

## CHAPTER 5

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# The Life and Legacy of Francisco Carreño

## Practicing and Protecting Freedom Between the Canary Islands and New Spain in the Late Sixteenth Century

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On his deathbed in Mexico City, a free-born *mulato* named Francisco Carreño carefully assembled paperwork that documented his complex negotiations with slavery and freedom throughout his life in late sixteenth-century New Spain (present-day Mexico).<sup>1</sup> Compiling his final will and testament in 1603, Carreño sought to assure the free status of his mulato son, Juan Carreño. The elder Carreño outlined how he had liberated an unnamed Black woman from slavery by paying the price of her liberty to her former owner because she was the mother of Carreño's only son and heir, Juan Carreño. Born thousands of miles away to a free Black mother named Violante in the Canary Islands probably imbued in the elder Carreño the importance of a Black mother's freedom in assuring the freedom of her children. While the younger Carreño's mother presumably kept a copy of her own *carta de alhorría* (freedom certificate), Carreño detailed how he also retained a copy that he wished his executor to safeguard. These precautions were wise; the existence of this freedom certificate prevented royal officials from selling Juan Carreño into slavery after his father's death. In addition to documenting his son's free status, Carreño deliberated on whether to liberate from slavery the five Black people who were enslaved to him. Carreño sought to manumit Juana, a Black woman whom Carreño had purchased on credit a few years earlier in the port of Veracruz, and to settle his various credits and debts with merchants sprawled across New Spain. The documents that Carreño assembled

to assure the freedom of Juan Carreño and to grant freedom to Juana also tell the story of Francisco Carreño's own cartography and experiences across the Spanish Empire, from his birth thousands of miles away on the Isla de Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands, to his arrival in the port of Veracruz around 1588, to becoming a skilled "master of sugar" in New Spain—a skill that he may have first developed in the sugar-production regions of the Canary Islands. Over the sixteen years that Carreño resided in New Spain, he plied his trade on sugarcane plantations across vast areas of New Spain, from the province of Michoacan, to Malinalco, Metepec, and Xalapa. He also engaged in commerce in Mexico City, Veracruz, and Xalapa. Carreño's choices on his deathbed highlight how he practiced freedom and sought to protect the freedom of his heir, revealing an important intellectual history of slavery and freedom in Black thought in late sixteenth-century New Spain, especially in the region between Carreño's first port of arrival, Veracruz, and the viceregal capital where Carreño perished in 1603.

This chapter builds a history of Black thought about slavery and freedom in late sixteenth-century New Spain among the free Black population that resided in the Atlantic port town of Veracruz and its environs, specifically, along the Camino Real (official royal trading route) that connected Veracruz to the viceregal capital of Mexico City. The vast geographical horizons and demographic heterogeneity of the free Black people who resided in the port meant that Veracruz served as an epicenter of knowledge about slavery and freedom in New Spain. In the first part of the chapter, I build a tapestry of the dynamics of life among free Black residents in the port town of Veracruz and its environs, documenting how free and enslaved Black residents often lived lives that were connected to the broader Atlantic World and to other key towns on the Camino Real. Black residents' forced and voluntary interactions with various institutions of colonial and religious governance led to the generation of documents that sometimes recorded fragmentary and mediated evidence of Black people's biographies and varied Atlantic cartographies. The records include petitions by free Black individuals for royal licenses to cross the Atlantic Ocean at institutions such as Seville's House of Trade and the Council of the Indies in Madrid and to various local authorities in key cities in the American viceroyalties, testimonies gathered in trials at the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City, testimonies and documents gathered by judges presiding over investigations for Assets of the Deceased Courts, and notarial records from the towns of Xalapa and Veracruz. Collectively, the evidence that emerges from these disparate sources reveals the

vast social webs that existed between Black populations across the early Hispanic Atlantic as well as their intellectual histories of slavery and freedom. The second part of the chapter focuses on the life and legacy of Francisco Carreño, exploring how he operated between different sites in New Spain as he plied his trade as a master of sugar, and how he conceptualized and practiced freedom in his own life, as well as his work to protect and assure the freedom of his son. Transitioning between micro and macro lenses through an array of archival fragments that catalogued Black life in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century New Spain might help to chart a tentative methodological path to writing more diverse histories of Black thought in the early Spanish Empire. The discussion that follows interweaves the varied ways that free Black individuals, whose lives were connected to the broader Atlantic World in the Spanish Empire, reckoned with the meanings of freedom and slavery in their daily lives.

