

From:

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Latin America since

Independence.

(Rowman & Littlefield, 2017)

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The Independence of Latin America

The United States achieved independence from Britain in 1783, launching the first wave of liberation from European imperialism. Haiti won independence from France in 1804, and except for Cuba and Puerto Rico, Spanish and Portuguese America severed ties with their Iberian masters by 1825. Most of the remaining European colonies would follow suit in the aftermath of World War II. The first wave of independence, then, occurred in the Western Hemisphere. The second wave—involving Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Oceania—took place primarily between 1946 and 1975, with a few exceptions, ending the period when Europe claimed most of the world's territory.

BACKGROUND TO INDEPENDENCE

The royal houses of Spain and Portugal held their American empires for three centuries through bonds of traditional loyalty and institutional legitimacy—through their subjects' voluntary acceptance of, or at least acquiescence in, their kings' rule. While the colonials certainly complained about the royal administration and some of its policies, the traditional refrain, "long live the king, down with bad government," described their long-standing relationship with their monarchs. Even Tupac Amaru, leader of the greatest native rebellion in the colonial period, took up arms in the name of the king and against royal officials' abusive practices. Spain and Portugal stationed only minimal military personnel in their colonies, and those soldiers were deployed to protect against European rivals or hostile Indians; they were not armies of occupation. Clearly, force was not the glue that kept the empires together.

By the late eighteenth century, the enduring bond between the colonials and their distant kings had begun to fray. One factor affecting the transatlantic relationship

was the simple passage of time: by 1775, some creoles and *mazombos* could trace their roots in America through ten or more generations; they were Peruvians, Brazilians, or Mexicans, and to most of them, Portugal and Spain were unknown, foreign places. Late-eighteenth-century policy changes stirred concern in both empires, both because of what they did and failed to do, and exacerbated long-standing tensions between colonials and the mother countries. Meanwhile, developments in the broader world introduced new ideas and provided examples that would eventually lead some among the elites to consider the radical notion of breaking with Spain and Portugal.

In Spain's domains, the Bourbon Reforms, which culminated under King Charles III (1759–1788), reorganized the colonies with three goals in mind: to tighten royal control, which had slipped particularly in the seventeenth century; to enhance the revenue of the Spanish crown and Spanish producers and merchants, in keeping with the original mercantilist goals of the colonial economy; and to prepare to defend the colonies militarily against encroaching European rivals, especially Britain and Russia. While moderately successful, the reforms created some discontent by raising taxes, reducing creole access to higher administrative positions, and expelling the Jesuit order that had educated many of the sons of the colonies' elites. Moreover, while liberalizing trade regulations, the crown stopped short of many colonials' aspiration of being able to trade legally with merchants from beyond the empire. Confident of their American subjects' loyalty, royal authorities reorganized and expanded the colonial militias to defend against foreign powers, inadvertently giving creoles a weapon that they would eventually use in pursuit of independence.

The eighteenth century was the Age of Enlightenment—a period of intellectual vitality and innovation centered in France and England that produced thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire, John Locke, and Adam Smith, whose ideas challenged the status quo in the political, economic, social, and religious realms. Realizing the potential danger in mainstream Enlightenment concepts, the Spanish crown attempted to control the literature that reached the colonies. Despite these efforts, ideas crossed oceans and borders and introduced educated creoles to subversive concepts such as unregulated economies and social compacts among men; some thinkers whose ideas reached America even challenged kings' divine right to rule with absolute power. While these intellectual currents influenced some of the colonial elites to contemplate the possibility of a future separate from their European monarchs, for most creoles, they were abstractions, not calls to action.

In Brazil, the *mazombo* elite experienced influences similar to those in Spanish America. Portuguese prime minister the Marquis de Pombal instituted changes that paralleled the Bourbon Reforms, creating additional royal monopolies, raising taxes on the colonials, and tightening Portuguese administrative control. Enacted during an economic downturn following the exhaustion of easily exploited gold fields, Pombal's reforms caused considerable resentment. *Mazombos* felt the influence of Enlightenment ideas but, as Brazil had neither a university nor a printing press, the impact was far weaker than in Spanish America.

Political developments in both the Western Hemisphere and Europe also shaped opinion in Brazil and Spanish America. The United States' independence from Britain proved that colonies could break from imperial rule and successfully manage their own affairs. Counterbalancing the influence of U.S. independence, however, were other events that provided cautionary tales about tampering with the status quo. The 1780–1782 Tupac Amaru native rebellion in the Andes, with its overtones of a race war, reminded not only Peruvians but also elites throughout the Iberian colonies of the social volcano atop which they sat, and dampened any inclination they may have had to start a movement of which they could easily lose control. The 1789 French Revolution brought dramatic political and social change, including the beheading of monarchs, aristocrats, and losers of political struggles; confiscation of properties of the wealthy; and persecution of the Catholic Church, raising a red flag for creoles and *mazombos* who had everything to lose in the event of such an upheaval. But nothing struck fear into the hearts of the colonial elites like the massive slave revolt in Haiti.

