

PAINTING A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: THE [IN]VISIBILITY OF THE CONVENT OF CORPUS CHRISTI, MEXICO CITY 1719–1775

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Produced from the early sixteenth century onward, images of Spain's colonial territories generated a substantial body of cartographic materials and secular art. Within this expansive oeuvre exists a category of images devoted to the urban environment of Mexico City, formerly known as the viceregal capital of New Spain. Accomplished artists and draftsmen rendered their perceptions of the city on the surfaces of canvas paintings, topographical maps, and even elaborate folding screens used as room dividers. Depending on a variety of artistic and functional criteria, these images may be classified by scholars according to a variety of descriptive labels that include: landscape, *veduta*, profile, map, elevation, and so on. Besides demonstrating colonists' fondness for city views and the usefulness of such images in regard to urban planning, the sum of these works also establish a distinct and relatively unexplored category for art historical analysis.

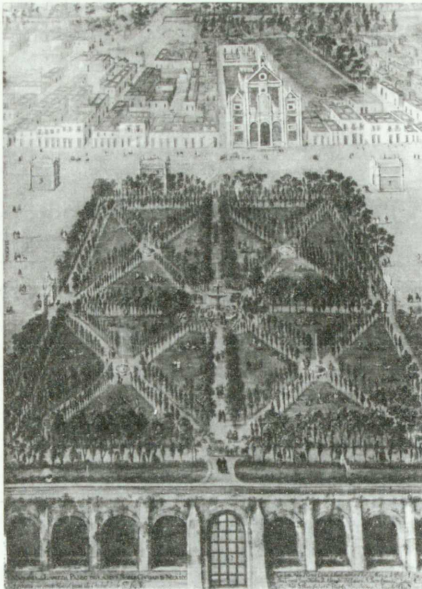


FIGURE 1. Anonymous, *Mapa de la Alameda Paseo de la Muy Noble Ciudad De Mexico*, ca. 1719, oil on canvas, 82.7 in x 58.25 in (210 cm x 148 cm). Courtesy of W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, Harvard University.

Mapa del Alameda Paseo de la Mui Noble Ciudad de México offers a prime example of a Spanish colonial landscape (Figure 1). Featured prominently in the mid-ground of this large canvas are the well-manicured gardens of the Alameda Park. Mature ash trees create the appearance of shady avenues that crisscross the lawns and direct the movement of figures. From a compositional standpoint, the prominent north/south thoroughfare bisects the image and creates a vertical axis leading the viewer's gaze to the facade of a large building that stands to the immediate right of the end of the thoroughfare. Carefully-wrought features, such as a tripartite portal, enclosed rooftop garden, twin bell towers, and a formidable brick façade indicate the structure is a church. Indeed, an explanatory key located the bottom of the painting verifies this assessment by identifying the building as, "the Convent of Corpus Christi fabricated by His Excellency the Marquee of Valero I."

The impact of the Convent of Corpus Christi upon the contours of colonial society cannot be overstated. Officially established in 1724, Corpus Christi provided a facility expressly reserved for nuns descended from the families of noble, pureblood Amerindians. It was the first of its kind in the Americas where throughout much of the colonial period ethnicity, gender, and class discrimination had prohibited native women from gaining official entry to any of the approximately fifty-three nunneries existing in the audiencia of Mexico. Sponsored by former Viceroy Zúñiga (also known as the Marquee of Valero, Viceroy 1716–1722), the foundation of Corpus Christi overturned more than two centuries of discriminatory policies. The convent also served as the prototype for three subsequent native nunneries including: Our Lady of Cosamaloapan in Valladolid (established 1734), Our Lady of Los Angeles in Oaxaca (established 1774), and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City (established 1811).¹

Taking into consideration the cultural significance of Corpus Christi and the Viceroy's personal interest in its establishment, the treatment of the convent within the aforementioned painting brings several issues into focus. Why for instance does the nunnery feature so prominently within the composition—locating, for example, the first ordinal reference of the textual inscription? Furthermore, to what extent did the artist faithfully depict features of the viceregal urban environment? What purposes might alteration, embellishment, and/or staging have served? While concrete

answers to these questions require further investigation, analysis of *Mapa del Alameda* and artworks of a similar nature can assist scholars in better understanding the ideology of visual representation within Spanish colonial landscape.

After establishing a theoretical framework from which to better comprehend the history of landscape in New Spain and discussing the social context in which the convent of Corpus Christi originated, this essay offers a reading of three paintings featuring Alameda Park, an area just north of the former convent. The visual handling of Corpus Christi within these works provides a source of insight from which to consider Spanish colonial perspectives on the assimilation of native and mixed-race populations, as well as how the arts were employed in an effort to communicate the various sociopolitical agendas of the viceregal state. The following essay contributes to existing scholarship on the social and cultural dimensions of colonial society through its application of art historical perspectives and analysis. The intent is to shed light on the ways in which visual representations of the city communicated specific messages about the “cultural landscape” of eighteenth century New Spain.

LANDSCAPE AND BUENA POLÍCIA

The essential starting point for this discussion is awareness that all landscape—despite ostensible veracity—must be understood as mediated representations of the social, political, and/or economic conditions existing within a given environment. Although definition of the term “landscape” continues to elicit debate among scholars, most would agree it refers to a category of works that offer graphic representation to a real or imagined location in order to facilitate understanding of space, concept, condition, process, and/or event. Author W.T. Mitchell offers researchers in this field a useful approach to the analysis of landscape. Using a theoretical model that takes into account both the transcendental viewing experiences of landscape and the semiotics inscribed within such works, Mitchell questions not what landscape *is* but what it *does* and how it functions as a cultural practice. He suggests that landscape operates as an instrument of power by naturalizing cultural constructions and giving form to the dominant ideology.² Put another way, landscape visualizes a complicated body of social, political, and economic practices in order to *make* history both within actual and represented environments.

