Natural Aristocracy, Virtue, and Slavery in 

*Jicoténcal*

Thomas Genova*

This paper will explore the relationships between virtue, slavery, “race” (in the phenotypical sense as well as that of aristocratic lines), and republican citizenship in the anonymous novel *Jicoténcal* (1826),¹ in light of the notion of “natural aristocracy,” as explained by Thomas Jefferson in his October 28th 1813 letter to John Adams. I will consider the implications of the novel's probable Cuban origins for its interpretation as well as the work’s place in the broader intellectual context of transatlantic republican thought.²

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* Thomas Genova is Ph. D. Student in Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz.


2 The book’s anonymous status, as well as its initial North American publication, has given rise to many theories about its authorship over the years. Henríquez Ureña argues that the author was almost certainly Mexican, while Anderson Imbert feels that he could have been a Spaniard. Rojas Garcidueñas, meanwhile, proposes simply that he was a Spanish American liberal. Luis Leal has pointed to Félix Varela, a liberal Cuban priest who lived the latter part of his life exiled in Philadelphia and New York, as the probable author, mostly for reasons of ideological and linguistic similarity between the novel and other texts known to have been authored by Varela. González Acosta, on the other hand, identifies Cuban poet José María Heredia as the author, also by means of linguistic comparison with the writer’s signed works. Most recently, Anna Brickhouse has suggested that the novel was produced by a triumvirate of Spanish American exiles in Philadelphia, arguing that Heredia drafted the work, the Ecuadorian Vicente Rocafuerte revised it, and Varela had it submitted for publication.
A pro-republican, anticolonial rewriting of New World history, the novel deals with the Spanish invasion of Mexico from the perspective of the Tlascaltecas. A “republic” that has been subjugated by the “despotic” Montezuma, Tlascala decides to side with Cortés against the Mexica, a move bitterly opposed by the Jicoténcals, a father and son who hold positions of leadership in the republic. Jicoténcal the Younger is eventually killed by Cortés for his opposition. Meanwhile, Teutila, his wife from a neighboring city-state, dies after a frustrated attempt to kill Cortés. The work constitutes a projection of the Cuba of 1826—still a colony while the countries of the Spanish Main had already achieved independence—onto early sixteenth century Mexico, deploying the Tlaxcaltecas as figurations of the upper-class Euro-American criollos of the colonial elite. The pre-Conquest Tlaxcalan republic serves as a space for the novel to discuss the limits and possibilities of republican government in the early nineteenth-century Americas.

The author employs the definition of “republic” given by Rousseau in *Du Contrat Social* as a society in which “chacun de nous met en commun sa personne et toute sa puissance sous la suprême direction de la volonté générale; et nous reçevons en corps chaque membre comme partie indivisible du tout” [“each of us puts his person and all of his power into the common pool under the supreme direction of the

Regardless of who the author was, it seems likely that he was Cuban. González Acosta notes that the text includes many words that were only used in Cuba at the time of the novel’s publication, such as “caobo,” “majagua,” and “ceiba” (149). He attributes the novel’s Mexican setting to “una antigua tradición insular…compuesta por la atención literaria cubana hacia la historia mexicana” [“an old insular tradition…consisting of Cuban literary attention to Mexican history] as evidenced by texts such as Heredia’s poems “Oda a los habitantes de Anáhuac,” “Las sombras,” “A los mexicanos, en 1829,” “Al Popocatepetl,” and En el Teocalli de Cholula;” Plácido’s poem “jicoténcal;” and Gómez de Avellaneda’s 1846 novel *Gutzimotzin, último emperador de México* (126). The geographical description of Tlascala, which, according to the novel, “se extendía más de Oriente a Poniente que de Norte a Sur” [“extended farther from East to West than from North to South”] – much as Cuba does – also suggests a Caribbean origin for the text (4). Moreover, as Leal points out in his “Introduction” to the Arte Público edition of the novel, the text contains a number of errors regarding Mexican geography, suggesting that the author lacked a deep knowledge of the region. Perhaps most importantly, anticolonial in nature, the novel would be out of place on the Spanish Main, which, by 1826, was already fully liberated from Spain and ruled entirely by republican governments. For these reasons, I assume Cuban (or Cuban-American) authorship in my discussion of the novel.

3 The Mexica are more commonly known as the Aztecs.

4 For information about the historical Tlaxcala, see Abasolo. *Tlascala en la conquista de México: El mito de la traición.*
general will; and we receive as a group each member as an indivisible part of the whole”] (24). Such a community necessarily does away with social hierarchies, as, according to Rousseau “the general will” tends towards “equality”—at least among citizens (55). However, the philosopher points out that the success of the egalitarian republic is contingent upon the citizens’ “virtue”—a term that Jefferson later employs in his explanation of “natural aristocracy.” In this paper, I will argue that Jicoteacatl presents a seemingly egalitarian vision of republicanism based on civic virtue—that is, the orientation of one’s energies towards the good of the nation—but that that vision is complicated by the way that the text understands “virtue” to exclude certain groups, particularly Afro-Hispanics, from public life. The virtue of the natural aristocracy presented by the novel serves to imagine a republican community that replaces Spanish feudal dynasticism with bourgeois civil society while conserving certain aspects of the colonial socio-political structure.

**Historical Background, Historical Fiction: National Romance as a Containment of Radical Anti-Racist Energy**

The question of republicanism became particularly important in Spanish America in the aftermath of the 1808 Napoleonic invasion of Spain, which forced monarch Fernando VII into exile and prompted the drafting of the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz by a committee of delegates from all over the Spanish Empire. Despite the liberal legacy of Cádiz, the European thinkers cited by Spanish American independentistas tend to be French. Richard Herr suggests that “the defeat of the constitutional regimes” by the returning Fernando VII, who refused to accept the new Constitution, “brought an end to the moment of Hispanic revolutionary inspiration,” in addition to precipitating the revolt of the Spanish American colonies. “European liberals began once more to look to France, and in Spanish America Benjamin Constant, Jeremy Bentham, and later Alexis de Tocqueville were taken up as prophets” (94-95). The Gallic influence on Spanish American liberal thought has lead some historians to view the independence of the Spanish colonies as an elite movement lead by, in Eric Hobsbawm’s somewhat condescending words, “small groups of patricians, soldiers and gallicized évolués,” ignoring local particularities and “leaving the mass of the Catholic poor-white population passive and the Indians indifferent or hostile” to their efforts to inaugurate European-style republics (175).

