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The Capital of Free Women

Race, Legitimacy, and Liberty in Colonial Mexico

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Preserving Legacies

On November 7, 1586, Ana de Arriaga must have dreaded the task at hand. As she approached the entryway of the notarial office in Xalapa, a flush of embarrassment might have come over her as she considered how best to couch her predicament. Ana was a free African-descended woman from a well-off family in late sixteenth-century Xalapa. Her brother Tomás Rodríguez de Alcazar also lived in town, but their parents, Beatriz de Arriaga and Pedro Rodríguez de Alcazar, resided nearby in the peripheral jurisdiction of Xalapa.[1] Curiously, the notarial records never designated Ana's parents or her sibling by caste but clearly noted her as a woman "de color negra." Ana's husband, Jordan Pérez, on the other hand, was from the greater Iberian world, a transplant from Lagos, Portugal.

Ana de Arriaga had lived a life of privilege and yet, on that day in 1586, she had to confront a mortifying possibility, namely, that her marriage to Jordan was not legitimate. An improperly contracted marriage was not a mistake a woman of her station and family would have made. Some aspect of the nuptial process might have gone awry without her knowledge; maybe the officiant was a novice. Or, as was more commonly

the case among elites whose legitimacy had been questioned, Ana's and Jordan's marriage may have been a clandestine one because their families did not approve of their union. Ana might have even been pregnant, and, in the hastily organized marriage, someone may have overlooked the required formalities. Whatever the blunder, Ana de Arriaga sought to right the ship and ascertain whether the Church deemed her marriage to Jordan Pérez valid or not. To this end Ana contracted the help of Juan Ruiz, a *procurador* (attorney) in Puebla de los Ángeles.[2] On that November day she issued him an official poder to represent her before the ecclesiastical tribunal in Puebla to establish beyond a shadow of a doubt, beyond a whisper of gossip, that she had indeed married Jordan according to the dictates of the Catholic Church. Established in 1525, the diocese of Puebla de los Ángeles represented the apex of the religious power structure in the region and was likely the definitive arm to resolve the confounding matter.

The legitimacy of Ana de Arriaga's marriage had been questioned because a friar named Joaqin had married the couple, and there was some doubt as to whether he had the authority to do so. At the time, Friar Joaqin was serving in the capacity of guardian of the Monastery of San Francisco. The monastery was the most important Catholic institution in the region and one of the oldest in the colony. As such, the friars should have known the protocols for contracting marriages, even surreptitious ones that would have still been deemed legitimate.[3] Ana did not state specifically what prompted her to request the confirmation. Had an unnamed figure slanderously accused her of being illegitimately wedded to her Portuguese husband? Had either of the couple's parents demanded proof? No extant documents shed light on these issues, but the poder reveals a bit about Ana's background and situates her petition in the same realm as those of other elites in Xalapa.

While Ana de Arriaga had only one notarial entry, and her father, Pedro Rodriguez de Alcazar, is only superficially mentioned, her mother, Beatriz de Arriaga, documented the family's elite standing in Xalapa. On January 20, 1592, Beatriz registered two business matters, details of which clarify information about the family left obscured in Ana's case. Her daughter's 1586 case mentioned only that her parents lived at the Venta de Aguilar. However, both of the 1592 entries clearly noted that Beatriz de Arriaga actually owned it. Beatriz's husband was deceased by then, leaving her as the sole proprietor and administrator of the inn. By 1592 she was also a slave owner according to a poder that she issued to sell one of her slaves. This poder did not specify whether Beatriz owned other slaves, but it was likely that she had either slaves or paid laborers to help her run the boarding establishment. The second entry was a general poder she issued to her son in order to collect on any debts that others might have owed her.[4]

Not until an entry on January 9, 1597, did Beatriz de Arriaga's record unveil a fuller picture of her wealth.[5] Beatriz continued to involve her son Tomás in business matters related to their family, and on this occasion the two cataloged her holdings. The first item listed in her estate was the Venta de Aguilar, one of the first ventas ever constructed in the region, with an estimated market price of 1,000 pesos, her highest-valued single asset. The inventory affirmed that Beatriz de Arriaga continued to invest in slavery, which accounted for the majority of her personal wealth at 1,700 pesos. She owned a negra slave named Joana (450 pesos), two of Joana's children described as a mulato and a negro (200 pesos), a negra slave named Isabel (350 pesos), two of Isabel's children described as mulatos (200 pesos), and a negro slave named Diego valued at 500 pesos.

Beatriz's household items further reveal her capital and perhaps the level of comfort in which Ana de Arriaga had grown

up and into which her daughter's Portuguese husband had married. Her collection included a number of items of silver, including an astonishing 100-peso serving dish. She owned a set of twenty bedsheets and ten sleeping mats valued at 120 pesos—most people's homes did not cost as much as Beatriz's supply of bedding. While the mats and linens affirm that she owned an inn, the expensive dishes imply that Beatriz may have been accustomed to hosting high-end parties or welcoming any number of distinguished travelers that sought luxury accommodations in town. For example, in 1640 Viceroy Don Diego López Pacheco enjoyed a week of relaxation in Xalapa before continuing his journey to Mexico City. As Bermúdez Gorrochotegui writes of him, "The viceroy remained in [town] for eight days, which was considered an honor and a significant cost for the hosts because in addition to the family, servants, and employees of His Excellency, there were also civil functionaries, military [personnel], ecclesiastics, and 'almost everyone noble in the kingdom.'"[6]

While certainly a privilege to have one's house graced by Crown dignitaries, even wealthy hosts likely fretted over the colossal expense incurred by offering lodging to such an illustrious guest and his accompanying entourage. Beatriz never hinted at the type of clientele she attracted, but it would not be outside of the realm of possibility that her establishment appealed to a more exclusive group. The additional sheets would have been found at other inns, but the silver dish marked Beatriz's household as wealthy. This entrepreneurial woman also had a collection of fine jewelry, which included gold rings and a rosary valued at forty pesos, an astonishing assortment of high-value items. Such baubles were well out of reach to the average vecino at the turn of the sixteenth century, demonstrating the lavish life that Beatriz de Arriaga had enjoyed and likely afforded her two children.

Along with material wealth, Beatriz de Arriaga had accumulated a sizeable debt. She owed a total of 540 pesos to nineteen individuals, most liabilities totaling less than 30 pesos each. She also owed 112 pesos to the aforementioned member of Xalapa's elite, Pedro de Irala. A few years later, in 1600, Beatriz was still in considerable debt to Pedro; the entry notes that by then she owed him 90 pesos.[7] The notary later marked the case as canceled but did not state why. At nearly every level of the social echelon in colonial Mexico, beleaguered debtors found their names marked in the personal notes of friends and acquaintances, in account books of their local shops, and in records in the notarial office. Even the wealthy Beatriz de Arriaga had reimbursements to manage. However, they did not appear to affect her or her family adversely because her assets were valued higher than her documented debt. Beatriz's largest liability was to Pedro de Irala and the two elites may have decided to resolve the question of the 90 pesos amicably outside of the purview of the notary public, as many others did. Considering the status of both individuals, it is possible that Pedro de Irala could have agreed on a trade of comparable services or goods since both had businesses in Xalapa.

