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It was not India but Europe which first invented the word “Casta” linking purity of blood & skin color to status in society. Hindus never had a word that meant caste. It's a racist term connoting white superiority as the measure of intelligence, civilization and morality.



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8. De español y alvina sale negro torna atras
(Spaniard and Albino Makes a Black-Return-Backwards)

2
"Casta" is an Iberian word meaning lineage. It is documented in Spanish since 1417. It is the root of the English word caste. It was historically used as a racial and social identifier where colonial Spanish & Portugese societies had a hierarchical race-based "caste system".

In *Diccionario de Autoridades*, the search of the words “casta”, “casto” and “castizo” is enlightening. “Casta” identifies social groups, meaning the “generation and lineage of well-known parents”.[48] This positive meaning evokes, of course, the role that “purity of blood” still had in Iberian social imagination. Secondly, “casta” refers to animals, but with the same meaning:

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Originating from the Spanish concept of purity of blood called "Limpieza de sangre", during Christian conflict with Islam, Casta was used in Christian Spain to demarcate those of Jewish or Muslim heritage who were usually convicted by the Spanish inquisition for heresy.

Tensions between the notions of purity of faith and purity of blood were an integral part of the limpieza certification process. As the questionnaires that were used in probanzas reveal, the status of purity had to be determined not just by the absence of Jewish, Muslim, and heretic blood but also by religious orthodoxy, usually measured by the lack of encounters with the Inquisition but by behavior more generally. The two definitions of purity of blood—as descent and practices—created a deep ambiguity in the concept of limpieza as a "natural" condition, all

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Only the “Old Christians” who had “Limpieza de sangre” or purity of blood, had high social status. So it was Christian religious extremism during the Inquisition with its ideas of racial superiority and purity of blood that created the original Sistema de Casta or Caste System.

If “casta” meant that, “castizo” was, consequently, the person whose “origins” and “caste” were known, but also “pure”.[51] This is an important addition, since it associated good origin with “purity of blood”, therefore, excluding from the “castizos” mixed-blood people.

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In the 1500s, the Spanish solidified the ideas of purity of blood & Casta as directly associated to skin color and percentage of “white blood” in a person. Anyone with a lineage even inked to a dark skinned ancestor was tainted by a "stain" due to that connection.

surrounded by a vastly greater native population. To preserve their wealth, power, and privileges, the Spanish created a caste-like system, the “Sistema de Castas,” with Spaniards in the top group. Others were ranked below based on their percentage of Spanish blood. The child of a Spaniard and indigenous person, for example, was called a *mestizo*, while the child of a mestizo and a Spaniard was called a *castizo*.

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Emphasizing “cleanliness of blood" & purity of white blood allowed Spain & Portugal to maintain a system of racial discrimination in their colonies. So when the Portuguese landed in India in 1497, they immediately labelled the vastly different Hindu Varna system as “Caste”

Besides travelers, other agents of the Portuguese Empire and abroad used the word "casta". This is very explicit in a translation of a letter of an ambassador of the zamorin of Calecut to king D. Manuel, which refers to the "casta" of "Chatins". Since we do not know anything further about the ambassador, it is impossible to know, from this translation, whether the Indians had already adopted the word to identify themselves when they were communicating with the Portuguese. However, the translation of this letter shows that since the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese were selecting "casta" as a convenient label of identification of certain Indian social groups and/or nations.[28]

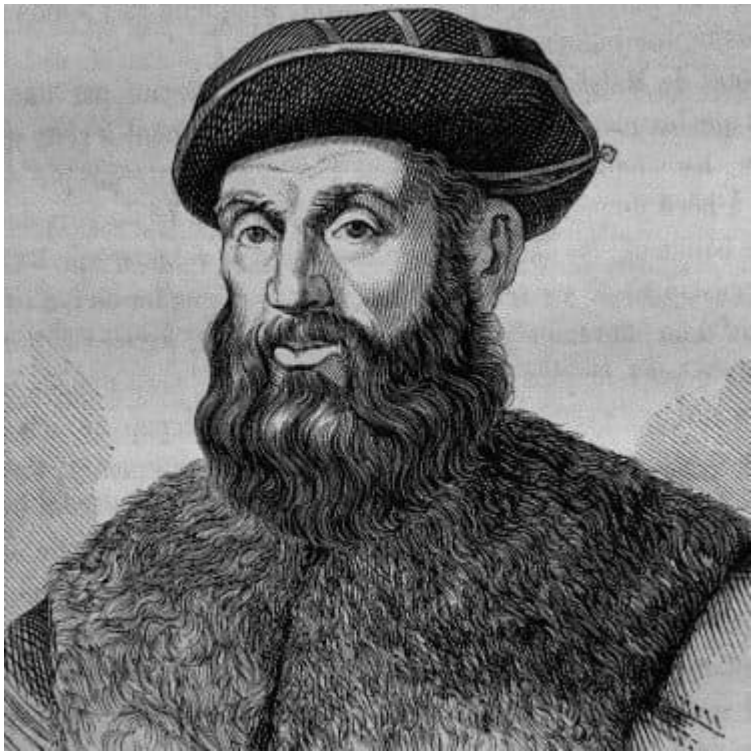
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In 1502, Vasco De Gama is said to have asked an Indian man his caste, to which he is supposed to have answered "Nair Bramane" This is not possible as Nairs were Kshatriyas or Shudras. Such instances prove the Portuguese accounts about Hindu caste were mostly fictional.