### **Veracruz: A Site of Freedom and Economic Opportunity for a Black Population on the Move, and a Crossroads of Gossip and Knowledge for Black Populations in the Spanish Atlantic**

Veracruz served as the principal Atlantic port of entry to the viceroyalty of New Spain via the Camino Real between Castile (in present-day Spain) and Mexico City; the port also connected Castile to overland trading routes to the Pacific and the port of Manila in the Philippines.<sup>2</sup> By the mid-sixteenth century, commercial, political, and social life in Veracruz was intimately connected with the broader Spanish Caribbean, especially Havana (in Cuba), Santo Domingo (in Isla Española, present-day Dominican Republic), and the inland towns of Xalapa and Puebla de los Ángeles that lay on the Camino Real route between Veracruz and Mexico City.<sup>3</sup> By the turn of the seventeenth century, there were two port towns of Veracruz: Old Veracruz, where the port had been located for most of the sixteenth century, and a new port fortified by the garrison of San Juan de Ullua called New Veracruz (henceforth, Veracruz) that was established in 1599.<sup>4</sup>

Free and enslaved Black Africans and their descendants comprised the majority of the year-round population in the Veracruz ports as the coastal littoral proved inhospitable for Spaniards who tended to prefer to settle in the northwestern inland town of Xalapa or further afield in Puebla de los Ángeles.<sup>5</sup> Although royal officials in New Spain encouraged residents to

move their places of dwelling from Old Veracruz to Veracruz, the old port maintained a small population throughout the period under study.<sup>6</sup> Black individuals in the region often resided in both ports over the course of their lifetimes, and thus maintained ties between both. A significant number of the year-long Black dwellers of both Veracruz ports were enslaved to owners who lived in the inland town of Xalapa and endured labor-for hire arrangements. Often, the Black residents lived and labored semiautonomously in the ports of Veracruz while their owners resided in plantation estates in the mountainous region of Xalapa and received a portion of the formers' wages.<sup>7</sup> The ports of Veracruz also included a large transient population of merchants, soldiers, royal officials, priests, friars, maritime laborers, and individuals who passed through the town, especially in the spring when fleets arrived from Castile and the port's population trebled.<sup>8</sup> The town also served as the first port of entry for the Atlantic trade in enslaved Black Africans to New Spain, with ships carrying enslaved cargo arriving annually. Many of the enslaved Africans who were forcibly displaced to Veracruz would endure another overland journey to either the town of Xalapa or Puebla de los Ángeles on the Camino Real to Mexico City, where merchants would sell them in slave markets.<sup>9</sup> The local Franciscan monastery played a central role in Black dwellers' religious life as many residents confessed in that institution throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> Veracruz-based Franciscan friars also served as deputies to the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City during the same period, meaning that these religious figures were embedded in Black residents' confessional lives in addition to policing their Christianity and informing inquisitors of any suspect behavior in the port.<sup>11</sup> Autonomous Black maroon communities formed by fugitive enslaved people formed in the regions near Veracruz as well, and members of such polities sometimes moved across the varied geographies of New Spain, often while negotiating peace with—or waging war against—the Spanish monarchy.<sup>12</sup>

In both Veracruz ports, Black residents often maintained ties with inland plantations and the towns of Xalapa and Puebla de los Ángeles, both located inland on the Camino Real. This is because a significant demographic of the Black population of Veracruz had previously resided across the rural and urban hinterlands of the Camino Real before eventually settling in Veracruz. For example, inquisitors arrested two free mulatas, Inés de Villalobos and Ana de Herrera, in Old Veracruz in 1594, on accusations of witchcraft; both women had been born in Mexico City, but their respective parents had taken them to reside in Old Veracruz when they were children.<sup>13</sup> Available historical

documents do not indicate whether the pair ever met in Old Veracruz, but they may have heard about each other as Black residents of the small port town who both hailed from Mexico City. In other cases, recently liberated and free Black people who had previously toiled on plantations also gravitated toward the economic opportunities and greater degrees of freedom that they perceived in Veracruz. Such was the case of Juana Jalapa (also known as Juana Gutiérrez), a free Black woman who was born at a sugarcane plantation in the mountainous hinterlands of the inland town of Xalapa in the early seventeenth century, where her father, a “Black congo” named Miguel Manuel, was enslaved to the owner of the plantation.<sup>14</sup> Juana Jalapa’s freedom probably stemmed from her mother, Ysavel de Arriaga of “lucumí caste,” a free Black woman who also lived and labored at the sugarcane estate. Juana Jalapa married Hernando Negro, an enslaved Black man from the same plantation. Perilous enslaved labor conditions on the plantation likely led to her enslaved husband’s early demise; by the age of twenty Juana Jalapa was a widow and had given birth to a daughter, fathered by a free mulato laborer on the same plantation. Years later, Juana Jalapa explained to inquisitors in Mexico City that she left the plantation in 1635, when she was twenty years old in order to avoid marrying another slave, which she noted “had been expected of [her].” Juana Jalapa abandoned the plantation and its particular hierarchies of freedom, enslavement, family, slave-owners, and intense, sugar-production labor and moved to the coastal region of Veracruz with her young daughter, first settling in the Atlantic port of Old Veracruz and then in Veracruz where she spent the next twenty years of her life. Upon arriving in the Veracruz region, Juana Jalapa—who had been baptized as Juana Gutiérrez reflecting the name of her enslaved father’s owner—became known as Juana Jalapa and a free Black *vecina* (loosely, resident) of Veracruz. The name Jalapa indicated to her contemporaries her region of *naturaleza* (birth) in the plantation near the town of Xalapa.

