The Decline of Slavery in Mexico

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Source: *The Americas*, Oct., 1987, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Oct., 1987), pp. 167-194

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1007289

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The history of African slave societies in the New World can be divided into three distinct phases—formation, maturity and decline. The third, the demise of the slave order, will be the focus of attention in the present discussion. There appear to be three general patterns to the decline of slave societies in the Americas. The first, exemplified by the United States and Haiti, came quickly, but at a time when the slave order was deeply entrenched, engendering profound resistance accompanied by a civil war. In the second, demonstrated by Cuba and Brazil, it occurred over the course of a few decades, involving a more varied combination of international pressure, slave resistance and a transformation of the labor regime utilizing both recently freed slaves and imported foreign workers. Of the third prototype, in which Mexico and Colombia represent cases in point, it was a seemingly undramatic, very slow process encompassing several generations, during which slavery appeared to wither away. This essay will examine the fate of slavery in Mexico, a topic which has been mentioned in various works, but has not been examined in detail. It is important not only for comparative purposes, but also for understanding the social history of late-colonial Mexico.

Three general interpretations of the end of Mexican slavery appear in the historical literature. One is that the nation's abolition in 1829 was a positive consequence of the social movement originally led by Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos that accompanied the wars for independence. Even though conservatives ultimately determined the fate of the independence movement, many of its progressive concerns, including the abolition of slavery, would be realized during the early years of the Republic.[1] A second interpretation views abolition as the result of conspiracy. It suggests that the Mexican government abolished slavery as a result of a plan to deprive

[1] See, e.g., Jesus Reyes Heroles, *El Liberalismo Mexicano* (3 vols., Mexico, 1957-1961), I, 28-29; Rodolfo Acuna, *Occupied America* (San Francisco, 1972), 12; Richard B. Morris, "The American Revolution and the Mexican War for Independence: Parallels and Divergences," in El Colegio de Mexico and American Historical Association, eds, *Dos Revoluciones: Mexico y los Estados Unidos* (Mexico, 1976), 27.

Anglo-Texans of their property and ultimately to dislodge them from Texas. Slavery was the productive base of Anglo-Texan society, and without slavery that society could not thrive. In abolishing slavery Mexico broke a contractual agreement which had allowed the early Anglo settlers to bring slaves into the province.[2] A final interpretation, never closely examined, focuses on the decline rather than the abolition of slavery. It suggests that at some time between the late-seventeenth and early-nineteenth centuries African slavery outlived its usefulness as an institution.[3] During this period slaves became extraneous to the social and productive schema of the Mexican colony and were replaced by mestizos and Indians.[4] Slavery in Mexico died a gradual death, and by the early nineteenth century few slaves were left. I accept the third interpretation as the most compelling, and in the following essay will discuss the details of the argument and some of its implications for the social history of late-colonial Mexico.

THE ROLE OF SLAVERY IN MEXICO

African slavery in Mexico peaked between the 1570s and the middle of the seventeenth century, the result of the convergence of demographic, political and economic factors on colonial labor demands. The demographic feature relates to sources of menial labor in the colony, particularly the Indian population. The number of Indians in Mexico declined dramatically from the time of the Spaniards' arrival in the 1510s until around the third or fourth decade of the seventeenth century.[5] A particularly crucial moment occurred during the 1570s, when a series of epidemics decimated the native population and initiated what many Mexicanists have labelled the "century of Depression." The sharp decline of the Indian population during the 1570s, and the resultant end of this abundant source of cheap labor in the colony often is cited as the most important cause of this "depression."[6] The other end of the period, the mid-seventeenth century, marks the beginning

[2] Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (New York, 1941), 9; Eugene H. Barker, *Mexico and Texas, 1821-1835* (Dallas, 1928), 77-78; Henry Bamford Parkes, *A History of Mexico* (Boston, 1970), 201 ff.

[3] Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 3; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran, "The Integration of the Negro in the National Society of Mexico," in Magnus Morner, ed., *Race and Class in Latin America* (New York, 1970), 16; Adelo Naveda Chavez-Hita, "La esclavitud negra en la jurisdiccion de la villa de Cordoba en el siglo XVIII," (Tésis de maestria en historia, Universidad Veracruzana, 1977), 67.

[4] Palmer, *Slaves*, 3.

[5] Woodrow Borah and Sherburne F. Cook, *Essays in Population History*. Vol. 2. *Mexico and the Caribbean*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1974), 180.

[6] Woodrow Borah, *New Spain's Century of Depression* (Berkeley, 1951); Francois Chevalier, *Land and Society in Colonial Latin America: The Great Hacienda* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970).

of the recovery of the native population. There had been another acute demographic crisis during the late-1620s and early-1630s, but afterwards the native population began to increase, meaning that it could again perform the work in which black slaves had been engaged during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, by the mid-seventeenth century, the population of mixed descent, the future "raza cosmica," was growing rapidly, and served as another potential replacement for slaves.

Two important political factors that explain the peak of African slavery in Mexico at the time are the joining of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns, and changes in Spanish policy regarding Indian labor. Because Portugal controlled the slave trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its political unification with Spain between 1580 and 1640 made it relatively easier during that time for Mexico to acquire slaves from Africa than it was earlier or later. A second political feature was embodied in Spanish-Indian relations as reflected in labor policies. The principal forms of labor relations in the colony were *encomienda* (conquest to mid-sixteenth century); *repartimiento* (mid-sixteenth century until early seventeenth century); and wage labor (early-seventeenth century until the end of the colony). The political impact of these policies was to bring Indians increasingly out of isolation from Spanish society and integrate them, where they would be available to perform the tasks the Spaniards demanded. With the introduction of wage labor, particularly as it became important after the 1630s, Indians could be most readily induced to perform tasks which African slaves often had performed earlier.[7]

The colonial economy also has a bearing on African slavery in Mexico. It was specifically in those economic activities that occurred in locations apart from the centers of Indian population into which slaves were imported. These included mining in the North, sugar production in the South and East, and the urban occupations of the "Republica de Espanoles" from which Indians were largely excluded, the obraje and domestic service.

The numbers of slaves in Mexico during the apogee of slavery, the late-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, including both foreign and Mexican-born, has been estimated at any given time as ranging between 20,000 and 45,000.[8] While the data remain somewhat sparse, slaves do not appear

[7] See especially Charles Gibson, *the Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, (Stanford, 1964), Ch. 9. See also Peter Bakewell, *Silver Mining and Society in Colonial Mexico: Zacatecas, 1546-1700* (Cambridge, 1972), 200, whose case study of the silver mining region of Zacatecas, concludes, "The most obvious inference to be drawn from these observations is that there were enough Indians available to man the Zacatecas mining industry, so long as the rewards were attractive enough."

[8] Palmer, *Slaves*, 187.

to have predominated in mining, sugar production or the obraje, even during this period of peak labor shortage. Palmer estimates that in mining, slaves were an estimated sixteen percent of the workers in the ten largest mining areas in 1597, while Bakewell notes that the Zacatecas slave populations in the late-1600s was perhaps twenty percent of the total.[9] Ward Barrett, in his study of the sugar hacienda of the Marquesado del Valle in the present-day state of Morelos, while not providing specific estimates, observes that "the importance of Negro slavery at the Cortes plantation occupied second place."[10] In the case of the obraje, Charles Gibson observes that Indian labor was more important than that of slaves in Central Mexico, while John Super qualifies the notion in Queretaro, indicating that some obrajes were worked entirely by African-descent slaves.[11] There have been no recent studies or estimates of the number or importance of urban domestic slaves in the early period. Yet there is little doubt that they were more important in that activity than in any of the productive occupations, and they were most numerous in the capital. For example, in 1628 Thomas Gage assumed that blacks and mulattos were synonymous with domestic servants in Mexico City, making no mention of others.[12] In fact, most slaves in Mexico lived in cities, and the only occupation which they dominated in the colony was that of domestic service.

Yet slavery would decline as the population increased and as wage labor became widespread, for the compulsion to work for money alone proved to be a more effective means of Indian labor exploitation. Supply was more elastic, as more workers could be induced to perform tasks whenever there was a demand simply by raising wages. The adoption of wage labor under the circumstances served to be one of the most effective ways to relieve the colony of its long-standing labor shortage.

THE DECLINE OF SLAVERY

The decline of slavery can be documented both by indirect evidence, which points to a greater supply of alternative forms of labor, and by direct proof of a sharp drop in the price of slaves. Three of those alternatives will be discussed, specifically the average daily wage for rural workers in Central Mexico, the cost of convict labor, and the demand for African slaves.