Given the enormous amount of energy and resources directed toward the development of Spain's cartographic tradition, it appears the Crown, indeed, aspired to *make* history. It was under Phillip II (r. 1556–1598) that the official institutionalization of cartography developed and rose to its apogee in sixteenth-century Spain. Sovereign ruler over a vast, unknown territory that encompassed the Spanish Netherlands and stretched across the Atlantic to the Americas, Philip valued maps for their potential to communicate information about his kingdom and to relay the directives of the Crown. Knowing he was physically unable to see his territory in its entirety and interact with his subjects firsthand, Philip turned to the emerging field of cartography as substitute. According to author Barbara Mundy, for the King and his contemporaries “knowledge was predicated on seeing.”³ Thus, by shaping the unknown into something concrete and intelligible, visual images offered a solution to the physical distance of the far-flung Empire.

Throughout much of the colonial period, New World territories provided an inexhaustible subject of study for artists, cartographers, surveyors, and military engineers who strove to display both the built environment and the human communities existing therein. Through his work on images of Hispanic cities, Richard Kagan suggested that the representation of Spain's “Empire of Towns” stood out as a subject of particular fascination among image makers and their patrons. Special regard for artistic images of the “city” likely developed in response to the renewed interest Europeans paid to ancient Greco-Roman sources related to urban planning. Materials such as Vitruvius's *Ten Books on Architecture* and translations of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* led Renaissance luminaries like Leon Battista Alberti (1402–1472), Andrea Palladio (1508–1580), as well as neo-Aristotleian Spanish philosophers such as Alonso de Castrillo (flourished 1521), Diego Pérez de Mesa (1563–1616), and others, to correlate the practice of urban dwelling with the rise and development of civilized society.⁴

Spaniards' understanding of the word “city” or *ciudad* owed much to Aristotle's theories suggesting that a well-organized urban space promoted an auspicious environment for the institution of law, government, and religion. It was additionally believed that cities provided privileged spaces that sheltered citizens bound by common laws in an attempt to protect civic justice and promote individual virtue. Understood in these terms, the demand for New World urban views—particularly communicentric

landscapes—comes as little surprise. Defined as images intended to evoke the intangible social and cultural characteristics of a commonwealth, communicentric landscapes gave prominence and/or invention to certain features of the urban environment.⁵ Drawing attention to churches, civic architecture, and charitable institutions enabled Spanish colonial landscapes to communicate the “civilizing” effects of the Conquest, as well as an ineffable sense of community forged amongst Spaniards within hitherto unknown lands. Communicentric landscapes also relayed critical information about the preservation of Spanish social order as seen through their display of *policía*.

According to author Kagan, the term *policía* derived from Greek and Latin sources and expressed attitudes relating to governance—most especially good governance and the peace, as well as order and prosperity that flourished as result of conscientious stewardship. Additionally, Spaniards associated a secondary meaning to the word beyond its magisterial and punitive connotations. Alternate definitions of “*policía*” linked it to ideas relating to individual comportment, manners, and refinement. In essence, *policía* more accurately amounted to a complex state of being that on one hand pertained to the political structures of urban living, and on the other hand, described standards of polite society.⁶ Evidence supporting this interpretation can be found within sixteenth-century Spanish sources, which often referred to Amerindian neophytes (residing in towns, villages, or *reducciones*) as having become civilized or ser *político*.⁷ Clearly derived from the Spanish *policía*, this phrase takes into account both conceptions of the term: adherence to the communal laws of a commonwealth and an appropriate level of social decorum. Yet, before exploring how specific landscapes communicated *buena policía* and naturalized the cultural constructions of the dominant social group, the origination of the convent of Corpus Christi shall be discussed in order shed light on the complex ethnic and class relations of Spanish colonial society. An analysis of the developments that precipitated the 1724 establishment of the first convent reserved for pure-blood, native women will reveal the cultural transformations occurring within eighteenth-century Spanish colonial society.

CORPUS CHRISTI

The first female convent founded in the New World, *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción* (Mexico City, 1540), offered respite to Spanish women opting a

religious life over conjugal domesticity. Admittance to *La Concepción* was selective and determined chiefly by legitimacy of birth and a family lineage derived from Old World Christian descendants. Ecclesiastical authorities believed these criteria best ensured that the standards and regulations of the Iberian world were upheld within a new colonial context. Accordingly, the admission policies of *La Concepción* became standard issue for convents later established in the Spanish Americas.⁸

While ethnicity and legitimacy of birth factored greatly, under the right circumstances certain exceptions were granted.⁹ The only members of society strictly barred from gaining entry through official channels were native women. Perceived as intellectually inferior, lacking self-discipline, and persistent in idolatrous practice, indigenous women were refused the opportunity to profess as black veiled nuns—those fully entitled to all the honors and obligations of life in the convent.¹⁰ The official position of the Church declared that these women, *las naturales de la tierra*, were immutably flawed by ethnicity and gender. According to officials, both afflictions fed wayward tendencies and rendered the women incapable of fulfilling the demands of their vows.¹¹ Therefore, for much of the colonial period, the roles of native women living within nunneries centered largely upon providing domestic service.

Although it would take nearly two hundred years to amend the admission policies of New Spanish nunneries, ecclesiastic support for the incorporation native women into the religious paradigm grew steadily throughout the colonial period. During the decades immediately following conquest, Bishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumárraga, suggested the humble natures of Amerindian women offered an apt example of model Christian behavior. Despite his observation, a majority of Church resources were allocated, instead, toward *colegios* providing grammar, art, and theological instruction to indigenous male youth, whom authorities deemed better suited to the rigors of formal education. Undeterred by his peers' reluctance to incorporate females into a program of Christian instruction, Zumárraga persisted in advocating for the spiritual interests of native women. In the early 1530s, he succeeded in organizing a girls' school that aimed to provide both religious instruction and an education in the "womanly arts." Within a few short years, however, the project was abandoned.¹²

In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, Spanish support for indigenous spiritual credibility surged. Belief in the special aptitude of native men and women to have transcendental Christian experiences was prompted, in part, by the writings of contemporary spiritual visionaries such as Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Friar Luis de León. Together, the messages put forward by these pious and uniquely "touched" individuals generated an eager and exuberant environment of religious abandon.¹³ In the Americas, the most well-known example of native spirituality was the account of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe before an Amerindian named Juan Diego; however, mendicant friars working on fringes of the frontier submitted reports that also built momentum. Over the century, the writings of these individuals coalesced into a substantial body of hagiographic literature documenting the pious natures of indigenous women and crediting them with great feats of devotion.¹⁴ Simultaneously, the works lessened Spaniards' doubts about the sincerity of Christian conversion amongst native populations.