A vignette of Francisco Camacho’s ties between the inland town of Xalapa and Old Veracruz evidence how Black individuals sometimes lived in the Veracruz ports while maintaining economic relationships with Xalapa. Camacho was born into slavery in Isla de la Palma in the Canary Islands and had endured a forced displacement as a slave from there to New Spain. His birth in the Canary Islands likely meant that he spoke Spanish prior to his arrival in New Spain. While enslaved in Xalapa, Camacho married a free Black woman named Juana de la Cruz.<sup>15</sup> The pair subsequently negotiated Camacho’s freedom in 1642, when he was fifty years old, agreeing to pay his owner 100 pesos de oro común in installments over five months.<sup>16</sup> Thereafter,

the couple lived as *vecinos* in Xalapa where they purchased a small plot of land (in the Xallitic area); they later moved from Xalapa to Old Veracruz.<sup>17</sup> They maintained ties to Xalapa during their initial residency in Old Veracruz through ownership of the land in Xalapa, until 1658, when Camacho gave a *vecino* of Xalapa named Bartolomé de Oliveros authority to sell the plot, which the latter sold for 20 pesos.<sup>18</sup>

Black individuals from the rural hinterlands often gravitated to Veracruz due to the economic opportunities of the port town. Depositions in Inquisition trials highlight how Black men and women who hailed from rural plantations often eked out a living by servicing the annual passing trade in the port. For example, after arriving from the sugarcane plantation near Xalapa in 1635, Juana Jalapa worked as a seamstress and a clothes-washer, and also labored in chocolate production.<sup>19</sup> In 1653, Juana Jalapa recounted to inquisitors that she owed twenty pesos for rent to a free mulata named Francisca de Arzola, ten pesos for rent to another person, four reales to a Black female baker, and a few loose reales to different free Black female traders in Veracruz. In 1655, after inquisitors determined that Juana Jalapa was innocent of the charges of witchcraft, she pleaded that they pardon the 216 pesos and 2 reales of debt that she had accrued in costs for her imprisonment and trial at the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City as she did not have enough money to pay for the cost of her return journey to Veracruz. Such pleas, when combined with her paltry debts for rents and other minor transactions in Veracruz, suggest that Juana Jalapa did not become particularly wealthy in the port. In contrast, one of Juana Jalapa's acquaintances named Adriana Ruíz de Cabrera, a free Black woman from Cartagena de Indias (in New Granada, present-day Colombia) who resided in Veracruz in the same period, owned at least two Black slaves.

The Black population of Veracruz also comprised a significant number of free Black people who hailed from other regions of the Spanish Empire, beyond New Spain. As Veracruz was the Atlantic port of entry to (and exit from) New Spain, Black *naturales* (those born in New Spain) of the region who travelled to Castilla or elsewhere in the Hispanic Caribbean usually passed through the town when leaving and entering New Spain.<sup>20</sup> Many of the free Black men and women who arrived in Veracruz from Castilla with passenger and embarkation licenses issued by the Council of the Indies and the House of Trade were *naturales* of New Spain, often of Mexico City, who were returning to the region. They had previously travelled to Castilla as wage-earning servants, or as slaves who were later freed in Castilla, or independently—sometimes to tend to business matters, or to deliver petitions to

