

Multi-Cultural Encounter and Exchange among Spaniards, American Indians and Africans in Colonial Florida and the Caribbean”

Kathleen Deagan, University of Florida

Introduction: History and Archaeology

One of the most striking aspects of Hispanic-American society today is the vibrant blend of Native American, African and European elements that is apparent in so many areas of life. We see this in cuisine, architecture, clothing, language, crafts , folklore and the very faces of people throughout Latin America. This cultural blending is not a modern phenomenon, but rather one that has its roots in the early years of colonial encounter among Spaniards, American Indians and Africans in America. This colonial pluralism is perhaps most evident in the material household life of early Spanish colonists, which is principally revealed through archaeology.

Because American cultural encounters were shaped by engagements between literate and non-literate peoples, it is impossible to rely exclusively upon either written sources or material evidence alone when examining colonial exchange and its outcomes. Historical archeology (sometimes called text-aided archaeology) is the study of the past through the integration of written documents, material remains and stratigraphic contexts in the dirt. Florida and the Spanish Caribbean were among the very earliest place in America to be colonized, and most of my comments about the nature of early cultural convergence are based on archaeological research carried out in those areas .

Historians have abundantly documented and dissected Spain’s colonial policies and practices in America ⁱ. These are essential contributions, but they tend to reveal the policies and practices of the literate European elite - a tiny minority of people in colonial America. From an archaeological perspective, the material world has the potential to offer a more sensitive index to cultural

exchange and social transformation during the colonial period, because it reflects the behavior and choices of all people – including the non-elite and non-literate members of society. In the absence of written documents about those choices, the material records of colonial households- where people lived their daily lives- is a critical source of information.

The archaeological study of inter-cultural engagement has also shown that gender roles and relations- both between groups in contact and within groups experiencing contact - are important conditioning factors in the outcome of cultural exchange. Gender roles – particularly in the area of cultural brokerage – can influence the specific ways in which culture contact unfoldsⁱⁱ, and this has been shown by historical and archaeological research in the early Spanish colonies of Florida and the Caribbean.

The Structure of Encounter

The Spanish colonial empire in the Americas of the 16th century was the largest ever known in the western hemisphere, incorporating an extraordinarily diverse array of societies, ethnic groups, geographic landscapes and polities (including at least two American empires). It endured as a colonial entity for more than three centuriesⁱⁱⁱ. Despite the great local variation in the Spanish-claimed territories, life in the Spanish colonies was overseen in almost every aspect by a mutually-understood, if essentially ideal, imperial-religious system implemented by the Spanish crown. Catholicism, centralized political administration, life in towns, class-based social hierarchies, institutionalized race mixture, a government-controlled mercantilist economy, and the Spanish language were all found throughout the empire^{iv}. Although there was tremendous variation in the ways in which these elements were manipulated and played out in local settings, they did offer a common frame of reference for social understanding.

These institutions and policies also organized the ways in which people of different cultures or races came into contact and engaged with one another. Catholicism, labor organization and assumptions about social hierarchy were particularly important influences on intercultural exchange and so I emphasize those in this talk.

Christianity and Labor

The Catholic Church – in tight alliance with the Spanish crown - pervaded nearly every aspect of social life, and privileged religion as the overriding factor (above race, rank or gender) in assigning social acceptability. This had a powerful influence on the nature of intercultural engagement among Spaniards, American natives, and Africans in the Spanish Americas. During the early years of American encounter, Spain energetically engaged in formal inquiry into the nature and capacity of American. It was ultimately concluded, and formalized in the 1512 Laws of Burgos, that the American Indians did indeed have souls, were indeed human, and as such would be considered free subjects of the Spanish crown ^v.

This position was in direct conflict with Spanish colonists' desires to exploit indigenous labor. Control of labor and land was necessary to maintain the elite social identity of *hidalguía*, being identified as a *hidalgo* (a person with claims to elite lineage, an *hijo de algo*). *Hidalguía* depended on a visibly Spanish lifestyle, the acquisition of wealth in the form of rewards for service to God and Country, and the avoidance of manual labor ^{vi}. The problem was initially resolved, however, by the uniquely American institution of *encomienda*, under which those natives associated with a particular allocation of land were obliged to exchange their labor for instruction in Christianity and civilization, although it seems quite clear that the Spanish side of the exchange was largely ignored ^{vii}. This system, along with epidemic disease, caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Native Americans in the Caribbean region.