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Duarte Barbosa was the first Portugese author in India to use "Casta" (1515) . He did not apply the word "casta" to identify every social group in India. He used it to refer to groups that combined endogamy & occupation as was common in



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Barbosa identified Indian social groups with the phrase “ley de gente” (type of people). He used “alvo, branco, quase branco, baço, & preto” (niveous, white, almost white, dim and black) in a hierarchy starting with “alvo” (whitest) at top, & “preto” (darkest) at the bottom.

“casta” in Duarte Barbosa’s writings. Possibly the first travel writer to use it, somewhere between 1512 and 1515, in *The book of Duarte Barbosa*, this author did not apply the word “casta” to identify every social group he met in India.[24] He mainly used it to refer to groups that combined endogamy and occupation (something that was very common in the Portuguese medieval corporations too) like the “casta de Nayres”, a martial group with endogamic practices. The expression Barbosa prefers to identify Indian social groups was, however, “ley de gente” (type of people). He frequently used, too, the qualifiers “alvo”, “branco”, “quase branco”, “baço”, and “preto” (niveous, white, almost white, dim and black) as part of a hierarchy that started with “alvo” (the whitest) in the top, and “preto” (the darkest) in the bottom.

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Barbosa linked “civilizational” behavior like “courtesy”, “hygiene”, and “food habits” of Indian people to their skin color. His description of “whiter” Indians as more civilized than “black” is the origin of when race linked caste was falsely attributed to Hindus.

Adding to that, Barbosa was also interested in "civilizational" issues, such as the "courtesy", "hygiene", and "food habits" of Indian people. His different "leys de gente" were identified through these criteria, and, in general, for Barbosa the "whites" were more civil than the "black".[25]

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Barbosa also categorized Indians by civility & color, but he used the word "Casta" because he could only think in terms of the Portuguese concept of "purity of blood" to describe how Indians avoided intermarriage between certain communities to preserve genetic health.

The confusion deriving from the assumption that the Indian rules of endogamy imply "purity of descent" has been compounded by the intermingling of the European notion of "racial purity" with the Hindu concern about "religious purity." Are castes "pure" then,

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By 1921, Indo Portuguese Catholic priest Sebastião Dalgado in Glossário Luso-Asiático, equated the Sanskrit word "varna" to caste to purposely portray Hindus as racist with the excuse that the Rig Veda described the fictional Aryan Invasion as a war among white & dark races.



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Dalgado's work was based on distorted racial theories of the false Aryan Invasion Theory. He simply assigned Varna as color to make it mean the bigoted European concept of racial purity based on skin color, declaring caste as the main Indian method of social categorization

question, for example, the junction of the words “varna” and “casta”. He just assumes that one means the other. In addition, he does not question why caste had become the main Indian social category. For Dalgado, castes existed, and that was it. Like Dalgado, the majority of scholarship on Indian castes of Portuguese origin followed (and still follows) the same kind of understanding.[22]

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In reality, it was Europeans who practiced caste as a social institution, linking race to social status in their colonies. Black Africans & dark indigenous people were discriminated as inferior races who were uncivilized, immoral & unintelligent due to lack of pure white blood

This system of classification, which sought to determine access to certain rights, professions, and institutions on the basis of ancestry, also accounted for Africans, most of whom were brought to the New World as slaves by the Spanish. Not all people of African descent were slaves, but Spaniards tended to associate them with bondage and tried to keep them in the bottom levels of society. By the last third of the 16th century, Africans

