6

The Indians Are Coming to an End

The Myth of Native Desolation

The history of Mexico [contrasts] a noble, valiant Cortés, with a timorous, cowardly Moctezuma, whose people by their iniquitous desertion of their natural leader demonstrated their indifference to the good of the commonwealth.

—Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1543)

These mysteries cannot be understood unless one accepts the fulfillment of the prophecy made by the blessed father fray Domingo de Betanzos, that before many ages the Indians as such would disappear, that those who came to this land would ask what color they had been.

—Agustín Dávila Padilla (1595)

The Indian Monarch [the Tarascan Cazonci] gazed with silent awe on the scene of desolation, and eagerly craved the protection of the invincible beings who has caused it.

—William Prescott (1843)

Enough-enough, submissive to my fate I now return to my distresstful fate.

—the native ruler in Mrs. Edward Jemingham's
The Fall of Mexico (1775)

There is no remedy, and the Indians are coming to an end.

—don Felipe Huaman Poma de Ayala (1615)

Early in the seventeenth century, a descendent of the imperial dynasty of the Incas, don Felipe Huaman Poma de Ayala, wrote a book-length letter to the king of Spain, describing all that was

wrong with the colony of Peru. His denunciations of the practices of corrupt colonial officials were particularly vivid, periodically punctuated by the declaration that the situation was beyond remedy and by an apparent prediction of native Andean extinction.[1]

An echo of Huaman Poma's lament can be found in French historian Nathan Wachtel's 1971 study of the Conquest of Peru, *La vision des vaincus* (*The Vision of the Vanquished*). Wachtel quotes an Andean lament, written in Spanish, probably in the sixteenth century, in which the sounds of an earthquake become a funeral chant, the foam of river rapids becomes tears, the sun is darkened, the moon shrinks, and

> All things hide, all vanish
> in suffering
>
> (*Y todo y todos se esconden, desaparecen padeciendo*).

According to Wachtel, the elegy, written for the death of Atahuallpa, describes "the birth of a kind of chaos . . . an abyss of emptiness in which the universe is swallowed up. Suffering alone remains." This, he argues, was the nature of "the trauma of the Conquest" for Andean peoples, whose sense of purpose and harmony with the world were inconsolably lost in the destruction of the Spanish invasion.[2]

In fact, the elegy that Wachtel quotes was specific to Atahuallpa's death and exemplifies the pre-Conquest rhetorical tradition of formal mourning for a recently deceased Inca. It is neither evidence nor symbolic of the traumatic impact of the Conquest on Andeans. Likewise, Huaman Poma's lament was a rhetorical device designed to bring the king's attention to the declining numbers and increasing poverty of native Andeans. However, his words, and those of others who denounced colonial practices, such as Las Casas, represented a thread of critical thinking about the impact of conquest and colonization upon Native Americans.

Over the centuries, this has developed into a myth about the nature of native civilizations before the Conquest, native reactions to the Conquest, and the long-term impact of colonization on native societies. The threads of this myth include the lament for native peoples, as introduced above by Huaman Poma and Wachtel, and its perpetuation today in *The Broken Spears*, a compilation of translations of Nahua accounts of the Conquest of Mexico. This book is now four decades old, but is still widely read and assigned in classrooms. In his introduction to it, Miguel León-Portilla refers to the Conquest as "the tragic loss that resulted from the destruction of indigenous culture," a sentence

that is quoted in the syllabus of a course developed in 1992 at the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute for use in public high schools (and still posted on the Institute's web site). The course, entitled "The Indians' Discovery of Columbus," intends, in the spirit of "multi-cultural . . . awareness," to view the Conquest from "the perspective of the Aztecs themselves." But by emphasizing "loss" and "destruction" it unwittingly perpetuates a myth that does little favor to the native cultures with which students are supposed to sympathize.[3]

Another thread of the myth is the notion that native civilization was some kind of Arcadia, as deftly illustrated by the title of Kirkpatrick Sale's book, *The Conquest of Paradise*. According to this perspective, the perfection of native societies and the innocence of their inhabitants could not possibly survive the experience of European invasion, depredation, and cultural imperialism. Another thread comes from the opposite direction, being grounded in an often-racist disdain for Native American cultures, rather than their romanticization. This approach holds that the Americas before Europeans arrived were largely "unused and undeveloped," and "life was nasty, brutish, and short" (in the words of Michael Berliner, at the time executive director of the Ayn Rand Institute, a right-wing think tank). Berliner's and Sale's positions on the Conquest are diametrically opposed in that Berliner views the Conquest's outcome as favorable for both natives and Europeans, because the latter brought "an objectively superior culture" to the Americas.[4] But both of the perspectives they represent contribute to this myth because they take it for granted that native cultures were destroyed, unable to withstand the onslaught of European invasion.

I have dubbed this the myth of native desolation. Over the centuries Europeans have imagined and invented the cultural and social breakdown of Native American societies. In its most extreme form, this perspective not only emphasizes depopulation and destruction, but perceives a more profound desolation amounting to a state of anomie. When a society is in a state of anomie, its individuals are suffering from a sense of futility, emotional emptiness, psychological despair, and a confusion over the apparent breakdown of previous systems of value and meaning.[5] This is precisely the state of mind that Le Clézio imagines pervaded Native American communities in the sixteenth century, where the Conquest left in its wake a "silence [that] was immense, terrifying. It engulfed the Indian world . . . reduced it to a void. Those indigenous cultures, living, diverse, heirs to knowledge and myths as ancient as the history of man, in the span of one generation were sentenced and reduced to dust, to ashes."[6]

This chapter will trace the development of this myth of native desolation, beginning with Columbus, and looking first at early colonial views of pre-Columbian native cultures, then at

European perceptions of native reactions to invasion and colonization. I will argue that native cultures were neither barbarous nor idyllic, but as civilized and imperfect as European cultures of the time. Native responses to invasion were based on appraisals of self-interest similar to Spanish decisions, and their responses were highly varied, not homogeneous. Native cultures proved resilient and adaptive, and many natives, especially élites, found opportunity in the Conquest-era transition.

One of the native groups of South America's northern coast, according to sixteenth-century English explorer Sir Walter Ralegh, was called Ewaipanoma: "They are reported to have their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts, and that a long train of haire groweth backward betwen their shoulders." Ralegh is skeptical of such a report, admitting that "I saw them not." But he seems reluctant to condemn completely the notion that acephali, or headless men, existed in the Americas, citing European and native sources, as well as a Spaniard who told Ralegh he had seen such a creature.[7]

Indeed, the larger context of Ralegh's elusive acephali is a large body of references to these and other human, semihuman, or subhuman beings, including Amazons (women-only "tribes") and cannibals. Tales of such aberrant peoples had existed both among Europeans and Native Americans for centuries before Contact, making the Conquest period a fertile time for the convergence, spread, and discussion of these "monsters."[8] Even when they did not personally sight them, Europeans commented on their absence, as Ralegh did. Columbus wrote to the king and queen in 1493 that one Caribbean island was inhabited by Amazons, one by cannibals, another by people with tails, and yet another by bald people. But these were islands Columbus had yet to explore, and he would soon admit that, with the exception of cannibals, "I found not a trace of monsters, nor did I hear of any."[9]

As Europeans became more familiar with Native Americans, the more fantastic tales became less frequent. But Contact and the Conquest stimulated the medieval European idea that there existed creatures in a category between animals and true human beings. Native Americans turned out not to be headless, but they were perceived as many other things that more or less placed them in this intermediary category. One such perception characterized natives as less than fully human because they lacked the attributes of human cultures and communities. An oft-quoted example of this is Columbus's initial reaction to the Guanahaní natives he encountered on his first voyage: "I believe that they would become Christians very easily, for it seemed to me that they had no religion. Our Lord pleasing, at the time of my departure I will take six of them to Your Highnesses in order that

they may learn to speak."[10] By this Columbus did not mean that the natives were mute, but that their language was so primitive as not to rise to the level of true speech. Likewise he commented on the political organization of the Arawaks, whom he describes as living "without order or government." Caribbean natives were not capable of using real weapons, because "they are hopeless cowards," and in all respects "their deeds are like children's."[11] Native Americans are thus a blank slate upon which "civilization" can be easily inscribed.

