, race was more about status and wealth, whereas in the United States it was based more on how one's phenotype presented. Even as a seemingly rigid racial caste system seemed to enact control over how race was viewed in México, the caste system in place was a highly malleable system and led to persons with non-Spanish ancestry to supersede the caste system as a whole.

### **Bias through the Sistemas de Castas**

Despite the fact that the racial caste system had strictly defined caste designations, the implementation of this proved to be much of the opposite, and many persons were able to pass or were given incorrect racial designations. Going through the records of colonial as well as postcolonial México highlights a more looming question: how do these people define race and what is different about México in this regard? In México, race was something that was not

---

<sup>90</sup> (United States Library of Congress 1864)

<sup>91</sup> Karl Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave who Became a Mexican Millionaire*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 57.

deeply analyzed. Evidence towards this comes in the lack of consistent and thorough researching of racial records. For instance, a baptismal record may list a person as Mestizo but will fail to mention which (or both) parents have indigenous ancestry, as well as failing to mention the race of the child's grandparents. This meant that the racial background of close relatives, such as grandparents, could be erased easily, as they were not recorded and put with importance. Persons who had mixed-ancestry and could pass as a lighter designation would be able to do so, as recordkeeping did not revolve around a thorough record search. The lack of comprehensive racial records made the accuracy of race in México more questionable, as Alteños would have been afforded more of an ability to pass due to a lack of comprehensive record searching.

Although we already know that a person being designated "Spanish" does not necessarily mean that they are fully Spanish, it is also important to highlight how contradictory a statement that is considering Spain's history. Spain itself is a place that has enjoyed great ethnic diversity over the past thousand plus years; as migration from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa has made it incredibly ethnically diverse, with the potential for more diversity with the introduction of indigenous persons in the New World. In this sense, these Spanish persons may be White, but in comparison to whom? The answer lies in Mexico's mestizaje society, the only place where Spanish persons can pass as White. Being Spanish in of itself is synonymous with being mixed, as Jewish, Moorish, and European influences are rich throughout Spain's history. Comparing two groups of mestizaje people (in Spain and México) to being White in itself proved to be a task that would be met with failure. The failure to accurately compare even Spainards reveals some of the deep flaws of the *sistema de castas* (caste system), as being Spanish is the product of many ethnicities.



Although societal repression would make it seem as if interracial relationships were uncommon, and met out of no necessity whatsoever, interracial relationships helped lay down the foundation of how generations of mixed-race persons in the Los Altos region were able to attain belongings such as land. In the Los Altos society, it was easier for women of non-European descent to marry someone of full Spanish descent; as low Spanish populations across the colonial period helped reveal a growing need for indigenous spouses.<sup>92</sup> This meant that for Spanish men, finding a pureblooded Spanish wife would have been hard, especially considering how early Spanish migration was dominated by male immigrants.<sup>93</sup> Yet, these men needed someone to create a future with, as well as someone to help with daily tasks such as cooking and collecting water, which helps explain how mixed-race marriages in the early period came about- due to necessity rather than luxury. This necessity of marriage helps show how México became a mestizaje society; as it was a great advantage for citizens of México to come together in marriage, regardless of race, in order to sustain their livelihood. Inheritance through male lines meant that early male Spanish settlers who were granted land from Spain were able to pass their land holdings to their children despite the race of the children. For people who are of mixed ancestry whose family owned land during the colonial and early post-colonial period, their paternal lines would likely run back to Spain (as land inheritance mostly flowed through paternal lines).<sup>94</sup> Maternal lines would be more likely to show some sort of eventual non-European ancestry, mostly due to low populations of Spanish women.<sup>95</sup> Over time, these hacienda grants from Spain would have been divided up by their descendants, producing *ranchos* (ranches) that

---

<sup>92</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 50.

<sup>93</sup> Cristóbal Bermúdez Plata, Luis Romera Iruela, María del Carmen Galbis Díez, *Catálogo de pasajeros a Indias durante los siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII* (Sevilla, Spain: Imprenta editorial de la Gavidia, 1940), 1-404.

<sup>94</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

Although it was not always the case, most families in the Los Altos region passed their land to their sons. Often, men could inherit land from their maternal grandparents (as my grandfather did) if there were no heirs.