[9] Palmer, *Slaves*, 79; Bakewell, *Silver Mining*, 124.

[10] Ward Barrett, *The Sugar Hacienda of the Marqueses del Valle*, (Minneapolis, 1970), 79-80.

[11] Gibson, *The Aztecs*, 243; John C. Super, "Queretaro Obrajes: Industry and Society in Provincial Mexico, 1600-1810," *Hispanic American Historical Review* (hereafter cited as HAHR), 56 (May 1976), 208.

[12] Thomas Gage, *The English-American, or a New Survey of the West Indies* (London, 1928), 85-87; Palmer, *Slaves*, 45-46.

The daily wages of rural workers in the region increased from approximately one-fourth of a *real* in the 1540s to about two *reales* by 1650, the period of acute shortage. Yet they remained practically unchanged from that time until almost the beginning of the nineteenth century.[13] Compensating for price inflation, and assuming no significant changes in other types of perquisites, real wages rose sharply until the middle of the seventeenth century, stabilized, remained fairly constant for more than one hundred years, and declined modestly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[14]

A second indicator of increased labor availability is a decline in the price of convict labor in the late-colonial period. A 1747 decree, for example, specified that employers who used convict labor regularly, among them owners of *panaderias* (bakeries) and *obrajes*, could purchase such workers in many locations of the colony for about one-half to two-thirds of their previous cost, another indication that alternatives were not as difficult or costly to obtain as they had been earlier.[15]

A third demonstration of the growing supply of other forms of labor was the decreasing demand for black slaves, which can be measured by the volume of African slave importation to Mexico. In the sixteenth century an estimated 60,000 were brought to Mexico, the volume doubling to 120,000 for the seventeenth century.[16] The peak years of the slave trade, Palmer indicates, were from the last decade of the sixteenth century until around 1640, after which importations declined.[17] For the entire eighteenth century, the volume of imports plummeted to perhaps 20,000.[18] The sharp drop in the number of African slaves being sent to Mexico further supports the view that the demand had fallen sharply.

Direct evidence of the decline of slavery is the drop in the cost of slaves in late-colonial Mexico. The prices of black slaves in their most productive years, ages 16-25, between the 1580s and the 1780s, are displayed in Figure 1.[19] Trends in slave prices in Mexico City can be grouped into three

[13] Gibson, *The Aztecs*, 249-52.

[14] The most important price index, maize, is examined in Enrique Florescano, *Precios del maíz y crisis agrícolas en México (1708-1810)* (Mexico, 1969), 181, cuadro 19.

[15] Archivo General de la Nacion, Mexico City (hereafter cited as AGN), Inquisicion, 912.24 (1747). Also in the year 1747, the Governor of the Estate of the Cortes family abolished the practice of using Indian prisoners in sugar mills, Barrett, *The Sugar Hacienda*, 86.

[16] Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran, "The Slave Trade in Mexico," HAHR 24 (Aug. 1944), 414, 427.

[17] Palmer, *Slaves*, 26.

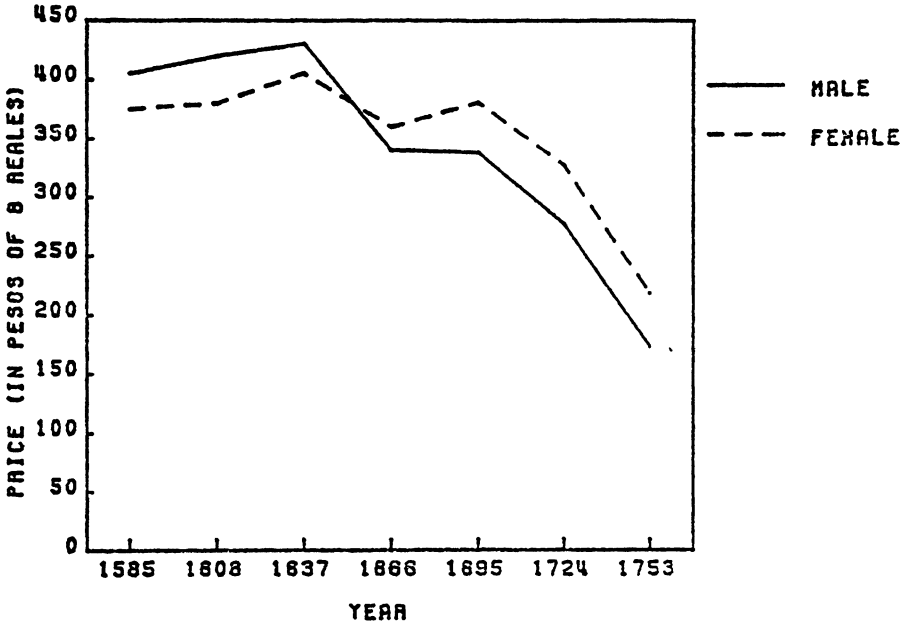
[18] Aguirre Beltran, "The Slave Trade", 427.

[19] Data for the period 1580 to 1650 taken from Frederick Bowser, "The Free Person of Color in Mexico City and Lima: Manumission and Opportunity, 1580-1650," in Stanley L. Engerman and Eu-

FIGURE 1

PRICES OF BLACK SLAVES AGES 16-25, BY GENDER

SOLD IN MEXICO CITY, 1584-1756



Source: See footnote 19.

periods, the first lasting until the 1630s, the second running from the 1630s until the 1690s, and the third between the 1690s and the late-eighteenth century. In the first, the sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries, when labor was at a premium, prices were highest. Between 1580 and the 1630s the cost of both males and females fluctuated within a range less than fifty pesos above or below the 400 peso level. The peak occurred during the 1630s, the time of the most severe labor shortage in the history of the city, caused by demands stemming from the great flood of 1629, a disaster ac-

gene D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Stanford, 1975), 331-68. For the period from the 1660s to the 1780s, samples of the notarial registers, taken by notary number, of the Archivo de Notarias del Departamento del Distrito Federal, Mexico City (hereafter cited as AN), were taken. Notaries' numbers listed as follows: 9, 14, 18, 20, 132, 142, 143, 196, 209, 253, 257, 270, 338, 350, 382, 386, 391, 392, 400, 403, 415, 454, 480, 504, 519, 569, 589, 590, 591, 632, 687, 700, 741, 742, and 745. The sample periods cover the years 1663-69 (35 cases), 1692-1698 (210 cases), 1721-1727 (222 cases), 1750-1756 (122 cases) and 1779-1785 (26 cases). The small sample of the 1660s was taken only to establish a link with the Bowser data. The small sizes of the 1750s and 1780s are due to the disappearance of deeds of slave sales from the registers at these periods in time. The same registers were used for gathering *Cartas de libertad*.

companied by epidemic diseases that resulted in thousands of deaths and an even greater number of evacuations to other parts of the colony.[20] Death, displacement and labor demands stemming from work on the *desague*, the drainage canal designed to divert water out of the city, combined to drive prices up to a record level at that time.

In the second period, from the 1630s through the 1690s, there was a gradual drop in the price of slaves. From an average of about 430 pesos, the price of young adult black males fell to about 340 pesos by the 1660s, and they remained relatively stable for the remainder of the century. The moderate drop in prices by mid-century is consistent with the view that the worst of the labor shortage of the 1630s had eased by mid-century and that non-slaves were performing an increasing amount of labor. Yet slavery still was important, as the cost of slaves in the later decades of the century was only about ten to fifteen percent less than it had been in the earlier ones. This drop in prices during the later-seventeenth century contradicts an interpretation of Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, who suggests in her study of Cordoba that the decline of slavery in Mexico was a phenomenon of the eighteenth century.[21] She notes that prices in the Cordoba area for adult males in their early twenties during the early and middle of the century averaged 310 pesos, a figure which, while somewhat higher than in Central Mexico at the time, still was about 120 pesos less than in the capital a century earlier.[22] Slavery already was losing its grip in Mexico during the second half of the seventeenth century.

In the final phase, from the 1690s until the mid-eighteenth century, the price of slaves plummetted dramatically. By the 1750s, young black adult slaves sold for an average of about 170 to 175 pesos, only half what they had cost sixty years earlier. The late-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries represent the final collapse of the slave market in Central Mexico.

