

## Introduction

December 8, 2015, inaugurated a new period in Afro-Mexican history. For the first time since September 16, 1810, when Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla declared Mexican independence from Spain, the federal government counted its African-descended population as such. According to the intercensal survey completed by the INEGI in March of that year, 1.4 million citizens identified themselves “in accordance with their culture, history, and traditions” as “Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant.” As 1.2 percent of the national populace, these numbers appear small, particularly in comparison to the 25.7 million people who self-reported as indigenous, the only other ethnic group that the government chose to include.<sup>1</sup> In a few coastal areas typically thought to have historical ties to

<sup>1</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, “Resultados definitivos de la encuesta intercensal 2015,” 8 de diciembre de 2015, [www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/intercensal/2015/doc/especiales2015\\_12\\_3.pdf](http://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/intercensal/2015/doc/especiales2015_12_3.pdf). The 25.7 million people who claimed to be indigenous possibly overstates Mexico’s indigenous population. This number is substantially larger than what is found in previous censuses. For example, using data from the 2010 census, the Consejo Nacional de Población concluded in 2013 that there were only 11.7 million people with at least moderately indigenous cultural or linguistic traits; see *La situación demográfica de México, 2013* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional de Población, 2013), 127, [www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/112476/La\\_Situacion\\_Demografica\\_de\\_Mexico\\_2013.pdf](http://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/112476/La_Situacion_Demografica_de_Mexico_2013.pdf). Although the counting of indigenous peoples has been a constant feature of the modern Mexican state, popular and official definitions of indigeneity have changed, thereby leaving the possibility for the number of citizens classified as indigenous to vary substantially; see Mara Loveman, *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo, eds., *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018). All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

African slavery, this demographic visibility was more pronounced. On March 28, 2017, *Excélsior* explained that least 10 percent of the residents in 100 communities – including 69 in Oaxaca, 16 in Guerrero, and 12 in Veracruz – claimed an African heritage (See Map 0.1).<sup>2</sup>

Activists saw the INEGI's data as a necessary step to rectify the structural inequalities that the descendants of enslaved Africans encountered daily. Not looking for an enumeration of historical offenses, national newspapers described the findings with a vision toward future social justice initiatives, such as better public education, and the possibility of amending the Constitution of 1917 to give African-descended Mexicans the same institutional protections as the indigenous communities whose cultural presence the state had always counted. Scholars, artists, and public intellectuals believed that social recognition validated the humanity of African-descended Mexicans.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, in an interview for *La Jornada*, Sergio Peñaloza Pérez, President and founder of the grassroots organization Black Mexico, *México Negro*, somberly noted that this new-found visibility was merely a step in the right direction: the INEGI's statistics, he clarified, “do not truly reflect how many we are, because many preferred not to assume this identity thanks to the historical discrimination that we have endured.”<sup>4</sup>

In the United States, remarks were equally positive but often tinged with exasperation. On January 27, 2016, in the *Huffington Post*, Krithika Varagur published “Mexico Finally Recognized Its Black Citizens, But That’s Just The Beginning.” In response to what many academics and activists perceived as the state’s erasure of African-descended identities, she wistfully asked “Why has it taken so long?” before continuing with the more hopeful query, “What’s next for Afro-Mexicans?” her article

<sup>2</sup> “Uno de cada cien mexicanos es afrodescendiente, revela estudio,” *Excélsior*, 27 de marzo de 2017, [www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2017/03/27/1154391](http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2017/03/27/1154391).

<sup>3</sup> There are countless articles published in mainstream Mexican newspapers referencing these ideas, including César Arellano García, “La población afrodescendiente sufre más discriminación que la indígena: Conapred,” *La Jornada*, 16 de marzo de 2015, [www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/03/16/sociedad/034n1s0c](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/03/16/sociedad/034n1s0c); and Julián Sánchez, “CNDH demanda evitar discriminación a afromexicanos,” *El Universal*, 3 de julio de 2015, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion-mexico/2015/cndh-demanda-evitar-discriminacion-a-afromexicanos-1111784.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Sergio Peñaloza Pérez qtd. in Blanca Juárez, “Habitan 1.4 millones de afromexicanos en el país: INEGI,” *La Jornada*, 9 diciembre 2015, [www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2015/12/09/habitan-1-4-millones-de-afromexicanos-en-el-pais-inegi-7219.html](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2015/12/09/habitan-1-4-millones-de-afromexicanos-en-el-pais-inegi-7219.html). Also see Glyn Jemmott Nelson, foreword to Paulette A. Ramsay, *Afro-Mexican Constructions of Diaspora, Gender, Identity and Nation* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2016), xi.



