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Latin America since Independence

Two Centuries of Continuity and Change

Thomas C. Wright

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Introduction

This book offers new perspectives on Latin American history by tracing continuity and change in important colonial legacies through two hundred years of postcolonial history. Geographically, it includes all the countries in the Western Hemisphere that Spain and Portugal colonized, from the U.S.–Mexico border to the southern tip of South America plus Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. As it is customary to consider the former French colony of Haiti, which was originally Spanish, as part of Latin America, it is covered as well. Chronologically, the book begins with background to the initial contact between Spaniards and Native Americans in 1492 and then examines the three-plus centuries of European colonial rule. Its primary focus is the period from 1804, when the first Latin American country secured its independence from European rule, to the present.

During Latin America's colonial period, many cultural traits, attitudes, values, practices, and institutions were formed and persist today in modified form. Five of these colonial legacies have been at the center of political life since independence. These include

- authoritarian governance, as exercised by the European monarchies that conquered and settled the region
- a rigid social hierarchy that the conquerors molded, based on race, color, gender, and until the abolition of slavery, degree of freedom
- a powerful Roman Catholic Church that monopolized formal religion
- economic dependency, an arrangement by which the European countries set the rules of production and trade for the colonies, to benefit the homelands
- the large landed estate that dominated the countryside, which conquerors and their descendants created out of land mostly appropriated from the Indians.

Chapter 1 examines the origins of these five important colonial legacies. The remaining eleven chapters interpret Latin America's history since independence by analyzing continuity and change in those legacies. Over the past two centuries, progressives have sought to modify or abolish them, while conservatives for the most part have sought to preserve them. Different legacies have been important political issues at different times. For example, the status of the Roman Catholic Church was passionately contested during the half-century following independence, the large landed estate first arose as a political matter in early twentieth-century Mexico, and economic dependency became an important matter at the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s. The outcomes of this political contestation over the colonial legacies have been central to molding today's Latin America.

By examining change and continuity in the colonial legacies over time, the book analyzes Latin America's political, economic, social, and religious history and aspects of its cultural history. In covering the broad sweep of Latin American history, it also provides a framework for further exploration. If this story awakens your interest in the history of a particular country, you will find that books are available on every country. If you care to learn more about popular culture, women, art, sports, cinema, the environment, music, sexuality, folklore, wars, or almost any other aspect of historic or contemporary Latin America, you will find books on those topics, too.

The book is organized chronologically and divided into six parts and twelve chapters. At the end of Parts II–VI, brief essays labeled "Reflections on the Colonial Legacies" assess the state of the colonial legacies at different times between independence and the present. The conclusion offers a comprehensive overview of how Latin America has evolved over the past two hundred years.

Interspersed through the book are country fact boxes. Each is placed to coincide with a discussion of the country it describes. The statistics provided in these boxes are from the current *CIA World Factbook*, which you can access on the Internet. Some of the data presented are based on statistics provided by the Latin American governments, each of which determines its own criteria for gathering and presenting data. Other data are based on estimates, and some information is a bit dated. In some cases, aggregate percentages do not come out to exactly 100 percent due to rounding.

These factors make precise comparisons difficult, particularly in the areas of ethnic composition, religious affiliation, and population living in poverty. Keep in mind also that poverty in Argentina is not the same as poverty in Haiti. Despite these limitations, the country fact boxes should help you to assess the current levels of development, ethnic and social composition, and quality of life of the peoples of each Latin American country. A country fact box for the United States is included to allow for comparison.

Finally, a couple of words on terminology. The term "Indian" is used in this book interchangeably with "native" and "indigenous." But in Latin America, the term "*indio*" is disrespectful, even pejorative; "*indígena*" is the best word to use when referring to native people in Spanish. Latin Americans can be sensitive to the words "America" and "Americans," which they correctly believe include them along with the United States and Canada. Therefore, the book refers to the United States as "the United States," or abbreviated as "the U.S.," not as "America." When Latin Americans are quoted in the text using the term "America," they are normally referring to Latin America, not the United States.

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Origins of the Colonial Legacies

The year 1492 was much more than the beginning of Iberian conquest and settlement in the Western Hemisphere: It launched the five-hundred-year period of European transoceanic imperialism. There had been grand and extensive empires before—such as the Han dynasty; the Roman, Mongol, and Ottoman empires; and in the Americas, the Inca and Aztec empires—but none that spanned oceans. In the four centuries following Columbus's landfall, Europeans incrementally extended their grip on the non-European world. Driven by a search for wealth and by a sense of racial, cultural, and often religious superiority, the Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, Dutch, Russians, and others appropriated for themselves the Americas, much of Asia, and eventually almost all of Africa and Oceania.

Latin America not only was the original venue of European transoceanic imperialism, but also experienced one of the longest colonial periods of all the areas that came under European control. Whether we count from Columbus's 1492 landfall, the Portuguese arrival in Brazil in 1500, or the fall of the Aztec empire in 1521, the colonial period, which ended in mainland Iberian America by 1825, lasted three centuries; in Cuba and Puerto Rico, almost four. By comparison, the English colonies that would become the United States extended from the founding of Virginia in 1607 to the British defeat in 1783—well short of two centuries. For perspective, the Portuguese had the greatest staying power of all European imperialists, holding Goa on India's west coast from 1510 to 1961 and Macao in China from 1557 to 1999.

The long colonial period in Latin America produced enduring legacies. Among these are languages, gender and race relations, mentalities, religiosity, diverse folkways, and an amalgamation of cultures from three continents. These are cultural traits that have been modified over time, but that persist today.

Other colonial legacies have been central to the political life of the independent Latin American countries. They have been contested between progressives who see them as atavistic impediments to modernization, development, and democracy and conservatives who consider them bastions of the colonial order that they have sought to preserve for their own benefit and bulwarks against change that they deem threatening. These politically contested colonial legacies include authoritarian governance, the powerful Roman Catholic Church, a rigid social hierarchy, the large landed estate, and economic dependency. While the first four have divided conservatives and progressives during much of the postcolonial period, the same cannot be said of the economic dependency. Both camps have embraced economic nationalism to fight against dependency at different times, but, generally, progressives have been more critical of economic dependency and more nationalistic in their policies than their conservative counterparts. This chapter offers an overview of Latin America's colonial period with emphasis on the origins of the institutions, values, and practices that became the colonial legacies which have been central to postindependence politics and to the formation of contemporary Latin America.

THE CLASH OF TWO WORLDS

Latin America began with conquest, followed by Iberian occupation of most of Mexico, Central America, South America, and some of the Caribbean islands. Conquest is a staple of world history. From Alexander the Great to Genghis Khan to Hitler, conquest has taken a huge toll in human life and caused immense material destruction, and the conquered populations have normally paid an enormous price for their defeat. But no conquest had a greater impact on the world than the Spanish and Portuguese conquest and occupation of the majority of the Western Hemisphere.

