

Primary Source: *Problems and Progress in Mexico* by Alexander von Humboldt, c. 1800.

Context:

Alexander von Humboldt was a German scientist who left a detailed description of his visits to the Spanish Empire around 1800. The laws of Spain prevented entry to all non-Spanish Europeans to the Spanish Empire. Humboldt's comments as an outsider are then, especially valuable.

Mexico is the country of inequality. No where does there exist such a fearful difference in the distribution of fortune, civilization, cultivation of the soil, and population... This immense inequality of fortune does not only exist among the cast of whites (Europeans or Creoles), it is even discoverable among the Indians.

The Mexican Indians, when we consider them *en masse*, offer a picture of extreme misery. Banished into the most barren districts, and indolent from nature, and more still from their political situation, the natives live only from hand to mouth. We should seek almost in vain among them for individuals who enjoy anything like a certain mediocrity of fortune. Instead, however, of a comfortable independency, we find a few families whose fortune appears so much the more colossal, as we least expect it among the lowest class of the people. In the intendancies of Oaxaca and Valladolid, in the valley of Toluca, and especially in the environs of the great city of la Puebla de los Angeles, we find several Indians, who under an appearance of poverty conceal considerable wealth. When I visited the small city of Cholula, an old Indian woman was buried there, who left to her children plantations of *maguey* (agave) worth more than 360,000 francs. These plantations are the vineyards and sole wealth of the country.

Amongst the inhabitants of pure origin the whites would occupy the second place, considering them only in the relation of number. They are divided into whites born in Europe, and descendants of Europeans born in the Spanish colonies of America or in the Asiatic islands... The Spanish laws allow the same rights to all whites; but those who have the execution of the laws endeavour to destroy an equality which shocks the European pride. The government, suspicious of the Creoles, bestows the great places exclusively on the natives of Old Spain. For some years back they have disposed at Madrid even of the most trifling employments in the administration of the customs and the tobacco revenue... The most miserable European, without education, and without intellectual cultivation, thinks himself superior to the whites born in the new continent. He knows that, protected by his countrymen, and favored by chances common enough in a country where fortunes are as rapidly acquired as they are lost, he may one day reach places to which the access is almost interdicted to the natives, even to those of men distinguished for their talents, knowledge and moral qualities.

Mediocrity	the fact of being average or not very good 平庸:它是平均水平或不好的事实 평범함
Colossal	extremely large 巨大:超大 거대한
Endeavor	an attempt to do something, especially something new or difficult 努力 노력
interdict	an official order from a court that orders you not to do something 禁制令:法院命令您不要做某事的正式命令 금지명령