The data for the capital, unlike that of most other locations in Mexico and Latin America, suggest only minimal differences in cost by gender throughout the colonial period, as males were slightly more expensive during the earliest phase of slavery, but females gathered higher prices in

[20] On the flood, see especially, Gibson, *The Aztecs*, 236 ff.; Hoberman, "Bureaucracy and Disaster: Mexico City and the Great Flood of 1629," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 6 (1974), 211-30; Richard Everett Boyer, "Mexico City and the Great Flood: Aspects of Life and Society 1629-1635," (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1973).

[21] Naveda Chávez-Hita, "La esclavitud negra," 68.

[22] Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, "Trabajadores esclavos en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Ver., 1714-1763," paper presented at the V Reunion de Historiadores Mexicanos y Norteamericanos, Patzcuaro, Michoacan, 12-15 Octubre, 1977, 6.

the second and third phases.[23] They are consistent with some other urban places, where gender differences often were negligible or inconsistent.[24] In many tasks performed by urban slaves, particularly domestic service, owners did not place brute strength at a premium, as they would in the mines and on the plantations. For domestic tasks, other qualities were emphasized in which the talents of males and females were considered more nearly equal. This is not suggesting that female and male urban slaves were relatively equal in price, as demonstrated in the Southern United States during the early nineteenth century.[25] Instead, it indicates that slave prices can be better understood more adequately within the context of the tasks they performed and the perceptions of owners on the capacities of males or females to perform them.

The authors who have mentioned the decline of slavery in colonial Mexico tend to agree that the expanding mestizo or Indian populations were the replacements, but they have not examined the process. Tracing the expansion of the mestizo population, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, unlike most other Mexican historians, attempts to distinguish the Euro-mestizo, the Afro-mestizo and the Indo-mestizo. He calculates that in Central Mexico the Euro-mestizo population rose from slightly more than 8600 in 1570 to roughly 95,000 by 1646, to more than 220,000 by 1742, while during the same points in time both the Afro-mestizo and Indo-mestizo rose nearly identically, rates, from 2,000 at the first date, to 43,000 at the second, to 100,000 by 1742, when slavery had effectively lost its importance in Mexico.[26] Since the expansion of any of these groups, as well as that of the larger indigenous population, was sufficient to replace slaves, whose numbers Palmer estimated at 45,000 at their peak, population figures alone will not provide an adequate key to understanding which group or groups actually did the replacing.

[23] See, e.g., Naveda Chávez-Hita, 11Trabajadoes esclavos," 5; Hubert H. S. Aimes, *A History of Slavery in Cuba 1511-1868* (New York and London, 1907), 267; Leslie B. Rout, *The African Experience in Spanish America* (London, New York and Melbourne, 1976); 72, 324, 325; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran, *La poblacion negra de Mexico* (Mexico, 1972), 30; Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman, "The Level and Structure of Prices on Cuban Slave Plantations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: some Comparative Perspectives," *American Historical Review* 88 (Dec. 1983), 1210; William Frederick Sharp, *Slavery on the Spanish Frontier: The Colombian Choco, 1680-1810* (Norman, 1976), 203; Warren Dean, *Rio Claro: A Brazilian Plantation System, 1820-1920* (Stanford, 1976), 58.

[24] For urban cases in Latin America, see Bowser, "The Free Person," 336-337; Moreno Fraginals et. al., "Level and Structure," 1211-12.

[25] For the urban United States, see Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History* (Chicago and London, 1976), 72-73.

[26] Taken from calculations of Aguirre Beltran, *La población negra*, 210 219, 222. (Tables VI, X and XII).

Demographic replacement can be measured more specifically observing the labor participation of the different ethnic groups in those tasks formerly done by slaves. Given the present state of research, it is difficult to achieve mathematical precision, particularly in the scattered and demographically less numerous cases of sugar, mining and the obrajes. Yet data from the eighteenth century, shortly after slavery peaked, can provide some general evidence. For sugar production, Ward Barrett's study of the sugar hacienda of the Marqueses del Valle indicates that black slaves were replaced by mulattos during the mid-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, while Naveda Chávez-Hita's work on Cordoba indicates that mulattos also came to dominate the sugar plantations there by the middle and later-century.[27] In mining, the major silver producing region, Guanajuato, had a labor force more than forty percent mulatto in 1792, representing more than double the proportions for slaves in mining estimated by Palmer and Bakewell for the seventeenth century. Furthermore, over sixty percent of the mulatto population of Guanajuato worked in the mines, a percentage much higher than any other ethnic group.[28] In the case of the obrajes, there are some suggestive indications that mulattos replaced slaves in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[29] Turning to urban household servants, data from the 1753 census in Mexico City, by far the largest single concentration of domestics, indicates that in one major *cuartel* of the city, where more than 10,000 inhabitants resided, fifty-six percent of the domestic servants were mulattos, and eighty-five percent of the economically active mulattos identified in the census were servants. Samples from the extant census for other districts indicate a similar degree of mulatto dominance in domestic service.[30] Thus in all the significant economic activities it was neither Indians nor mestizos who immediately replaced black and mulatto slaves in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was free mulattos.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

In discussing the social consequences of the decline of slavery on the population still enslaved, I will address two topics. The first is concerned with demographic changes in the age of the enslaved population of Central Mexico during the period, the second with slave liberation. A number of

[27] Barrett, *The Sugar Hacienda*, 78-79; Naveda Chávez-Hita, "Trabajadores esclavos," 3.

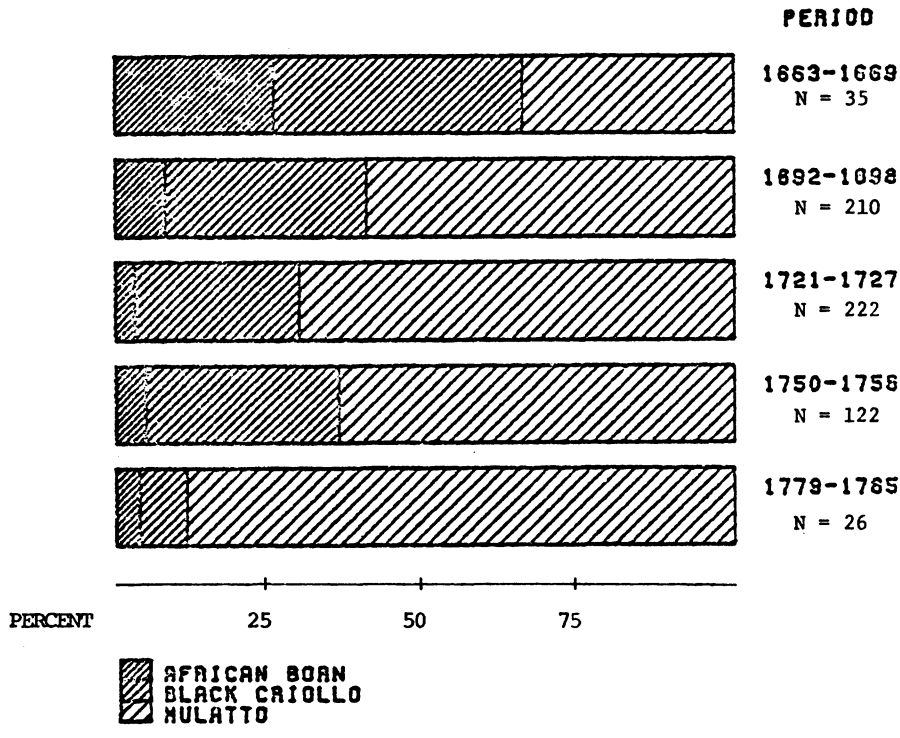
[28] David Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1759-1810* (Cambridge, 1971), 254, 259.

[29] Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Obraje in the Late Mexican Colony," *The Americas*, 23 (Jan. 1967), 227-50, the most recent work on the topic, makes no mention of labor. However, court cases of the Audiencia and Inquisition offer many cases of free mulatto obraje workers.

[30] AGN, Padrones, 52.

