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Dispossession, Assimilation, and the Image of the Indian in Late-Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting

By Stacie G. Widdifield



Fig. 1 Anonymous, *Castes*, 18th century, oil on canvas, 58 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 40 $\frac{15}{16}$ inches. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Mexico City.

The Spanish conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century dispossessed the Indian of autonomy and power, of land and resources, and of other forms of material and social culture. In general, the colonial policy carried out from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century was not one whose goal was complete segregation or annihilation of the Indian, as was the case in the United States; rather, it was one characterized by control of a large, potentially productive labor force through its assimilation into the dominant culture. The process began with the conquerors' programs of forced or consenting conversion to European, "civilized" ways, through the so-called spiritual conquest, or through the imposition of other practices and institutions that altered or destroyed native ones. But physical assimilation was equally important because it provided a basis for establishing a racially based social hierarchy.¹ To be white skinned and of European descent put one at the apex of power. To be of mixed blood, and having dark skin, put one ever lower in the social order.

A visual record of physical assimilation and its social importance is seen no more vividly than in the colonial-period "caste sheets" (fig. 1). These large painted charts, usually commissioned by the colonial government, pictorialized the process of miscegenation among Europeans, Indians, and Blacks.² Artists of the caste sheets paid careful attention to those visual aspects that could distinguish one "caste" from another. The characteristics included skin color, costume, and sometimes physical environments of the man, woman, and child shown in each panel. Not only did these caste sheets reaffirm the importance of racial heritage in colonial Mexico, they also codified a taxonomy of social types. Every child, representing a new racial mix, was labeled by an epithet such as "A Jump Backward" or "Tent in the Air."³ The latter term indicated the

ambiguity of that person's social standing, while the former indicated his or her retrogression toward dark skin and racial impurity, rather than a progression toward lighter skin and racial purity.

Postcolonial legislation purportedly rendered unimportant the racial differences that had been represented earlier. Although it outlawed racist practices and the imposition of various economic, legal, and social sanctions on the "impure," "mixed" members of colonial society, the tradition of picturing racial types remained vital. In Agustín Arrieta's mid-nineteenth-century "provincial" painting *La Sorpresa* (fig. 2), for example, race and class are still clearly defined by skin color, clothing, and occupation.⁴ There were significant shifts in emphasis, however: with the consolidation of the independent Mexican nation-state at the end of the century, the Indian became the celebrated basis of national culture. The alleged longevity, complexity, and authenticity of indigenous cultures were now often documented by the very same texts and images that had once allowed sixteenth-century friars and government officials to detect (and then punish) practitioners of native religion. These texts came to supply the heroic and emotional narratives for a new type of dispossessing image, one that fitted the needs of contemporary politics.⁵

The process of choosing a politically legitimizing cultural heritage by the major opposing factions—by the early 1800s referred to as liberals and conservatives—began with the push for independence in the late eighteenth century

and continued into the mid-nineteenth. Whereas the procolonial faction (the conservatives) located ancient Greco-Roman culture at the beginning of its national chronicle, the proindependence (liberal) faction gave primacy to ancient Indian culture.⁶ By the time of the production of the academic history paintings of pre-Hispanic Indians under discussion here, the liberal version of the national chronicle was dominant; liberals held sway in the political sphere and its apparatus for controlling culture, such as the National Academy of Fine Arts in Mexico City, for most of the years following the 1860s. The intense nationalism of the time was prompted by the end of the reign of the French puppet emperor Maximilian, whose execution at the hands of the exiled liberal government had rendered him the ultimate symbol of foreign intervention. Subsequently, the liberals' celebration of indigenous culture through the prominent placement of the Indian in academic history painting could not but aid in the construction of a national identity, so important to the solidification of the nation-state.

From 1869 through the early 1880s, Mexican artists represented pre-Hispanic Indian subjects never before seen in history painting.⁷ Most were shown at the biennial exhibitions at the National Academy of Fine Arts, more commonly known as the Academy of San Carlos.⁸ An ironic process took place through these images. On the one hand, the process celebrated the Indian, proclaiming the importance of Mexico's indigenous national heritage as opposed to its European heritage. The most

obvious way in which history painters represented that difference was by means of an indelible physical characteristic: namely, dark skin color. On the other hand, it required a resolution or erasure of differences; the Indian had to be made like the European in order to be worth celebrating. Thus, the suppression of what has been called the "autochthonous beauty" of the Indians⁹ was often apparent in academic painting of the time.