the Council of the Indies in Madrid.<sup>21</sup> Those who resided in other cities of New Spain would invariably sojourn in the port of Veracruz when leaving and returning to New Spain, and often spent a few days in Veracruz—probably renting rooms from free Black female innkeepers, while organizing onward journeys.<sup>22</sup> Testimonies from Inquisition trials of free Black men and women in Veracruz reveal that many Black residents of Veracruz had previously lived in other sites in the Spanish Atlantic. The histories of free Black men and women, who had previously resided in other regions in the Spanish Atlantic World who settled in Veracruz and along the Camino Real, demonstrate the need to expand our understanding of the demographic composition of late sixteenth-century Atlantic New Spain to include free Black men and women who brought lived experiences and memories from Castile and other regions of the Spanish Empire, including different sites in New Spain. The punitive trials against Black Veracruz dwellers led by the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico City sometimes recorded Black residents' heterogenous social webs that spanned the Atlantic world. For example, the Inquisitorial trial against Juana Jalapa evidences how her social world in Veracruz was defined by geographical itinerancy across the Atlantic, as well as by commercial, religious, and personal ties to the wider Castilian Empire.<sup>23</sup> The coterie of Black men and women who Juana met in Veracruz brought knowledge and experiences from the various places where they had previously dwelled, which included Cartagena de Indias, Castile, Havana, Cordoba (in New Spain), and Guatemala. The accusations levied against Juana Jalapa commenced when a free Black woman named Ana María Vásquez, who had previously resided in the cities of Santiago (in Guatemala), Cartagena de Indias, and Havana, testified against Juana Jalapa to the Inquisition. In Veracruz, Vásquez claimed that Juana Jalapa and a coterie of other Black women had conspired to commit sorcery in her presence. This group of Black women included Adriana Ruíz de Cabrera and Doña Lucía la Prieta, who were two free Black women who resided in Veracruz after arriving from Cartagena de Indias, and Adriana Ruíz de Cabrera's two Black slaves named Juana and Elena whom she had also brought from Cartagena de Indias. In addition, Ana María Vásquez named a Spanish woman who also lived in Veracruz. Another accusation levied against Juana Jalapa recounted how Juana had sought the help of a free Black man from the town of Córdoba in New Spain for a love potion in a desperate attempt to restrain her violent son-in-law. This accusation and Juana Jalapa's defense reveal that her networks extended to the town of Córdoba, which lay southwest of Veracruz and along a different route to Mexico City from the

Camino Real that connected Veracruz with her place of birth, Xalapa, which lay northwest of Veracruz. It is likely that Juana Jalapa possessed knowledge of the hinterlands and familiarity with networks of healers who resided inland due to her early life in a plantation in Xalapa. The accusations in the Inquisitorial trial suggest that Juana Jalapa became adept at drawing on her geographical knowledge of the region, while establishing relationships with individuals who arrived in Veracruz from the Caribbean.

After her arrest and during her subsequent Inquisitorial trial in Mexico City, Juana Jalapa presented various witnesses from Veracruz to aide in her defense (and to discredit Ana María Vásquez's testimony) who also hailed from varied regions of the Atlantic World. For instance, a sixteen-year-old enslaved Black *criolla* from Cartagena de Indias named Dominga Ybañez explained to inquisitors that the free Black woman named Ana María Vásquez had abducted Ybañez from her owner in Cartagena de Indias and forcibly brought her to Veracruz via Havana. As Juana Jalapa and other witnesses in Veracruz began to present accusations to inquisitors about Ana María Vásquez and her history of robberies and elaborate lies, Vásquez subsequently changed her testimony in the Inquisitorial court. She claimed that, contrary to her previous assertions that she hailed from Guatemala, instead she was a free Black woman who had been born in Barajas (near Madrid in Castile), where she had married a soldier. She claimed that she had travelled to New Spain to try and locate her absent husband. While it is difficult to assess whether Ana María Vásquez indeed travelled to Veracruz from Guatemala or from Madrid, witnesses agreed that she arrived in Veracruz onboard a ship that sailed from Havana along with the young enslaved Ybañez whom she had stolen in Cartagena de Indias, thereby suggesting that Vásquez had sojourned in two of the major ports of the Spanish Caribbean, Cartagena de Indias and Havana, prior to arriving in Veracruz. A Spanish vecina of Veracruz recounted arriving in Veracruz on the same ship from Havana with Ana María Vásquez and Ybañez; the witness detailed how she had become acquainted with Vásquez's poverty and tendency to spin outlandish fabrications while onboard the ship. These testimonies of Veracruz-based Black women who had each previously resided in other sites in the Spanish Atlantic highlight that Juana Jalapa had become part of a Black population and social milieu in early seventeenth-century Veracruz whose horizons spanned the Hispanic Atlantic, and who each brought to Veracruz particular knowledge and experiences from different regions of the Atlantic World.

