

CHAPTER 19

Early Latin America

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The new Latin American empires of Spain and Portugal maintained special contacts with the West. Western forms were imposed on indigenous cultures as the militarily superior European invaders conquered their lands. Latin America became part of the world economy as a dependent region. The Iberians mixed with native populations and created new political and social forms. The resulting mixture of European, African, and Indian cultures created a distinctive civilization. Indian civilization, although battered and transformed, survived and influenced later societies. Europeans sought economic gain and social mobility; they used coerced laborers or slaves to create plantations and mine deposits of precious metals or diamonds.

Spaniards and Portuguese: From Reconquest to Conquest. Iberians had long inhabited a frontier zone where differing cultures interacted. Muslims invaded and conquered in the 8th century; later, small Christian states formed and began a long period of reconquest. By the middle of the 15th century, a process of political unification was under way. Castile and Aragon were united through marriage. Granada, the last Muslim kingdom, fell in 1492, and Castile expelled its Jewish population.

Iberian Society and Tradition. The distinctive features of Iberian societies became part of their American experience. They were heavily urban; many peasants lived in small centers. Commoners coming to America sought to become nobles holding Indian-worked estates. Strong patriarchal ideas were reflected in the family life, which was based on *encomiendas*, large estates worked by Indians. The Iberian tradition of slavery came to the New World. So did political patterns. Political centralization in Portugal and Castile depended on a professional bureaucracy of trained lawyers and judges. Religion and the Catholic church were closely linked to the state. The merchants of Portugal and Spain had extensive experience with the slave trade and plantation agriculture on the earlier colonized Atlantic islands.

The Chronology of Conquest. A first conquest period between 1492 and 1570 established the main lines of administration and economy. In the second period, lasting to 1700, colonial institutions and societies took definite form. The third period, during the 18th century, was a time of reform and reorganization that planted seeds of dissatisfaction and revolt. From the late 15th century to about 1600, two continents and millions of people fell under European control. They were joined to an emerging Atlantic economy. Many Indian societies were destroyed or transformed in the process.

The Caribbean Crucible. The Caribbean experience was a model for Spanish actions in Latin America. Columbus and his successors established colonies. The Indians of the islands were distributed among Spaniards as laborers to form *encomiendas*. European pressures and diseases quickly destroyed indigenous populations and turned the islands into colonial backwaters. The Spaniards had established Iberian-style cities but had to adapt them to New World conditions. They were laid out in a grid plan with a central plaza for state and church buildings. Royal administration followed the removal of Columbus and his family from control. Professional

magistrates staffed the administrative structure; laws incorporated Spanish and American experience. The church joined in the process, building cathedrals and universities. During the early 16th century, Spanish women and African slaves joined the earlier arrivals, marking the shift from conquest to settlement. Ranches and sugar plantations replaced gold searching. By this time, most of the Indians had died or been killed. Some clerics and administrators attempted to end abuses; Bartolomé de las Casas began the struggle for justice for Indians. By the 1520s and 1530s, the elements of the Latin American colonial system were in place.

The Paths of Conquest. The conquest of Latin America was not a unified movement. A series of individual initiatives operating with government approval was the pattern. One prong of conquest was directed toward Mexico, the second at South America. In 1519, Hernán Cortés led an expedition into Mexico. He fought the Aztecs with the assistance of Indian allies. At Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma II was captured and killed. By 1535, most of central Mexico was under Spanish control as the Kingdom of New Spain. Francisco Pizarro in 1535 began the conquest of the Inca Empire, then weakened by civil war. Cuzco fell in 1533. The Spanish built their capital at Lima, and by 1540, most of Peru was under their control. Other Spanish expeditions expanded colonial borders. Francisco Vazquez de Coronado explored the American Southwest in the 1540s; Pedro de Valdivia conquered central Chile and founded Santiago in 1541. By 1570, there were 192 Spanish urban settlements in the Americas.