The elite form of history painting, so the argument goes, could never represent the "real," unassimilated Indian because academics would automatically make native material culture look like stage props for an exotic drama, recasting indigenous cultural forms in European molds.¹⁰ Often cited is *The Deliberation of the Senate of Tlaxcala* by Rodrigo Gutiérrez (fig. 3), which represents a classicized, indigenous political entity and its transformation into a Roman senate. The "senate" members are shown upon a dais in poses derived from classical oratory. Indian material culture is westernized in a different way in José Obregón's *Discovery of Pulque* (fig. 4), as clothing and furniture become only "Indian-like" and lightening of dark skin is evident, notably in the features of the young woman in the center of the painting.¹¹ The result is an Indian version of some classical throne scene, typical of the effects of nineteenth-century classicism in both Mexican and European painting. There is also a complex transformation achieved here, centered around the process of reproduction—itsself obviously a question of gender, as well as race and class. Obregón's painting is a representation of the pre-Hispanic legend in which an eleventh-century ruler, the so-called King Tecpancaltzin, receives the first cup of the newly discovered cactus liquor, pulque. On the right, we see the enthroned ruler and his courtiers; in the center, Xochítl, the young peasant woman who discovered the juice, presents it to the ruler. To either side of Xochítl stand her parents; servants, one carrying the maguery cactus itself, enter the room from the left.

The scene is divided into two parts, male and female, metaphorically conceived as culture and nature. The concept of nature is emphasized by the bare-breasted woman who holds the plant directly in front of her. Xochítl stands at the point of transition between the two zones, the second of which is clearly represented by the enthroned ruler and his surrounding courtiers. The wild maguery plant on the left, the natural form, stands in contrast to the cultural form, the fermented pulque,



Fig. 2 Agustín Arrieta, *La Sorpresa*, mid-19th century, oil on canvas, 29 × 38 inches. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.

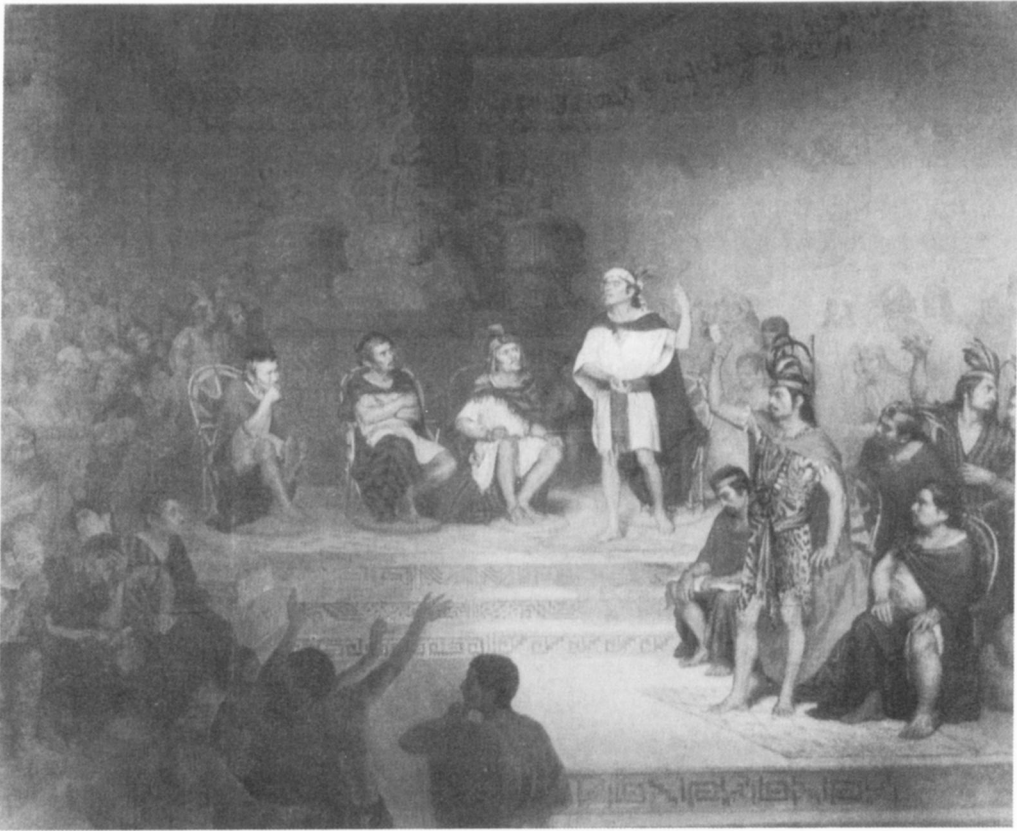


Fig. 3 Rodrigo Gutiérrez, *The Deliberation of the Senate of Tlaxcala*, mid-1870s, oil on canvas, 74 × 95 inches. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.



Fig. 4 José Obregón, *The Discovery of Pulque*, 1869, oil on canvas, 73 × 91 inches. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.