In addition to pioneering five centuries of European imperialism, the Iberian conquest of America joined two worlds separated by a vast ocean and previously isolated from and unknown to each other. It connected different peoples and cultures, different flora and fauna, and different microbes, with profound results—both beneficial and detrimental. The most beneficial was the enrichment of the world's diet through the Columbian Exchange, which sent corn, potatoes, tomatoes, chiles, and dozens of other foods along with tobacco to Europe and eventually throughout the world, while introducing wheat, rice, sugar, coffee, bananas, citrus, cows, pigs, sheep, and horses to the Americas. Undoubtedly, the most dire consequence of the Columbian Exchange was the demographic catastrophe in the Americas, in which virtually the entire native population of the Caribbean islands was wiped out within two generations and as much as 90 percent of the native population in parts of the mainland disappeared within a century. This disaster derived primarily from the diseases that the Europeans brought—smallpox, typhus, measles, influenza, and plague, to which the American natives had no immunity because of the oceans separating the Western Hemisphere from the rest of the world. After hitting bottom in the mid-seventeenth century, the Indian population stabilized and began a gradual recovery, without coming close to preconquest numbers. It is believed that the Americas contributed syphilis to the Old World.

The exact population of Latin America at the time of European contact is unknown, but a mid-range estimate is approximately fifty million; by contrast, Portugal had roughly a million people and the Spanish kingdoms around seven million. Latin America was very diverse demographically, having some 350 major tribal groups and over 160 distinct language families. These peoples can be distinguished also by their levels of development and sophistication. The least developed were the nomadic or seminomadic hunters and gatherers. More sophisticated were the sedentary and semisedentary practitioners of agriculture. Finally, there were the high civilizations characterized by sedentary agriculture, dense populations, complex societies, urbanization, advanced engineering, elaborate public structures, sophisticated theologies, and powerful ruling classes. Numerous high civilizations had flourished and waned in Mesoamerica and the Andean area by the time of European contact, including the Maya of Mexico and Guatemala. When the Spaniards arrived, they found the latest in this succession of high civilizations: the Aztec and Inca empires.

The conquests of the Aztecs and the Incas were the most dramatic in the entire process of European subjugation of America. Although separated by thousands of miles, and despite having distinctive peoples and cultures, these magnificent empires had important features in common. They were new, less than a century old when the Spaniards arrived, created by conquest of numerous ethnolinguistic groups, or tribes. Both were extensive and heavily populated: the Aztec Empire comprised some 85,000 square miles in central and southern Mexico and up to twenty million people, while the Inca covered around 772,000 square miles along the Andean spine of South America (from the southern boundary of today's Colombia to Chile's Central Valley) and contained between eight million and twelve million people. Both were governed by absolute rulers who were believed to be demigods—particularly the Inca emperor, or *Sapa Inca*. Both Aztecs and Incas appropriated much of their subjects' wealth and concentrated it in their capitals. The recollection of conqueror Bernal Díaz del Castillo upon reaching Tenochtitlán reflects the imperial bounty of the Aztec capital: "Some of our soldiers even asked whether the things that we saw were not a dream."[1] Spaniards likewise marveled at the organization of the Inca Empire and the riches of its capital, Cuzco.

The conquests unfolded in two stages: first, toppling the empires, and then, a longer process of gaining firm control over the former empires' peoples. Hernán Cortés's defeat of the Aztecs came first, in 1521, and it gave Francisco Pizarro and his men important insights into how to defeat the Incas a decade later. Although vastly outnumbered and facing professional imperial armies, the Spanish had advantages that allowed them to prevail in both encounters. Among these were superior weapons and armor, horses (which have been likened to tanks on a modern battlefield), and invaluable assistance from native groups that the Aztecs and Incas had conquered and incorporated into their empires. A smallpox epidemic in the Aztec capital facilitated

Aztec calendar stone
Source: Library of Congress, photograph by William Henry Jackson

the final Spanish assault. The Spaniards arrived in the Inca Empire at the conclusion of a civil war for control of the empire between two royal brothers, Atahualpa and Huáscar; Atahualpa prevailed, but the war left deep animosities and weakened armies which the Spaniards exploited.

The ultimate Spanish advantage in both Mexico and Peru was their recognition that the Aztec emperor Moctezuma and the Inca ruler Atahualpa were at once absolute monarchs and demigods, omnipotent and autocratic, to the point that their subjects, including their generals and armies, were paralyzed without their rulers' orders. By capturing and manipulating these imperial lords, the *conquistadores* opened the way to victory. To the Spaniards, these conquests were unheard of: heroic episodes that glorified the soldiers, the king, and the Christian god. The conquests shattered the natives' world as they knew it and a set a course of exploitation and degradation that survived the colonial period and continues today.

The Aztec and Inca empires were the greatest prizes in America, as no other area held the vast treasures of precious metals and dense native populations found in these regions. Subjugation of the other areas of the Americas followed different patterns. Areas such as Central America, northern Mexico, Chile, and Argentina initially disappointed the Spaniards who were seeking the valuable fruits of conquest provided by the Aztec and Inca empires. Spaniards who explored and settled in those areas had to make do with little or no gold or silver and sparse Indian populations to exploit. Therefore, while most of Spanish America beyond central Mexico and Peru

Hernán Cortés
Source: Library of Congress

was occupied by the late 1500s, much of it was thinly settled and yielded relatively little in rewards.

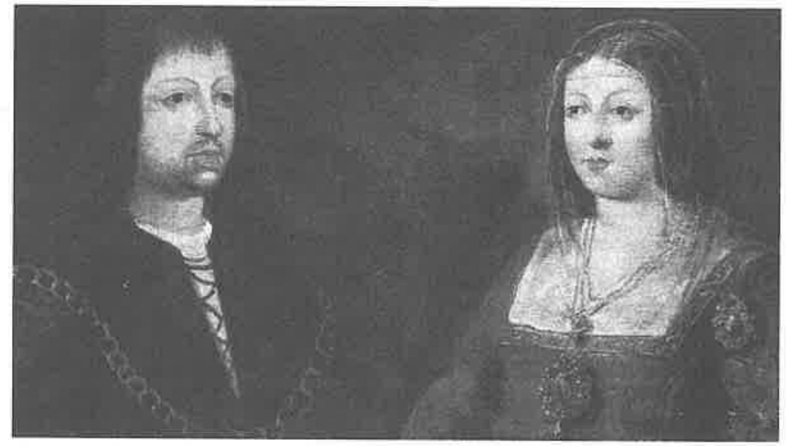
Portuguese occupation of Brazil following initial contact in 1500 was similar to that of Spanish America beyond Mexico and Peru. Finding neither precious metals nor centralized empires, and focusing on its new, lucrative trade with Asia, Portugal did not commit military resources capable of bringing large territories and dispersed populations under control. The dominant Tupí peoples found along the coastal strip that the Portuguese occupied were semisedentary, enabling them to relocate their villages to the interior beyond effective European control. Thus, the subjugation of the Brazilian Indians was not a conquest but a gradual process of gaining control incrementally, and at the end of the colonial period, many natives remained free of Portuguese domination.

AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNANCE

At the onset of Spanish imperialism, Queen Isabella of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragon were in the process of imposing far-reaching change on their kingdoms. Monarchs of two realms that shared the Iberian Peninsula with Portugal, Moorish Granada, and smaller entities, Isabella and Ferdinand married in 1469 and assumed their thrones in 1474 and 1479, respectively. They were determined to create a united and powerful monarchy out of a medieval system in which power was dispersed among the nobility, the Catholic Church, powerful orders of knights, and cities possessing charters of rights—whose representatives met periodically in the *cortes*, or parliament, to review the royal agendas and authorize taxes. While Ferdinand left the political institutions of Aragon essentially intact, the royal couple focused their ambitions on Castile, which was four times larger than Aragon in both territory and population.

The measures Isabella and Ferdinand took in Castile were designed to reduce or break the power of these counterweights to royal authority and centralize power in their own hands. They expanded the number of *corregidores* (literally, corulers) sent to strengthen royal authority over the cities and increased their control over the

Iberia c. 1481.



Wedding portrait of Isabella and Ferdinand
Source: Library of Congress, photograph appeared in GEO Epoche, Vol. 31, 2008

countryside by reorganizing and augmenting the *Santa Hermandad*, or Holy Brotherhood, a militarized police force. Ferdinand became master of the main orders o knights, thus curbing their independence and gaining access to their considerabl wealth. The nobility was weakened by a combination of force, judicious maneuvering, and selective favoritism, and by the couple's development of a professiona bureaucracy comprised of university-educated commoners whose first loyalty wa to the monarchs. Although the *cortes* continued to meet irregularly, the measure that Isabella and Ferdinand took to augment their power made the parliament les relevant to the governance of Castile.

Isabella and Ferdinand's successor, King Charles I, united the two kingdom under the Hapsburg royal dynasty in 1516. Although Castile and Aragon remained separate entities, since they were henceforth ruled by a single monarch we can use the term "Spain" from this point forward. Charles was well positione and disposed to continue the process of strengthening the monarchy, but the Spanish conquests in America posed new and unprecedented challenges to hi authority. Following the defeat of the Aztec and Inca rulers, his primary challenge was to complete the conquests by establishing control over his million of new subjects on the American mainland. When the smoke cleared over the destroyed Aztec capital, there were around one thousand Spaniards among nearly twenty million natives in the territory that would become New Spain—today' Mexico and Central America. When the Spaniards captured the Inca capita twelve years later, they faced a similar scenario: a few hundred Spaniards in the midst of millions of natives. Establishing control over the masses of Indians, then, was the first imperative for conquerors and king alike.

Spanish control over the former Aztec and Inca subjects was facilitated by the structure of the native empires. As they expanded from the Valley of Mexico, the

Aztecs had left the rulers of the conquered peoples in control of their own regions, so long as they delivered the taxes (in goods) that the Aztecs imposed and paid homage to the Aztecs' special god, Huitzilopochtli. The Incas did the same with the rulers of the peoples they conquered, although they exercised closer control over their territories and tried to integrate the conquered peoples into Inca culture. But both empires were very young: The Incas had begun to conquer beyond their Cuzco homeland in 1438 and the Aztecs beyond the Valley of Mexico only in 1453. Many groups in Mexico still seethed with resentment against the Aztecs and readily accepted Cortés and the king of Spain as their new overlords, perhaps in the misplaced hope that they would be more benevolent rulers than the Aztecs. Conquered groups in the Inca Empire were less receptive to the Spaniards, but some did collaborate, and all eventually were forced to accept Spanish rule.

After decapitating the empires by capturing and killing their rulers, the Spaniards confirmed the tribal chiefs (*caciques* in Mexico and *kurakas* in Peru) in their positions of authority over their own people. These chiefs in turn were overseen by Spanish officials, the *corregidores* (territorial administrators based on the Spanish office), who by the early seventeenth century numbered two hundred in New Spain and eighty-eight in Peru. Accustomed to authoritarian rule under both their tribal chiefs and their Inca or Aztec overlords, the natives acquiesced in rule from afar by the Spanish king through his officials on the ground, although not without some resistance and numerous rebellions, especially in the former Inca Empire.

In the other areas they occupied—those lacking dense populations and centralized authority—the Europeans were forced to impose their authority piecemeal. Some native groups successfully resisted the Spanish: The Yaqui, Apache, and others in northern Mexico; the Indians of the Argentine plains; and the Araucanians of southern Chile threatened the security or very survival of Spanish settlements in or near their territories. The Aruacanians posed such a danger in southern Chile that the Spanish built a string of forts along the Bío-Bío River frontier and stationed there the largest Spanish military contingent in America. None of the above-mentioned groups was subdued until the late nineteenth century—decades after the colonial period had ended.

Heir to an emerging absolute monarchy at home, King Charles saw the opportunity to construct a system of governance in the New World that would not only control the natives but also severely limit the power and authority of Spanish colonists. He first had to deal with Cortés, whose astounding feats of conquest in Mexico had earned him the steadfast loyalty of his men and the awe of the native masses, and with the Pizarro brothers in the former Inca Empire. While Cortés threatened no disobedience to the crown, the king recognized that the conqueror had the power to challenge royal authority in Mexico should he choose to do so. In Peru, the conquering Spaniards did challenge the king directly, killing the first viceroy he sent there in 1546.

To bring Mexico and Peru under effective control, King Charles gradually whittled away the conquerors' powers and perquisites and replaced their initial authority

with a formal administrative structure based on institutions transferred from Spain and its European possessions, and staffed at its upper levels by Spaniards dispatched to the colonies. Above the *corregidores*, the royal administration included *audiencias*, or royal high courts, of which there were thirteen in Spain's American territories by the end of the colonial period. The highest authority was the viceroy, or vice-king, always chosen from the noblest of Spanish families. Until late in the colonial period, there were only two viceroyalties in all of Spanish America: located in Mexico City (from 1535) with jurisdiction over Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean; and in Lima (from 1543) with control over all of Spanish South America and Panama. In the eighteenth century, the crown sought to strengthen its authority in South America by carving two new viceroyalties out of the sprawling jurisdiction of Lima: the viceroyalty of New Granada created in 1739 with its capital in Bogotá, and that of the Río de la Plata in 1776, whose capital was Buenos Aires. Overseeing all royal administration in the Americas was the Council of the Indies in Spain, which dealt with policy and administrative matters and advised the king. A parallel structure of royal treasury officials was also established.

The institutions that were prohibited in the king's new domains were as important to the construction of royal authority as the administrative structure transferred from Spain. No *cortes* or parliament was allowed to develop; of the titles of nobility awarded to worthy colonials, none carried the prerogatives that such titles entailed in Spain; and city charters conferred no special powers. The only representative institutions, the city councils, were very limited in their purview and by the 1560s, in the more important cities, many of their seats were acquired by purchase rather than by election.