Later that year, on September 2, 1600, Beatriz de Arriaga returned to the notarial office with her son Tomás Rodríguez to serve as his fiadora.[8] The poder cites that Tomás needed his mother to guarantee a rather large debt of 115 pesos. Only wealthy colonial subjects could afford to put their possessions and economic reputations up for collateral in such sizeable transactions, and Beatriz did so as a widow. The prospects of growing her family's wealth by supporting her son's new enterprise likely motivated her. Tomás had accrued the 115-peso debt when he purchased from the prominent aforementioned muleteer Jerónimo de Vega two horses and one mule with all attendant packtrain gear. It would appear that Tomás intended

to profit from the burgeoning transportation market that would become a mainstay business venture for many throughout the seventeenth century.

Tomás was not the only family member looking to invest. On November 14, 1601, Beatriz de Arriaga continued to expand her holdings by purchasing a plot of land for thirty pesos that adjoined her property line located on the Camino Real in Xalapa. The seller was her fellow inn owner Bartolomé Martín who owned the Venta de Los Naranjos, demonstrating that Beatriz not only maintained relationships with other business owners but also that they might have viewed her as a genuine peer.[9] Again, it is unclear if this speaks to questions of racial dynamics since Beatriz is never categorized by race. However, her position as an elite business owner disrupts notions of women being too vulnerable for the potentially rough and tumble male-dominated industry of innkeeping. Her purchase of the additional property also alludes to her desire to put her stamp on Xalapa's landscape in a highly sought-after area and implies that other members of the community were willing to concede that space to her.

Ana de Arriaga, Tomás Rodríguez, Pedro Rodríguez de Alcazar, and their matriarch Beatriz de Arriaga formed a nuclear family of considerable wealth and opportunity. And while Ana did not even know how to sign her name, her petition to establish the validity of her marriage reflected an upbringing accordant with her family's background. Ana's mother, Beatriz, had successfully embedded her family in a higher echelon of society. A single poder reveals little about how the free negra Ana de Arriaga and her Portuguese husband, Jordan Pérez, made a living or how the couple navigated life in colonial Xalapa. Her mother, Beatriz de Arriaga, left a much more accessible historical trail in the archive as she sought to secure her and her family's economic position through continued engagement with

local markets and the regional elite—a legacy she likely hoped would affirm the marital legitimacy expected of the daughter of a wealthy family.

Confirmations of marital legitimacy, while generally rare, occurred when families feared an unforeseen canonical impediment that might void a union, jeopardize the legitimacy of children or forfeit crucial dowries, individual inheritances, and family mayorazgos. As such, most cases involved elite members of society.[10] Xalapa's parish archives establish that free African-descended women valued marriage as a sacrament throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Ana de Arriaga's case highlights that the institution of marriage as a vessel for anxieties around legitimacy, family, and wealth reaches as far back as at least the 1580s in Xalapa for African-descended women and their families. One can imagine the unsympathetic face of her mother, Beatriz de Arriaga, after learning that her daughter's actions might have put her family's status in peril. That the daughter of a prominent business owner had to send a legal proxy to Puebla de los Ángeles in order to stand before a council to verify *anything* given her mother's successful management of family affairs must have been infuriating. Heirs of wealth did not always exhibit the same know-how (or cultural capital) that their parents, and sometimes their grandparents, had that would have prevented such dilemmas in the first place. Beatriz de Arriaga and Pedro Rodriguez de Alcazar (and perhaps even Tomás) might have urged Ana to resolve the matter as expeditiously (and discreetly) as possible to avoid any further cost to their social legitimacy.

Most significantly, while some fathers were absent and others deceased, it was often African-descended mothers who led the fight in defending their family's legacies. Unlike the typical elite Iberian families, in which male family members often were expected to take charge of businesses and personal matters,

women of African descent in Xalapa consistently guided their families, often through the roughest of waters.[11] Another distinguished matriarch, María de la Candelaria (not to be mistaken for the daughter of Agustina de Acosta from chapter 5), attempted to shield her family from economic misfortune but could not save them all from tragedy. And yet, even when faced with heartbreak, this free African-descended mother fought to retain her status and that of her children, just as Ana de Arriaga and her mother, Beatriz, had done almost exactly one hundred years earlier.

The free parda María de la Candelaria was a vecina of La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz with long-established family ties to Xalapa through her wealthy free pardo husband, Diego Ordóñez. She and Diego had raised five children: Francisca, Juana, María, Mariana, and Joseph. Tragically, Diego died at some point before 1682, and his death precipitated María's entry onto the historical stage along with a collection of her friends and associates. In 1685 María de la Candelaria, very much like Ana de Arriaga in 1586, had to subject herself, her family, and members of her community to the humiliating process of proving the legitimacy of her marriage. In one month's time six notarial entries named María de la Candelaria as the primary agent or secondary actor. Five of these took place on March 30, 1685, and involved settling an inheritance dispute regarding a substantial estate left to María and her children by her late husband. María served as the administrator of Diego's assets for her four daughters because they were still considered legal minors, but Joseph appeared alongside his mother, as he was over the age of twenty-five.[12] Importantly, María asserted time and again that all of her children were legitimately born.

María's first notarial business involved transferring her

"complete power [of representation]" to Joseph, "especially so that in her name and representing her person, he may sell some tracts of rural land and livestock grazing sites that her aforementioned husband possessed [located] on the limits of the town of Xalapa, donated to him by Luisa Ordóñez, widow of Manuel Rodriguez."[13] The poder did not divulge the nature of the relationship between the widow Luisa and Diego, but given the shared surname it was implied that they were kin.

The second entry begins with María and Joseph testifying before Señor Capitán Andrés Garcia de la Peña, the *alcalde ordinario* of La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz.[14] Writing in blunt, declarative language, she proclaimed, "We appear before you to say that we agree to prove and ascertain that between myself, María de la Candelaria, and my deceased husband Diego Ordóñez, we had and procreated legitimate children, Francisca, Juana, María, Mariana, and the aforementioned Joseph. And as legitimate children, any assets that might have been left [by Diego] correspond and belong to them." María and Joseph concluded the one-page petition by stating with resolve, "We ask that there be justice [in this matter]." Near the end of the document, the alcalde noted that neither María nor her son could sign their names.

What followed was tantamount to a procession of character witnesses, all attesting that María de la Candelaria was the lawful wife of Diego Ordóñez and that all of their children were *legítimos*. One of their witnesses was the free pardo and vecino Francisco Maldonado, who testified that he had known the couple for more than thirty years, declaring that he "saw them legitimately married in this city and that during their marriage, he saw them have their children." He then named all five children and swore that Diego "always recognized, raised and nurtured them, and that was the truth." The following witness called to testify was another free pardo and fellow vecino,

Manuel de Ortega.[15] He too corroborated that he had known María and Diego and that all five children were conceived during their marriage.