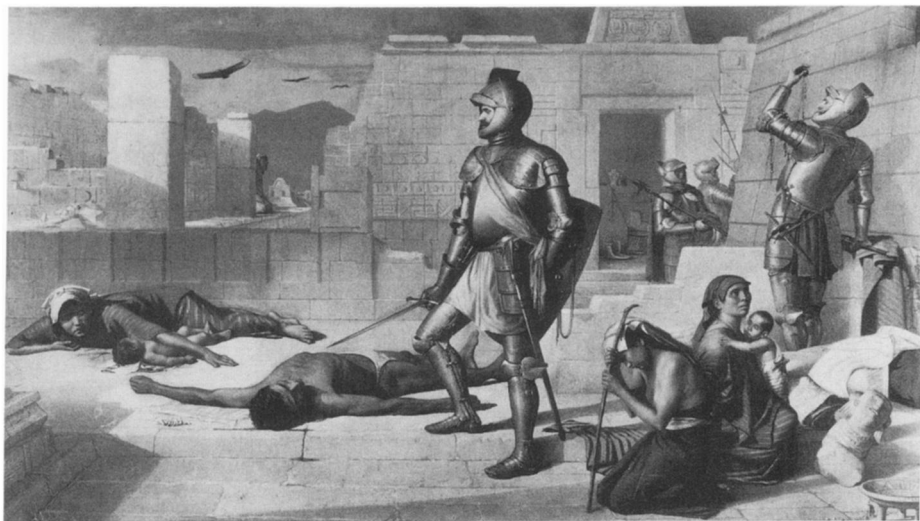


Fig. 5 Felix Parra, *The Massacre of Cholula*, 1877, oil on canvas, 31 × 41 inches. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.

milked from the plant. Xochítl offers the pulque to the ruler, in a small bowl, which is poised momentarily in front of her father's chest before it passes into the ruler's hands. The equation between the passage of pulque and of Xochítl into the ruler's control is clear: both the maguey cactus and its product, like Xochítl, become the property of the ruler.

The "natural" result of the physical union between Xochítl and Tecpancaltzin would be an Indian child, a conclusion drawn logically from the narrative.¹² But whereas Xochítl and Tecpancaltzin should both have dark skin and Indian features, there is instead a decided difference between the two, especially in skin color. Tecpancaltzin is darker, more Indian looking, while Xochítl is paler, more European looking. The difference could certainly be attributable to conventions for representing gender that were traditional in both Mexican and European academic painting. In light of these conventions, Xochítl and Tecpancaltzin would seem not at all incongruous because of their color differences, especially in view of the general classicizing we see in the painting. It is difficult to believe, however, that the distinctive features of the work are to be explained only by a Euro-academic context and a dominant classical pictorial language. Considering the previous discussion of skin color and its meaning in Mexico, Obregón's painting must be far more complex, more than merely derivative of European trends.

To classicize a pre-Hispanic scene, to represent its so-called king and court structure as if they represented some ancient ruler giving audience to his subjects and claiming his virgin, is to do more than exemplify the process of

elevating the indigenous past by translating it visually into classical terms. It is also to civilize the barbaric. Indians and Indian culture had long been considered by the West—indeed, by the conquerors—as in need of conversion to Christianity and of taming through other forms of physical and cultural assimilation. But when the modern, postindependence requirement for an ancient, indigenous heritage emerged, the man-eating Indians were represented as members of a civilized society with political structures similar to Europe's classical world. Barbaric Aztec society became noble, orderly, hierarchic, productive, and civilized in the history painter's classical spectacle. Even the maguey and its product, pulque, contribute to this process by their presence in the painting, for the wild becomes the domesticated through cultivation, harvesting, and fermentation.

Xochítl herself is being "civilized" here, not only by her lighter skin color (i.e., less Indian) but also by her "marriage" into a class above her. Moreover, Obregón's classicizing brush had so transformed Xochítl that one of the critics of the painting did not seem to recognize her as an Indian. Describing her essentially in terms of sexual values reserved for non-Indian women, he called her lithe, charming, elegant, and lovely.¹³ No contemporary observer would have used such words to describe an Indian woman, nor, for that matter, the dark-skinned servant women to Xochítl's right. These terms register physical attraction and desire, precisely what was elemental in the story Obregón painted. And they emphasize Xochítl's purpose in the story: not only to present the pulque but to become the sexual property of the king. There is an

intermeshing of class, race, and gender in *The Discovery of Pulque*, the subtle visual clues of which show the viewer the multifold process of homogenization of the Indian.

Assimilation takes place not merely by the inclusion of the Indian in history painting, and classicism is not always at work in these pictures. Academic realism does the job of assimilation just as well as classicism. And, just as in Obregón's painting, skin-color differences stand out as key to the process—for example, in a pair of paintings portraying episodes from the Spanish conquest by Felix Parra. *The Massacre of Cholula* (fig. 5) represents the aftermath of the bloody devastation of the city of Cholula by the Spanish conquistadors. Cortés stands victorious in the center of the scene, his vanquished Indian enemies below him. Behind him stand his soldiers, greedily eyeing their spoils. Of the Indians portrayed, only one is male. The pathos of the scene is thus heightened by the presence of the women and children, whose innocence and helplessness make the Spaniards' greed and plunder seem doubly wanton. But note that the one male Indian who is included serves a decidedly contrived purpose. His martyr's status is indicated by his foreshortened pose, arms outstretched to mimic the crucifixion. To our left, a woman struggles to reach him, over the body of a small child—whether dead or alive we cannot tell. (Surely Parra intended to suggest that the man and woman were a pair, and that with the child, they make up a family; but this family is destroyed, its reproductive function denied.) On the right side of the temple courtyard, other women and a child sit on the pavement, framed by the conquistadors, in poses that mimic the stacks of cloth and goods beside them. These women, like the goods next to which they are placed, are themselves ready for the taking. They too will become the property of the Spaniards, likely victims of rape, for which the soldiers are well known.

