From the 16th to the mid 19th century, the territory known as La Taguzgalpa or “Taguis-galpa”\textsuperscript{1} remained, in large part, outside Spanish colonial rule. Secular and religious officials carried out both colonizing and missionary expeditions to appropriate this Honduran terrain, form permanent settlements, and subjugate many of its semi-nomadic indigenous and sylvan populations, including the Xicaques, Payas, Tawankas, Miskito-zambos, and the Black Caribs or Garifuna.\textsuperscript{2} These measures were largely unsuccessful because they lacked a clear strategic vision and a systematic course of action—the number of intents were few, sporadic, and poorly structured. Even when the Spanish conquistadors created either small villages or Indian reducciones, the mechanisms to oversee these populations were weak or non-existent. Soldiers were, for the most part, absent, and there were usually only one or, at most, two priests (if they did not suffer gruesome deaths or fall ill with malaria and other diseases) for the different establishments that were separated by large distances and rugged landforms (AGCA, A1.12.1685-13.934-2013). There was no clear center from which to exercise hegemony over the reducido populations and protect them from outside attacks. Another factor for the lack of success by the Spanish was the arrival of the British, attracted by the news of the land’s riches, to the Bay Islands and coastal region in the late 1570s. They, unlike the Spanish, did have a solid economic, political, and military presence in the Taguzgalpa (Argueta 416; Jimenez

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\textsuperscript{1}This area covered over 400 leagues and today, makes up part of the departments of Olancho, Yoro, Colón, and Gracias a Dios in Honduras.

\textsuperscript{2}The Xicaques inhabited the department of Yoro and Olancho, the Paya were present in small nuclei in the departments of Colón, Olancho, and Gracias a Dios, the Tawankas settled in the mountainous region between Olancho and Gracias a Dios, and the Miskitos lived primarily in the jungle areas of Gracias a Dios (Pineda-Portillo 71).
Moreno 21), and were able to form permanent settlements that lasted for over two centuries. Nevertheless, the Spanish colonial powers were able to gain control and begin to repopulate the coastal region in 1797. Also, thirty-eight years after its independence from Spain, Honduras recovered the Bay Islands and La Mosquitia area from the British crown as part of the Wyke-Cruz Treaty of 1859.

The repossession of these territories resulted in a renewed interest in the tribes of the northeast of Honduras and ensuing efforts to control and incorporate them into the nation being constructed. It also coincided with the arrival of the Catalan priest Manuel de Jesús Subirana, whose apostolic zeal and devotion to social justice and the protection of the Honduran indigenous groups were unmatched (and still revered to this day). In this paper, I seek to: discuss the methods that Father Subirana utilized to integrate thousands of natives into the overall population of the State; describe the effect that his “pro-indigenous” ideology had on the State’s policies towards the indigenous peoples; and explain how Subirana’s success in this region was tied to State-supported civilizing projects that were characterized by a plurality of discourses on race.

After serving as a priest for sixteen years in his native city of Manresa in Spain and five years in Cuba under then-Archbishop Anthony Claret, Subirana traveled to Honduras in 1856, where he continued his vocation until he died in 1864 (Garrido 21). According to the letter, dated October 24, 1856, from the Bishop Hipólito Casiano Flores to the then President Guardiola Bustillo, Subirana had personally presented himself to the Bishop to solicit a place among the Honduran clergy, for the sole purpose of serving as a missionary priest in the coasts of the nation. Subirana even desired to enter the deep jungles of La Mosquitia where he would Christianize the “indios selváticos” that had resisted the authorities’ control for centuries (Garrido 68). Bishop Flores welcomed Subirana’s arrival and missionary goals because a mere 20 priests were under his jurisdiction for an estimated 300,000 inhabitants. Moreover, Subirana was proficient in English, the language spoken or at least understood by some of the area’s populations (Garrido 66-68). This correspondence resulted in support from the State, which also considered his missionary goals in line with the government’s discourse of civilization.

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3“Traders and pirates engaged in lively and lucrative commerce with the indigenous inhabitants [– the Xicaques in the northwest part of the Taguzgalpa and the Miskitos in the northeastern section]. Trees were felled, animals were hunted for their pelts, gold was extracted from the rivers, and rubber was harvested from the castilla tree. In exchange for their cooperation, the natives were supplied with tools, firearms, and other objects of foreign manufacture” (Gold 9-10), which would be used to protect themselves from the Spaniards. Some Spanish officials would also engage in a series of contraband affairs with their supposed enemies (Argueta 416).