<sup>95</sup> Bermúdez Plata, Romera Iruela, Galbis Díez, *Catálogo de pasajeros a Indias*, 404.

would have been passed on to these *hacendero's* (hacienda owner, large farm owner) mixed-race children. This is similar to what is seen in the Los Altos region, as it is scattered with many small ranches across the region, many of which have been in the same family for 300 years. The presentation of mixed-race ownership in the Los Altos region is not one that was done in subversion or through unusual means. As the children who were products of interracial marriage were able to have their parent's wealth passed on in similar fashion to how the wealthy Spanish elite of the past did to their children.

One aspect that likely had a significant impact on racial categorizations was not one's actual ethnic heritage, but rather the color of one's skin. More specifically, this would have meant that skin tone would have been compared subjectively to persons in the near vicinity of the record-keeping.<sup>96</sup> This meant that if one could look Spanish in comparison to others in the Los Altos region, they could pass, which highlights how being Spanish was more of a comparison to others rather than an ethnicity. We find evidence of this variance in the Los Altos region when looking at baptismal records between siblings, as a variance of racial categorization likely indicates that the caste system was based solely on the phenotype of a person.<sup>97</sup> This basing of race on skin tone may also account for the malleability seen in racial categorizations, as skin color would have shifted throughout the year, meaning a person could be possibly seen as a different racial group in summer than in winter. Similarly, class discrepancies would have attributed to this, as persons with higher economic status, such as merchants and landowners, would have been able to avoid the harsh Jalisco sun and may have been afforded a lighter complexion; thus allowing them to be more likely to get Spanish racial designation in comparison to those who labor in the hot sun all day. Skin tone likely played a large role in how

---

<sup>96</sup> Frederick, "Without Impediment," 497.

<sup>97</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1776, 151);(San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1784, 640)

record keepers looked at race as variations of race over time and siblings highlight the subjectivity of record-keeping.

It is also important to point out how race was a malleable definition in México, as my family is one great example of this malleability of race in México. Historical examples give evidence towards this as the *gracias al sacar* program highlighted how there was a conceited approval by the highest-ranking people in all of Spain to endorse the changing of racial designations for persons deemed worthy enough. Yet in my family's history, the malleability did not come through top-level legislative overruling, but rather through the subjective eye of the record keeper. As seen in the baptism of my grandfather José Manuel, the designation of his mother as *mestiza* highlights a change from previous (and future) racial designations given to her that have her listed as "white".<sup>98</sup> Examples from my own family highlight the large scale malleability of race in México, which was a concept that has been around for hundreds of years, but under different pathways; highlighting how a person's racial standing at birth did not define them, as the possible upward mobility gave hope of better social standing for many persons of non-European descent.

### **Why racial purity in the Los Altos region is Impossible**

As México moved toward being a country of *mestizaje*, it also sought to remove previous markers of race, including markers that went beyond genealogy and phenotype. This idea of cultural and ethnic *mestizaje* took hold of nearly every aspect of Mexican life. Dressing in Spanish garb, eating Aztec food, embracing Catholicism, producing legitimate children (in the eyes of the Catholic church), speaking Spanish, embracing mercantile capitalism, and interracial relations stand as some of the significant aspects that show this *mestizaje*. This shows how México's indigenous culture, as well as its indigenous race, merged with Spanish culture and

---

<sup>98</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935);(San Miguel el Alto Civil Registrar 1947, 19)

race. The result of this mixing made it more complicated to designate race. Nearly everyone could do something that would be seen as a piece of indigenous culture, but one could also present aspects of Spanish culture as well. For example, someone may present as Spanish- dress in Spanish garb, speak Spanish, and be Catholic, yet may eat tamales as well as drink pulque (which both come from indigenous traditions and cuisine). Sometimes, mestizaje resulted not in the mixing of both cultures, but rather the embracing of different aspects. This is most easily exemplified in how Spanish could dominate Mexican linguistics, yet much of the Mexican food has its roots in indigenous traditions. As México moved further from the original conquest of México, it shifted more and more towards a country that resembled mestizaje in nearly every way. With time, old markers of difference between the castes began to fade as differences of phenotype, dress, language, religion, architecture, cuisine, and culture began to morph into a mestizaje collective.