The Conquerors. The conquest process was regulated by agreements concluded between leaders and their government. Leaders received authority in return for promises of sharing spoils with the crown. The men joining expeditions received shares of the spoils. Most of the conquerors were not professional soldiers. They were individuals from all walks of life out to gain personal fortune and Christian glory. They saw themselves as a new nobility entitled to domination over an Indian peasantry. The conquerors triumphed because of their horses, better weapons, and ruthless leadership. The effect of endemic European diseases and Indian disunity eased their efforts. By 1570, the age of conquest was closing.

Conquest and Morality. The Spanish conquest and treatment of Indians raised significant philosophical and moral issues. Were conquest, exploitation, and conversion justified? Many answered that Indians were not fully human and were destined to serve Europeans. Converting Indians to Christianity was a necessary duty. In 1550, the Spanish ruler convoked a commission to rule on such issues. Father Bartolomé de las Casas defended the Indians, recognized them as humans, and argued that conversion had to be accomplished peacefully. The result was a moderation of the worst abuses, but the decision came too late to help most Indians.

The Destruction and Transformation of American Indian Societies. All indigenous peoples suffered from the European conquest. There was a demographic catastrophe of incredible proportions as disease, war, and mistreatment caused the loss of many millions of individuals. In one example, the population of central Mexico during the 16th century fell from 25 million to fewer than 2 million. The Spanish reacted by concentrating Indians in towns and seizing their lands. An entirely different type of society emerged.

Exploitation of the Indians. The Spanish maintained Indian institutions that served their goals. In Mexico and Peru, the traditional nobility, under Spanish authority, presided over taxation and labor demands. Enslavement of Indians, except in warfare, was prohibited by the middle of the 16th century. In place of slavery, the government awarded *encomiendas* (land

grants) to conquerors who used their Indians as a source of labor and taxes. The harshness of *encomiendas* contributed to Indian population decline. From the 1540s, the crown, not wanting a new American nobility to develop, began to modify the system. Most *encomiendas* disappeared by the 1620s. Colonists henceforth sought grants of land, not labor. The state continued to extract labor and taxes from Indians, who worked in mines and other state projects. Many Indians, to escape forced labor, fled their villages to work for wages from landowners or urban employers. Despite the disruptions, Indian culture remained resilient and modified Spanish forms to Indian ways.

In Depth: The Great Exchange. The Spanish and Portuguese arrival ended the isolation of the New World from other societies. After 1500, millions of Europeans and Africans settled in the Americas. Biological and ecological exchange—called the Columbian Exchange—changed the character of both new and old societies. Old World diseases decimated New World populations. Old World animals quickly multiplied in their new environments and transformed the structures of Indian societies. Both Old and New Worlds exchanged crops and weeds. The spread of American plants, especially maize, manioc, and the potato, had a major effect, allowing population expansion in many world regions.

Colonial Economies and Governments. More than 80 percent of Spanish America's population was engaged in agriculture and ranching, but mining was the essential activity. Until the 18th century, the Spanish maritime commercial system was organized around the exchange of New World precious metals, especially silver, for European manufactured goods. The exchange made Latin America a dependent part of the world system.

The Silver Heart of The Empire. The major silver mines opened in Mexico and Peru during the middle of the 16th century. Potosí in Bolivia was the largest mine, and Zacatecas in Mexico resulted in the creation of wealthy urban centers. Mines were worked by Indians, at first through forced methods and later for wages. Mining techniques were European. The discovery of extensive mercury deposits was vital for silver extraction. The crown owned all subsoil rights; private individuals worked the mines at their expense, in return for giving the crown one-fifth of production. The government had a monopoly on the mercury used. The industry, dependent on a supply of food and other materials for workers, was a stimulus for the general economy.

Haciendas and Villages. Spanish America remained an agricultural economy. Large sedentary Indian populations continued traditional patterns. When population dwindled, Spanish rural estates (*haciendas*) emerged. Using Indian and mixed-ancestry workers, they produced grains, grapes, and livestock primarily for consumers in the Americas. The *haciendas* became the basis of wealth and power for a local aristocracy. In some regions, there was competition between *haciendas* and Indian farmers.

