Monsón y Mojica, Capt. Felipe, (early seventeenth century-1684), Afro-Mexican ex-slave and captain for Puebla's mulatto militia during the 1683 pirate raid on Veracruz, also served as a prominent confraternity leader and chile vendor. Felipe Monsón y Mojica's staggering rise to prominence from slavery to the apex of colonial society is directly related to his influential wife and emancipator, Juana María de la Cruz.

Felipe Monsón was born a slave of partial African ancestry in early seventeenth-century Puebla de los Ángeles, (now Puebla, Mexico) thereby forming part of an exponentially-growing mulatto population that served in the city's elite households and textile mills. Undoubtedly his mother was also a slave of African descent, and Magdalena Monsón de Mojica, a free mulatto woman, may have been his sister or a close niece. Unfortunately nothing else is known about his immediate family or childhood. At the time of his liberation (sometime before 1660) Monsón was owned by Joseph de Higuera, a member of the powerful Higuera Matamoros family. Juana María de la Cruz, his Indigenous wife, a native of the peripheral Santa Ana neighborhood, purchased Felipe's liberty for an undisclosed amount of money. It is uncertain whether Felipe and Juana María were married prior to his manumission. Together Cruz and Monsón would establish one of the most remarkable Afro-Indigenous households in colonial Mexico by way of their successful chile vending enterprise. Felipe Monsón attained such success in this particular venture that he became known as "el chilero". Although a resident of the northern San José parish, Monsón sold his produce within Puebla's central plaza. He specialized in the commerce of three particular chile varieties: jamanqui, ancho and
chilpasilla.  

Over time, the Monsón de la Cruz union attained true financial success, which they invested in the construction of two-story, seven-room complex within the limits of Puebla's San José parish. The couple invested over 12 000 pesos in the endeavor, a remarkable amount of money since most houses cost between 200 to 300 pesos during the late seventeenth century. In addition to its multiple rooms, the housing complex also featured two patios, horse stables, fruit orchards, and a private well. More importantly, a separate entrance gave way to a prehispanic steam house or temazcal, "in which people continually bathed". As a result, the Monsón de la Cruz complex became a distinctly Afro-Indigenous communal site, which the urban masses of Puebla frequented for recreation, cleansing, and medicinal purposes.

During the 1660s and 1670s, Felipe Monsón consolidated his position as a prominent merchant within an urban society dominated by Spanish merchants. Yet numerous loans made out to his name confirm the fact that his credit network included Spanish clergymen, Indigenous traders, and free-colored militia captains. This diverse network allowed Monsón to receive produce from remote Indigenous towns such as Tlatlauquitepec, Jutupango, Ayutla and Aguacatlan. In fact, Felipe Monsón even established a strong commercial reputation with merchants located in the town of Celaya, 250 miles (400 kilometers) away from Puebla. As a chile vendor, Monsón also contributed to the development of a distinctively urban brand of popular Catholicism in his devotion to an image of Christ the Redeemer. Puebla's chileros distinguished themselves from the city's other merchants through their devotion to this particular image, which was painted on one of the cathedral's exterior walls.

A devout Catholic, Monsón y Mojica manifested his religiosity by
participating in the Expiración de Cristo confraternity, donating considerable sums of money to Puebla's religious orders and establishing a chaplaincy in his name. In 1682, while serving as the administrator (mayordomo) for this Afro-Poblano brotherhood, he commissioned the construction of a side altar within the Limpia Concepción church hospital. Juan Lázaro and Diego Lázaro, two Indigenous master artisans from Puebla's Santiago neighborhood, were awarded the contract. Monsón remained committed to his confraternity even as his health faltered and forgave its members a considerable debt. In addition, various postmortem donations to the Dominican and Discalced Carmelite orders cemented his legacy as a devout Catholic.

In 1682, Felipe and his wife agreed to establish a chaplaincy for the salvation of their souls after their death. The couple agreed to endow the chaplaincy with a 4,000 peso fund which would be used to celebrate one hundred yearly masses in their name. The remaining funds would finance the religious career of Antonio de Heredia, a student of the San Juan and San Pedro Royal College. Heredia eventually abandoned his religious studies and Monsón's endowment was applied to the nuns of Puebla's Discalced Carmelite convent. Incredibly, the Carmelite nuns upheld Monsón's wishes and continued to hold religious services in his honor as late as 1851. These pious actions bolstered Felipe Monsón's prominence within Puebla's social circles and converted him into the de facto leader of the city's pardo/mulatto community.

On 14 May 1683, Felipe Monsón was named captain for Puebla's mulatto militia. His appointment to this honorable position was recorded in the city's Indigenous annals, which were presumably penned by his contemporary, the Indigenous governor Don Miguel de los Santos. Capt. Monson's nomination
occurred in the context of Lorenzo de Graff's devastating raid on the port of Veracruz. Along with Capt. Lorenzo de Tapia, captain of Puebla's black militia, Capt. Monsón was assigned the responsibility of supplying the poorly armed mulatto units with sufficient weapons, gunpowder and rations to make the trek down to Veracruz. Considering his fragile health and advanced age, Monsón in all likelihood restricted his military participation to an administrative role in the Veracruz rescue operation.

Nonetheless, Monson's appointment as captain of the mulatto militia would mark a watershed moment in the history of Puebla's free-colored companies. Henceforth, the men assigned such positions would originate from strong commercial backgrounds, participate in various Catholic brotherhoods and enjoy considerable social status prior to their military charge. During his lifetime, these characteristics allowed Monsón to establish strong relationships with Puebla's high society, including the city regent, Juan Valera. Lieutenant Baltazar de los Reyes, of the mulatto militia, was also a close friend and ally of Monsón's. The extraordinary life of Capt. Felipe Monsón y Mojica ended in 1684 in Puebla, just over a year after his military appointment. He and Juana María de la Cruz, who died in 1688, did not have any children of their own. Instead, they adopted and raised a pair orphans, Matias Monsón and Felipe Monsón.

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