In order to defend one's perception of pure European ancestry, some believers in the Alteño's pure European genealogy refer back to the frequency of cousin marriage in the Los Altos region as reasoning why they are 100% European- but in reality, this gives evidence to the contrary.<sup>99</sup> One point here is true: cousin marriage is a common practice in the Los Altos region. This is something seen in my own family and many of the baptisms spanning hundreds of years. It is quite common to see persons who have parents with the same last names (which often, in the less populated Los Altos region, means that they are of some kinship) with some Alteños even having all four grandparents with the same last name. For my family, similar instances are shown throughout. Three of my great-grandparents have the last name, Márquez, and similar patterns of familial dominance occur throughout my extended family tree. These familial connections are important when deciphering the genealogy. As if someone marries someone who has some

---

<sup>99</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

non-European ancestry and that person is a close relative, it is almost certain that they will have some indigenous ancestry themselves, regardless of what their genealogy or caste designation says. For example, my great-grandparents José Jesús Márquez De La Torre and María Refugia Márquez De La Torre were (going back up to seven generations) second cousins, second cousins once removed twice, third cousins seven times, and third cousins once removed. This close relation means, without any certainty, that because my great grandmother Refugia had half indigenous ancestry, her husband Jesús must have had some significant (although possibly significantly less) indigenous ancestry. Even more to the point, my great-grandmother María Refugia Márquez De La Torre and my great-grandfather Salomé Olivares Gutiérrez were also first cousins once removed on their Márquez line, more evidence that there is non-European ancestry on more than one side of my familial tree, despite none of these Márquez ancestors (aside from my great-grandmother Refugia Márquez De La Torre) having listed non-European ancestry. Although some people in the Los Altos region use cousin marriage as reasoning why they are 100% European, we can also apply the same logic to prove the contrary, as any significant indigenous ancestry on one side of the family tree is likely to be present on the other side of the familial tree.

Arguments for pure European ancestry in the Los Altos region are also easily seen to be flawed with statistics, as it would be nearly statistically impossible for the perceived Spanish of the Los Altos region to be of pure Spanish (or even European) ancestry. One historical model projects the European population in México at 6,644 (of 3.38 million) in 1570, 13,780 (of 1.71 million) in 1646, 9,814 (of 2.48 million) in 1742, and 7,904 (of 2.7 million) in 1793.<sup>100</sup> In percentage terms, the European population represented .2% of the population in 1570, .8% of the

---

<sup>100</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 50.

population in 1646, .4% of the population in 1742, and .3% of the population in 1793.<sup>101</sup> These statistics reveal how much of a minority Europeans were in México, despite their influence over religion, wealth, and politics. It would be nearly impossible for these few thousand Europeans to be the sole representatives of the Alteños. This is also due in part to the fact that there are other areas of México that have some significant European ancestry aside from the Los Altos region. Parts of Northern México, as well as the wealthy elite in México City, are regarded as some of these groups.<sup>102</sup> These other European populations also highlight the lack of ability for the Alteños to be fully European, as these few thousand Europeans would have been spread across México, meaning that although the Los Altos region may have significant European ancestry, it does not make it the only ethnicity in its region. Low populations of Europeans in México shed light on an unknown truth to many who claim full ancestry- that the math does not fit, and it is a fact that they are mixed, no matter how they look or what their family history tells them.

Table 1: Baptismal caste designations for San Juan de los Lagos, 1727<sup>103</sup>

Caste:	Español(a)	Indio(a)	Mestizo(a)	Mulatto(a)	Lobo(a)	Convos de Hija
Number:	65	65	47	27	2	1
Percent:	31.4%	31.4%	22.7%	13%	1	.5

<sup>101</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 50.