Industry and Commerce. Sheep-raising led to the formation of small textile sweatshops worked by Indian women. Latin America became self-sufficient in foodstuffs and material goods, requiring from Europe only luxury items. From the point of view of Spain and the world economy, silver ruled the commercial system. All trade was reserved for Spaniards and was funneled through Seville and Cádiz. A board of trade controlled commerce with the Indies. The board often worked with a merchant guild (*consulado*) in Seville that had extensive rights over American trade. To protect their silver fleets from rivals and pirates, the Spanish organized a convoy system made possible by the development of heavily armed galleons.

Galleons also transported Chinese products from the Philippines to Mexico. Strongly fortified Caribbean ports provided shelter for the ships. Only one fleet was lost before the system ended in the 1730s. The wealth in silver that went to Spain was used for state expenses and for manufactured goods for the Americas. Much of the silver left Spain and contributed to general European inflation. All through the period, Spain's wealth depended more on taxes than on American silver, although the prospect of its continuing import stimulated unwise government spending.

Ruling an Empire: State and Church. Sovereignty over the Spanish Empire rested with the crown, based on a papal grant awarding the Indies to Castile in return for its bringing the lands into the Christian community. The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) between Spain and Portugal regularized their conflicting claims by drawing a North-South line around the Earth; the eastern regions belonged to Portugal, the western to Spain. All of the Americas, except Brazil, went to Spain. Indians and many Europeans did not accept the decisions. The Spanish Empire became a bureaucratic system built on a juridical core of lawyers who had both legislative and administrative authority. The king ruled from Spain through the Council of Indies; in the Americas there were viceroalties based in Mexico City and Lima. The viceroys, high-ranking nobles, represented the king and had extensive legislative, military, and judicial powers. The viceroalties were divided into 10 divisions run by royal magistrates. At the local level, other magistrates, often accused of corruption, managed tax and labor service regulations. The clergy performed both secular and religious functions. They converted Indians and established Christian villages. Some defended Indian rights and studied their culture. In core areas, the formal institutional structure of the church eventually prevailed; since the state nominated church officials, they tended to support state policies. The church profoundly influenced colonial cultural and intellectual life through architecture, printing, schools, and universities. The Inquisition controlled morality and orthodoxy.

Brazil: The First Plantation Colony. The Portuguese reached Brazil in 1500 as Pedro Alvares Cabral voyaged to India. There was little to interest Europeans apart from dyewood trees; merchants received licenses for their exploitation. When French merchants became interested, a new system was established in 1532. Portuguese nobles were given land grants (captaincies) to colonize and develop. Towns were founded and sugar plantations were established using Indian and later, African, slave workers. In 1549, a royal governor created an administration with a capital at Salvador. Jesuit missionaries also arrived. Indian resistance was broken by disease, military force, and missionary action. Port cities developed to serve the growing number of sugar plantations increasingly worked by African slaves.

Sugar and Slavery. Brazil became the world's leading sugar producer. The growth and processing of sugar cane required large amounts of capital and labor. Brazil, with a single crop produced by slave labor, was the first plantation colony. In its social hierarchy, white planter families, linked to merchants and officials, dominated colonial life. Slaves, composing about one half of the total population at the close of the 17th century, occupied the bottom level. In-between was a growing population of mixed origins, poor whites, Indians, and Africans who were artisans, small farmers, herders, and free workers. Portugal created a bureaucratic administrative structure under the direction of a governor general that integrated Brazil into the imperial system. The cores of the bureaucracy were lawyers. Regional governors often acted independently and, along with the governor general, reported directly to Lisbon. Missionaries had an important role: they ran ranches, mills, schools, and church

institutions. During the 17th century, Brazil became the predominant Portuguese colony. It remained closely tied to Portugal; there were no universities or printing presses to stimulate independent intellectual life.