The king designed the colonial administration to extend his highly centralized power across the Atlantic. However, given the distance and travel time between Spain and the colonies—for example, 75 days on average westbound to the Mexican port of Veracruz and 128 days eastbound, and much longer to and from Lima—a good deal of flexibility was necessarily built into the system. The sale of offices in the Americas also weakened royal control. As silver began to flow into Spain from Mexico and Peru in the 1550s, the Spanish monarchy overextended itself in the long European wars of religion fought between Protestant and Catholic forces and went bankrupt several times beginning in 1557. To raise revenue, the crown began selling offices—initially city council seats; then treasury, *corregidor*, and *audiencia* positions in the 1600s; and eventually a few viceroys took office through purchase.

Men bought these offices for both prestige and profit. *Corregidores*, for example, normally purchased their offices for fixed terms of three or five years and made money by abusing their Indian subjects in various ways, including forcing them to purchase goods they neither wanted nor needed at inflated prices. This practice of buying offices engrained corruption into the administrative system which, in many Latin American countries, persists today. While distance, corruption, and a series of weak kings in Spain diluted royal authority in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the authoritarian, top-down model of colonial governance remained constant. After the French Bourbon line replaced the Hapsburg dynasty as rulers of Spain in 1713, a series of administrative changes, known as the Bourbon Reforms, reversed the long-term weakening of royal authority over the kings' American domains.

Portuguese governance in Brazil was initially much less centralized than its Spanish counterpart. The crown paid little attention to Brazil for some thirty years after Portuguese sailors landed and claimed the territory in 1500, as there was neither the treasure nor the dense population that the Spaniards found in Mexico and Peru. Moreover, the great wealth in spices and silk brought by Portuguese traders from Asia focused royal attention on the other side of the world. Rather than promote the colonization of Brazil directly, the king granted huge tracts of land stretching inland from the coast, along with extensive powers, to twelve influential Portuguese in exchange for the obligation to settle and develop their domains; only two succeeded in the long run. The king sent a governor general to represent him in 1549. Other administrative institutions were extended gradually to Brazil in response to foreign threats against the colony and to Portugal's loss of most of its Asian holdings to the Dutch in the seventeenth century, which elevated Brazil's importance to the mother country. The two royal courts were established in 1609 and 1752, Brazil's first viceroy was appointed in 1720, while city councils carried out most local administration. Under the direction of the powerful Marquis of Pombal, prime minister from 1750 to 1777, the Portuguese crown strengthened its control over the colony in a number of ways. Though less rigid and controlling than Spain's colonial administration, by the end of the colonial period the Portuguese had adopted a top-down, authoritarian approach to the administration of Brazil.

THE POWERFUL ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Roman Catholic Church was present in the Americas from the earliest years of the Iberian colonial enterprise. Spanish sea and land expeditions of exploration and conquest were required to include priests, and men of the cloth played important roles in the Portuguese settlement of Brazil. By the end of the colonial period, the Roman Catholic Church was a powerful, wealthy, and ubiquitous institution that anchored the Iberians' colonial systems and exercised a monopoly over formal religion.

Just as they molded the state to their designs, Isabella and Ferdinand fundamentally altered religion in their realms. When they ascended their thrones, Castile and Aragon were home to Roman Catholics, Muslims, and Jews. Christianity took root in the fourth century CE, while Iberia was part of the Roman Empire. Jews had been present since at least the third century. Islam arrived from across the straits of Gibraltar in 711 when Moorish armies, comprised of North African Arabs and Berbers, invaded and overran Iberia in their quest to acquire land and vassals and to spread their new religion, then less than a century old. Within decades of the Muslims' triumph, small armies of Christians in the northern mountains began to slowly drive them back southward in the multi-century *reconquista*, or reconquest. By 1248, only the southern kingdom of Granada remained in Moorish hands.

The final stage of the *reconquista* began in 1482 and ended in January 1492 with Ferdinand and Isabella's triumphal entry into the city of Granada. The monarchs then began to implement measures designed to create religious uniformity across their lands. Driven by the ambition to impose a unifying institution on their subjects as well as by religious zeal, they decreed in 1492 that all Jews convert to Catholicism or leave their domains within four months. Estimates of the Jewish population of Castile and Aragon range between one hundred thousand and three hundred thousand, of whom roughly half are believed to have converted. The remainder departed to settle in North Africa, the Middle East, and beyond as the Sephardic Jews. Ten years later, the monarchs extended the same order to the Muslims who remained behind after their rulers had been driven out of Granada. By 1502, Roman Catholicism had become the sole religion allowed in Castile and Aragon. The imposition of religious uniformity provided a unifying institution for the monarchs' subjects who were divided by regionalism, culture, and several different languages. The church would jealously guard its monopoly of religion in both the homeland and the American colonies, relying in this endeavor on the Inquisition which had been established in Castille in 1480 and would be exported to the New World.

Following Columbus's return from his first voyage in 1493, Isabella and Ferdinand asked Pope Alexander VI, a native of Ferdinand's Kingdom of Aragon, to grant them title to the islands that Columbus had found and the unknown lands that might be discovered through further exploration. Invoking the temporal authority that popes were accustomed to wielding at that time, Alexander acceded, but reserved lands closer to Europe for the Portuguese, who were already exploring and slaving along the African coast. The line of demarcation between the Portuguese and Spanish domains was moved westward the following year by the Treaty of Tordesillas, giving Portugal a claim to a small portion of today's Brazil. In exchange for the pope's generosity, the monarchs accepted the obligation of converting every last person in those uncharted lands to the Roman Catholic faith. As a result of this so-called Papal Donation, which was never accepted as legitimate by the other European monarchs, conversion of each successive group of Indians they encountered was of paramount importance to the Iberians, especially the Spaniards.

To facilitate the task of conversion on what would be a massive scale, Alexander granted the Spanish crowns extensive control, known as the royal patronage or *patronato real*, over the church on the islands and any other future domains they might conquer. Spanish monarchs were empowered to appoint all clergy, up to the level of archbishop; regulate the establishment of churches, monasteries, and convents; and collect the tithe, a tax on agricultural production that sustained the church's coffers. The Portuguese crown received similar powers, known as the *padroado real*. Royal control over the church did not extend to church doctrine, the exclusive domain of the popes.

church was a major owner of the large landed estates that dominated the countryside in much of Spanish America. The Jesuit order was known for the efficient management of its numerous estates. More wealth was accumulated from the dowries required of women entering prestigious convents such as Santa Catalina in Arequipa, Peru, where each nun's elaborate dwelling had adjoining slave quarters. While performing essential services such as running alms houses and hospitals, providing education to sons of the elites, and keeping birth and death records, the church by the late colonial period had become a huge bureaucracy paralleling the civil bureaucracy that sustained the crown's authoritarian rule.

The Catholic Church's monopoly of religion in Spain was extended to the Americas, and the Inquisition was charged with enforcing the monopoly and guarding against any kind of heresy among professing Catholics. The Inquisition kept subversive information from the faithful through its *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (List of Prohibited Books). *Conversos*, or former Jews who had converted to Christianity in 1492, were often suspected of secretly continuing to practice Judaism in the New World and frequently hauled before the Inquisition, which meted out penalties ranging from public humiliation to, in rare cases, burning at the stake. A few years after the major conquests, Indians were exempted from the Inquisition's oversight because the Spanish considered them intellectually immature and thus incapable of mastering the nuances of Catholic theology.

