

# **The Beata of the Black Habit: Race, Sexuality, and Religious Authority in Late Colonial Mexico**

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María Anastasia Gonzales was a mystic; out of step with the elite religiosity of late eighteenth-century Bourbon reformers, but highly respected in her local community as a beata—a laywoman who lived under vows of celibacy and piety. When the Inquisition compelled her to testify against her former confessor for sexual misconduct, the content of her testimony—and the fact that she experienced ecstatic visions in the middle of it—drew the ire of local clergy and Inquisitors alike. Over the course of a thirteen-year investigation, trial, and post-humus inquisitorial debate, Gonzales got caught in the cross fire between religious authorities and became the focus of elite imperial anxieties. All the while, she insisted on the validity of her own religious experiences in the face of Inquisitors' gendered and racialized depictions of her as arrogant, ignorant, or mentally deficient. This talk examines the extraordinary furor caused by one woman's way of making sense of her confessor's sexual exploitation to explore changes in religious culture, colonial power, and racialized ideologies of gender in late eighteenth-century Mexico.

presented by  
**THE DEPARTMENTS OF  
COMPARATIVE STUDIES,  
HISTORY, AND WOMEN'S,  
GENDER AND SEXUALITY  
STUDIES**

**WEDNESDAY**

**JAN 23**

**3:45 p.m. - 5:15 p.m.**  
**168 Dulles Hall**