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5 All of the translations are my own.
That said, in recent years “a more fragmented and contingent understanding of independence” has also “taken shape, less triumphalist than earlier nationalist histories but also more attuned to the democratic potential of Latin America’s Age of Revolution” (Schmidt-Nowara 230). Juan Marchena points out that “el mundo pre-independista no es precisamente un rebalse de paz” (“The pre-independence world wasn’t exactly a reservoir of peace”). Rather, he notes, there were uprisings against corruption and inequality throughout Latin America before the Napoleonic invasion. While the 1780 Tupac Amaru rebellion in Peru and the 1795 Coro Rebellion in Venezuela may be the most famous examples, Marchena notes that, for example, in 1806, the peninsulares of Buenos Aires rebelled against the tax laws. Meanwhile, the popular uprisings in Mexico in and before 1810 provided the impetus for the independence movements in that country. Citing Haiti as a paradigmatic example, he notes that the goals of these movements were not those of the French enlightened republicanism that the Creole elites later espoused, as political and economic liberty could mean little to slaves, peons, and menial workers. In this way, Marchena presents a vision of independence “from below” that traditionally has been marginalized in official histories.

Though at first, the popular revolts against Spanish rule “received tacit, sometimes even active, support from the local and regional elites, who also had their grievances against Bourbon policy and who were initially willing to use the rebellions as tools for obtaining royal redress for those grievances…. as the rebellions followed their course, attracting...tens of thousands of followers and generating calls for an end to slavery and forced Indian labor, the dominant class could not ignore their potential revolutionary content” (Reid 117). Moreover, “the Haitian Revolution,” and similar, failed revolts, “offered convincing evidence of the destructive forces contained within the structure of colonial society” (124). Fearful that the radical energy unleashed against the Spaniards might turn against them after independence, the criollo elites took great pains to limit popular participation in the post-colonial nation-states. For example, Bolívar, in his “Discurso de Angostura,” says:

No aspiremos a lo imposible, no sea que por elevarnos sobre la región de la libertad, descendamos a la región de la tiranía. De la libertad absoluta se desciende siempre al poder absoluto, y el medio entre estos dos términos es la suprema libertad social. Teorías abstractas son las que producen la perniciosa idea de una libertad ilimitada. Hagamos que la fuerza pública se contenga en los límites que la razón y el interés prescriben: que la voluntad nacional se contenga en los límites que un justo poder le señala: que una legislación civil y criminal, análoga a nuestra actual constitución domine imperiosamente sobre el poder judiciario, y entonces habrá un equilibrio, y no habrá el choque que
[Let us not aspire to the impossible such that, raising ourselves above the region of liberty, we descend into the region of tyranny. Absolute liberty descends always into absolute power, and the mean between those two points is supreme social liberty. Abstract theories are all that the pernicious idea of unlimited liberty can produce. Let us have public strength check itself at the limits that reason and interest prescribe. May the national will check itself at the limits that just power indicates for it. May a civil and criminal legislation analogous to our present constitution rule imperiously over the judiciary, and then there will be a balance, and there will not be a clash that hinders the march of the state and there will not be such complications that weigh down, instead of unite, society.]

In Marixa Lasso’s words, then, Bolívar “feared not that the popular classes would remain aloof from modern politics but that they would participate too much” (3).

The historiographic reinterpretation of caste and class politics in the independence movements calls for a reconsideration of the social implications of the literature from the period. According to Doris Sommer, nineteenth-century criollo writers deployed “foundational romances” in novel form in order to help “solve the problem of establishing the white man’s legitimacy in the New World,” that was threatened by the social and political movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (15). Drawing on Benedict Anderson’s theorization of the importance of the novel for nation-building, Sommer argues that these narratives played a crucial role in the development of nationalism in Latin America, educating readers as to the human borders of the nation through the topos of the foundational couple, which served to establish and justify social hierarchies for the newly-formed Spanish American republics by uniting certain elements of the population in the national family, while excluding others.

Frequently, these foundational romances take the form of historical novels – often, like Jicoténcal, set in “the colonial period or the pre-Hispanic civilizations” (Brushwood 5-6). As Aida Cometta Manzini comments in El indio en la novela de América, this translated into a literary interest in indigenous themes. She attributes the decision to political struggles which “engendran un repudio hacia todo lo español y, como consecuencia lógica, un acercamiento al indio,” perhaps due to the influence of French romanticism” (“create a rejection of things Spanish and, as a result, a rapprochement with the Indian”) (11). This does
not mean, however, that foundational historical novels are, in general, particularly interested in the social and political concerns of the indigenous. In *Jicoténal*, for instance, the Amerindian characters, as I have already said, serve as figurations for the criollo elite. This substitution is common in nineteenth-century Cuban literature, and can be seen in works such as Heredia's poem “Las sombras” and Gómez de Avellaneda's novel *Guatimozín*. Just as important is the fact that the text of the novel does not refer to the Amerindians as “indios,” as would have been common at the time that the novel was written. Instead, when the indigenous are marked ethno-racially on a transnational level, the term used is “americanos,” which is the semantic opposite of “europeos” and not “ blancos” (Pagden). In this schema, the Amerindians of *Jicoténal* lose their referential specificity and become simple binary opposites of the European despots.

**The Virtuous Republic**

The novel’s opening makes clear this Manichean conflict between Spanish despotic vice and New World republican virtue. In the first paragraph, the “republica de Tlascal” is juxtaposed with the Spanish “bárbaros medio salvajes” [“half-savage barbarians”] who subject the Amerindian “sociedades civiles” to “trastornos inacapes de descriptirse” [“indescribable disturbances”] (3). Likewise, Carlos V, Emperor of Spain at the time of the Conquest of Mexico, is characterized in the second paragraph of the novel as a “déspota,” while the Tlascaltecas are “simple” “republicanos valientes aguerridos” [“brave republican warriors”] (3). By describing the Tlascalans in both political and moral terms in the successive paragraphs, the narrator establishes a link between republicanism and moral virtue, a link that is made clear later on when Jicoténal the Younger claims that “a la sombra de nuestras leyes seguimos nosotros el camino de la virtud y de la gloria, y con ellas hemos ligando cuanto hay de bueno en la sociedad” [“in the shadow of our laws we follow the path of virtue and glory, and with them we have bounded all that is good in society”] (51). The law may be the foundation of Tlascala’s republic, but virtue and glory are necessary to create a model society.