FIGURE 2

BACKGROUND OF SLAVES SOLD IN MEXICO CITY



seldom-examined but important questions regarding comparative ethnicity can be addressed by means of the slave sales data from Mexico City, which covers the period from the 1660s to the 1780s, the waning years of slavery in Mexico. The first is, at what rate did the ethnic composition of the slave population change in the Mexican capital during that period? According to Colin McLaughlin and Jaime Rodríguez, most blacks in Mexico were slaves, and most mulattoes were not.[31] Consequently, one might be led to suspect that most slaves in Mexico throughout the colonial period were blacks. Figure 2 displays data on the relative size of the slave population by ethnicity in different periods between 1665 and 1783. It indicates sharp changes in the proportion of the three slave groups, the *bozales* (African-born), *negros criollos* (American-born blacks) and mulattoes sold during

[31] Colin McLaughlin and Jaime Rodriguez O. *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), 222.

each period. *Bozales*, who would have comprised the entire enslaved population of African descent in the early sixteenth century and certainly a vast majority until at least the end of the century, had already declined to only about a quarter of the total by the 1660s, and diminished rapidly afterwards as importation from Africa abated. American-born blacks comprised somewhat more than a third of the total number of slaves between the 1660s and 1750s, but practically disappeared by the 1780s. Mulattoes increased in relative importance continuously, from about one third of the total slaves sold in the 1660s to almost 90 percent by the 1780s. This suggests that in the sixteenth century most slaves in Mexico City were blacks born in Africa, during the seventeenth American-born blacks became the most important group and in the eighteenth mulattoes were the majority. Even if most mulattoes were free persons in colonial Mexico, by the eighteenth century they were also the vast majority of the remaining slaves. Mulatto slaves did not necessarily increase in numbers while the others fell, but rather, they were the last of the African-descent slaves to disappear.

A second important comparative question is whether there were any significant differences between the prices of blacks and mulattoes. There are two types of evidence available, descriptive statements in which slave owners and government offficials expressed their opinions and attitudes, and data on prices, or material indicators of their personal preferences. The first type, while impressionistic, might provide useful clues to understanding the second. The white elite in colonial Mexico portrayed both blacks and mulattoes with great disdain, but was much harsher toward the latter. Mulattoes were described consistently as unruly, contentious, sneaky, disrespectful and occasionally intelligent, traits considered unbecoming of proper slaves. Furthermore, mulattoes frequently were blamed as instigators of trouble, conspiracies and riots, and were much more feared than blacks, who were sometimes considered docile.[32] On the other hand, their knowledge of local conditions, their ability to adapt, and even their intelligence indicate that despite their negative qualities, they might make better workers.

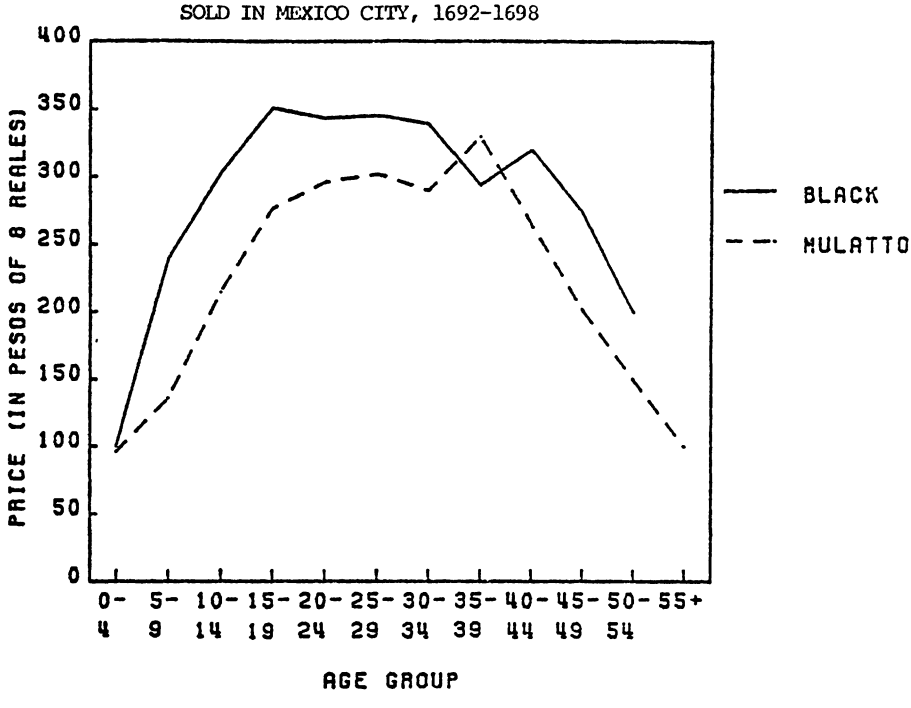
While the impressionistic evidence is not convincing, the slave prices are. The data indicate that African and American-born blacks were fairly close in price (the former sold for ninety to ninety-nine percent of the latter), so the two have been clustered for purposes of comparison with

[32] *Instrucciónes que los virreyes de Nueva Espana dejaron a sus sucesores* (Mexico, 1873), I, 72, 106, 259; John Francis Gemelli Careri, *A Voyage Round the Word*, in Vol 4 of Awsham Churchill, ed., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1704), IV, 520; Gage, *The English-American*, 85-87.

FIGURE 3

PRICES OF BLACK AND MULATTO SLAVES

SOLD IN MEXICO CITY, 1692-1698



mulattoes.[33] Prices for mulattoes and blacks are displayed in Figure 3 by age groups using a subset of data for the 1690s, when the two groups were most nearly equal in numbers. The evidence reveals that there were important differences, and that blacks were worth about twenty to twenty-five percent more than mulattos throughout the life cycle. Similar differences were evident for other periods in time, with black slaves consistently higher in price than mulattoes.

One can only speculate on why the two groups varied in price so markedly. While attitudes were not consistent, there are material reasons why mulattoes might be less attractive in Mexico City than blacks. While they would be likely to survive longer than bozales, in the urban location they would also be more likely to cause problems to masters. Mexico City, unlike plantation and mine settings, housed thousands of people of a wide

[33] Discussion of the price differences between bozales and American-born blacks appears in Moreno Fraginals et. al., "Level and structure," 1213 and n.

range of backgrounds, and most of its slaves were domestic servants, people very acculturated and understanding of the relative freedom offered by urban life. Particularly in the eighteenth century, when slave prices were declining rapidly and other types of servants were available, an owner might view a relatively free mulatto slave as more of a nuisance than a symbol of status or a useful domestic worker. Eighteenth-century Mexico City offers much evidence of mulatto slave resistance, demonstrated by contentiousness with masters, poor performance and flight, topics which will be discussed in greater detail in the final section of this essay.

Turning to the topic of age of sales in Mexico City, one can focus on owner motivation and on the implications for the social organization of slave families. Conditions in Mexico, where slaves were losing their value as investments, might have induced slave owners to adopt distinct strategies in selling slaves. On the one hand, if slaves were not considered particularly valuable, it is possible that owners would pay little attention to age, but sell slaves more or less randomly, so the pattern of sales would reflect the normal distribution by age and gender. On the other, one might suspect that owners still might adopt a strategy of breeding, or at least encourage their reproduction in order to sell them when they reached the age of tehir greatest sale value in early adulthood, the former pattern documented in the case of the United States and the latter discussed in many other locations.[34] If so, owners would maintain the children born to their female slaves, then sell them as they approached their peak value, which in Mexico City generally was attained by age twenty.

These hypotheses can be tested by examining the pattern of slave sales by age and gender as illustrated in Figure 4, which does not indicate a normal population distribution. There is a low frequency of sales of children, a gradual increase during adolescence, a peak during early adulthood and gradual decline afterwards. The pattern of sales adheres more closely to the second interpretation, that masters were holding on to their slaves as children in order to sell them for profit when their prices peaked.

