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Race in Early Modern Iberia^{1*}

Erin Kathleen Rowe

Investigating the development of the concept of race and the deployment of racist norms in early modern Iberia is a task that involves unpacking a series of interlocking historical problems. The first of these problems stems from the racialization of Spain and Portugal and their attendant treatment by the field of European history. The second problem involves exploring Iberian ways of imagining, constructing, and litigating ‘race’ through legal, social, and theological norms. The distinction here between legal-social norms and theology derives from the tensions often at play between the norms produced by these different bodies of theory and law. And lastly, we must reconsider how scholars investigate the consequences of such norms on the lives of racialized communities themselves. In this article, I argue that the first must be acknowledged, the second examined closely, and the third moved to the center, guided by new methodological insights from Black Studies that offer opportunities to transform the study of Black Iberia. While the essay’s main intervention centers on emerging scholarship on Black Iberia, it is impossible to understand the current and future shape of this historiography without analysis of the entanglement of race and history in premodern Iberia.

The essay examines each problem separately as they span complex histories and dynamic historiographies. Such an approach helps clarify where the historiography on race in premodern Iberia originated and how it developed, leading to where it stands now. Yet the third problem, which focuses on the surging new scholarship on early modern Iberia and Black Studies, sits at the heart of this essay as one of the most recent innovations in research. It is only by understanding the nexus of Black Studies and Iberian studies that we can arrive at a fuller understanding of what serious engagement with Black Studies might bring to the study of race in early modern Iberia.

1.

When the Race Before Race movement emerged several years ago, many early modern Iberianists welcomed the new attention being paid to this important topic, yet were simultaneously surprised to see few Iberianists included in conferences, symposia, and larger conversations about race in premodern Europe,

^{1*} I would like to thank editors A. Katie Harris and Pamela Radcliff, as well as Nicholas R. Jones, for their careful read of this essay. I am further grateful to Patricia Martins Marcos for supplying some references for twentieth-century Portuguese historiography on Lusotropicalism.

or integrated into larger studies of the topic.² Such conversations tended to be dominated by literary scholars of England and France, in ways that strangely reified older historiographic boundaries between Iberia and the rest of Western Europe that placed Spain and Portugal on the margins. This neglect is particularly problematic when examining the history of anti-Semitism in Europe, as this field has been richly scrutinized by scholars of Iberia for at least half a century. As Sarah Pearce adroitly points out in her trenchant critique of Geraldine Heng's *The Invention of Race*, ignoring communities and historiographies of pre modern Europe – Jewish and Islamic, Spanish and Portuguese – fails to recognize the domination of Northern European historiography on deciding what topics and-geographies are deserving of scholarly attention.³

Unconscious neglect of the important insights of scholars of Portugal and Spain in European historiography writ large did not occur accidentally, but rather resulted from the ways the discipline of history developed at northern European universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Spain and Portugal were dismissed as “backward,” “superstitious,” and “despotic.” Such frameworks grew from the Black Legend first articulated by the British in the sixteenth century, yet this history is often left unacknowledged by scholars of premodern Europe outside of Iberia. The lack of reflection on the relative absence of Iberia in larger historiographies of premodern Europe is particularly problematic in the case of scholarship on race, precisely because the marginalization of Iberia stems from its racialization. The exoticization and orientalizing of Spain and Portugal rested on the notion of these nations as racially mixed, diminished by the “impurity” of their Jewish and Muslim ancestry. Proponents of ugly racial hierarchies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries included Europeans in such hierarchies, intensifying the exclusivity of Aryan/Nordic “superiority” over its racially degenerate, Catholic, southern neighbors.⁴

² One can find, for example, the archive of symposia by the RaceB4Race conference series at Arizona State University here: <https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race/inaugural-raceb4race>. To be clear, this series of conferences represent indispensable research on race in premodern Europe, and there have been more recent efforts to include scholars of Iberia.

³ S. J. Pearce, “The Inquisitor and the Moseret: The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages and the New English Colonialism in Jewish Historiography,” *Medieval Encounters* 26 (2020): 145-190; and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See also similar queries raised by Francisco Bethencourt in his review: “Geraldine Heng. The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages,” *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 3 (Sept. 2021): 1211-13.

⁴ I am uninterested in giving such authors lengthy citations, but one of the most influential of these thinkers was Arthur de Gobineau: Louis Thomas, *Arthur de*

The persistence of such ideas has meant that from the birth of modern historical studies of Spain in the nineteenth century, the concept of race has always played a particularly important role. Historiographic approaches to thinking with Spain and race have been fruitful when considering the ways that the field of Spanish history itself developed. The anti-modernity with which Spain has been accused, from the earliest English translations of Bartolomé de las Casas to the work of the American scholars William Prescott and Henry Charles Lea in the nineteenth century, has always been racially coded, while premodern Portuguese history remained neglected by scholars in the United States and Britain. Richard Kagan's excellent examination of American and later British historiography of Spain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries highlights the scholarly emphasis on Spain's exceptionality, backwardness, despotism, and religious extremism.⁵ In a more recent study, Kagan returns to the topic of American historians grappling with Spain in the nineteenth century, pointing out: ". . . Adams, together with most nineteenth-century historians, believed that national character was a dynamic historical force, one that determined a nation's trajectory, as well as what it could or could not achieve."⁶ Kagan then addresses the relationship between censorious judgments of Spain's 'character' with the exoticizing and Orientalizing fascination Americans began to hold for it. This duality – exotic and degraded, fascinating and repellent – lies at the heart of Orientalist discourses that hardened in the nineteenth century, most prominently directed at the Ottomans and parts of East Asia.⁷ Such characterizations created racializing categories of otherness; in the context of Spain, such discourses were grounded in its post-711 history.