While both men testified that they had known María and Diego as a married couple and watched them care for their children, neither man stated that he had served as an official witness in their marriage application. Nor did either serve as the *padrino* of any of the five kids, which might have denoted a close familiarity with the free couple of African descent. However, as both men claimed to be vecinos, affirming their long relationship with the city of La Nueva Veracruz, they implied that had a wealthy couple like María and Diego not been legitimately married, it would have been common knowledge. The alcalde, and likely María and her son Joseph, must have understood the potential ambiguity of their witnesses' statements and calculated the need for someone who could offer a more absolute narrative.

To that end, they called upon Licenciado Don Juan Sánchez de Tovar, a *presbítero* (a local priest) and vecino of La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz. Licenciado Don Juan "promised to tell the truth" and testified that María de la Candelaria and Diego Ordóñez had been married according to the dictates of the Church. He asserted that because he "saw them in a married life, their children were legitimate." When the *presbítero* named all five children, he stated that Francisca, Juana, and Joseph were in La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz, and Mariana was in Mexico City. When he mentioned María "the daughter," he added, "who was taken prisoner by the enemy."[16] He then reemphasized that all the children were legitimate and declared that "this is the truth." María de la Candelaria had provided an unassailable witness, one who would have known if she and Diego had followed the proper protocols of a religious union, but in addition the ecclesiastic assisted the widow's enterprise

The shores of Veracruz City (1847). From *City of Vera Cruz: From the Road to Mexico / Vista de Vera Cruz: Por el Camino de Mexico* (New York: N. Currier, 1847). Courtesy of the Library of Congress

for the restitution of her rights by calling upon the power of a recent collective memory, one that resonated across the region. María de la Candelaria and her husband had established a life of relative privilege for their children. But in the 1680s María had to contend with the possibility that one of her daughters, who had been born free, was living the nightmare of enslavement, other sordid forms of exploitation, or was already deceased. Enemy pirates who threatened the total destruction of colonial Mexico's most important Atlantic gateway had taken María's daughter prisoner, and Don Juan Sánchez de Tovar was there to remind everyone of that tragic event.

Two years prior, in the early hours of May 18, 1683, a wave of violence unfolding on the shores of Veracruz awoke the res-

idents of the sweltering port. By daybreak, some would bear witness and others would fall to one of the greatest assaults on Spain's crown jewel of New Spain. The Dutchman Laurens de Graaf, also known as Lorencillo, had planned and executed an unprecedented raid on the city, held hundreds of people captive, and left the port in shambles during a two-week siege of La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz. The event resulted in hemispheric implications for colonists, Crown, and the Church.

Outside of war, widespread economic crises, and the most destructive natural disasters, few events mark time across a diverse spectrum of society. The 1683 Great Siege of Veracruz Port was one such event. In addition to the near ruin of the city and the horrors experienced by its residents, African-descended people were targeted, abducted, and sold into slavery rather than ransomed like Spaniards. While the Atlantic and Pacific pirates who haunted the shores of the Spanish circum-Caribbean had for years attacked unsuspecting towns and captured underprotected communities during the so-called Golden Age of piracy, this large-scale targeting of African-descended people was singular among documented raids in the Spanish empire.[17]

Ceaseless assaults, big and small, during the seventeenth century frustrated Crown strategies to establish and secure reliable Atlantic trade. Pirates, privateers, buccaneers, and corsairs all found the Spanish bonanza, particularly in silver mining, rife with opportunity. While minor attacks occurred during the early sixteenth century, the latter part of the 1500s witnessed more daring exploits. In 1597 the English pirate William Parker attacked the port of San Francisco de Campeche in the Yucatán Peninsula, provoking dread along New Spain's shores when unidentified ships approached the horizon. Parker's raid had caused so much panic that year that, fearing a similar fate, authorities in Veracruz requested auxiliary troops from Mexico, of which two hundred arrived to fortify the coastal militias.[18]

As the Spanish Crown attempted to coordinate more frequent and safer transatlantic journeys, galleons traveling to and from Veracruz Port became marked prizes for the most enterprising pirates. In fact, Laurens de Graaf was not even the first Dutchman to successfully attack Spanish convoys circulating in the Gulf Coast and Caribbean. In the autumn of 1628 a twelve-ship fleet disembarked from La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz weighed down with silver and other colonial treasures. When the convoy neared the Cuban coastline near Matanzas, the infamous privateer and onetime director of the Dutch West India Company Admiral Piet Heyn purportedly captured eleven ships. Heyn's thirty-one vessels seized nearly 11 million guilders (5½ million pesos), a crushing hit to the Spanish in the middle of the Anglo–Spanish War (1625–30). This fateful commandeering not only debilitated the Spanish treasury but also fueled the Dutch territorial battle for Spanish Netherlands. Heyn's attack on the silver fleet also enshrined him in Dutch history as the greatest pillager of Spanish resources during a critical time in the future country's trajectory. It also "earned" him a children's nursery rhyme extolling his actions that is still sung today.[19]

Three decades later pirates dealt New Spain's shores another blow. In February 1663 the Englishman Christopher Myngs and the Dutchman Edward Mansvelt sacked Campeche with 1,000 buccaneers. The attack on the Yucatán Peninsula likely shocked the Spanish realm since the city had fortifications and a standing militia of 150 men. Within hours of their arrival the pirates had overcome the Spanish forces and launched an assault on the city that lasted for two weeks and yielded 150,000 pieces of eight.[20] Campeche, however, was not Veracruz Port. And even with foreign pirates making more daring attempts along New Spain's coasts, the Great Siege of Veracruz was unparalleled and unprecedented.

Colonial officials knew well the importance and vulnerability of their port cities. In 1535 construction began on the fort of San Juan de Ulúa, which would become a monumental structure located on a small island facing the main pier of the port. While nearly always under construction, the fort variously counted militiamen and slaves of African descent along with Spanish troops who lived near or at San Juan de Ulúa. The defensive companies of the port city did not have to wait long before their first test of preparedness. A few decades after San Juan de Ulúa's initial development, two of history's most infamous seafarers arrived on the shores of the island fortress. In 1568 Spanish forces spotted the ships of Francis Drake and John Hawkins nearing the fort as they supposedly took cover from a storm. While initially agreeing on a truce that would allow the Englishmen time to gather supplies for their Atlantic crossing, the Spanish set upon Drake and Hawkins. The price of that miscalculation by the English privateers resulted in a loss of more than three hundred men and four ships.[21] For more than a century before the Great Siege, the city of Veracruz decisively held off the enemies creeping toward its coastline. If military leadership in 1683 had been as suspicious of incoming vessels as those in 1568 with Drake and Hawkins, perhaps the city could have heralded its more than two-hundred-year record of exceptional defense of the port rather than its spectacular defeat.