The details and arrangement of the figures and objects in the painting reinforce the idea of the end of the Indian past and the beginning of the European present. Cortés effectively declared the death of the Indian family, his sword menacingly and emphatically pointed toward the dead man. The women at the right represent the transformation of the Indians, the violent transition from Indian Mexico to European New Spain—a contrast underscored by the dark skin of the Indians and the pale skin and silver armor of the Spaniards. A detail in the right-hand

corner seems to signal the brutal experience about to begin: the destruction of native culture. There, a small stone statue representing a female fertility deity is shown in the process of falling from its once-upright position onto the ground.

Parra's realism and his attention to detail give the painting the ring of truth and documentation. The critics had no trouble identifying Indians here. While Xochítl, for example, was the object of the critics' desire, the all-too-real subjects in Parra's painting were the object of the paternalism typical of nineteenth-century writing about the contemporary Indian. Condemning Cortés and his men for their cruelty to the natives, the critics of the painting nevertheless reminded the public that the conquest had its good and positive side, as portrayed in another work by Parra.¹⁴ In *Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas* (fig. 6), the Dominican friar (later bishop) looks heavenward in the center of the canvas. Behind him are the ruins of a pre-Hispanic temple, below him an Indian woman who grieves for the dead man on the right. As the accompanying catalogue description would have explained to the Academy viewer, Las Casas is responding to the carnage of a vicious attack by the Spanish soldiers, which had taken place shortly before his arrival.

Parra portrayed Indians and Europeans here, as well as their material culture, in a sharp, almost photographic realism. The Indians are arranged as a couple, as husband and wife—terms that both the artist's catalogue description and critics used to describe the two. Like the couple in *The Massacre of Cholula*, they are denied the capacity to reproduce. In her grief and desperation, the woman clings to Las Casas, her arms wrapped around his legs. She does not turn to the seated statue of a deity on its pedestal behind her—a statue still intact and bearing the traditional pre-Hispanic offerings of paper and flowers, which the pair had placed there just prior to the soldiers' attack. This deity, moments before being worshiped, now sits abandoned; instead, the Indian woman shifts her devotion to the European friar. Assimilation is thus implied to take place here by conversion. The future is guaranteed not to the reproduction of the Indian or to the continuity of native religion but to the reproduction of Christianity, to the transformation of the pagan into the civilized.

Cultural assimilation through conversion to Christianity takes place in two other paintings. The first is Antonio Ruíz's *Quetzalcoatl Discovers Corn* (fig. 7), a lithograph of a sketch for an oil painting submitted to the 1880

student painting competition at the Academy. The artist portrayed Quetzalcoatl (whose name means "Feathered, or Quetzal, Serpent"), a pre-Hispanic figure with post-Hispanic significance. By the time of the painting, Quetzalcoatl had become a figure with historical and mythical origins, often also given a role as creator deity in written chronicles. He is credited as well with being the legendary herald of conquest—the Indian who left his native central Mexican homeland and returned years later by sea, bringing with him the true faith and enlightenment to the Indians he had left behind.¹⁵

In this version, creator and herald are combined, as Quetzalcoatl distributes the newly discovered corn to the Indians around him. To make his special attributes and function apparent, Ruíz showed him as the European Christ. He stands with eyes heavenward, dressed in a long robe, with long hair and beard. It is clear even from this lithograph that the other Indians are distinguished from him by both features and clothing. Ruíz's work shares several components of paintings already discussed. Like Obregón's *Discovery of Pulque*, the Quetzalcoatl scene is supposedly pre-Hispanic. Yet racial differences imposed