Gobineau: inventeur du racisme (1816-1882) (Paris: Mercvire de France, 1941). For a discussion of the early evolution on the idea of innate intelligence and craniometry, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: Norton, 1996).

⁵ Richard L. Kagan, "Prescott's Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain," *American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (1996): 423-446. See also William H. Prescott, *History of the Reign of Philip the Second, King of Spain*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1855-58).

⁶ Richard L. Kagan, *The Spanish Craze: America's Fascination with the Hispanic World: 1779-1939* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 29.

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Press, 2003 ed.); Wael Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); and Marcus Keller and Javier Irigoyen-García, *The Dialectics of Orientalism in Early Modern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). See also Barbara Fuchs, "Sketches of Spain: Early Modern England's 'Orientalizing' of Iberia," in *Material and Symbolic Circulation Between Spain and England 1554-1604*, ed. Anne J. Cruz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 63-70.

This is not to claim, of course, that we can compare Spain – and other groups sometimes referred to as “White adjacent” – to the dire and devastating genocide unleashed by Iberian colonizers beginning in the fifteenth century and persisting at least to the middle of the twentieth, or to claim that the Othering discourses evinced by Northern European scholars toward Southern Europe are equivalent to anti-Blackness. The chasm between prejudice and genocide must be absolutely clear. Yet as we investigate more deeply the role that early modern Iberian thinkers played in the development of racist concepts and strategies, it is important to keep in mind that Spain’s racial marginalization within Europe has fundamentally shaped the field of premodern history and Spain’s and Portugal’s presence therein – or absence, as is most commonly the case.

Even as northern European nations touted their purity and whiteness, marking Spain and Portuguese as racially “other,” Iberian nationalists sought to insist on their own Christian whiteness. In order to do so, however, they were forced to grapple with their multicultural past. Their history of race, therefore, co-emerged with modern historical studies of Spain in particular beginning in the nineteenth century. To put it baldly, there was never a national history of Spain or Portugal that was not explicitly about race, and premodern race in particular, beginning with the explosion of local and national history writing in the sixteenth century through the twentieth century. Few intellectual debates reveal the fundamental questions at play for Spanish thinkers of the last century more clearly than the controversy provoked by Américo Castro in his 1948 *España en su historia*, in which Castro argued that the Spanish nation was created out of the cultural convergence of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam during the Middle Ages.⁸ His opponents, including Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, insisted in contrast that Spanish identity predated the Islamic invasion, and was therefore not a product of it. Positing a pre-Islamic identity had the potential to mitigate or outright erase what were viewed as stains on Spain’s past.⁹ It is not surprising that refutations of Castro’s work would take such a line; not only did they draw on a vast historiographic tradition, they echoed the propaganda of the Franco regime, which

⁸ Américo Castro, *España en su historia: cristianos, moros, y judíos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1948). See also later examples of analysis of his impact on Spanish historiography: Ronald E. Surtz, Jaime Ferrán and Daniel P. Testa, eds. *Américo Castro: The Impact of His Thought: Essays to Mark the Centenary of His Birth* (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1988); and Guillermo Araya, *El pensamiento de Américo Castro: Estructura intercastiza de la historia de España* (Madrid: Alianza, 1983).

⁹ Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, *España: un enigma histórico* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1956). For a more recent English translation, see Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, *Spain: A Historical Enigma*, 2 vols, trans. Colette Joly Dees and David Sven Reher (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1975).

promoted a racially pure Spanishness. One of the clearest examples of such an effort included efforts to bury archival knowledge of the converso past of Teresa of Avila's father. How could the ultimate symbol of Spanishness be "tainted" with Jewish blood? The information about her converso parentage was suppressed for many decades.¹⁰ The debate over Spanish national identity encapsulated competing visions for Spanish nationhood - either vibrant and multicultural or ancient and resolutely Christian - in which the particular history of Spain required its historians to grapple with its past during a time (the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) in which European national historians insisted on whiteness and purity as the foundation of civilization, and in which Spanish scholars were all too aware of the inferiority by which they were judged by their northern European peers who viewed them as a "mongrel" nation. Race and purity were omnipresent in modern Spanish historiography.

In some ways, the Portuguese colonial experiences and attitudes towards race mirrored Spanish ones - or perhaps, they were co-created, both born out of similar experiences of fears of Jewish and Muslim contamination alongside Christian providentialist foundations of colonial conquest and violence. Layering onto these phenomena, both nations developed twentieth-century fascist white Catholic nationalism, although the Franco regime linked itself to Catholicism in a more intimate way than that of Salazar, who evinced more ambivalence about religion.

While embroiled in some of the same central questions as Spain, however, Portuguese historiography cleared a distinct path. Beginning in the mid eighteenth century, for example, Portuguese rulers attempted to erase categories of "New" and "Old" Christian, folding them into one category. This process brought all white, Christian Portuguese people into one group, which in turn hardened the line that marginalized people of color. Moreover, while Spain's colonial ambitions were reduced by the twentieth century, the Portuguese maintained a strong foothold throughout the world, especially in Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Goa, and Timor well into the middle of the twentieth century. These African and Asian colonial efforts were layered onto (and helped to drive) the nearly unfathomable millions of enslaved Africans carried to Brazil, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Portuguese historians, scholars, and intellectuals, then, had to grapple with the concept of race on a larger scale than their peninsular neighbors.