<sup>102</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

<sup>103</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1727)

Table 2: Baptismal caste designations of San Juan de los Lagos from January 1st, 1801- June 3rd, 1801<sup>104</sup>

Caste:	Español(a)	Indio(a)	Mestizo(a)	Mulatto(a)	Lobo(a)	<i>Exposita</i> (abandoned-Race Unknown)
Number:	83	59	30	16	7	1
Percent:	43%	30%	15%	8%	4%	1%

Table 3: Non-European heritage in comparison European heritage in San Juan de los Lagos for the years 1727 and 1801<sup>105</sup>

	1727	1801
Full European heritage (Españoles)	32%	42.3%
Mixed and Non-European heritage (Indios, Mestizos, Lobos, and Mulattos)	68%	57.7%

A deeper dive into the baptismal records of San Juan de los Lagos presents more evidence towards contradicting popular narratives of pure European ancestry in the area, as the majority across nearly one hundred years stood with persons with at least half non-European ancestry. Similarly, arguments for racial passing are supported by Tables 1 and 2, as in the 74 years between the two records, the Spanish population had increased by over 10%, despite negligible populations of Spanish persons in México, and little immigration in comparison to non-European populations.<sup>106</sup> This builds toward an argument of passing, as over time more and

<sup>104</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1801)

<sup>105</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1727);(San Juan de los Lagos Registros Parroquiales 1801)

<sup>106</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 50.; Bermúdez Plata, Romera Iruela, Galbis Díez, *Catálogo de pasajeros a Indias*, 1-404.

more people were able to pass as White in this region, likely due in part to social reinforcement through intermarriage and the acquisition of perceived Spanish traits by persons of mixed heritage. This also suggests a new envisionment of what it meant to be Spanish, as the increasing populations of Spaniards likely mean that many Castizos and Harnizos were able to pass as Spanish, thus giving new meaning to the term. It is also of note to take record of the lone exposita of these tables as it represents how race was very much based on a presentation of oneself in the public sphere, due to the fact that this baby was not given a racial categorization. This child could not be given a race because society could not judge the status of its parents, its genealogy, the color of its ancestor's skin, or its social status, thus revealing some of the flaws of the caste system. Contrary to more popular claims about the Los Altos region being 100% pure European, I would argue that this is not possible. As baptismal records show that this region has had long-standing populations of non-European persons, which would dismiss any stereotyping about racial purity in the region.

For some people, baptismal records indicating that the Alteños are of Spanish descent is enough for them to believe that these people are truly pure-blooded Spaniards. Yet for my family, there is little significance in these records; as all but a handful of records cite pure Spanish ancestry despite the statistical improbability of this and also the fact that my great-grandmother was Mestiza.<sup>107</sup> Moreso, my family has been in México since the sixteenth century, meaning that marriage with persons of indigenous descent in the last 400 plus years is all but a certainty. Yet my family is not the only one that has been in México for so long. Many of the residents of the Los Altos region have roots in México that place them in the Altos region going back to the early seventeenth century, meaning that their European ancestors likely came in the mid sixteenth century to México. For someone born in 2000, this likely means that they would go back about

---

<sup>107</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935)



14 generations to find their European-born ancestors (assuming one generation every 25 years). This would leave the same person born in 2000 with 131,070 ancestors, yet Historian Phillip Russel estimates that there were only 6,644 Europeans in México in 1570.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, migration to the New World (in general) in the early sixteenth century was quite low, which backs up Russel's claims, as migration from 1509 to 1538 only lists 5,620 immigrants from Spain (for a yearly average of only 194 migrants a year).<sup>109</sup> The belief that these few Spaniards fathered the Los Altos region as we know it is false. As for people who have been in México dating back to the sixteenth century, it is nearly impossible for them to not have some non-Spanish ancestry in their lineage.

Furthermore, I am arguing that there is a larger significance to these points I have made, as there is great significance in how my family has a mixed heritage, yet offers phenotypes that are associated with European ancestry. The fact that my family had people who were well above six feet tall, had colored eyes, and other perceived markings of European ancestry reveals how often, people cannot judge someone based on how they look.<sup>110</sup> There is a larger theme that can be taken out from this, in how judgment based solely on one's skin color or phenotype fails to be a conducive marker of one's true ethnic heritage.

Despite the broad inaccuracies of the racial caste system that may point to potential flaws in my methodology, and the fact that there are few records that give mixed ancestry to my ancestors, I would take the bounds of evidence that indicate that my family had an indigenous past to be correct representations of my family's true identity. In this case, I would argue how there would be no significance for someone such as my great-grandmother, who was able to pass as White in many records, to all of a sudden be recorded as Mestiza; especially considering the

---

<sup>108</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 50.