MAP 0.1 Map of Mexico.

was as much the dutiful reporting of the INEGI's data as a political statement about Mexico's insufficient constructions of blackness, which she characterized as "a still tenuous identity." Like Peñalosa Pérez, she condemned the fragmented state of Afro-diasporic identity in civil society. Too many citizens, she lamented, "use labels like 'criollo' (creole) or 'moreno' rather than the ones black Mexicans tend to prefer. Peñalosa, for instance, describes himself as 'afrodescendiente (of African descent), negro (black), or fromexicano (Afro-Mexican).'"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Krithika Varagur, "Mexico Finally Recognized Its Black Citizens, but That's Just the Beginning," *Huffington Post*, January 27, 2016, [www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mexico-finally-recognized-its-black-citizens-but-thats-just-the-beginning\\_us\\_568d2d9ce4b0c8beacf50f6b](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mexico-finally-recognized-its-black-citizens-but-thats-just-the-beginning_us_568d2d9ce4b0c8beacf50f6b). For a similar perspective, see Sameer Rao, "Mexico Finally Recognizes Afro Mexicans in National Census," *Colorlines*, December 14, 2015, [www.colorlines.com/articles/mexico-finally-recognizes-afro-mexicans-national-census?fbclid=IwARoX5DUZF-WxAptzWoXPgzvh7tdAYvsAPgJlBJKcX7Akyn2JSBtfz-TRHfs](http://www.colorlines.com/articles/mexico-finally-recognizes-afro-mexicans-national-census?fbclid=IwARoX5DUZF-WxAptzWoXPgzvh7tdAYvsAPgJlBJKcX7Akyn2JSBtfz-TRHfs). Odile Hoffmann discusses the complex social questions surrounding blackness in "Negros y afroestizos en México: Viejas y nuevas lecturas de un mundo olvidado," trans. Camila Pascal, *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 68, no. 1 (2006): 103–35.

These responses to the INEGI's statistics point to the demographic, social, cultural, and spatial politics of African-descended identities in Mexico, the subject of *Finding Afro-Mexico*. The black body buoyed the socially visible and politically active form of diasporic subjectivity that Peñaloza Pérez and Varagur desired. Conceived through some combination of physiological, ancestral, and sociological attributes, the racialized body has often been reduced to a biological typology that scholars and policy makers can count, whether to surveil and oppress African-descended peoples, to study them, or both.<sup>6</sup> However, the INEGI's groundbreaking work – and the turn-of-the-century grassroots mobilizations that advocated for it – signified a stark about-face from the cultural and regional constructions of blackness that Mexican intellectuals, political officials, and cultural producers had crafted in the two centuries between Mexican independence and the publication of the intercensal survey.<sup>7</sup> To tell this history of how blackness became Mexican after the Revolution of 1910, this book integrates the political and cultural dimensions of the African Diaspora into Mexican nation-state formation and vice versa.

*Finding Afro-Mexico* contends that the celebratory refrains penned since the INEGI published its results have been erected on a false premise. The activists, scholars, and reporters who celebrated this newfound demographic visibility incorrectly assumed that Mexican

<sup>6</sup> There is a large literature on the black body in Anglophone scholarship on the African Diaspora, including Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999). For a Latin American perspective, see Livio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), esp. 11 and 79. On the construction of the body as a political act rooted in specific historical contexts, see Emily S. Rosenberg and Shanon Fitzpatrick, eds., *Body and Nation: The Global Realm of US Body Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). Historian Jessica Marie Johnson challenges scholars to consider the quantifiable black body not only as a foundation for the study of slavery and the slave trade but also as part of the recuperation of black humanity; see “Markup Bodies: Black [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads,” *Social Text* 36, no. 4 (2018): 57–79.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, the distinction between biological and cultural race is not absolute, even when Mexican nationalists claimed it to be. As historian Laura Gotkowitz explains, scholars need to consider constructions of biological and cultural race on a continuum and in conversation with each other; see “Introduction: Racisms of the Present and the Past in Latin America,” in *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Laura Gotkowitz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 8–11.