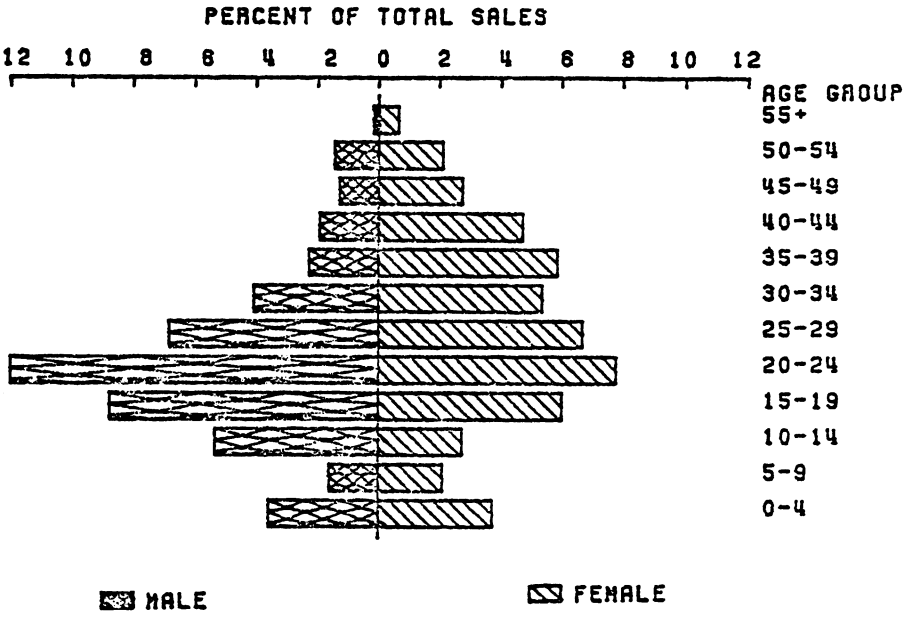
There is a curious exception to this trend, namely the higher number of infant sales than of youths and adolescents. On the surface it might appear to challenge the concern masters would have had for the survival and well-

[34] Richard Sutch, " The Breeding of Slaves for Sale and the Westward Expansion of Slavery, 1850-1860," in *Race and Slavery*, 178 ff.; Michael Craton, "Jamaican Slavery," in *Race and Slavery*, 269; Stanley L. Engerman, "Comments on the Study of Race and Slavery," in *Race and Slavery*, 503; Arthur Corwin, *Spain and the Abolition of Slavery in Cuba 1817-1886* (Austin, 1967); 33, 133, 136; James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru* (Madison, 1968), 178-79; Frederick L. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Stanford, 1974), 255, 257-258.

FIGURE 4

FREQUENCY OF SLAVE SALES BY AGE AND GENDER

IN MEXICO CITY



N=615

being of infants. It is more understandable in light of owners' strategies in maintaining the mother and infant together, as Table 1 shows that almost all children aged five years or less were sold with their mothers and practically all the older children were sold alone. This pattern does not conform with Frederick Bowser's interpretation that infants were purchased by guilty fathers who had engaged in amorous escapades with their female slaves and that those fathers intended to free the children at a later date.[35] In fact, it points to a different one, namely that if the sellers were in fact the fathers, they commonly unloaded themselves of a potentially embarrassing problem by ridding themselves of both mother and child. Furthermore, it would lead one to suspect that owners were selling mothers and children because the mother was of interest as a wet nurse for the families of the rich in the capital. The sale of a mother with her infant essentially would confirm that

[35] Bowser, "The Free Person," 348.

TABLE I: SLAVES SOLD WITH MOTHER, BY AGE GROUP IN MEXICO CITY

Age Group	*Number*	*% Sold with Mother*
0–1	18	94.4
2–3	15	73.3
4–6	14	57.1
7+	347	1.1
	394	10.2

she was lactating and would be able to take care of her own child as well as those of the household into which she entered until they were weaned. Such behavior would not conflict with humanitarian concerns masters might have to keep mother and infant child together. It helps also to explain why urban slave households were smaller than those of other ethnic groups. Mother and child frequently were separated once the latter reached the age of six or seven, the mother to be sold again while the child, whose sustenance no longer depended on the mother's milk or her constant care, could be kept until obtaining a higher price.

SLAVE LIBERATION—MANUMISSION AND FLIGHT

In an era of declining slavery, one might assume that manumission would take on a different character than in locations where slavery was thriving. Extant studies of manumissions in Latin American slave societies have tended to focus on locations of the latter type.[36] The comparisons in these studies do not address factors that might have affected manumission other than location, such as the tasks the slaves performed, the economy in which they worked, the availability of alternative sources of labor and the comparative demand for slaves, all of which would seem to affect manumission more than location alone. The principal concern in the present discussion is how manumission changed in one location when the conditions of slavery changed, to examine the comparative context of manumission in Mexico City between its earlier, vital phase and its decline. It seems appropriate first to ask the question, other things being equal, what influence would the decline of slave prices have on the master's willingness to free a slave?

[36] See, for example, Lyman L. Johnson, "Manumission in Colonial Buenos Aires, 1776-1810," HAHR 59 (May 1979), 258-279; Bowser, "The Free Person", 339-351; Stuart B. Schwartz, "The Manumission of Slaves in Colonial Brazil: Bahia, 1684-1745," HAHR 54 (Nov. 1974), 603-635; Katia M. de Queiros Mattoso, "A proposito de Cartas de Alforria, Bahia, 1779-1850," *Anais de Historia* 4 (1972), 23-45.

One way to measure motivation is to examine the effect of the declining slave prices on the profitability of raising slaves from infancy to young adulthood. In a case of high, stable prices the gross profits for owners would be much greater than in periods of decline. For example, gross profit for rearing an infant mulatto slave in the 1660s, if prices were steady, would be based on the length of time kept. The infant born in the household would already be worth about 70-80 pesos by age two or three, and increase steadily to about 350 pesos by the age of twenty. But the collapse of slave prices during this period of relatively steady wages made this a much less attractive option, as demonstrated in Figure 5, which describes predicted values of mulatto slaves between birth and age twenty at different points in time between the 1690s and the 1780s. The values have been obtained by performing separate regressions of price on age at each of the four periods.[37] The figure a represents the hypothetical value of a slave at birth at each historical moment, while the figure b_1 represents the predicted price increase of a slave (measured in pesos) for each unit increase in age (measured in years). Both the predicted values of mulatto slaves at birth and the incremental values (the slope of the lines in Figure 5) decrease for each successive historical point in time. The data show that young mulatto slaves increased in value by almost 12 pesos for each additional year of age in the 1690s, about 9 pesos in the 1720s, but only slightly more than 5 pesos in the 1750s. During the comparatively brief period between the 1690s and the 1750s, the predicted gross profit for investment in young mulatto slaves declined by more than fifty percent.

The effect of the declining value of slaves as a form of investment must be considered in the attitudes and behavior of both masters and servants as they considered how to deal with the quickest forms of ending bondage—manumission and flight. As prices plummeted, it would be much easier for masters to consider releasing their slaves. Furthermore, the environment would have an effect on the slaves' own attempts to escape slavery, both because purchasing freedom would be easier, and flight logically would offer greater opportunities for success if masters stood to lose less. For the latter to maintain slaves or to spend great sums of time and energy tracking them down would be increasingly unprofitable.

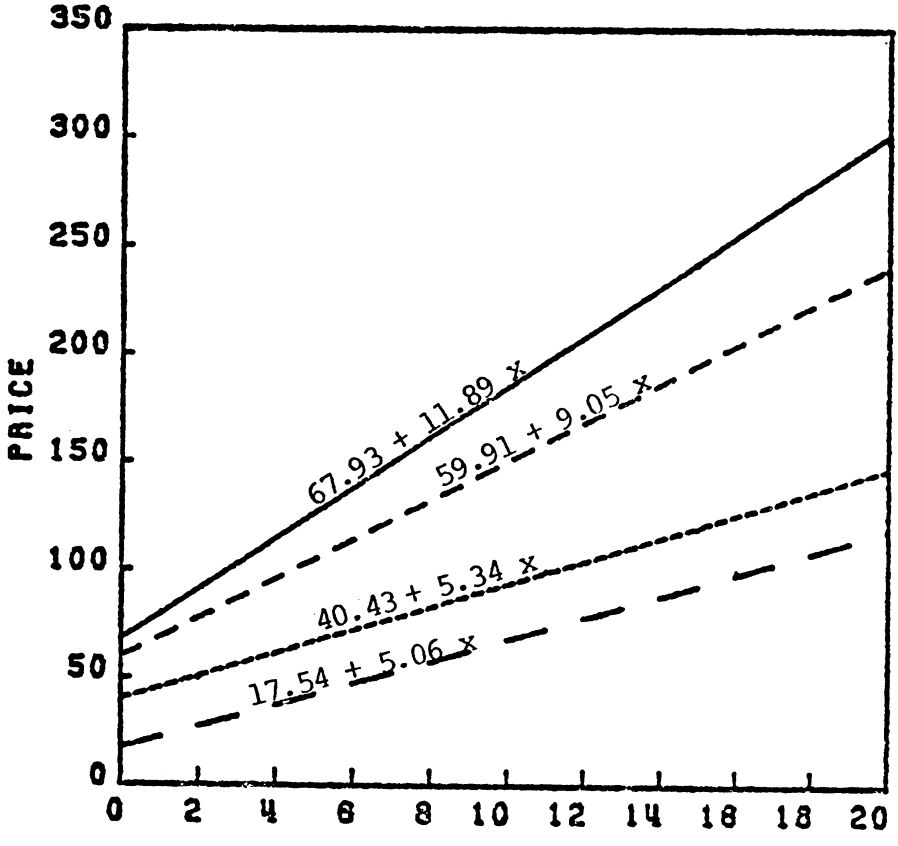
On the topic of how conditions of manumission would change in this era of declining slavery, comparison with the earlier period of slavery in Mexico City is possible, using Bowser's data. The material for the years

[37] In regression, the question being asked is how well the variable x (age) accounts for y (price), assuming a linear relationship.