<sup>109</sup> Bermúdez Plata, Romera Iruela, Galbis Díez, *Catálogo de pasajeros a Indias*, 404.

<sup>110</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

social benefit she would have had for being able to pass as Spanish.<sup>111</sup> When comparing to potential alternatives, it is important to consider the low probability of the records listing my great-grandmother as White to be correct, as it is far more likely that her family was able to pass for many generations, and that the 1935 baptismal record for my grandfather was a representation of her true heritage. As seen through statistical evidence from Russel citing low populations of Spanish persons in México, it is nearly impossible that pure Spanish ancestry would have been present in my family considering how long they have been in México.<sup>112</sup> More to the point, if my great-grandmother was of Spanish descent, why would she have allowed for someone to designate her as Mestiza in her son's baptism if she felt that she was not?<sup>113</sup> Think of the reverse, if one was of Mestizo descent (and knew it), would they not have any problem being designated as Spanish, especially considering the societal benefit for having this caste? More than anything, people were looking to improve their caste, and given the opportunity, people would have taken any whitening to their caste.<sup>114</sup>

Answering why these Alteños sought to pass as White for tens of generations lies in the Alteños' strong preference towards Europeanness. One such example comes in physical descriptions, as brown hair is considered blonde.<sup>115</sup> This reveals that a more broad emphasis is placed on aspects that are perceived to be European, especially pertaining to phenotype, as Alteños seek to stretch this at times. Similarly, beauty in the region emphasizes perceived

---

<sup>111</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935) (San Juan de los Lagos Civil Registrar 1880, 129) (San Miguel el Alto Civil Registrar 1947, 19)

<sup>112</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 50.

<sup>113</sup> (San Juan de los Lagos Registro Civil 1935)

<sup>114</sup> Russel, *The History of México*, 37,95.

<sup>115</sup> "Las Mujeres más Bellas del Mundo Están en Los Altos de Jalisco," La Brecha, last modified July 26, 2013, <https://labrecha.me/?p=17243>.(Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

The fact that brown hair is called blonde also indicates a great likelihood that there are no true blondes in the Los Altos region. The fact that there are likely no true blondes in the Los Altos region also sheds light to its mestizaje genealogy, as if these people were as blonde and European as they claim, they would not need to re-define things such as what it means to have blonde hair if they had these perceived markings of European ancestry.

European phenotypes- lighter skin, colored eyes, slender builds, light hair, and height; even today, beauty pageants place great emphasis on physical traits such as eye color.<sup>116</sup> The deep emphasis placed on Europeanness in the Los Altos region helps show how intertwined this society feels with its European past, and how this area has sought to bury any aspects of indigeneity in the Los Altos region.

With this uplifting of Europeanness, the shared indigenous past of all Alteños has almost been made invisible. Features such as town centers revolving around basilicas, Spanish language predominance, the dominance of Spanish names, and the mass adoption of Catholicism (which has helped to nearly destroy indigenous religions) stand as some examples of how European dominance made its indigenous history invisible. As with this influx of Spanish culture into the Los Altos society, the indigenous aspects of society are pushed out, even to the point where cities in the Los Altos region consider the founding of the city not when it was founded by indigenous Mexicans, but rather when it was founded by the Spanish.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, European culture and traditions grew to prominence in the Los Altos region by way of pushing out its rich indigenous culture. One example can be seen in its charro culture, to which its roots are in Spanish bullfighting. Another example would be the Europeanizing of the indigenous drink of pulque, thus turning it into tequila, and giving another example of how Spanish dominance permeated nearly every aspect of Mexican life. Arguably most significant of the aforementioned changes in Mexican society following the conquest is the adoption of Catholicism, which made México's leadership and history White. Catholic citizens now looked towards stories of European saints as their history; and a White pope for their leader in comparison to previous forms of leadership as well as religion under indigenous rule. Even activities such as naming began to ignore an

---

<sup>116</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

<sup>117</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

indigenous past, as Alteños would take on Spanish last names, erasing the long indigenous history that preceded them. All of this comes with more broad significance when considering how often first and last names are passed from generation to generation, and the Hispanicizing of indigenous names meant the erasing of a part of their history. In this sense, for many Alteños, the only remnants of their indigenous past remain in their blood, as their DNA offers a physically invisible last remnant of the once predominant society and culture.