Fortifications for the city's protection continued in the seventeenth century as rumors of Atlantic rivals spurred new investments in military defense in the 1630s. Viceroy Don Rodrigo Pacheco y Osorio de Toledo, the Marquis de Cerralvo, approved the purchase of "four hundred muskets and arquebuses and six pieces of bronze artillery, as well as gunpowder and lead balls." Before his departure from office in 1635, the viceroy ordered the construction of "two small bulwarks . . . in

1633 and 1634." Not even Havana, the most important port city in the Spanish Caribbean, received such fortifications, demonstrating the Crown's awareness of Veracruz's significance but also its shortcomings.[22]

By the late seventeenth century royal officials in Veracruz praised the efforts of Viceroy Antonio Sebastián Álvarez de Toledo y Salazar, who had "since he entered government in this kingdom taken the utmost care and attention (as in all of his service to your Majesty) with the royal forces of San Juan de Ulúa, as it is the only entry of this kingdom." Acutely aware of the threat of enemy pirates from repeated news of their appearances, the city's bureaucrats stated in the same 1670 report, "Luckily [the fort] has always been on full defense and full of provisions." But, they noted, "the fort is in need of a few [improvements] for its greater defense." The officials described La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz as being exposed but stated that the fort offered a critical barrier for "the greater security of the city." In addition to new construction, they rallied three hundred Spanish infantrymen across three companies to guard the port.[23] While concerned administrators dispersed funds and drew up plans to further develop the fort, San Juan de Uluá remained largely untested in the seventeenth century, and others might have known this too.

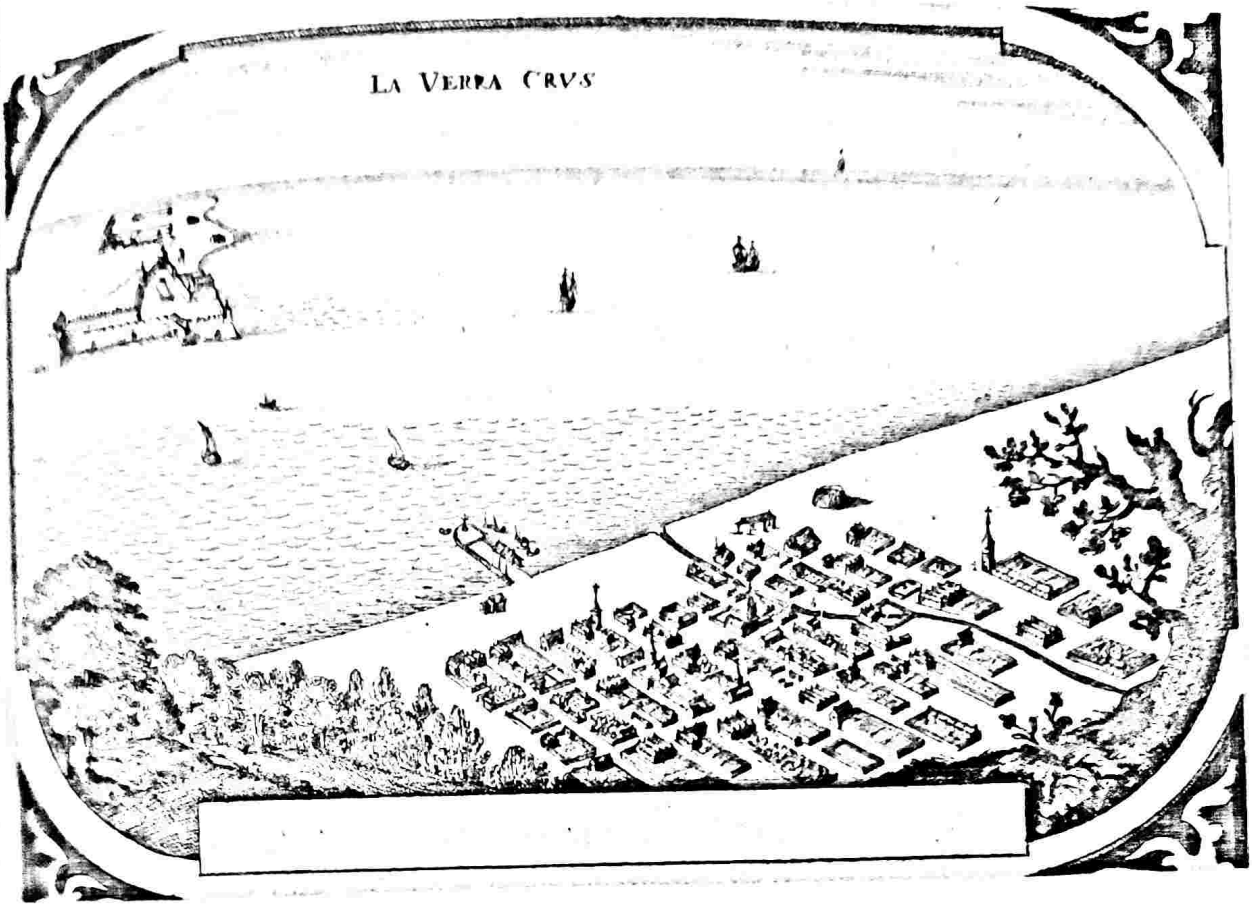
In August 1675, just eight years before Lorencillo's attack on the city, royal officials in the port reported that San Juan de Ulúa was badly in need of repairs. However, due to the untimely death of the supervising foreman, construction had come to a halt. Local authorities beseeched Viceroy Payo Enríquez de Rivera Manrique to urgently send a replacement in order to resume the building of fortifications, describing the fort as old and gravely beaten down by the unforgiving *nortes* that violently struck Veracruz every season. While the viceroy received the letter by January 1676, he did not dispatch another

supervisor to San Juan de Ulúa until the war council convened in November 1677. The military assembly charged the new supervisor with expediting the work "with the brevity that is convenient."[24] While the council encouraged swift action, the viceroy's two-year delay in responding to the needs of his port officials likely caused a series of dangerous postponements to the work. The cost of the delay would inevitably be paid for by the people of Veracruz as 1683 approached.

Under the cover of the predawn hours on May 18, 1683, Laurens de Graaf and his band of pirates crept toward the central plaza of La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz. With a stunning early-morning assault, they caught the city's inhabitants by surprise, confronting residents in various states of confused slumber and undress. In short order pirates overtook San Juan de Ulúa, ransacked and looted elite homes, and rounded up officials and their families while others hid in fear for their lives. For nearly two weeks Laurens and hundreds of other pirates held New Spain's chief port of entry hostage.[25]

According to Philip Ayres's account of the Great Siege, published in 1684, Laurens de Graaf had support from experienced English, Dutch, French, and Bermudan pirates by the eve of the invasion. Ayres claimed that these men controlled a cadre of artillery, including a commandeered fifty-gun English ship and water crafts that ranged from an eight- to a forty-gun capacity. Ayres adds, "These vessels had between nine hundred and a thousand men, most of them French and Dutch, and some few English."[26] The number of marauders likely did not reach such heights, but the 1683 Great Siege of Veracruz represented the fears of the Crown: invaders with the explicit or implicit backing of Spain's foreign rivals.