FIGURE 5

PREDICTED VALUES OF MULATTO SLAVES, AGES 1-25

SOLD IN MEXICO CITY, 1692-1785



1690s ————	1750s - - - - - -
N = 57 RSQ = .57 α = 67.93 b_1 = 11.89	N = 35 RSQ = .57 α = 40.43 b_1 = 5.34
1720s – – – – – –	1780s — —
N = 66 RSQ = .71 α = 59.91 b_1 = 9.05	N = 14 RSQ = .69 α = 17.54 b_1 = 5.06

TABLE II: TERMS OF MANUMISSION BY GENDER AND AGE IN MEXICO CITY

		Gender		*Type of Manumission*	
Period	*Age Group*	*Male*	*Female*	*Unconditional*	*Conditional*
1580–1650	Child (0–15)	13	22	15	22
(N = 107)	Adult (16–45)	12	10	8	15
	Elderly (46+)	3	5	6	2
	Unknown	12	27	13	26
	Total	40	64	42	65
1660–1785	Child (0–15)	10	15	9	16
(N = 83)	Adult (16–45)	13	27	17	23
	Elderly (46+)	0	8	6	2
	Unknown	2	8	7	3
	Total	25	58	39	44

Source: See footnote 19.

1580-1650 indicates that most of those liberated were children or adult females, suggesting that in a setting in which domestic service predominated, females would be most able to garner the good will of masters and be manumitted, along with their children. In the later period, when slaves had a relatively greater voice, given the less stringent conditions of achieving freedom, one could predict that a greater proportion of adults and males might be manumitted. The comparative terms of manumission in the two periods, 1580-1650 and 1663-1785, is presented in Table 2. In order to ensure comparability, I have used Bowser's categories for age and terms of manumission, gratis versus conditional, and by gender. As expected, an increasing proportion of adults in their most productive years, ages 16-45, were liberated in the second period (fifty-five per cent of those identified by age) compared to the earlier period (thirty-four per cent). However, gender differences during the two periods in time were fairly close, as most of those freed were females at both times, sixty-two per cent in the first period and seventy per cent in the second, percentages consistent with those of manumission generally throughout the Americas in thriving slave societies.[38] The argument that females had greater intimacy as servants and mistresses and as a result were more likely to receive freedom holds up even in late-colonial Mexico City, where the general conditions for achieving

[38] Schwartz, "The Manumission," 611; Mattoso, "A proposito," 41; Bowser, "The Free Person," 350; Johnson, "Manumission," 262-263; A.J.R. Russell-Wood, *The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil* (New York, 1982), 48; B.W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica 1807-1834* (London, New York and Melbourne, 1976), 176.

freedom for all slaves were becoming more relaxed. In examining the terms of manumission, there was a moderate percentage increase of those slaves being freed without conditions, rising from thirty-nine per cent in the first period to forty-seven per cent in the second, suggesting that masters who permitted their slaves freedom were increasingly inclined to do so without conditions. Yet in both periods most masters did expect some additional form of compensation at the time of liberation.

The *cartas de libertad* (liberation deeds) enable a closer examination of the altruism of individual masters toward their slaves. The appropriate question is, what types of conditions did masters place on their slaves and to what degree did master suffer losses by liberating slaves? This is particularly important in understanding the context of slavery in an urban setting like Mexico City during a period when slavery was losing its vitality. The capital offered an environment in which slaves had more freedom than on the plantations, in the obrajes or in the mines. They could exert more influence over owners, for the contacts were more intimate, and the opportunities to leave were more readily available. The cartas de libertad indicated, as one would expect, that most masters liberated slaves gratis because of good service, love and affection. The meaning of these terms often was very clearly understood. For people like thirty-three year old mulatto Gertrudis de Contreras and sixty year old mulatto Josepha de al Encarnación, "love and affection" meant serving a single master for an entire lifetime.[39] Yet there were also instances in which masters granted unconditional manumission to children, such as the case of owner Doña Gertrudis Veedor y Paloma, who stated that because of her regard for a former slave named Rosa María, she was liberating two of her mulatto children, ten year old Juan Faustos and twenty-one year old María de los Dolores.[40] Mother and children clearly had served the owner for many years suggesting on the one hand that Doña Gertrudis was already compensated, but on the other that it is likely that she could have gotten more. In the case of late colonial Mexico, when the price of slaves was declining, the promise of freedom often represented a reasonable agreement between masters and slaves. Such tactical devices as the promise of eventual freedom were frequent in other locations, as indicated by Rebecca Scott in her study of slavery in Cuba during the waning of the peculiar institution.[41]

Conditional manumission, or freedom granted on the condition that

[39] AN, 391 (1721); AN, 196 (1722).

[40] AN, 391 (1722).

[41] Rebecca J. Scott, "Gradual Abolition and the Dynamics of Slave Emancipation in Cuba, 1868-1886," HAHR 63 (Aug. 1983), 449 ff.

owners receive additional compensation, was a more complicated phenomenon than unconditional freedom. For purposes of comparison, Bowser divides it into three distinct categories, freedom contingent on future payment or services, outright purchase by the slave and purchase by third parties. Freedom contingent on future services or deferred payment meant that masters still could recover the money they might have received from a direct sale but that slaves would be given freedom. Sometimes it took the form of selling the personal services of a slave at the assessed value, as in the case of Doña María de Ochoa, who sold the services of her forty-two year old black slave, Theresa de la Encarnación, in 1692, to Pablo Suárez for 12 reales per month, with the money counted toward her assessed value of 160 pesos.[42] Barring other future setbacks, Theresa would have completed her obligations at the age of fifty-one and finally be free while Doña María could receive a fixed income for nine years. On other occasions manumission was conditional on the death of a master, as in the case of Luisa de Coca. She was a thirteen year old *morisco* who was freed in the will of her master, Pedro de la Puente, with the stipulation that she serve his daughter, Doña Juana de Arze, for the remainder of her life. Doña Juana died some twenty years later and Luisa, by then an adult in her thirties, was granted formal freedom, after she petitioned for it.[43] Conditional manumission could serve as a form of inducement or as a threat by the owner to extract the most of slaves. The latter understood that unusually good service for most of a lifetime was essential if they expected to be liberated, and so would not be inclined to be hostile, recalcitrant or unwilling to abide by the owner's wishes.

A second type of arrangement was outright purchase of freedom by the slaves themselves or by third parties. This would require many years of perseverance by slaves, such as the case of a forty year old mulatto named Isabel who, after twenty-five years serving Doña Josefa Torres, was able to save her assessed value of 150 pesos and purchase freedom in 1727.[44] Many deeds recognized the efforts made by slaves, such as that of María Theresa, a thirty-three year old mulatto in 1723 and Joseph Patricio, a twenty-seven year old mulatto in 1721, who through "personal work and industriousness," saved the necessary 150 and 170 pesos, respectively, to purchase their own freedom.[45] As both slaves had been born in the owners' household, the payments actually represented direct profit to the owners, who also received many years' worth of service as well.

[42] AN, 392 (1692).
[43] AN, 325 (1666)
[44] AN, 257 (1727).
[45] AN, 391 (1723); AN, 391 (1721).