4According to Honduran legislation, the groups considered “indios selváticos” included the Xicaques, Payas, Tawankas, Miskito-zambos, and the Caribs or Garífuna. For the most part, these groups were the most difficult to reduce, and many of them had or continued to maintain relations with the English.

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and progress.

Although Subirana emphasized that his sole goal was to bring salvation to the sylvan tribes and that he had no desire to intervene in governmental matters, he quickly realized that his work was directly tied to the politics of the times and that he would require the assistance of the State in carrying out his apostolic missions. In eight years of missionary work, Subirana created, organized, and carried out what Herranz called a neo-colonial policy with the various indigenous groups (178-182). Herranz characterized Subirana’s approach to these populations as neo-colonial because it did not differ much from those applied by missionaries during the Colonial Period. In essence, Subirana created post-colonial reducciones where he, with the assistance of others, evangelized, organized, and educated the different tribes by providing them with essential skills training in Spanish literacy and agriculture (Sierra-Fonseca 118).

In a report submitted to the Minister of State Relations on October 17, 1858, regarding the tribes in the Department of Yoro and Olancho, Subirana detailed the process he undertook to reducir 2,127 indigenous people from the two departments. Subirana indicated that when he arrived at a village of Indians, he drew the attention of the natives through music (the singing of hymns sometimes accompanied by a violin that he played). Once he gained their confidence, Subirana catechized, baptized, and instructed them on living a moral and civil life. After that, he made sure that the natives paid any debts they may have had. Still, if they did not have any, Subirana left them under the care of a citizen (a “white” land-owning male) who provided them with agricultural work and the tools necessary to accomplish such labor so that they might have a source of food. In this report, Subirana also recommended that small chapels be constructed in haciendas contiguous to their inhabitants so that the local priest may be able to gather and instruct all of them in the Catholic faith and to gradually ensure the formation of permanent establishments (Alvarado-García, *La legislación* 69-71).

The work that Subirana accomplished in Olancho and Yoro was quite efficacious. For example, in a letter to the Minister of Regulations, dated November 1859, he claimed to have Christianized 5,022 “indios selváticos” (150 Tawankas, 600 Payas, and 4,272 Xicaques) and had initiated the construction of schools in different villages (Alvarado-García, *La legislación* 72-75). But something that I should underscore about this report is that he included his 12-point plan for the recently baptized Indians known as Father Subirana’s regulations, demonstrating his commitment to defending the sylvan Indians from cruel, unfair treatment. Among the suggested principles was the right of Indians to work for themselves or for whomever they

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5See also Alvarado-García’s *El misionero español Manuel Subirana* (1964).
6See Subirana’s November 4, 1859, letter directed to the Minister of Relations for a detailed transcription of the “Reglamento del Padre Subirana.” Alvarado-García includes a copy of this letter in *Legislación indigenista* (1958), p.72-74.
wanted, to obtain just prices for products they sell or purchase from others, and not to pay those debts that they claimed to have paid or if they had been harmed or wronged by the lender. These norms, his suggestions, and missionary work immediately affected the State’s approach to La Mosquitia and its population.

But how did this occur? Herranz argues that Subirana’s previous success in Cuba and the friendships he developed with the then two current presidents –Guardiola Bustillo and Medina— allowed him to influence much of the legislature that the State issued in the 1860s (178). For example, Guardiola Bustillo’s 1861 presidential decree called for the newly appointed governor of La Mosquitia, José Lamorte, to perform the following:

To inspire in the sylvan Indians the liking for farming, agriculture, and the other Arts necessary to the sustenance and maintenance of life; insist that the tribes form settlements so that they may gradually become accustomed to the routines of daily life; make sure that in these settlements chapels are erected for the celebration of Christian faith, in which they should be instructed; insist on the immediate catechization of every individual who up to this date had not adopted the religion; to establish, as soon as possible, schools where the native tribes may receive basic Catholic teachings; and to assure the observance of the regulations issued by Subirana to protect the interests of the Indians (Alvarado-García, La legislación 19-20).

Many of the governor’s specified responsibilities are the same suggestions Subirana had previously presented in his reports. Moreover, this law expressly indicated that the governor must adhere to the Subirana regulations I described above. After this presidential order, other decrees considered favorable to the native populations were issued, including naming administrators for the tribes, establishing schools, and granting specific land grants to the Indians (Herranz 178).