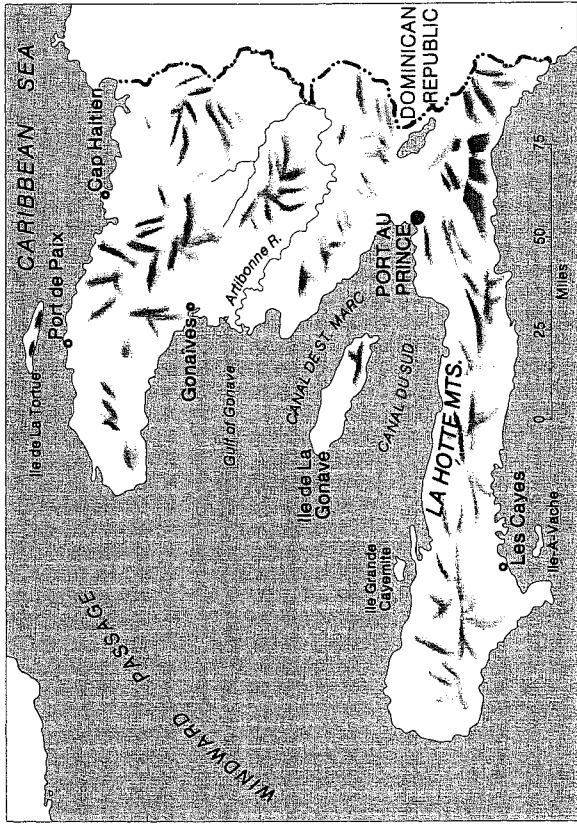
The second successful independence movement in the Western Hemisphere occurred in Haiti, then known as Saint Domingue, a French possession since 1697 that occupies the western third of the island of Española (or Hispaniola). Under French governance, Haiti had become a major producer of sugar for export. In the late eighteenth century, its population consisted of some forty thousand Europeans, thirty thousand free people of color, and half a million African slaves. With its seductive slogan of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” and its adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the French Revolution created a potentially explosive situation in the colony.

In August 1791, slaves rose under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Although France abolished slavery in 1794, the rebellion continued. L'Ouverture's troops controlled most of Saint Domingue by 1799, and most Europeans had been killed or driven out. After repelling a military expedition sent by Napoleon Bonaparte, France's new ruler, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, L'Ouverture's successor, formally declared Saint Domingue independent on January 1, 1804, under its original native Arawak name, Haiti. He also confirmed the abolition of slavery. These developments sent the unequivocal message that upsetting the status quo in Spanish America or Brazil could spell the end of the privileged life that the colonial elites had enjoyed for centuries.

Pulled in different directions by developments in the late eighteenth century, the elites of Brazil and Spanish America did little more than think or talk guardedly about changing their status vis-à-vis their imperial rulers. A few minor conspiracies were discovered and easily quelled by colonial authorities. It was neither attitudes nor events in America, but developments in Europe that set the forces of independence into motion.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Napoleon came to power in the late 1790s, named himself emperor of France in 1804, and set out to conquer Europe. His strategy included subduing Britain, and to that end in 1806 he issued the Berlin

Haiti Today Fact Box



Area: 10,714 square miles
 Population: 10,110,019
 Population growth rate: 1.172%
 Urban population: 58.6%
 Ethnic composition: black 95%, mulatto and white 5%

Religious affiliations (nominal): Catholic 54.7%, Protestant 28.5%, voodoo 2.1%, Other 4.6% and none 10.2%
 Life expectancy: 63.51 years
 Literacy: 60.7%
 Years of schooling (average): no data
 GDP per capita (U.S. dollars): \$1,800
 Percentage of population living in poverty: 58.5%
 Household income (proportion in the highest and lowest 10%): highest 47.7% and lowest 0.7%
 Military expenditures as percentage of GDP: no data
 Internet users (percentage of total population): 11.6%

Source: *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Public Affairs, Internet).
 Note: GDP, gross domestic product

Decree, which required all countries on the European continent to boycott British goods. Portugal, economically tied to and militarily dependent on Britain, refused Napoleon's order. Having lost most of his fleet the previous year at Trafalgar, Napoleon could only invade the recalcitrant Portugal by land. Spanish minister Manuel de Godoy extended permission for Napoleon's troops to cross Spain, but when they arrived at Lisbon in late November 1807, they found that the Portuguese royal family, accompanied by ten to fifteen thousand people and the treasury, had sailed for Rio de Janeiro under the protection of the British navy. Turning his sights on Spain, Napoleon took advantage of political chaos and rioting caused by the abdication of Charles IV to his son Ferdinand VII and captured Madrid in March 1808. He then ordered the current and former kings to Bayonne, in southwestern France, where he held them captive. He placed his brother Joseph Bonaparte on the Spanish throne and, in the face of unexpectedly stiff resistance to the French usurpation, ordered his troops to conquer the entire kingdom.

The migration of the Portuguese royal family to Brazil and the usurpation of the Spanish crown profoundly impacted the relationship between metropole and colony, and unleashed events that would lead to the severance of the transatlantic bonds. While both Spanish America and Brazil achieved independence by the mid-1820s, they gained their freedom by very different routes.

SPAIN AND SPANISH AMERICA

The collapse of the Spanish monarchy stirred historic memory on both sides of the Atlantic and set off a dizzying chain of developments that both confused and politicized creoles. By ancient custom, in the absence of a legitimate monarch, power devolved to the king's or queen's subjects, who would govern themselves until his or her restoration or the succession of a legitimate heir. These subjects, of course, were the elites. In Spain, after some initial confusion, they established a junta, or temporary governing board, to rule in Ferdinand's absence; driven southward, the Junta Central convened in December 1808 in Seville, which was still free from French

control. Under military pressure, this body disbanded in January 1810 and created a Council of the Regency to govern until Ferdinand's restoration. Before dissolving, the Junta Central called for the revival of the ancient parliament, the *cortes*, which Isabella and Ferdinand had reined in but not formally abolished. Select representatives of the colonies were invited to participate in the *cortes*, which began meeting in still unconquered Cádiz in September 1810. The offer of colonial representation built expectations for a degree of equality between Spain and America, but the Spaniards refused colonial representatives' demands for an equal voice and for free trade. Further roiling transatlantic relations was the liberal 1812 constitution produced by the *cortes*, which limited the powers of the monarchy and called for some creole participation in governance in the colonies. By 1812, however, impatient colonials had begun taking things into their own hands.