Even as popular culture promotes the Los Altos region of Jalisco as an area sheltered from indigeneity- both in culture and in genealogy, I have argued that could not be further from the truth. The Los Altos region during the period of 1720-1950 became an area where many people who had indigenous ancestry were able to mitigate it by passing as ethnic Spanish persons if they had the perceived social and economic perceptions of being Spanish (Thus owning land and having titles such as “Don”). The extreme inaccuracy of racial records meant that not only did people pass, but that race was malleable, and that race was more based on factors such as socio-economics rather than one’s genealogy. In this, I have built upon Twiniam’s ideal of public and private spheres and expanded it to regard not only to legitimacy, but also to race, as dual presentations of Alteños meant that one may be a Spanish Don on a baptismal record, but in reality could be Mestizo (thus invalidating the term of Don, which was traditionally conferred only to Spanish persons). Examples of marriage and the lack of quarter racial designations stand as some of the ways in which Alteños manipulated this malleable system to their benefit. My evidence of racial passing presents itself in more broad significance when comparing the treatment of non-Europeans across the United States, where they faced extreme hardship and prejudice. As México under its mestizaje society meant that everyone, not

just everyone except the Alteños, has mixed ancestry and culture whether they choose to embrace it or not.

What we see in the Los Altos region is an example of how racial definitions have changed over the years. I am arguing that after Mexican independence, definitions of race began to change as México truly became a mestizaje society with the disconnection from Spain following its independence. This meant that after Mexican independence, the new Spanish persons were not 100% Spanish, but rather 20%, 30%, or 40% non-European, in essence the people who could pass as Spanish were the new Spanish- not people who were actually 100% Spanish. Now, definitions of castes such as Mestizo would have meant that to be considered Mestizo one would likely be closer to 55% to 60% indigenous based on new definitions of ethnic Spanish purity, as the pushing of Spanish to be 20%, 30%, or 40% indigenous would mean the other castes would have shifted in a similar fashion. This means that for persons who have been in México as long as my family has (that being for over four hundred years) to claim to not have any indigenous ancestry is ignorant at the least, and at worst give evidence to the deep prejudice that has affected the Los Altos population.

*Nopal en la frente* (cactus in the front) typically refers to persons of indigenous descent who ignore their indigenous history and uphold a claim of Spanish ancestry despite presenting as visibly indigenous.<sup>118</sup> This is also in reference to a blindness- which stems from having a *nopal* (cactus) in front of one's eyes, causing a blindness of their ethnic history. The idea here is that the cactus in front of one's face blinds them from the truth, as when they look into a mirror, their true reflection is hidden by the cactus in the front. Despite the fact that many Alteños have colored

---

<sup>118</sup> (Hector Márquez Olivares, Oral communication, May 9, 2021)

*Nopal en la frente* is also an illusion to people viewing persons who have *nopal en la frente* as people who hate themselves, as they cannot bring themselves to accept the fact that they, despite however they look, have non-European ancestry in their family lines.

eyes, light skin, and stand remarkably tall, I am re-appropriating this terminology to define the blindness that clouds some white-passing Alteños who ignore their indigenous (and in some cases, African) ancestry. The fact that the history of the Los Altos region ties them more similarly to the mestizaje collective of México is not a stain on the region, but rather a way in which this area can embrace their non-European past despite their strong European cultural and ethnic presentations; and jump further into the mestizaje collective of México.

Image 1: Modelas Alteñas (models from Los Altos)<sup>119</sup>



---

<sup>119</sup> “Bella Señorita Valle de Guadalupe Conociendo a las Reinas Alteñas,” Cyber Space and Time, August 5, 2020, <http://cyberspaceandtime.com/36aRnG4BoFl.video+related>.