The need for a virtuous political class was felt widely throughout the Americas during the early republican period by thinkers such as Bolívar, Varela, Jefferson, and Heredia.6 It seems likely that this idea is drawn from *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), in which Montesquieu argues that republican

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6 In addition to the works by Bolivar, Jefferson, and Varela discussed in this paper, see Heredia’s articles on corruption in *El Conservador*, 15th June - 13th August 1831. *Niagra y otros textos (poesía y prosa selecta)*. Ed. Augier.
governments are founded on the principle of virtue. He argues that, while “il ne faut pas beaucoup de probité, pour qu’un gouvernement monarchique ou despotique se maintienne ou se soutienne” [“not much probity is needed for a monarchical or despotic government to maintain or sustain itself”] because “la force des lois dans l’un, le bras du prince toujours levé dans l’autre, reglent ou contiennent tout” [“the force of the laws in the one, the arm of the prince always raised in the other, rule or contain everything”], “dans un état populaire, il faut ressort du plus, qui est la vertu” [“in a popular state, another means is necessary. That is virtue”] (39-40). He feels that “lorsque cette vertu cesse, l’ambition entre dans les coeurs qui peuvent la recevoir, et l’avarice entre dans tous” [“when this virtue ceases, ambition enters into the hearts of those who can receive it, and greed enters into all”] (42). Yet, how is the European republican notion of virtue, conceived as a counter-discourse to the dynastic system of pre-Revolutionary France, modified when adapted to fit the particular needs of the New World colonial caste hierarchies, which are based both on family networks and racial phenotype?

A genealogical overview of the discourse of “virtue” may prove helpful. In La ciudad y el campo (1966), Julio Caro Baroja explains that “la palabra honor, o honos-honoris, tiene muchas acepciones en latín clásico. Se asocia así con las ideas de consideración, estima, gloria; se liga con la existencia de dignidades y magistraturas públicas, recompensas, ornamentos y vestidos que realzan al que los lleva ante los demás” [“the word honor, or honos-honoris, has many acceptences in classical Latin. It is associated with notions of consideration, esteem, and glory. It is tied to the existence of public dignitaries and magistrates, compensations, ornaments and dress that elevated those that wore them above the rest”] (66). In the Middle Ages, the term comes to have two referents:

1. El orgullo de sangre, que es sentimiento muy cultivado por los pueblos llamados bárbaros, tales como visigodos, ostrogodos, frances, etc. 2: La convicción de que los hombres buenos constituyen, ante todo, una comunidad de fieles, idea que se deriva de la propaganda cristina y que…tiende a restringir de modo considerable los principios éticos difundidos en época clásica, en la que la comunidad era de ciudadanos ante todo (67).

[1. Pride in one’s blood, which is a highly cultivated feeling among the so-called barbarous peoples, such as the Visigoths, the Ostrogoths, the Franks, etc. 2: The conviction that good men constitute, above all, a community of the faithful, an idea derived from Christian propaganda and which...tends to restrict considerably the ethical principles disseminated in the Classical period, in which the community was made up of citizens above all else.]
In the thirteenth century, a series of “enfamamientos” (“infamements”)?, such as illegitimacy or adultery, that stripped people of their honor, were codified (70-71). The existence of these enfamamientos results in the “inca pacitación o inhabilidad para cargos, tales como los de juez, consejero real o de concejo, vocero o cargo público en general” [the incapacitation or inability for positions such as judge, royal advisor, or member of an advisory panel, spokesperson, or public employment in general] (71-72). At the same time, the twin notions of “valer más” [to be worth more] and “valer menos” [to be worth less] entered into law. “El ‘valer menos’ ocurría por cosas tales como manifestar cobardía, incumplir la palabra dada o desdecirse” [“Being worth less occurred for things such as showing cowardice, not keeping one’s word, or recanting something one has said”] while “el ‘valer más’ parece haberse conseguido sólo con las armas en la mano y sin atender casi nunca a principios de templanza y de valor sereno y justo” [“being worth more seems only to have been attainable with weapons in one’s hands or by almost always disregarding the principles of temperance and of just and serene valor”] (74).

The notion of valer más “está ligado con una idea de la honra que no es individual, sino con una especie de honor colectivo” [“is bound up with an idea of honor that is not individual, but a sort of collective honor”] which adjusts itself to “un sistema de linajes patrilineales” [“a system of patrilineal lineage”] in which “las glorias de un individuo del linaje alcanza [sic] a la totalidad de éste, las vergüenzas también” [the glories of an individual from the line extend to the entire line, and his shames, too] (76).

Later, the consolidation of the absolute monarchy and the creation of a court during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when Jicoténcal takes place, lead to a conception of honor based on noble rank (90-91). Meanwhile, with the contemporaneous establishment of the Inquisition and the persecution of conversos suspected of secretly maintaining the Jewish faith, the question of limpieza de sangre [“cleanness of blood,” or, the absence of Jewish ancestry] became important in Spanish society, as a lack of limpieza rendered one ineligible for noble honors and public office (92-97). This situation continued until the eighteenth century, when the ascendancy of bourgeois commercial interests led to the replacement of honor with virtue as the organizing principal of society (116-118) and the eventual suspension, in the nineteenth century, of “las penas de infamias hereditarias” [“penalties for hereditary infamies”] (121).

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7 The term is a neologism in Spanish.
This Enlightenment notion of virtue has its origins in classical thought. Aristotle attempts to explain the concept in the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, arguing that virtue is “a kind of mean [and] aims at what is intermediate”:

Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme (Chapter 6 n. p.).

An embracing of reason and moderation over the boundless heroism of the “valer más” and the character of an individual over the accomplishments of one’s ancestors, “virtue” seems an appropriate ideology for the temperate and individualistic bourgeoisie. Yet, even in classical times, the discourse of virtue retained a certain aristocratic character. In Book VIII of the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle, attempting to explain why some are more fortunate in their endeavors than others, writes that:

Things are fine when that for which men do them and choose them is fine. Therefore to the noble man the things good by nature are fine; for what is just is fine, and what is according to worth is just, and he is worthy of these things; and what is befitting is fine, and these things befit him—wealth, birth, power. Hence for the noble man the same things are both advantageous and fine; but for the multitude these things do not coincide, for things absolutely good are not also good for them, whereas they are good for the good man; and to the noble man they are also fine, for he performs many fine actions because of them. But he who thinks that one ought to possess the virtues for the sake of external goods does fine things only by accident. Nobility then is perfect goodness (n.p.).