INDEPENDENCE IN MEXICO

The unimaginable evaporation of the traditional transatlantic tie and the rapid-fire succession of developments in Spain caused confusion and conflict in the colonies. Rather than accept Joseph, the Junta Central, the Council of the Regency, or Spanish officials in America as legitimate authorities, some creoles in administrative centers considered themselves the appropriate rulers in their jurisdictions and proposed establishing juntas to govern in Ferdinand's name until his restoration. Conservative creoles and Spaniards, while disagreeing over which Spanish authority to recognize, opposed the devolution of power to colonial subjects. In Mexico, the two years following Napoleon's invasion saw political instability approaching chaos as Spaniards, creoles, and officials sent to Mexico by the competing authorities in Spain jockeyed for position. A short-lived junta was formed but dispersed by Spaniards in Mexico City, and a pro-independence conspiracy was disrupted in Valladolid in 1809. Another conspiracy unfolded in Querétaro.

The Querétaro group, constituted as a "literary club," included creole military men; a former *corregidor* and his wife, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez (known as *la corregidora*); several others of varied backgrounds; and the creole priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. When news of their conspiracy to rebel reached the authorities, some plotters were arrested while others decided to act immediately. Father Hidalgo rang the bells of his church and gathered his parishioners in the largely Indian town of Dolores early on the morning of September 16, 1810, and gave his fateful *Grito de Dolores*, crying out "Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe, death to the Spaniards." Although he did not declare independence, September 16 is celebrated as Mexico's independence day.

Intentionally or not, Father Hidalgo's *grito* evoked the Indians' experience with colonialism: three centuries of exploitation and humiliation at the hands of Europeans, whether Spaniards or creoles, and deep devotion to the dark virgin who had appeared a decade after the fall of the Aztec Empire to offer hope and consolation



Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla

Source: Library of Congress

to the defeated and down-trodden survivors. Armed with sticks, stones, and other improvised weapons, the crowd of Indians and mestizos attacked and sacked two nearby towns before setting out for the rich silver-mining city of Guanajuato, gathering forces and killing light-skinned people as they went. Upon learning of the mob's approach, hundreds of creoles and Spaniards took refuge in the public granary, but the enraged rebels burned down the gates and slaughtered over three hundred of those sheltering inside, then continued to maraud through the city. Eighteen-year-old Lucas Alamán, who would have a distinguished career in politics and letters, wrote of the scene in Guanajuato: "This pillage was more merciless than would have been expected of a foreign army."¹

After the events in Guanajuato, Father Hidalgo and coconspirator Ignacio Allende led their untrained and haphazardly armed followers to the major cities of Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, and Valladolid. With some eighty thousand men, they then turned toward Mexico City. A royalist militia unit temporarily stopped the rebels and led to large-scale desertions. Assessing their forces' lack of military preparation and arms, and perhaps contemplating the blood bath that would have ensued if they attacked the seat of Spanish power, Hidalgo and Allende retreated and split their forces. Hidalgo's dwindling group was defeated near Guadalupe, and he and Allende retreated northward. Both were captured and executed. The heads of Hidalgo, Allende, and two other rebels were displayed in cages placed on the four corners of the Guanajuato granary for ten years as a warning against further rebellion.

Following Hidalgo's and Allende's deaths, another priest, the mestizo José María Morelos y Pavón, took up the cause of independence and social justice. He developed a fairly disciplined army and, after capturing substantial territory, called in September 1813 for a congress to be held in Chilpancingo (in today's Guerrero state) to formalize his movement's goals and appeal for broader support. Morelos invoked the Aztec past and submitted a document that he called "sentimientos de la nación" (sentiments of the nation), whose twenty-three points laid out a radical vision for an independent Mexico: abolition of slavery, the tribute, torture, and legal distinctions based on race; expulsion of Spaniards and confiscation of their property; and a republican form of government with executive, legislative, and judicial branches and universal male suffrage. Reflecting his religious vocation, Morelos's document made Catholicism the official and exclusive religion of independent Mexico, but required priests to administer the sacraments free of charge. Harried by royalist troops, the congress moved to Apatzingán where it promulgated a constitution that laid out a framework for government but failed to include Morelos's social program.

Within a few months of the Chilpancingo congress, Napoleon was driven from Spain and Ferdinand returned to claim the throne in March 1814. With Spanish troops freed from the European wars, Ferdinand was able to reinforce the modest military presence in Mexico, and Morelos was captured and executed in December 1815. A few men kept alive an ineffectual guerrilla campaign for independence, but sobered by the racial and social hatred and violence of Hidalgo's uprising and by the Chilpancingo program, most creoles welcomed the continuation of Mexico's colonial status quo. Yet when an 1820 military revolt in Spain succeeded and restored the liberal 1812 constitution, which Ferdinand had abolished, both conservative creoles and resident Spaniards concluded that their interests were no longer served by Mexico's subordination to an unstable master.