¹⁰ On the mid-twentieth-century discovery of Teresa's paternal family, see Manuel Burgos Madroño, "En torno a Santa Teresa de Jesús," *Islas de Arriarán* 10 (1997): 263-80; and F. Herranz Velázquez, "Nuevas aportaciones al debate historiográfico sobre el linaje de Santa Teresa de Jesús," in *Nuevas aportaciones en la investigación en Humanidades*, ed. Ernesto Cutillas Orgilés (Alicante: University of Alicante, 2017), 107-114.

The prominent myth of Portuguese colonization as it was developed by the Portuguese and White Brazilians insisted on the Portuguese as benign colonizers who promoted racial mixing and diversity; this myth of benignity was termed Lusotropicalism. To put it simply, those that espoused this concept, first developed by Gilberto de Freyre, turned the Portuguese empire's "multicultural" composition into a hallmark of racial democracy and imperial success, similar to Américo Castro's myth of *convivencia*.¹¹ Lusotropicalism operated on two levels: First, it argued that interracial marriage and family building signaled state tolerance; in the process, it obscured the eugenicist goals of erasing its Black history, literally and figuratively. Brazilians, like Spanish colonial authorities, believed that people could return to whiteness through generational marriages to White people, with the goal of achieving erasure of people of color. At the same time, however, violence and oppression against Black subjects throughout the Portuguese empire insisted on the strict maintenance of hierarchical oppressions where Black subjects had limited legal rights and social access.¹² The myths of a kind and racially tolerant Portuguese empire persist strongly today, as we can see in the bitter debates that have emerged over the monument in Lisbon that celebrates Portuguese "explorations" and "discoveries" called the *Padrão do Descobrimentos*, completed in 1960 in honor of the anniversary of Henry the Navigator's death. The plaza in front of the monument is inlaid with a map of the world at its moment of "discovery" by the Portuguese, a gift of the South African government, which tells us much about the meaning of this monument.¹³

All European colonial powers embraced racist ideologies to justify enslavement and genocide in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but during this period, Spain and Portugal evolved distinct ideologies that were founded on

¹¹ On Lusotropicalism, see: Ronaldo Vainfas, "Colonização, miscigenação, e questão racial: notas sobre equívocos e tabus da historiografia brasileira," *Tempo* 8 (1999): 7-22; Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, *Brasil, um refúgio nos trópicos: a trajetória dos refugiados do nazi-fascismo* (São Paulo: Estação Liberdade/Instituto Goethe, 1996); and Marshall C. Eakin, *Becoming Brazilians: Race and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹² Warwick Anderson, Ricardo Roque, and Ricardo Ventura Santos, eds., *Luso-Tropicalism and Its Discontents: The Making and Unmaking of Racial Exceptionalism* (London: Berghahn Books, 2019); and Francisco Bethencourt and Adrian Pearce, eds., *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-Speaking World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹³ On commemoration of the slave trade, see Ana Lucia Araujo, *Museums and Atlantic Slavery* (Milton: Routledge, 2021). There is currently a bitter political debate in Portugal over the possibility of removing the *Padrão*, as well as spikes in hate crimes against Black residents:

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-portugal-rights-racism/confront-your-colonial-past-uncil-of-europe-tells-portugal-idUSKBN2BG138> <accessed 9 Oct. 2021>

their own ideas about exceptionalism. One of the other elements they shared with their European counterparts, however, was a determination to forget the Black history of their nations – Spanish and Portuguese scholars viewed Black people as existing only in colonized spaces. Spanish history is steeped in doubleness - it is raced by its European neighbors while articulating shifting discourses of racism and White supremacy that had devastating effects on indigenous and African people.

2.

In spite of being overlooked by premodern European historiography writ large, scholars investigating the history of race in Spanish and Portuguese historiography do not begin with the question “Where do I look?” but rather “How do I manage all the material on this topic?” Scholarly inquiries into the roles of racism in the development of modern Iberian nations remain fertile ground for analysis. Ideas about religious minorities and persecution, however, are not always grounded in the conceptual framework of “race,” as not all scholars view anti-Semitic massacres or the morisco expulsion as racist per se. This section traces the disparate ways in which scholars have understood the genealogy of concepts of race and racist ideologies in premodern Iberia.

For example, Antonio Feros’s recent book, *Speaking of Spain*, provides an important synthesis on the development of the idea of the Spanish nation and how it became tied inextricably to a concept of belonging that was grounded in ethnicity and exclusion, both in the peninsula and in the Americas. Feros focuses on the eighteenth century as the century of transition, where ideas about nationhood and race cohered in the Spanish empire.¹⁴ Such an historical approach analyzes the ways race and national identity evolved in a specifically Spanish context while accepting twentieth century genealogies of race and state that posits both as fundamentally Enlightenment in origin.

When thinking with scholarship that carefully parses what did and did not qualify as race or racism in the premodern era, one should consider what it means to argue that race was a category invented by Enlightenment scientists or modern nationalism. Although such ideas are often qualified, one can be left with the impression that the Enlightenment conceptualization of race constitutes “true” racism. This specific way of discussing and categorizing race is familiar to modern thinkers, as it provides an easily-identifiable precursor to the ways in which nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers picked up the ideas about race

¹⁴ Antonio Feros, *Speaking of Spain: The Evolution of Race and Nation in the Hispanic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017). I recommend watching this interview between Feros and scholars from the Universidad Nacional de San Martín (UNSAM) in Buenos Aires, wherein Feros discusses the differences in receptions of his book in the US and in Spain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHBw9xMFo9g>.

and nationhood that have left their ugly marks on society today. Yet this model suggests that what came before the Enlightenment constitutes something that is not race/racism. We less often ask what is at stake with understanding race through a modern prism, with (Northern) European Enlightenment ideas about what constitutes race as the origin point. How do we understand the relationship between race (a concept) and racism (a structure)? What do we gain or lose by adhering to this Enlightenment narrative, especially considering we know how long into the eighteenth century some of the old beliefs about the origin of human difference lasted? What does all this agonizing about when race became race get us? There is a balance between concerns about adopting anachronistic frameworks and rejecting the existence of racism in the premodern era. The problem with the latter is that it runs the danger of creating - intentionally or not - the idea that in earlier periods, those in power oversaw more tolerant and less violent and coercive structures.

