In a remarkable late eighteenth-century Peruvian painting, America is allegorized as a richly dressed, voluptuous female suckling two youths (Fig. 10.1). To judge by hair and skin color, the boys feeding at her breast are clearly Spanish, as are most of the cadre of children who surround her. There is also one child of African descent. In the foreground, several distressed indigenous American boys witness the scene hungrily. One of them even wipes a tear from his eye. Flanking the indigenous youths are two native couples. The Indian men draw attention—one by gesture, the other by gaze—to their sad, hungry offspring. This painting, like many images from the colonial period, suggests that the Americas are like a woman who willingly offers up her bounty to the colonizing Europeans. In this particular allegory, breast milk serves as the metaphor for indigenous land, labor, and natural resources, some of which are pictured in the lush and verdant background. Unlike most representations of allegorical America, however, this painting acknowledges those in the New World who don’t feed, who don’t grow wealthy and prosper: The Indians, America’s native offspring.

This essay considers the exposed breast of the more typical savage allegorical America, and how both its visibility and availability represented the conquest of American land and people. Such considerations enable us to read the singular breastfeeding America of the painting described above as a call, couched in allegory, for Peruvian independence from Spain. Further, I will show how this America figure derives from the *Virgo Lactans*, the traditional European image of Mary breastfeeding Jesus, and how that derivation influences the reading of the allegory. Finally, the paper reflects on the predicament of real Indian women who were employed as wet nurses for Spanish infants in colonial Peru. While they are never pictured,
Fig. 10.1 Anon., An Allegory of America Suckling Foreigners (called An Allegory of Spain and Her Treatment of Her South American Colonies). Ca. 1780, oil on canvas, 32" by 23 ½", Cuzco, Peru. Priv. Col. Photo courtesy of the Frick Art Reference Library.