When the country achieved independence in 1821, it was under the conservative leadership of a creole military officer, Agustín de Iturbide, who persuaded some of the rebel groups to join him in common cause. His Plan of Iguala essentially called for the colonial system to remain unchanged after the severance of political ties to Spain. The plan had three points: Mexico would be governed by an invited European monarch, the Catholic Church would retain its monopoly and privileges, and Spaniards who stayed in Mexico would enjoy the same rights as creoles. Facing a united pro-independence force, the Spanish viceroy recognized Mexican sovereignty in the Treaty of Córdoba of August 24, 1821, and Iturbide maneuvered himself onto the promised throne a few months later.

The visions of Morelos and Iturbide for Mexico could hardly have differed more. Except for Morelos's position on religion, they framed the nineteenth-century liberal-conservative political debate. No mainstream Mexican liberal embraced all of Morelos's platform, and after the collapse of Iturbide's 10-month reign, conservatives reluctantly abandoned their commitment to monarchy. Nonetheless, the ideological and programmatic differences between Morelos and Iturbide—between liberals and conservatives—would lead to instability, dictatorships, civil wars, and ultimately

to the French occupation of Mexico in the 1860s. Such issues and divisions also plagued most of the other new Spanish American republics for the first half-century after independence.

CENTRAL AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

In Central America, independence resulted largely from developments external to the region. Central America was governed as the Captaincy General of Guatemala, which was subordinate to the viceroyalty of New Spain. The captaincy general in turn was subdivided into regional administrative units, the intendancies, which would later define national boundaries. The collapse of the Spanish monarchy and of Hidalgo's and Morelos's rebellions alerted creoles to the prospect of independence and led to minor revolts and a serious conspiracy in the capital, Guatemala City. But it was Mexico's independence under Iturbide that galvanized the Central American elites to action.

As news from Mexico spread through the region, leading creoles challenged the Spanish authorities. They convened in Guatemala City on September 15, 1821, and on the same day declared independence from Spain. Independence was ephemeral, however, as Iturbide reestablished the colonial chain of authority by annexing Central America to his Mexican Empire. With the collapse of Iturbide's brief regime, Central America again declared independence on July 1, 1823, and adopted a federal constitution as the United Provinces of Central America. The region thus escaped the warfare that seriously damaged parts of Mexico and Spanish South America in their quest for independence.

INDEPENDENCE WARS IN SPANISH SOUTH AMERICA

Independence in Spanish South America followed still different patterns. The first short-lived junta was formed in September 1808 in Montevideo. Two more followed in 1809, in La Paz and Quito, both controlled by creoles determined to run local affairs, until royalist military forces dispersed them. But by 1810, despite resistance from Spanish authorities, resident Spaniards, and conservative creoles, juntas had been established in Caracas, Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Santiago de Chile, and a second one in Quito. While professing loyalty to Ferdinand, the juntas began making policy decisions for their jurisdictions, including enactment of the long-held creole aspiration of free trade.

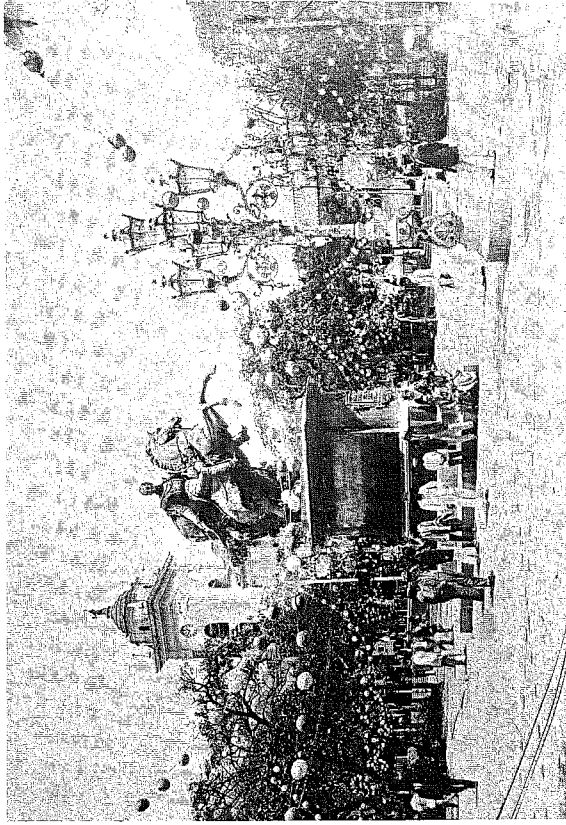
Buenos Aires and Caracas were the epicenters of the South American independence movements. In Buenos Aires, capital of the new viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata established in 1776 as part of the Bourbon reforms, destabilization of Spanish rule began even prior to Napoleon's invasion of Spain. When a British expedition captured the city in June 1806, the viceroy fled and an improvised, creole-led force

drove the British out, in the process giving locals a taste of power. Irregular and militia units defeated a second British invasion the following year. Thus when the rupture of legitimate authority occurred in 1808, Buenos Aires's creoles were experienced and confident of their ability to rule in the king's name, and after two years of jockeying among appointed viceroys, Spaniards, and creoles, the latter formed a junta on May 25, 1810. Although independence was not formally declared until 1816, Spain never regained control of the future Argentina. But the efforts of Buenos Aires to control the entire territory of the viceroyalty failed. Creoles in La Paz and Asunción repelled military expeditions from Buenos Aires, laying the basis for the future republics of Bolivia and Paraguay. Uruguayans also fought to escape Buenos Aires's domination, only to fall under Brazilian control until a British-brokered compromise created the independent republic of Uruguay in 1828.