Brazil's Age of Gold. Between 1580 and 1640, Portugal and Brazil shared the same monarch, the Habsburg ruler of Spain. During the 17th-century struggles between Spain and Holland, the Dutch occupied part of Brazil until expelled in 1654. Meanwhile, the Dutch, English, and French had established sugar plantation colonies in the Caribbean. The resulting competition lowered sugar prices and raised the cost of slaves. Brazil lost its position as predominant sugar producer, but exploring backwoodsmen (Paulistas) discovered gold in the Minas Gerais region in 1695. People rushed to the mines and formed new settlements. Mines were worked by slaves. Government controls followed to tightly manage a production that peaked between 1735 and 1760. Brazil then was the greatest source of gold in the Western world. The gold, and later diamond, discoveries opened the interior to settlement, devastated Indian populations, and weakened coastal agriculture. The government managed to reinvigorate coastal agriculture and control the slave trade, while the mines stimulated new ventures in farming and ranching. Rio de Janeiro, nearer to the mines, became a major port and the capital in 1763. A societal hierarchy based on color remained in force. The gold and diamonds did not contribute much to Portuguese economic development. The resources gained allowed Portugal to import manufactured goods instead of creating its own industries.

Multiracial Societies. The conquest and settlement of Latin America by Europeans formed large multiethnic societies. Indians, Europeans, and Africans came together in hierarchies of color, status, and occupation. By the 18th century, mixed peoples (castas) were a major population segment.

The Society of Castas. The key to societal development was miscegenation. Indian women suffered sexual exploitation from Europeans, and the crown sponsored marriages in a society where there were few European women. The result was the mestizo population possessing higher status than Indians. A similar process occurred in colonies with large African slave populations. American realities had created new social distinctions based on race and place of birth. Europeans were always at the top; African slaves and Indians occupied the bottom. Mestizos filled the intermediate categories. Restrictions were placed on mixed-origin people, but social mobility was not halted. Over time, distinctions grew between Spaniards born in Spain (peninsulares) and the New World (Creoles). The latter dominated local economies and developed a strong sense of identity that later contributed to independence movements. Society as a whole remained subject to Iberian patriarchal forms. Women were under male authority; upper-class women were confined to household occupations, but many from the lower class participated in the economy.

The 18th Century Reforms. Spain and Portugal shared in the 18th-century European intellectual ferment and in the changes forced by new demographic and economic trends. European population growth and 18th-century wars gave the colonies new importance. Both Spanish and Portuguese empires revived, but with long-term important consequences detrimental to their continuation.

The Shifting Balance of Politics and Trade. Spain's colonial system by the 18th century required serious reform. Spain was weakened by poor rulers, foreign wars, and internal civil

and economic problems. France, Britain, and Holland were dangerous enemies; during the 17th century, they seized Spanish Caribbean islands and developed their own plantation societies. As the Spanish mercantile and political system declined, the flow of silver dropped and the colonies became increasingly self-sufficient. Local aristocrats took control over their regions, while corruption was rampant in government. Crisis occurred in 1701 when disputes over the Spanish royal succession caused international war. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) ended the fighting and, for concessions opening the colonies to some foreign trade, recognized the Bourbon family as rulers of Spain.

The Bourbon Reforms. The new dynasty worked to strengthen Spain. Charles III (1759-1788) instituted fiscal, administrative, and military reforms in an effort to create a rational, planned government. The Jesuits were expelled from Spain and the empire in 1767, but the church remained an ally of the regime. French bureaucratic models were introduced, taxation was reformed, and ports were opened to less restricted trade by Spanish merchants. In the Americas, new viceroalties were created in New Granada and Rio de la Plata to provide better defense and administration. Under the authority of José de Galvez, broad general reforms followed. Creoles were removed from upper bureaucratic positions. The intendency system, borrowed from the French, provided more efficient rule by Spanish officials. As an ally of France, Spain was involved in the 18th-century Anglo-French world wars. In the Seven Years War, the English seized Florida and occupied Havana. The losses stimulated military reform. More troops went to the New World, and Creole militias were formed. Frontiers were defended and expanded; California was settled. The government took an active role in the economy. State monopolies were founded and monopoly companies opened new regions for development. More liberal trade regulations expanded Caribbean commerce. Cuba became a full plantation colony. Buenos Aires presided over a booming economy based on beef and hides. The more open trade, however, damaged local industries. Mining revived with new discoveries worked by improved technology. The Bourbon changes had revitalized the empire, but in the process, they stimulated growing dissatisfaction among colonial elites.

