

EARLY MODERN IBERIAN CRITICAL RACE STUDIES

Workshop Call for Proposals

The past decade has witnessed a vibrant expansion of the transdisciplinary field of premodern critical race studies (PCRS), bringing much-needed scholarly attention to the Renaissance's many racialized others. These efforts, along with earlier pioneering studies, have firmly established that race was operative centuries before the Enlightenment-era systems of biological classification that marked the conventional genesis of modern racial thinking. Yet, with notable exceptions, Iberia has remained marginalized in scholarly conversations among PCRS practitioners, which have been conducted most prominently by those working within Early Modern English studies. This workshop is interested less in diagnosing the potential reasons for this neglect than in showcasing, stimulating, and supporting the work of scholars studying race in early modern Iberia and its empires. It seeks to bring recent insights in PCRS scholarship into a mutually enriching dialogue with the cultural and historical specificity of Spanish, Portuguese, transatlantic, and transpacific forms of racemaking.

Potential Questions

- How can we recognize the abiding differences of transnational racemaking without falling back on previous paradigms that designated Iberian practices of othering as something other than race? In what ways can the tools and methodologies of PCRS, which have been articulated robustly for an Anglophone context, inform scholarly work in Iberian studies? In what ways is premodern Iberian race a unique phenomenon that warrants developing our own set of methodological tools?
- How did race overlap with *limpieza de sangre* and ethnoreligious genealogy, and how was it shaped by histories of religious coexistence, conversion, and enslavement? How do the analytical tools of race shed new light on developed areas of the field such as caste, *convivencia*, colonialism, and empire?
- How did interactions with Native peoples and with the African diaspora influence Iberian notions of race, and how can twenty-first century critical concepts like indigeneity, antiblackness, and critical whiteness studies illuminate these processes of racialization?
- How did the practice of empire and conquest in the Mediterranean, American, and Asian spheres lead to innovations in systems of racial classification already at work in medieval Iberia (e.g., climate theories of race, the Curse of Ham, theories of maternal impression...)?
- How was race in Iberia constituted by somatic and phenotypical markers like skin color, but also by legal-bureaucratic and taxonomic systems and cultural signifiers of religious identity and geographic origin? To what extent



Carta ejecutoria (detail),
Granada, 1572

were such systems and signifiers regionally distinctive but also influential beyond national borders?

- How did this configuration of race enable or generate narratives of passing, race and caste concealment, visual practices of coding caste and race, and understandings of intermarriage or “mixing” between and among racialized and dominant groups?
- How did members of racialized groups dialogue with, push back on, or otherwise respond to the processes of racialization underway in Iberia? How did they insist upon their own humanity in the face of the dehumanizing processes of racialization?
- To what extent did systems of racialization and premodern structures of enslavement coincide? How did the burgeoning transatlantic trafficking in the enslaved, conducted by Iberians and for the profit of Iberian kingdoms, give rise to the conflation of those systems?

Workshop Format

The workshop will be comprised of two parts. The first invites participants to bring works in progress to share at the **College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, MA) from March 5–8, 2026**. Position papers with a thesis and initial articulation of evidence or theoretical apparatus will be pre-circulated and then presented and discussed in round tables organized by theme. Participants will also collaboratively generate a shared bibliography of essential, touchstone critical sources for early modern race in Iberia.

The second leg of the workshop, planned for **Fall 2026 at Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD)**, will provide a forum for presenting more advanced work that has developed from the initial meeting, following a more traditional conference format and including keynotes by prominent scholars of early modern race. One potential outcome of these events is an edited volume or special issue of a journal, but the broader goal is to create a space and community for ongoing, generative dialogue on PCRS in Iberian Studies.

Application Instructions

Interested scholars from any discipline and at any career stage, including advanced graduate students, are invited to apply by submitting their CV and a brief statement (200–300 words) describing their proposed project and how it would benefit from the workshop. Proposals are due by Friday, October 24, and applicants will be notified of their acceptance by Monday, November 24. While ensuring a diverse range of scholarly profiles and interests, priority will be given to non-tenured and contingent faculty, as well as to those with a developing profile in PCRS, at any career stage or rank. Lodging, meals, and local transportation will be provided, and each participant will be reimbursed for up to \$400 in travel expenses to and from Holy Cross.

Please send proposals, CVs, and any questions to Elizabeth Spragins (espragin@holycross.edu) and Paul Michael Johnson (pmjohnson@jhu.edu).

Holy Cross