And yet the flipside of adopting an overly narrow definition of race/racism is that it can also become too broad - a label that captures a number of complex historical phenomena and flattens them. Unmoored from its modern genealogy and specific nineteenth-century manifestations, which did give rise to a very distinct vision of race and racism that has had a devastating effect on the world, racism can also at times recede from a serious category of inquiry to a shorthand that totalizes the historical experiences of different communities, in the same way that the concept of “otherness” can.

Francisco Bethencourt provides a broader view of the topic of the development of racisms, a plural that demonstrates the varieties that racist ideologies could take throughout early modern history. For this study, Bethencourt defines racism as ethnic prejudice in combination with legal discrimination. He details the deep history of how difference became adjudicated, which he connects to the Crusades and to the Latin West’s clash with Islam in the medieval Eastern Mediterranean. While the scope of Bethencourt’s book is global, he draws largely from the history of Portugal and its empire, his area of expertise.¹⁵ Here Bethencourt posits Iberia as the source for European racism – an idea also argued by earlier scholars such as James Sweet.¹⁶ One of the most important contributions of this volume is its centering of early modern Iberia in a global history of racism. While Bethencourt creates a large-scale investigation of race as

¹⁵ Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 143-166; John Edwards, “Beginnings of Scientific Theory of Race?: Spain, 1450-1600,” in *From Iberia to Diaspora: Studies in Sephardic History and Culture*, eds. Yedida K. Stillman and Norman K. Stillman (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 179-196.

having premodern antecedents and manifestations, he largely concurs with Feros that racism (so-called scientific racism) as we know it is a product of nationalism, while premodern racism was rooted in religious difference.

The idea of racism emerging in premodern Europe has long been controversial, as many scholars along with Bethencourt have posited that the primary marker of difference in Europe during that period was religious and not racial, and therefore that anti-Jewish and anti-Islamic beliefs and laws were not inherently racist, but instead emerged out of religious dogma. It is undeniably true that theology stood as a central marker of difference, that those Christians deemed heretics were subject to extreme levels of violence and punishment alongside Jews and Muslims, and that unbelief was entangled with political dissent and fears of divine punishment. At the same time, premodern Europeans frequently discussed how people inherited good and bad traits, or perhaps more precisely propensities for good or ill. The children and grandchildren of heretics were viewed not only as suspect but barred from certain offices and positions, because they had a genetic tendency to deceit. It was not a cultural argument (i.e., that they had been taught bad ways by their heretic relatives) but one about inheritability.

Christian jurists viewed sin itself as inheritable corruption. Just as all humans were tainted by the sins of their primordial parents, Adam and Eve, so those who committed additional transgressions of apostasy, heresy, denial of Christian ‘truth’, and treason defiled not only their own souls, but the souls of their children. The opposite could also function in a similar way – individual virtue could arise out of familial or genealogical virtue. Consider, for example, images of the Virgin Mary being taught to read at her mother’s knee. It was not only Christ whose birth was important, but the purity of his mother and the holiness of her entire lineage. In fact, devotion to the Virgin’s parents, Sts. Anne and Joachim, and to the Holy Family more generally, intensified during the Late Middle Ages and early modern period at the same time Europeans began increasingly invested in lineage and civilizational hierarchies. As Patricia Marcos points out “This is a belief system within which not only was religion racialized, but constitute the very concept of race. In other words, to profess a non-Christian religion made one open to being or becoming racialized.”¹⁷

Jean-Frédéric Schaub and David Nirenberg in particular have done important work in demonstrating the relationship with premodern ideas about blood and difference grounded in the body.¹⁸ Many scholars of race and

¹⁷ Patricia M Marcos, “Portugal, Race, and Memory: A Conversation, A Reckoning,” <https://www.buala.org/en/to-read/portugal-race-and-memory-a-conversation-a-reckoning> <accessed 15 September 2021>.

¹⁸ David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Nirenberg, “Was There Race Before Modernity? The Example of ‘Jewish’ Blood in Late Medieval Spain,” in *The*

anti-Semitism in Iberian history have focused on the “purity of blood” statutes that took hold throughout the Iberian kingdoms, albeit through separate trajectories. While there were those who vocally opposed them and others who ignored them, they were eventually adopted by all the religious orders and applied to many civic offices in both Spanish and Portuguese cities. Defects of blood and lineage became legal categories of marginalization and discrimination.¹⁹

Scholars of early modern Spain and Portugal, especially those who focus on the sixteenth century, have engaged in significant analyses of the concepts of race and purity as they emerged from this period. Such studies often connect sixteenth-century Iberia with its colonialization of the Americas, examining the relationship between the emergence of race at the moment when Iberia’s hostility toward ethnic difference collided with colonialism.²⁰ The historiography on race in colonial Latin America is vast and rich, particularly that which emerged from Brazilian scholars - too rich to do justice here.²¹ Many such scholars have

Origins of Racism in the West, ed. Mariam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 232-264; and Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Race is About Politics: Lessons From History*, trans. Lara Vergnaud (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) (French original, *Pour une histoire politique de la race*, 2015).