By the time Florida was settled in 1565, *encomienda* had been eliminated. Florida furthermore had no major mining or agricultural operations that required huge labor forces. From the Spanish perspective, however, workers were still needed to grow and transport food to St. Augustine, and to work on construction of St. Augustine's defenses. This need was met principally through the Spanish mission system, which controlled the Florida frontier throughout the seventeenth century.

The success of the mission effort was essentially dependent on the native *caciques*, who sanctioned not only the presence of the missionaries but also the allocation of their subjects' labor. As reward for this, the *caciques* were acknowledged as privileged leaders, and considered the native equivalent to Spanish *hidalgos*. They were exempt from manual labor, and received gifts of tools, blankets, ornaments and cloth. Acknowledging and respecting elite Native Americans was a cornerstone of initial Spanish policy toward the American Indians, based on the recognition, at least in principle, of a legitimate "Republic of Indians," and the political authority of its leaders^{viii}

Through the agency of their *caciques*, the non-elite Native Americans (*indios peones*), produced food for the Spaniards, built mission structures, served as long-distance bearers, operated ferries and filled annual labor drafts for work on the public defenses of St. Augustine. There is little indication that this kind of intercultural encounter – either on the frontier or in St. Augustine – inspired significant exchange between Spaniards and Indians, other than the incorporation of Spanish materials by the *caciques*, and the incorporation of Native American materials by the friars. The few excavations done in Native American households on the mission frontier indicate that the *indios peones* neither received nor incorporated significant amounts of European materials (or European traditions) in their domestic lives. Archaeologists have found that the distribution of European artifacts in these sites is highly non-random, occurring primarily in areas thought to be Chief's houses^{ix}.

The labor drafts primarily affected Indian men, and in the households of Spanish St. Augustine, there is very little visible evidence for material culture or technology associated with Native American men (other, of course, than the Spanish fortifications constructed with their labor). It is likely that Native American men interacted with both Native Americans from different tribes, and with Africans in the context of labor (a subject to which I return below), but the consequences of this are poorly understood in terms of material culture.

Notions of status and race.

These examples help support the suggestion that the notion of “race” (as defined by physical appearance) did not structure social interactions with conquered peoples in the Spanish empire in the same way that it appears to have in other European colonial arenas. Although it was certainly recognized, social class and religion in many ways overrode considerations of physical genetics. As noted, for example, Native Americans nobles were held in high social and political esteem regardless of their appearance. The hundreds of thousands of African people brought unwillingly to the Americas as slaves after 1518, however, did not have this opportunity, no matter what their political or social status might have been in Africa. Stripped of political power and homeland social identity by the institution of slavery, these unwilling immigrants possessed neither of the essential qualities for Spanish colonial social acceptability; they were not Catholic, and they did not constitute a recognized political “Republic of Africans”.

It was initially these qualities, rather than “race”, that doomed them to slavery in America. There were always free black Catholic Spaniards in the American colonies, and many of them had participated in the early expeditions of conquest, sometimes gaining *hidalgo* status, and grants of land and Indian labor^x

African slavery placed many American Indian and African laborers in daily contact which often resulted in collaborative resistance against European overlords. The African and Indian rebels (referred to a *cimarrones*) were often successful, and when the Spanish authorities were unable to defeat the rebels, they agreed instead to peace treaties that guaranteed freedom and legitimization of the *cimarrones*. This was a continuing process in the Spanish American world, and similar accommodations were reached in many places, leading in Florida to the origins of eighteenth century Ft. Mose ^{xi}.

Very little is known archaeologically about these early Indian and African resistance movements, since the places in which the rebels lived were well-hidden and apparently equally inaccessible to both 16th century Spanish authorities and 20th century archaeologists (see Vega 1979; Arrom and García Arévalo 1986; Weik 2004) . It is evident, however, that their material world combined African, Native American and European elements (as epitomized by the portrait of the Zambo Kings^{xii}).

Domestic Arrangements

The notion of “otherness” as measured solely by skin color was not a defining factor in the choice of marriage partners in the early Spanish colonies. In the earliest years of contact, there were frequent marriages between Spanish conquistadors or soldiers and Indian cacicas and noblewomen^{xiii}. Pedro Menendez himself entered into a marriage with the sister of the Calusa cacique, Carlos, in an effort to consolidate a political alliance ^{xiv}. The cacica of the 16th century mission town of Nombre de Dios at St. Augustine, Doña Maria, was married to a Spanish soldier ^{xv}.