In the first decades of Contact, Europeans encountered only the semisedentary peoples of the Caribbean and its borders. Semisedentary peoples subsisted on hunting as much as agriculture. Their communities were smaller and their social structure less complex than those of the sedentary societies of Mesoamerica and the Andes. Thus the notion of native societies being virtual nonsocieties can most commonly be found in this early period. In 1503, for example, Vespucci wrote that natives "have no property; instead all things are held in community. . . . They live without king and without any form of authority, and each one is his own master."[12]

At first this kind of primal anarchy tended to be seen as a utopian innocence. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, "Indians" lived "in agreement with nature," claimed Vespucci. "The innocence of Adam himself," wrote Brazil's first chronicler, Pedro Vaz de Caminha, in a letter to the king of Portugal in 1500,"was no greater than that of these people." This characterization of natives thus emphasized "their goodness and gentleness" (in the words of Las Casas), thereby highlighting their consequent vulnerability. As Las Casas puts it, in his summary of Columbus's *Diario*: "It should be noted here that the natural docileness, simple, benign, and humble condition of the Indians, and their lack of weapons, together with their going naked, gave the Spaniards the audacity to hold them in low esteem, and put them to such harsh labor as they put them to, and to be relentless in their oppression and destruction of them."[13] Such a view was anticipated by fray Antonio de Montesinos as far back as 1511, when the Dominican, in his famous sermon to the Hispaniola colonists, asked them: "On what authority have you waged a detestable war against these people, who dwelt quietly and peacefully on their own land? . . . Are these not men?"[14]

The combination of these views of natives as blank slates and naturally innocent, with the general perception that colonial brutality had caused the dramatic decline in native Caribbean populations, inspired various attempts to build utopian Christian communities upon the natural foundation of native simplicity. The mystic Franciscan Gerónimo de Mendieta proposed that all native peoples be administered by friars under a modified version of monastic rule. Mendieta's plans challenged the authority of the secular church and seemed incompatible with royal and settler

extraction of native tribute and labor, and were thus blocked by the crown. However, Vasco de Quiroga, a colonial judge, went ahead without royal approval and built two utopian "hospital-republics" in Mexico in the 1530s. Based consciously on the fictional community in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, such experiments could take place in the paternalistic colonial setting of early Spanish America only because of the degree to which Native Americans were seen as malleable. "The Indians are not good as teachers, but as disciples," proclaimed Mendieta, "nor as preachers, but as subjects, and for this the best in the world.[15]

Of course, natives were no more naturally malleable than were Spaniards. The Spanish colonial enterprise worked relatively well when it coincided with native practices, patterns, and structures, but otherwise it met with the same level of tenacious resistance that all peoples tend to display to outsiders radically interfering in their lives. Manifestations of this resistance contributed to the development of a European perception of natives as fundamentally wicked rather than essentially innocent. At one end of the spectrum, Europeans blamed the culture clash on native failings. Exasperated by the frequent flight of Tainos, for example, Columbus remarked (in an echo of the Requirement) that "it is not the result of any harm that we might have done them, for on the contrary, everywhere I have been and have been able to speak to the natives, I have given them everything I had . . . without receiving anything in return."[16]

At the other end of the spectrum, the view was downright hostile and often venomously racist. One Dominican friar, in a letter to colonial officials in Spain, described Native Americans as stupid, silly, disrespectful of the truth, unstable, lacking foresight, ungrateful, changeable, brutal, disobedient, and incapable of learning. Such a judgement could be used to justify any Conquest act. Indeed, the conquistador-chronicler Oviedo, refusing to lament the extinction of the natives of Hispaniola, asked "Who can deny that the use of gunpowder against pagans is the burning of incense to Our Lord?" Vargas Machuca concluded that "Indians . . . are a people without any kind of virtue when they are not in fear, but when fearful they are completely meek." Other Spaniards may not have viewed mere paganism as justifying the use of gunpowder or terror tactics, but there were plenty of pagan stereotypes to provide additional justification—natives had a supposed proclivity for sodomy, for example, or were committed cannibals, or were infected with diabolism. Even Bernal Díaz, usually seen as more evenhanded than most Spanish chroniclers, harps repeatedly on native tendencies toward sodomy, human sacrifice, cannibalism, and larceny.[17]

All three of these stereotyped perceptions of natives (as cultureless, as innocents, as nefarious) are illustrated in an engraving by Jan van der Straet around 1575 (Figure 13). The image's combination of detail and ambiguity have encouraged numerous and varied interpretations, some of

which have emphasized its erotic content, others its depiction of Contact as overtly gendered, others its illustration of how Europeans "invented" America.[18] Van der Straet's engraving illustrates the notion that native peoples lacked culture and society through the absence in the picture of native clothing or evidence of permanent settlements. There are a few native-made items—a hammock, a club, the woman's hat, a roasting spit. But otherwise the natives seem more akin to the animals whose land they share than to the civilized man, represented by Vespucci, with his elaborate dress, astrolabe and bannered cross in hand, and the state-of-the-art ship from which he has just disembarked.

The position of the native woman seems to represent an innocence and naiveté that is both hesitant and welcoming, childlike and sexually charged; she seems to be inviting Vespucci to both protect and possess her. The success of this image in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries lies in the fact that it would have resonated in viewers' minds regarding the appropriate nature of male-female and European-native relations. This included the notion of native "gentleness" (Las Casas's term), here rendered visually both in terms of female sexuality and childish innocence.

Fig. 13. "America," by Theodore Galle, engraving after a drawing from Nova Reperta *by Jan van der Straet (Stradanus) (ca.1575).*

The scene in the background depicts that emblematic monstrous activity, cannibalism, illustrating the perception of natives as wickedly subhuman. The caption to the scene could almost be the following passage taken from the sixteenth-century jurist Ginés de Sepúlveda: "Here is the proof of their savage life, like that of wild beasts: their execrable and prodigious immolations of human victims to demons; the fact of devouring human flesh; . . . and other similar crimes."[19] Spaniards ascribed cannibalism to natives because it was the classic marker of barbarianism. Sepúlveda and van der Straet do the same, then taking this as proof of that "savage" barbarianism. This kind of circular argument is fundamental to the myth of native desolation.

Sepúlveda's phrase "like that of wild beasts" evokes another aspect of this negative view of natives. By comparing natives to animals, they thereby acquire a range of supposed animal attributes, including dangerousness. Thus hostile natives are, along with hostile fauna, tropical diseases, difficult terrain, and a harsh climate, part of what makes the Americas a challenging environment for Europeans. In his descriptions of early Spanish encounters with Yucatan and its Maya population, the Franciscan bishop Diego de Landa emphasized the treacherous shores that shipwrecked Spaniards, dangerous animals (from the crab that bit off one Spaniard's thumb to lions and tigers), and the fate of those captured by Mayas. Spanish captives, Landa suggests, met one of three ends: they were "fattened up," sacrificed, and "given to the people" to be eaten; they were "used as slaves"; or they went native, "becoming an idolater like them" (as did Gonzalo Guerrero, a legendary figure in colonial-era histories and in Mexico today).[20]

Finding somewhat contrasting perceptions of natives together in one drawing is not surprising. Examples of all three attitudes can be found in Columbus's writings, for example, and Cortés too variously sees Mexico's natives as innocent or savage, childlike or barbarous. Though the phrase "noble savage" was not coined until 1609 (by a French chronicler named Lescarbot), and did not become a full-fledged and complex myth until the 1850s, the roots of that construct and its attempt to reconcile two otherwise contradictory strains of ethnocentric perception can be found in the attitudes of Columbus and Conquest-era Spaniards.[21] Furthermore, perceptions of the nature of Native Americans at the time of Contact served as the basis for perceptions of how natives reacted to conquest and colonization.

"If they say that I'm a god, that's what I am," sing the two Spaniards washed up on Native American shores in the recent animated movie, *The Road to El Dorado*. The rulers of El Dorado, the king and

high priest of the film's imaginary natives, who seem based mostly on Mayas but who embody various native and Latin American stereotypes, appear to take the Spanish visitors for gods. It turns out that the local lords are actually manipulating the occasion of the sudden arrival of the two Spaniards for their own ends, but the film has the city's populace accepting the notion as a fulfillment of an ancient prophesy. The Spaniards, meanwhile, embrace their sudden apotheosis. In the words to the soundtrack song, "It's Tough to Be a God:" "Listen if we don't comply / With the locals' wishes I / Can see us being sacrificed or stuffed / Let's be gods, the perks are great / El Dorado on a plate / Local feeling should not be rebuffed."[22] This song and the accompanying portion of the plot evoke various stereotypes—native lords who are seemingly submissive but are actually duplicitous and untrustworthy, natives who do not merely kill strangers but "sacrifice" and eat them (although this is not depicted in the movie). Among them is a key element of the myth of native desolation—the myth that Native Americans believed Spanish invaders to be gods. In an echo of a study of a similar phenomenon in eighteenth-century Hawaii, this myth might be labeled "the apotheosis of Captain Cortés."[23]

The apotheosis myth—part of the larger myth of native desolation—is central to the way Europeans perceived the native reaction to the Conquest. That connection is made explicit by Todorov, when he refers to "the paralyzing belief that the Spaniards are gods."[24] Todorov is not alone in taking the apotheosis myth for granted; it is more a part of the Western understanding of the Conquest today than it was in the sixteenth century. Larson's lampooning of the myth (Figure 14) works only because it is still such common currency in popular histories and textbooks. But there was no apotheosis, no "belief that the Spaniards are gods," and no resulting native paralysis.