Pombal and Brazil. The marquis of Pombal directed Portuguese affairs from 1755 to 1776. He labored to strengthen the Portuguese economy and to lessen his country's dependence on England, especially regarding the flow of Brazilian gold to London. The authoritarian Pombal suppressed opposition to his policies; the Jesuits were expelled from the empire in 1759. Reforming administrators worked in Brazil to end lax or corrupt practices. Monopoly companies were formed to stimulate agriculture. New regions began to flourish, among them the undeveloped Amazon territory. Rio de Janeiro became the capital. Pombal abolished slavery in Portugal, but not in Brazil. To help increase population growth, Indians were removed from missionary control and mixed marriages were encouraged. The reforms had minimal effect on society: the colony remained based on slavery. The trade balance first improved, but then suffered when demand for Brazilian products remained low.

Reforms, Reactions, and Revolts. By the middle of the 18th century, the American Iberian colonies shared world growth in population and productive capacity. They were experiencing a boom in the last years of the century. But the many reforms had disrupted old power patterns, at times producing rebellions. In New Granada, the widespread Comunero Revolt occurred in 1781. A more serious outbreak, the Tupac Amaru rising, broke out among Peruvian Indians. Brazil escaped serious disturbances. The movements had different social bases, but they demonstrated increased local dissatisfaction with imperial policies. Sharp social divisions

among colonial groups hindered effective revolutionary action until Spain and Portugal were weakened by European political and social turmoil.

Global Connections: Latin American Civilization and the World Context. The large colonies of Portugal and Spain provided an important place in the expanding world economy. By the 18th century, weakened internal situations allowed European rivals to benefit directly from Iberian colonial trade. Portugal and Spain had transferred their cultures to the Americas, recreating there a version of Iberian life modified by local influence. Surviving Indian populations adapted to the colonial situation, and a distinctive multiethnic and multiracial society emerged that mixed the cultures of all participants. Where slavery prevailed, African cultures played a major role. Latin American civilization was distinct from the West, but related to it. In world markets, Latin American products remained in demand, maintaining a society with its economic life dependent on outside factors.

KEY TERMS

Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile: Monarchs of Christian kingdoms; their marriage created the future Spain; initiated exploration of the New World.

Encomiendas: Grants of estates Indian laborers made to Spanish conquerors and settlers in Latin America; established a framework for relations based on economic dominance.

Hispaniola: First island in the Caribbean settled by Spaniards; settled by Columbus on his second voyage.

Bartolomé de las Casas: Dominican friar who supported peaceful conversion of the Native American population; opposed forced labor and advocated Indian rights.

Hernán Cortés: Led expedition to Mexico in 1519; defeated Aztec Empire and established Spanish colonial rule.

Moctezuma II: Last independent Aztec ruler; killed during Cortés' conquest.

Mexico City: Capital of New Spain, built on ruins of Tenochtitlan.

New Spain: Spanish colonial possessions in Mesoamerica in territories once part of Aztec imperial system.

Francisco Pizarro: Began conquest of Inca Empire in 1535.

Francisco Vazquez de Coronado: Led Spanish expedition into the southwestern United States in search of gold.

Pedro de Valdivia: Spanish conqueror of Araucanian Indians of Chile; established city of Santiago in 1541.

Mita: Forced labor system replacing Indian slaves and encomienda workers; used to mobilize labor for mines and other projects.