As the Portuguese did not encounter large, highly organized native populations such as those in the Aztec and Inca empires, they did not face the challenge of rapid, mass baptisms and conversions to Christianity as required by the Papal Donation. Instead, they relied primarily on the new Jesuit order to convert the dispersed natives living along the coastal strip where the Portuguese settled. The Jesuits gathered the Indians into new villages, the *aldeias*, in order to convert and tutor them while attempting to protect them from colonists who sought to enslave them. Paralleling the construction of the colonial administration, religious institutions were slow to develop. The first bishop was assigned to Brazil in 1552, and at the end of the colonial period, six bishops and one archbishop comprised the entire church hierarchy—a contrast to the thirty-one bishops and six archbishops who served the much more extensive Spanish Empire in America.

A RIGID SOCIAL HIERARCHY

By the end of the colonial period, Latin American society was a mosaic of races, colors, cultures, and languages from three continents. This outcome was not what the Iberians, and particularly the Spanish, had envisioned for their American empires. The Spanish foresaw an empire constructed on a caste system that still existed in their homeland, based on the medieval notion of two distinct estates—the noble and the common—with the clergy constituting a third estate. In America, the two estates would be the Europeans and the Indians, coexisting but rigidly separated except for

certain regulated points of intersection. The Iberians would administer and exploit primarily from urban enclaves, while the natives would continue to occupy their ancestral lands. The lower estate, or (following Aristotle) the *república de indios*, would support the upper, or the *república de españoles*, by providing labor and taxes. As Christians and subjects of the crown, the natives would be protected from avaricious Spaniards who might seek to enslave them and take their lands.

But things did not turn out that way. The two-republics model began to unravel with the arrival of lusty conquerors who appropriated native women for sex and occasionally marriage, yielding the first mestizos, and the scarcity of European women among the early settlers contributed to the proliferation of these biracial offspring. But the cause of the demise of the two-republics principle was, primarily, the decimation of the native population owing to European diseases and, secondarily, mistreatment at the hands of the Iberians.

We can only imagine the impact on survivors as they experienced a force that they could not understand kill their families and neighbors and demolish their world. The impact on the Iberians, especially the Spanish, is more easily understood. For Spaniards who settled in Mexico and Guatemala and in the central Andes, where the native population was most dense, the millions of Indians who surrounded them constituted an unimaginably abundant source of labor. Native labor was originally allocated under the *encomienda*, a grant of Indians obligated to provide labor as well as goods to the conquerors and well-connected Spaniards who received the grants. As the natives' numbers dropped, the Spaniards were forced to develop new approaches to organizing and rationing the labor that remained available.

Forced labor was called the *repartimiento* in Mexco and *mita* in the Andes. Royal officials decided how to assign the labor, usually to agriculture and mining. Every able-bodied male Indian was obligated to participate in the labor drafts, and as the native population continued to fall, the burden on survivors became heavier. Beyond these areas of dense population, Spanish colonists still demanded Indian labor for agriculture, mining, and other economic activities; as the population declined, so did the possibilities of profitable enterprises. The demand for labor on the Brazilian sugar plantations was extremely high and the native population relatively sparse.

The long-term solution to the shortage of native labor, in areas where economic activity could sustain the cost, was African slavery. Slavery was not new to many African peoples as tribal warfare routinely yielded captives who served the victors in that capacity. In most cases, slavery was not hereditary or even permanent for the captive; it was commonly a temporary condition of servitude and lack of freedom. When Europeans began using Africans as slaves in the early 1400s, the nature of the institution changed. Europeans considered slaves property, or chattel. Slaves were bought and sold like any other commodity, their condition as slaves became permanent, and children of slave mothers became slaves for life.

To supply slaves to the Iberian and other European colonies in the Americas, Africans began delivering captives to outposts established initially by the Portuguese, where they exchanged them for European goods. Originally limited to coastal areas of western Africa, slaving reached well into the interior in response to rising demand. Europeans, particularly Portuguese, supplemented Africans in slaving expeditions, ensnaring people of varied ethnicities and cultures. Massive demand for slaves in the Americas institutionalized the slave trade and led to the deportation of some 12.5 million Africans to North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean over a period of more than three hundred years.

Slaves bound for the Iberian colonies were perfunctorily baptized into Christianity before embarking on their forced journey. On average, some 20 percent of the women, men, and children perished on the overcrowded, unsanitary ships known in Portuguese as *tumbeiros* (floating tombs). Upon arrival in Salvador de Bahia, Vera Cruz, or Havana, Africans were displayed in slave markets and sold, not as individual humans but as *peças de Indias* (pieces of the Indies)—a category determined by their expected productivity and life span; an older woman or a child might be half a piece of the Indies, while a robust young male might be a full piece. Africans were deployed above all in agriculture; the highest concentration initially was in the Brazilian sugar industry, a highly profitable enterprise. But slaves were used throughout the colonial economy, in a wide variety of economic enterprises, wherever profits justified the purchase and maintenance costs. Wealthy elites indulged in household slaves not only to perform work, but also to enhance their social status. Later in the colonial period, African slaves provided virtually all the labor in Cuba's sugar production as well as in the Caribbean islands that were taken over by Spain's European rivals.

With the racial mixing between Spanish and Portuguese men and native women that commenced upon contact, compounded by the introduction of African slaves, the simplistic model of the "two republics" envisioned by the Iberians broke down, destroyed by miscegenation. With the passage of time, a social hierarchy developed whose complexity was reflected in the dozens of racial categories recognized by the colonials. These multiple racial–social groupings can be reduced to four broadly defined categories of people found in Spanish America.

At the top of the social hierarchy were the Spaniards and their descendants, the creoles. In addition to their high status, males of "pure blood" enjoyed access to formal education offered by religious orders and to the twenty-plus universities founded during the colonial period—ten of them doctorate-granting "major" universities. They alone qualified for the profession of law and for membership in the merchant guilds, posts in the colonial administration, and until late in the colonial period, the priesthood. While these elite males shared important privileges, Spaniards and creoles were not equals. Spaniards by birth commanded the bulk of the most prestigious positions in both the civil administration and the church; they virtually monopolized the positions of viceroy and predominated among the bishops and archbishops and, for most of the colonial years, among *audiencia* judges and prosecutors. Spaniards also tended to look down on creoles as somewhat degenerate, owing to the supposedly enervating tropical climate of much of the empire. As the colonial period advanced, distance and tensions between creoles and Spaniards increased.

In the middle of the social hierarchy were the *castas*, or persons of mixed race, who could be combinations of two or all three races found in colonial Latin America. Generally speaking, they had neither rights nor obligations. They could not obtain a formal education nor enter a profession, but they were not subject to the labor draft as Indians were. They were normally exempt from the tribute that Indians paid, although from time to time colonial authorities sought to apply the head tax to *castas*. The *castas* had a reputation as disorderly and untrustworthy, as revealed in a Spaniard's characterization of them in seventeenth-century Peru: "Because they are most often born out of adultery or other illicit unions . . . , they bear the taint of illegitimacy and other vices which they take in, as it were, with their milk. The majority of them come from a vicious and depraved environment."[3] With the passage of time, restrictions on the *castas*, such as entering the priesthood, were partially relaxed. The *castas* became the largest social grouping in many parts of Latin America before the colonial period ended.