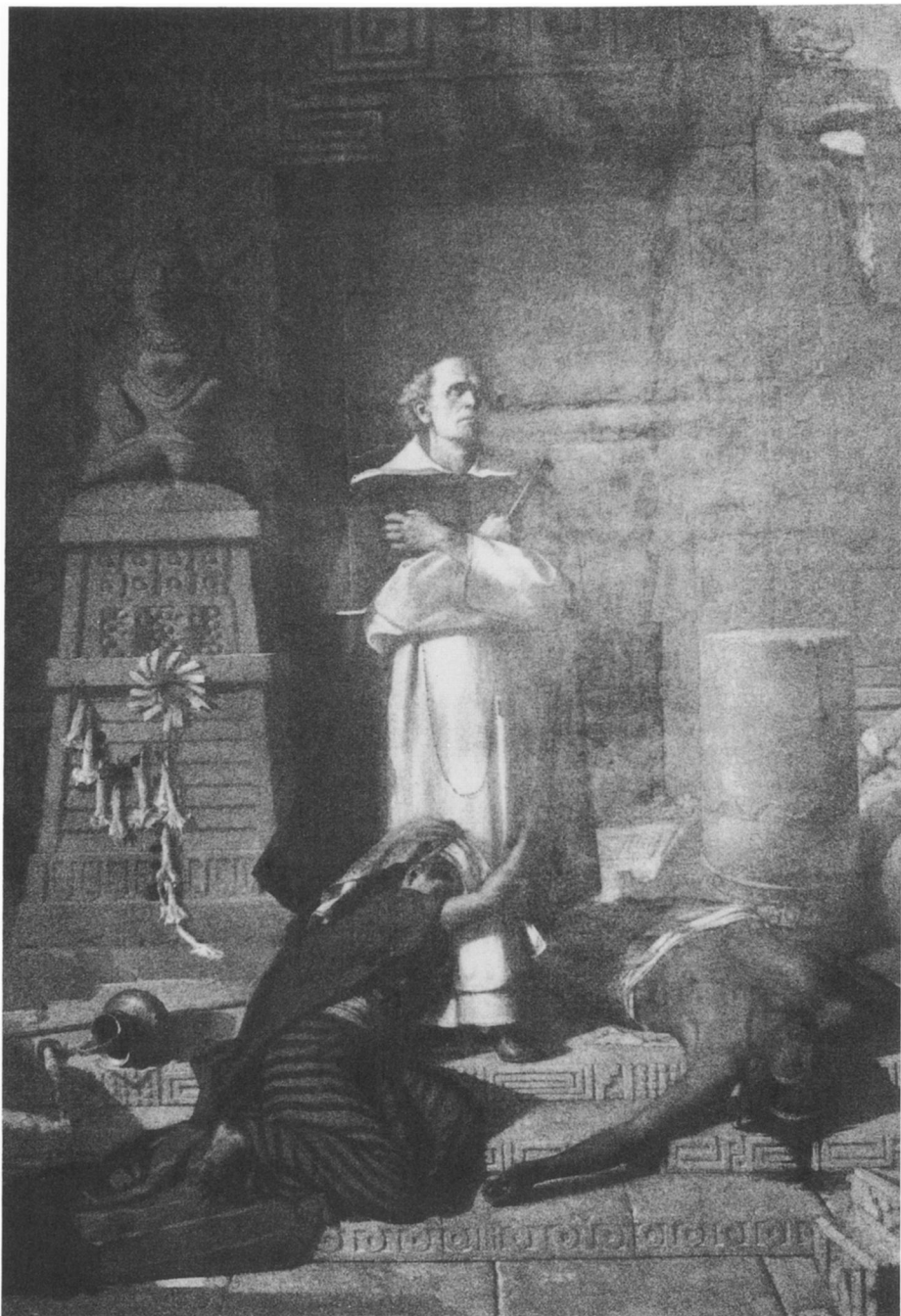


Fig. 6 Felix Parra, *Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas*, 1875, oil on canvas, 141 × 105 inches. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.

upon what should be a heterogeneous group suggest the future process of assimilation, and thus a post-Hispanic context. Quetzalcoatl, originally Indian, is assimilated through his representation as a standardized version of Christ. And just as Las Casas will heal and save the Indian woman, who stands for the same peasant class as do the Indians in Ruíz's sketch, so Quetzalcoatl will bring Christianity and salvation to his people.

In the paintings discussed thus far, difference and opposition have been represented explicitly—male/female, Indian/non-Indian, and peasant/elite. Opposition and difference in history paintings express conflict and drama, and they require some form of resolution. In Isidro Martínez's *Princess Papantzin* (fig. 8), however, opposition and difference are not shown; rather, what appears is the result of their resolution.¹⁶

The story upon which this painting is based relates that Papantzin, sister of Moctezuma II, the Aztec ruler in power at the time of contact, became ill and died. Her supposed death was actually a deep sleep during which she had a vision of a messenger heralding the arrival of foreigners bringing with them the true faith. Her apparently miraculous revival allowed her to report this vision. In the painting we see Papantzin seated by a small temple, awakening from her "lethargy," as it was called. The two servant girls who run away in astonishment to find Papantzin's family believed instead that the princess had actually been brought back to life. Papantzin's features are neither fully Indian nor fully European. Her skin is that of a mestiza, a child of mixed parentage.¹⁷ Although *mestizaje* ("mixing") would appear to be the result of physical assimilation, hers seems to make sense as a symbol of cultural transformation. The implication of the story is that Papantzin was converted to Christianity through her vision. Assimilation has thus already taken place. The token of her conversion is her mestiza features. And she returns, like Quetzalcoatl, to spread the word, her own royal status granting her the authority to do so.

