Casta Painting: Art, Race and Identity in Colonial Mexico (HI972)

Module Leader
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Aims
This module explores the distinctive vision of colonial Mexico purveyed via the artistic genre known as the casta painting. Casta paintings depict the outcomes of different types of inter-ethnic mixing, and often come in series of 16, showing many different family groups. They are quite remarkable. Consider, for example, José de Alcíbar's painting showing a family group consisting, we are told in the helpful label, of a Black father, and Indian mother and their 'Wolf' son:

José de Alcíbar, *De Negro y De India Sale Lovo*

Casta paintings can be seen as attempts at cataloguing the varied inhabitants of Spain’s colonial universe. They thus offer a visual taxonomy of colonial space. At the same time, they have been read as statements of local pride, and usually include a wealth of details about local customs and habits. In addition, they are rich and complex documents relating to the material culture of colonial Spanish America. In Alcíbar's painting reproduced above we notice not only the domestic strife but also the beautiful china (which is endangered by the parental row) and food items such as the headless chicken. How are we to interpret and understand such images? The module will introduce students to this artistic genre, and will explore different ways of interpreting these multi-valent images. Its educational aims, therefore, are to help students consider how to read artistic works produced in a colonial setting, how to use casta paintings as a body of source material, and how to explore the relationship between visual and textual depictions of colonial space.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this module you will be able to:
- Assess the historiographic treatment of race in colonial Mexico.
- Understand and evaluate the scholarly literature on the emergence of creole patriotism in eighteenth-century Mexico
- Show that you have improved your research and presentation skills
• Recognise and evaluate the different ways in which scholars in different disciplines have interpreted casta paintings
• Discuss the challenges posed by the use of casta paintings as a historical source.
• Apply your scholarly and theoretical knowledge to the analysis of a specific casta painting

Assessment
1 assessed essay of 5,000 words

Syllabus
week 1: Introduction
week 2: Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico
week 3: Men and Women
week 4: Materialities
week 5: Families
week 6: Reading Week
week 7: Trip to Breamore House
week 8: Student presentations.
week 9: Student presentations
week 10: Conclusions: Race, Class and the Colonial Imagination

Seminar Readings
week 1: Introduction
What are casta paintings?
Readings:
Peruse the illustrations in one of the following books:
García Sáiz, María Concepción, Las castas mexicanas. Un género pictórico americano, Olivetti (Milan, 1989).
Skim the chapters on colonial Spanish America in one of the following:
Bakewell, Peter, A History of Latin America, (Blackwell, 1997).
Lockhart, James and Stuart Schwartz, Early Latin America, (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

week 2: Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico
How well do the racial taxonomies of casta paintings reflect the lived experience of eighteenth-century Mexicans? Do you agree with Susan Kellogg that these paintings help legitimise mestizaje by making it seem ‘part of everyday life’?

Readings:
Bourbon Society
Casta Paintings


**week 3: Men and Women**

What sorts of intimate relationships do casta paintings depict? What role does violence play in structuring gender norms?

Readings:

*Marriage and Sexualities*


*Casta paintings*


**week 4: Materialities**

How should we interpret the abundant material culture depicted in casta paintings? What is the importance of all that food?

Readings:

*Commodities and Identities*


*Casta paintings*

Fisher, Abby Sue, ‘*Mestizaje and the Cuadros de Casta*: Visual Representation of Race, Status, and Dress in Eighteenth Century Mexico’, D.Phil, University of Minnesota, 1992


week 5: Families
To what extent do casta paintings engage with Enlightenment debates about domesticity and the family? What images of paternity and maternity do they promote?

Readings:
Families
Casta paintings

week 6: Reading Week

week 7: Trip to Breamore House (Hampshire) to view collection of casta paintings

week 8: Student presentations.
Please present an analysis of a specific casta painting.

week 9: Student presentations, con’t.

week 10: Conclusions: Race, Class and the Colonial Imagination
What accounts of the current popularity of casta paintings?

Bibliography
Primary Sources
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Casta Paintings and Visual Culture
Ebert, Anne, ‘La representación de las Américas coloniales en los cuadros de castas’, Scientia, vol. x, no. 10.
Estenssoro Fuchs, Juan Carlos, ‘Los colores de la plebe. Razón y mestizaje en el Perú colonial’, Los cuadros de mestizaje del Virrey Amat. La representación etnográfica en el Perú colonial, Museo de Arte (Lima, 2000).

Frutas y Castas Ilustradas, Museo Nacional de Antropología Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (Madrid, 2004).

García Sáz, María Concepción, Las castas mexicanas. Un género pictórico americano, Olivetti (Milan, 1989).


Sentiments and Emotions


Material Culture


Colonial Culture and Society

Alberro, Solange, et al., El placer de pecar y el afán de normar: ideologías y comportamientos familiares y sexuales en el México colonial, Planeta (Mexico, 1986).

Alberro, Solange, et al., Seis ensayos sobre el discurso colonial relativo a la comunidad doméstica, (Mexico City, 1980)


Arrom, Silvia, The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857, Stanford University Press (Stanford, 1985)


Lipsett-Rivera, Sonya, ‘Marriage and Family Relations in Mexico during the Transition from Colony to Nation’, *State and Society in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution*, Víctor Uribe-Urán (ed.) (Wilmington, 2001).


Ortega, Sergio, ed., *De la Santidad a la Perversión, o porqué no se cumplía la Ley de Dios en la Sociedad Novohispana*, Grijalba (Mexico, 1985).


Seed, Patricia, To Love, Honour and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821, (Stanford, 1988)


Stern, Steve, The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men and Power in Late Colonial Mexico (Chapel Hill, 1995)


Race and Caste

Aguirre Beltrán, Gonzalo, La población negra de México: Estudio etnohistórico (Mexico, 1984 [1946]).


Ares Queija, ed. Negros, Mulatos, Zambaigos: Derreeroes africanos en los mundos ibéricos (Seville, 2000).

Bennett, Herman, Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640 (Bloomington, 2003).


Carroll, Patrick James, Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity and Regional Development (Austin, 2001).


Martínez, María Elena, Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico, Stanford University Press (Stanford, 2008).


Mörner, Magnus, Race Mixture in the History of Latin America, Little, Brown (Boston, 1967).