This brings me to an important point; One I believe to be most indicative of Subirana’s pro-indigenous ideology and one that differs from most missionaries in Honduras during the Colonial Period. From 1862 to 1864, he systematically worked to ensure that the Paya and Xicaque Indians successfully attained land endowments from the government. Using his political influence and knowledge of nineteenth-century (1836 agrarian reform statute) and colonial law, he secured twenty titles for these two indigenous groups (Davidson 451-457).

By 1864, when Subirana passed away, more than 10,000 men and women were baptized (2000 Miskitos, 150 Tawankas, more than 700 Payas, 5500 Xicaques, 2000 Black Caribs). He also established around thirty-seven villages or missions: twenty-six in Yoro, four in Santa Barbara, three in Colón and Gracias a Dios (two departments which include the Honduran Mosquitia area), and four in Olancho (Alvarado-García, La legislación 80). After Subirana’s death, government officials continued to promote exploring these areas and the Christianiza-
tion of its peoples, but the main objectives were to nationalize the area and instill in the sylvan tribes the ideas of civilization and progress. Their protection and overall well-being became secondary. This is most reflected in the principal articles of the presidential 1868 decree that designated La Mosquitia an official department of the State, but that, unlike the 1861 law, did not include the observance of Subirana’s regulations or the protection of the Indians’ interests (Alvarado-García, La legislación 30-32). Also, in this and other ensuing State laws, reports, and pseudo-anthropological studies, there was a resurgence of discourses concerning the inferior nature of the Indian and African race, their supposed lack of reason, inability to self-governance, and unsuitability to the right to citizenship (Barahona, “Imagen y percepción” 20; Alvarado-García, La legislación 30-32). For instance, José Lamorte, the first official governor of the region, argued that both the Miskito-zambos and Black Caribs were uncivilized and defiant of all authority. They were unwilling to recognize him or the State as superiors despite his labors, and they often conspired together to rebel and enslave other indigenous groups. In addition, Lamorte utilized, in all his reports, disparaging adjectives such as savage, idle, and nomadic when referring to these groups (Oquelí 146-147). Similarly, to Lamorte, the government commissioner, Melquidesec Zúñiga, also provided a disapproving description of the Miskito-zambos and Black Caribs in the 1870s when he argued that their indolence was the direct product of their inferior nature and affirmed that it was imperative to improve their disposition to ensure the progress of the State (Barahona, “Imagen y percepción” 20-21). Additional civilizing commissions followed during the last decades of the nineteenth century, but, like most missions to this region, they too were largely unsuccessful.

Because the State could not assert its control over the Honduran Miskito Coast nor ignore the threat that its peoples posed to the country’s progress and identity, it utilized legislature and ideology to affirm its dominance (Barahona, “Imagen y percepción” 22-34). At a legislative level, the State denied representation and rights to these groups by limiting the privilege of citizenship, as delineated in its constitutions, to individuals who met the conditions of moral and physical beauty, literacy, property ownership, hygiene, and individual autonomy. The Miskito-zambos, Black Caribs, and most Indian groups did not satisfy the majority, if not all, of these requirements and were barred from exercising any authority.

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7By 1887, the Mosquitia had become part of the department of Colón. This department encompassed most of the territory of the Caribbean coast. See Barahona’s Evolución histórica de la identidad nacional (2002), p. 243.
8See also the decree for the improvement of the Xicaques titled “Ordenazas para la dirección y mejoramiento de las tribus Xicaques.” This law is included in Alvarado-García’s Legislacion indigenista (1958), p. 35-37.
9See also the writings of nineteenth-century intellectual and legislator Adolfo Zúñiga in Euraque’s Free Pardos and Mulattoes (2007), p. 94.
10See Lara’s “Veiled Whiteness in Nineteenth-century Honduran Constitutional Law & Citizenship” on how citizenship was established in Honduras.
statutory exclusion was their absence from its national imaginary and history.

The “saintly priest,” the missionary with an aura of a miracle worker, and the apostle of the Honduran Indians are some of the epithets used to describe Father Manuel de Jesús Subirana until this day. At a time when the Church in Honduras was in crisis because it had lost its prestige and influence and had only twenty priests for the entire nation, Subirana took it upon himself to dedicate eight years of his life to missionary work in the northeastern region of Honduras that had remained for over 300 years largely unexplored and outside of governmental control. The fruits of his apostolic labor may not have lasted, but they are laudable, and in the context of Honduran history, his denouncement of the numerous injustices facing various indigenous populations was unheard of during that period.
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