The heterogeneous free Black population of Veracruz in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries combined with the town's central position in



trade, travel, and communication in the Spanish Atlantic with the viceroyalty of New Spain and the Philippines meant that the port served as a site for gossip and the exchange of information between Black populations across the Atlantic World. Many testimonies attest to Veracruz—in addition to Mexico City—serving as a site for gathering news about Castile and other regions of the empire. News and gossip arrived by word of mouth and in epistles brought by passengers and sailors on fleets that docked in the port. Veracruz-based Black residents from Castile sometimes received written correspondence, likely arriving on fleets carrying royal mail or with appointed messengers.<sup>24</sup> For example, three Black Castilians—María Gerónima, Cristobal de Castroverde, and Antonio Sigarra—received written correspondence in Veracruz in the early seventeenth century from family members in Castile.<sup>25</sup> Veracruz was also a site where individuals met other passersby who relayed news from different ports of the Hispanic Atlantic World. Two Iberian mulatos accused of bigamy in Inquisitorial trials in 1579 and 1622, Antonio de Arenas and Cristobal de Castroverde, suggested to inquisitors that they had heard of the deaths of their respective mulata wives in Cádiz and Seville through information relayed by travelers passing through the port of Veracruz.<sup>26</sup> Neither of these individuals lived in the port. Instead, they resided in Mexico City and the rural and mining environs of the viceregal capital. But the two men's pinpointing of Veracruz as the site where they received news of their wives' deaths highlights that they travelled through that port on their way to Mexico City, and shows how Veracruz often connected Black populations in New Spain with the wider Atlantic world.<sup>27</sup> The types of information and knowledge that passed through bustling port towns like Veracruz were sometimes mundane, as passersby in Veracruz often trafficked in information about the whereabouts of family members. Trading centers in Castile and the Spanish Americas were often connected through hearsay, whispers, and gossip about people's lives—which in turn were sometimes formalized through webs of informants to the Inquisition—as well as friendship ties across vast geographical distances.<sup>28</sup> Antonio de Arenas, a Portuguese mulato, became a victim of the webs of information that connected Castile and the Spanish Americas.<sup>29</sup> Born in the village of Estrema in Portugal in the mid-sixteenth century, Arenas had labored on ships between ports in Castile since the age of eight. He lived in Cádiz for a few years, where he was known as a “man of the sea,” and he later crossed the Atlantic to New Spain via Cabo Verde. Upon arriving in the viceroyalty of New Spain, Arenas spent a year or so residing in the viceregal capital of Mexico City, where residents testified to knowing him as a Portuguese-speaking mulato and vinegar peddler around the city center near

the Cathedral, before he moved to the nearby village of Yztlavaca.<sup>30</sup> There, he married Catalina de Esquevel, a fourteen-year-old mulata, who worked as a servant. In 1578, two separate travelers—one from Portugal and the other from Cádiz—appeared in the Inquisition courts in Mexico City accusing the Portuguese-speaking mulato of bigamy.<sup>31</sup> According to these witnesses, Arenas had married Catalina de Esquevel while he was already married in Cádiz. They testified that Arenas' first wife, a free Portuguese mulata named Isabel who lived in Cádiz, was still alive.

Arenas' defense strategy highlights his vision of an interconnected Atlantic World, even if spread over vast distances. Arenas argued that, in fact, he had not been married in Cádiz.<sup>32</sup> Instead, he claimed that he had merely cohabited with a free mulata named Isabel who owned a dried fruits shop in that city. He admitted that the pair had known each other for five or six years in Cádiz, but he stated that they had only cohabited for two years.<sup>33</sup> Arenas argued that many people in Cádiz incorrectly thought that the two were married because they lived together, when in fact the two were merely *amancebados* (lovers). After sailing as a seafaring laborer from Cádiz to Cabo Verde and subsequently to New Spain, Arenas claimed to have received news from two people in different cities of New Spain—one in Veracruz and the other in Mexico City—that his *amancebada* (lover) had passed away.<sup>34</sup> To that end, he recalled encountering someone in Veracruz who informed him that Isabel had died in the Hospital of Nuestra Señora de Los Ángeles in Cádiz.<sup>35</sup> Upon further investigation and the discovery of a marriage record in Cádiz, inquisitors convicted Arenas of bigamy.<sup>36</sup> His defense strategy of naming specific individuals who had informed him of Isabel's demise failed, and perhaps historians should construe it as just that—a strategy employed in order to circumvent the justice that awaited him at the hands of the Inquisition. Nonetheless, Arenas presented a vision of an interconnected Spanish Atlantic World, even if the particulars were mere fabrications spun in an attempt to evade justice.

### **Practicing and Protecting Freedom Across the Atlantic: A Case Study of Francisco Carreño**

The movement of information and knowledge among and between free Black populations in New Spain, and beyond, had a bearing on how Black individuals conceptualized and practiced freedom. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore how Francisco Carreño, a freeborn mulato who lived in various

sites in New Spain, conceptualized and practiced freedom, including his deathbed attempts to assure the freedom of his son. Carreño arrived in the port of Veracruz from his native Isla de Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands in approximately 1588. He did not reside in the port for long but would return to the town many times over the subsequent sixteen years. After arriving in New Spain, Carreño became a skilled master of sugar, and over the following sixteen years, he plied his trade on sugarcane plantations across New Spain, from the province of Michoacan, to Malinalco, Metepec, to Xalapa, and also engaged in commerce in Mexico City, Veracruz, and Xalapa. For instance, Carreño toiled as a master of sugar every year for four months in the province of Michoacan, while spending other months of the year laboring in the hinterlands of Xalapa, and residing intermittently in the village of Malinalco (southwest of Mexico City).<sup>37</sup>