Like so much of Conquest mythology, the apotheosis of the conquistadors seems to be rooted in the voluminous writings of Columbus. Or at least so it appears. In Dunn and Kelley's translation of the diary of the first voyage, the natives "are credulous and aware that there is a God in heaven and convinced that we come from the heavens." In Zamora's translation of the 1493 letter to the king and queen, Columbus states that "generally, in whatever lands I traveled, they believed and believe that I, together with these ships and people, came from heaven, and they greeted me with such veneration." But here is Morison's translation of the parallel passage in another letter written by Columbus in 1493:

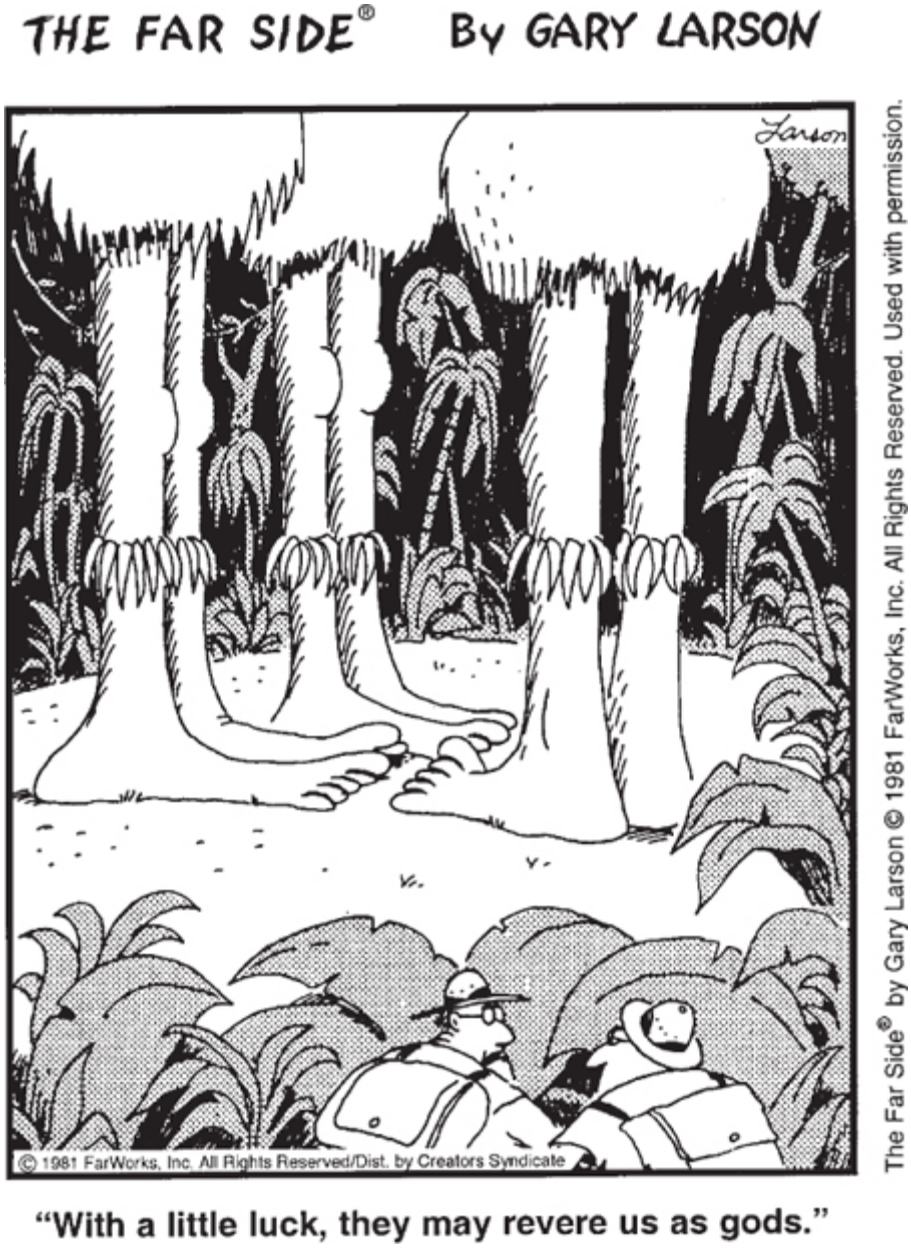

Fig. 14. "With a little luck, they may revere us as gods," from Gary Larson's, The Far Side *(1981).*

Fig. 15. Mexica lords prostrate before Cortés, from John Ogilby's America *(1670), p. 85.*

> And they are still of the opinion that I come from the sky, in spite of all the intercourse which they have had with me, and they were the first to announce this wherever I went, and the others went running from house to house and to the neighboring towns with loud cries of, 'Come! Come! See the people from the sky!' They all came, men and women alike, as soon as they had confidence in us, so that not one, big or little, remained behind, and all brought something to eat and drink which they gave us with marvelous love.[25]

The key word in these passages is *cielo*, glossed as "heaven" in the first two translations above, and as "sky" in the third. *Cielo* means either, or both, so accurate translation hinges on context. Zamora states clearly that she disagrees with Morison's gloss because both of the 1493 letters "imply that the Indians took the Spaniards for divine beings, venerating them and making offerings to them as such."[26]

In fact, the passages are ambiguous, at best. Columbus never uses the word "gods," nor are we are given any idea as to what native word he has taken to mean *cielo*. In light of the inexact nature of Columbus's so-called conversations (*conversación*, "intercourse" in Morison's translation) with

Caribbean natives, his interpretations of native statements and actions must be taken with more than a pinch of salt. Furthermore, there remains not even circumstantial evidence that the provision of food and drink and other gestures of friendship—made to Europeans by natives all over the Americas for various practical reasons—constituted "offerings" of a religious nature.

Zamora accepts the apotheosis myth tentatively, but others have embraced it fully. Swiss historian Urs Bitterli, for example, spins the scant "evidence" in Columbus's writings into a full-blown acceptance of the myth, summarizing his reasoning with the question, "Was it not the most obvious conclusion to regard these beings, so unfamiliar in their appearance, their behavior and their powers, as supernatural?" Surely the most obvious conclusion was to see Europeans as human beings, as they looked and acted like them, and as in fact they were taken to be by natives throughout the Americas. Bitterli's question is related to his discussion of the Tainos of Hispaniola, but he goes further still, asserting that "the civilized peoples of the Central and South American mainland, the Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas, saw the advancing conquistadors as gods." Upon first seeing Europeans, claims Bitterli, natives felt "a sensation of trembling awe, which is present in all acts of divine worship." The colonialist nature of Bitterli's perspective is illustrated by a drawing in John Ogilby's *America* (1670), depicting Mexica lords prostrate before Cortés (see Figure 15).[27]

If Mexico's Nahuas and other natives did indeed take Cortés to be a god, a good place to look for evidence would be the conquistador's hagiographer, Gómara. But Gómara makes no direct mention of the captain's apotheosis, referring vaguely to the topic only a few times. He alleges that the natives of Tabasco (Totonacs) initially "thought that man and horse were one," a probable Spanish invention that had grown in proportion by late colonial times. Gómara states that as the Spaniards passed through Valley of Mexico towns on their approach to Tenochtitlán, locals came out to marvel at their "attire, arms, and horses, and they said, 'These men are gods!'"—an exclamation of wonder at something new, rather than a statement of belief in the divinity of the invaders. He also reports that "Teudilli," a regional Tabascan lord allied to the Mexica, wondered if the Spaniards' ships meant that "the god Quetzalcoatl had come, bearing his temples on his shoulders." However, Gómara's other references to Quetzalcoatl are as the patron deity of Cholula, and to native concerns over Quetzalcoatl's displeasure as a background cause of the massacre of Cholulans instigated by Cortés. Were the Spanish captain deemed to be this god, one would imagine that Gómara, always keen to seize on anything that glorified the conquistador, would mention it. He does not. Gómara does have Cholulan lords saying, in reponse to Cortés confronting them with knowledge of their plot to ambush the Spaniards, that "this man is like one of our gods, for he knows everything; it is useless to deny it [the plot]." This is not the same as natives believing Spaniards actually to be gods. The

entire exchange is also called into question by evidence that Cortés and/or the Tlaxcalans invented the plot as a pretext for the massacre.[28]