After the initial lightning strike of pillaging, the pirates rounded up the port's residents and held them captive. The city officials' report a year later stated, "They took our families and



The city of Veracruz with a view of the Island Fortress of San Juan de Ulúa (circa 1670–1770). Source: Anonymous. © The Trustees of the British Museum

imprisoned them in the parish church, where we were confined with four thousand people—men, women, priests, children, and enslaved negros."[27] While the extant historical documents do not specify the breakdown of these masses, the description makes evident the scope of the impact: no one was spared, regardless of gender, religious position, age, race, or legal status.

Given the size of most seventeenth-century churches, however, the estimate of four thousand people appears to be an exaggeration. While the population of the port of Veracruz sometimes fluctuated substantially with the arrivals and departures of the flotas carrying merchandise from Spain, the greater Caribbean, and South America, people of African descent consistently maintained a visible presence. If Laurens de

Graaf held four thousand people in a church (or even a quarter of that number), a large percentage would have likely been people of African descent. As early as 1578 one Jesuit source noted, "Father Juan Rogel preached daily to the negros and mulatos, of which there was a large number in the city." A letter from 1597 describing the work of the Jesuit residence in Veracruz noted, "[The] work is with españoles, the citizens, as well as with the ones who come and go on the flotas, passengers and the people of the sea. Also, [the fathers] preach to the great number of slaves that are in this city and the many others who serve the king on the island [of San Juan Ulúa]." A population estimate for 1646 posits that there were five thousand African-descended people in the city with an additional three thousand people of African descent laboring in the port's agricultural periphery on cattle ranches and sugar plantations.[28]

There is no available population breakdown for 1683, but one estimate proposes that Veracruz was home to roughly six thousand people, including Spaniards. However, any demographic projection would have certainly vacillated depending on whether a fleet was approaching or leaving Veracruz Port.[29] For most of the year La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz likely counted no more than a few thousand souls. Few seasonal residents lingered in the port after the merchant ships left the city. As emphasized in chapter 1, Xalapa was the more ideal site, which explains why plenty of port vecinos maintained property in and fostered ties with the hillside town on the Camino Real. These trends also emphasize how events in the port could have lasting effects on the central Veracruz region as a whole. Even if the estimate of four thousand hostages is a misrepresentation of those directly affected, it stresses a fundamental reality of this episode: No one was safe from the terror of Laurens de Graaf.

One account by the port's secular council a year after the

siege provides a vivid retelling of the depths of the depravity that the residents endured. It reads, "[While being held hostage] in the church, we suffered hunger, thirst, and other disgraces, not sparing the priests, who endured by the Grace of God and the hope for the assistance provided by your Majesty. . . . Not content with the sacking of the city, they terrorized men and women who only had the heavens to protect them." While many had suffered, not all had done so in the same ways. The city council highlighted the degradation borne by the priests and the agony of the greater religious community. It is believed that religious authorities shuttered the doors of the Convent of Nuestra Señora de la Merced due to the "desecration suffered at the hands of Lorencillo in 1683."[30] In that priests were representatives of Catholicism, their victimization, in a church, no less, might have also symbolized a targeted assault on the cornerstone of Spanish culture and society. An explicit rejection of the Catholic Church and its legitimizing power by pirate apostates must have shaken the religious communities of the region. Most significantly, the report by the city council of Veracruz begins a line of narratives that identified victims and described the long-term effects of the attack. How subsequent reports positioned casualties underscores the gendered, racialized, and classed experiences of midcolonial Mexico.

People of African descent were always vital to understanding the history of the Great Siege of 1683—with the experience of trauma but also with the city's survival. African-descended men had long served in the defense of the Spanish colonies. And while the Crown depended on their defensive labor, trepidation persisted about African-descended men having access to weapons. Although that fear continually played against the necessity of defense, free men of African descent answered the call to take up arms in 1683. According to the city

council, free mulatos on horseback intervened in the attack, killed fifty pirates, and helped drive them out of the city. The report also noted that these African-descended men did so without being asked to since they "found themselves unsupervised." Men of African descent fought against the foreign invaders and yet an air of suspicion remained—"unsupervised" they were. The fear of the autonomy of African-descended people harkens back to beliefs and laws that attempted to require that even free people live under Spanish *amos* (owners or "supervisors").[31] Nevertheless, African-descended men risked their lives in a city where the majority of all enslaved Africans entered colonial Mexico. Perhaps they battled against the enemies because it was their duty. Or perhaps these men rallied on horseback as they witnessed pirates abusing and rounding up hundreds of women and men of African descent.

The Great Siege documented loss, but it also highlighted how Spanish authorities imagined the impact on the port's community, which was distinctly bereft of care for the most marginalized. In their report the city council members indicated their level of concern for the people abducted by Laurens de Graaf by stating, "Not only does this create a great need [for labor] but these people also [used to] pay tribute to Your Majesty." The shortage of labor and tribute, the colonial space that Spaniards expected Africans and their descendants to fill, was the primary point of distress for the royal officials.[32] The Great Siege of 1683 stressed the marked priorities of the colony and the social hierarchies from which they emanated. The council reduced the port's African-descended population to an abstraction of colonial inconvenience: the loss of productivity and capital, not people, not members of a community.

The council report also noted that the pirates had captured four hundred "poor and miserable" free women of African descent. This description seems to have opened up space

for free African-descended women to be acknowledged as victims who had suffered a specific tragedy. That pirates deprived free women of their liberty was perhaps shocking even to the council members. However, officials said little else about the trauma that African-descended women experienced and turned their sympathies to Spanish women.

The members of the city council stated that the pirates forced the hostages from the church to march and carry supplies like "animales cargados" (pack animals), adding that, "At eleven in the morning, they took us but left the *mujeres blancas* in the church."[33] This is a remarkable description for its erasure but also for its specificity. Most archival descriptions of Spanish women simply noted them as "women" since Spanishness was the normalized universal identity. Rarely did documents denote Spanish women as "blancas" as there would be no need to do so as an archival convention. In fact, more often notarial records used the modifier "blanca" in cases about African-descended people (such as references to mulatas blancas), attempting to clarify the predominance of their European features and to announce their African ancestry. For an incident that affected all sectors of society in a racially diverse site such as La Nueva Ciudad de Veracruz, perhaps the clarification of who was left in the church was necessary. Additionally, one had to consider if the church was actually safer for these mujeres blancas as plunderers still roamed the streets. Doubtful, but the pirates did not force them to carry supplies like animals, as others were forced to do that day. The council members offered no further elaboration on the fate of the mujeres blancas, but by signaling their gendered experience they also silenced the racialized experiences of non-Spanish women as Laurens terrorized the port's residents.