The information that Carreño provided in his final will, particularly the 1602–1603 financial transactions his will unveils, as well as commercial contracts signed with notaries in Xalapa and Veracruz, reveal his extensive travel and connections. For example, in 1602, Carreño borrowed 200 pesos de oro común from Diego de Salazar in Xalapa; Carreño pawned a Black slave named Isabel as guarantee for repayment within three months.<sup>38</sup> The following year, Carreño labored on a sugarcane plantation in Michoacan, and subsequently travelled from there to Mexico City with his horses and slaves.<sup>39</sup> On his deathbed in 1603, Carreño noted that the owner of the Michoacan sugarcane plantation owed him 850 pesos de oro común for his labor, while a Xalapa landowner had deposited 1,700 pesos with a Mexico City merchant in payment for Carreño's salary for work that he had completed in the Xalapa region.<sup>40</sup> The respective 1,700 pesos and 850 pesos suggest that Carreño commanded a significant salary for his work as a master of sugar. Around the same time, a healthy enslaved Black person skilled in the sugarcane industry would sell for approximately 300 pesos in a public auction in Mexico City. The sale of Carreño's own Black slaves, María and her young daughter, raised 550 pesos in an auction that took place in Mexico City a decade after Carreño's demise.<sup>41</sup>

While Carreño spent time in Mexico City, he did not appear to be embedded in Black life in the viceregal capital. Instead, Carreño's testament reveals his financial obligations and credits across the urban hubs of New Spain, including Mexico City, Xalapa, and Veracruz.<sup>42</sup> In 1603, Carreño owned 150 pesos de oro común, two horses, and five Black slaves, in addition to various outstanding credits for his labor and loans. In his testament, Carreño requested his executors repay a Gaspar de Mendoza for the worth of a horse

that the latter had provided Carreño. Separately, a Mexico City merchant named Baltasar Luis Álvarez had received 1,700 pesos of oro común from Juan de Castillete, an *encomendero* of Francisco Hernández in Xalapa in payment for Carreño's labor in sugar production. Carreño instructed his executors to collect an outstanding 1,400 pesos from the Mexico City merchant. Further, Carreño noted that he had purchased a Black slave, named Juana Criolla, on credit in the port of Veracruz with a local guarantor, adding that he still owed 200 of the 450-peso sale price. In Mexico City—where Carreño fell ill in 1603—Carreño convalesced at the house of his friend, and possibly also a former employer or commercial associate in the sugarcane industry named Francisco Galindo de Herrera, who also owned a house and sugarcane plantation in the village of Malinalco, where Carreño had spent time residing (and probably working) in the past.

Carreño was also embroiled in political disputes that shed light on the ambiguities of his life as a property-owning, free mulato, master of sugar in New Spain.<sup>43</sup> He detailed in his testament an ongoing legal battle with the *alcalde mayor* of the village of Metepec (west of Mexico City, near Toluca) about payment of royal tribute.<sup>44</sup> Debates about tribute payment and who must pay the royal tax were acute in the early colonial period.<sup>45</sup> Royal decrees of the late sixteenth century specified that free Black people should pay tribute because so many free Black men and women in the Indies had accumulated significant "riches" after they had been freed, but many free Black populations petitioned the crown for exceptions.<sup>46</sup> Carreño detailed how—as a result of his refusal to pay tribute—the *alcalde* of Metepec had embargoed fine Castile-made clothes that Carreño had sold on credit to the *alcalde's* wife.<sup>47</sup> Carreño asked that his executor represent Carreño's interests in the ongoing case with the *alcalde*, and retrieve the dresses from embargo. One intention of resolving the tribute dispute posthumously with the *alcalde* might have been to assure that his son and future heirs would also be exempt from paying tribute.