Similarly, Bernal Díaz's account contains no consistent evidence of Spaniards being taken for gods. According to Díaz, some Cempoalans (Gulf coast natives) exclaim upon learning of guns, "Surely they [the Spaniards] must be *teules*!" *Teules* is usually translated as "gods," but the term is a more ambiguous than that. The Nahuatl for "god" is *teotl*, *teteoh* in the plural, but it has a less restricted meaning than the English "god" or Spanish *dios*. It could be combined with other words, for example, to qualify them not as specifically godly or godlike, but as fine, fancy, large, powerful, and so on.[29] Thus, without the substantiating support of other evidence, the casual nicknaming of Spaniards as *teules* suggests a recognition not of divine status but of their political and military significance in the region. Furthermore, there is no follow-up to this moment to show that Cempoalans really did adopt the notion of Spanish apotheosis.[30]

Like Gómara, Díaz tells of the same Mexica lord (whom he calls "Tendile") expressing wonder at the Spaniards and their technology. But instead of the Quetzalcoatl reference, he tells an odd Cinderella-as-conquistador tale of matching helmets. One of the Spaniards has a rusty old helmet that resembles the headgear on an image of Huitzilopochtli, the patron deity of Tenochtitlán. Tendile is given the helmet to send or take to Moctezuma, who is supposedly so struck by the similarity he is "convinced that [the Spaniards] were of those whom his ancestors had said would come to be lords of that land."[31] This is an echo of the speech that Moctezuma allegedly delivered to Cortés upon their meeting. This does not mean that Spaniards were seen as gods, merely as descendants of men who once ruled Mexico, but it is one of the threads of invention and misunderstanding that became woven into the myth of Spanish apotheosis. Shortly after the Spanish-Mexica war, the Cortés-Huitzilopochtli connection evolved into a story that Moctezuma had welcomed Cortés because he believed the Spaniard to be Huitzilopochtli. But the royal chronicler Oviedo, who found the story in a letter written by colonial Mexico's first viceroy, stated it to be untrue.[32]

As for Cortés himself, he neither names Teudilli/Tendile nor mentions any tales of wonder, referring to him as a local lord who offered gold and provisions to the Spaniards (as native rulers often did to avoid hostilities and encourage the invaders to move on). In his letters to the king Cortés makes no claims to having been taken either as Huitzilopochtli or Quetzalcoatl (whom he never mentions at all) or any kind of god. His concern is more to establish the political legitimacy of his invasion and, in letters written before Tenochtitlán has fallen, to convince the king that despite ongoing hostilities the Mexica empire had already in some sense been ceded to Spain.

Perhaps it is not surprising that we find overt references to the apotheosis of the Spaniards in accounts by Franciscans, whose concerns were more religious than political, and whose emphasis was on the legitimacy and divine approval of Christianization campaigns. Writing in the 1530s, fray Toribio de Benavente, who took the name Motolinía, claimed that the Nahuas "called the Castilians *teteuh*, which is to say gods, and the Castilians, corrupting the word, said *teules*."[33] Whereas Díaz omits discussion of the origins or implications of the term *teules*, Motolinía seizes upon it as supposed evidence that Mexico's natives somehow anticipated the arrival of the Spaniards—an anticipation that proved the Conquest was part of God's plan for the Americas. For this reason, Franciscans such as Motolinía appear to have invented the Cortés-Quetzalcoatl identification after the Conquest.[34]

The most fully developed version of the Quetzalcoatl aspect of the myth is found in Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*. Because the text was written in Nahuatl as well as Spanish and was compiled using native informants, it has mistakenly been taken as gospel evidence of native reactions to the invasion. In fact, the *Codex* is a native *and* Franciscan source, as Sahagún conceived, compiled, and formulated the questionnaires for all 12 volumes between about 1547 and 1579. Book XII (on the Conquest) was first drafted about 1555, 35 years after Moctezuma's death, when the *Codex*'s informants would not have been old enough to know what went on before and during the war, or would not have been directly privy to the emperor's thoughts, words, and deeds. The informants were from Tlatelolco, the original Mexica island city that in the fifteenth century had become subsumed into Tenochtitlán but retained some semblance of separate identity. Its people usually called themselves Tlatelolca, rarely Mexica, and as Tlatelolco was the last part of the island to fall to the Spaniards, Tlatelolcans blamed the Mexica-Tenochca for the defeat. As a result, Moctezuma receives harsh treatment in the *Codex*, which portrays him as vacillating, inert with anxiety, terrorized by omens predicting his downfall, and ingratiating to the Spaniards.[35]

This depiction of Moctezuma has him shaken by a series of portents predicting the arrival of the Spaniards before and during their advance on Tenochtitlán. Some of these omens were phenomena that can easily be explained and probably occurred—a comet, an eclipse, an especially rough storm on the lake surrounding Tenochtitlán, the birth of Siamese twins. But whether these and others occurred or not, there is no evidence that they determined Moctezuma's response to Cortés. The same Franciscans who spread the Quetzalcoatl myth also spread the story of the omens to further promote the idea that the Conquest was providential. Motolinía wrote of the portents in the 1540s and by the time of the *Florentine Codex* they seem to have become common currency among Nahuas and Spaniards, having evolved into a set of eight, complete with details drawn from medieval

European literature. Omens were a part of both European and Native American cultures in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so it is not surprising that the story was readily accepted. This acceptance was part of the spread of the myth of native desolation and the myth of Moctezuma's psychological collapse, but it is not evidence of that supposed collapse.[36]

By the mid-sixteenth century this derogatory portrait of Moctezuma had already been circulating among Spaniards and had clearly become convenient as a native explanation for a complex series of developments. Already there had been a historical convergence of the Tlatelolcan scapegoating of Moctezuma, with the Cortés invention of Moctezuma's willing submission to Spain, and with the Franciscan campaign to present the Conquest as divine intention. The legend of the returning lords—originated during the Spanish-Mexica war with Cortés's reworking of Moctezuma's welcome speech—had by the 1550s merged with the Cortés-as-Quetzalcoatl legend that the Franciscans had started spreading in the 1530s.[37]

The myth of native desolation was thus personified in Moctezuma. Given a famous face, the myth became increasingly entrenched as the centuries passed. Moctezuma's image has remained tarnished ever since. In her best-seller, *The March of Folly*, a study of foolish decisions made by leaders in history, Barbara Tuchman blames the entire Conquest of Mexico on Moctezuma's being paralyzed by superstition or "delusion," by a sense of impending doom. Similarly, Todorov both blames Moctezuma and credits Cortés with embracing and encouraging the legend of the return of Quetzalcoatl and his identification as that god, so as to gain "control over the ancient Mexican empire."[38] The rest of the Mexica, as Le Clézio puts it, were "naively led by the myth of the return of their ancestors" and of Quetzalcoatl, "blinded . . . incapable of seeing the true motives of those whom they already named *teules*, or gods." By the time they had understood, "it was too late. The Spaniards had taken advantage of the Indians' hesitation to penetrate into the very heart of their empire."[39]

Because of the argument's potentially broad applicability, it has also been used to explain the Conquest in regions beyond central Mexico. For example, in the Cakchiquel Maya account of the Spanish invasion of highland Guatemala (part of the *Annals of the Cakchiquels*), there is a line that is usually translated as "the lords took them for gods" and interpreted literally as an "admission" by native chroniclers that their rulers initially saw the Spaniards as divine beings.[40] But the original Cakchiquel phrase could as easily be read as "the lords looked at them as though they were gods" and, set into context, it suggests that a figurative meaning was intended. The Maya passage was intended to convince the reader that at first Alvarado and the Cakchiquels were at peace, with the

Spanish leader well disposed to the Mayas and the Mayas fearful and respectful. This spin on initial relations is a setup for the subsequent presentation of Spanish-Cakchiquel hostilities as entirely the fault of Alvarado. Because the account was written down at the end of the sixteenth century, it cannot be taken as a direct and unfiltered representation of native attitudes—or even basic events—in 1524. Finally, nowhere else in the Cakchiquel account is there mention of Maya rulers taking Spaniards for gods, nor is there evidence of such a perspective in this or any account. On the contrary, from the sending of ambassadors to Mexico in 1522 to the end of the Cakchiquel-Spanish war in 1530, the Cakchiquels consistently sought to manipulate the Spaniards and preserve, if not improve, their status with respect to other Maya groups in highland Guatemala.[41] The Cakchiquels were no different in this respect from other native peoples.