nationalists uniformly sought to silence – if not erase – the country’s African heritage through *mestizaje*, a postcolonial project to craft a modern Mexico through the racial and cultural fusion of indigeneity and Spanishness.<sup>8</sup> The recuperation of blackness, however, was a much more piecemeal process than they have described. This history reveals the social, demographic, cultural, and spatial dimensions of racial visibility and invisibility that are all too often lumped together, represented by the racialized body. At the turn of the twentieth century, tropes of black disappearance left intellectuals, like sociologist and lawyer Andrés Molina Enríquez, assuming that African-descended peoples were, as he stated in 1909, “insignificant” to the course of Mexican history.<sup>9</sup> Yet, by the 1930s and 1940s, when the specter of global fascism placed the Revolution’s populist aims in conversation with the New Negro Movement, Afro-Cubanism, and other similar initiatives to refashion African-descended identities in the Atlantic world, enslaved Africans, often symbolized by Gaspar Yanga, entered the national narrative as patriotic rebels who foreshadowed postrevolutionary conceptions of social justice. These transnational dialogues provided a select but immensely well connected set of Mexican anthropologists, artists, and composers with the ethnographic methodologies to perceive and to discuss the similarities between the cultural expressions found in Mexico’s coastal regions and those of African-descended peoples in the United States, Cuba, and other American nations.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the descendants of colonial Mexico’s free and enslaved black populations slowly became visible, first culturally and spatially, then socially and demographically. For the first time since independence, ethnographers could study African-descended peoples and cultures, as anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre

<sup>8</sup> For example, see Laura A. Lewis, “African Mexicans,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico*, ed. Michael S. Werner (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 4; and Christina A. Sue, “Hegemony and Silence: Confronting State-Sponsored Silences in the Field,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44, no. 1 (2015): 113–40.

<sup>9</sup> Andrés Molina Enríquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (Mexico City: A. Carranza e Hijos, 1909), 292.

<sup>10</sup> By rooting my analysis in the intellectual strands of cultural production, I nuance B. Christine Arce’s argument that there is a paradox in Mexico, where the official narrative erases blackness but popular culture celebrates it as foreign and exotic. This tension, she explains, has its origins in the discursive, cultural, and tropological process of transforming black bodies into “no-bodies”; see *México’s Nobodies: The Cultural Legacy of the Soldadera and Afro-Mexican Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 3, 8, and 9.

Beltrán had in the decade preceding the 1958 publication of *Cuijila: Esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro*, the first book dedicated to blackness in postrevolutionary society.

The radicalization of Afro-diasporic politics in the 1960s, however, has cast aside Mexico's cultural and spatial visions of its African heritage. It has imposed what Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant call "imperialist reason," a foreign brand of diasporic authenticity, on Mexican history and society.<sup>11</sup> Characterized by the socially visible, racially conscious communities of the Anglophone world, an Afro-diasporic ideal-type has prevented Mexico from entering global conversations about blackness on its own terms.<sup>12</sup> As such, I ask, how did Mexican intellectuals and cultural producers construct African-descended identities as Mexican? By highlighting how Mexicans and their colleagues abroad discussed the nation's African heritage – rather than how they did not discuss it – *Finding Afro-Mexico* illuminates an alternative history and politics of racial formation and diasporic consciousness-raising to the ones activists and scholars heralded after the publication of the INEGI's data.

The intellectual and cultural histories I tell in *Finding Afro-Mexico* reveal the transnational interdisciplinary dialogues among the historians, anthropologists, writers and poets, composers, and artists in Mexico, the United States, and Cuba who selectively integrated the African Diaspora into Mexican nation-state formation and Mexico into the African Diaspora. Their constructions of Mexico's African heritage expose the ontological boundaries of modern Mexican mestizaje and Afro-diasporic politics. The potential for blackness to be cultural or demographic, Mexican or foreign, visible or invisible gave postrevolutionary

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, "On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 1 (1999): 41–58. Regarding this critique for the study of Afro-Mexico, see Laura A. Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans: The Dynamics of Race, Nation, and Identity in a Mexican 'moreno' Community (Guerrero)," *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 4 (2000): 898–926; María Guevara Sanginés, "Perspectivas metodológicas en los estudios historiográficos sobre los negros en México hacia finales del siglo XX," in *Poblaciones y culturas de origen africano en México*, comp. María Elisa Velázquez Gutiérrez and Ethel Correa Duró (Mexico City: INAH, 2005), 76–77; and Luis Eugenio Campos, "Caracterización étnica de los pueblos de negros de la costa chica de Oaxaca: Una visión etnográfica," in Velázquez Gutiérrez and Correa Duró, *Poblaciones y culturas de origen africano en México*, 411–13.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic," *African Affairs* 104, no. 414 (2005): 35–68; and Elisabeth Cunin, "Introducción: ¿Por qué una antología?," in *Textos en diáspora: Una antología sobre afrodescendientes en América*, ed. Elisabeth Cunin (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2008), 11–29.

intellectuals, cultural producers, and policy makers the opportunity to articulate their global visions, ideological projects, racial fantasies, and democratic yearnings more freely than they could through other racial categories. While indigeneity had to be conceived locally, where communities could negotiate with or rebel against the state, blackness first and foremost lived among abstractions, articulated to cast a positive light on state racial policies: it fed Mexico's claim to be free of the racism plaguing the United States. Blackness offered no specter of social or political revolution. No one had to write about it, and consequently every discussion of it was a radical act, pushing the boundaries of what and eventually who was Mexican and Afro-diasporic.

#### THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN MEXICO

The INEGI's 2015 intercensal survey concluded a century-long project to document Mexico's cultural and racial diversity. In 1910 Francisco I. Madero led the charge to overthrow Porfirio Díaz, a dictator who had ruled Mexico since 1876. His goal was political, to create electoral democracy, but he unleashed a social revolution that transformed the relationship between civil society and the state. Calls for popular political participation, social justice, and the cultural representation of the people – whether male or female, urban or rural, indigenous or *mestizo* (racially mixed) – abounded. As anthropologist Manuel Gamio proclaimed in 1916, the histories and cultures of every community needed to be studied so that government officials could design policies to integrate each region of the country respectfully and efficiently into a modern unified nation-state.<sup>13</sup>

Although Mexicans gave primacy to indigeneity in their postrevolutionary ethnographic and historical accounts, they schematically wove African slavery into their narratives. Historians and social scientists constructed blackness and indigeneity in tandem. After all, the origins of the Atlantic slave trade could not be divorced from the precipitous decline of the indigenous population across the New World in the decades after Christopher Columbus set foot in the Caribbean, and Hernán Cortés, in Mexico. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Spanish and Portuguese colonial economies could not have prospered without African slavery. Free and enslaved blacks and their mixed-race progeny frequently worked in sugar production and silver mining, but they were also

<sup>13</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria (pro nacionalismo)* (Mexico City: Librería de Porrúa Hermanos, 1916).

ranchers, artisans, urban service workers, militiamen, and sailors, among countless other occupations.<sup>14</sup> From 1521 to 1640, Africans outnumbered Europeans in colonial Mexico. The urban settings of Veracruz, Guadalajara, and Mérida housed at least as many African-descended individuals as Spanish settlers. In 1646, while the Atlantic slave trade turned its attention to other parts of the New World, there were approximately 35,000 Africans and another 116,000 African-descended individuals residing in Spain's most valuable colony.<sup>15</sup>

By the nineteenth century, the place of blackness in Mexican society had entered troublesome terrain. With the resurgence of the indigenous population, the expansion of a racially mixed caste population, and a preference for free wage labor throughout the colony, slavery had fallen out of favor. Manumission – whether through the benevolence of slave owners and abolitionists, religious or political decree, or self-purchase – accelerated. Slavery only continued as a viable institution in sugar producing regions, like Veracruz, where the economic reverberations of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) created the opportunity for a race-based plantation economy to expand. When Father Miguel Hidalgo y Castillo called for Mexican independence on September 16, 1810, approximately 624,000 people, or 10 percent of the population, were of African descent.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For example, see Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Herman Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003). The simultaneous crafting of indigeneity and blackness has also garnered scholarly attention; see Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997); and Barbara Weinstein, “Erecting and Erasing Boundaries: Can We Combine the ‘Indo’ and the ‘Afro’ in Latin American Studies?,” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 19, no. 1 (2008): 129–44.

<sup>15</sup> Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570–1650* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 40 and 46; Patrick J. Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), xiii–xv and 8–26; Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 1 and 21–23. Of course, the slave trade did not end in 1640 and continued until its abolition in 1824; see Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita, *Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz, 1690–1830* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1987), 35–43; Antonio García de León, *Tierra adentro, mar en fuera: El puerto de Veracruz y su litoral a Sotavento, 1519–1821* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011), 692–703; and Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva, *Urban Slavery in Colonial Mexico: Puebla de los Ángeles, 1531–1706* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 107–43.