Thus, noble people have greater access to virtue than common people, suggesting that, even if the Aristotelian concept of virtue does not rely on bloodlines – as do the Hispano-feudal notions of honor and valer más – it is

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8 On bourgeois cultural values, see Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic.*
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still not a leveling force in society. Aristotle makes this clear in Book III of the *Politics*, where he claims that “no man can practice virtue who is living the life of a mechanic or laborer” – occupations that are incompatible with the contemplative lifestyle that he believes to be essential to the acquisition of virtue (Chapter 5 n. p.).

As a result, according to Aristotle, “at Thebes there was a law that no man could hold office who had not retired from business for ten years” (Chapter 5 n. p.). At the same time, however, he feels that “the noble, or free-born, or rich, may with good reason claim office; for holders of offices must be freemen and taxpayers: a state can be no more composed entirely of poor men than entirely of slaves” (Chapter 12 n. p.). Though he believes that “justice and valor” are necessary qualities in the leaders of a state (Chapter 12 n. p.), he also believes that “those who are sprung from better ancestors are likely to be better men, for nobility is excellence of race” (Chapter 13 n. p.). In sum, Aristotle does not embrace the hereditary lines of honor and infamy that would become dominant in medieval thought but, rather, advocates for an aristocracy in the etymological sense of the word: government by the best. It so happens, however, that the best tend to come from select families.

This slippery notion of virtue is significant for discourses on citizenship during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the nascent bourgeoisie revives the term as the bulwark of civil society. Article VI of the 1789 “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” for example, states that “tous les Citoyens, étant égaux” [“all Citizens, being equal”] before the law “sont également admissibles à toutes dignités, places et emplois publics, selon leur capacité, et sans autre distinction que celle de leurs vertus et de leurs talents” [“are equally admissible to all dignities, appointments, and public employment, according to their ability, and without any distinction beside that of their virtues and talents”], in this way replacing the hereditary privileges of the nobility with rights based on “talents and virtues.” The bourgeois notion of virtue referenced in the Article, however, is not incompatible with the idea of aristocracy, as can be seen in Thomas Jefferson's famous 1813 letter to John Adams on natural aristocracy. Perhaps quoting the French document, Jefferson writes that:

There is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents….There is also an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents; for with these it would belong to the first class. The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed it would have been
inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society. May we not even say that that form of government is the best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural *aristoi* into the offices of government? The artificial aristocracy is a mischievous ingredient in government, and provision should be made to prevent its [sic] ascendancy (n.p.).

On the one hand, the notion of natural aristocracy represents a counter-discourse to the hereditary honor of the medieval period and the divine right of kings, advocating instead for government by a “best” class determined not by accidents of birth, but by virtue. On the other, the aristocracy proposed by Jefferson is a hybrid institution, marrying the feudal concept of aristocracy to the bourgeois principle of virtue.

But, what is this virtue, exactly? The anonymous author of *Jicoténcal* seems to understand the term as Rousseau does in the “*Discours sur l'économie politique*” (1755) as “cette conformité de la volonté particulière à la générale” [“that conformity of the individual will to the particular”] (n.p.). Echoing ideas set forth by Montesquieu in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), he adds that “les plus grands prodiges de vertu ont été produits par l'amour de la patrie” [“the greatest marvels of virtue have been produced by the love of the patrie”]. He offers Cato as an example of virtue as love of the patrie, noting that the Roman statesman sought the happiness of all his countrymen, while the philosopher Socrates, for example, possessed a lesser form of virtue because he sought only his own happiness (n.p.).

The author of *Jicoténcal*, too, holds this love of the patria above all else. When Teutila is imprisoned by Cortés, for example, Jicoténcal the Elder comments that his son’s beloved is “indignamente oprimida,” [“undeservingly oppressed”] and that “fácil le sería” [“it would be easy”] for the Young Jicoténcal to attack “por sorpresa su prisión y no le faltarían bravos que le ayudasen” [“her prison by surprise and he would not lack brave men who would help him”]. Yet, Jicoténcal the Younger, “también tiene una patria y sabe que debe sacrificarle sus pasiones, y este sufrimiento y esta conformidad…hacen ver que Tlascala tiene todavía vida y vigor” [“also has a patria and knows that he should sacrifice his passions to it. This suffering and this acceptingness…show that Tlascala still has life and vigor”] (52). The young Jicoténcal should [debe] “sacrifice his passions” to the patria, virtuously privileging *el deber*, or “duty” over “passion” and personal desires, thereby ensuring the “life and vigor” of the Tlascalan republic.
Reproducing Virtue

When the younger Jicoténcal finally marries Teutila, his father advises him not to “dejarte seducir por los dulces placeres de tu nuevo estado cuando la voz de la patria te llame en su socorro” [“allow yourself to be seduced by the sweet pleasures of your new state when the voice of the patria calls you to its succor”] as this is “la primera obligación de todo hombre en sociedad” [“the first obligation of every man in society”] and Young Jicoténcal’s obligation will increase along with his “existencia social” (80). Here, the success of the Tlascalan society is tied to that of Jicoténcal and Teutila’s marriage. The “sweet pleasures” of this marriage, however, are subordinate to “the voice of the patria,” which represents Jicoténcal’s primary obligation. Productive romantic love is at the base of the Tlascalan state, and represents a form of virtuously subordinating one’s desires—both personal and interpersonal—to duty and the common good.

Importantly, in addition to virtuously serving the needs of the state by marrying and fulfilling their own needs, Jicoténcal and Teutila are called upon to reproduce their virtue. As Jicoténcal the Elder states at their wedding:


Jicoténcal and Teutila must “educate their children in virtue,” in this way reproducing the republic’s natural aristocrats, thereby ensuring that the civic body will continue to be virtuous.
Yet, it is not enough for governments to invest in human capital by encouraging citizens to make ideal matches and reproduce a certain kind of virtuous citizens. Rather, the unvirtuous must be expelled from the body politic in order to protect the virtuous natural aristocracy from corruptions hereditary and moral. When Ordaz hears of doña Marina’s designs on the young Jicoténcal, he exclaims: “Jicoténcal el bravo, el honrado, el virtuoso Jicoténcal unido a Marina! No permitáis, señor, una unión tan monstruosa. ¡La perfida unida a la franqueza, el vicio a la virtud, el envilecimiento a la nobleza!” [“Jicoténcal the brave, the honorable, the virtuous Jicoténcal united with Marina! Do not permit, señor, such a monstrous union. Perfidy united to frankness, vice to virtue, lowliness to nobility!”] (59). Vice with virtue, lowliness with nobility make for unviable foundational marriages, weakening the natural aristocratic line with the blood of people who, as I will now show, are not fit for citizenship.

