Foreword

Taken collectively the chapters in this volume make a strong statement about the relevance of identity to the study of the Iberian (mostly Spanish) colonial world. They also make a strong case for a particular view of identity—one that understands the concept as fluid, malleable, yet constrained; one that understands identity as being born out of a dynamic between individuals and the givens of cultural and political life—the relations of being—through which humans make themselves and succeeding conditions of experience. That is, they insist on studying identity in history.

And that history was quite extraordinary, for Spanish colonialism was coterminous with the initial processes of European state making. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, witnessing profound transformations in political and economic life, spawned nothing less than a cultural revolution—or, better said, a revolution in the possible ways of being human. This was a revolution of identities—a revolution of social selves, of social relations, and of social understandings; this was the cultural revolution behind the making of the emerging modern world.

One of the emerging modern world's signature behaviors was to embed economic and political authority into a radical cultural design. Spanish political and economic dominion was charted through a novel trio of human beings—*español*, *indio*, and *negro* (to be expanded as the categories proved insufficient)—each with a publicly conferred configuration of obligations and possibilities. These categories contributed to the ambience of political culture through which human beings, in daily living, gave meaning to themselves and their lives. Taken as a whole, the essays here explore how structures of colonial rule were transformed into venues of lived experience, were transformed into identities.

In the colonial world, aspects of identity were in dialogue with categories of rule—the categories through which the Crown governed its population. Institutions of political and religious life—the bureaucracies of church and state—circumscribed individuals by placing them in colonialism's definitional boxes. Although these categories were implanted into the sinews of living, state and religious institutions did not have the only say—or even the final say. These categories were frames of cultural possibility; but it was individuals, in history, living through social relations, that made them into structures of experience.

I stress again the importance of seeing these chapters as part of a whole, more comprehensive project. The kind of wide-ranging lens provided by this volume points to the analytical advantage of abstractions like "identity" and "race" but it also lays bare their limits. If one of the messages of this volume is the importance of studying identity dialectally, as a dynamic relation between a subject and the social forms and practices of a given milieu, another is the importance of history, of exploring identity in terms of the context through which identities are created, transformed, and maintained. We can draw lessons about the nature of identity—or, better, of identities—only by analyzing their varieties over lifetimes, over decades, and over geographies. Then we can see how relations of power, in a variety of spheres, tinge the air in which identities breathe.

If we are to think about race and identity not as things but as processes of living, a turn to Iberian colonialism is particularly helpful. One reason is that the first waves of colonialism inaugurated the global, racialized categories of humanity with which we are only too familiar today. We are forced to recognize that these divisions had a historical genesis and that their construction was party to the politics making the modern world and its illusions.

Western mythology, described by Fernando Coronil as "occidentalism," masked the roots of Western nation building in global politics. Contrary to common understandings, the modern world, from its inception, was transnational in scope and hierarchical in structure. These characteristics are evident in the categories of Spanish colonialism, constructed to politically order the newly globalized humanity. Notions of "Spanishness" were emerging in Europe at the same time that colonizers were civilizing Indians, enslaving Africans, and distinguishing themselves

from the lower orders of Indians and blacks by calling one another "Spanish." Exploring Spanish expansion allows us to better grasp the significance of colonialism to what we call "modernity" as well as the antagonistic social relationships—racialized relationships—at its core.

Bureaucrats control knowledge, and, as social analysts have pointed out, this authority is a source of their power. But many colonial bureaucrats dominated a special kind of knowledge: they could determine the most profound of societal truths—membership in a human community. Seventeenth-century functionaries inherited a world whose humanity was increasingly understood in racialized, colonially driven terms. With the authority to determine the categorical "box" in which human beings were placed, officials played a significant (if unwitting) role in deepening and consolidating race-thinking as a way of life. In their bureaucratic practices, officials were specifying the very terms of social experience: the terms by which the world was to be judged and the terms framing any individual's social truth. Essays in this volume shed light on this process of identity-naming and, taken collectively, they locate identity in history, by highlighting the interaction of identity with structures of power.

Administrators in Spain and Spain's colonies used a particular race-thinking notion to shape and calibrate the "natural order" of political life. They argued that blood carried stains, and that stains could determine character traits, intelligence, political rights, and economic possibilities. The notion of blood purity was first elaborated in Europe, where it was used to separate Old Christians from Spain's New Christians—women and men of Jewish and Muslim origin whose ancestors had converted to Christianity. New Christians carried stained blood and, consequently, were perceived as a potential danger to official life. Conquistadores brought the curse of New Christians, the concept of stained blood (*mancha*), to the Americas. Bureaucrats were obliged to indicate the "race" and blood purity of everyone brought before them; their records give us a ringside view of the New Christian dilemma in the New World. Authorities in the Americas were vexed by such blood-related questions as Was the blood stain of Europe's New Christians the same as the blood stain of Indians or blacks? Were such stains indelible? Could baptism override them? Were all stains equal? When bureaucrats and their colleagues responded to these issues in their daily chores of statecraft, they helped

make race into a calculable thing. They were also imbuing "race" with very modern, often state-related, confusions—of nation and religion, culture and genes, color and ability.

The essays in this rich and varied collection point to the confused, overlapping, and muddied dimensions of identitymaking in the Spanish colonial world; they point to the dialectic conjoining public dimensions of colonial order, expressed through cultural designs, and the ways that human beings, born into this world, gave meaning to, made sense of, and in the process (unwittingly) put their stamp on the racialized orders of colonial life. By providing us with abundant examples—crossing boundaries of time and geography—they give us a perspective on the broad historical processes, mixing cultural forms and political ordering, that have shaped not only the Spanish colonial world but so much of modern experience.

Thus, domination, in its many forms, was overlaid on a radical, cultural map of social being; moreover, the exploitative social relations girding this global cultural map were hidden behind a semblance of categorical "race" things.

Irene Silverblatt