Caracas was the capital of a captaincy-general subordinate to the viceroyalty of New Granada in Bogotá, which had been carved out of the viceroyalty of Peru in 1739. Caracas was the scene of the most aggressive push for outright independence in Spanish America. In 1806, Francisco Miranda, a radical creole advocate of independence, led a small army comprised largely of U.S. volunteers in an unsuccessful invasion. After the fall of the Spanish monarchy, however, Venezuelan creoles became receptive to self-rule. Following three failed attempts to establish a junta, Caracas creoles overthrew the Spanish administration in April 1810, began making policy, and convened a congress that issued Spanish America's first formal declaration of independence in July 1811. In contrast to Buenos Aires, Spanish forces attacked the new republic and captured Miranda, leaving Simón Bolívar as leader of the pro-independence forces.

Bolívar retreated westward to New Granada proper, from where he carried out a successful invasion of Venezuela in 1813. His hold on Venezuela was never secure, and by the following year, royalist guerrillas drove him back to New Granada. The release of Spanish troops from the Napoleonic wars in 1814 was a turning point in Bolívar's fortunes. Spanish General Pablo Morillo finished the reconquest of Venezuela and New Granada in 1815, carrying out serious reprisals against patriots, including the execution of at least three hundred men, and driving Bolívar into exile in British Jamaica.

Meanwhile in southern South America, Chile had become increasingly autonomous since 1810 without proclaiming independence. The junta established a congress, and after dissolving that body, strongman José Miguel Carrera promulgated a constitution and adopted a flag for Chile in 1812, while still proclaiming loyalty to Ferdinand. When the viceroy in Lima dispatched a sizeable force to put down the Chileans, Bernardo O'Higgins replaced Carrera as military leader of the patriot forces. However, a Spanish victory at the battle of Rancagua in 1814 forced O'Higgins, Carrera, and others to seek refuge across the Andes in the interior of Argentina, which remained in patriot hands. In Chile, as in northern South America, the Spanish reconquest was carried out with considerable brutality; colonial restrictions on trade were reimposed and reprisals were harsh, driving many reluctant



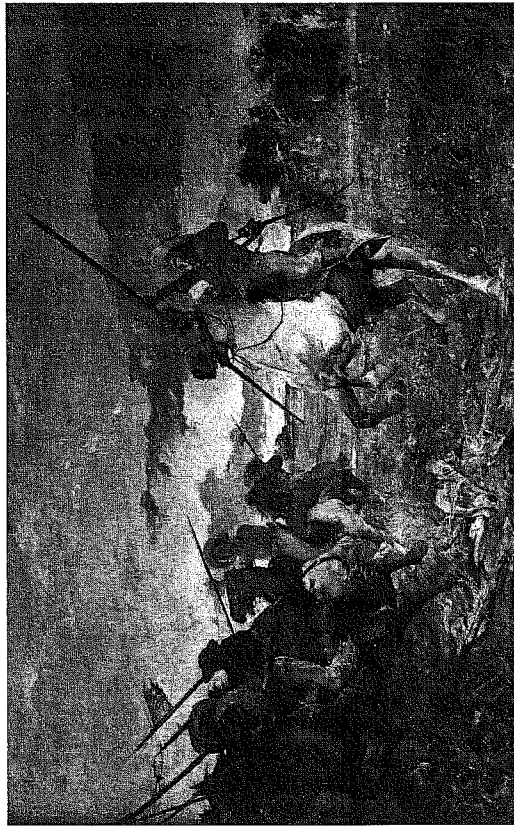
Simón Bolívar's statue in Caracas

Source: Library of Congress and Bain News Service

creoles who had earlier opposed self-rule in Ferdinand's name into the camp of full independence.

Beginning in 1817, the military fortunes of the independence forces brightened. O'Higgins returned from exile reinforced by the chief Argentine military leader, General José de San Martín, and his troops. Together the Chileans and Argentines inflicted two successive defeats on Spanish armies, securing Chile's independence at the battle of Maipú in 1818. San Martín then turned his attention to Peru. Peruvian creoles had not followed the lead of their fellows in most of Spanish South America by forming a junta. Living in the heart of the former Inca Empire among a strong majority of Indians, and with memory of the bloody Tupac Amaru rebellion still strong, they were leery of disturbing the status quo. Moreover, as capital of the viceroyalty, Lima was more heavily garrisoned than most points of South America. However, when San Martín reached Lima in 1820 with a large army, the Spanish forces withdrew to the Andean highlands. The Argentine declared Peru's independence in 1821.

As Chile and Peru were being liberated, Bolívar's fortunes also improved. Returning from his Jamaica exile, he reconquered parts of Venezuela before delivering a crushing defeat on the Spanish at Boyacá, effectively liberating New Granada. He then returned to Venezuela, defeating the Spanish at Carabobo in 1821 and securing his homeland's independence. He dispatched his lieutenant and fellow Venezuelan Antonio José de Sucre to liberate Ecuador the following year. Both Venezuela and



Battle of Las Queseras del Medio, Venezuela, 1819

Source: Library of Congress

Ecuador were incorporated into the independent Republic of Gran Colombia, under Bolívar's leadership.