Another example of the appearance of the apotheosis argument is in the *Relación de Michoacán* (Account of Michoacán), a 1540 narrative of the Conquest of that Mesoamerican region written by a Franciscan friar using Tarascan noble sources. In the *Relación* the Tarascan king or Cazonci fails to resist the Spaniards because he believes them to be gods, an unlikely explanation that has been accepted by historians from Prescott to Todorov. As James Krippner-Martínez points out in a new appraisal of the *Relación* and of the Conquest of Michoacán, "this deeply rooted yet false image of Indian passivity" is part of a larger "bias."[42]

The apotheosis myth also surfaced in accounts of the Conquest of Peru, perhaps not coincidentally in a form similar to that of the Cortés-Quetzalcoatl legend. The myth was not mentioned in the earliest "eyewitness" accounts, but by the 1550s it was reported in several sources. Cieza de León remarked that the Spaniards acquired the name "Viracocha," because, as some say, "they were believed to be [the god] Ticsi Viracocha's children," or, as others say, because "they came by sea like foam." As with parallel Mexican accounts, the reference is a brief, vague, and half-hearted attempt to convince the reader that native Andeans really viewed Spaniards as divine.[43]

However, other accounts soon showed signs of the creative imagination of colonial chroniclers, the possible influence of stories about Cortés and Moctezuma, and the desire of proselytizers to "prove" that the Conquest was preordained and divinely sanctioned. "When Atahuallpa heard of this," wrote Pedro de Sarmiento, referring to the Spanish arrival in northern Peru, "he was delighted, believing that it was Viracocha who had come, just as he had promised them when he went away. . . . And he gave thanks to Viracocha because he was coming at the appointed time." Aside from its improbability, Atahuallpa's apparent "delight" runs contrary to all evidence of his attitude toward the Pizarro-led invasion.[44]

The intrusion of biblical tropes into the story is made even more transparent by the Jesuit chronicler José de Acosta, who explains that native Andeans "called the Spaniards *viracochas* because they thought they were children of heaven and as it were divine, just as others attributed divine status to Paul and Barnabas, calling one Jupiter and the other Mercury and trying to offer them sacrifices as though they were gods."[45] The Peruvian version of the apotheosis of the conquistadors thus turns largely on the legend and meaning of Viracocha. Although Viracocha's Mexican equivalent, with respect to this myth, is Quetzalcoatl, the parallel misunderstood Nahuatl term is *teteoh* (rendered as *teules* in Spanish). Christianity's sharp division between humanity and God was found neither in Mesoamerican nor in Andean religions, which recognized gradations of natural and supernatural, with some of those gradations consisting of mortal humans of high status. Thus Andeans nicknamed Spaniards *viracochas* for the same reason Nahuas called them *teules*—in recognition of their status. The term *viracocha* is still used today in Quechua as a reference not to the divine in the European sense but to the privileged and powerful.[46]

Another Quechua term applied to Spaniards and altered in meaning in the course of its translation was *supay*, which originally meant a morally neutral spirit that could be evil or benevolent. However, the Santo Tomás dictionary of 1560—that has *viracocha* glossed as "Christian"—shows the early accommodation of *supay* to the spiritual concepts of Spanish culture. It is entered as meaning "angel," with the qualifiers of *alliçupa* (*ángel bueno* or good angel) or *manaalliçupa* (*ángel malo* or bad angel). But as Spaniards could not find in Quechua a good term for "devil," one of these meanings soon came to dominate *supay*, while at the same time it became a more appropriately derogatory nickname for Spaniards. As Cieza de León observed in the 1550s, "the Indians . . . later said that these people [Spaniards] were not the sons of God, but worse than *supays*, which is the name of the devil."[47]

Interestingly, the Andean chronicler Titu Cusi Yupanqui, the nephew of Atahuallpa whose account was written about 1570 when Titu Cusi himself was Inca, says almost the same thing: "I thought that they were kindly beings sent (as they claimed) by Tecsi Viracocha, that is to say, by God; but it seems to me that all has turned out the very opposite from what I believed: for let me tell you, brothers, from proofs they have given me since their arrival in our country, they are the sons not of Viracocha, but of the Devil."[48] Within this passage three things undermine the notion that this is evidence of Spanish apotheosis in Andean minds. One is that the passage has the Spanish not as Viracocha(s) but merely sent by Viracocha, and as his sons, meant not in a literal sense but in the way Spaniards called themselves and other Christians "sons of God." Another important detail is the

reference to the Spanish claim to have been sent by God. This reflects both the way in which the use of religious language was so easily misunderstood in translation, and the Spanish expectation that natives might view them as gods.[49]

The degree to which Andean beliefs and Quechua phrases could be misunderstood by Spaniards, and the degree to which Spaniards bandied about vague tales of prophesy and apotheosis, is illustrated well by the following passage by colonial Peruvian official Agustín de Zárate:

> When they afterwards saw Atahuallpa killed, the Indians believed that Huascar was truly a son of the sun since he had prophesied his brother's death. And Huascar also said that his father, on his deathbed, had commanded him to make friends with a white and bearded people who would one day come to the land, since these men would become lords of the kingdom. This may well have been a trick of the devil, since before Huayna Capac's death the Governor [Pizarro] was already travelling down the coast of Peru, conquering the country.[50]

A "trick of the devil" is certainly a succinct way of explaining the spread of rumors about omens, predictions, and native deification of Spaniards. As the colonial period progressed, the subordinated status of natives in the Spanish colonies seemed to confirm that these were the kinds of people "in whose minds superstition and credulity go hand in hand," as a governor of Yucatan in the 1840s described the Mayas. The supposed substitution of sympathy for prejudice has not stopped modern-day commentators from likewise seeing natives as likely to have been "paralyzed by terror" as the invaders approached, and desperately hoping "for support from the 'gods' or 'divine emissaries.'"[51]

Two brief examples illustrate the state of the myth by the eighteenth century. One is the following comment by Ilarione da Bergamo, an Italian friar who learned of Mexican history from local Spanish settlers while traveling in the colony in the eighteenth century: "At the beginning of the war, that race [the Spaniards] had the reputation of being immortal, because they [the Indians] had not seen a single dead Spaniard, whether from natural or violent causes. They also said that Spaniards were children of the sun, and they thought the cavalryman was a single body of both horse and rider."[52] Eighteenth-century Spanish notions of the sixteenth-century native mentality cannot be taken as good evidence of that mentality. It seems unlikely for natives to assume that men on horses were a new type of creature when the riders were accompanied by other men who looked the same but were on foot. Indeed, Mesoamericans had never seen horses, but they had seen deer, and indeed

immediately began to call horses a type of deer.[53] Delight, not fear, was the reaction of the Chontal Maya king, Paxbolonacha, when invited by Cortés on the occasion of their initial meeting to ride for the first time on horseback into the Chontal capital.[54]

Similarly, it seems unlikely that natives would assume a man was a god pending his death as evidence of his mortality. The human experience leads us to assume, from a very young age, that people (in fact, all living creatures) are mortal, an assumption that would only logically be overturned by repeated acts of invincibility or resurrection. But the myth has no tales of such acts. Nor can we speculate on some sort of cultural exceptionalism on the part of Mesoamericans. There is plenty of evidence that they took death for granted much as other cultures do. One of the most important deities in Mesoamerica, the rain god and Earth god called Tlaloc by the Nahuas, was also a death god.[55] Furthermore, deification in Mesoamerica was postmortem, not premortem. The ruler Quetzalcoatl became a god, or became associated with the god of the same name, only after he died.[56] Finally, there are many more logical explanations for Spaniards being called “children of the sun.” For example, a lieutenant of Cortés, Pedro de Alvarado, was nicknamed Tonatiuh, “the sun,” by the Mexica because of his shock of blonde hair—no doubt his most notable feature from the perspective of the dark-haired natives. As we have seen, in the Andes the designator “son of the sun” was one of high status originally reserved for the Incas.