**Feminine Virtue and the “Prostitution” of Peoples**

All this noble reproduction of the citizen body depends on a disciplining of female comport in order to safeguard feminine virtue, as is made clear in the dichotomous relationship between Teutila—true to her people, husband, and self, even in death (she commits suicide as part of a failed attempt to avenge the Tlascalans against Cortés)—and doña Marina, who, according to the novel, betrays her people to the Spanish invaders, is uncertain of the paternity of her child, and shifts allegiances easily and incompletely. In the novel, the “virtue” of both of these women is under constant attack – attacks which are consistently described by the text in terms of “esclavitud” [slavery]. When Teutila becomes a prisoner of Cortés, for example, the narrator says that she “se vio…esclava” [“she found herself a slave”], an allusion to the conquistador’s lascivious intentions (which are ultimately frustrated) (48). As Teutila says later in the book, “en mi esclavitud tiene una gran parte su brutal injuria. Ese insolente orgulloso ha querido prostituirme” [“his brutal lust is a large part of my slavery. That proud, insolent man wanted to prostitute me”] (62). Similarly, Cortés separates doña Marina from “el camino de la virtud” [“the path of virtue”] at which point she becomes his “esclava” – a term she uses to refer to herself throughout the book. Prostituted, she is, according to the text, unfit for the virtuous republican motherhood of the natural aristocracy emphasized in Jicoténcal the Elder’s wedding speech, as her desires do not promote the general welfare. She becomes a slave, a non-citizen of the republic.

Similarly, at another point in the novel, Jicoténcal the Elder ventriloquizes the conquistadores and argues that their thoughts are:
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‘Yo vengo a esclavizaros a vuestros pensamiento, vuestros hijos y vuestra descendencia, vengo a destruir vuestro culto y haceros apostar de vuestra religión – vengo a violar vuestras mujeres y vuestras hijas; vengo a robaros cuanto poseéis si os sometéis gustosos a tanto envilecimiento. Mi soberana benignidad os reserva el alto honor de que seáis mis aliados para que perezcáis peleando contra mis enemigos’ (10).

[I come to enslave you and your thinking, your children and your decency. I come to destroy your rite and have you abandon your religion. I come to rape your wives and daughters. I come to rob all that you have if you submit willingly to such degradation. My sovereign benignity reserves for you the high honor of being my allies so that you may perish fighting against my enemies’].

If the text defines virtue as a noble mastery of one’s own desires for the good of society, it posits slavery as the complete opposite, as the surrender of control over one’s values and actions, a state that Teutila, in the quote discussed above, likens to “prostitution.”

The same term appears again in reference to the Tlascalans after they have decided to forge an alliance with the Spanish against the Mexicas. The narrator comments that:

La soberanía de los Estados es como el honor de la mujer: cuando los pueblos la conservan intacta, son respetados y estimables, como lo es una mujer honrada en todos los países; mas cuando el interés, la corrupción, la debilidad o cualquiera otra causa les hacen ceder su apreciable joya, ni los unos ni las otras son más que objetos de desprecio, dignos, cuando más, de lástima y de conmiseración. Sin embargo, los pueblos pueden revivir al honor y lavar su envilecimiento reconquistando con valor lo que les arrancará el torrente de la fatalidad. Empero la infeliz república de Tlascala fue condenada por entonces a sufrir por largas edades el digno castigo de su vil prostitución (107).

[The sovereignty of States is like a woman’s honor: when peoples conserve it intact, they are respected and estimable, as an honorable woman is in all countries. However, when self-interest, corruption, weakness or any other cause makes them yield their precious jewel, neither is more than the object of scorn and worthy, at best, of pity and commiseration. Nonetheless, peoples can revive their honor and wash away their debasement by reconquering with valor that which the current of fate tears from them. However, the unhappy republic of Tlascala was condemned to suffer for many ages the rightful punishment for its lowly prostitution.]
Here, the parallels between the “prostituted” Tlascalans and doña Marina, the Amerindian lover of conquistadors, are striking. According to the text, both “yield their valued jewel” out of “self-interest, corruption, and weakness.” Both, too, experience the loss of the noble, properly reproductive republican virtue upon which Tlascalan society rests. As Debra Castillo says, Cortés “sullies the virtue of both women and the State with his corrupting acts,” thereby linking the personal virtue of potential republican mothers to the political virtue of the republic (53).

Thus, just as individuals like Ordaz and doña Marina can be barred from equal participation in the republic because of their unvirtuous slave status, so, too, can whole peoples. After the Tlascalans decide to side with Cortés against the Mexica, Jicténcal the Younger reflects on how “la cadena de sucesos que la fatalidad había dispuesto contra su república, había hecho que ésta pasase en tan poco tiempo desde el alto rango de una nación digna y respetable al envilecimiento de unos esclavos vendidos a un advenedizo afortunado” [“the chain of events that fate had set against the republic had made her pass in such a short time from the high rank of a worthy and respectable nation to the debasement of slaves conquered by a lucky newcomer”]. Here, too, “slavery,” and enchainment are equated with loss of virtue in all senses of the word: “Los vínculos sociales estaban rotos, la autoridad prostituida, la traición dominante y premiada, el patriotismo y el mérito despreciados, hollados los derechos y ultrajadas las leyes; en una palabra: desquiciado todo el grande edificio que no pudo jamás conmover el poder colosal de los emperadores mejicanos” [“Social links were broken, authority prostituted, betrayal widespread and rewarded, patriotism and merit scorned, rights trampled upon and the law outraged – in a word, shattered was the whole great edifice which could no longer unsettle the colossal power of the Mexican emperors”] (117). The notion of service to the patria has been replaced by treason, the ties that bind society have been broken and republican rights trampled upon. “Patriotism and merit” (“virtues” in the language of Montesquieu, the French National Assembly, and Jefferson) have been scorned. Authority has been “prostituted”—a term that also appears, as has been already mentioned, in Teutila’s description of Cortés’s lust for her—and the laws “ultrajadas” [outraged, violated, raped].

