

**FRANCISCO JAVIER CLAVIJERO (1731–1787)**  
***THE HISTORY OF MEXICO (1780)***

**Preface**

I have undertaken to write *The History of México* . . . for three reasons: to avoid the irksome inactivity to which I found myself condemned, to serve my *Patria* insofar as I was able, and to restore the splendor of the truth about *América*, so unjustly maligned by certain modern writers.

**Dissertation on the Physical and Moral Constitution of the *Mexica* People**

Four classes of men can be discerned in México and the other countries of *América*. They are: 1) Those who are vulgarly called Indians, but ought to be called *americanos*, that is, the descendants of the original inhabitants of the New World, whose blood has not been mixed with that of the Old World; 2) Those from Europe, Africa, or Asia who presently live in *América*; 3) The children and descendants of these newcomers, who are called creoles (especially when of pure European descent) by the Spanish; 4) The mixed races, whether European/*americano*, European/African, or *americano*/African, collectively called *castas* by the Spanish. Mr. de Pauw applies his vicious criticisms to all these classes of men. He supposes, or perhaps deliberately misrepresents, the climate of *América* to be so malignant that it causes degeneration not only in the creoles and *americanos* but even in the Europeans who were born under the supposedly more benign skies, in a climate supposedly more favourable to all forms of animal life.

Leaving aside the errors that Mr. de Pauw and other writers of his ilk direct against other classes of men, I will address only what he says about those properly called *americanos*, the most maligned and most defenceless against his criticisms. If I were motivated by a desire to benefit or aggrandize myself, I would naturally have preferred to write a dissertation clearing the creoles against Mr. de Pauw's slanders. Besides being the easiest defense to make, it is the one that most nearly touches me, because I was born in *América* of Spanish parents, without a trace of Indian blood . . .

Thus far we have examined what Mr. de Pauw says about the physical qualities of *americanos*. Let us see what nonsense he has to offer concerning their mental and spiritual qualities. He finds their memories to be so defective that they cannot remember today what they did yesterday. He believes their minds so obtuse that they are incapable of thought, their spirits so cold that they do not feel love. Mr. de Pauw paints their portrait in hues so grim that he certainly would have numbered among those who, centuries ago, called into question their very humanity. I know that many other Europeans, and strangely, even a few descendants of Europeans born in *América*, share de Pauw's way of thinking, some out of ignorance or lack of reflection, some simply because they desire to affirm the superiority of Europe. But their opinions, even were they more widely shared, cannot overwhelm the force of my own experience . . .

**Taken from Francisco Javier Clavijero, "A Scholarly Polemic: Clavijero Refutes the Myth of *Americano* Inferiority," in *Latin American Independence: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. and eds. Sarah C. Chambers and John Charles Chasteen (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), 26–28.**