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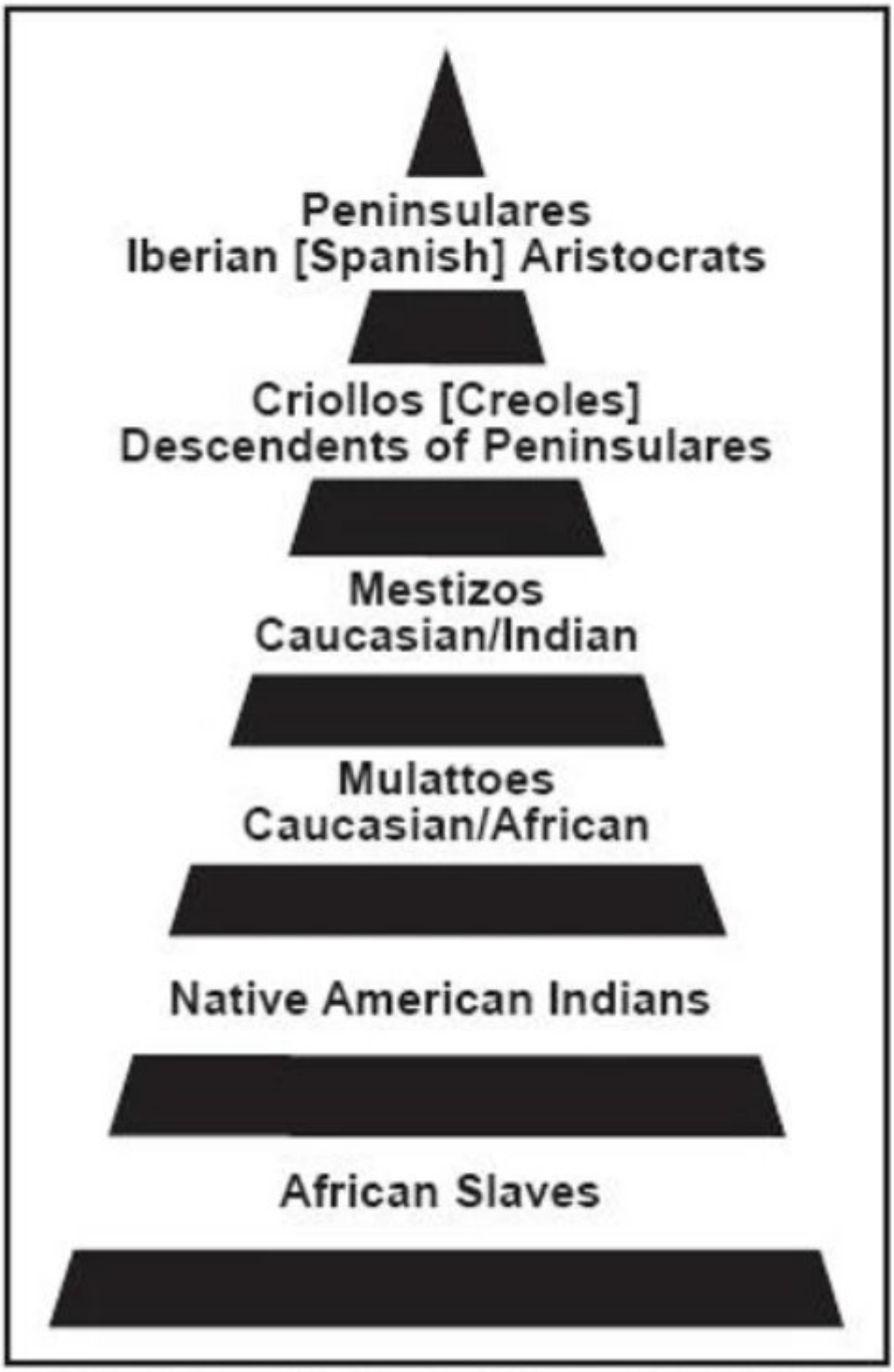
In Spain, this racist emphasis on purity of white blood went so far, it meant ineligibility for office, priesthood, or emigration to foreign territories. Having to produce genealogical records to prove one's pure ancestry resulted in a full blown market for fake genealogies.

Some of the scholarship on the history of race and racism has been casting early modern Iberia as the site of a precocious elaboration of racial concepts and practices. A recent historical overview of the problem, for example, begins by discussing developments in Spain, “the first great colonizing nation and a seedbed for Western attitudes toward race.”[17] Iberia’s pioneering role in the development of racial ideologies is sometimes linked to its participation in the early stages of the transatlantic African slave trade and in the colonization of the Americas.[18] But it is

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By the 1600s, anyone with ancestral connections to black Africans or indigenous people was classified as a ”stain" by Spaniards. Any hint of black ancestry was a stain as shown in 18th c. paintings of racial hierarchy, known as Casta paintings illustrating the “Caste System"

Social Classes in Spanish Colonies



Source: John Osborne et al., *Global Studies*, N & N Publishing (adapted)