The paintings just discussed stood out among the history paintings of traditional subjects offered to the Academy's public.¹⁸ The critics who wrote about them in the Mexico City press did so with enthusiasm and regarded them as contributions to national culture and to the establishment of a new genre—namely, national history painting. Indeed, these works, though few in number, received far more attention than most of their biblical, classical, or mythological counterparts—certainly



Fig. 7 Antonio Ruíz, *Quetzalcoatl Discovers Corn*, 1880, lithograph, 22 × 33 inches. Reproduced from *Vigésima exposición nacional de bellas artes, catálogo ilustrado*, 1881. Courtesy of Museo Nacional de San Carlos, Mexico City.

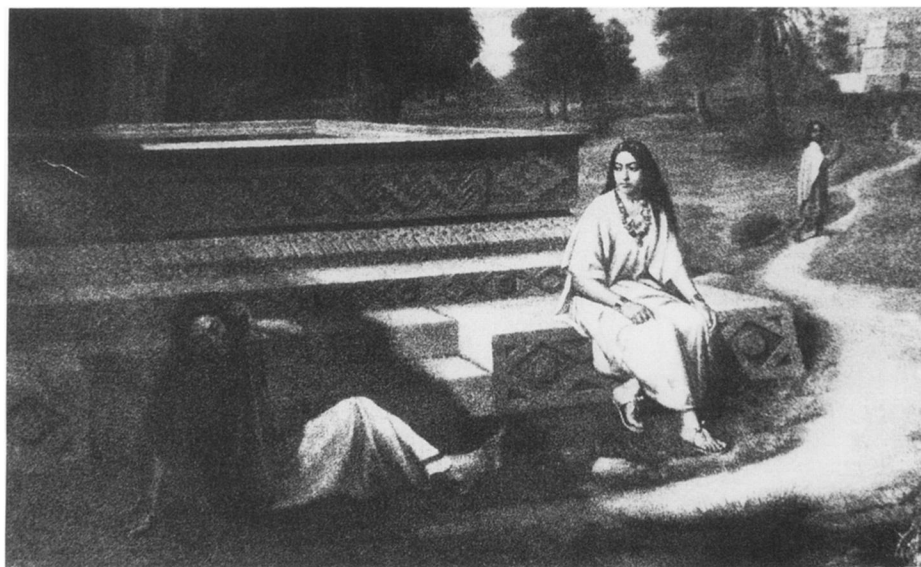


Fig. 8 Isidro Martínez, *The Princess Papantzin*, 1880, oil on canvas, 44 × 70 inches. Museo de Bellas Artes de Toluca, State of Mexico.

in part for what critics saw as innovative. Yet their contribution to national culture alone cannot account for public interest. Their subject matter, specifically that of the Indian, tied them not just to the ancient past but also to the present. Indians, after all, were still a living people and still, at mid-century, the majority of Mexico's population. They were not just the subject of history painting but also the subject of numerous tracts and speeches—in short, a national "problem."

While Mexican intellectuals celebrated their ancient indigenous heritage in prose and poetry, and painters cele-

brated it in oil, the contemporary Indian was the object of paternalism, racism, and continual public debate. It was considered tragic that contemporary Indians had nothing of the glory or noble culture of their pre-Hispanic forebears. They were, as a rule, rural peasants, or urban workers, illiterate and, often, non-Spanish speaking.¹⁹ They often retained cultural and economic practices that prohibited their becoming part of the Mexican nation, by which was meant an increasingly homogeneous group that spoke Spanish, had urban ways, was educated, obeyed the laws, and had memorized the lines of the

constitution and other nationally unifying texts. Mexico, like Europe and North America, wanted to be a modern, progressive country. But such nations required homogeneity, unification, and unfettered access to progress in all its forms, economic and otherwise. In many ways, the Indian was seen as a great stumbling block to the jump forward, to progress and national unity.²⁰ Assimilation was clearly essential in Mexico's quest for progress.

Official policy thereby dictated massive educational reforms—including the effective tools of teaching a single language, national history, and technical skills whose practice would be personally and nationally beneficial. The government also tried to entice workers from European countries to move to Mexico by offering them political and economic rewards. They were encouraged to introduce their own cul-



Fig. 9 José Escudero y Espronceda, *Portrait of Benito Juárez and Margarita Maza de Juárez*, 1890, oil on canvas, 28 × 23 inches. Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

tural (read civilized) practices, to set up rational economic enterprises, and to intermarry.²¹ There is perhaps no more telling evidence of this historical moment than the double portrait of Benito Juárez and his wife, Margarita (*fig. 9*), by José Escudero y Espronceda.²² Here the heritage of Mexico's first full-blooded Indian president is emphatically asserted through the deep bronze of his skin color, in striking contrast to the pale skin of his wife of European descent. At the same time, their proximity to one another asserts their marital status and implies the process of assimilation, made possible through physical union.²³

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Notes

This article is a revision of sections of my Ph.D. dissertation, "National Art and Identity in Mexico, 1869–1881: Images of Indians and Heroes" (UCLA, 1986). Earlier versions of the paper were read at UCLA (1985) and MIT (1988). For their comments, special thanks go to Faye Hirsch, Cecelia F. Klein, Gene Mandish, and Joan Weinstein.

- 1 The question of race and class in Mexico and in the New World is a complicated one. The debate continues as to which is the dominant factor. Most authorities would agree, however, that there is a coincidence of the two, with, for example, the lower classes being primarily Indian and dark skinned. Scholars have focused almost exclusively on the colonial period. Although restrictions based on race seem to have declined during the postindependence period *de jure*, they clearly did not *de facto*. For a summary of arguments concerning the questions of race and class, see Magnus Mörner, "The History of Race Relations in Latin America: Some Comments on the State of Research," *Latin American Research Review* 1, no. 3 (1966): 17–44.
- 2 Much remains to be studied about the caste sheet. For basic studies about castes and color, see R. Blanchard, "Les Tableaux de métissage au Mexique," *Société des Americanistes, Journal*, 1907, pp. 59–66, and 1908, pp. 37–60; and Irene Diggs, "Color in Spanish America," *Journal of Negro History* 38, no. 4 (1953): 403–27.
- 3 The names imply the evolutionary progress from dark/Indian to white/European, which the caste sheet actually shows. "A Jump Backward" is the name given to a child whose

parents' racial mix impeded this progress. Here the jump backward was caused by intermarriage with a Black. In *The Women of Mexico City, 1790–1857* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), 102–3, Silvia Marina Arrom argues that the caste sheets also imply "certain moral characteristics." The more elaborate sheets include the environment of the couple and child—for example, their living quarters and their participation in specific trades. She also notes that gestures and facial expressions contribute to the representation of social status and character; in one, for example, a mulatto woman is shown assaulting her mate, thereby suggesting the degenerate nature of the mixed couple.

- 4 Paintings such as Arrieta's were especially popular during mid-century, from the 1840s through the 1870s. More often than not, the artists of these paintings were trained at technical schools or informally, rather than at the Academy, and their subjects included local customs, street scenes, kitchen interiors, and "social types." The production of such paintings parallels the written "documentation" of provincial, folk, and popular culture. A well-known example of this literary tradition is *Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos, obra escrita por una sociedad de literatos* (Mexico City: Símbolo, 1946)—a work originally published in 1855 and modeled after *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (Paris: L. Curmer, 1840–42).
- 5 For a political history of nineteenth-century Mexico, see Ciro Cardoso et al., *México en el siglo XIX (1821–1910)* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1978). A recent study that

focuses on the relationship between partisan politics and national culture of the period is Eloisa Uribe, ed., *Y toda . . . por una nación: Historia social de la producción plástica de la Ciudad de México, 1761–1910*, 2d ed. (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública and Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia [Colección Científica], 1987).

- 6 For the relationships between emergent nationalism, partisan politics, and the role of indigenous culture, see John Leddy Phelan, "Neo-Aztecism in the Eighteenth Century and the Genesis of Mexican Nationalism," in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, Stanley Diamond, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 760–77; Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971); and David Brading, *Los orígenes del nacionalismo mexicano* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1980).
- 7 The exhibition of José Obregón's *Discovery of Pulque* (*fig. 4*) of 1869 marks the first manifestation of this nationalistic tendency in academic history painting. While Indians had been represented in both academic and nonacademic images prior to 1869, I isolate those from the 1869–81 period because they appear to have been responses to the official push for the construction of a national culture, which included the establishment in 1869 of a prize to be awarded by the Academy of San Carlos for the best national history painting. The critics of the time regarded these paintings as contributions to a "new genre." For a more thorough discussion of the issue, see esp. chaps. 1 and 2 of my dissertation, "National Art and Identity in