Indians and Africans shared the bottom rung of the social ladder. Spaniards tended to view the Indians as inferior—as perpetual minors lacking the ability to adapt to Spanish standards and customs. The priests saw Indians as souls to save; the conquerors and subsequent settlers saw them as sources of labor; and the crown saw them as subjects and sources of tax revenue. Thus, Indians were converted and ministered to by the priests, forced to labor by the colonists, and ruled over and charged a tribute, or head tax, by the crown. In all cases, the Indians were expected to be subservient and obedient. In short, the Indians had many obligations and few rights.

Common Indians were initially prohibited from wearing Spanish-style clothing, owning horses, and selling goods of substantial value. They had no access to education and no entry to the professions. They had "protectors" (Spaniards assigned to watch after their interests), but in practice, the protection was minimal. *Caciques* and *kurakas*, however, had some privileges. They were normally exempt from the tribute and in a few locations had access to formal education provided by religious orders, but they could not practice the professions. Descendants of the Inca royalty and nobility living in and around the former Inca capital of Cuzco were a group apart who received special recognition of their status from the Spanish monarchy.

The common Indians' obligations to pay tribute and provide labor were exacerbated by the drastic decline in their population. While the Indians' numbers fell, Spanish treasury officials were reluctant to accept less in tribute and colonists still expected the amount of labor yielded by a much larger population in the early post-conquest years. Although royal officials tried to limit the burdens, creoles resisted and squeezed all they could out of the natives. One result was rebellions, almost all of which were localized and posed little real threat to Spanish control. A major exception was a series of eighteenth-century rebellions in the former Inca Empire that culminated in the Tupac Amaru rebellion of 1780–1782, which spread through the Andes and threatened Spanish control of Cuzco and several other cities.

African slaves, of course, had the obligation to serve their master's will. Their quality of life was determined sometimes by fate: Was their master considerate or abusive, permissive or closely controlling? Beyond fate, the primary determinant of quality of life was whether slaves were field hands or domestic workers. Field slaves normally led short, miserable lives and had little hope for a meaningful existence, while domestic slaves sometimes could carve out a niche that allowed a degree of freedom and a few perquisites such as decent food and living quarters. In urban areas, slaves often had the opportunity to circulate through the city. Owners rented slaves to perform work for others, and some slave women sold goods in the markets for their masters. Social contacts and a small degree of self-determination probably made these slaves' lives less onerous than those of field slaves. Yet, the frequency of slave runaways and rebellions tells us that slaves longed for freedom. The runaway slave settlement of Palmares in Brazil, which contained some twenty thousand inhabitants at its peak and repelled Portuguese attacks for nearly a century until its destruction in the 1690s, was testament to slaves' resistance to their condition.

The status of slaves in Latin America was somewhat more flexible than it was in the English colonies. Slaves could turn to the church or the courts to plead a case against an unusually abusive master or to ask for manumission. Slaves, especially domestic ones, were occasionally freed, most commonly through a deceased owner's will. In the cases in which they were able to accumulate enough money, slaves could purchase their freedom under Iberian law.

Colonial Latin American society was highly stratified but was not strictly a caste society. In the latter, of which India until recently was the paradigm, one is born into a stratum, or caste, and regardless of circumstances cannot move out of it; there is no mobility from one caste to another. In colonial Latin America, despite many obstacles to mobility, people could occasionally move upward in the hierarchy, and downward mobility was not uncommon. Indians who abandoned their communal villages, cast off their native clothing, and learned Spanish could sometimes pass as *castas*, while individuals of Spanish background who became impoverished might sink into the same broad grouping. Racial categories were as much socially as genetically determined.

There was another method available to select *castas*, normally illegitimate sons of Spaniards or creoles, to advance up the social hierarchy. If the father was caring and had money, the son could ask for a formal change in status. This involved filing a formal petition to the king and accompanying it with a sum of money. The petition asked for rectification of the petitioner's "birth defect," or condition as a *casta*. If approved, the petition would result in a decree known as *gracias al sacar* that certified the individual's "purity of blood," meaning that the mixed-race person had been declared a creole and could enjoy the opportunities open to others of his new social class. This illustrates not only the limited flexibility of the social structure, but also the Spanish crown's perpetual need of money.

In addition to the hierarchy of race and color, another fault line divided and defined colonial Latin American society. Gender determined rights and obligations throughout society, most strictly among Spanish and creole women. Public life was closed to women, as it was throughout the Western world: women were denied offices in the civil bureaucracy and were not (and still are not) ordained as priests. Their participation in the church was limited to membership in *cofradías*, or sisterhoods dedicated to a particular saint, or in female orders such as the Barefoot Carmelites or the Order of Saint Clare. The choice of becoming a "bride of Christ" appealed to many as an alternative to marriage, as it could offer more outlets for creativity and allow women to escape a husband's domination. Among other activities, nuns could educate themselves and live intellectual lives, as did the famous Mexican Sor Juana de la Cruz, and sometimes could conduct business from within their cloisters, as did Catarina de Monte Sinay, a Brazilian nun known for her business acumen and the fortune she made.

Though excluded from formal institutions of learning, upper-class girls could obtain rudimentary schooling in convents or from tutors. Women of that station were expected to remain in and run the home, oversee the servant staff, and raise the children. Gendered codes of behavior allowed males to take mistresses and engage in casual sex, while extramarital relations were strictly taboo for women. There were exceptions, of course, like the famous eighteenth-century Limeña actress known as La Perricholi, who appeared to thrive on scandal. Women exercised more power as widows than they did as wives: They inherited a fixed part of their husbands' estates and might become successful businesswomen.

Behavioral codes were less strict and opportunities for achieving autonomy were greater for mixed-race women. Just as *castas*, in general, were not subject to many rules, so women of that social grouping had more room for maneuver than their upper class counterparts. While individual husbands may have controlled their wives' activities, in many cases, *casta* women became small-scale entrepreneurs as owners of stores and bars and as market sellers; others worked as domestics and in textile production.

At the bottom of the social hierarchy, Indian and African women faced serious obstacles to self-realization. As customs among the myriad Latin American native ethnicities varied, it is impossible to generalize about the roles, restrictions, and opportunities open to Indian women. With the passage of time, imposition of the Iberian patrimonial ideal may have restricted native women's roles. Most Indian women shared with native men the general exploitation that European elites imposed on them. Among slaves, women were less likely to be assigned field labor than were males; working in homes or selling in urban markets gave them a chance for better social contacts and material conditions. Yet, being a piece of property, regardless of the latitude allowed by owners, was degrading and dehumanizing. And the emotional and psychological toll of having one's child sold to another master, beginning what was likely a permanent and painful separation, was traumatic.