Carreño's final will was the product of a specific intellectual milieu and personal cartography that evidenced particular theological interpretations of Catholicism, the meanings of Blackness, and freedom. Individuals used their testaments to record final decisions about investments in religious institutions that would shoulder the responsibility for moving their respective souls through purgatory. Carreño's endowments and theological choices reflect his Atlantic life between the Canary Islands and New Spain. His bequests to certain churches and images in the Canary Islands highlight

that he developed a theological proximity to the Franciscan Order and its early Christianization efforts in his birthplace, the Canary Islands, while his choice to endow certain churches in Mexico City also reflected his life and ties in New Spain.<sup>48</sup>

Carreño also made provisions to liberate from slavery one of his slaves in his will, Juana, a “*negra criolla*” whom he had purchased in the port of Veracruz for 450 pesos.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, he bestowed significant trust in Juana by requesting that she administer the outstanding debt for the purchase of her own body. Carreño stipulated that his executors liberate Juana from slavery and give her thirty pesos de oro común and one of his horses with a saddle so that she could “go to her natural [Veracruz] if she wishes, or do whatever she like.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Carreño asked that his executors obtain 200 pesos that a Xalapa landowner named Diego Salazar owed Carreño, in order for him to repay his debt to Alonso Pérez in Veracruz; Carreño still owed Pérez 200 of the 450 pesos for the price of Juana as a slave. Carreño asked his executors to give those 200 pesos to Juana so that she could distribute them to his Veracruz-based guarantor who had provided credit for the sale, or to Pérez who had sold Juana, or to whomever seemed appropriate to Juana. Carreño thus gave Juana the power to freely administer the 200 pesos that he owed for the previous purchase of her body as a slave. Juana’s fate after obtaining her freedom following Carreño’s death fades from the historical archive, but the image of her galloping from Mexico City along the Camino Real to Veracruz on the horse and saddle that Carreño gave her, towards a life of freedom with the thirty pesos that she received upon her liberation from slavery, and an additional 200 pesos that she should administer to repay her former owner for her own body, raises many questions about the relationship and apparent camaraderie that existed between this mulato slave owner and Juana.

Only sparse information exists about Carreño’s relationship with his other slaves, but two of the enslaved people whom Carreño did not manumit in his testament, María and Mateo, who were both described as “Black Angola,” had worked alongside Carreño in sugarcane plantations.<sup>51</sup> Carreño had purchased Mateo in Veracruz, and Mateo later described that he was from tierra Angola and that he was a “master of sugar.” After Carreño’s death, the enslaved pair reported that they autonomously administered Herrera’s sugarcane plantation near Malinalco, suggesting that they possessed particular skills in sugar production.<sup>52</sup> A fourth slave was María’s young daughter named Gerónima, whom Carreño did not manumit either. The fifth was a Black slave named Isabel who Carreño had pawned to Diego de Salazar in

Xalapa for a 200-peso loan in 1602.<sup>53</sup> Notarial records show that by 1603, it was Salazar who owed Carreño 200 pesos.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps Carreño had not repaid the loan on time and Salazar had subsequently sold Isabel to recuperate his losses, an eventuality that the pair had agreed on in their initial notarial contract of 1602.<sup>55</sup> In any case, Carreño did not mention Isabel in his 1603 testament, nor did she appear in the subsequent Assets of the Deceased Court's investigation into Carreño's property, which suggests that Carreño no longer owned Isabel by the time that he composed his will in 1603.

Even though Carreño was a free mulato property owner who commanded a significant salary, he was acutely aware of the ambiguities and heightened risk of being free while Black. Carreño took particular measures to navigate colonial law in order to ensure his heir's freedom. Carreño declared his son, a mulato named Juan Carreño, his universal heir.<sup>56</sup> Naming as his executor Herrera—the friend or employer in whose house Carreño was residing while taken ill in Mexico City—Carreño asked that Herrera safeguard his property and adopt the young mulato as though the boy were his own. Carreño wished for Herrera to feed, clothe, teach, cure, and indoctrinate Juan Carreño until he was old enough to inherit the property.

Carreño explained that Juan Carreño's mother was a Black criolla slave of another owner, whom Carreño had liberated by purchasing her freedom.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the purchase of her freedom represented a bid to secure or assure Juan Carreño's free status, or perhaps the action stemmed from charitable or affectionate feelings towards the enslaved Black criolla whose name Carreño did not mention in his will. Carreño explained in his will that he possessed notarized transcripts of the purchase of her liberty and a copy of her *carta de alhorría* (freedom certificate), which he asked his executors to safeguard in case his son might need the documents at a later date.

Carreño's specifications served as an acknowledgement that individuals racialized as Black in the early Spanish Empire often needed thorough layers of documentation to prove their legal status as free people. Carreño's own birth to a free Black mother named Violante in the Isla de Gran Canaria—who may have been enslaved before obtaining her freedom—perhaps imbued in him a particular awareness of how a mother's legal free status would shape Afro-descendants' own freedom in the Spanish Empire.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Carreño's precautions foresaw problems that occurred a decade after his death, when royal officials assumed that his son was a slave and briefly imprisoned him. In fact, had Carreño not safeguarded the freedom documents of his son's mother nor composed a will, judges of the Real Consejo in Mexico City may