One of the most prolific hagiographic writers of the seventeenth century was Jesuit scholar Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora. Best known for his praise of Spanish Creole identity, Sigüenza y Góngora expressed a strong admiration for the ancestral peoples of the Americas. Through his writings, Sigüenza y Góngora commended certain aspects of pre-Conquest civilization in an attempt to strengthen his case for the ascendancy of Creole culture. Additionally, Sigüenza y Góngora was receptive to the idea that religious women, rather than men, might be endowed with a unique ability to communicate with the Divine. He cleverly formalized these attitudes in his allegorical narrative dealing with the Conceptionist convent of Jesús María located in Mexico City.

In *Parayso Occidental*, Sigüenza y Góngora suggested that the Conceptionist convent provided a metaphor for New Spain, which he extolled as a New World Paradise that had triumphed against sin and paganism. The manuscript also included uncommon praise of two indigenous women living within the convent. According to Sigüenza y Góngora, despite their lowly status as servants to the Spanish nuns, both Petronila de la Concepción and Francisca de San Miguel repeatedly demonstrated remarkable "proofs of grace." Discussing not only the miracles attributed to Petronila and Francisca, Sigüenza y Góngora argued the two should be honored as models

of Mexican, female virtue. He laid groundwork for this argument in the opening chapters of *Parayso* by crafting parallels between pre-Conquest Mexico and the ancient Greco-Roman world. Sigüenza y Góngora proposed that because vestal virgins were honored in both societies, the two great civilizations possessed similar cultural values.¹⁵ This argument supported the belief that native descendants of the great pre-Conquest societies were also noble and worthy in their own right.

The ideas expressed by Sigüenza y Góngora did not exist within a cultural vacuum. Indeed, Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, Bishop of Puebla (1640–1655), participated within the growing intellectual circle that sung praise to the virtues of indigenous people. Once again, of special consideration were native women, whose dignity, humble natures, innocence, and great piety continued to garner much admiration. Palafox and others fell short, however, of recognizing the infraction of social justice inflicted upon these women as result of convent admission policies. Dismissing the matter entirely, Palafox explained the inability of native women to profess was caused by an economic issue, not one of ethnic discrimination. In his *El libro de las virtudes del Indio*, Palafox entirely dismissed the question of ethnic discrimination by stating, “Lacking a dowry they [native women] enter the convents to serve willingly and with great pleasure.”¹⁶

Despite an apparent disinclination of the Church to formally rescind its admission policies, eighteenth-century society was poised for change. Unfortunately, exact events precipitating the establishment of Corpus Christi, the first convent to welcome professed native nuns, remain shrouded in mystery. Scholars do know that the project generated fierce debate among colonial officials and ecclesiastical authorities. However, supporters of the initiative had in their corner the highest secular authority in all of New Spain. Indeed, Viceroy Francisco Baltasar de Zúñiga y Guzmán (vr. 1716–1722), also known as the Marquis of Valero, played an essential role in the founding of Corpus Christi.

As the story goes, Viceroy Zúñiga, a pious man, sought the council of a young novice in the Franciscan convent of San Juan de la Penitencia concerning governmental affairs. The young woman, *Sor* Petra Francisco, held a reputation of exceptional piety, and incidentally, was the daughter of a wealthy Spanish couple. In her letter of response to Zúñiga, *Sor* Petra never

disclosed the Viceroy's reason for contacting her, but stated she would pray for quick resolve of the matter. She also mentioned her own fierce hope that the Viceroy would found a new convent for nuns of the First Rule of Saint Clare. Zúñiga, it seems, was so deeply moved by this request that he paid a personal visit to the young woman to further discuss the proposition.¹⁷ Although Sister Petra's initial appeal did not stipulate the convent be reserved for native women, negotiation between the two parties yielded this very outcome.

Yet, securing approval for the convent generated a storm of controversy amongst various ecclesiastical and civic bodies. Detractors of the initiative insisted native women remained incapable of managing the spiritual demands of cloistered life. Countering the opposition, Franciscan advocates argued that pureblood native women did not suffer from the irredeemable character flaws formerly ascribed to *los naturales* as a demographic whole. Even the Mexico City Council expressed reserve for the foundation of yet another convent whose charitable needs would create economic strain on the capital. Unwavering in his commitment to the convent, Zúñiga donated some 40,000 pesos for the project—an endowment intended to cover the living expenses of the nuns. In 1719, he also contracted Spanish architect Pedro de Arrieta to submit plans for the convent. Construction began in July of the following year. Although the dispute raged on for almost five years, the matter was finally put to rest when the royal charter arrived in March of 1724.¹⁸

According to the official paperwork, the nunnery would belong to the First Order of Saint Claire and would house thirty-three nuns.¹⁹ Franciscan ministers presided over inaugural ceremonies, which opened with three days of prayer and official blessings. These were open to the public. Community endorsement of a nunnery, even if somewhat sensationalized by the unique circumstances of Corpus Christi, was not uncommon. In her study of eighteenth-century nunneries in central Mexico, author Margaret Chowning found that, in most cases, residents avidly supported the foundation of female convents since the facilities bore testament to the outstanding Christian values of the community.²⁰ In this manner, Corpus Christi offered an asset, rather than concession, to the residents of the city.

Fabricated from local *tezontle* and *chiluca* stones, the facade of Corpus Christi provided a stunning focal point to the area south of Alameda Park. Just above the main portal of the convent, a monstrance carved in stone relief referenced the namesake of the Church. The heraldic *escudos* of Viceroy Zúñiga also appeared on either side of the monstrance in honor of his patronage. According to author Josephina Muriel, there was nothing outwardly “indigenous” in the appearance of Corpus Christi. The only indication of its designation as a native nunnery was an inscription located directly above the main portal. Placed within an elegant cartouche, letters carved in high-relief clearly stated:

This is a Franciscan convent for the Indian daughters of caciques and no others, the convent was founded and constructed by His Excellency Señor Don Baltazar de Zúñiga... being Viceroy, Governor and Captain General of this Kingdom, genteel man of the House of Your Majesty and Overseer of Your Royal *Audencia*.²¹

Indeed, so crucial was this fine point that Zúñiga, in 1727, petitioned and received a papal brief from Pope Benedict XIII to confirm that only legitimate daughters of noble, Indian *caciques* would be admitted to Corpus Christi.