The social hierarchy in colonial Brazil mirrored that of Spanish America, with Portuguese and Brazilian-born whites, or *mazombos*, at the top, people of mixed race in the middle, and African slaves and Indians on the bottom. As in the Spanish colonies, regional differences in race and class developed in Brazil. Portuguese settlement began in the near-coastal northeast region that offered ideal soil and climate for sugarcane cultivation. Planters relied initially on Indian slave labor, but the relatively sparse native population and the Indians' ability to uproot and move beyond Portuguese control made that arrangement untenable. Growing demand for labor on the sugar plantations gave rise to the large-scale importation of Africans from the 1550s on. Thus, the population of that region was primarily black, white, and mulatto. Large cattle ranches developed in the interior of the northeast, the *sertão*, where people of mixed race predominated.

Another area of early Portuguese settlement was São Paulo, where a distinct society developed in relative isolation. Whites and mixed-race *mamelucos* (Indian and white) presided over a lower stratum of Indians, many of them captured in slaving raids by mobile groups known as *bandeirantes* (carriers of banners or flags). These groups of a few dozen to several hundred men, accompanied by Indian auxiliaries, set off for months or years on slaving raids aimed often at Jesuit missions in Paraguay. The *bandeirantes* also explored the interior in search of gold and precious stones, coincidentally pushing Portuguese-claimed territory well beyond the line of demarcation that theoretically defined Brazil's western border with Spanish America. Antônio Raposo Tavares led a legendary expedition between 1648 and 1652 that reached the Andean foothills and then sailed down the Amazon to its mouth, covering some six thousand miles. *Bandeirantes'* discovery of extensive gold deposits in the 1690s attracted hundreds of thousands of Portuguese to Brazil over the following years and caused a substantial migration from the coast to the interior province of Minas Gerais.

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY

While saving the souls of millions of natives provided the justification for Iberian imperialism in the Americas, Spain and Portugal also colonized for economic advantage. The colonial economic arrangement was based on the theory of mercantilism, which was standard economics at the time. The accumulation of bullion was a major objective of mercantilism, and the economic system devised by the colonizing countries was intended to accomplish that through the development of commercially valuable colonial resources, the creation of preferences for goods from the metropole, the monopolization of trade, and the maintenance of a trade balance favorable to the home countries. Spain and Portugal imported raw materials from the colonies and sold the colonials processed or manufactured goods. In the case of Spanish America, the crown tried to prohibit the cultivation and production of certain commodities, such as vineyards and wine, and olive trees and olive oil, in order to benefit Spanish producers and merchants. This mercantilistic arrangement created colonies that were subject to economic policies and decisions made in Europe, not in America—in other words, economic dependency.

Many parts of Spanish America and Brazil developed little more than subsistence economies, producing almost nothing to export or trade with other regions. Some

produced foodstuffs for consumption in cities and towns and in nearby mining regions. Other areas developed exportable products such as the natural dyes indigo and cochineal, gold, emeralds, pearls, cattle hides, dried meat, cacao, and tobacco. The most lucrative export from Spanish America was silver, found in great abundance in Mexico and Upper Peru (today's Bolivia).

Discovered in the 1540s, the deposits at Potosí in Upper Peru and several sites in Mexico were soon producing prodigiously, creating wealth for the mine operators and the merchants who supplied them. The crown benefited from the "royal fifth," a 20-percent tax on refined ore that was reduced to 10 percent in Mexico owing to the cost of importing the mercury essential to refining. Labor at Potosí was acquired through a wide net of coercion, the *mita*, which yielded thousands of forced Indian laborers from hundreds of miles around the mines who suffered high mortality rates in the dangerous working conditions. Some stayed behind after their draft labor assignments ended, becoming wage laborers who did much of the skilled labor. In Mexico, labor initially was a mixture of forced Indian levies and wage labor, although by the late sixteenth century wage labor predominated. These mining centers provided markets for far-flung enterprises producing foodstuffs, alcohol, textiles, mules, and tallow for the candles that illuminated the dark shafts; in the case of Potosí, which at over thirteen thousand feet of elevation was too high to produce its necessities, goods to sustain the mines and miners came from as far away as the Río de la Plata (today's Argentina), Chile, the Peruvian coast, and Quito. Silver was so valuable and essential to Spain that a special system of armed convoys was designed to protect the precious metal from pirates and privateers; it worked remarkably well until its abolition in the late colonial period.

Sugar, a highly valued commodity in Europe as an alternative to honey for sweetening, was Brazil's primary export. Concentrated in the northeastern regions of Salvador de Bahia and Pernambuco, it was produced on plantations worked by African slaves after the supply of Indian slaves dwindled. Sugar made fortunes for planters and merchants until the second half of the seventeenth century, when England captured Jamaica, the French wrested Haiti from Spain, and the Dutch occupied several smaller islands. With their greater financial resources, more advanced technology, and closer proximity to markets, these rival powers established flourishing sugar plantations and eventually eclipsed Brazil as the main supplier to Europe. The Brazilian economy thereafter entered a long period of decline until the discovery of gold in the 1690s revived the colony's fortunes.

The Iberian design for mercantilistic control of the colonial economies did not work perfectly, as neither Spain nor Portugal was capable of supplying its overseas consumers with all they demanded or enforcing their theoretical monopolies of trade. Thus, rather than enriching the country, much of the silver reaching Spain passed through to northern European countries whose productive capacities were greater, and which made up the deficit of Spanish trade goods for the colonies; some of the profits from the sugar trade went to the same places rather than remaining in Portugal. Eluding efforts to enforce the monopolies, merchants from rival European countries delivered contraband goods without paying the fees required of legal traders, further eroding the mercantile arrangement. In the late eighteenth century, both countries liberalized their trade policies but continued in vain to try to enforce their monopolies. Economic dependency thus lessened, but persisted.

THE LARGE LANDED ESTATE

Large landed estates dominated many parts of rural Latin America within a century and a half of the Iberians' arrival. Two distinct types of these holdings developed: the plantation and the hacienda (in Brazil, the *sesmaria*). The plantation appeared initially in northeastern Brazilian to produce sugar for export. Plantations were characterized by large size, substantial investment in equipment, a slave labor force, specialization in a single product—normally for export—and dependence on outside sources of foodstuffs. Plantations were fully capitalist enterprises; owners were intimately connected to creditors, export merchants, and shippers. Brazilian plantations were known as *engenhos*, or mills, so named for the facilities that each had for grinding cane and finishing the product for shipment. Plantations appeared in Spanish America, most notably in Cuba from the eighteenth century onward; others developed to produce sugar and other products for growing urban markets.

Most agricultural production for domestic consumption occurred on haciendas (or *sesmarias*), while smaller holdings also contributed to the food supply. In Mexico, parts of Central America, and the Andean region, haciendas coexisted with traditional communal Indian landowning villages, which produced for their own subsistence, while haciendas produced for the markets provided by cities and mines. The crown initially sought to protect Indian land from the ambitions of Spaniards, who during the *reconquista* had become accustomed to receiving large tracts of land and vassals as rewards for military success against the Moors. But as the native population dropped precipitously, Indians were forced to abandon land they could no longer work and were resettled in new towns—a process that freed up more of their land for Spanish occupation. Spaniards and creoles moved in and built houses for themselves, huts for their Indian workers, and facilities for ranching and farming. These holdings were initially illegal, as they contravened the crown's laws designed to uphold the "two republics" principle by keeping natives on their lands and Spaniards primarily in cities and towns. But sacrificing principle to expediency, in one of its repeated approaches to raising funds to offset bankruptcy, the Spanish crown in the 1590s began selling deeds to Spaniards illegally occupying Indian lands—and the de facto hacienda became de jure.