There were variations of the theme of purchasing freedom, as in cases in which it was granted although only part of the money had been saved, or when special services were rendered. Demonstrating the first instance, African-born Joseph, aged thirty in 1752, was assessed at 270 pesos and freed by the master after a payment of 140 pesos, the remainder to be paid in future installments.[46] Special services varied, and included the notions of "good service, love and affection" which justified unconditional freedom as well, as in the case of Don Gregorio Carillo, who granted freedom to his twenty-five year old mulatto, Balthasar de los Reyes in 1725, who was assessed at 150 pesos, "for 100 pesos lawfully, the other 50 pesos freely pardoned."[47] In a similar vein, Dona Margarita Martínez liberated Theresa, a mulatto who had spent twenty-three years in her service, along with Theresa's two daughters, named María Antonia and María Ana (ages not specified) for 150 pesos in 1725, considerably less than their theoretical market value.[48] The material payment for special services rendered was evident in the 1725 deed in which Don Nicolás de Sinagua, who discounted 100 pesos from the 210 pesos assessed value of his slave, forty-two year old light mulatto Juana Josepha Burgero, because she took special care of him during an illness, apparently saving his life.[49] In all these instances, masters had a clear understanding regarding the monetary value of special services rendered but not normally expected of slaves, and for which they received specific compensation.

Purchase of freedom by third parties, as one might expect, usually meant purchase by parents or spouses of the individuals affected. Because of the changing prices over time and the small number of cases encountered at any moment, it is not possible at present to determine the relationships between the average price paid for manumission and market price. Frequently, it was close to the assessed value, as in the 1751 case in which Antonio Martínez, a free black, paid Don Juan de los Rios 200 pesos to grant liberty to his future wife, African-born María Antonia.[50] On other occasions, masters seem to have taken the long personal relationship into account, as in 1723 when María de la Encarnación paid only 50 pesos to her former owner, Doña Rita de los Dolores, for the freedom of her eight year old daughter, Bernarda Antonia.[51] On a few other occasions, owners clearly were not sympathetic with their slaves, and made conditions difficult for them to

[46] AN, 589 (1752).
[47] AN, 700 (1725).
[48] AN, 454 (1725).
[49] AN, 454 (1725).
[50] AN, 350 (1751).
[51] AN, 196 (1723).

purchase freedom. This is evident in the case of Andrés Joseph, a mulatto who borrowed the sum of 400 pesos from Don Marcelo Muñoz Therán to pay the owner Don Diego Manuel Carrocellido for the freedom of his twenty year old fiancee, María Josepha Blancarte, who was also a mulatto.[52] The average market value for female slaves of her background and age at the time (1722), was about 225 pesos. In this instance deferred payment by the third party did not represent any financial sacrifice by the owner, but rather a willingness to exploit the romantic impulses of the couple, to profit far beyond what might normally have been expected on the open market, and to burden them with a very heavy debt. The impression that masters more often liberated slaves for amounts below than above the assessed value indicates that those masters who expected a payment when they freed slaves often took into account previous good service, love and affection.

The rarity of masters who were willing to offer unconditional manumission and the heavy burden imposed on those seeking to purchase their own freedom, particularly since it was so difficult without the compliance of the master, convinced many slaves to resort to the other alternative to obtain freedom: the instantly gratifying but more dangerous method of flight. The records on escapes of slaves are necessarily fragmentary, for they deal with a few who were caught for another crime, not with running away itself. While a greater abundance of information could reveal additional features of runaway slaves and their patterns of behavior, such records may never be available, so one must turn to those stories of individual runaway slaves which have, almost by chance, survived.

There were two general directions in which runaway slaves in Mexico fled, first to the remote areas of the colony beyond the pale of Indian and Hispanic settlements, and second to the cities themselves. In the first instance, slaves often established their own communities, called *palenques* in Mexico, located in mountainous regions in the hot climates of the Gulf and Pacific coasts, especially in the present-day states of Veracruz and Guerrero. although many of these villages were destroyed shortly after they were formed, others actually survived and in rare instances were recognized as independent communities by the Spanish Crown, and their inhabitants were granted citizenship and free status with the provision that they accept and abide by the laws of the land.[53]

[52] AN, 569 (1723).

[53] The most recent literature on runaway slaves in Mexico can be found in Palmer, *Slaves*, 52 ff.; William B. Taylor, "The Foundation of Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe de los Morenos de Amapa," *The Americas* 26 (Apr. 1970), 439-46; Patrick J. Carroll, "Mandiga: The Evolution of a Mexican Runaway

A second and more frequent route of escape was to a city, particularly to the largest cities, where runaway slaves would attempt to adopt a different identity and start a new life as free individuals. The records are too sketchy to permit any serious quantitative examination of the behavior of escaped slaves in the city. While such cases focus on those who were caught, they represent only a fraction of the thousands of slaves who escaped in colonial Mexico, some for short periods of time, others for many years, and still others for the remainder of their lifetimes. I will discuss five particularly detailed cases taken from Audiencia and Inquisition records in order to elucidate some common patterns of behavior and social implications of escaped slaves on the waning of slavery in Mexico, paying particular attention to location, ethnicity and the work in which the escapees engaged.

The first case is that of Juan Pasqual, who was born around the year 1700 in San Cristóbal de Jutiapa, Guatemala, the son of two unmarried black slaves, Manuel Calderón and María de la Rosa. In 1722, while he was residing in the house of his Guatemalan owner, Don José de Alvarado, he married María Pasquala, a free domestic servant also employed there. She claimed to be an Indian, while others described her as either a mulatto or a morisco. The two were married at Alvarado's insistence and against Juan Pasqual's will, almost certainly because she was pregnant, for she bore an infant son who died only a few months after the wedding.

Around 1727 Juan Pasqual fled his residence in Guatemala and quickly went to Mexico City, where he changed his name to Juan Antonio Alvarez de Escobar and claimed to be a free mulatto. In 1728 he married Gertrudis Micaela de Aristigueta, an eighteen year old free mulatto. While he changed associates and wives in Mexico City, he retained the same job status, employed first as a domestic servant in a private residence and later as a servant in an ecclesiastical office. For a few years he managed to conceal his former life, even though a number of other acquaintances of his in Guatemala had also migrated to Mexico City and knew of but did not betray his past. For reasons undetermined, one of them returned to Guatemala and informed his first wife of his whereabouts, but not of his new spouse. In 1731 María Pasquala decided to journey to Mexico City to join her husband, and apparently she remained ignorant of his recent past while they spent some time together, including at least part of one blissful afternoon. But they were discovered by Gertrudis Micaela, the second wife, who interrupted them *en flagrante*. Juan Pasqual had been able to create a

Slave Community, 1737-1827," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 19 (Oct. 1977), 488-505; David M. Davidson, "Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519-1650," HAHR 46 (Aug. 1966), 243 ff.

new identity and to find a new home in Mexico City for about five years, four with a new, young wife, but after this episode he was charged with and found guilty of bigamy by the Inquisition and put in prison, where he died a few months later.[54] The court appeared to be more interested in punishing him for his sins than returning him to his owner.

The second case involves Francisco de Zarate, born about 1710 in a Queretaro obraje owned by Manuel de Pasas. He was the son of Isabel Zarate, a mulatto slave in the same obraje and an unknown father. In 1731, identified as a mulatto slave, he married Paula de la Rosa, a free mulatto who worked in the same obraje, and they soon had a daughter, Antonia de la Cruz. In 1737 Zarate fled to Mexico City without his wife or child, where he changed his name to Juan de Dios Ramírez and claimed to be free. In Mexico City he remained in the same occupation, an obraje worker. In fact, he entered and left a number of obrajes in the capital, including one owned by Don Diego Troncoso, where he met Barbara Xaviera Borques, a widow who identified herself as a mestizo although others testified that she was an Indian, and they married in 1743. He was identified as a mulatto slave in his first marriage document, but a mestizo the second time around. In other instances he called himself a morisco and even a Spaniard, and people who knew him in Mexico city identified him variously as a mulatto, mestizo or morisco.

A few years later Zarate learned that his former master knew of his whereabouts and was trying to catch him. He informed his wife Barbara Borques that he was a runaway slave and was being pursued, so together they fled to Puebla. There they obtained employment again in an obraje. He was finally caught in 1763, when an overseer from the Queretaro obraje from which he had escaped twenty-six years earlier recognized him in Puebla and promptly informed the Inquisition that he was a bigamist. Although Zarate's first wife actually died in 1759, the ecclesiastical court did not forgive him. He was tried and convicted of polygamy, but rather than being imprisoned, was returned to his Queretaro owner and put to work. The fate of his second wife is not mentioned in the records.[55]

A third case involves two brothers, Pedro Pablo and Dionisio, born in the mid-1710s. They were the property of Don Juan Carlos and Doña Francisca Chavarría, who lived in Mexico City. In 1716 Don Juan Carlos purchased their mother, an unmarried mulatto named Gertrudis, aged twenty-two,

[54] AGN, Inquisicion, 832.52 (1731); AGN, Inquisicion, 832.53 (1731); AGN, Inquisicion, 832.54 (1731).