well have sold his son and heir into slavery.<sup>59</sup> In 1613, a decade after Carreño's death, Doctor Juan Quesada de Figueroa of the Real Consejo in Mexico City noted that he had received information about a Castile-native who had perished intestate and whose abundant property, including slaves, were in the hands of Hernando Herrera in the village of Malinalco.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Figueroa was concerned that the assets of this deceased man had not been correctly administered.<sup>61</sup> Although Carreño had not died intestate, it would take a few weeks for such a fact to become evident. In the meantime, Quesada de Figueroa dispatched a deputy named Felipe de Medina from Mexico City to the village of Malinalco to investigate the death. In Malinalco and the surrounding environs, Medina found two of Carreño's slaves, Mateo and María—whom he described as “between bozal and ladino”—toiling in Herrera's sugarcanes while the enslaved child, Gerónima, and Carreño's young son, Juan Carreño, lived in Herrera's house. Medina interviewed numerous residents of Malinalco to build a biography of Francisco Carreño. Unconvinced that Carreño's property had been correctly administered following his death, Medina confiscated and imprisoned the four Afro-descendants and took them to Mexico City, noting that he was embargoing Carreño's slaves.

Having protested the confiscation, Herrera followed the party to the vice-regal capital where he retrieved a copy of Carreño's testament from a notary and presented it to the Real Consejo. After examining Carreño's testament, the judge of the Real Consejo in Mexico City recognized Juan Carreño as the universal heir and Herrera as Juan Carreño's guardian, and freed the young mulato from custody.<sup>62</sup> The judge also noted a clause in the will that asked executors to send monies to churches in the Canary Islands. Because Herrera could not provide documentation of having sent the funds, the judge ordered the sale of two of Carreño's slaves, María and her daughter Gerónima, to raise the necessary sums for this endowment.<sup>63</sup> A town crier administered the auction of mother and daughter at the Portal de los Mercaderes by the Cathedral in the central square of Mexico City and sold the pair for 550 pesos de oro común.<sup>64</sup> The court then sent the relevant sums to the Canary Islands, and returned the difference to Herrera for the young Carreño to inherit.

The vignette of Juan Carreño's brief imprisonment in 1613—ten years after his father's demise—highlights how law and legal status often superseded discriminatory attitudes towards skin color when individuals were in possession of pertinent paperwork to prove their liberty. Medina's assumption of Juan Carreño as a mulato slave, in spite of hearing sworn testimony by vecinos of Malinalco who assured him that the “mulatillo” was free, evidences that royal

officials often linked Blackness to slavery, at least until evidence through written documents proved one's freedom. However, upon production of the relevant documentation, the court reversed its position and recognized Juan Carreño as the legal heir, regardless of Medina's views about Blackness that associated the young Carreño with the former enslaved conditions of his mother, and perhaps also his paternal grandparents in the Canary Islands. It is worth noting too that Medina arrived in Malinalco in search of information about "a deceased Castilian" and did not report any surprise upon learning that the property-owning Castilian whose life he was investigating was a free mulato, even though he later assumed that the deceased's son, Juan Carreño, was a slave.<sup>65</sup> More importantly though, it was Francisco Carreño's intentional explanations about his son's status in his testament and his purchase of his son's mother's freedom, thereby liberating her from slavery, that eventually assured the young Carreño's freedom. The elder Carreño's precautions to guarantee his son's freedom evidence his astute engagement with a legal culture of written documents in the early Spanish Empire. He navigated colonial society, legislation, and attitudes to Blackness with dexterity.

### Conclusion

Arguably, any exploration of how free and formerly enslaved Black people lived in colonial regimes of racial slavery in late sixteenth-century New Spain must include the interconnected histories of Black life and knowledge across different sites in New Spain. This chapter has sketched out how the Black population in the port town of Veracruz often comprised people who had previously resided in other regions of the Spanish Atlantic, and has traced select examples of broader communication ties between Black populations in Veracruz and the Atlantic World. These biographical snippets demonstrate the need to expand our understanding of the free Black population of late sixteenth-century New Spain to include free Black men and women, who often hailed from Castile and other regions of the Spanish Empire (including different sites in New Spain). Many Black residents of the port of Veracruz, for example, were naturales of other regions of the Hispanic Atlantic and New Spain, and a world of free Black property owners who accumulated significant wealth developed in the ports of Veracruz and in rural regions between Veracruz and Mexico City. Some accumulated significant property—including ownership of enslaved Black men and women—while



maintaining commercial and religious ties in key cities and across the Atlantic. Others composed testaments that organized endowments to churches across the empire that evidence specific theological choices that mirror their geographical trajectories in the Atlantic World. A close reading of Francisco Carreño's life across the Atlantic World, and his deliberations in his final will reveals a rich intellectual history of slavery and freedom among Black and mulato dwellers of this region.