At another point in the novel, the narrator moralizes that:

Cuando el poder arbitrario llega a asesinar a un hombre virtuoso, cubriendo este horrible atentado con una farsa judicial tan ridícula como insultante, y cuando el despotismo descarga así su mano de hierro a presencia de un pueblo que no le aboga o despedaza en la justa indignación que debe excitar tan
bárbara tiranía, ese pueblo sufre justamente sus cadenas, aun éstas son poco para lo que merece su cobarde y vil paciencia (120).

[When arbitrary power manages to murder a virtuous man, covering this horrible affront with a judicial farce as ridiculous as it is insulting, and when despotism thusly unleashes its iron fist in the presence of a people who do not drown it out or rip it to shreds out of the righteous indignation that such barbarous tyranny should excite, that people suffers its chains justly, and even these are little in comparison with what their cowardly and base patience deserves.]

Heredia makes similar comments in his 1832 poem “La estrella de Cuba,” in which he accuses the Cuban people of “entregarse” “al tirano insolente” [“giving themselves” “to the insolent tyrant”] – an image not lacking in sexual connotations – and that, “cobarde y estúcidamente/ no ha querido la espada sacar” [“cowardly and stupidly/ did not want to draw the sword”] (56: 21-23). Like the anonymous author of Jicoténcal, Heredia believes that liberty must be virtuously won. A few lines later, he declares that, “…si un pueblo su dura cadena/ no se atreve a romper con sus manos/bien le es fácil cambiar de amos/pero nunca ser libre podrá” [“if a people their hard chain/donot dare to break with their own hands/easy is it for them to change masters/but never can they be free”] (29-32). The critique, common in early nineteenth-century Cuban independentista discourse, echoes Rousseau’s belief that peoples become enslaved by surrendering their liberty in return for protection from a sovereign. Such comments are particularly pertinent in the context of an early nineteenth-century Cuba that recently declined to join the colonies of the Spanish Main in the struggle for independence (Contrat social 15-16). In this reading, the Cuban people, like Jicoténcal’s doña Marina, unvirtuously fail to subordinate their own desires to the common good of the republic, instead forming alliances with the Spanish colonial powers. Like doña Marina, then, the Cuban loyalists do not number among the natural aristocracy, but among the slaves, and must be expelled from the body politic if the republic is to thrive. 

Racial Restrictions on Virtue

This equation of unvirtuous disqualification from participation in public life with “esclavitud”—a legal condition in which the rights of citizenship are suspended—then, is hardly accidental and points the reader back to the racial tensions underlying the New World Age of Revolution discussed earlier in this paper. As I have stated, Tlascalan republicanism does not imply democracy. Hannah Arendt argues that “democracy…to the eighteenth
century still a form of government, and neither an ideology nor an indication of class preference, was abhorred because public opinion was held to rule where the public spirit ought to prevail” (227). Rather, the ancient and neoclassical ideal was *isonomy*, or political equality among citizens:

This equality within the range of the law, which the word isonomy suggested, was not equality of condition – though this equality, to an extent, was the condition for all political activity in the ancient world, where the political realm itself was open only to those who owned property and slaves – but the equality of those who form a body of peers. Isonomy guaranteed…equality, but not because all men were born or created equal but, on the contrary, because men were by nature…not equal, and needed an artificial institution, the polis, which…would make them equal. Equality existed only in this specifically political realm, where men met one another as citizens and not as private persons. (23)

As Hobsbawm puts it, the 1789 Rights of Man and Citizen is a “manifesto against the hierarchical society of noble privilege, but not one in favour of democratic or egalitarian society” (81). For the French National Assembly, as I have shown, the idea of “virtue” is ostensibly tied to that of equality. Yet, in the phrase “*tous les Citoyens étant égaux à ses yeux, sont également admissibles à toutes dignités, places et emplois publics, selon leur capacité, et sans autre distinction que celle de leurs vertus et de leurs talents*” [all Citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally admissible to all public dignities, positions, and employments according to their capacity, and without any distinction other than that of their talents and virtues”], “virtue” is deployed as a means of containing equality; citizens are equal before the law, but it is permissible to make distinctions between them according to their talents and virtues. The definition of equality allows for a certain degree of inequality.

Father Félix Varela, who translated natural aristocrat Thomas Jefferson’s 1812 *Manual of Parliamentary Practice* into Spanish in the same year that *Jicoténcal* was published (González Acosta 141), alludes to this dialectic between equality and inequality in his *Observaciones sobre la constitución política de la monarquía española* [Observations on the Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy] (1821), when, echoing sentiments expressed in Rousseau’s “Discours sur l’origine et les fondaments de l’inégalité parmi les hommes” and Bolívar’s “Carta de Jamica” (1815) and “Discurso de Angostura” (1819), he argues that:

*La igualdad natural y social van acompañadas necesariamente de una gran desigualdad, pues los hombres en la naturaleza, sin embargo de que constan de*
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Natural and social equality are necessarily accompanied by a great inequality, as men in nature, even though they have the same beginnings and the same rights of the species, differ in their individual perfections. Be it in the bodily, the intellectual, or the social spheres, it is all the same—it is clear that there is difference, as the wise man will never be equal to the ignorant, the rich man to the poor, the strong man to the weak, as these things depend either on strength or opinion, always deserving more attention the man from whom greater goods are expected or from whom greater evils are feared.

Perhaps for this reason “The Rights of Man and of the Citizen” decrees that “les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune” [“social distinctions can only be founded on common usefulness”], suggesting that the less virtuous do not enjoy the same sort of equality as the natural aristocracy. Indeed, as I have already shown, the novel Jicoténecal denies doña Marina the right to participate in republican life in the same way that the characters Jicoténecal and Teutila are able to because of her relative lack of virtue, a condition which, in the language of the text, renders her “una esclava.”