PAINTING A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Returning to the aforementioned painting, *Mapa del Alameda* presents a striking communicentric portrait of Alameda Park and the surrounding urban environment (Figure 1). Naturally, city views completed prior to the foundation of the Convent of Corpus Christi did not include the convent; and, rarely did these images present a southern view of the city's yet undeveloped neighborhoods. Although the artist and date of completion remain unknown, the visual prominence of Corpus Christi suggests *Mapa del Alameda* was intended as a commemorative work, and completed 1719 or later in order to celebrate the convent and honor the accomplishments of the Viceroy. Favorable regard for the nunnery is suggested here by the artist's careful treatment of it. Weighting the upper one third of the composition, the convent enjoys a commanding presence. Sight lines created by the main thoroughfare of the Alameda move the viewer's gaze to the main portal. Its

barred doors and windows, as well as small rooftop garden, symbolize the purity and strict enclosure of the nuns inside. Although sculptural details of the main façade have been rendered, they appear to depart from historical accuracy.²³

The vertical orientation of the canvas works to naturalize a theoretical partitioning of space, specifically a distinction between divine and profane spheres. Like colonists elsewhere in the Spanish Americas, residents of the viceregal capital believed that nunneries offered profound benefit to the community at large. As the epitome of earthly perfection, observant nuns were thought to share in an intimate bond with God. While for the laity this closeness was unattainable, the faithful nevertheless believed that ordinary folks could leverage the nuns' spiritual closeness with the Divine. Developing close friendships with cloistered nuns was one way the laity could ensure an abundance of prayer on their behalf.²⁴ The juxtaposition of the public garden with that of the convent reinforces an interpretation that normalizes cultural perceptions about the communal value of religious institutions. The message is clear—while the gentry enjoy a day of leisure in the park, a community of unseen nuns works diligently to safeguard the collective welfare.

Additionally, the carefully orchestrated composition projects a favorable image of the order, cleanliness, and efficiency of the viceregal capital—a civility suggestively represented by a buoyant image of verdant park, prosperous, city, and convivial citizens. The notion of responsible stewardship as it relates to *Mapa del Alameda*, thus, raises the issue of how landscape visualizes the real and illusionary practices of *buena policía*. Of interest to this interpretation is the title of the work. Consider, for example, *Mapa del Alameda Paseo de la Mui Noble Ciudad de México*, a rather cumbersome phrase literally painted onto the canvas. By definition, this landscape offers “*un mapa*”—a word that in eighteenth-century, Spanish vernacular meant a brief description of the sight and state of something and all of its inclusive elements.²⁵ An informational key, located at the bottom of the canvas, offers additional supporting evidence. By identifying eight critical features of the landscape—including, the aqueduct, nunnery, eastern and western entrances to the park, and four park fountains commissioned by Zúñiga—*Mapa del Alameda* presents an informative summary of the urban environment. In other words, the landscape offers testament to the

buena policía of the Viceroy near the completion of his term, a tenure that spanned from 1716 to 1722.

Furthermore, although one might simply accept Zúñiga's activism in the foundation of Corpus Christi as evidence of his altruism, this interpretation seems somewhat naïve when considering the Viceroy never explicitly revealed his motives for establishing the convent. He also did not justify his rationale in insisting it be reserved for native women. As suggested by author Asunción Lavrín, the Viceroy may have envisioned the convent as his personal contribution to festivities celebrating the second centennial conquest of Mexico, occurring in 1721.²⁷ If true, the visual prominence of Corpus Christi within *Mapa del Alameda* conveyed a profound symbol of the triumph of Church and Crown over a now fully assimilated indigenous population. The acceptance of pureblood, native women to one of the most prestigious vocations of society also gave credence to Spaniards' claims that the Conquest had "civilized" the peoples of the Americas. Furthermore, the success of this endeavor epitomized Spanish enterprise and the complete appropriation of all the colony had to offer in terms of spiritual and human capital. In this way, *Mapa del Alameda* visualizes a historical precedence of *buena policía* credited to Viceroy Zúñiga, steward of the Spanish Crown.

Directing visual attention to the Convent of Corpus Christi also allows *Mapa del Alameda* to formalize complex ideas about Spanish beliefs about ethnicity—most directly the concept of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) and its relation to social class. Recall that in 1727, three years after the establishment of Corpus Christi and five years concluding the Viceroy's term of office, Zúñiga solicited a papal brief from Pope Benedict XIII confirming that only legitimate daughters of pureblood, Indian *caciques* would be admitted to the convent. Presumably, the intent was to prevent the entrance of women with mixed race or indeterminable backgrounds. As María Elena Martínez discussed in her work on genealogy and the construction of race in Spain and Colonial Mexico, the meaning of the term *limpieza de sangre* was incredibly complicated and somewhat mutable. For much of the colonial period, for example, Spaniards generally defined *limpieza de sangre* in terms of religion wherefore its application distinguished Spaniards descended from Old World Christians with complete absence of Jewish, Moorish, or heretical ancestry.²⁸ Understood in this manner, the term carried extraordinary weight in the determination of one's social status.

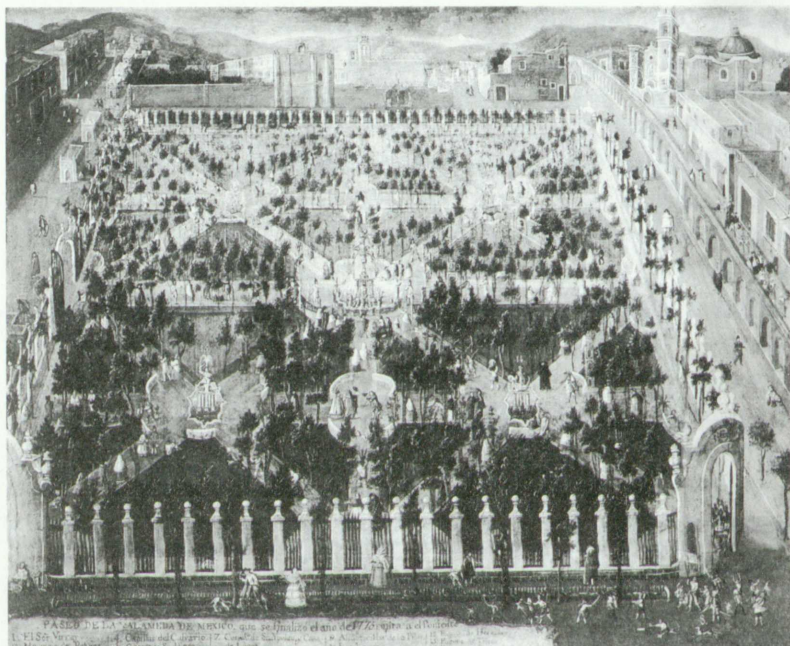


FIGURE 2. Anonymous, *Paseo de la Alameda de Mexico*, ca. 1775, oil on tin 18.5 in x 22 in (47 cm x 56 cm). Courtesy of private collection.