Such marriages were intended to legitimize Spanish claims to land, labor and conversion, but unions between non-elite Spaniards, Native American and Africans for purely domestic reasons

were more common, and they began during the earliest days of colonization. In St. Augustine of ca. 1580, it is estimated that half of the married men had Indian wives, and alliances between European and non-European partners accounted for between one quarter and one half of all marriages in many parts of the Spanish Americas during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries^{xvi}. Marriages between Africans and Spaniards occurred, but were considerably less common than those between Native Americans and Spaniards. Spanish-African and Indian-African concubinage was, however, apparently practiced widely, and influenced domestic life^{xvii}.

This was not a simple function of gender ratios, since the proportions of Spanish women to Spanish men in the first several decades of colonization was about the same as English gender proportions in first decades of the Anglo-American colonies^{xviii}. It was rather in part the position of the Catholic Church that as long as both parties were Catholic, culture or race were not impediments to marriage. This may have been reinforced by the centuries-long traditions of *convivencia* and intermarriage among Iberian and North African people in Spain itself. Whether as wives, servants of concubines, however, non-European women (unlike non-European men), were in daily household engagement with Spaniards.

Archaeologists throughout the Spanish Americas have revealed striking adjustments to traditional Spanish practices in the domain of women in Spanish colonial households. Excavations at 16th through 18th century “Spanish-identified” homesites in Florida (as well as the Caribbean, , Mexico, Panamá, Venezuela and the Rio de la Plata region) consistently reveal that domestic, female-associated aspects of those households are represented predominantly by American elements, or mixed European-American-African elements. Cooking vessels excavated in such sites are predominantly hand-built, low-fired, unglazed, and locally-made. In Florida they are most often local indigenous ceramic pots that retain traditional Native American shapes and

decorations. In other parts of Latin America, people used (and still use) locally-made “*cerámica criolla*” that incorporates elements of Native American, European, and sometimes African ceramic traditions.

Manos and *metates* useful for grinding corn, and *griddles* for toasting corn tortillas and cassava bread seem quickly to have replaced the Spanish *morteros*, *anafres* and *sartenes* used for grinding wheat and frying in olive oil . Beverages in the Rio de la Plata area were most often prepared with *matés*; and *chocolateros* were used in Mexico. American Indian-style smudge pits have been found in Spanish-style houses in St. Augustine. In contrast to this, both traditionally "male" categories and socially visible categories of the material world (e.g. architecture, religious items, clothing, tablewares, weaponry) remained Spanish or European in form from the 15th through the 18th centuries ^{xix}.

This pattern of carefully maintaining the ideal of Spanish identification in socially-visible areas, while adapting to the local circumstances of the colonial setting in private and domestic life, seems to have developed very rapidly as a means of social integration in the towns of the Spanish empire. Through various roles, non-European women seem to have been central to the process of cultural exchange and integration in households, which is the place most people learn who they are, what they believe, and how they should behave.

These pluralistic households also led to a bewildering array of genetic admixture among European, Indian and African populations. Spanish 18th century ideology responded in characteristic fashion by formally institutionalizing genetic mixtures into more than 25 categories, which were explicitly illustrated in more than 1,000 colonial Mexican “Casta” painting²⁰. Although these categories reflected a commitment to social hierarchy and social prejudice, they nevertheless provided a formal means of integrating and legitimizing virtually

any combination of genetic attributes into a recognized institutional structure. They were furthermore used very flexibly in social practice. In 18th century Mexico, for example, individuals often identified themselves at different times as belonging to different racial categories depending on the relative advantages of a category in a specific situation ²¹.

CONCLUSION

Before the end of the sixteenth century, the character of social life in Spanish-American colonial towns was distinctly different from that of Spain, owing in large part to exchange and accommodation among people whose cultural and genetic origins lay variously in Europe, America, Africa or in a combination of these. They represented a new kind of social identity, distinct from either indigenous Europe or indigenous America. In matters of “living like Spaniards and civilized people” colonial residents of all ethnic and racial backgrounds made their own decisions about what that meant; marrying one another, incorporating one another’s domestic practices into their daily lives, and claiming a distinct identity as Americans. It is likely that the emergence of this distinctly American identity was most pronounced among those people who did not share in the wealth of the colonies. Spanish authorities (like indigenous Indian caciques) did not change much either in personhood or policy, but the non-elite people of both republics did.