In the rest of this section, I will explore the ways in which ideas of virtuous citizenship and lowly slavery are, for the author, at the same time mutually exclusive and constitutive of one another. Particularly key is the rather free use of the term “esclavitud” in the novel, to which I have already alluded. The metaphor of slavery, of course, is widely used in Enlightened and Romantic discourse to refer to the condition of people living under absolute rule and appears perhaps most famously at the opening of the first chapter of On the Social Contract, where Rousseau exclaims that “man is born free and yet everywhere he is in chains” (6). Nonetheless, while slavery might be a mere metaphor in eighteenth-century Geneva, the trope could not be so innocuous in the Americas of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; Cuba, for example, had depended heavily upon the labor of African chattel slaves for two or three generations by the time Jicoténecal was written. In such a society, the concrete referent of a word like “slavery”
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would have been at least as immediate as the abstract one. Meanwhile, David Brion Davis points out that, even in Europe, the term becomes increasingly slippery during the second half of the eighteenth century, as some French thinkers begin to wonder if the semi-feudal lifestyle of the colonies might contaminate the modernizing metropole. “Already the wealthy colonial slaveholders had allied with the most conservative nobility, and had begun to treat the people of France like American Negroes. If colonial slavery was not abolished, the liberties of France could not survive” (439). At the same time, in British North America, some thinkers began to recognize “certain connections between Negro slavery and the infringement of colonial liberties,” adding yet another layer of meaning to the notion of “slavery” in Enlightened discourse (441).

In Spanish American letters, the trope appears in Juan Pablo Vizcaino y Guzmán’s Lettre aux espagnols américains [Letter to the Spanish Americans] (1791).9 He writes that, as far as “our three centuries” of Spanish colonialism are concerned, they can be summarized in four words: “ingratitude, injustice, esclavage et désolation” (2). Meanwhile, in the Romantic period, “the topic of slavery provided an opportunity for writers to express the characteristic romantic longing for freedom” (Lindstrom 99) – especially, as González Acosta points out, in Cuba, as works such as Gómez de Avellaneda’s 1841 novel Sab – in which slavery serves as a metaphor for the injustices of colonial society as it becomes incorporated into the capitalist world system attest (143-144).

It is clear, then, that it is not African chattel slaves, but rather, feudal subjects in the colonies and metropole who are being interpolated by the Enlightened and Romantic discourses of slavery. More important for my purposes, however, is the fact that African chattel slaves are specifically excluded by the discourse. The text of the Cádiz Constitution and the political debates that produced it represent a privileged site from which to explore this exclusion.

For the Cadiz Constitution, there is something about the condition of servitude which is not compatible with the rights and duties of citizenship. Article 25 of the document states that the exercise of citizenship “se suspende” [“is suspended”] for, among other reasons, “el estado de sirviente doméstico” [“the

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9 The document was written in French and published in London (though the title page claims that the work was published in Philadelphia, perhaps because of the liberal cache that the city enjoyed at the time) where the author was living in exile after the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish empire (Grases 148).
status of domestic servant”). Father Félix Varela attempts to explain this restriction on Spanish citizenship in his Observaciones. He notes that a “mayordomo” [“butler”], for example, is not excluded from citizenship, even if he is a salaried employee and dedicates himself to household management because “sus funciones son de orden muy distinto” [“his functions are of a very different order”] from those of a domestic servant, and one cannot “suponer en ellos la escasez de ideas, la debilidad de sentimientos, y la deferencia absoluta a un dueño que pueden sospecharse en un sirviente verdaderamente doméstico” [“suppose in them the scarcity of ideas, the weakness of feeling, and the absolute deference to a master that you can suspect in a true domestic servant”] (108-109). A domestic servant, then, lacks the control over his own actions that is so important to the concept of virtue presented in Jicoténcal and, like Cortés’s Tlascalan allies, shows “absolute deference to a master/owner.”

Of course, words such as “master” and “owner” had very particular connotations in slaveocratic nineteenth-century Cuba, in which a particular caste was legally bound to show “absolute deference” to its dueños. A year after the publication of his Observaciones, Varela writes his “Memoria sobre la esclavitud” [Notes on Slavery], in which he proposes a plan for emancipation. Interestingly, the priest does not argue that the slaves should refuse to show “absolute deference” to their owners, as a reading of his Observaciones might lead one to believe, but that these owners should be economically compensated for granting the slaves their freedom. That is to say, in Varela’s plan, slaves do not dare to break “su dura cadena…con sus propias manos” [“their hard chain with their own hands”], as Heredia advises in his poem. Consequently, “nunca ser libre[s] podrán” [“they can never be free”]. In this discourse, slaves and libertos are denied the sort of autonomy that Heredia, Varela, the Cortes de Cádiz, and the author of Jicoténcal all identify as a prerequisite for virtuous republican citizenship. Always already unvirtuous, they have no place in public life.

However, it is important to point out that the Constitution does not stop at denying citizenship to subalterns, servants and slaves; rather, it includes measures to limit the political rights of all people of African descent. While Article 5 declares all “hombres libres” [free men] to be Spaniards, Article 22 suggests that Afro-Hispanics – both blacks and mixed-race castas of partial African descent – are somehow not automatically included in this group. Rather echoing the notions of valer más and valer menos, the Article declares that:

\[ A \text{ los españoles que por cualquier línea son habidos y reputados por originarios del África, les queda abierta la puerta de la virtud y del merecimiento para ser } \]
Thus, Afro-Hispanics—even those who are free—may only obtain citizenship if they prove themselves to be virtuous, to be worthy of membership in the natural aristocracy to which other inhabitants of the Spanish Empire seem to belong without question. This “virtue” consists of birth to “ingenuous” – or free – parents, marriage to a woman of similar standing, and either gainful employment or economic self-sufficiency (Alvarado 58). Like Jicoténcal and Teutila (and unlike doña Marina), then, a virtuous Afro-Hispanic will be able to reproduce the virtuous nation. Yet, the Constitution does not demand these proofs from people of other ethnic backgrounds. Given the material and social conditions of the time, the requirements for obtaining a letter of citizenship exclude all African chattel slaves and most libertos, as well as many Afro-Hispanics who had been born free, as evidenced by widespread Afro-Hispanic opposition to the Article. Lasso points out that, despite the opening of the road to citizenship via “virtue and deservingness,” Afro-Hispanics were generally held to be unvirtuous by early nineteenth-century Hispanic societies (41). She argues that, due to the influence of African cultural retentions, the Spaniards argued that even blacks who were “born and raised in America…had learned African habits from their parents” (40). African ancestry, then, becomes an Enlightened variation on the hereditary infamy, an impurity of blood that disqualifies one from participation in public life.