However, by the eighteenth century, a complex process of cultural change prompted Spaniards to revise definition and use of the term. As a result, “*limpieza de sangre*” could be applied in reference to pureblood indigenous peoples—provided they possessed a genealogical record of blood purity and meritorious Catholic service.²⁹ Thus, Amerindians fitting the criteria were afforded a measure of increased social status in opposition to the large and ever-growing mixed race, caste population. Within *Mapa del Alameda*, the visual prominence of Corpus Christi (also inscribed within the key as the premier focal point of the image) supports the assumption that although the convent housed primarily native women, their purity of blood and distinguished lineage ranked them among society’s elite. Presentation of the Convent of Corpus Christi, a principal subject of this cultural landscape, therefore, expresses societal regard for an institution that preserved class boundaries and the ethnic standards of elite society.

Another landscape, completed approximately fifty years following the production of *Mapa del Alameda*, offers a strikingly different portrait of the built environment surrounding Alameda Park (Figure 2). Dated 1775, *Paseo de la Alameda* again features a bird's eye view of Alameda Park; yet, it departs from *Mapa del Alameda* in its omission of the Convent of Corpus Christi. Using the previous painting as a point of reference, the orientation of *Paseo de la Alameda* has been shifted ninety degrees counterclockwise, so that the top of the canvas aligns due west. The location of Corpus Christi should be to the left of the viewer; however, it remains [in]visible, falling just outside the picture plane. While it appears the painting has been cropped for framing purposes, an explanatory key also does not reference the convent. Alternatively, activities occurring in and around Alameda Park occupy center stage.

The tighter composition serves two purposes. First, unlike *Mapa del Alameda* which directs attention to the lay-out and condition of a large portion of the city, *Paseo de la Alameda* presents only the area immediately surrounding Alameda Park and brings to focus the social exchanges occurring there. In doing so, this landscape initiates a dialogue about life in the viceregal capital. Secondly, through its representation of the social ambit, *Paseo de la Alameda* offers viewers a rare glimpse of the boisterous nature of viceregal society. Figures obscured or abbreviated within *Mapa del Alameda* have been rendered, here, more legible. Soldiers, vendors, clerics, and men and women exhibiting the trappings of high society, interact with one another in a congenial, park setting. Closer inspection also reveals differences in the presentation of the park such as a formidable iron fence that skirts the perimeter. Although prettified with stone pillars topped by finials, this enclosure creates a barrier between figures contained within the park and others that linger on the fray.

Among those depicted outside of the park are beggars, vagrants and hooligans, who loiter just beyond the eastern gate. One particularly rowdy group, visible in the lower, right-hand corner, provides a measure of comic relief. Waving makeshift swords and battle implements, these revelers cavort in a make believe game centered upon the 1492 *Reconquista*. This tableau is, in fact, labeled "8. *Muchachos jugando a moros y cristianos*." Others, labeled "10. *Los Locos*," include several grouping of single or multiple figures.

In demonstrating their lack of mental and/or moral correctness, these individuals brawl (upper, right-hand corner) or teeter unsteadily through the streets (far right mid-ground). The most reproachable act of indecency, however, is perpetrated by a figure located in the lower right-hand corner of the painting. With pants pulled down and posterior exposed, the squatting personage is engaged in a rather delicate matter. Indeed, he appears to be defecating near the arcades of the aqueduct.

Unlike the first painting, *Paseo de la Alameda* takes care to present what may be considered correctional institutions or reformatory facilities. For example, "7. *Convento de San Ypolito y Casa de Locos*," identifies a convent housing the mentally ill (upper right-hand corner). Likewise, "2. *Hospicio de pobres*," identifies the Mexico City Poorhouse, visible in the top left-hand corner of the canvas and physically located just two doors west of the Convent of Corpus Christi. Both charitable institutions, the *Hospicio* and the *Casa de Locos*, were established in 1774 under the directive of Viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa.³⁰ But what do these institutions have to do with the [in]visibility of Corpus Christi; and, how do the appearances of a poorhouse and asylum comment upon a shifting cultural landscape?

As previously discussed, the presentation of Corpus Christi within *Mapa del Alameda* offers visual representation to a monumental achievement of equality within a long trajectory of ethnic struggles. However, some fifty years later, that focus shifts from the convent to social rehabilitation centers. *Paseo de la Alameda*, unlike *Mapa del Alameda*, also addresses the unsightly elements of colonial society and presents the agencies responsible for correcting them. In the manner suggested by author Mitchell, the latter landscape works to visualize the prevailing ideological position of the dominant social group—in this case, the colonial elite. *Paseo de la Alameda* provides a visual description supporting claims made by eighteenth-century social critics who complained about the presence of the poor and the woeful state of city infrastructure.³¹ As such, the landscape communicates competitive relationships occurring between various social and institutional apparatuses. Put another way, this painting offers a class view that embodied the beliefs of colonial elite, which quite literally associated the city's poor with the repugnant functions of the lower body.³² It differs from *Mapa del Alameda* in its presentation of the contours of colonial society because the cultural landscape of *Paseo de la Alameda* does not appear to differentiate

or give visual prominence to any particular race or ethnic group—as, for example, the representation of the convent had accomplished in the prior painting. Instead, this image comments upon the economic base of viceregal society (with no apparent regard for race), suggesting that the idleness of the unemployed and the shameful habits of the poor, such as drinking, gambling, and begging, undermined the tranquility of the park and city at large.