Colombian Exchange: Biological and ecological exchange that occurred after European arrival in the New World; peoples of Europe and Africa came to the Americas; animals, plants, and diseases moved between the Old and New Worlds.

Potosí: Largest New World silver mine; located in Bolivia.

Huancavelica: Greatest mercury deposit in South America; used in American silver production.

Haciendas: Rural agricultural and herding estates; produced for consumers in America; basis for wealth and power of the local aristocracy.

Casa de la Contratación: Spanish board of trade operated out of Seville; regulated commerce with the New World.

Consulado: Merchant guild of Seville with a virtual monopoly over goods shipped to Spanish America; handled much of the silver shipped in return.

Galleons: Large, heavily armed ships used to carry silver from New World colonies to Spain; basis of convoy system used for transportation of bullion.

Treaty of Tordesillas: Concluded in 1494 between Castile and Portugal; clarified spheres of influence and rights of possession; Brazil went to Portugal and the rest to Spain.

Recopilación: Body of laws collected in 1681 for Spanish New World possessions; bases of law in the Indies.

Council of the Indies: Spanish government body that issued all laws and advised the king on all issues dealing with the New World colonies.

Letrados: University-trained lawyers from Spain; basic personnel of the Spanish colonial bureaucratic system.

Viceroyalties: Major divisions of Spanish New World colonies headed by direct representatives of the king; one was based in Lima, the other in Mexico City.

Audiencia: Royal courts of appeals established in Spanish New World colonies; staffed by professional magistrates who made and applied laws.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: 17th-century author, poet, and musician of New Spain; gave up secular concerns to concentrate on spiritual matters.

Pedro Alvares Cabral: Portuguese leader of an expedition to India; landed in Brazil in 1500.

Captaincies: Areas along the Brazilian coast granted to Portuguese nobles for colonial development.

Paulistas: Backwoodsmen from São Paulo, Brazil; penetrated Brazilian interior in search of precious metals during the 17th century.

Minas Gerais: Brazilian region where gold was discovered in 1695; a gold rush followed.

Rio de Janeiro: Brazilian port used for mines of Minas Gerais; became capital in 1763.

Sociedad de castas: Spanish-American social system based on racial origins; Europeans on top, mixed race in the middle, Indians and African slaves at the bottom.

Peninsulares: Spanish-born residents of the New World.

Creoles: People of European ancestry born in Spanish New World colonies; dominated local economies; ranked socially below peninsulares.

Amigos del país: Clubs and associations dedicated to reform in Spanish colonies; flourished during the 18th century; called for material improvement rather than political reform.

War of the Spanish Succession: Caused by the succession of the Bourbon family to the Spanish throne in 1701; ended by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713; resulted in recognition of Bourbons, territorial loss, and grants of commercial rights to English and French.

Charles III: Spanish enlightened monarch (1759-1788); instituted fiscal, administrative, and military reforms in Spain and its empire.

Comercio libre: Opened trade in ports of Spain and the Indies to all Spanish merchants during the reign of Charles III; undercut monopoly of consulados.

José de Galvez: Spanish Minister of the Indies and chief architect of colonial reform; moved to eliminate Creoles from the upper colonial bureaucracy; created intendants for local government.

Marquis of Pombal: Prime Minister of Portugal (1755-1776); strengthened royal authority in Brazil, expelled the Jesuits, enacted fiscal reforms, and established monopoly companies to stimulate the colonial economy.

Comunero Revolt: A popular revolt against Spanish rule in New Granada in 1781; suppressed due to government concessions and divisions among rebels.

Tupac Amaru: Mestizo leader of Indian revolt in Peru; supported by many in the lower social classes; revolt failed because of Creole fears of real social revolution.

Carribbean: First area of Spanish exploration and settlement; served as experimental region for nature of Spanish colonial experience; encomienda system of colonial management initiated here.

Encomendero: The holder of a grant of native Americans who were required to pay a tribute or provide labor. The encomendero was responsible for their integration into the church.

Enlightened despotism: Actions of absolute rulers which have been influenced by the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment.