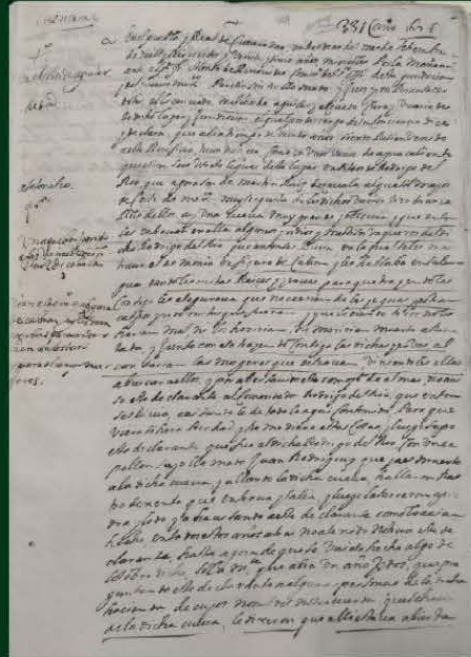


Afro-Mexican Women in the Northern Frontier: Subalternity, Agency, and Power Dynamics in the 17th Century

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Project Description:

The purpose of this project was to analyze the inquisitorial confessions and accusations collected by Alonso de Benavides, Commissary of the Holy Office, during his visit to Cuencamé (currently part of the state of Durango) in 1625 and 1626, to unveil the voices and stories of Afro-Mexican women living near the northern frontier. When exploring the first generations of Black Mexicans dating from the Colonial period (1521-1810), the majority of published works have relied on primary texts from Mexico City, the capital of New Spain, and other metropolitan areas including Puebla and the port of Veracruz. In contrast, this study explored sources and informants from the periphery. By examining these thirty-five files (digitalized and made available to the public in 2020) this project aimed to dispute the historical invisibility of Afro-Mexican women and reveal still unknown complexities of Colonial Mexican society.



Sample page

Source: *Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo Inquisición*, tomo 356, fols. 317-370.

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Project Findings:

The first-hand accounts found in these thirty five inquisitorial files provided a rare glimpse into the power dynamics of a remote town in Colonial Mexico. By analyzing statements given by and about Black women, it was possible to identify the ways in which they manipulated their subaltern position in society to have an active role in the peripheral culture of Cuencamé. It became evident that in contrast to metropolitan and more populated Colonial towns, such as Mexico City and Puebla, the remoteness of settlements near the northern frontier fostered a more permissive environment in terms of gender and race boundaries. Among the stories of these *negra*, *criolla*, *mulata*, and *ladina* protagonists, we encounter fascinating tales of love-triangles, crossdressing, sorcery, and even bullfighting. This exploration was informed by a Post-Colonial theoretical lens and framed by the concepts of subalternity, intersectionality, and transculturation.

Next Steps:

The manuscript containing the results of this project was submitted for consideration for the upcoming edited volume *AfroLatinas/LatiNegras: Culture, Identity, and Struggle from an Intersectional Perspective* to be published by Allegheny College.