Image 2: (L to R) Manuel Márquez De La Torre, José María Márquez De La Torre, José Jesús Márquez De La Torre (my great-grandfather)<sup>120</sup>



---

<sup>120</sup> Unknown Artist, *Photo of the Márquez Brothers Manuel, Chema, and Jesús*, circa 1920, Personal Collection.



**Primary Sources:**

De Las Casas, Bartolomé. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. Translated by Nigel Griffin. London, UK: Penguin Books, 1992.

Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. *The Conquest of New Spain*. Translated by J.M. Cohen. London, UK: Penguin Books, 1963.

Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1757. Baptismos hijos legítimos 1754-1764, Nacimiento de Andrea De Anda Ramires. Pagina 198. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-VPL2-S?i=190&wc=3JCB-6TL%3A172124201%2C172124202%2C172337701%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>.

Márquez Olivares, Hector. 2021. Oral communication May 9, 2021.

San Miguel el Alto, Jalisco, Civil Registrar. 1947. Matrimonio de Daniel De la Torre y Antonia Márquez. Pagina 19. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9PG6-244?i=911&cc=1918187>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registro Civil Registrar. 1880. Matrimonio de Francisco Márquez y Rosalía De La Torre. Página 129. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GPXN-97NH?i=128&cc=1918187>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registro Civil Registrar. 1897. Nacimientos 1897, Nacimiento de María Refugio Márquez De La Torre. Numero 412. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GPNY-43P?i=157&cc=1918187&personaUrl=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AQQ7S-D4WK>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registro Civil Registrar. 1912. Matrimonio de José Jesús Márquez De La Torre y María Refugia Márquez De La Torre. Página 82. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GPKF-9M1B?i=322&cc=1918187>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Dirección General del Registro Civil. 1935. Acta de

Nacimiento de José Manuel Márquez Márquez Acta 769. Personal Collection.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1727. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1710-1737, Baptismos for the year 1727. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903>

/3:1:9392-VRSM-YF?wc=3JZX-FM9%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172468102&cc=1874591.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1768. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1765-1774, Nacimiento de Manuel Alberto Muñoz Olivares. Número 159.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V2QZ-3?i=158&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1771. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1765-1774, Nacimiento de María Rafaela Muñoz Olivares. Número 375. [https://](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V2SQ-J?i=374&wc=3JC8-MNG%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172584401%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591)

[www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V2SQ-J?i=374&wc=3JC8-MNG%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172584401%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V2SQ-J?i=374&wc=3JC8-MNG%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172584401%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591).

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1776. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1774-1784, Nacimiento de María Petronila Muñoz Olivares. Número 151.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V29Z-YT?i=150&wc=3JC6-T3D%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172609001%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1784. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1774-1784, Nacimiento de María Felipa Muñoz Olivares. Número 640.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V29D-NS?i=639&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1796. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1793-1800, Nacimiento de María Apolonia De Anda. Número 157.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-K3NY-D?i=156&wc=3J8G-SP8%3A>

172468101%2C171934802%2C172661301%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-K3XC-P?i=340&wc=3J8G-SP8%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172661301%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1798. Baptismos hijos legítimos 1793-1800, Baptismo de José Eusebio de la Trinidad Magaña. Número 341.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-K3XC-P?i=340&wc=3J8G-SP8%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172661301%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1800. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1793-1800, Baptismos for the year 1800. Numero 459. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-K367-T?i=458&wc=3J8G-SP8%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172661301%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1801. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1801-1809, Baptismos for the year 1801. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V1SC-RZ?wc=3J84-PTL%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172679301&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1804. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1801-1809, Baptismo de María Josefa Ygnacia Muñoz de Anda. Número 227. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V1S7-P4?i=226&wc=3J84-PTL%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172679301%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1807. Baptismos hijos legítimos

1801-1809, Nacimiento de José Bruno Gutiérrez Gutiérrez. Número 502. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V1SH-KR?i=447&wc=3J84-PTL%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172679301%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1810. Bautismos hijos legítimos  
1809-1816, Nacimiento de María Anastacia Gonzales Ybarra. Numero 390.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-VG9B-9T?i=62&wc=3JCT-DPD%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172704301%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1854. Bautismos hijos legítimos  
1852-1855, Bautismo de Victoriano Olivares Magaña. Página 407.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-VGSM-CZ?wc=3JCT-VZ9%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172923101%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591>.