As Pamela Voekel explained through her work on social conflict in the late eighteenth century, New Spain's colonial elite despised the urban poor and held this group responsible for the many ills plaguing the city—problems such as unsanitary conditions, outbreaks of disease, and the overall moral dissolution of colonists. Fueled by interventionist vigor, colonial administrators undertook unprecedented efforts to transform the physical environment of the viceregal capital and the ethical values of its subjects. Morality campaigns railed against the lower classes and cited the poor as antagonistic to the economic, political, and social aspirations of the State. Persecution of this group also, provided a convenient means to preserve class identity in a society in which *limpieza de sangre* had become an increasingly muddled concept, and the elevated class distinction it denoted, harder to ascertain.³³

Here, the concept of *buena policía*, formerly visualized by images of straight streets, regular plazas and a proliferation of churches, found new representation in a cultural landscape that drew a distinction between the masses and the “civilized individual.” This person was one who internalized the virtues of self-discipline, moderation, and moral integrity—in short, the self-definition of the elite. Treatment of the urban environment seen within *Paseo de la Alameda* encourages this sort of class comparison. Here, all manner of unsavory characters skulk in the margins, literally and figuratively just outside of polite society. Unable to comply with standards of decorum, these rogues represent the unlawful practices and moral pollution of the city. The fortified gates and iron fencing seen within this image provide, as well, an illusionary account of actual park conditions.³⁴ In this case, the barrier shelters those assembled inside the park and sets apart shadowy delinquents still in need of rehabilitation. Understood in these terms, it seems reasonable that the Convent of Corpus Christi would be minimized within *Paseo de la Alameda*—a cultural landscape giving prominence to reformatory institutions like the *Hospicio* and *Casa de Locos* and juxtapositions of social

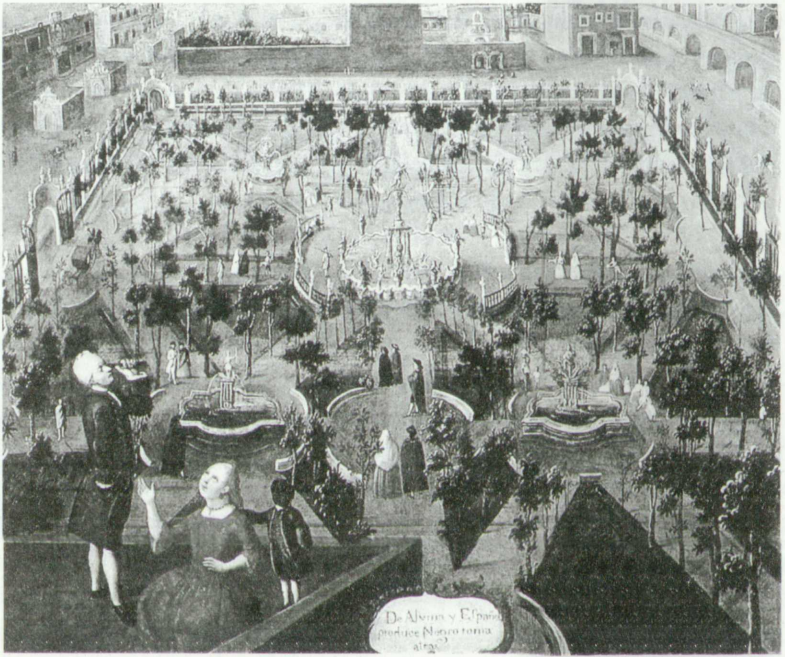


FIGURE 3. Anonymous, *De Albina y Español produce Negro torna atrás*, ca. 1775, oil on copper, 18.1 in x 21.7 in (46 cm x 55 cm). Courtesy of the Colección Banco Nacional de México.

class. Analysis of a final image will provide further insight into the ideology of race, class and governance addressed within Spanish colonial landscapes.

Similar to the previous two paintings, *De Albina y Español* (ca. 1775) features a panoramic view of Alameda Park (Figure 3). The painting is horizontally-oriented, and, like *Paseo de la Alameda*, displays the park from an Eastern vantage. Differing from the other paintings, however, this scene has been brought into sharper focus and provides a probing view of the park and three figures poised on a balcony overlooking the grounds. Once again, the convent of Corpus Christi is not visualized; but the *Hospicio* is, and stands out among only a few discernible buildings. Additionally, the outcasts of society, displayed within *Paseo de la Alameda*, are no longer part of the scene, which alternatively features an image of well-mannered and law-abiding citizens who stroll peacefully within the park.

De Albina y Español also differs from the previous paintings because it belongs to a genre of colonial artworks, known as *pinturas de castas* or caste paintings. Generally consisting of a series of sixteen to twenty individual canvases, caste paintings visualized the *mestizaje* or (blood) mixing of Spaniards, Amerindians, and Africans. Unique to eighteenth century Spanish America, scholars now understand the genre to have been responsive to the assertion of Creole identity and the socioeconomic hierarchies of colonial society.³³ Caste sequences invariably began with the pairing of two pureblood races—specifically, the union of Spaniard and an Amerindian to produce a *mestizo* child. African bloodlines were introduced by the fourth succession with the pairing of a Spaniard and African to yield a *mulata/o*. Colonists additionally believed that individuals of ethnic variation inherited stereotypical characteristics, including physical features, temperaments, and professional and intellectual aptitudes. These beliefs colored the nature, so to speak, of the *sistema de castas* or caste system.

In contrast to the paintings previously examined, *De Albina y Español* offers viewers visual access to the world of the upper crust. A stylish trio of figures, representing a family, occupies the lower left-hand side of the canvas. Man, woman, and child are situated on a tile floor, indicating a private veranda. Identified as, “*Español*,” the male figure stands erect peering intently upon the scene at hand. His vision is aided by the use of a spyglass. Meanwhile, the Albino woman, with upward gaze and outstretched arms, kneels in a gesture that could either read as prayer or exasperation. Evidence of the latter is suggested by the woman’s posture and stance, seeing as she turns her back to the child. Both parents, in fact, appear wholly uninterested in their offspring, a small boy pejoratively labeled *Negro torno atrás* or “Black return backwards.” One may speculate as to whether or not colonial audiences appreciated a compositional arrangement lending itself to visual pun.