This silencing is especially disturbing given what the council revealed next about this traumatic event. Of those forced

out of the church, the report stated that more than fifty people lost their lives in this dreadful march, as people drowned in river crossings and died from exhaustion.[34] The report did not designate these fifty souls by race or gender. Did they include some of the enslaved women and men whom the pirates held hostage with hundreds (or thousands) of others in the church? How many of these fifty people were free people of African descent? Did this undifferentiated number represent the non-Spanish women forced from the church as the mujeres blancas stayed behind?

The descriptions of the Great Siege of 1683 center religion, the interests of the secular government, the importance of Spanish womanhood, and the otherness of "poor and miserable" African-descended women. The official report's tone also conveys outrage. The council's indignation seemed to be steeped in feeling as though *they* had been treated like slaves. The pirates had forced them into a cramped space in the church, deprived them of food and water, separated Spanish mothers from their children, and then marched weary survivors to an unknown destination like beasts of burden. The imagery of the report recalls the violence of the slave marches to West African ports, the deprivation experienced in dungeons, the trauma of the slave ship, and the savagery of bondage on the shores of the colonies. Perhaps most horrific to the city council members, Laurens de Graaf had reduced Spaniards, priests, and their children to captives exposed to endless degradation and death. The Great Siege caused more than just physical and financial damage to the city's elite.

While the Spanish residents of the port had doors broken in and windows busted out, African-descended people were vulnerable on all the registers that made their lives both precarious and necessary in a slave society. On June 1, 1683, members of the Veracruz city council witnessed pirates sailing away

with "1,500 slaves and more than four hundred poor and miserable free pardas and negras." The officials further testified that as the pirates fled from their final stand at Isla de Sacrificios, a small island near the port, they abducted one hundred more people, "personas negras y mulatas, esclavas y libres" (free and enslaved people of African descent).[35]

The council solemnly reported that the "sacking [of Veracruz] was one of the greatest that the Crown had experienced in many years." In fact, the pirates had caused so much damage that even after the Auditor of War Don Francisco Fernandez Marmolejo conducted an appraisal, he declared that the loss could not be accurately assessed. If one accounts only for the value of fifteen hundred slaves taken by the pirates, more than half a million pesos had been stolen. The council offered the Crown a rough estimate of four million reales in lost goods and damaged property, a number that does not appear to reflect the capture of slaves.[36] For people of African descent, the toll was immeasurable.

The Great Siege of Veracruz shattered the lives of free and enslaved African-descended people. One of these ill-fated victims was the daughter of the widowed matriarch María de la Candelaria. Many people had failed to protect her and the greater port community. Who was to blame? Viceroy Don Tomás de la Cerda, who served from 1680 to 1686, placed culpability squarely on the infirm corregidor of Veracruz, Don Pablo Zepeda y Lira, who was recuperating in Puebla de los Ángeles due to an unspecified illness. According to the viceroy, Don Pablo was unfit when he arrived to take on the responsibilities of governing and defending the port. In a 1684 letter to King Charles II, Viceroy Don Tomás asserted, "I now realize that having [Don Pablo Zepeda y Lira in command] of this city, [and] him not being a soldier, allowed for the loss and great damage"; he added that the "gall of the pirates and ene-

mies of the Crown of Your Majesty" also played a contributing role.[37] The viceroy then relieved Don Pablo of his duties, citing the preferred Spanish euphemism of "inconvenience" in having him return to Veracruz Port and reiterating that he was not a soldier.

In his place, Don Tomás appointed a man with military experience, the Maestre de Campo Don Francisco Osorio de Astorga. The viceroy believed Don Francisco was the best choice for the port's grieving vecinos, who now "found themselves better off . . . [with] the Maestro de campo and his sargento mayor, [who] spent the evenings making [patrol] rounds and guarding the plaza." The viceroy also promoted Don Francisco Osorio de Astorga, naming him interim *maestro teniente general.* Viceroy Don Tomás de la Cerda was so confident in this newly installed military government that he boldly proclaimed that had such a man been chosen in the first place, "the sack of the city would have never occurred."[38]

The letter penned by the viceroy in the early weeks of 1684 carried a tone of disappointment and regret but also of determination. Don Tomás refers to Francisco Osorio de Astorga as the remedy and highlights the importance of his military experience combined with his clear political background. What might have also influenced the viceroy's tenor in the letter was the fact that he had a lot to prove since he himself was new to the viceregal seat. Don Tomás de la Cerda's investiture took place on November 30, 1680. Two and a half years later pirates nearly destroyed the port of Veracruz. As he wrote to King Charles II just six months after the Great Siege, he likely wanted to emphasize that he was well in command and had corrected the problem with an interim military governor of Veracruz. Notably, the viceroy's letter to the Spanish monarch appeared reluctant to describe the current state of affairs in the port. Other than vague notes about "loss and great

damage" and "the despair of the vecinos," the letter offers little of the viceregal office's specific sense of Veracruz and its needs outside of better management, which Viceroy Don Tomás de la Cerda defined as more militaristic.[39]

The Crown would not have to wait long before another group of officials offered a sharply different assessment of the Great Siege and the challenges of moving forward. According to the report by the city council of Veracruz, royal officials had betrayed the trust of the public by not listening to the experts, resulting in the tragedy that befell the port. They wrote, "In agreement with men with maritime experience, seeing these ships turn about, [three] messages were sent to Don Luis Francisco de Cordoba, governor of this city, saying that those ships did not seem right and that [the city] should be put [ready] at arms to which the governor responded that everything was already prepared [for such an attack].[40] The indictment was clear. There had been a window during which the governor could have mobilized the resources of the port, readied additional men, and prepared for a full-scale defense. Instead, he ignored the training of his subordinates, and the people of Veracruz suffered for his hubris, especially people of African descent.

The council also wanted to make clear that the people of Veracruz did not simply put down their arms and surrender the city to the raiding pirates. They carefully explained that more than six hundred armed pirates had overtaken the royal warehouses and gained access to arms, gunpowder, and ammunition, which crippled the city's ability to defend itself. In an attempt to perhaps exculpate themselves, they noted, "[The city had] more than 1,200 Spanish men who, even though brave, were caught asleep due to the carelessness of military leaders and the lack of attention paid to the [warnings sent]." According to the council, the lookouts had accurately perceived

and dutifully reported to their superiors, but the chain of command had failed at the top. The governor was derelict in his duties by not giving the people of Veracruz a fighting chance as they slumbered, unaware of the danger already advancing to their doorsteps. However, they agreed with the viceroy, adding, "[Given] the individual laws of our Majesty and the mandates of the viceroys that speak to military prevention . . . this situation should not have happened."[41]

Even if María de la Candelaria had heard about the assessment by the council, it likely did not soothe her spirit to know that her daughter's abduction was preventable. What is clear is that this free African-descended woman was not the only one who called upon the memory of the Great Siege when in need. In a letter penned on August 24, 1683, the city council stated that while they were ordered to help unload the flota of General Don Diego de Zaldivar "without any delay" they struggled with the workload due to a lack of African-descended laborers and other service people. They then offered the oblique reference to "that fatal incident."[42] Just three months after the attack, the population most affected by the ravages of the pirates had again been rendered a colonial inconvenience as others moved on and considered operational matters.