But the desolation myth, in all its various forms, fitted well with the perception of native peoples by eighteenth-century Europeans—and perhaps too with eighteenth-century native perceptions of their own pagan ancestors. It helped explain the Conquest and suggested a relationship of inequality and deference that was reflected in the structure of colonial society. Even when, a century and a half later, the Mexican Revolution gave rise to a new discourse on the nation’s past, the myth of Spanish apotheosis persisted under the misguided belief (or pretense) that it was a part of the native perspective on the Conquest.[57]

The other illustration of the state of the myth in the eighteenth century is found in a powerful parallel English myth known as the Black Legend. It originated in the rise of England as a world power in the late sixteenth century, in the global Catholic-Protestant conflict stemming from the Reformation, and in the consolidation of English-Spanish hostility in the decades after the Armada affair of 1588. The legend depicted the Spaniards as brutal and bloody colonists who systematically victimized their native subjects. It was perpetuated primarily by the English, later the British, drawing upon such sources as Las Casas, but by the late eighteenth century it was also conventional wisdom among other Protestants, such as the Dutch, the Prussians, and the Anglo population of the

new United States. While the Black Legend can be found in numerous sources over the centuries, an infrequently cited one efficiently evokes its relevance here. An epic poem published in 1775 by Mrs. Edward Jemingham, *The Fall of Mexico*, portrays Cortés as a diabolical genius and the Spanish as cold-blooded killers, with their native victims resigned to their fate but permitted by God to take revenge by cursing the Spanish Armada of 1588. Jemingham's poem thus unwittingly articulates a clear connection between the Black Legend and the myth of native desolation, with Mexico's natives "submissive" to their "fate" and able only to strike back at the conquistadors through the divine agency of the English.[58]

In the twentieth century the myth has received not only the support of many historians and writers, but also an indirect boost—and, in response, an assault—from an unexpected source. In contrast to examples from Latin America (that tend to take the myth's historical basis for granted), the case from eighteenth-century Hawaii has taken the form of a fierce debate between two highly articulate anthropologists. Marshall Sahlins has argued that the native Hawaiians took Captain Cook and his fellow British seamen to be gods, with the commoner women seeking—with the connivance of their husbands—to become pregnant by these "gods" in order to have children of high status and good fortune. Although the Hawaiian chiefs objected to this behavior and later redefined Cook as a mere human (for Cook, a fatal development), when the British captain first stepped ashore the Hawaiian lords and their subjects prostrated themselves before the *akua* (god), who had come from the Kahiki, the mythical homeland of divine and sacred chiefs.[59] Gananath Obeyesekere took issue with this interpretation, arguing that Westerners have tended to take literally and uncritically the sources that allegedly prove that natives did view Europeans as gods. Obeyesekere's principal concern is Sahlin's view of the apotheosis of Cook, but he also takes aim at Todorov and the myth of Cortés's apotheosis, arguing that the notion of "the European as a god to savages" is not a native tradition but one rooted in "European culture and consciousness."[60]

The interpretations by Sahlins and Obeyesekere of Hawaiian reactions to Cook, as different as they are, are arguably compatible explanations of adjacent aspects of a very complex encounter. Sahlins reminds us of the function of cultural consistency in human societies; how people tend to accommodate the new to the old, something we have seen with respect to Columbus and the Spaniards. Obeyesekere shows that political considerations are always relevant, in part because decisions made by the powerful have political motivations that are universally comprehensible. In colonial encounters, native peoples were not innately prone to esoteric thinking, but were as likely as Europeans to make choices based on "the pragmatics of common sense."[61]

Although Obeyesekere does not frame his argument in terms of a myth of native desolation or anomie, he does expose the way in which Western historians have tended to juxtapose a progressive and pragmatic Europe with a tradition-bound native world. In doing so, he connects the apotheosis myth to larger problems of European perceptions of Native Americans. The Spaniards-as-gods myth evolved over the centuries to take various forms, but all of them share a vision of Native Americans as so superstitious, credulous, and primitive in their reactions to the invaders as to be beneath reason or logic—and Spaniards as so superior in their technology and its manipulation as to be psychologically overwhelming. In a sense, the juxtaposition is between the subhuman and superhuman. But despite superficial differences of appearance, Spaniards looked and acted like human beings, and there is overwhelming evidence of myriad ways in which natives treated the invaders as such. The Spaniards-as-gods myth makes sense only if natives are assumed to be "primitive," childlike, or half-witted.

In 1539, Jerusalem was attacked by three Christian armies at once. One was an imperial force led by Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and king of Spain, accompanied by his brother, the king of Hungary, and French king Francis I. This army had come as reinforcements for a separate Spanish army led by the Count of Benavente. The third attacking force was the army of New Spain, led by Viceroy Mendoza. The battle raged for hours, until the Muslim defenders of Jerusalem finally capitulated. Their leader, "the Great Sultan of Babylon and Tetrarch of Jerusalem," was none other than "the Marqués del Valle, Hernando Cortés."

This battle did not actually take place in the Middle East, but in the vast central plaza of Tlaxcala, the Nahua city-state whose alliance with Cortés had proved crucial to his defeat of the Mexica empire almost two decades earlier. The mock battle, part of a day-long series of plays and battles, was staged on Corpus Christi day by the Tlaxcalans, with the possible assistance of Franciscan friars. One of the friars witnessed the spectacle and wrote an account of it, published soon after in Motolinía's *History of the Indians of New Spain*.[62]

While a mock battle in which the victorious armies are led by the Spanish king, the colonial Mexican viceroy, and a Spanish count prominent in colonial Mexican affairs might seem to be a celebration of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, Tlaxcala's theatrical "Conquest of Jerusalem" was hardly that. Cortés (played by a native Tlaxcalan actor) was not the victor in the drama, but the Sultan, doomed to defeat—and the captain general of the Moors was Pedro de Alvarado, the second most prominent Spaniard in the fall of Tenochtitlán and the subsequent conqueror of highland

Guatemala. As the losers, Cortés and Alvarado requested mercy and baptism, and admitted that they were the "natural vassals" of the Tlaxcalan-played Charles V—an interesting inversion of the conquistadors' claim that natives were naturally subject to Spaniards.[63] As possible insurance against Cortés's reacting negatively to his role in the play, the Tlaxcalans had the army of New Spain led by a Tlaxcalan playing the viceroy, don Antonio de Mendoza, with whom Cortés was in dispute in 1539 (resulting in Cortés's sailing to Spain later that year).[64]

The parts in the play were all played by Tlaxcalans. It was Tlaxcalan warriors, in their thousands, who took Jerusalem, just as 18 years earlier thousands of them had taken Tenochtitlán. And whereas the Tlaxcalans playing soldiers in the European armies all wore the same bland uniforms, the Tlaxcalans of the army of New Spain dressed as themselves—in the traditional multicolored costumes of the city-state's warriors, complete with feathered headdresses, "their richest plumage, emblems, and shields" (in the words of the Franciscan observer). The setting for the play was Tlaxcala's impressive new plaza, the size of four football fields, whose buildings, still under construction, became part of the elaborate scenery. An important aspect of the festival's political context was Tlaxcala's age-old rivalry with the Mexica, as the play was put on in part to trump a similar spectacle staged four months earlier in Mexico City and centered on an imaginary Spanish "Conquest of Rhodes" that was a thinly disguised Mexica reconquest of Mexico.[65] The "Conquest of Jerusalem" was thus a Tlaxcalan creation intended to glorify Tlaxcala's recent triumphs and current status as an important, if not the most important, *altepetl* or central Mexican city-state.

Called "the most spectacular and intellectually sophisticated theatrical event" of its time, Tlaxcala's 1539 Corpus Christi celebration is an especially rich illustration of the genre.[66] But it was by no means the only such festival in sixteenth-century Mexico, or indeed in colonial Spanish America. Throughout the colonies in Mesoamerica and the Andes, plays, dances, and mock battles were staged by native communities. Many persist to this day. All placed complex local spins on a mix of traditional native ritual performance and various elements of Spanish theatrical tradition. The effect, if not the purpose, of such festivals was to reconstruct the Conquest not as a historical moment of defeat and trauma, but as a phenomenon that transcended any particular historical moment and was transcended in turn by that local native community. These festivals were not commemorations of something lost, but celebrations of community survival, micropatriotic integrity, and cultural vitality.[67] Festivals of reconquest therefore represent the first of the seven indicators of Conquest-era and post-Conquest native vitality.

The second such indicator consists of other expressions of native denial or inversion of defeat. An extraordinarily rich body of sources illustrating this phenomenon with respect to Mesoamerica is contained within the genre referred to by scholars as the primordial title, or *título*. The *título* was a community history that promoted local interests, particularly related to land ownership, often those of the local dynasty or dominant noble families. Such documents were written down alphabetically, in native languages, all over Mesoamerica during the colonial period—but especially in the eighteenth century when land pressures mounted due to population growth among Spaniards and natives alike. Late-colonial *títulos* drew upon earlier sources, both written and oral, representing continuities from pre-Conquest histories and often including accounts of the Spanish invasion.[68] Maya accounts of the Conquest contained in *títulos* from Yucatan reveal that there was no single, homogeneous native view; perspectives were determined largely by differences of class, family, and region. Most of the Maya elite, however, tended to downplay the significance of the Conquest by emphasizing continuities of status, residency, and occupation from pre-Conquest times. Mayas placed the Spanish invasion, and the violence and epidemics it brought, within the larger context of history's cycles of calamity and recovery, relegating the Conquest to a mere blip in their long-term local experience.[69]

Another example of the localized nature of native responses to the Conquest come from the Valley of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. In the 1690s a legal dispute over land erupted between two native communities in the valley, one Nahua, the other Mixtec. In court, both submitted *títulos* to prove their cases, each complete with a brief Conquest account. The Nahua version of events of the 1520s asserted that Nahua warriors had come down to Oaxaca from central Mexico in response to a plea from the Zapotecs, who needed help defending themselves from the cannibalistic Mixtecs. Cortés approved the mission, but when he came to Oaxaca in the wake of Nahua victory, he and the Nahuas fell out and fought. The Nahuas won this battle too, and after this, the "original conquest," they settled in the valley on land granted to them.