<sup>16</sup> Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz*, 55–56 and 65–78; and Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*, 1. On the demographic shifts in sugar producing regions, see Naveda,

During and after the wars of independence (1810–21), liberal elites proclaimed that all Mexicans should be defined by their vice or virtue, not their racial heritage. First professed by Father Hidalgo on that fateful September day, abolition blossomed into a fundamental component of Mexican nation-state formation: it signified the idea that all citizens must be treated equally under the law. Two African-descended generals, José María Morelos y Pavón and Vicente Guerrero, reasserted Hidalgo's emancipatory sentiments respectively in 1813 and 1829. In between, wartime mobilization and other presidential decrees created new pathways to freedom.<sup>17</sup> For liberals, slavery and caste were intrinsically bound together as a sociological problem in need of extirpation – and blackness, its most pernicious social and demographic incarnation, needed to disappear. If a postcolonial fantasy rooted in national unity and racial harmony were to become a reality, then the new nation's African heritage could only remain as a subject of historical inquiry buried in Spanish colonial archives.<sup>18</sup> As historian Peter Guardino explains for the state of Oaxaca in years leading up to and during the wars of independence, “Afromexicans had a symbolic weight that was much larger than their demographic weight.”<sup>19</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, most liberal intellectuals and policy makers assumed that mestizaje, driven by the invisible hand of progress, rendered blackness socially and demographically invisible.<sup>20</sup>

*Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz*, 63–65. For a discussion of slavery in a region not defined by sugar production, see Juan Carlos Reyes G., “Negros y afroestizos en Colima, siglos XVI–XIX,” in *Presencia africana en México*, coord. Luz María Martínez Montiel (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1997), 322–28. Ben Vinson has recently made the argument that the black population was likely overestimated in census data on the eve of independence; see *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 123.

<sup>17</sup> Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz*, 93–102; Naveda, *Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz*, 148–61; and García de León, *Tierra adentro*, 751–65.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the colonial foundations of blackness, see Patrick J. Carroll, “Los mexicanos negros, el mestizaje y los fundamentos olvidados de la ‘Raza Cósmica’: una perspectiva regional,” trans. Jeffrey N. Lamb, *Historia Mexicana* 44, no. 3 (1995): 403–38; and Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, *Afrodescendientes: Sobre piel canela* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1997), 21–24. On the discursive place of blackness in Mexico's postcolonial imaginary, see Vinson, *Before Mestizaje*, 182–202.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Guardino, “La identidad nacional y los afroamericanos en el siglo XIX,” in *Prácticas populares, cultura política y poder en México, siglo XIX*, ed. Brian Connaughton (Mexico City: Casa Juan Pablos, 2008), 272.

<sup>20</sup> Studying the history of blackness in predominately indigenous countries helps scholars interrogate the racial and cultural boundaries of indigenous assimilation and mestizaje. For a discussion of why historians and anthropologists need to question these narratives,

This liberal dedication to a race-blind society has shaped how academics search for African-descended peoples to investigate and how activists advocate for these historically ostracized communities. The claim that there are no longer any African-descended people has regularly been the point of departure for historical, ethnographic, and cultural inquiries into modern Mexico's relationship to the African Diaspora. As such, it has become fashionable to lament the state of black identity in modern Mexico.<sup>21</sup> Defining "nonblackness" as a pillar of *mestizaje*, sociologist Christina A. Sue concludes that state racial policies, theoretically ensconced in doctrines of racial harmony, guarantee "the marginalization, neglect, or negation of Mexico's African heritage." A spate of scholarly accounts contends that African-descended peoples embraced – and continue to embrace – racial identities affixed to indigeneity to downplay their African heritage. Presuming archival and demographic sources do not exist, most historians choose to remain in the comfortable confines of the colonial period or, at best, continue to abolition, when liberal scripts destined African-descended peoples to social and demographic obscurity.<sup>22</sup>

The historical and historiographic lacuna between abolition in 1829 and the emergence of popular organizations, like Sergio Peñaloza Pérez's Black Mexico, at the end twentieth century casts Mexico's African-descended peoples as historical spectators consigned to colonial slavery, just as the nation's founders dreamed.<sup>23</sup> With the discussion of blackness

see Laura Gotkowitz, ed., *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker unpack the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the term *identity* in "Identity," in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, by Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 59–90.

<sup>22</sup> Christina A. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14. Also see María Luisa Herrera Casasús, *Presencia y esclavitud del negro en la Huasteca* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, 1989); Rafael Valdez Aguilar, *Sinaloa: Negritud y Olvido* (Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico: Talleres Gráficos, 1993); and Francisco Fernández Repetto and Genny Negroe Sierra, *Una población perdida en la memoria: Los negros de Yucatán* (Mérida: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, 1995), ix–x.

<sup>23</sup> Ben Vinson and Matthew Restall mention the lack of research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Afro-Mexico in their introduction to *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times*, ed. Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 8. Thinking about these historiographical tropes for the colonial period, Herman Bennett makes a similar case for the writing of Afro-Mexican history in *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 6–7. Nonetheless, these methodological questions are not unique