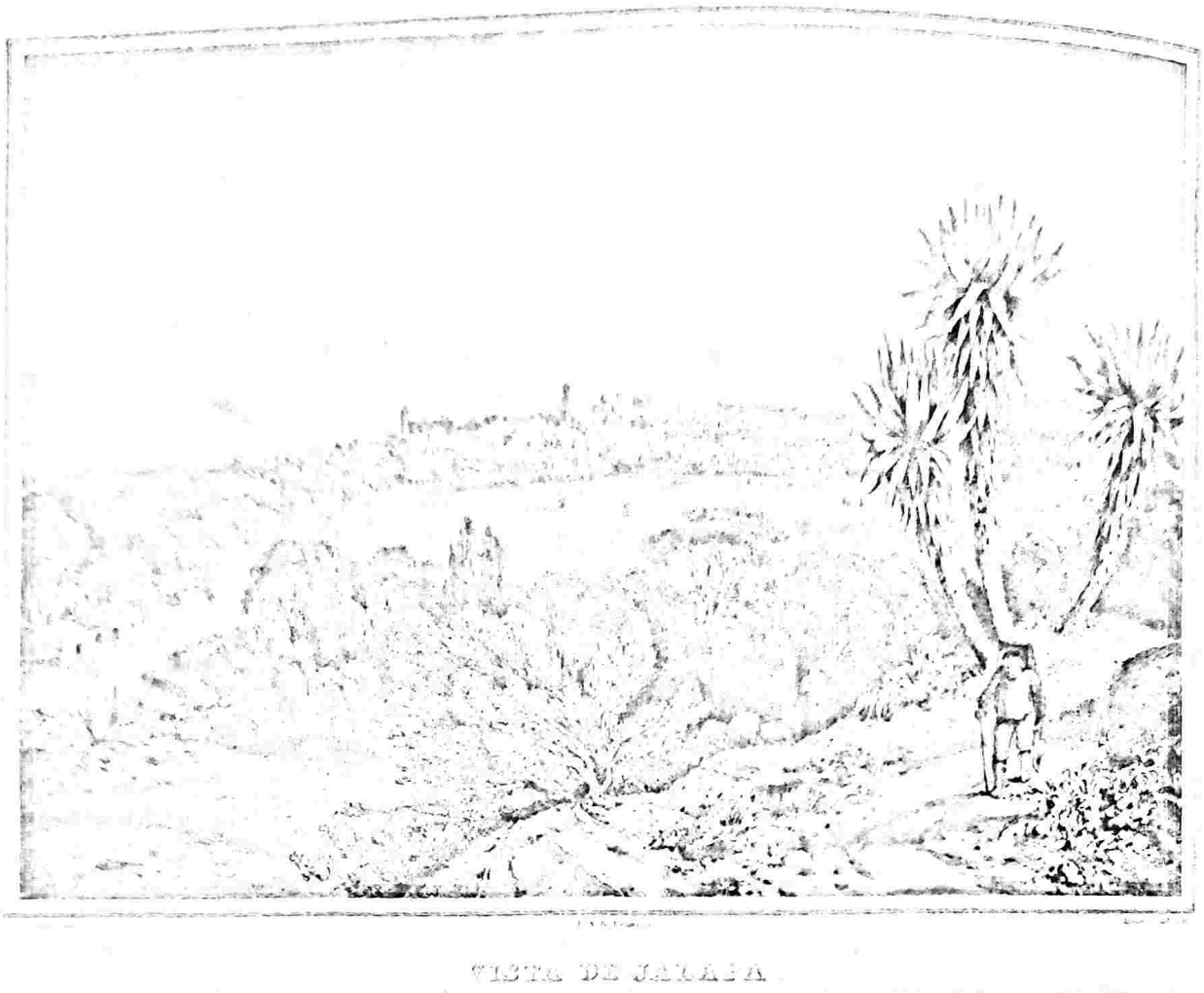
Stalled work schedules were not the only occasions when royal magistrates invoked the explanatory power of the Great Siege of 1683. Three regidores (council members) convicted in 1686 of an unnamed offense against the vicar of Veracruz stated that they could not pay the one-thousand-peso fine due to the "poverty that they remained in due to the invasion of the enemy."[43] The judges noted at the end of their letter to the king that they would eventually charge the men the required amount and remit it. The magistrates seemed to have offered some leeway to the officials, likely due to their positions, but the mobilization of the memory of the Great Siege also appeared

to function as a convenient avenue of extenuating circumstances for the regional government.

Licenciado Don Juan Sánchez de Tovar's narrative aside about María's abduction by the enemy pirates may have elicited a visceral response from people all over the region and perhaps across the colony. He had positioned María de la Candelaria as the archetype of the grief-stricken protagonist: a widowed mother of five children in need of legal protection. That she had also been victimized by the hated scoundrel Laurens de Graaf perhaps heightened the degree of sympathy she was afforded by others. As further investigation into her notarial life reveals, María de la Candelaria might have been grieving, but she was still a woman of means.

One month after María presented her case, on April 26, 1685, her son Joseph registered a final entry on her behalf. While not a letter verifying that María was the lawful wife of Diego Ordóñez, Joseph's assertions of his family's legitimacy resonate throughout the document and imply that María's campaign was perhaps successful. Joseph's introductory statement reads, "I, Joseph Ordóñez, pardo libre . . . legitimate son of Diego Ordóñez and María de la Candelaria . . . and as the heir of my aforementioned father and in virtue that I have the poder of my aforementioned mother as [she is] the guardian and administrator of the other heirs of my aforementioned deceased father Diego Ordóñez." Joseph then noted that he had sold a sizeable number of his father's properties in the greater jurisdiction of Xalapa.[44] That he was able to transact this sale for María and exert some control of the inheritance implies that the officials who had examined María's case had likely sided with the wealthy widow of African descent, at least partially.

As his mother's legal proxy, Joseph sold two grazing areas for smaller animals, such as pigs and sheep. The first measured three acres and was located on the outskirts of the town of Chil-



Carl Nebel, elevated view of Xalapa with a lone traveler (1836). Lithograph. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California

toyac. The second measured two acres and was situated about a league and a half from Ixhuacán, approximately two leagues from Xalapa. The second pasture had the advantage of being located near the Joloatl River. Although a few acres of land do not sound particularly impressive, María sold them for a windfall of four hundred pesos. María's diligence in her presentation of her family's narrative paid off not only because it appears that she was confirmed as the legitimate wife of Diego, but, as is now clear, she had a lot to gain financially in securing the inheritance rights to high-value real estate.