¹⁹ Max S. Hering Torres, “Purity of Blood: Problems of Interpretations,” in *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, ed. M.S. Torres, M. E. Martinez, and D. Nirenberg (Zurich: Verlag, 2012), 11-38; María Eugenia Chaves Maldonado, ed., *Genealogías de la diferencia: tecnologías de la salvación y representación de los africanos esclavizados en Iberoamérica colonial* (Bogotá: Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2009). For a recent volume on race, religion, and the body, see Mercedes García Arenal and Felipe Pereda, eds., *De sangre y leche: Raza y religión en el mundo ibérico moderno* (Madrid: Marial Pons, 2021).

²⁰ John Russell-Wood, “Iberian Expansion and the Issue of Black Slavery: Changing Portuguese Attitudes,” *American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (Feb. 1978): 16-42. See also Jean-Frédéric Schaub, Silvia Sebastiani, and Max S. Hering Torres, eds. *Perspectivas transatlánticas*, Special Edition of *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 43, no. 2 (2016); this special edition includes important essays on early modern race by Giuseppe Marcocci, “Blackness and Heathenism: Color, Theology, and Race in the Portuguese World, c. 1450-1600”, pp. 33-57; Rafael Mandressi, “Los mejores médicos de la Tierra. El ‘pueblo de Israel’ en el Examen de ingenios de Juan Huarte (1575), pp. 59-87; and Ángela Barreto Xavier, “Languages of Difference in the Portuguese Empire. The Spread of ‘Caste’ in the Indian World,” pp. 89-119.

²¹ Scholars of Africa too play a crucial role in this historiography, a scholarship often neglected by scholars of the Spanish Atlantic in particular; see for example Mariana P. Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and its Hinterland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Cécile Fromont, *Images on a*

wrestled with how peninsular ideas about purity and status evolved into *casta* categories and racist ideologies in the Americas, most centering the early modern legal category of “purity of blood” as a conceptual linchpin.

One of the most well-known studies of *limpieza de sangre* in the Atlantic is by María Elena Martínez, who traced the movement of Iberian purity statutes to the colonial context, where she differentiated “casta” from race, with casta categories emerging as “more inclusive” than race, a distinction often made by scholars of colonial Latin America.²² The idea of purity of blood as a legal requirement or principle of social organization, Martínez argues, did not work as well in colonial society, because casta status remained in a state of perpetual negotiation and renegotiation. Many scholars of purity, status, and casta agree with Martínez that these categories were fluid and capacious, more easily evaded than one might imagine.²³

In spite of potential fluidity, however, many communities were almost inevitably marked as different in ways that precluded evasion. This latter characterization marked the body with difference that was viewed by racists as inescapable, inevitable forms of physical and moral inferiority, which in turn calcified the structure of power to place certain racial groups at the bottom. Yet no matter where, the concept of entrenched, racial difference lies at the heart of this – if it is necessary to ‘pass’ to evade oppressive power structures, to be unable to ‘become White’ leads to multigenerational race-based oppression.

Scholars of early modern Spain and Portugal have also been deeply engaged in the complex social, political, and legal conversations about religious and ethnic minorities within their kingdoms, and how such conversations evolved over time and space, without engaging at length with the concept of race or racism. Such fine-grained analysis of local contexts is crucial for understanding the dynamics of how discrimination and racism became entrenched in communities. While for most of the past century, historiography on minorities in Spain and Portugal has tended to focus on Jewish/converso and Muslim/morisco

Mission in Early Modern Kongo and Angola (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2022).

²² María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

²³ Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); M. Calleja Puerta, “Historia y falsificación en las pruebas de hidalguía de un caballero andaluz: un estudio histórico-diplomático,” en *Sulcum Sevit: estudios en homenaje a Eloy Benito Ruano*, vol. 1 (Oviedo: Universidad, Facultad de Geografía e Historia, 2004), 173-192; Ângela Barreto Xavier “Parecem indianos na cor e na feição: A ‘lenda negra’ e a indianização dos portugueses,” *Etnográfica* 18, no. 1 (2014): 111-133; and Ângela Barreto Xavier, “Purity of Blood and Caste. Identity Narratives among Early Modern Goan Elites,” in Torres, Martínez, and Nirenberg, eds., *Race and Blood*, 125-150.

communities, the scholarship on Africans and their descendants has been rich, and accelerating rapidly in the past decade or so. Many of these studies utilize the framework of social history in order to investigate the lived experience of minority communities in Iberia, eschewing much interest in the meaning or development of the concept of race and instead digging into day-to-day family, economic, and social structures.²⁴

The research produced both by scholars engaged in close-textured studies of ethnic minorities and those that investigate questions about race-formation are essential for nuanced examinations about the multivalent ways the concept of race and social exclusion were practiced, performed, and responded to in different places and times among different groups. Overarching theories of the longue durée history of racism in Iberia serve an important purpose, but it is only through more finely ground studies that we understand the full complexities of race making in action. Difference and identity (religious and ethnic) were negotiated in intricately complex and historically variable ways, and it should always be approached as such.

3.