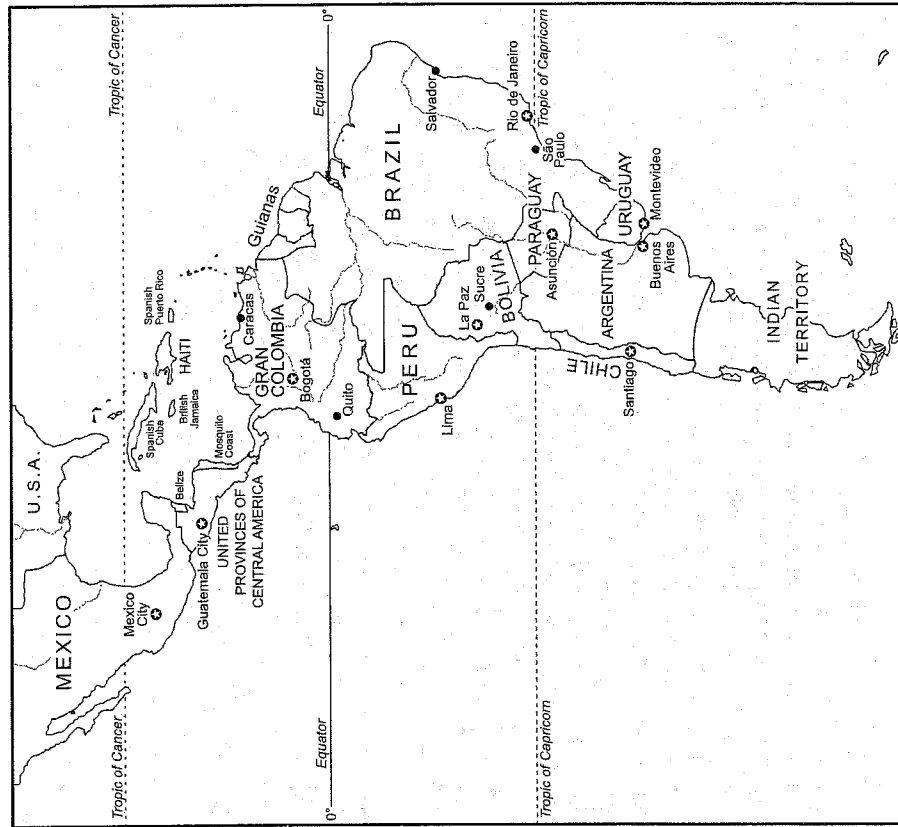
In July 1822, the two primary liberators of South America met in Guayaquil. Historians have long wished that notes had been kept or declarations issued, but neither happened. Underlying differences over the forms of future governments—Bolívar favored republics while San Martín advocated constitutional monarchies—must have been a primary focus of their discussions. Moreover, Bolívar had the military momentum. San Martín stepped aside, resigned his position in Peru, and went into exile in Europe, where he lived until his death in 1850. Bolívar and Sucre then moved to consolidate patriot control in Peru, which Sucre secured by defeating the last viceroy of Spain's American empire at Ayacucho in December 1824. That battle left only Upper Peru in Spanish hands, but with his power already crumbling, the Spanish commander was defeated and killed by Sucre's forces in April 1825. The grateful residents named their new republic after Bolívar and their capital city after Sucre. The Spanish garrison at Lima's port of Callao surrendered in January 1826, and the independence of mainland Spanish America was complete.

In South America, African slaves were among the combatants at all stages of the independence wars. Both the Spanish and the patriot sides recruited slaves by offering them freedom, and thousands of slaves won their freedom through military service. Women were also active on the patriot side. In addition to *la corregidora* in Mexico, Manuela Cádiz was instrumental in forming the brief 1809 junta in Quito. Women served in combat, sometimes dressed as men. They proved their mettle as artillery gunners on Margarita Island off Venezuela, where they were essential

in repelling a Spanish assault, and served troops as nurses, cooks, and gatherers of supplies. But whereas enlisting as fighters led to substantive changes in the status of slave combatants, women generally did not benefit from their service.

THE INDEPENDENCE OF BRAZIL

Brazil's independence from Portugal came about in yet a different manner. As a result of the Portuguese court's migration from Lisbon to Brazil, Rio de Janeiro was designated the temporary capital of the Portuguese Empire. Prince Regent João (King João VI beginning in 1816) quickly enacted changes that altered Brazil's status as



Latin America in 1829.

a colony. Chief among these were the establishment of free trade with all countries and the abolition of restrictions on manufacturing products that competed with Portuguese goods. Rather than returning home following Napoleon's defeat, João elevated Brazil to a kingdom equal to Portugal, thereby formally ending Brazil's colonial status.

With the benefits of becoming imperial capital came costs, chief among them the growth of resentment among the Brazilian elites over the favored treatment and luxurious life styles of the Portuguese court. Yet, it was not events in Brazil but developments in Portugal that led to independence. Aggrieved by the king's refusal to return home, Portuguese liberals formed juntas in 1820 and convened a *cortes* to write a liberal constitution. To Brazilians' consternation, the *cortes* approved the reestablishment of colonial economic restrictions and reinforced the Portuguese military presence in Brazil. Facing this political turmoil and challenges to his authority, King João returned home in 1821, leaving his son Dom Pedro as regent of the Brazilian kingdom. As tensions rose over Portuguese pretensions to reestablish colonial control over Brazil, the *cortes* in January 1822 demanded that Pedro also return, but he refused. A few months later, Portuguese authorities caught up with Pedro on the banks of the Ipiranga River where, on September 7, 1822, he proclaimed "Independence or death"—his famous *Grito de Ipiranga*. Brazil achieved independence peacefully and remained under the Braganza dynasty through most of the nineteenth century.