[55] AGN, Inquisicion, 1035.35 (1763); AGN, Inquisicion, 1035.4.

along with Pedro Pablo, one and one-half years old. Only a few days after she was purchased by the couple she fled, leaving Pedro Pablo behind. She remained free for seven years until she and her son Dionisio, who was born during the period of freedom, were caught in San Juan de los Llanos, Tlaxcala, where her mother lived. Mother and son were returned to their owners and rejoined with Pedro Pablo in the capital. Shortly after Don Juan Carlos died in the early 1730s the brothers escaped, but remained in Mexico City. They changed their names to Pedro and Dionisio Jimenez, claimed that they were Indian caciques born in Tlaxcala, the sons of two deceased Indian caciques named Don Miguel Vásquez and Doña María Jiménez, and they found employment as laborers in the Royal Mint. They were soon located and Doña Francisca had them imprisoned.

They filed a suit against her promptly, claiming that they were not her slaves and that they were being imprisoned illegally. During the court proceedings she presented a very strong case and compelling evidence to support her contention, including the sale deed in which she purchased their mother and Pedro Pablo. She then argued that the two simply attached the surname Jiménez to conceal their real identities, and she produced numerous witnesses from both Mexico City and San Juan de los Llanos who corroborated her claims and who testified that they were personal acquaintances of Pedro Pablo, Dionisio, their mother Gertrudis and even their maternal grandmother. The two brothers, on the other hand, could not offer a single witness to testify on their behalf, and eventually they did admit that they were her slaves, meaning they would return to her control.[56]

The fourth case involves Manuel Francisco de Villanueva, born in the mid-1690s, the son of two married slaves named Diego de Aranza and Agnes, all of whom were the property of a Queretaro obraje owner, Don Bernardo de Zuanabar. In 1716 de Villanueva married Micaela Gerónima, a mulatto slave in the obraje. Around 1720 he escaped from the obraje without his wife and fled to Puebla, where he began to associate with members of the religious order of San Agustín, and he claimed to be a Spaniard. Yet he feared detection in Puebla and moved to Mexico City some years later, but continued to affiliate with the order there and to reside in its monastery, and he told many of the friars that he had in fact been ordained in 1724. In 1735 he was recognized in the capital by a friend of Zuanabar, who quickly brought the matter before the Inquisition, the charge being that he could not be a cleric since he had broken the vow of chastity by marrying. During the trial the court appears to have attempted to dis-

[56] Archivo Judicial del Tribunal Superior del Distrito Federal, Mexico City, 92.18 (1738).

cover whether Villanueva actually had been ordained, but was unsuccessful, perhaps not pushing the search too energetically out of fear of embarrassment that a runaway mulatto slave could in fact have been ordained and passed as a Spanish cleric for more than a decade. The fate of Manuel Francisco de Villanueva does not appear in the Inquisition records.[57]

The final case of flight involves a domestic servant named Antonio Fernandez, apparently born in the 1690s, who married an Indian, Juana, in Sagrario parish of Mexico City in 1716. On the petition of Don Angel Tagle, a plantation owner, he was brought to trial before the Inquisition in 1734 on the charge of bigamy. Tagle claimed that Fernandez actually was his black slave, Francisco Joseph, and previously had been married to his African-born slave, Ana María, that he had fled in 1729 and had subsequently remarried. In the trial Fernandez was able to produce documentary evidence and personal witnesses to refute Tagle's charges. They included Don Carlos de Tenepantla, an overseer in the convent of San Lorenzo in Mexico City, who testified that Fernandez was a free man and that his father, a mulatto also named Antonio Fernandez, had been liberated in his master's will while his mother, Antonia, was not a slave and "was not a black, mulatto or a Spaniard, but between a mestizo and a coyote." Other testimony in the trial identified the immediate members of the Fernandez family, including the defendant's widowed sister Teresa and his unmarried sister Gregoria, who were domestic servants, another sister named María, who was married to a coachman, and a brother named Miguel, apparently unmarried, who was a lackey. The evidence was sufficient to convince the court that Fernandez was not a runaway slave, and he won the trial.[58]

Certain common threads appear in these cases which can help to elucidate the relationship between slave liberation and the decline of slavery in late-colonial Mexico. First, the city was a place where many escaped slaves headed, for it allowed them better opportunities to escape detection, retain anonymity and find employment. In particular in a setting like Mexico City during the eighteenth century, slaves had opportunities since locational mobility was frequent, people generally did not know many of their neighbors, workers changed jobs frequently, and thousands of free blacks and mulattoes already resided there, offering opportunities for friendship, association and protection. In all the cases examined the escaped slaves spent time residing and working in Mexico City and were not immediately betrayed by others who knew them and in many instances knew that they were escaped slaves.

[57] AGN, Inquisicion, 856.5 (1735).
[58] AGN, Inquisicion, 849 ff. 504 a 545 (1734).

A second common thread is that the presence of runaway slaves in the city, while it represented the erosion of slavery, was not a challenge to hierarchy *per se*. Their freedom was contingent on remaining as inconspicuous as possible, even if it meant frequent flight. The least successful, Pedro Pablo and Dionisio, by remaining in Mexico City and failing to shed their former identities sufficiently, were the most easily caught.

A third point is that escaped former slaves seldom achieved significant upward mobility and almost invariably assumed the same jobs that they had performed as slaves. The sole exception, Manuel de Villanueva, does offer proof that there was at least a rare opportunity for some very fortunate individuals to improve social position, although such success was indeed precarious. It made little practical difference if they identified as blacks, mulattoes, mestizos or Indians, for these former slaves worked as laborers and domestics, part of a wage-earning urban proletariat.

CONCLUSION

The interpretation that slavery in Mexico basically ended with a whimper during the course of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is more compelling than those that focus on the bang of abolition in the 1820s. While abolition might have been a progressive consequence of the independence movement, it was not particularly significant socially or demographically, for there were very few slaves remaining in the country to be freed. The view that abolition was a conspiracy against Anglos in Texas is clearly wrong; not only does it interpret the social history of slavery in Mexico, it consciously overlooks the details of abolition in 1829, for Mexico was excluded from its provisions.[59]

By the 1820s slavery in Mexico had long been moribund. Its decline can be traced to the appearance of alternative sources of laborers, the increasing difficulty of obtaining slaves from Africa and the introduction of wage labor, which made the supply of workers more elastic. It was also due to the actions of slaves themselves, who in the urban settings where most resided, were able to exert influence over masters and mistresses, sometimes by convincing them that liberation was a reasonable exchange for many years of faithful and loyal service. Slaves also resisted their condition by escaping, an option increasingly feasible in the ethnically diverse cities of Mexico, where there were thousands of free blacks and mulattoes among whom they could live, work and shed their identities as slaves. It was these

[59] Luis G. Zorrilla, *Historia de las relaciones entre Mexico y los Estados Unidos de America 1800-1958* (2 vols.; Mexico, 1977), I, 87.

free mulattoes, not Indians or mestizos, who initially replaced black and mulatto slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The eighteenth century was the era of the mulatto slave in Mexico and the final period of the decline of slavery in the colony. The fact that most slaves of the era were mulattos itself hastened the decline of the institution. Mulattos in urban Mexico were worth less as investments and lacked the distinct cultural and physical characteristics that readily separated African-born and African-descent slaves from the others. They worked in places where they could learn the Spanish language, the local terrain and the customs of the people with whom they associated at work, in public and in their homes. Their cultural cohesiveness was further weakened by decisions of the Spanish Crown to destroy their distinct institutions, including the cofradias that were created specifically for people of African descent,[60] and by the practical cessation of the slave trade, which no longer offered them constant cultural renewal. Since the overwhelming majority of mulattos in colonial Mexico were free, unlike blacks, those mulattos who escaped frequently could pass as free individuals without suspicion. Furthermore, when they did escape, their masters had fewer incentives and less interest in pursuing them.[61] While they tended to lose their distinct physical and cultural characteristics, the free mulattos of colonial Mexico would not achieve significant upward social mobility, but would continue to perform the same occupational tasks as their enslaved ancestors.

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[60] Palmer, *Slaves*, 140.

[61] Barrett, *The Sugar Hacienda*, 85, suggests that there were more runaways in the Morelos region in the mid-eighteenth century than at any other time, and that masters exerted, "less trouble to capture them than formerly."