It is evident from the above section that the majority of research on race and prejudice in premodern Iberia has focused Muslim and Jewish communities, and not on Iberia's Black history. Scholarship on Black communities in both Spain and Portugal have lagged behind, although scholars have been writing about enslaved Black Africans for several decades. Perhaps one of the greatest risks of sustained inquiries on the development of the concept of race in Europe is that it keeps scholarly focus on White European ideas rather than the lives of those facing systematic oppression, culminating in a second erasure. In spite of the richness of the scholarship discussed above, I want to turn the conversation around and see what happens when we reorient our gaze to a new question: What happens when we examine race and Spain through the lens of Black Studies? Preliminary answers to this question have the potential to advance the current scholarly conversation about race/racism in premodern Spain by providing new methodological and historiographic insights.

²⁴ For a few examples, see Linda Martz, *A Network of Converso Families in Early Modern Toledo: Assimilating a Minority* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); François Soyer, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal: King Manuel I and the End of Religious Tolerance (1496-7)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Giuseppe Marcocci, "Remembering the Forced Baptism of Jews: Law, Theology, and History in Sixteenth-Century Portugal," in *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: Coercion and Faith in Premodern Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 328-353.

Black American scholars in the nineteenth-century US shared the interest of their White compatriots in the history of Spain, most prominently the towering intellectual Arturo Alberto Schomburg, who traveled to Spain in 1926.²⁵ As a result of his journeys, he began to write about then-obscure Black Spanish painter, Juan de Pareja, who had been enslaved by Diego Velázquez. Pareja was the subject of a famous portrait by Velázquez, today hanging in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City), although Schomburg's interest in Pareja focused on him as an artist and person, not as the subject of a portrait by a famous artist. While in Seville, Schomburg viewed several of Pareja's works; he also learned about the history of the city's important Black confraternity, the Hermandad de Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles, today known by its nickname, Hermandad de los negritos. His goal was eventually to write a book on the African past in Spain, and he returned to the US with over a hundred documents and objects from Spain, which currently reside with his papers at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center.

What does Schomburg have to show us about the way we frame questions about Iberia, African diaspora, and the history of Europe? What can Schomburg teach scholars at Spanish and Portuguese universities? And further, how does scholarship by Americans and British academics of Spain differ from such scholarship by those in Spain and Portugal in terms of methodology? If Schomburg had written his book on Spain, one wonders how different our historiography on Black Africans in early modern Spain would have been.

Let us turn to a scholarly case study: Herman Bennett's recent monograph *African Kings and Black Slaves*.²⁶ In this monograph, Bennett unpacks the early years of the Portuguese slave trade and diplomatic relations with West and Central African sovereigns. He places the Christian, legal framework of sovereignty as the cornerstone for understanding the European understanding of its African encounters. The synthesis that he elegantly and thoughtfully assembles serves as an insightful path through the earliest years of the Iberian encounter with West and Central Africa, contextualizing these events through the larger lenses of canon law, sovereignty, Islam, and more. Bennett is an expert on colonial New Spain and Black Mexico; his work on the early years of the Portuguese slave trade, therefore, offers a departure from his previous two monographs and advances a more ambitious theoretical framework. For example, the introduction

²⁵ For a crucial account of Schomburg and his interest in early modern Spain, see Vanessa Kimberly Valdés, *Diasporic Blackness: The Life and Times of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg* (Albany: State University of New York, 2017); and Adalaine Holton, "Arturo Alfonso Schomburg's Archival Encounters in Spain," *African American Review* 54, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2021): 31-47.

²⁶ Herman L. Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

to *African Kings* takes up the long historiography in the US regarding slavery and the slave trade grounded in political economy and capitalism, and the effect of this entanglement on the emergence of modern states. As a result, he places the earliest period of the slave trade squarely within the historiography of the African Atlantic.

Bennett's introduction and conclusion clearly identify his intended readership: English speaking (primarily US based) scholars of Black Studies who have developed important work on the relationship between slavery and the economy. His goal is to offer them a different way of understanding the earlier history of the slave trade and its political history, to reveal "a glimpse of a lost past - a past buried beneath layers of contemporary historiographical sediment." Here Bennett describes these "foundational encounters" as "overlooked" by scholars of the slave trade with their focus on the Anglophone and Francophone Atlantic in the eighteenth century.²⁷

These foundation encounters have not, however, been overlooked by Portuguese scholars of enslavement and the slave trade, although the dense historiography in Portuguese and Spanish do not make a central appearance in Bennett's study. His bibliography is almost exclusively English language and draws very little from the rich scholarship on slavery and the slave trade in Iberia, with no archival references. None of this is to argue that Bennett is unfamiliar with archives and scholarship on early modern Iberia – in fact, I imagine that he has worked extensively in Iberian archives. To be clear, I do not see this as a failure or weakness on the book's part – his choice of focus reveals his audience and his goal to reshape Atlantic scholarship by emphasizing the centuries that became before the eighteenth, which were less shaped by capitalism and secularism. As a result, a dense bibliography in Spanish and Portuguese would have less relevance for his U.S. based audience. It is only by understanding the audience that we can see more clearly what Bennett is attempting to do in this work and appreciate it on a deeper level.

The choice of audiences in Bennett's book leaves specialists in early modern Iberia in a strange position. On one hand, the book describes a

²⁷ Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slavery*, 14-15. The role not only of capitalism but also numeracy and fungibility in the historiography of Black studies and Atlantic history is virtually unknown to scholars of Iberian slavery. See also Jennifer L. Morgan's recent work, which grapples with the historiography of numeracy, while rejecting the emphasis of the economy history of slavery as a form of erasure that must be contested: "And while the manifestations of racial hierarchy are inescapable violent, they gestate in the claims of neutrality, calculability, and rationality": Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 9. This work engages with Iberia, but is fundamentally rooted in the British Atlantic.

historiography that is unfamiliar and articulates problems that do not exist for their work in any clear way. It can feel alien. Yet this book has much to tell – and teach – us as specialists of Iberia with its unfamiliar theoretical framework. Bennett’s analysis reframes our work in ways that connect to disparate but interlocking spheres – Atlantic, African, Caribbean, and North American, among others. And through that process, Bennett challenges us with new, fruitful ways of thinking and writing about the topics of race, ethnic and religious minorities, and slavery. As a result, it is a work of great historiographic significance to specialists in early modern Spain and Portugal.