10 On Afro-Hispanic opposition to Article 25, see Alvarado, op. cit. and Lasso.
Not coincidentally, the article of the Cádiz Constitution governing the citizenship of Afro-Hispanics mirrors Article 4 of the 1793 French Constitution, which establishes the rules for the naturalization of foreigners:

*Tout étranger âgé de vingt et un ans accomplis, qui, domicilié en France depuis une année - Y vit de son travail - Ou acquiert une propriété - Ou épouse une Française - Ou adopte un enfant - Ou nourrit un vieillard; - Tout étranger enfin, qui sera jugé par le Corps législatif avoir bien mérité de l'humanité - Est admis à l'exercice des Droits de citoyen français.*

[Any foreigner who has reached twenty years of age who, having lived in France for a year, and supported himself through his labor, or acquired property, or married a Frenchwoman, or adopted a child, or supported an elderly person; in sum, any foreigner who the Legislative Body judges to be deserving of humanity, will be admitted to the exercise of the Rights of French citizens.]

It seems that the naturalization of foreigners in France was the model for the citizenship of Afro-Hispanics in the Spanish Empire. To the Cortes de Cádiz, then, Afro-Hispanics are essentially foreign, not really part of the nation.

The denationalization of Afro-Hispanics must be understood in its historical context. The Cádiz Constitution was drafted in the same year as the Aponte Conspiracy in Cuba. An anti-colonial revolt against slavery led by the free black José Antonio Aponte and rumored to be supported by Haiti, the rebellion had a lasting impact on race relations in Cuba, leaving a fear of freedmen in the Creole elite that would hamper abolitionist and independence movements for two or three generations. As late as 1832, “Captain-General Francisco Dionisio Vives…returned to Spain…and briefed the Spanish authorities about the situation on the ground. Although he had had to break up several separatist conspiracies of white Creoles, Vives saw the main threat to colonial rule neither in the liberal elites, nor in the slaves by themselves, but in the free people of color” (Fischer 80-81). If Afro-Hispanics were the only group denied the rights of citizenship by the liberal Constitution, it may very well have been because they were perceived as the greatest threat to Spanish colonial policy.

11 The Spanish Constitution actually makes the requirements stricter; while the Parisian document stipulates that a foreigner must meet one requirement or the other, the Cádiz document states that all must be met. Mariano Juan Bautista Picornell “Estudios sobre Los derechos del hombre y del ciudadano.” Afterword. Discurso preliminario dirigido a los americanos. Derechos del hombre y del ciudadano. Varias máximas republicanas. Derechos del pueblo.
Natural Aristocracy Revisited

This belief in the unassimilability of Afro-descent people to New World republican projects was widespread in the Americas during the Age of Revolution. In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), for example, Jefferson writes of an emancipation bill which includes provisions for the colonization of freedmen. Anticipating objections, he comments that:

> It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expense [sic] of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race. – To these objections, which are political, may be added others, which are physical and moral (264).

Like the framers of the Cádiz Constitution, he views blacks as beyond the limits of the nation. Bitter, inherently distinct, and physically and morally deficient, blacks, according to Jefferson, are lacking in the virtue necessary for participation in public life and are excluded from the natural aristocracy.

What does it mean for the concept of natural aristocracy if there are racial restrictions on citizenship and participation in public life? What is “natural” about this natural aristocracy? Biology, it would seem. In his letter to Adams, Jefferson’s comments on natural aristocracy come after a discussion on breeding. He writes to Adams of a “piece” he has read which seems to be “a reproof to man, who, while with his domestic animals he is curious to improve the race by employing always the finest male, pays no attention to the improvement of his own race, but intermarries with the vicious, the ugly, or the old, for considerations of wealth or ambition.” Jefferson disapproves of marriage that does not take into account “the beauty, the healthiness, the understanding,” or, importantly, “virtue of the subject from which we are to breed.” The Virginian goes on to argue for government by population, saying that:

> The selecting [of] the best male for a Haram [sic] of well chosen females also, which Theognis seems to recommend from the example of our sheep and asses, would doubtless improve the human, as it does the brute animal, and produce a race of veritable aristoi. For experience proves that the moral and physical qualities
of man, whether good or evil, are transmissible in a certain degree from father to son. (n.p.)

As has already been noted, these considerations are central to Jicoténcal's union with Teutila, which has as much to do with the consolidation of state interests and the production of a virtuous line of descent as it does with romantic love.

Importantly, the word “race” appears twice in the fragment quoted above: once to refer to a breed of plants or animals and again when discussing “a race of veritable aristei.” It seems, then, that Jefferson is talking about breeding a particular subset of the human species, a race of aristocrats. While the term may sound strange to modern ears, it will be remembered, for example, that in Waverly (published just one year after Jefferson’s letter and twelve years before Jicoténcal) Walter Scott uses the term “race” not to refer to ethno-national groups, such as the English or the Scottish who confront each other in the novel, but to aristocratic houses. The virtuous “natural aristocracy” is not simply racially exclusive, as the Cadiz Constitution suggests, but is also—like the hereditary nobility it was meant to replace—based on lineage.

Thus, despite the bourgeois emphasis on virtue, the natural aristocracy continues to be as much of a caste as that of the colonial ancien régime. That said, natural aristocracy is not synonymous with whiteness, as Jefferson’s condemnation of “false aristocracy” makes clear. Rather, as the comments on procreation in his letter and in the anonymous Jicoténcal suggest, one must be bred to virtue. A system of social stratification that appeals to both lineage and comport (Foucault’s symbolics of blood and symbolics of sex), the discourse of natural aristocracy represents an intermediate point between the feudal realm – in which sovereignty was hereditary – and the capitalist nation-state, in which sovereignty theoretically resides in the people, who freely compete with each other for positions of power.

Jicoténcal, then, is a foundational fiction that attempts to resolve the tensions between the two models, casting off the colonial yoke while maintaining the criollos’ hegemonic status. More than that, however, the novel offers a vision of how such hybridity might be politically productive, of how the dynastic family model of feudalism might be mobilized to (re)produce a particular citizen body for the republic so that the social mobility resultant of emancipation from feudal “slavery” does not lead to the political or economic vitiation of the republic. Flawed though it may strike contemporary readers, the model proposed in Jicoténcal was in fact in place in
many New World republics during the early nineteenth century, which perhaps begs a reconsideration of the New World nation-state model itself.
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