In contrast, the Mixtec version claimed that Cortés came to the valley first, where he was welcomed by the Mixtecs, who gave Spaniards some land on which to settle. The trouble began when Cortés returned with a group of Nahuas, who started a fight and were soundly defeated by the Mixtecs. With Cortés as peace broker, the Mixtecs graciously allowed the Nahuas to settle in the valley. The boundaries of the land they were given were not surprisingly less generous in the Mixtec *título* than in the Nahua version.

In both versions, local community—or micropatriotic—identities remain paramount. There is no acceptance of the colonial division of peoples into Spaniards and "Indians," nor is there an

acceptance of the Conquest as either a Spanish initiative or a primarily Spanish triumph. Native defeat is not only denied, but inverted. Even the phrase "native defeat" is meaningless from a community perspective that views all outsiders in more or less the same way, whether they be Spaniards, Mixtecs, Nahuas, or Zapotecs—or even people of the same language group who live in a separate town.[70]

The third indicator of native vitality during the Conquest was the role played by natives as allies in the campaigns that followed the major wars of invasion. Although in the long run these campaigns usually (but not always) resulted in the spread of Spanish colonial rule, in the short run they often constituted local native exploitation of the Spanish presence to advance regional interests. For example, the armies of Nahua warriors who waged campaigns in what is now northern Mexico, southern Mexico, Yucatan, Guatemala, and Honduras helped create the colonial kingdom of New Spain and were led by Spanish captains. But the vast majority of those who fought were Nahuatl-speakers under their own officers. Many of them remained as colonists in new colonial towns such as Oaxaca, Santiago (Guatemala), Mérida, and Campeche, and their culture and language made a permanent mark on these regions. As symbolized by place-names in highland Guatemala to this day, Nahuatl became a lingua franca in New Spain. In many ways, these campaigns were a continuation of the Mexica expansionism that had gone almost unchecked for a century before the Spanish invasion.[71]

A slightly different type of example is that of the Chontal Maya expansion of the late sixteenth century under their king, Paxbolonacha. His simultaneous colonial identity was as don Pablo Paxbolon, the region's governor. Although the Chontal Mayas's first major contact with Spaniards was as early as 1525, not until the 1550s did the region become fully incorporated into the nearest Spanish colony, Yucatan. Beginning in the 1560s, and running continuously until his death in 1614, Paxbolon engaged in campaigns against neighboring Maya communities that had yet to be incorporated into the colony or that had slipped out of colonial control. The Spanish presence on most of these expeditions was minimal or nonexistent. Although Paxbolon had a license from Mérida permitting him to round up refugees and "idolaters," a Chontal Maya *título* written during his rule recorded such campaigns before and after the Spanish invasion, revealing the colonial ones to be little more than continuations of age-old slaving raids.[72]

Paxbolon's expansionism was a localized phenomenon, but so were all cases of native military activity after the Spanish invasion—from Nahua campaigns after the fall of the Mexica empire to campaigns by Andean warriors for decades after the capture and execution of Atahuallpa. Local circumstances produced regional variations, but the general pattern reveals considerable native

military activity during the Conquest and after it was supposedly over, not always directed against Spaniards but often pursued to advance local native interests.

The historian Charles Gibson, in his seminal study of colonial Tlaxcala, remarked that there were times when "Indians accepted one aspect of Spanish colonization in order to facilitate their rejection of another."[73] This situation is illustrated by the role often played by native élites, whose partial and complex collaboration in Conquest and colonial agendas represents the fourth antidesolation indicator. At the highest level of native leadership, that of the Mexica and Inca emperors, such collaboration served only to buy time. But while Moctezuma and Atahuallpa lived, even as captives, their policies of collaboration and appeasement served to save native lives and prevent full-scale wars. The Moctezuma of myth—invented by Franciscans and Tlatelolcans and perpetuated by modern historians from Prescott to Tuchman—was no artful collaborator. But the real Moctezuma was the most successful ruler the Mexica empire had known; "the most dynamic, the most aggressive, the most triumphantly self-confident of all," in Fernández-Armesto's words, Moctezuma "outstripped all predecessors" with campaigns that ranged over some 150,000 square miles and continued even after Cortés had taken up residence in Tenochtitlán. Cortés later claimed to have captured Moctezuma soon after reaching the city, but it is clear from descriptions of the emperor's activities in other Spanish and native sources that his arrest did not take place for months. Meanwhile, the Mexica ruler spun a web of confusion around the Spaniards, who remained unsure right up to their disastrous and bloody escape from Tenochtitlán whether to expect submission, deadly duplicity, or open hostility.[74] Atahuallpa's capture was more immediate, but even as a captive he was able to plot and strategize, temporarily containing the Spaniards and using them to win his own war against his brother.

The high status of Moctezuma and Atahuallpa made them unsuited in the long run for the roles of puppet rulers and condemned them to death at the hands of Spaniards. Lesser native rulers, however, were able to negotiate their way out of captivity and execution, or avoid imprisonment altogether, and be confirmed in office by the colonial authorities. Don Pablo Paxbolon is a good example of such a ruler who was able to maintain this dual status throughout his long reign/rule, partly because his small kingdom was of relatively little interest to Spaniards. In contrast, Manco Inca Yupanqui's kingdom attracted so much Spanish attention that he soon rebelled against his dual status. As well as being Inca (meaning "emperor") by right of succession, Manco was confirmed in office as regent of Peru by the Spaniards in 1534 and was supposed to function as a puppet of the colonial régime (see Figure 16). But by 1536 the conditions of compromise had become too onerous, and the abuse of the Inca's family and retainers by the Pizarros and their associates had become intolerable. Manco fled

the capital of Cuzco, raised an army, and laid siege to the city for a year before retreating into the Andes, where an independent Inca kingdom lasted until 1572. Meanwhile, in 1560, Manco's son Titu Cusi became Inca, later becoming baptized and negotiating a rapprochement with the Spanish. Although his brother, Tupac Amaru, and other family members were executed in 1572 as rebels, Titu Cusi, his descendents, and other members of the Inca nobility were able to maintain considerable economic and political status within colonial Peru for centuries.[75]

Fig. 16. "Manco Inca, raised up as Inca king," in Nueva corónica y buen gobierno, *by don Felipe Huaman Poma de Ayala (1615).*

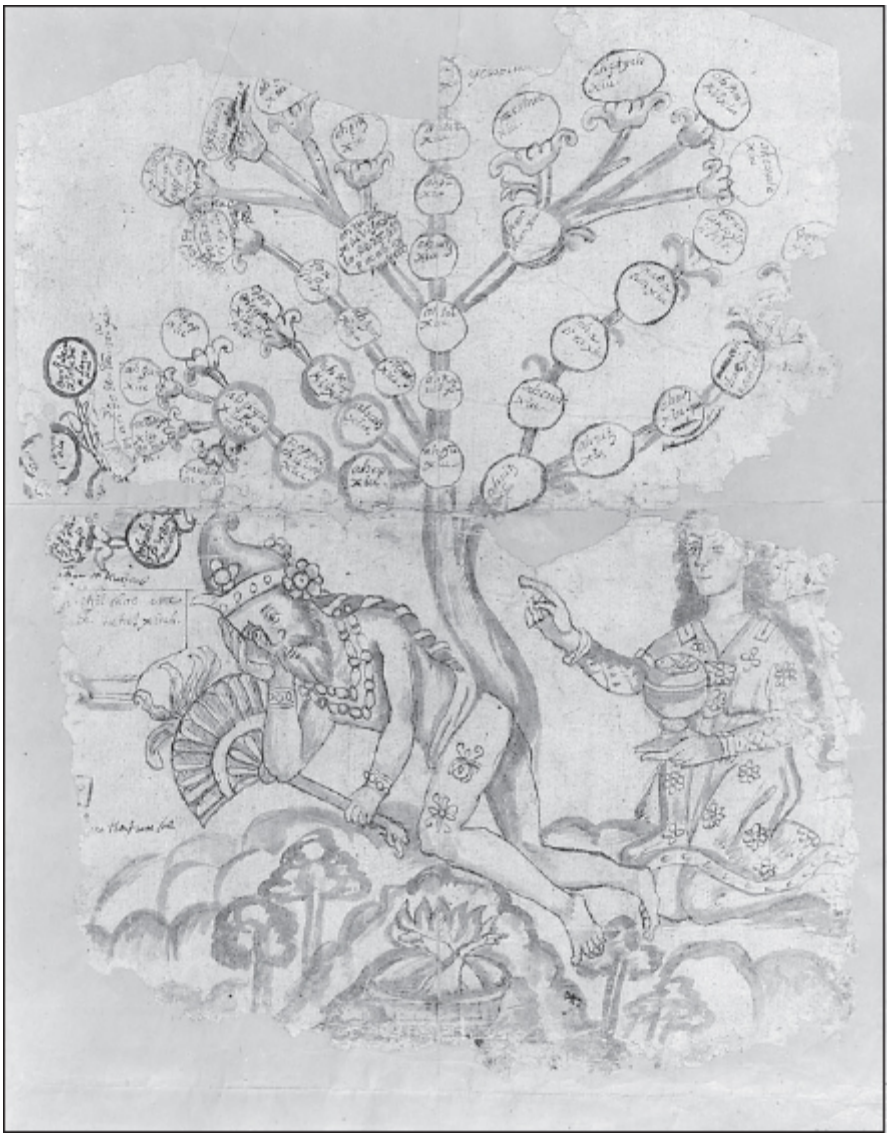

Fig. 17. "The Xiu Family Tree," probably by Gaspar Antonio Chi (c. 1557), updated by don Juan Xiu (c. 1685).