Through a narrative of *mestizaje*, *De Albina y Español* communicates the anxiety colonial elite felt about a social pecking order they believed unstable. As Ilona Katzev explained in her seminal study of colonial caste paintings, racial classification was a highly impractical and fluid concept. The categorization of race as projected by the *sistema de castas*, as well as Spaniards’ preoccupation with *limpieza de sangre*, only underscored the inadequacy of such artificial determinations to the preservation of the social hierarchy.³⁶ Indeed, author María Elena Martínez demonstrated how

late colonial society became increasingly alarmed by the blurring of social boundaries, as physical appearances, among other factors, failed to offer a reliable method of ascertaining social status. The colonial elite perceived this ambiguity as a threat to the order that defined the social superiority of the upper classes—a system they believed essential to the organization of civilized society. As *De Albina y Español* makes apparent, even the so-called marginalized members of caste society, in this case the “*Negro torno atrás*,” could gain access to the upper class where tailored clothing and impeccable manners concealed a dubious ancestry of mixed-race descent. Whether intentional or not, this painting and the genre to which it belongs, also makes a parody of eighteenth-century social correctness and the transparent fraud of *limpieza de sangre* within a clearly heterogeneous society.

Secondly, by exploring the faculty of vision as a subject, this painting additionally confronts ideas relating to the administration and governance of colonial society. Within *De Albina y Español*, vision is both subject and verb. From his propriety post, the ever-vigilant Spaniard actively looks upon society. His vision is aided by a spyglass, ensuring no misdeed, great or small, escapes notice. This arrangement works to suggest the present state of order has been executed as a result of careful observation, or surveillance of the populace. Enforcing the “public gaze”—in this example, a visual rhetoric supplanting the concept of *buena policía*, was a real and concrete goal of late eighteenth century civic reformers. As Pamela Voekel explained, the cultured elite sought to expand the criminal justice system and renovate city infrastructure in order to enforce the “public gaze” and bring the misdeeds of the poor under direct surveillance. Important contributions to this endeavor included, for example, a reorganization of the city into thirty-two jurisdictions manned by the *Alcaldes de Barrio* and *Guardafaroleros*, two special police forces; public street lighting projects; and numerous regulations directed at policing the city’s taverns and other alcohol-serving establishments.³⁷

Just as Corpus Christi within *Mapa del Alameda* represented the physical arm of the Church, the Spaniard in this cultural landscape embodies the human extension of new correctional institutions like the *Hospicio de Pobres*, as well the social engineering impulses of the latter part of the century. With spy glass raised and pressed to his eye, the ever-vigilant Spaniard forcibly probes the scene before him. The figure—understood, here, as a metaphor

for the “public gaze”—uses the instrument to extract a penetrating view of society at large, a vantage that would otherwise be inaccessible and outside the scope of vision. Within *De Albina y Español*, the faculty of sight and the visual manipulation of the “public gaze,” give representation to the chief strategy colonial reformers applied in their attempts to expose and correct the misdeeds of the lower classes. Under the intense and duty-bound scrutiny of the Spaniard, it appears justice will prevail. The presence of the figure, thus, symbolizes the inescapable “long arm of the law” as envisioned by the city’s elite, as well as the corrective institutions intended to shape society’s misfits into productive individuals. Carefully controlled and frighteningly omniscient, the staging also works to suggest that the all-seeing eye of God has been superseded by that of the all-seeing eye of the colonial punitive system.

CONCLUSION: THE ART OF LANDSCAPE

In conclusion, this essay has sought to challenge the problems of visual representation encountered in three Spanish colonial landscapes. Doing so has provided insight into colonial attitudes about the assimilation of native and mixed-race populations, as well as the social conditions of viceregal society. Each of the landscapes examined, here, can be understood to have functioned as a medium of exchange by naturalizing the cultural conventions of the dominant social group, at times varying from viceregal authorities to the social elite of the late eighteenth century. While the touchstone for this study has been the visual presentation of the Convent of Corpus Christi—an institution whose foundation in the early eighteenth century evidenced the profound ethnic struggles of the Spanish colonial period—two additional themes have emerged to overshadow the historiography of the convent. These include the presentation of *buena policía* and the concept of *limpieza de sangre*.

At first pass, these themes have little to do with developments surrounding the establishment of the convent. However, I maintain the account of Corpus Christi remains significant to this investigation as it evidences the profound social changes of the century and the first stirrings of what historian Pamela Voekel identifies as *piedad ilustrada* or enlightened piety—an eighteenth century Catholic reform movement experienced in the colonies and in Spain.³⁸ Those of the *piedad ilustrada* promoted a more egalitarian theology that condemned the dominant influences of Old Guard social hierarchies

and exalted an internalized piety hinged upon the virtues of self-discipline.³⁹ While this avenue of research remains underrepresented within the present essay, continued research will likely yield multiple intersections of relevancy to bring these culturally-contingent themes: Catholic Reform, colonial administration, and racial miscegenation, into alignment. Throughout this essay I have discussed the manner in which the visual handling of Corpus Christi referenced a shifting “cultural landscape;” yet, my interest in this subject belongs to a larger set of research questions directed at the spatial, political, and cultural dimensions of Mexico City as represented in urban views.

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NOTES:

¹ Josefina Muriel, “El Convento de Corpus Christi de México. Institución para indias caciques,” in *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, II, 7 (México, 1941), 88–107 offers a rich history of the Convent of Corpus Christi. For a discussion of other indigenous convents consult Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 265–266. For an approximate number of convents existing in New Spain, Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 351.

² W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1–3.

³ Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7–9. See also, Ricardo Padrón, *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 8–9, 12–29.

⁴ Richard L. Kagan and Fernando Marías, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493–1793* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 10. For an overview of these ideas see, Santiago Quesada, *La idea de ciudad en la cultura hispana de la edad moderna* (Barcelona, 1992).

⁵ My understanding of the term “communicentric” derives from Kagan, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World* and Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26–28, 33–36; and Padrón, *The Spacious Word*, 101.

⁷ Kagan, *Urban Images*, 37.