Scholars of early modern Spain and Portugal are often hesitant to – even hostile toward – engaging with theoretical frameworks of race that were primarily developed in the context of the US or the British and French Atlantic, considering them “Americanisms.” Conceptualizing race and enacting racist policies functioned differently in the Spanish and Lusophone worlds than in the Anglophone and Francophone, let alone the United States. Yet many major theorists have been read across geographies and time periods, albeit often with significant caveats by scholars of the premodern era, including Judith Butler, Foucault, Habermas, and Bourdieu, to name a few. The employment of these theoretical frameworks has generated controversy and has been rejected by some scholars of the premodern era as anachronistic. Many other scholars, however, have found them fruitful and generative, giving rise to a large body of significant work that have helped us ask different and sometimes better questions about the past. The conceptual frameworks of theorists can be adopted, adapted, or used as inspiration for periods outside those for which the theories were originally developed, even as premodernists carefully determine which elements are not appropriate for their historical period.

The imperatives outweigh the concerns. Some of the most important elements about critical race theory as articulated by Black and Brown scholars are *methodological* – they provide deep insights about how to do Black history: How to center Black subjectivity and Black voices in the archive. *Black history is about centering Black people in their own histories*, rather than a set of prescriptions about the meaning of race and race relations. The specific answers to this directive varies of course based on archives. But White scholars need to think carefully through their choices, *and reading Black scholars will help us do this*, no matter where we study or work, whatever our nation or primary scholarly languages.

I am not asserting that all scholars should be required to learn the historiography of Black Studies and apply its methodologies - rather, I argue that it offers us a rich set of tools to excavate the past in ways that can break us out of problematic scholarly traditions and assumptions. It connects our history of Black Iberia with the intellectual world of the African Diaspora. The entire field has the

potential to gain by such engagement, not just scholars based at North American institutions. At the risk of reducing a rich field to a small group of scholars, the foundational works by Trouillot, Fanon, DuBois, Wynter, Hartman, Fuentes, and more merit significantly greater attention in Spain and Portugal.²⁸ Marisa Fuentes, for example, demonstrates that merely to lament the silences of the archives on the lives of Black men and women “reproduces the same erasures and silences they experienced.” She argues powerfully that “this is a methodological project concerned with the ethical implications of historical practice and presentations of enslaved life and death produced through different types of violence.”²⁹ Saidiya Hartman proposes a different type of narration altogether – responding to silences with sound; to do so, she “pressed at the limits of the case file and the document, speculated about what might have been, imagined the things whispered in the dark bedrooms.”³⁰ This is a theoretical and methodological approach that dislocates traditional scholarship, disorienting and challenging the reader. Such maneuvers lie at the heart of Black Studies.

The historiography of the Black Atlantic has been developed in almost unimaginably rich ways by over a century of Black scholars. With the exception of Schomburg, however, not many of these scholars have evinced much interest in Spain and Portugal themselves, while the African diaspora in premodern Europe had itself been largely overlooked by European scholars until the past two or three decades. But here again, we can point to Spanish and Portuguese scholars as leaders, as they had been writing about enslaved Africans in Iberia since the 1970s at least. The absence of Spanish and Portuguese historiography in larger conversations about the Black Europe and the slave trade can be frustrating, as it

²⁸Just naming a few scholars cannot do anywhere near full justice to the depth of Black Studies scholarship. I include here a few examples of the works of these authors as a small introduction to this vast and dynamic field: Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 2d ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grive Press, Inc., 1967); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks: Essays and Sketches [1903]* (New York: Dover, 1994); Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: Norton and Norton, 2019); Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); and Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2019).

²⁹Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 6.

³⁰Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, n.p.

overlooks large bodies of scholarship. Using the tiniest example, when the pathbreaking 1619 project conceptualized by Nikole Hannah-Jones appeared, I understood the intention behind the choice of the date in question, but also wanted to remind those around me that enslaved Africans had existed in what would become the United States long before 1619, and in the Americas for a full century before. Dating the origins of the US to 1619 chained it to the history of the “original” thirteen colonies and to the British empire – a common elision among USian scholars who often forget that an enormous portion of the now-United States had once been a part of the Spanish empire. What if instead of an East-coast/Anglophone account of US history, we grounded ourselves in a West Coast/Spanish one? Or the southeast (Florida/New Orleans)?³¹

There is an emerging group of specialists in early modern Iberia that draws deeply from the methodological and theoretical insights of Black Studies, with thought provoking results. One important example is Nicholas R. Jones, whose recent monograph engages with and adds to Black Studies directly and boldly. Jones argues that the use of Black speech (*habla de negros*) and dance in early modern Spanish and Portuguese plays “render legible the voices and experiences of black Africans in fundamental ways that demand our attention.” He places this argument as a response to the historiography that views theatrical representations of black Africans solely through the lens of racism and mockery.³² Jones deftly intertwines early modern Black performance with Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*, itself a work of art that creates a space where past and present merge and are held together.³³ This spirit of the imaginary, of poetics and playful juxtapositions, moving between spatial scales, are common features of the most recent works in early modern Black Studies. By bringing such approaches into his analysis of early modern Iberian theater, Jones argues persuasively for the need to re-imagine Black performances and cultural production in early modern Spain.