THE CHALLENGES OF INDEPENDENCE

Even before the euphoria of independence wore off, leaders of the new countries began to grapple with serious challenges. In those areas where military action had been widespread and prolonged, an immediate task was to promote recovery from war damages. In large parts of South America and Mexico, passing armies commonly appropriated cattle and crops to feed themselves and wrecked agricultural infrastructure, reducing the productive capacity of large estates and Indian communities. Merchants and other individuals possessing wealth frequently found their goods and capital confiscated to support patriots and royalists alike. In mining zones, particularly Mexico and the Andean region, essential equipment was destroyed, most importantly the pumps that kept the deep shafts free of flooding. Once flooded, these mines ceased production, greatly reducing several countries' major source of export income.

Capital flight and contracting government revenues posed other economic problems. Spaniards were among the wealthiest merchants, and many of them fled the war-torn colonies, taking their liquid capital with them to Spain or Cuba, which remained a Spanish colony until 1898. The colonial taxation system, particularly unpopular since the Bourbon Reforms had raised the levy on colonials, became a

matter of controversy. In some areas, creoles lowered or abolished some of the taxes they paid, leaving the new governments financially crippled.

The new authorities faced the major challenge of dealing with the thousands of men who had participated in the independence wars, some of whom had been under arms for a decade or more. Included among these soldiers were former slaves whom both sides had recruited by offering them freedom. Other men had been displaced from the damaged haciendas and the shuttered mines. Neither former slaves nor displaced workers had livelihoods to return to, and the new independent governments lacked the resources to offer cash bonuses in order to demobilize them; nor could they offer land, as was done in the aftermath of the U.S. independence war, as most productive land was claimed. These former independence fighters, many of them still armed, implicitly threatened governmental stability as they might readily be mobilized by dissident leaders promising rewards. The existence of former fighters without means of support was exacerbated by the *fuero militar*, the arrangement by which all men in the military or militias enjoyed the right to be tried in special military courts for any infraction, including civil offenses. This colonial inheritance meant in practice that military men were not subject to civilian control and had the potential to become autonomous predatory groups.

The colonial legacy of a rigid social hierarchy complicated the problem of demobilizing independence fighters. Although some barriers to social mobility were broken down, the hierarchy based on race, color, and gender remained essentially intact following independence. The mass of Indians, people of African descent, and *castas* had very little to call their own, and thus little to lose and the possibility of gain when a leader appeared promising rewards for their participation in an assault on an existing government.

Regionalism was another practical issue facing the new countries. Creoles in the colonial administrative centers assumed that their control over the outlying areas of those jurisdictions would be respected as an inheritance of the royal administration, but they failed almost everywhere. As noted, the former viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata fragmented. Centrifugal forces would fracture the former viceroyalty of New Granada into three republics. The viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico) lost Central America, and the initially unified government of Central America split into five republics in 1838. In some areas, regionalism was also based on economic conflicts between the principal city and the hinterlands. Exacerbated by the rugged topography and the primitive road systems throughout Spanish America, regionalism continued for decades to thwart governments' efforts to exercise effective control over their national territories. Regionalism was also a destabilizing force in Brazil's early independent history.

Another factor challenging new governments was the demarcation of national boundaries. During the colonial period, exact borders within Spanish America were unimportant, as all jurisdictions were ruled ultimately from Spain. As a result of

unclear boundaries between the colonial administrative units, successor national governments were left to determine the contours of their territories, often resulting in armed conflict with their neighbors—a phenomenon that continued sporadically through the twentieth century.

In addition to such practical matters that burdened the new countries, ideological divisions made consensus on fundamental issues difficult to achieve. The Enlightenment had challenged the status quo in general, and by the time of independence, there was a clear division between liberals and conservatives, and significant ranges within each group. In general terms, conservatives stood for as little change as possible from colonial institutions and practices. They supported authoritarian government, retaining the Catholic Church's powers and monopoly of religion, and keeping the colonial social hierarchy intact. Liberals generally opposed authoritarian government and the Catholic Church's power and monopoly, and some favored altering the social hierarchy by abolishing slavery and eliminating the tribute—the colonial head tax on Indians.

The broadly defined ideological differences between conservatives and liberals translated into rival concepts of how government should be structured. Conservatives preferred a strong executive power and centralized government, similar to the colonial regime, and favored severely restricted suffrage based on property and literacy, or both. Liberals endorsed a strong legislative branch to restrain the executive and broader suffrage—although few advocated extending the vote to Indians, former slaves, illiterates, or women. Some embraced federalism to distribute power away from the capital to the provinces. Disagreement over whether to preserve or dismantle the colonial regime and over the structure of government fueled controversy that commonly disrupted governmental continuity and prevented the establishment of stable and effective governments.

By adopting institutions alien to the Latin American tradition, the new countries added to the difficulty in finding a workable formula for effective governance. With the exception of Brazil and briefly of Mexico, all the new countries entered independent life as republics. The ascendancy of the republican idea in Latin America—at a time when monarchy still held sway in Europe, and the United States, Haiti, and only a handful of other republics existed in the world—resulted primarily from the independence struggle itself. The initial colonial response to Napoleon's usurpation of the Spanish crown—the establishment of juntas governing in Ferdinand's name—demonstrated the colonials' continuing loyalty not only to the king but also to the institution of monarchy. Moreover, prior to Ferdinand's restoration, only the Caracas and Bogotá juntas along with Morelos in Mexico had rejected the crown by declaring independence. But Ferdinand's response to the actions his American subjects had taken during his captivity was a turning point. By reestablishing the colonial restrictions on trade and ending the limited creole participation in governance established by recent practice and by the 1812 constitution, Ferdinand rolled back the gains that the creoles had made after 1808. The attempted restoration of royal

absolutism after creoles had tasted self-governance turned many of them against the king and raised doubts about the absolute power that kings traditionally exercised. And the bloody retribution meted out by the troops that Ferdinand sent to America to restore his rule, not only on the few who had dared to declare independence but also on the many who had not done so, further disillusioned colonials with the king and with the institution of monarchy itself and made the republican idea appealing.