⁸ Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*; Asunción Lavrin, “Indian Brides of Christ: Creating New

Spaces for Indigenous Women in New Spain," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 15, no. 2 (Summer, 1999): 225–260; Asunción Lavrin and Rosalva Loreto López, *Monjas y Beatas: La Escritura Femenina En La Espiritualidad Barroca Novohispana: Siglos XVII y XVIII* (Mexico: Universidad de las Américas-Puebla: Archivo General de la Nación, 2002); Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Josefina Muriel, *Conventos De Monjas En La Nueva España* (México, D.F.: Santiago, 1946); Muriel, *Las Indias Cacique De Corpus Christi*, 2nd ed. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001); and Pilar Gonzalbo, *Las Mujeres En La Nueva España: Educación y Vida Cotidianana* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1987).

⁹ Gonzalbo, *Las Mujeres*, 213–214. Here, the author discusses two mestiza daughters of Isabel de Moctezuma who were admitted to La Concepción after their mother's death.

¹⁰ Lavrin, "Indian Brides of Christ," 247–248.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 225–260.

¹² José María Kobayashi, *La Educación Como Conquista: Empresa Franciscana En México* (México: El Colegio de México, 1974), 239–92 and Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 246–247.

¹³ Lavrin, "Indian Brides of Christ," 230.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 231–241.

¹⁵ Kathleen Ross, *The Baroque Narrative of Carlos De Sigüenza y Góngora: A New World Paradise* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 67–69; Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *Parayso Occidental plantado y cultivado por la liberal benéfica mano de los muy católicas y poderosos reyes de España nuestros señores en su magnifico real convento de Jesús María de Mexico [1684]* (Mexico: UNAM-ConduMex, 1995).

¹⁶ Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, *El libro de las virtudes del Indio* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, no date), 40.

¹⁷ Lavrin, "Indian Brides of Christ," 241–242. For a more thorough discussion of the term of Viceroy Zúñiga and his involvement in the foundation of Corpus Christi see, Muriel, "El Convento de Corpus Christi," 88–94.

¹⁸ Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi*, 45.

¹⁹ Muriel, "El Convento de Corpus Christi," 92; Lavrin, "Indian Brides," 245; and Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 259.

²⁰ Margaret Chowning, *Rebellious Nuns: The Troubled History of a Mexican Convent, 1752–1863* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 38–40.

²¹ ESTE CONVENTO ES DERELIGIOSAS FRANCISCANAS INIDAS HIJAS DE CACIQUES Y NO PARA OTRAS, SE EDIFICO YFUNDO POR EL EXCELENTISIMO SENOR DON BALTAZAR DE ZUNIGA Y GUZMAN SOTOMAYOR YMENDOZA, MARQUE DE VALERO Y ALENQUER, SIENDO VIRREY, GOBERNADOR Y CAPTIANGENERAL DE ESTE REYNO, GENTIL HOMBRE DE LA CAMARA DE SU MAGESTAD Y OIDOR DE SU REALAUDENCIA.

²² Lavrin, "Indian Brides of Christ," 245.

²³ The relief sculpture appearing above the main portal appears to be a representation of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception; and in fact looks very different the actual relief sculpture installed in 1729 featuring a monstrance, see Muriel, "El Convento de Corpus Christi," 103. This speculative evidence provides suggests that Mapa del Alameda was completed sometime between 1719 and 1729. To be certain, the provenance of this

painting is need of further investigation.

²⁴ Chowning, *Rebellious Nuns*, 38. Of course, in addition to spiritual favors, convents and nunneries provided real and tangible benefit to colonial communities as they often severed as money lending institutions. For further discussion see, Lavrin, "The Role of the Nunneries in the Economy of New Spain in the Eighteenth Century," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Nov., 1966): 371–393.

²⁵ *Diccionario de la Lengua Espanola* (Real Academia Espanola). (Madrid: Real Academia Espanola, 1734). "Mapa: Aquel escrito en que en resumen se pone á la vista el estado de alguna cosa con todas sus partes." The main entry for "mapa" is as follows: "Mapa. La descripcion geográfica de la tierra, que regularmente le hace en papel ó lienzo, en que se ponen los lugares, mares, rios, montañas, y otras cosas notables, con las distancias proporcionadas, segue el pitipí que se elige, señalando los grados de longitud y latitud que oua el País que se describe, para conocimiento del parage ó lugar que cada cosa destas ocupa en la tierra..."

²⁶ The cartouche reads: "Mapa del Alameda Paseo de la Mui Noble Cividad de Mexico, Las cañas por donde biene el agua ala Ciudad desde Sta. Fee 8., Convento Corpus Chrisit de fundo por El Excelentísimo Sr. Marquez de Balero 1., las cuatro fuentes que dicho Señor, mandó hacer nuevas 2., Hermitas del Calvario, 3. Puerta San Ysabel 4., Puerta 5., Puerta San Diego 6., Puerta a San Juan de Dios 7."

²⁷ Lavrin, "Indian Brides of Christ," 242.

²⁸ María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza De Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 200–226.

³⁰ Silvia Marina Arrom, *Containing the Poor: The Mexico City Poor House, 1774–1871* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Richard A. Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens: Politics and the Masses in Mexico City from Colony to Republic* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2001).

³¹ See for example, Hipólito Villarroel, *Enfermedades Políticas Que Padece La Capital De Esta Nueva España*. 3 ed. (México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 1999).

³² Pamela Voekel, "Peeing on the Palace: Bodily Resistance to Bourbon Reforms in Mexico City," *Journal of Historical Society*, 5:2 (1992): 184, 199–202.

³³ Voekel, "Peeing on the Palace," 183–208.

³⁴ María Estela Duarte, Américo Sánchez, and Nadia Ugalde, *Alameda: Visión Histórica y Estética De La Alameda De La Ciudad De México* (México, D.F.: Inst. Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2001), 261. Iron gates were installed in 1732 under Viceroy Don Juan de Acuña, and renovated in 1766 under Viceroy Don Carlos Francisco de Croix.

³⁵ Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*.

³⁶ Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 227–264.

³⁷ Voekel, "Peeing on the Palace," 183–208. See also, Magali Carrera, *Imaging Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 106–116.

³⁸ Pamela Voekel, *Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 43–76. See also, Arrom, *Containing the Poor*, 32–39.

³⁹ Voekel, *Alone Before God*, 1.