³¹ Of course, the legal, social, and economic forces that organized the United States as it came into being were predominantly British and grounded in the Eastern States (and hence to 1619), and the project itself is indispensable to scholars and US citizens: Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverman, eds., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York: One World Press, 2021).

³² Nicholas R. Jones, *Staging Habla de Negros: Radical Performances of the African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2019), 5-8: “As a scholar whose work is deeply rooted in early modern Iberian studies and Africana studies, I enlist the strategies, methodologies, and insights of Africana studies in the service of Early Modern studies – and vice versa. . . the project theorizes a synthetic methodology for the Early Modern/Africana studies discursive divide” (8).

³³ Nicholas R. Jones, “Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* Folklore: Feminine Reverberations of Odú and Afro-Cuban Orisha Iconography,” in *The Lemonade Reader*, eds. Kinitra D. Brooks and Kameelah L. Martin (New York: Routledge, 2019), 88-97.

Another insightful model on bringing early modern studies into closer conversation with Black studies is the *Early Modern Black Diaspora* anthology. In the introduction, the editors of the volume – Cassander Smith, Nicholas Jones, and Miles Grier – position their volume as changing “the frame of reference for Early Modern Studies to one more Afrocentric in nature, a move that inherently disrupts Eurocentric epistemologies. . . Blackness is not alterity. Rather it is a particular synthesis of experiences and ways of thinking, acting, producing, creating, building, speaking, and problem-solving, that can tell us something about (early modern) humanity in general.”³⁴ The purpose of the anthology and Jones’s monograph is not merely to add to early modern scholarship, but to *transform* it. These works provide major contributions to the project of challenging Eurocentric and White supremacist approaches to history, and in turn challenge more scholars to follow suit.

One of the most striking of the Black Studies scholarship discussed here from the vantage point of premodern European Critical Race Studies is that none of the authors engage in elaborate discussions about what constitutes race and whether or not racism existed in the early modern period. There is a simple reason for this: examining European ideas about race centers White thinkers, perceptions, and beliefs. Black Studies, on the other hand, has a radically different charge as mentioned above: to center Black people in their own histories. For example, Jennifer Morgan and Sasha Turner have located the bodies of Black women as the site of maintaining of slaving systems. In a breathtaking methodological move, Stephanie Jones-Roger’s argues for the important role White women played as enslavers through the testimony by Black witnesses, rather than analysis of White women’s writing.³⁵ When we turn our gaze to center Black subjects, certain historical questions recede to be replaced by others more urgently required.

Several of the works discussed here - particularly Bennett’s and Jones’s - came from scholars outside Iberian history; Jones is a literary-cultural studies scholar, while Bennett is a specialist in colonial Mexico. This is not surprising, given that in both fields, the study of race, the African diaspora, and Black lives

³⁴ Cassander L. Smith, Nicholas R. Jones, and Miles P. Grier, eds. *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3.

³⁵ Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); and Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

have generated the most cutting-edge scholarship on Black Iberia.³⁶ History and art history have lagged behind such literary and cultural studies, although the history of Black Iberia has been the subject of important scholarship in these fields.³⁷

This article has demonstrated the complex and multilayered history of race and the study of racism in Spain and Portugal. It is a field that is developing rapidly and will no doubt continue to expand as the imperative to examine and highlight the lives of Black Africans and their influence on early modern European culture and society grows. One additional area of significant potential for thinking with new theoretical frameworks is to think with the entangled triangle of enslaved North African Muslims and Black Africans, who lived side by side throughout the early modern period in both Spain and Portugal. Understanding these systems as bound together might provide useful insights for not only the first developing stages of the Atlantic slave trade but for thinking with the relationship between orientalism, racism, anti-Blackness, and enslavement in the Western Mediterranean. At the same time, Iberia should be represented more fully in premodern critical race studies, not merely as a jumping off point as the earliest enslavers of West Africans, but as major players in the process of captivity, enslavement, racist regimes, and the dispersion of human beings across vast distances. Moreover, scholars of Iberia have generated much expertise and home to rich histories and archives of Black history, as well as instantiations of racism among non-Black marginalized communities. It is increasingly imperative – and fruitful, as Bennett and Jones demonstrate – to bring Black Studies into Spanish history, and to remind us all that Spanish history is Black history.

³⁶ For discussions of Black subjects of early modern Spanish theater and poetry, see new research by PhD candidate Cornesha Tweede; John Beusterien, *An Eye on Race: Perspectives from Theater in Imperial Spain* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006); and Baltasar Fra Molinero, *La imagen de los negros en el teatro del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1995).

³⁷ Carmen Fracchia, *'Black but Human': Slavery and Visual Arts in Hapsburg Spain, 1480-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Tanya J. Tiffany, "Light, Darkness, and African Salvation: Velázquez's *Supper at Emmaus*," *Art History* 31, no. 1 (Feb. 2008): 33-56; Aurelia Martín Casares, and Margarita García Barranco, *La esclavitud negroafricana en la historia de España, siglos XVI y XVII* (Granada: Comares, 2010); Aurelia Martín Casares and Margarita Barranco, "The Musical Legacy of Black Africans in Spain: A Review of Our Sources," *Anthropological Notebooks* 15, no. 2 (2009): 51-60; and Erin Kathleen Rowe, *Black Saints in Early Modern Global Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).