

## ABSTRACT

### CRIOLLO IDENTITY AND THE COLONIAL STATE IN NEW SPAIN

This thesis looks at the formation of criollo, or Spanish-American, political and cultural identity from the sixteenth through the late eighteenth century in New Spain. Identifying themselves as the descendants of the conquerors of Mexico, criollos asserted their preeminent “rights” to the spoils of conquest and prominent places in colonial government. The Spanish crown and other Spaniards born in the Iberian peninsula viewed criollos as fundamentally different and inferior to the Spanish-born by reason of their birth in America, and used that supposed difference to limit criollos’ privileges and to deny them access to state power. This thesis examines how crown policies to limit criollos’ “place” in the colonial system, which fluctuated from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, resulted in the formation of Spanish-American political identity in opposition to the strictures placed upon them by the metropolis and in defense of their perceived natural rights as American-born elites.

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