One of the clearest archaeological expressions of this new sensibility was in domestic life, in households, where a culturally pluralistic and culturally integrative material expression prevailed by the middle of the sixteenth century. The ways in which integrative household practice developed were undoubtedly many. I have suggested that the regular incorporation of American Indian and African women into “Spanish” households (whether through marriage, servitude, or concubinage) was a central factor. Some have argued that Spanish strategies for

accommodating and incorporating native elites contributed to such integration, and others point to the organization by Spaniards of Native labor and production, or to simple economic necessity as contributing factors ²².

But to the extent that material life expresses practice and choices; American Indians, Spanish creoles and African laborers all contributed visibly to the collective identity of Spanish colonial households, and a way that was uniquely American. This may seem obvious from the perspective of Latin America today, but this was not the case in the Anglo-American colonies of the same region. Archaeologists working throughout the English colonies have consistently documented a very strong adherence to English domestic practices, furnishings, food, architecture and landscape organization, and have shown that that there was virtually no incorporation of Native American or African material elements into English colonial households or domestic life organization²³.

Today, happily, cultural pluralism is increasingly becoming the norm in most parts of North America. Global developments in immigration, transportation and communication have placed people, products and ideas of hundreds of societies in direct contact with one another, and we are seeing the creation of an extraordinarily blended world in cultural and material terms. How people choose, reject and transform these new things and ideas will provide fodder for anthropologists, historians and archaeologists for many decades, and we may find that America is finally becoming a true melting pot.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ for example Elliott 2006; Hanke 1965; Hulme 1986, MacAlister 1984).

ⁱⁱ (Barr Deagan 1996; Ettiene and Leacock 1980; Ewen 1991; Rothschild 2003)

ⁱⁱⁱ Burkholder and Johnson, 1990; Elliott, 2006; Kagan, 2000; Lockhart and Schwartz, 1983; MacAlister, 1984).

^{iv} for discussions of these elements from Americanist historical perspective see Burkholder and Johnson, 1990; Elliott, 2006; Kagan, 2000; Lockhart and Schwartz, 1983; MacAlister, 1984)

^v Brading, 1991, p. 79; Hanke, 1965; Hussey, 1932; MacAlister, 1984, p. 153-166; Pagden, 1982

^{vi} Wolf 1963:55-59; Lockhart and Schwartz 1983:61-63; Elliott 1987:1-10).

^{vii} Elliot, 2006, pp. 39-41; MacAlister, 1984, pp.157-166).

^{viii} Hanke 1949:27; MacAlister 1984:180; Gibson 1987:377; Bushnell 1994).

^{ix} Scarry 2001:54; Shapiro and McEwan 1992; Loucks 1993).

^x (see Landers 2000, 2006).

^{xi} Landers, 2000, 2006, 198 Mose); Landers and Robinson, 2006).

^{xii} The painting, “ *The Mulatos of Esmeralda* “ by Adrián Sánchez Galque, was done in 1599, to commemorate a peace contract between the Spaniards and Afro-Indian *cimarrones* of Esmeralda in Ecuador, See Rout, 1976 pp. 116-117.

^{xiii} Morner 1967:37; Floyd 1973:59-61

^{xiv} Lyon 1976:148

^{xv} Deagan 1985:304-5.

^{xvi} Arranz Marquéz, 1991; Morner, 1976; Socolow, 2000, pp. 39-41

^{xvii} MacAlister, 1984, pp.126-127; Morner, 1967, pp. 30-31

^{xviii} see Konetzke 1945; Deagan 1996

^{xix} Deagan 1983:108, Domínguez 1984; McEwan 1988, 1992; Ewen 1991; Charlton and Fournier 1993; Reitz and McEwan 1995; Senatore 1995).

²⁰ García Saíz 1989

²¹ For examples of this see Boyer 1997

²² for example, DeFrance, 2003; Rodríguez-Alegría, 2005; Voss, 2009

²³ Deetz, 1977, 1993; Honerkamp, 1990; Kelso, 1984, 2007; Shackel and Little, 1994; South, 1977; Zierden and Herman, 1999).