The new countries adopted another institution that was alien to their history: constitutions. At the time of the Latin American independence movements, written constitutions were new. The first of these was the U.S. Articles of Confederation (1777) and the second the U.S. Constitution (1787). Shortly thereafter, successive French revolutionary governments adopted three constitutions in the 1790s. Latin American leaders of course were familiar with the liberal Spanish Constitution of 1812. All of these written constitutions limited the powers of the executive, whether of presidents or kings. Since from the creole perspective Ferdinand had abused his absolute power in returning Spanish America to colonial status, the idea of adopting constitutions was attractive to many of the new countries' leaders. Even monarchist Brazil adopted a constitution as early as 1824.

Although many constitutions failed because they were copies of foreign documents or for other reasons did not conform to national realities, they carried a powerful mystique. It was as if constitutions were magical instruments that would create general happiness and well-being—none more so than Chile's 1823 constitution, whose article 250 dictated: "Included in the legislation of the state will be the moral code that will detail the duties of the citizen at all ages and in all states of his social life, thus forming in him habits, exercises, duties, rituals, and pleasures that will transform the law into customs and the customs into civic and moral virtues."² The frequency with which some of the early republics changed constitutions did not reflect a cavalier attitude toward them, but the opposite—a strong feeling that constitutions were necessary and essential to defining leaders' visions and goals for the country.

The constitutions of the new republics established governments consisting of three separate powers: executive, judicial, and legislative. The third branch was new to Latin Americans: Having lived under absolute monarchs, they had no experience with making laws beyond mundane municipal regulations. But the U.S., French, and Spanish constitutions had included legislative powers, and many creoles had been introduced to the making of policy decisions as members of juntas in America or in the *cortes* of Cádiz. Moreover, the reimposition of royal absolutism under Ferdinand underscored the value and importance of elected legislative bodies to check the power invested in any executive. National legislatures were often ignored, trampled upon, or disbanded in the new countries, but the idea of citizen legislatures would persist.

These practical and ideological impediments to establishing stable and effective political institutions were exacerbated by an even more profound challenge: creation

of legitimate authority, meaning authority accepted by citizens, or rule with the consent of the governed. The authority of Spanish kings had been legitimate, even when certain of the kings' personnel or policies were widely disliked, at least until the Enlightenment raised doubts among a few intellectuals. How could new legitimate governments be constructed following the evaporation of the traditional legitimacy of kings' rule? This was a matter of paramount importance.

Simón Bolívar offered insights into what was missing in the Spanish American colonial experience that could have facilitated the creation of governmental legitimacy and eased the transition from colony to republic. In a letter he wrote in 1815 to an acquaintance during his exile in Jamaica, known as the Jamaica letter, Bolívar pointed to a phenomenon common to almost all colonies, regardless of place or time: the absence of political experience. "The role of the inhabitants of the American hemisphere [in the Iberian colonies] has for centuries been purely passive. Politically they were nonexistent. We have been harassed by a conduct which has not only deprived us of our rights but has kept us in a sort of permanent infancy with regard to public affairs. We were cut off and, as it were, removed from the world in relation to the science of government and administration of the state."³

Bolívar clearly understood the difference between the Spanish and the English colonies regarding political experience and participation: "If we could at least have managed our domestic affairs and our internal administration, we could have acquainted ourselves with the processes and mechanics of public affairs." Had that opportunity existed, he insisted, Latin Americans might have acquired "the abilities and political virtues that distinguish our brothers of the north" and, by extension, been able to construct governmental institutions that citizens would have embraced as legitimate.⁴

What Bolívar recognized was the result of the opposite trajectories followed by England and Iberia, especially Spain, from the Middle Ages onward. While Spain evolved into absolute monarchy, as begun by Isabella and Ferdinand, England was moving away from all-powerful monarchs toward representative government. Although representation in parliament was limited to the elites until the nineteenth century, English colonists in America invoked their "rights as Englishmen" to establish deliberative and decision-making bodies in each of the thirteen colonies. These bodies—with names such as the House of Burgesses, the Assembly of Freemen, and the House of Delegates—did essentially what Bolívar lamented that the Spanish colonials had been prohibited from doing: They ran their own affairs, without serious interference from the king or his representatives. It was precisely the assertion of royal power under King George III that led to U.S. independence. And that practice of self-governance, the "science of government and administration of the state" as Bolívar called it, was the foundation of a relatively smooth transition from colony to independent republic in the United States. The lack of that practice would greatly complicate the transition from colony to independent country in Latin America.

The same would hold true of the great majority of former European colonies in Asia and Africa that won their independence after World War II.

Most of Latin America, along with the United States, secured its independence during the first wave of decolonization, 1783–1825. Developments in the imperial countries sparked uprisings in Haiti and much of Spanish America, where juntas initially loyal to King Ferdinand eventually chose to sever ties with Spain. Haiti, Mexico, and Spanish South America gained independence through war, while Central America and Brazil achieved independence peacefully. Independent Brazil remained under the Portuguese Braganza dynasty, while after Mexico's brief experiment with monarchy, all of Spanish America became republics. As with almost all former colonies, Latin America faced major challenges of governance and economic development.

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NOTES

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