Haciendas varied in size from a few hundred to tens of thousands of acres, depending on location, soil, and climate. Regardless of size, they had in common a resident labor force of Indians or *castas*, or both, low levels of technology and investment, a combination of crop cultivation and cattle or sheep raising, and orientation toward local or regional markets. In contrast to the market- and credit-dependent plantations, haciendas could more easily survive periods of economic downturn that reduced demand. With diversified production and less reliance on creditors, they could revert to self-sufficiency until market conditions improved. This made the hacienda a durable feature of rural life through the colonial period and beyond.

Haciendas were a major point of contact and acculturation between European and Indian, and were the breeding ground, sometimes literally, of the mixed race population of mestizos. In exchange for their labor and that of their families, resident hacienda workers typically received a hut, a small plot of land on which to grow food, often a ration of comestibles, and sometimes a small wage. Hacendados often offered advances on wages and kept workers permanently indebted, thus tying them to the estate, in an arrangement known as debt peonage. When haciendas were sold, it was common for the indebted resident workers to be listed as property, along with land, structures, and equipment. Hacendados were absolute rulers on their properties, and their power often reached beyond their land's borders to neighboring villages where they hired seasonal hands for planting, harvest, and cattle roundups. Some also encroached on communal village land, which the Indians vigorously resisted. Haciendas dominated the best lands in much of Spanish America and brought their owners income, power, status, and occasionally a title of nobility.

In Brazil, the *sesmarias* coexisted with plantations and smaller agricultural properties. Plantations flourished near the Atlantic coast where conditions were propitious for sugar production, while the *sesmarias* developed further inland. Many of the latter originated with the generous land grants made in the 1530s to induce the settlement of Brazil. Like their Spanish American counterparts, the *sesmarias* were large, worked mostly by non-slave but servile labor, and produced for towns and the slaves working on sugar plantations.

COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA IN CONTEXT

Within the global context of European imperialism, the experience of Latin America was unique. Engaging in broad generalizations, we can suggest that most European colonization yielded two distinct outcomes. With the exception of Russia, which expanded by land, imperial powers in Asia and Africa conducted their colonial affairs with a minimum of personnel: soldiers, administrators, businessmen, and in many cases missionaries. The typical agent of imperialism returned home after a tour of duty, becoming (in English parlance), a "nabob." Very few Europeans immigrated to sink roots and make permanent homes, with the primary exception of South Africa and to a lesser extent Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe) and Algeria. The native populations exponentially outnumbered their colonial rulers and, in contrast to the natives of the Americas, did not die off from European diseases, to which they had developed immunities through centuries of pre-imperial contact. While miscegenation occurred, the impact was small in light of the ratio of native to European, South Africa and Algeria being major exceptions. And given European attitudes of superiority, little effort was expended on acculturating natives to European norms beyond introducing Christianity in some areas.

When the Europeans withdrew from Africa and Asia in the twentieth century, whether after eighty or four hundred years, the peoples of most former colonies remained, culturally and racially, largely as they had been before the Europeans arrived. Those whom the Europeans converted to Christianity may be counted as a cultural exception. Even where imperial languages became official languages of the independent countries, as is common, they are the languages of government, business, and the elites that serve as bridges among the native tongues that most of the population continues to speak.

The other pattern of colonization played out in North America, Australia, and New Zealand—areas appropriated by the British. These regions were lightly populated by native peoples: Indians, Aborigines, and Maoris. They attracted mass immigration of Europeans, largely by family units of people seeking economic opportunity and/or religious freedom. In contrast to the Iberians, the British found no large populations of natives to exploit and had no obligation to convert those they found to Christianity. The natives constituted an obstacle to the immigrants' drive to occupy and exploit the land and other resources, so they were pushed back onto less desirable territories or killed. Upon achieving their independence, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were predominantly European with relatively small native populations that had been displaced and marginalized and, in the United States, a substantial population of African origin.

Latin America followed neither of the above patterns. Spaniards and Portuguese encountered a great number and variety of natives, from those living in the great Aztec and Inca empires to primitive hunters and gatherers. They valued all these natives as potential labor, souls to save, and new subjects and sources of revenue for the crown. Rather than push them back, wherever possible, the Iberians incorporated them into the lower ranks of their developing hierarchical colonial societies. As occurred in Asia and Africa, the Iberian monarchs dispatched soldiers, administrators, and merchants, as well as clergy to implement their colonial designs in America. But in contrast to their European counterparts in most of Africa and Asia, many Spaniards and Portuguese immigrated to put down roots and stay: nearly a million Spaniards and around seven hundred thousand Portuguese through the colonial centuries. Their numbers then grew through reproduction to reach 3.2 million (or nearly 20 percent of Spanish America's population at the time of independence) and 1 million (or a quarter of Brazil's people at the same time). The only parts of the colonial world with larger percentages of European populations were British North America and Oceania.

The demographic makeup of colonial Latin America became more complex when, as the native population declined, the Portuguese, Spanish, and the French in Haiti turned to Africa for labor, as did the British in North America. The tricontinental heritage that characterizes Latin America, then, is shared by the United States, but even a casual examination reveals that the outcome of the complex interaction of different peoples has varied. While miscegenation among the three races certainly occurred in North America, it appears to have been much less common than in Latin America. Furthermore, offspring of such liaisons were not recognized as belonging to new, distinct racial categories in North America as they were in Latin America. The terms mestizo or *mameluco*, mulatto, the general term *castas*, and dozens of subcategories of racial identity frankly recognized the outcomes of interracial sexual activity in Latin America and established a continuum of race rather than the unrealistic absolute categories of white, black, or Indian as used in the United States. (The U.S. Census Bureau's forms did not allow individuals to list more than one race until 2000.)

This cultural and genetic outcome of the era of European imperialism is what gives Latin America its unique place in the world. It is commonly said that a new race was created in Iberian America: European, Native American, and African melded into what José Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher and minister of education in the 1920s, called the "cosmic race." This is not to say that all Latin Americans are a mixture of the three—far from it. But census data tell us that a majority of Latin Americans today are of mixed race: European and Indian (mestizo), European and African (mulatto), Indian and African, or all three—further diversified in the postindependence period by immigration from non-Iberian Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. This "cosmic race," a construct that is both genetic and cultural, continues to distinguish Latin America long after its colonial period ended.

This overview of Latin America's long colonial period examined the origins of five important legacies: authoritarian governance, the powerful Roman Catholic Church, a rigid social hierarchy, economic dependency, and the large landed estate. Throughout the remaining chapters of this book, we will follow these legacies, which played a central role in shaping today's Latin America, through two hundred years of postcolonial history.

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