This final entry also clarifies how María's husband came

into possession of these lands. The documents of March 30, 1685, cited only that Doña Luisa Ordóñez had given Diego some properties. The April 26, 1685, bill of sale specified that she was Diego's wealthy and generous aunt originally from Palm Island but for decades a vecina of Xalapa. Diego had inherited the property in 1638 when he was just ten years old. Doña Luisa and her husband, Manuel Rodríguez de Maya, had long been fixtures in Xalapa, owning property in the region valued at thirty-five hundred pesos as early as 1598 and owning slaves in the early 1600s before establishing a packtrain business in the 1620s. The couple echoed elite religious practices and endowed a chapel in the Monastery of San Francisco for masses to be celebrated for their souls and those of their deceased family members. When Manuel Rodríguez de Maya died in 1625, Doña Luisa continued to conduct business on her own, selling some of her land and owning slaves.[45]

The additional information regarding Doña Luisa Ordóñez's background hints that María de la Candelaria might have needed a carefully curated narrative with a whole team of legal representatives and witnesses to prove her claim. The Spanish legal system allowed for the acknowledgment of natural children, if the father chose to grant such rights. The case of Polonia de Ribas profiled in chapter 4 underscores that one could even establish legal rights of inheritance for illegitimate grandchildren, if the petitioner so wished. The same could be done for female consorts. Under Spanish colonial inheritance laws, if María de la Candelaria successfully defended her position as the legitimate wife of Diego Ordóñez, she would have the right to half of his estate, the other half being evenly distributed among the legitimate heirs.[46] In addition to the financial benefit she would receive, it likely mattered quite a bit to this woman of means that she set the record straight regarding the legitimacy of her family.

María assembled an infallible defensive line against the accusation of her illegitimacy with three witnesses, one a clergyman, to assert her marital as well as her classed status. Although more widely documented among the Spanish elite, mothers and fathers rebutted claims that they conceived children out of wedlock to ensure that their progeny would continue to enjoy the material and social benefits ascribed to legitimacy.[47] Some African-descended families understood marital legitimacy as being socially important, while others valued its approximation, as discussed in chapter 2. Religious legitimacy opened doors for elite Spaniards attempting to enter power structures of the colonies, such as universities, convents, and Crown-sanctioned positions. María de la Candelaria might have also wanted to affirm her family's place in the social order and defend a position not outrightly presumed to be the domain of even a wealthy African-descended woman. Whether women of African descent were legitimate wives or lovers, the men's families likely did not welcome the cases of free negras, morenas, mulatas, and pardas who sought to establish control over inheritances.

María's approach highlights her awareness of the weight accorded to gendered prescriptions, perhaps especially for African-descended women. María did not legally need her son to represent her before the notarial authorities—there was nothing in the Spanish legal code that would have prevented her, as a widow, from presenting her case alone. However, she must have known that having her son serve as her proxy together with three male witnesses fortified her case as a woman of African descent attempting to secure her rights as a mujer legítima. Perhaps María de la Candelaria strategically mobilized her trauma to her benefit, but so too did others.

In proceedings that sought to establish whether María de la Candelaria and Diego de Ordóñez had been legitimately married, we learn that their daughter, also named María, along with hundreds of other free women of African descent, had been "taken prisoner by the enemy." Perhaps those listening to and transcribing her testimony, unquestionably men and possibly slave owners too, did not empathize with the free woman standing before them. Nevertheless, few in the region would have been able to so casually disregard a reference to the horror caused by the Dutch pirate Laurens de Graaf.

The Great Siege created a traumatic shared memory of hundreds of pirates terrorizing the residents of the port, damaging private and public property, and shattering the lives of both free and enslaved families as they witnessed loved ones taken hostage. The event so fractured the sense of safety of port residents that Xalapa's population experienced a boom after 1683 as people abandoned the port en masse, again seeking refuge in the way station town.[48] Most significantly, an entire region had experienced a tragedy, and the consequences ranged from a family in mourning to colonial authorities renegotiating the power dynamics of governance. The official reports of the tragedy centered people of African descent as indispensable but important only in their worth as chattel, in their representation as the Crown's tributaries, and in their value as members of the free colonial workforce.

The loss, the city council officials argued, "was nearly incalculable"—something the African-descended community in Veracruz would have agreed upon. The social status of people of African descent in the midcolonial era was always contingent, even for the wealthy. Who, for example, had questioned the legitimacy of Ana's and María's marriages? Importantly, neither woman allowed such an affront to stand. Ana de Arriaga and María de la Candelaria were women of means, but

manumission was not the same as freedom. The abduction of a wealthy daughter of legitimately married, landowning parents was a chilling reminder that the threat of enslavement was never far away.

The aftermath of the Great Siege of 1683 had long-ranging consequences, including the havoc it caused in the archives after the installation of the military government. In a rare case of contemporary admission, officials highlighted the significance and challenges of maintaining the documentary arm of colonial administration. In 1689, government administrators requested that Veracruz's sitting corregidor, Pedro López Pardo, compile a report on the dispatches and records of his predecessor, Maestro de Campo Don Francisco Osorio de Astorga. Pedro noted that while he had not located all of the records in the city council archive, he could offer a summary of core concerns, the first of which was the "good treatment of and religious ministry to the slaves." Corregidor Pedro López Pardo then followed this proclamation by addressing issues of commerce, including the threat of piracy.[49]

How was it possible that the archive, in just one administration, had fallen into such disarray that not even the military governor's papers could be located? Additionally, why did the corregidor begin his summary with a centering of the "good treatment" of enslaved people? And in light of the sheer scale of the population decimation experienced due to the attack, why attempt to reassure his superiors that he would attend to those who remained? There might have been other reasons that Pedro López Pardo specifically and prominently addressed the treatment of African-descended people. Perhaps the royal official's statements spoke to a broader concern of the scarcity of slaves and their continued demand in the region. By the late seventeenth century many places in colonial Mexico had turned toward wage laborers, but others in the central Veracruz region

still relied on slavery. He may have wanted to assure his superiors that he had a more watchful eye on the enslaved population and would not allow the mistakes of his predecessors to reoccur during his tenure. "The enemy would not steal away more slaves from Veracruz," he might have murmured as he drafted the note.

María de la Candelaria's daughter was taken prisoner by the enemy. Her abduction still lingered in the minds of her family and community. The Great Siege marked time for the region's African-descendant population, and the aftermath must have been all-encompassing. Economic insecurity likely affected a large number of families since pirates killed, injured, and seized breadwinners, caregivers, children, and patrons. Perhaps the Candelaria family depended on María the daughter or her contacts in La Nueva Veracruz, her capture propelling the economic need to secure the inheritance. The archive reveals that María the mother wanted those hearing her tragic story to feel that absence too—to relive that traumatic event as fellow vecinos of the region. Whether it was to provoke the compassion of the officials who might have also lost loved ones or property in the Great Siege, the abduction of María the daughter called upon multiple notions of family, Crown obligations, and patriarchal duties. "She had suffered enough," a notarial assistant might have thought as María de la Candelaria's witnesses appeared one after another to attest to her good religious character and her family's legitimacy. What might have been a gendered strategy of survival, a utilitarian attempt to secure her future, demonstrates the importance of a collective memory for traditionally marginalized people as they pled their cases before Crown authorities, offered up their family legacies, defended their humanity, and called for justice.