Inca survival paralleled in many ways the perpetuation of status by Moctezuma's relatives and descendents. While they lacked their pre-Conquest political clout, their local social and economic significance was underpinned by confirmation of titles and honors by the Spanish crown.[76] Likewise, most of the highest-ranking noble Maya families, as a result of protracted negotiations through a Conquest decades long, succeeded in preserving their local status as community rulers in return for accepting Spanish political authority at a regional level. The Spanish governor of Yucatan became the *halach uinic* (provincial ruler) but the noblemen of dynasties such as the Cocom, Pech, and Xiu remained as *batabob* (local rulers or town governors) for the next three centuries.

The Xiu were among the most powerful noble families in Yucatan before and after the Conquest.[77] Figure 17 illustrates through the medium of a family tree the perpetuation of the Xiu dynasty's sense of historical legitimacy through the Conquest period. The semimythical founding couple are supposed to have lived centuries before the Conquest, while the named individuals run from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. Drawn in the 1550s by Gaspar Antonio Chi, and updated over a century later by a member of one branch of the family, the tree exhibits a complex mix of Maya, Nahua, and Spanish cultural elements. The image evocatively exhibits the blend of change and continuity, compromise and survival that underscored élite native adaptation to colonial rule.

Most of the Xiu noblemen named in Figure 17 served as *batabob*, illustrating the flourishing of the native municipal community from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries—the fifth indicator of postinvasion native vitality. One of the native mechanisms of adaptation to colonial rule that fostered the golden age of the native town was the ready adoption of the Spanish *cabildo* (town council). The *cabildo*'s election, offices, and functions Spaniards imposed on native towns early in the colonial period—or at least, Spaniards assumed they did. In fact, native élites only appeared to create Spanish-style *cabildos*. Their "elections," if held at all, were but a veneer covering traditional factional maneuvers and cycles of power sharing. Spanish titles such as *alcalde* (judge) and *regidor* (councilman) were adopted, but the numbers, rankings, and functions of the officers followed local traditions, while many *cabildos* contained officers with pre-Conquest titles. In some cases municipal governors were Spanish appointed, but in many more instances native governors continued to function as they had before the Conquest, even keeping precolonial titles, ruling for life and passing the positions on to their sons.[78]

While Spaniards viewed native *cabildos* as products of colonialism, natives initially adopted the framework of the *cabildo* as a superficial change and then soon came to view it as a local institution rather than a colonial one. This double perception is another example of Double Mistaken Identity, whereby both Spaniards and natives viewed the same concept or way of doing something as rooted in their own culture. In this way, the native borrowing of Spanish cultural elements did not represent native culture loss or decline, but rather adaptability and vitality (the sixth indicator of post-Conquest native cultural vitality). Natives tended to view borrowings—be they Spanish words, concepts, ways of counting, of worship, of building houses, or of town planning—not as loans but as part of community practice and custom. They viewed them not as Spanish, nor even as native, but as local. And they were able to do this because of the integrity and flourishing of semi-autonomous municipal communities. By the end of the colonial period, there was little about native culture in most of Spanish America that (in James Lockhart's words) "could safely be declared to have been entirely

European or entirely indigenous in origin. The stable forms that emerged in the long run often owed so much to both antecedents, with many elements having been similar from the beginning and others now interwoven and integrated, that identifying what belonged to which antecedent becomes to a large extent impossible, and even beside the point."[79]

Just as the violence and drama of the Spanish invasion gave way to gradual cultural change, so did the immediate tragedy of native population decline give way in the long run to opportunities of various kinds. The Andean chronicler Huaman Poma warned in 1615 that the "Indians are coming to an end," and in demographic terms, a century after Spaniards began their conquests on the American mainland, this almost seemed a real possibility. The rapid decline in the Native American population, beginning in 1492 and continuing well into the seventeenth century, has been called a holocaust. In terms of absolute numbers and the speed of demographic collapse—a drop of as many as 40 million people in about a century—it is probably the greatest demographic disaster in human history.[80]

But the decline was not a holocaust in the sense of being the product of a genocide campaign or a deliberate attempt to exterminate a population. Spanish settlers depended upon native communities to build and sustain their colonies with tribute, produce, and labor. Colonial officials were extremely concerned by the demographic tragedy of Caribbean colonization, where the native peoples of most islands became extinct within a few decades. That concern mounted with evidence of massive mortality on the mainland during—and even preceding—Spanish invasions. What Spaniards did not fully understand was the degree to which disease caused this disaster. The arguments of a vocal minority—of whom Las Casas remains the best known—that colonial brutality was the principal cause of the natives seeming to "come to an end" were taken seriously by the crown. As a result, edicts were regularly passed that were designed to protect natives from colonial excesses. Their impact was limited, but they reflected the important fact that Spaniards needed Native Americans to survive and proliferate, even if this was only so they could be exploited.

The combination of population decline and Spanish colonial dependence upon a shrinking—and then very slow growing—native population actually provided opportunities for the survivors. One type of opportunity was political. The relative stability of the ruling élite in Yucatan, and the few instances of upstart families acquiring power as a result, was not paralleled everywhere in Spanish America. In the Riobamba region of colonial Quito, for example, the pre-Inca élite and the surviving families among the local Inca nobility vied for power within the crucible of the Conquest and colonial rule. The situation was skillfully manipulated by the Duchiselas, a family that was prominent in the area before the Inca conquest but not a ruling dynasty. The family welcomed the 1534 Spanish expedition under Sebastián de Benalcázar and as a result was granted a local lordship.

By the 1570s they parlayed this into the governorship of the town of Yaruquíes. Over the next two centuries the Duchiselas consolidated considerable regional political power, established a land-based family fortune, and largely succeeded in inventing the dynasty's deep-rooted historical legitimacy.[81]

The Duchisela family fortune was land based, and by the early seventeenth century its patriarch, don Juan, and his wife, doña Isabel Carrillo, owned almost a thousand hectares of land. Indeed, land was another arena of native opportunity in the Conquest's wake. Contrary to common belief, Spaniards did not come to the Americas to acquire land. The goal of conquistadors was to receive an *encomienda*, a grant of native tribute and labor—not land. The Spanish pressure on native communities to give up or sell land was not serious until later in the colonial period. In the sixteenth century there was a great deal more land available to natives than before the Conquest. And with the advent of iron and steel tools and a new array of crops and domesticated animals, there were new opportunities for working that land.[82]

To be sure native peoples in sixteenth-century Spanish America faced epidemics of lethal disease and onerous colonial demands. But they did not sink into depression and inactivity because of the Conquest. Instead they tenaciously sought ways to continue local ways of life and improve the quality of life even in the face of colonial changes and challenges. Furthermore, the decline in population did not mean that native culture declined in some or any sense. Native cultures evolved more rapidly and radically in the colonial period as a result of exposure to Spanish culture and the need to adapt to new technologies, demands, and ways of doing things. But as historians of late-medieval Europe have observed, when populations were periodically decimated by plagues and epidemics, this did not result in culture loss.

All of this is ignored by the myth of native desolation, which subsumes into "nothingness" the complex vitality of native cultures and societies during and after the Conquest.[83] As Inga Clendinnen puts it, the mythic or "conventional story of returning gods and unmanned autocrats, of an exotic world paralyzed by its encounter with Europe, for all its coherence and its just-so inevitabilities, is in view of the evidence like Eliza's progression across the ice floes: a matter of momentary sinking balances linked by desperate forward leaps."[84] The next chapter looks at those floes—specifically, the notion of Spanish superiority—and reveals that the ice is thin indeed.