- Mexico.”
- 8 The Mexican Academy was founded in the late eighteenth century as part of the Bourbon reforms of Charles III and Charles IV. It was modeled after its European counterparts, especially the Academy of San Fernando in Spain. See, among others, Thomas A. Brown, *La Academia de San Carlos de la Nueva España*, 2 vols., trans. from the English by María Emilia Martínez Negrete Deffis (Mexico City: Sepentas, 1976); and Jean Charlot, *Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos, 1785–1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962).
 - 9 Justino Fernández, *Arte moderno y contemporáneo de México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1952), 88. Fernández’s description of these “indigenist paintings” is still the model for most scholarly discussions of them.
 - 10 For further discussion, see Widdifield, “National Art and Identity in Mexico,” chap. 3, 83–130. For the most focused analysis of the image of the Indian in the nineteenth century, see Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, “La figura del indio en la pintura del siglo XIX, fondo ideológico,” *Arte, Sociedad e Ideología*, October–November 1977, 56–66.
 - 11 Obregón’s painting was commissioned by an influential liberal political figure, Felipe Sánchez Solís, who was himself of Indian descent. Sánchez Solís also commissioned Gutiérrez’s *Deliberation of the Senate of Tlaxcala*. These paintings and several others (not finished) were intended for display in his salon, which was decorated with Indian motifs and also housed pre-Hispanic ceramics and other artifacts. Sánchez Solís’s home and the salons held there were the subject of several newspaper articles in 1875.
 - 12 While there is no marriage taking place in the painting, and while Obregón’s description itself does not indicate more than “taking her for his wife,” the text upon which the work was very likely based refers specifically to marriage; see Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, “Sumaria relación de las cosas de la Nueva España,” in *Obras históricas*, Edmundo O’Gorman, ed. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1975), 2: 275. It is also important to point out that the social-climbing aspect of this “marriage” is underscored by Ixtlilxochitl’s reference to Xochitl (whom Ixtlilxochitl curiously called Papantzin) as a *doncella*, which can mean a maid-in-waiting as well as a virgin. The text designates her neither as a princess nor as of any royal lineage. Her parents stood to gain titles and property from the marriage between their daughter and Tecpancaltzin. Sánchez Solís, the painting’s patron, claimed descent from the ancient royal line of Texcoco, of which Ixtlilxochitl himself claimed to be a member. Ixtlilxochitl’s text clearly asserts that royal lineage.
 - 13 Although several critics commented on this painting, only one spoke at length about it. See L. G. R., “La exposición de bellas artes,” *El Siglo XIX*, November 15, 1869.
 - 14 See Felipe Gutiérrez, “Revista de la exposición de San Carlos,” *La Libertad*, February 3, 1878; Francisco Díez de Bonilla, “Academia de Bellas Artes,” *El Siglo XIX*, January 23, 1878; and L. Agontía, “La Academia Nacional de San Carlos en 1877: El arte,” *La Libertad*, January 12, 1878. These reviews, as well as much of nineteenth-century art criticism published in the Mexico City press, are reproduced in Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, *La crítica de arte en el siglo XIX*, 3 vols. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1964). Both of Parra’s paintings were based on colonial accounts of the Spaniards’ brutal treatment of the Indians; see Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Tratados*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 1965).
 - 15 For an analysis of the Europeanization of Quetzalcoatl, see Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1532–1815*, trans. Benjamin Keen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
 - 16 Another academic artist, Juan Urruchi, submitted a sketch of the same subject to the 1881 exhibition. It is likely that Princess Papantzin was the subject of a painting competition, though neither the exhibition catalogue nor the Archives of the Academy of San Carlos supply documentation of this. Urruchi’s painting is currently in the Museo de Bellas Artes de Toluca, Mexico; the location of the finished work is unknown.
 - 17 The mestizo is always represented in the first panel of the caste sheet. His parents, a European man and an Indian woman, are always shown as the original couple of miscegenation.
 - 18 This fact is certainly indicated by the number of history paintings recorded in the Academy exhibition catalogues; see Manuel Romero de Terreros, *Catálogos de las exposiciones de la Academia de San Carlos* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1963). It is particularly telling that by 1880, when Indian subjects had become part of the student (as opposed to national) painting competitions, European subjects still dominated.
 - 19 A notable exception was Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834–1893), a full-blooded Indian who had climbed the social ladder to reach the ranks of the middle class—a move facilitated by the empowerment offered by democratic institutions. Altamirano was a decorated military officer, held both elected and appointed government posts, was trained as a journalist and lawyer, and wrote plays, poetry, novels, and art criticism. His “face was not of the Grecian mold,” one of his biographers said, yet he managed to achieve stellar status in spite of his dark skin. See Ireneo Paz, *Hombres prominentes de México* (Mexico City, 1888), 69–70.
 - 20 The literature on the “Indian question” in the nineteenth century is fairly extensive; major dailies published in Mexico City often carried feature articles on the subject. Twentieth-century studies that provide summaries of the various positions include Martin S. Stabb, “Indigenism and Racism in Mexican Thought, 1857–1911,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 1 (1959): 405–23; and T. G. Powell, “Mexican Intellectuals and the Indian Question, 1876–1911,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, no. 1 (1968): 191–230.
 - 21 Such “colonization,” as it was officially called, was encouraged especially in northern Mexico, where what were regarded as “barbaric” Indian groups still flourished, virtually outside of the control of the government, and sitting on vast areas of unmined, unfarmed land.
 - 22 The painting was done in 1890, eighteen years after Juárez’s death.
 - 23 Juárez, from all accounts, understood what it meant to “marry up”; his children, all daughters, would be mestizas. There are no substantial studies on marriage patterns of the nineteenth century. In her chapter called “Demographic Patterns,” Arrom (cited in n. 3 above) discusses this issue for the first half of the century but, as she notes, she relies heavily on the census of 1811.

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