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1861. Bautismos hijos legítimos  
1857-1861, Bautismo de María Refugia Gutiérrez Márquez, Pagina 476. [https://www.](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-G5QX-X1?wc=3J66-MNL%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172985701%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591)

[familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-G5QX-X1?wc=3J66-MNL%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172985701%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-G5QX-X1?wc=3J66-MNL%3A172468101%2C171934802%2C172985701%3Fcc%3D1874591&cc=1874591).

San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Registros Parroquiales. 1935. Bautismos hijos legítimos  
1934-1936, Bautismo de José Manuel Márquez Márquez. Página 621. [https://](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V134-K?from=lynx1UIV8&treeref=G3DG-MRZ&i=369)

[www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V134-K?from=lynx1UIV8&treeref=G3DG-MRZ&i=369](https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:9392-V134-K?from=lynx1UIV8&treeref=G3DG-MRZ&i=369).

United States Library of Congress. 1864. "Learning is wealth. Wilson, Charley, Rebecca, and Rosa. Slaves from New Orleans / Chas. Paxson, photographer, New York." Library of Congress Photo, Print, Drawings. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010647859/>.

Unknown Artist. *Photo of the Márquez Brothers Manuel, Jesús, and Chema*. circa 1920.

Personal Collection.

## Secondary Sources:

- Andrien, Kenneth J. *The Human Tradition in Colonial Latin America*. 2nd ed. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2013.
- Baskes, Jeremy. *Indians, Merchants, and Markets: A Reinterpretation of the Repartimiento and Spanish-Indian Economic Relations in Colonial Oaxaca, 1750–1821*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Bermúdez Plata, Cristóbal, Luis Romera Iruela, María del Carmen Galbis Díez. *Catálogo de pasajeros a Indias durante los siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII*. Sevilla, Spain: Imprenta editorial de la Gavidia, 1940.
- Curley, Robert. *Citizens and Believers: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Jalisco, 1900-1930*. Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2018.
- Cyber Space and Time. “Bella Señorita Valle de Guadalupe Conociendo a las Reinas Alteñas.” August 5, 2020. <http://cyberspaceandtime.com/36aRnG4BofI.video+related>.
- Frederick, Jake. “Without Impediment: Crossing Racial Boundaries in Colonial México.” *The Americas* 67, no. 4 (April 2011): 495-515. <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/stable/pdf/41239107.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8e7fcf39654538f58aa92bef47c05e14>.
- Hackel, Stephen W. *Children of Coyote, Missions of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Jacoby, Karl. *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave who Became a Mexican Millionaire*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2016.
- Johnson, Susan Lee. *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush*. New

- York: W.W. Norton, 2000.
- Johnson, Lyman and Lipsett-Rivera Sonya. *The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America*. Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 1998.
- La Brecha. "Las Mujeres más Bellas del Mundo Están en Los Altos de Jalisco." July 26, 2013. <https://labrecha.me/?p=17243>.
- LaFevor, David C. *Prizefighting and Civilization: A Cultural History of Boxing, Race, and Masculinity in México and Cuba, 1840-1940*. Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2020.
- Magliari, Michael. "Free State Slavery: Bound Indian Labor and Slave Trafficking in California's Sacramento Valley, 1850-1864." *Pacific Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (May 2012): 155-192.
- Nemser, Daniel Joseph. "Toward a Genealogy of Mestizaje: Rethinking Race in Colonial México." PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011. [https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Nemser\\_berkeley\\_0028E\\_11452.pdf](https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Nemser_berkeley_0028E_11452.pdf).
- O'Hara, Matthew D. *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion and Politics in México*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
- Pascoe, Peggy. *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Russel, Phillip L. *The History of México: From Pre-Conquest to Present*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Twinam, Ann. *Public Lives Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Wasserman, Mark. *Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth Century México: Men, Women*

*and War*. Albuquerque: University of New México Press, 2000.

Wikipedia. 2021. "Los Altos de Jalisco." Wikimedia Foundation. Last modified June 6, 2021.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los\\_Altos\\_de\\_Jalisco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Altos_de_Jalisco).